

Indian Diasporic Films as Quantum (Third) Spaces: A Curriculum of Cultural Translation

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Abstract

This thesis examines narrative articulations in the films *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Bhaji on the Beach*, and *American Chai* as a complicated conversation in relation to bicultural-identity construction in the Indian diaspora. Unpacking the way “desi” identities are managed in/as a quantum (third) space – one that is continuously shifting and deferred – the films exemplify how “desi” is a heterogeneous cultural “group” without a homeland from which to speak or to return. The narratives of these films are considered cultural translations that expose inter-generational culture-clashes in the spaces between Indian and Western cultures. Screenplay pedagogy was used as a methodology to (re)read analysis of the films, revealing the ways that different movies employ and reinscribe themes of the multicultural pastoral, the carnivalesque, and melodrama, respectively. This thesis concludes by opening up some of the places from which individuals enunciate their desi identities, including the possibilities for (self)reflection.

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American Born Confused Desi Emigrated From Gujurat House In Jersey Kids Learning Medicine Now Owning Property Quite Reasonable Salary Two Uncles Visiting White Xenophobia Yet Zestful

Now you know your ABCDs.

(Hidier, 2002, p. 108)

Prologue: A Canadian Desi Generation

I grew up in what many Indo-Canadian adults now consider the “desi-generation” – one that began with the parents of Indo-Canadian youth emigrating from India during the mid-1960s to 1980s and having children in Canada who would then grow up here with mixed cultural heritage. *Desi* is a term “coined by Indian nationals to describe culturally challenged second-generation Indians raised in the U.S.,” and by extension, Canada and Britain (Lahiri, 2000). It is an abbreviation of the Hindi word *pardesi* which means foreigner. I am one of many people born with a hybrid desi background in Canada and I am attracted to most things that shed light on, or make light of, our complicated cultural position here. Comedian Russell Peters, for example, has championed this pastime of many desis across Canada, bringing his commentary about the complicated terrain of being born to immigrant parents in a Western milieu to comedy clubs, television specials, and movies. He capitalizes on the often humorous “disconnect” between so-called traditional Indian values and Canadian culture to speak to non-Indians and Indians alike. Whether you find it funny or not, his comedy illuminates what it might be like to live as a hybrid citizen – one seemingly in limbo between India and Canada, what Tenuja Desai Hidier calls being an *ABCD*, an *American Born Confused Desi*.

Desi comedy, filmmaking, blogging, and online commentaries look “both ways” in our collective identity struggle. From one side, there are recent popular movies such

as *Breakaway* (2011) which introduce audiences to our possible common ties as Canadians; the easiest to pinpoint is Canada's deep attachment to hockey. Punjabi-Canadians are, in large part, devoted hockey fans. Consider that *Hockey Night in Canada* is broadcast in three languages on CBC Television: English, French, and Punjabi. *Breakaway* is cultural insider-talk to Sikh men who love hockey but know they wouldn't be accepted on a "regular" Canadian team (wearing a turban notwithstanding). It is also humorous for the general public (what isn't funny about a team where all the members have the last name Singh?). Looking a different direction, there are other forms of comedy such as amateur online videos featuring desi comedians making light of how hybrid cultures are seen by others. These amateur comedians employ historical terminology to reverse the colonial gaze in the comedic context, speaking "back" to India while addressing both desi and non-desi viewers. Some of the more popular examples include the stand-up club *Indian Invasion Comedy: Civilizing the West*, and online video series like *Shit White Girls Say to Brown Girls*.

All of this points to a larger cultural conversation. Desis explore what it might mean to be "born confused" by carving out room in Canadian society for a conversation about finding and shaping a hybrid identity amidst all of the cultural chaos, politics of multiculturalism, pains and joys of immigration, and colonial histories back in India which have never left our parents' and relatives' minds (many lived through Indian Partition in 1947). The conversation often returns us into the space of a so-called motherland: India. Many desis have only visited India as tourists but are nevertheless raised to identify with it as the location of "real" origins, values, and traditions. Far from shying away from this seeming paradox, many desis seem to take their hybrid

Indianness into a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) where personal journeys, translations between cultures, and cultural expressions in media such as music and film unfold.

As part of contributing to the conversation, I offer this thesis which takes up three films: *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), and *American Chai* (2001). These films are modes of expression and exploration of ways of living as a hybrid citizen – citizens who are invariably caught-up-in, contribute to, and are on a curricular journey within a Third Space framed by Western and Indian cultures (Wang, 2004). I invite you along on this journey to learn about the different things which make-up hybrid cultures and identities through, and inside, the space of desi.

Chapter One

Introduction

Learning to be desi: embracing a journey

So I was an ABCD. Why hadn't anyone told me? Why didn't they put this in spots where they say race doesn't matter but please check one of the following? Growing up, I was always exing Asian/Pacific Islander, even though I didn't understand why they were treated as the same thing. (Hidier, 2002, p.108)

This thesis is about confronting identity questions – and for me, this thesis helps to confront a personal identity question about how one comes to *feel* desi, and be identified as one by others. My work will ask what it means to stake a claim to any kind of identity in the first place, and what the term “identity” might mean (Bhabha, 2000). It only became clear to me in my youth that I am desi, on account of being seemingly identifiable from the outside to everybody around me. This points to the multiple ways the term desi is felt by its members and to o/Others; after all, no cultural identity – desi included – is all-encompassing and/or homogenous. Cultural identities are only thought of as homogenous by those who conflate cultural identifiers into essentializing attributes – including desis themselves.

To begin the work of unravelling the complicated terrain of both “identity” and “desi,” I look back to my childhood as the starting point of my journey to explore hybrid roots/routes. I remember that as a little girl, I always found books and movies about Indians living outside India fascinating. I now ask myself, “why?” At that time, I was always looking for something I could feel but not quite identify. What was it about these texts was appealing to me, born in suburbia outside Edmonton to an Indian mother and racialized-white Canadian father? My brother and I were raised by my mother – a strong, single parent who emphasized our versatility in academics, “Western” modes of self-expression (music lessons on the piano and bassoon, for example), and Indian

culture (Bharatnatyam dance, Hinduism, and the Hindi language), all at the same time. Therefore, my questions begin from a childhood filled with a mixture of cultural influences.

I remember that I was profoundly motivated to read and look outside the world of my school and neighborhood to texts and movies because of childhood experiences that pointed out my differences. This is because it was almost always my “Canadian” life that felt painful. I definitely did not fit in with the other children at my elementary school, where all the kids except a Chinese girl in my class were white. I was taunted and called racial slurs. In kindergarten, my brother was punched in the playground by a sixth grader for being “brown shit.” I failed at trying to teach him to protect himself because I didn’t “get it” about how to blend-in properly myself – dress like the others, do my hair, walk, look “cool” in sports uniforms, and play the girl politics of friendships. I was told by teachers to just try and act like the “Canadian” girls, to be more social. This included advice to change my hair from berets to ponytails and to try wearing brand-name clothes so I wouldn’t be so “special.” So on the advice of these teachers, I tried to imitate my Caucasian peers but somehow always failed, going home from school sad and angry a lot of the time. This began a desire at a young age to discover what it means to have the *right* identity in Canada.

If my attempts to be an imposter of (white) Canadian culture in the elementary playground were perpetual failures, I decided, at ten years old, to look elsewhere for answers. This didn’t mean I stopped trying extremely hard to fit in and avoid being singled out, but it meant that I began to read and watch films. I searched for fictional characters that didn’t fit the norm (as I saw it). My discoveries began when I sneaked

into my mother's library at home and took *Othello* from the top shelf. In eighth grade, I found the movie, *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993). I quickly became attached to fiction about Indian immigrants for its portrayal of desolation and pain, and sometimes became angry at authors like Bharati Mukherjee for writing Indian culture and Indianness as negative in her stories. I hated her depiction of embarrassing situations, abusive relationships, and awkward immigrants. Other times, I sought out this kind of fiction, becoming particularly attached to Jhumpa Lahiri's (1999) Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Interpreter of Maladies*, where I searched for answers about my mother's immigrant experience. Simple works like Tanuja Desai Hidier's (2002) youth novel, *Born Confused* felt like they were speaking to me directly about struggles to fit in and resist Indian culture while at school. Hidier's novel problematizes being born "hybrid," fitting in during high school, and being attracted to the "wrong" kind of boy by Indian cultural standards. This novel became a place of comfort where I could return and voyeur into the protagonist's struggle, her negotiation of dual cultures, and read myself through and against the text. Most important for me was that this book was always on the shelf to read on those difficult days when I couldn't decipher the culture in which I was immersed, feeling embarrassed (after all, I am born here in Canada!), or when I felt completely Othered by those around me – just like those days of being made to feel alien/ated by my peers and teachers in elementary school.

Returning now to films and literature – things which continue to bring me comfort in all sorts of challenging situations – I (re)search here, writing this thesis as part of a quest to discover what constitutes hybrid Indo-Canadian identities within Canadian communities. I examine Indian diasporic films in part to see how some of

these identities are (in)formed by, and represented in, popular media. I look to movies as a curriculum that is a journey through third spaces, marked by “movement simultaneously inside and outside” (Wang, 2004,) Indian and “Western” cultures.

Educational research has absorbed dynamic discussions taking place within cultural studies about hybridity as a productive “third space” (beyond binaries of colonizer and colonized) that is “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” (Bhabha, 1994), where curricular questions about the pervasiveness of totalizing binaries that describe West and East civilizations can be asked (Aoki, 2005). This questioning of essentializing binaries such as colonized versus colonizer, civilized versus savage, and self versus Other, has been extended beyond academic articles and discourse about academic or literary texts into the realm of popular culture to which I feel so attached. Films about diasporic¹ Indo –Canadians, –British, and –Americans² address our imagined and material boundaries between cultures, the very places where cultural differences can be seen most vividly, and where conflict has historically arisen. Cultural difference at these boundaries is most pronounced as the misrecognition of meanings, values, and signs (Bhabha, 1994). And films such as *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), and *American Chai* (2001) exemplify how the space between cultures is sometimes viewed as an unbridgeable chasm. Nevertheless, these three films

¹Often people consider immigrants only as part of the Indian diaspora and categorize diasporic movements separately from “the descendants of diasporic movements” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p.70). There has been a recent shift in this definition in relation to popular culture. Hirji (2010) defines diasporas as “imagined communities in that they may consist of people who have never visited the so-called homeland or who lack any ambition to do so” (p.35). In another example, third-generation Person of Indian origin (PIO), Dutch professor R.S.Gowricharn, self-identifies as part of the Indian diaspora. He uses an anecdote of his experience of finding kinship with another Indian scholar with whom he had nothing in common, simply through the mutual recognition of a Hindi film song (Assisi, n.d.).

²The use of the word “American” is meant to denote United States of America. To indicate this, I have listed it separately from “Canadian.”

all conclude with cultural understanding, compromises, and resolutions on the part of their first generation protagonists – which seem to be ways of negotiating the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994), the “cracks” (Aoki, 2005), or the “interstices” (Asher, 2009a/b), through particular modes of translation that “ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p.208). In the words of Henry Giroux (2002), these films continue to be curricular on account of being “a compelling mode of communication and form of public pedagogy...that functions as a powerful teaching machine” (p.6). Therefore, I ask myself what these films attempt to teach viewers who are both inside and outside this culture about the cultural spaces seemingly located “in/between” (Aoki, 2005).

To answer this question, I use a methodology that involves examining the narratives put forth in these films that depict how characters strategize the formation of their “multiple identities” through a common cultural language (Hall, 1997a) inside “multilayered lifeworlds” (New London Group, 1996). More specifically, I will look at how culture might be understood in the Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) as language and performance that is constantly translated by desis like me: first generation diaspora living in the West who have bicultural and transcultural knowledge. I look to Judith Robertson’s (1995) method of screenplay pedagogy to peer inward at my engagements and re-readings of identifications with and against the films, locating narrative constructions of my identity within this space of (self)-translation.

Teaching O/others: Three Films

By talking about desi (first-generation diaspora), I wish to introduce here the idea of “teaching O/others” as a way of complicating the colonial gaze. In my childhood memory of feeling like I was being seen and *made* by others’ ways of viewing me, I felt the history of colonialism pressing down. The powerful experience of being viewed and judged by primary school teachers and a racialized/racist white community of school peers, points to the ways one is formed from the outside-in. I have used the doubled and “cracked” (Aoki, 2005) word *O/others* to remind readers of this colonial past in the formation of sometimes ambivalent cultural identities, even now. I also wish to imply that the films I will explore in this thesis are a way for those who are traditionally Othered to reverse the gaze, to peer outward from within the films, and say (perhaps teach) something to those traditionally doing the Othering. My title refuses to identify who is captured by the small “o” or the capitalized one, leaving open a space of ambiguity for readers to consider that perhaps the films, through their universalizing portrayal of daily life within diasporic communities, question the validity of Othering as a way of conferring marginalized and minority status. Movies centred around desi life, in all of its complex manifestations, often push the values attributed to dominant (North American and British) cultures to the margins and question their correctness and place in the diaspora, if only for a few hours.

Bhaji on the Beach, *American Chai*, and *Bend It Like Beckham*, are part of the group of Third Cinemas, “produced by people descended from immigrants from the Third World...[that] occupy a space somewhere in-between – which has been categorized as a possible third space that occupies both an insider and outsider status”

(Rajgopal, 2003, p. 52). The genre of Third Cinema films that I will study is situated between the film cultures of Hollywood and Bollywood. It is a form of diaspora filmmaking “that is being produced in the interstices of dominant culture industries and social formations” (Naficy, 1999, p.5). As such, I feel it is a genre “caught in the middle” that speaks both inside, to desi culture, and outwards, to viewers worldwide.

All three movies have similar themes. *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) is about a group of Indian women of Punjabi descent who confront the issues of spousal abuse, teen pregnancy, interracial relationships, intergenerational conflict, and the preservation of traditional Indian values, while on a road trip in Blackpool, England. *American Chai* (2001) is centred around the life of a desi college student who hates Indian culture, and who lies to his parents about being a pre-med student when he is really enrolled in music. He finally tells his father about his love interest (ironically, to another Indian student) and his music career because he wants to be recognized for who he really “is.” *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) similarly involves a British desi girl who loves soccer (football) more than anything in her life and has to confront her Punjabi parents’ traditional beliefs and desires in order to pursue her sports career in America.

Research Questions and Chapters

These three movies contain representations of desi identities within Indian diasporic communities. This project will attempt to establish the dynamics of such “identities” that are fictional onscreen yet serve to both represent hybrid identities and construct them for audiences. Drawing upon works that help to situate the concept of “identity”

(Bhabha, 2000; Giardina, 2003; Ibrahim, 2008; Shukla, 2001), I wish to engage the film reading process to ask what knowledge these diasporic films attempt to convey about hybridity, and what value it might be to consider these films as curriculum. Drawing upon the work of Hongyu Wang (2004) to situate the idea of curriculum as a journey, I wish to propose that the films present a *curriculum of cultural translation*. The word translation implies the movement across spaces, and a “process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place” (Bassnett, 2002, p.6). As such, I feel that the curricular journeys into hybrid spaces, - where complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004) take place between, across, and within cultures - are about speaking inward and outward to Indian and “Western” cultures alike while charting how desi culture(s) change along the way. Engaging with screenplay pedagogy as a methodology to unpack the space of self-identification, retaliation, and engagements with and against the films will allow me to examine what the movies could be teaching with respect to the following research questions:

- How might we translate the cultural representations put forth in these films of Indian diasporic communities abroad and here in Canada?
- In what ways do these films work as a curriculum of living at the interstices of different cultural spaces?
- How can screenplay pedagogy help us re-read the concept of hybridity and Third Spaces in relation to the intertextual representations and curriculum in these three films?
- What do those born like me, within the Third Space of hybridity, have to say about living as part of the diaspora in Canada?

The second and third chapters of this project structure my later analysis of the films. In chapter two, I frame this project theoretically to first understand the dual concepts of Third Spaces and hybridity through existing theories and then to derive a new way of looking at desi cultures as existing within, and evolving from, theories of hybrid Third Spaces. Looking at the films as a curricular journey (Wang, 2004) within this theoretical framework, I will address the question of how “identity” might be formed within a certain cultural group, provide my understanding of Third Spaces that will inform my larger study.

Chapter three takes me to a literature review that asks how scholars in education have seen hybrid cultures within/as Third Spaces, and how films have informed educational research in the past, especially around questions of identity. I explore the influences of cultural translation studies, postcolonialism, and films as public pedagogy on research about movies and education, to establish this inquiry within a field where conversations about identities and Third Spaces are already taking place.

In the fourth chapter, I describe the application of screenplay pedagogy (Robertson, 1995) as a method to analyse *Bhaji on the Beach*, *American Chai*, and *Bend It Like Beckham*. Screenplay pedagogy looks for “structural explanations” and “system[s] of relations” (p.27) in the analysis of films – explanations for why people become attached to, and self-identify with, the films they watch, how they “make themselves” through film viewing, and what cultures the films portray, elaborate-upon, fictionalize, and create so to be reproduced (in real life).

This leads me to chapters five, six, and seven of this project, in which I look at each film individually. I point toward and analyse scenes in the films that are instances of cultural translations, manifestations of hybrid identities on a curricular journey around, within, and between Indian and “Western” cultures.

I conclude this thesis by meditating on the larger question of why thinking about desi cultural identification in a hybrid Third Space is important within the field of education in Canada.

Chapter Two

Theorizing a Cartography of Hybrid (Third) Spaces

The key curricular question – what knowledge is of most worth? – is posed by individuals existing at specific historical moments, in particular places, confronted by, infused with, reality that itself is ever shifting, in part as a consequence of one’s engagement with it. Reality requires subjectivity: It is subjectivity that enables reality to speak. (Pinar, 2009, preface page)

In the above quotation, curriculum theorist William Pinar (2009) asks readers to confront the possibility of subjectivity as cosmopolitanism, as individual realities multiply conceived and felt, and as the “inner life, the lived sense of ‘self’ – however non-unitary, dispersed, and fragmented – that is associated with what has been given and what one has chosen” (p.3). The project of this theoretical framework is to look at how subjective experiences are able to become representations as/in films, through characters that experience such dispersal and fragmentation. For some, this is on account of being born “hybrid” (Bhabha, 1994) in diasporas, and for others, feelings of fragmentation result from the process of migration from homelands and the experience of re-settlement. Through their depictions of the lives of diasporic Indians, *Bhaji on the Beach*, *American Chai*, and *Bend It Like Beckham*, are all “narrative modes of subjectivity, discursive means of self-disclosure and self-understanding” (Garrison 1997, p. 191). The representation of journeys to, and through, challenging spaces can be thought of as an experience of charting a course – mapping which is subjective, held in the eye of the cartographer who can rewrite and update the maps as time passes and new experiences are felt.

Many theorists have explained their own personal journeys, others’ experiences of migration, the condition of being born hybrid, and what it might be like to live in diasporas, as part of a collectively understood experience of existing in Third Spaces

(Bhabha, 1994). The vocabulary of “Third Spaces” and “hybridity” are common in postcolonial studies. Though I will work through different interpretations of the Third Space in coming sections, the original use of the term by Homi Bhabha (1994) was to point towards the mutable spaces between subject-positions where disruptions in hegemonic practices of colonialism could occur. Hybridity, for Bhabha, *is* a liminal Third Space, “the cutting edge of translation and negotiation” (1994, p. 38). This space is understood in different ways by different theorists. As such, in this framework, I introduce the multiple “realities” (Pinar, 2009) of these spaces in relation to emergent Third Cinema (Hall, 1996) so that I can then situate my own reading of Third Spaces - my reality, a way of making my own map which will help me journey through the curriculum offered in these films. I will attempt to chart a course out of the existing theories, one which, in its revision of the language that is used to describe Third Spaces, expands upon current ways of mapping them.

Forming Hybrid Identities

Stuart Hall, in his discussion of Third Cinemas, asks, “Who is this emergent, new subject of the cinema? From where does it speak?” (1996, p. 210). Hall emphasizes that in the making of diasporic films, the postcolonial subject is always situated in a particular time and place, and represents his or her culture from an *enunciated* position – keeping in mind that “who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never exactly in the same place” (p. 210). The question of identity and its representations is thus a question of *who* is doing the speaking, who is being spoken to, and how the word

“identity” comes to signify a set of practices that includes the representation of self and others within particular groups.

So what does it mean to have a hybrid identity? It seems logical to me to ask whether the term “identity” can even be fixed and thus spoken about as a single Third Space where anti-colonial practices (subversive, progressive, or otherwise) can play out. The term “hybrid” carries with it historical baggage. Victorian scientific taxonomies about hybrids, for example, warn against inter-species breeding – something which applied not only to animals and plant grafts but also to different races (species) of people (see Nott’s 1854 work, *The Types of Mankind*, for instance). However, as Ania Loomba (2005) points out, “in postcolonial theory, hybridity is meant to evoke all those ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined” (p. 145). Bhabha makes this clear in his questioning of essentialist views of identity and so-called “originary” cultures: “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity ... is the ‘Third Space’ which enables other positions to emerge” (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). What are these positions? For Bhabha, these are *ambivalences* – the ways people present themselves through different, ever-evolving cultural (self)-representations in contradictory, simultaneous, and selective ways.

The diaspora involved in the making of films are confronted with an ongoing problem of enunciating multiple cultural identities through different representational apparatuses. Stuart Hall (1996) presents two different ways of understanding cultural identity in terms of this project of representation. First is the “idea of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial

or artificially imposed ‘selves,’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (p. 211). This presents a problem in that it points to a cultural *essence* – that beyond borders, the conditions of diaspora-making, and personal histories, there is a “true” Indian that exists “underneath.” This way of looking at culture also returns cultures in the post-colonial era to a fantasy of a primitive ideal, a rediscovery of a culture suppressed, fragmented, and all-but-destroyed by colonialism. Films therefore often act as a “texts...of imaginary reunification” (ibid., p. 212), making large, stereotypical statements about how cultures “really are” from the inside. Yet it is important to recognize the power of imaginary cohesion within cultures. Collective identification with a single cultural identity can bring disparate groups together, those feeling culturally lost into the fold, and provide a site for cultural resistance to Eurocentric practices of representing the Other in history-writing, lawmaking, media, and politics.

A second way of thinking about cultural identity is to acknowledge the “uniqueness” within cultures – recognizing some common histories but attributing individual differences to the way history, culture, and power play upon the enunciation of cultural identity. This idea of “play” allows for discontinuities and differences within cultures, as well as acknowledges the different ways colonialism affected different people. In recognizing the ways that colonial power usurped people from their traditional cultures, languages, and histories, cultural identity might better be seen as “the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of cultures. Not an essence but a *positioning*” (ibid., p. 213). In this way, diasporic

identities are always repositioning themselves, reinventing difference, and coping with the (positive or negative) effects of power and change.

Homi Bhabha, in “Interrogating Identity” (1987), questions modes of representation “through which the authenticity of identity comes to be reflected in the glassy metaphors of the mirror and its mimetic narratives” (p. 6). He assures us that there is no way to tackle the question of what constitutes identity “as an object outside the act of writing” (ibid.). Extending Barthes’ assertion that the signifier is always pre-determined by the signified in language (signalling a “real space” outside the object of signification), Bhabha looks at hybrid identities as sometimes spilling outside boundaries (perhaps beyond the object of signification), flowing over, exceeding the frame of representation. He describes this “encounter with Identity ” as occurring when something “eludes the eye, evacuates the self as a site of identity and autonomy and – most importantly – leaves a resistant trace, a stain of the subject, a sign of resistance” (ibid.). In his later work, Bhabha describes the process of hybrid identification through similar descriptions of excess:

[It] bears the traces of those feelings and practices which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original. They are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211)

Bhabha gives us a way of looking at hybrid identities as continual processes of reinvention, not only for people living in diasporas but also residing in homelands around the world. For Indo-Canadians this continual translation of the self in the

diasporic space of Canada is also about writing the “homeland” (India) anew in the process of translation. There is no original “India,” anymore after it has been copied, translated, imitated, renewed, transformed, and brought abroad. A search for origins would amount to a search for essentializing attributes, something to pin down a totalizing view of India that translations somehow work against. But there isn’t an India “out there” as such.

Also speaking to the representations of Asian (Indian)³ identity in British popular culture, Giardina (2003) reminds us that stylized representations of race (ie. elements of South Asian in British culture) are often read as “authentic representations of reality” (p. 68). What is meant by this is that the representation *is* a reality, and it is impossible to get out from underneath representation in order to find something else which is authentic (else risk essentializing British Asians, for example). However, Giardina importantly notes that “the apparatus of representation is always already ideological and, through that, always already performative” (ibid.). In other words, the representation is a performance which has politics. Representations of ethnicity in popular culture are carefully constructed, and are *not* reflections of “authentic” cultures – something which Bhabha also warned in his rejection of the “glassy metaphors of the mirror.”

Judith Butler’s (1990) work on gender constructs identity theoretically as “performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). This is to say that the performance of identity (as gender in Butler’s work, or ethnicity in this thesis) puts out representations of what identity “is” and these

³ In Britain, the Indian diaspora is often referred to as South Asian. In North America, the more common vernacular is “East Indian” or just “Indian.” I would like to retain the usage featured in Giardina’s article, so I will use “British Asian.”

representations act recursively to create the idea of that particular identity. This means that cultural identity operates solely on the level of signification. For example, while Indian diasporic people and communities do exist, performativity works to create this existence both in immaterial and literal terms. The fact that culture (what Giardina terms the “racialized body”) is a performance “suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler, 1990, p. 173). Therefore, repeated acts of signification work as representations put forward, as well as “speak back” to continue to reinvent the subject. This challenges the power of normalization strategies in relation to culture. Inda (2000) describes this destabilization as “making the subject the site for the perpetual possibility of a certain resignifying process, the site for the proliferation of certain effects that undermine the power of normalization” (p. 95). The subject always remains tentatively (re)constituted, situated in forms of representation (writing, film, etc) that are newly conceived, revisited, and rewritten.

If identity is (re)made in an ongoing, recursive, process of signification, how are such performances put forth and for whom? Considering the question most simply, representations of identities in films draw viewers into ways of seeing from the characters’ points of view and envisioning themselves acting and feeling like them. In psychoanalysis, this is the process of identification. Freud proposed that identity is formed by desire followed by identification (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). The process involves the transformation of the subject psychologically by a model provided by another, and personalities are constructed by multiple identifications. Freud explained this through a theory about formation of sexual identity. In the Oedipus

complex, for example, a boy vicariously desires the father's love interest, the mother, and identifies with/as the father. Lacan (1977) introduced another viewpoint on identification, called the "mirror stage." This begins when a child sees itself in the mirror and recognizes itself as a being and aspires to be/come something. The self is what is reflected in the mirror and identifications are made with other "reflections" – such as the mother, people in society, etc. Because the process of identification is never complete, identity always remains partial, and often a series of identificatory aspirations remind the subject that the process of trying to become a "whole" is futile.

Reversing the idea that identification is the result of desire and needs to be pursued by a subject, Borch-Jakobsen (1988) asserts instead that "[w]hat comes *first* is a tendency toward identification, a primordial tendency which *then* gives rise to desire... identification brings the desirous subject into being, not the other way around" (p. 47, emphasis mine). Looking to movies and literature, this is commonly seen in plots where a male pursues a woman already involved with another man, identifying with his desire for her, subsequently copying it, and vying for the woman's interest and attraction.

Looking more broadly, one might ask how the identification process might work in relation to group dynamics (ie. for cultural groups). On the one hand there is a risk. Documenting performances of cultural identities in film, for example, risks homogenizing the experiences of diasporas, exiles, and migrants for public consumption as entertainment. This goes back to the colonial project of rendering the Other visible for visual, social, and anthropological consumption by the colonizer. The Other is "made" by the colonial gaze, rendered into being, but as the lowest possible kind of subject. On the other hand, looking to Althusser's commonly understood concept of

cultural interpellation, any person who is addressed by another, recognized, “hailed” -- is given status as a subject. One way of looking at group dynamics in relation to this question of identity is to reference Foucault’s (1978) *History of Sexuality (Vol. 1)* where he describes the effect of making homosexuals a single group in psychiatric literature. The medical and social diagnoses of this “deviant” class gave the group coherence it otherwise didn’t have. Homosexuals found themselves labelled-into-being, so to speak, and were able to then make demands for recognition. The dominant group practice of essentializing Others backfires, inadvertently giving power to groups it intends to marginalize.

Here in Canada, the work conducted by Awad Ibrahim (2008) in Ontario high schools invokes this idea of being “made” by others (and subsequently attaining legitimacy). French-speaking students of African descent are “hailed” as Black students within a Canadian educational context. Speaking to identity formation as an expression of/as/within Third Spaces, Ibrahim asserts that “the third space [is] an ethnographic *performance* of two or more languages, cultures, and belief systems (p. 239, emphasis mine). Instead of focusing on hybrid subjects undergoing translations, rendering the self in/visible, in excess of the colonial gaze, or out of frame, as in Bhabha’s description, Ibrahim calls attention to the traceability of the ethnographic performance and calls Bhabha’s theory into question on the basis that he “does not subjectify, historicize, or make tangible the hybridization project” (ibid.). Ibrahim is interested in seeing how “hybridity ethnographically look[s]” (p. 240) in his project of studying the performances of these African diasporic students. The students are made by the conditions which surround them, and then articulate themselves newly using the standards imposed upon

them by the culture in which they are immersed. This includes the learning of “BESL” – or Black English as a Second Language, something which comes from the cultural milieu assigned to, and then absorbed by, these students.

Putting together a Hybrid Identity

What might all of this about performances, identification, and desire have to do with *hybridity* and *Third Spaces*? Drawing upon the theories I previously outlined, I would like to propose the following simple diagram as my way of understanding identity for this thesis:

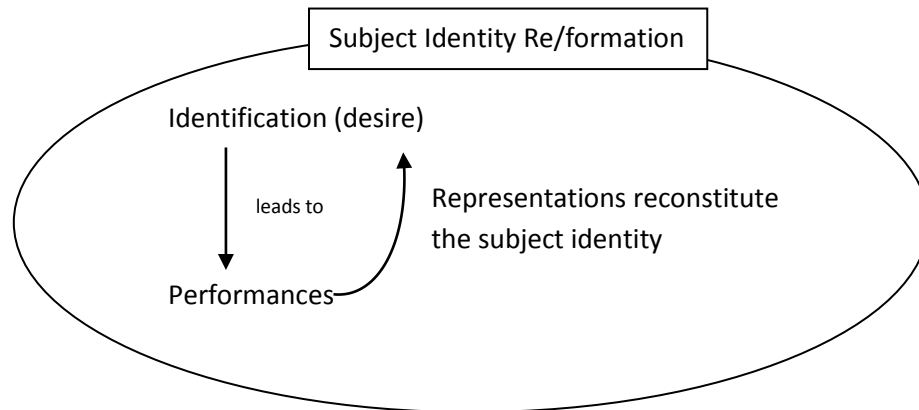


Figure 1: A subject identifies with others, desires to be like them in part or in whole, and this leads to actions. These actions are performances – what a viewer sees (representations like films) and also identifies with. The subject who has represented herself publicly in some way (through speech, film, written text) is personally changed by this act of representation. The process is cyclic.

The above process that helps me understand identity for this thesis takes up the idea of performativity as making the identity of the person undertaking the performance

(as self-presentation in everyday society, writing a text, the directing of a film). Representations are continuous acts of translation as Bhabha reminds us; they are imitations, revisions, and mobilizations of other representations. These new representations then become things with others of the same or different cultural groups can identify with, and desire to become or copy. The desire to become the object of identification transforms into action where new representations are again made, and so on.

When applied to thinking about hybridity as an identity, it seems to me that the process of identification with something *cultural*, and the resulting desire, could be considered hybridity. Desire plays out in disparate cultural places and in partial ways. Different members of the Indian diaspora, for example, identify with innumerable cultural artifacts and histories about different regions of India and those who have left India, all in different proportions. They adopt and re/articulate different identities through multiple identifications with parts of the global cultural economy of “India” newly all the time. For example, my idea of being *desi* involves identifications largely with comedic representations of young people born outside of India, as portrayed in English-language films. I identify with products on the market, films, writing, and desire them (and sometimes go so far as to buy/consume them). In allowing these things with which I identify into my life, they become part of my daily performance as a *desi* person. My representation of self out in everyday life as a Canadian citizen about who I am *as desi* is marked and changed all the time by acts of identification, desire, and consumption. And I am made anew by each performance which is a manifestation of different cultural pieces I have chosen to identify with and absorb (and even those which

I am aware of overlooking and even rejecting). My desi identity changes all the time. Identity is fluid and the process of its continual remaking is circular.

Why call this particular identity construction *hybrid*? And how can we begin to understand hybridity as a *Third Space*? For one thing, the process of identification in this conceptualization of identity happens across cultures, places, spaces, and colonial histories of oppressors and oppressed. It is an insoluble mixture of multiple influences – a shifting hybrid undertaking. The identification process is not about clear desires to be in one “world” or another. The hybrid subject undergoes identifications that might be contradictory, or as Homi Bhabha says, *ambivalent*. The identification with historical colonizer (British culture) and colonized (Indian traditional customs) at the same time is symptomatic of this. The multiple spaces of diaspora and “homeland” are felt in this process of re/articulation of identity in sometimes contradictory ways. Perhaps a refusal to reside in one space or another is what makes having a Third Space necessary.⁴

Foremost, I am interested in how these performances might look. For Hongyu Wang (2007), performing identity in/as a Third Space is an ongoing struggle to articulate. She seems to ask herself what the ethnography of third spaces might be, given her academic practice of attempting to give voice to them:

I cannot emphasize enough that a third space is unsettling and never settles down. The third is not another version of the unified one but holds both unity and multiplicity. My efforts to produce a poetic prose to “speak the unspeakable” of a third space (pp.146-151 [of *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home*]) are due to the limitations of analytical writing to describe such a moving and fluid process. (p.390)

⁴ I will work through possible structures for the Third Space in the coming section of this theoretical framework.

Wang's work focuses on her experience away from "home" (China) and "abroad" (USA) and the experience of journeying, translating, and feeling a part of both cultures as a curriculum that asks and reveals what can be learned from the journeying. She represents her experiences narratively, for readers to see, interpret and, she hopes, *feel* a third space.

Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) explains the conditions of making Third Cinema as representing certain cultural identities. For her, identity is marked by questions of insider-outsider status:

A good, serious film about the Other must show some kind of conflict, for this is how the West often defines identities and differences. To many scientifically oriented film-makers, seeing ironically continues to be believing. Show is not showing how I can see you, how you can see me, and how we are both being perceived – the encounter – but how you see yourself and represent your own kind... (p.134)

...The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks from the outside while also looking from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her-the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalising strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure... Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out... (p.145)

In this formation, the Third Space appears to emerge for Trinh as a place of performance and execution by those on the "inside" of a particular culture. The borders between self and Other, whites and non-whites, is clear but the modes of representation that Trinh articulates are complicated by positionality, the enunciation of an unfixed position. The so-called Other is a participant in the making of her own identity outwardly and importantly for the consumption by the dominant culture ("the West"). Looking at

cultural performances in Third Cinema film-making, perhaps the drifting between spaces could be considered ways of displaying cultural identity that is meant to be seen and consumed no matter what the cost. Films are meant to be reviewed and examined – and perhaps the project of filmmakers is to provide the evidence that Ibrahim seeks to determine what hybridity “looks like.” Trinh’s filmmaking is troubled by the division between audience and film content (the world as captured “out there” while examined by audiences in theatres). She describes this disruption in *The Moon Waxes Red* (1991), and in an interview with Maria Grzanic (1998) through the paradigm of the “inappropriate/d other.”

We can read the term "inappropriate/d other" in both ways, as someone whom you cannot appropriate, and as someone who is inappropriate. Not quite other, not quite the same. ... Depending on the context, one term may prove to be more relevant than the other. ... Since inappropriate(d)ness does not refer to a fixed location, but is constantly changing with the specific circumstances of each person, event or struggle, it works differently according to the moment and the forces at work.

To relate this situation in which one is always slightly off, and yet not entirely outside, I've also used the term "elsewhere," to which I've often added "within here"-an elsewhere within here. That is, while one is entirely involved with the now-and-here, one is also elsewhere, exceeding one's limits even as one works intimately with them. This is a dimension that one develops simultaneously, not something that happens linearly and successively in two time-phases, with one coming before the other.

Building upon the idea Trinh proposes about the disruption of binaries – that, in postcolonial terms, the margin can exist within the centre and vice versa, I wonder how the films in this study provide a space where identification with binaries leads to them becoming objects of transformation. These binaries include Asian/White, Muslim/Hindu, upper class/working class (Giardina, 2003). Looking back to my picture

to ask what is re/formed with each performance, I can begin here by suggesting that diasporic films are sites of economic mobility and cultural opportunity for the diaspora. Looking from a practical and global worldview, hybrid cultures in the late 20th and early 21st century have constructed their identities (in all of their multiplicities) without national and physical borders in the way. Movies such as *Bhaji on the Beach*, *American Chai*, and *Bend It Like Beckham* point to the fact that hyphenated identities have currency – that “hybridity, diaspora, and post-coloniality are now fashionable and even marketable terms” (Hutnyk, 2000, p.118 in Giardina, 2003). These public displays of hybrid identities make the representations of Third Spaces from the “margins,” sites of resistance (hooks, 1990) beyond the historical desire to be allowed to move from the colonized periphery to the colonial metropole – that is, beyond a desire merely to be seen and acknowledged. These films speak to a newer reality – that hybridity is about mobilizing fluid identities, demanding recognition, and making the diasporic self available to be reached-into and explored (Ibrahim, 2008). The transactions become powerfully economic and culturally mainstream for those inside and outside the diaspora alike. I ask, however, how evolving conditions of consumption (the showcasing of “Otherness” by the diaspora - for the diaspora and non-diaspora) influence the way we might see Third Spaces.

Third Space Geographies

Many ways for understanding Third Spaces already exist – both in cultural studies and in education. In this section, I would like to situate my understanding of identity

amongst several paradigms. Drawing upon each in different ways, I hope that my own “hybrid” understanding of Third Spaces expands upon how they might be looked-at, and how the films I will analyse might be read differently.

To begin, I ask how movies might allow us to understand the concept of hybrid Third Spaces simply through the stories they tell. First, let me return to Bhabha’s (1994) view about culture itself as undergoing continuous acts of translation. Each individual act of translation is an effort to create place and meaning in a continuum of experiences between/within multiple cultures. A film might be thought of as a “freeze frame” in a moment of cultural translation. The translation act is both linguistic (literal translations between languages) and cultural (the cultural reinvention of self in new spaces – like the Indian who presents herself differently when abroad, bringing a translated version of “India” to others through self-representation). This translation along multiple trajectories is the *ambivalence* of hybridity that he explains in relation to mimicry by the colonized, the “colonial double” (p.86). Historically, mimicry is strategic in its threat to colonialism:

...the excess of slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed in an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence. By ‘partial’ I mean both ‘incomplete’ and ‘virtual’. (p. 86, original emphasis)

This state of ambivalence today, for diasporas, can be seen in the occupation of multiple contradictory spaces at once by the diasporic individual. The Western milieu in which the diasporic individual lives, and the residues of a “home” culture learned in the diaspora (Indians born in the West who have never seen India but still identify with it somehow) constitute these contradictory but simultaneously inhabited spaces. The

diasporic subject might carry within him or her the histories of colonialism, the feeling of being an imposter, but not just in relation to the colonizer but *all the time*, since there is no “home” to go back to. The act of translating culture for o/Others might never be complete nor clear for the diasporic Indian born abroad. Desi films therefore necessarily call attention to uncertain cultural futures, including possible losses and/or transformations of (m)other tongues and Indian traditions as they become less recognizable over generations *as Indian*.

So what is Bhabha’s structure of Third Spaces, exactly? The concept is elusive and I have made reference to some of its features: mimicry, ambivalence, hybridity. A challenge and defining feature of Third Spaces is that the concept can be understood in different ways. From an interview with Jonathan Rutherford (1990), Bhabha explains that Third Spaces are spaces of identification,

...a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness.... [T]he importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practice which inform it, just like a translation, so that hybridity puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. (p .211)

This explanation, in Bhabha’s own words, removes the idea of a “sovereign self” that can exist outside culture. Bhabha also proposes that hybridity helps eradicate cultural binarism at the level of the subject, and the result is that we “emerge as the others of ourselves” (1994, p. 39). This concept is abstract. My understanding of Bhabha here is that there is a space between the subject and its “other self.” The space in-between and along the way between subject and its other is the space of

translation. It is an identity (a hybrid one) which is a space (a Third Space). As someone who understands theoretical concepts visually, I have drawn the concept in one plane:

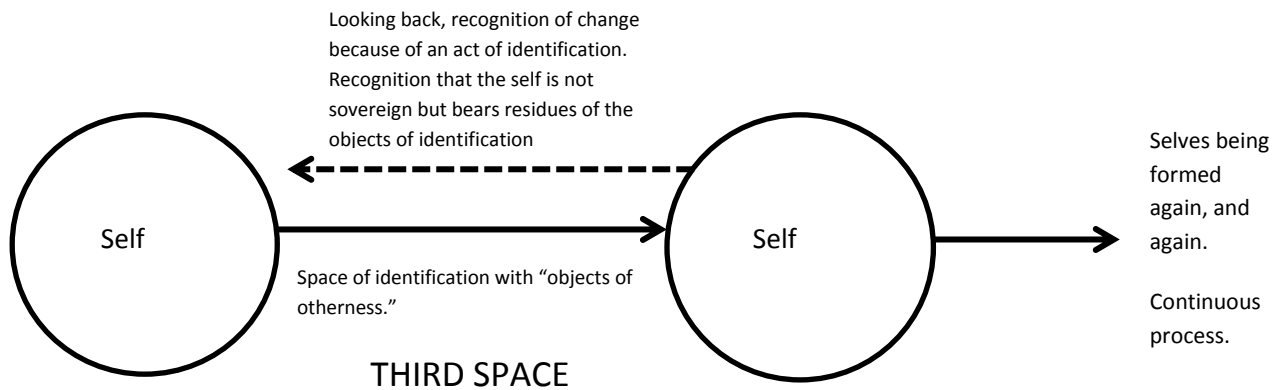


Figure 2. A diagram of my understanding of Bhabha’s (1990/1994) concept of Third Spaces.

Ambivalences are part of hybrid identity because of being “you” in one sphere and recognizing yourself simultaneously in another. They involve acts of identification with and through objects of otherness that change you through processes of translation. The self is neither static nor incognizant of its own change, and part of the human unconscious. Contradictory understandings of the self is part of the ambivalence and hybridity of the Third Space. The rejection of the logic of binarism exists in the ability to simultaneously be *both* or even *multiple* selves all at once. One doesn’t have to be either one or the other.

In “The Void of Misgiving,” Robert J.C. Young (2009) asserts that the Third Space does not have to be a “space,” but rather a site of enunciation. Drawing upon the works of Benveniste and Lacan, Young argues that just as subjectivity exists and ceases to exist all at once at the moment of speech, the same applies for a moment of cultural encounter. However, this perspective has its weaknesses also, in Young’s emphasis that the moment of cultural encounter leads to a “fall into [a] void” and that it “opens up a gap, a lacuna that is not emptiness, into which the subject is dropped” (p. 89). Culture is thus ephemeral in this model.

Edward Soja (1996) draws upon spatial theory to introduce the concept of *thirdspace* far beyond single cultural encounters. Using Borges’ metaphor of the Aleph, Soja proposes thirdspace as a concept that includes everything in society in continuous movement towards “an-Other.” As a challenge to dualisms, Soja uses the idea of *thirthing*, which he explains is “cumulative trialectics that it is radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (p. 61) This constantly evolving concept of thirdspace is similar to Bhabha’s original concept because it involves the unending renegotiation of boundaries and thus the renewal of the ground upon which cultural identity stands. Julia Lossau (2009), however, challenges this view of vast unending terrains of thirdspace. She reminds us that in spatial theory, physical spaces are always contained and demarcated by boundaries. Thus, there is a theoretical disconnection between the fields of spatial theory and (cultural) third spaces in Soja’s work. Given this problem, theories about identity and spatial theory cannot be reconciled since it means that cultural identity must necessarily remain contained and bound.

Ulrich Beck (2009) employs the idea of cosmopolitanism (versus globalization) to propose that a person can be in more than one spatial location at once. He raises issues of nationalism in the global imagination through a discussion of off-shoring jobs – namely that views about job loss on a national level (the “national container”) misunderstand the idea of job gain on a global level, and that the matter of joblessness in a transnational economy exceeds national boundaries. He for a process of cosmopolitanization that

realizes elements of the cosmopolitan dream, yet in an unexpectedly *deformed* way – involuntary, unseen, often non-reflexive, creating ambivalent contradictory realities. What cosmopolitan idealists dreamed of, namely the inclusion of the excluded other, has become (in a specific sense) reality. You can be an alien, a non-citizen living elsewhere and at the same time be a neighbor, a competitor. (p. 13, original emphasis)

The third space, for Beck, is the idea of being in two places at once, abroad and at home simultaneously, though not equally, and this is about a real, tactile, experience of life. The life of a global citizen is the real existence of that person in asymmetrical ways in third spaces made out of cosmopolitan spatial conditions.

“Mapping” Quantum (Third) Spaces

Ulrich Beck’s description of the possibility of inhabiting two spatial positions simultaneously brings me to how I see third spaces, in terms of what I have read from Bhabha’s original text, and others’ interpretations. I have used a mapping metaphor throughout this section so far as a way to understand third spaces. In regards to why I have put the word “mapping” in quotation marks here, I realize that any attempt to

assert that third spaces can be read through quantum physics, as I am about to do, necessarily rejects the idea of mapping as the conventional practice of fixing points and locations. Like Beck, I wish to offer a theory that takes the concept of third spaces to another dimension of simultaneous inhabitation of different cultural spaces. To situate my understanding of (third) spaces within the realm of physics, I offer the following two vignettes before turning to a description of Quantum (Third) Spaces.

Vignette 1: Quantum Physics

In the early twentieth century, physics became increasingly theoretical and interpretive, moving away from commonly understood Newtonian principles of gravity, velocity and acceleration that can easily be measured macroscopically. New terminology and pictorial representations were constructed that formerly applied to physical systems that only existed as theoretical mathematical formulae. Contemporary physics sees the world as relative, subjective, uncertain, probabilistic, and discontinuous.

Expanding upon conventional Newtonian understandings of physics as linear, quantifiable, and measurable, Bohr, Heisenberg, Planck, and Einstein all contributed theories to understanding that dimensions of space and time were interrelated and existed *only* in relative frames. Planck's (1900) theory that light is emitted in packets was expanded upon by Einstein who described light as being made up of particles in 1905. In an attempt to resolve light's inherent paradox, how particles could act like waves, Max Born (1926) proposed that the wave function of electrons represents the *probability* of their presence in a particular location. Significantly, this theory began the

pervasive questioning of a causal universe. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (1927) furthered the idea of this statistical universe by showing that both the velocity and position of particles could never be determined at once because the act of attempting to measure position changes the velocity and vice versa.

For third spaces, this might be considered the *enunciated* position (Young, 2009). Bohr's Principle of Complementarity in physics puts it most clearly: an independent reality in the ordinary physical sense can neither be ascribed to the phenomenon nor the agencies of observation. There is no resolution to the fact that a causal universe is undermined completely by the fact that the involved position of an observer changes subatomic reality.

Vignette #2: Movie Screen

Salman Rushdie's (1981) novel *Midnight's Children* capitalizes on the inescapable contingency of reality through its use of magical realism. One scene in particular, gives us an idea about how third spaces might be understood. The novel's protagonist, Saleem, is conflicted by his ties to the national history of India; he is born at midnight on the eve of Partition in 1947. His life is an improbable and sometimes fatalistic series of events and encounters that result from this chance birthdate. The dimension of time is both random and causal in the novel simultaneously, as Saleem's life often causes and mirrors events happening across the whole nation of India.

To bring perspective to his situation, Saleem uses the analogy of a movie picture. He describes how even though the movie screen becomes less definable as one moves

closer to it and the large images are reduced to a series of dots, the “illusion dissolves...or rather, it becomes clear that the illusion itself *is* reality” (p. 166). The macroscopic image of the movie is ordered, revealing how the “dancing grain” of the actors’ images are actually “tiny details [assuming] grotesque proportions” (ibid.). There is an ordered pattern of pixels, but only in a moment of temporary arrangement – a moment of enunciation, if you will. Spatial theory can be invoked here, as the encounter with a particular shape – a character, a scene – is made up of tiny dots only for an instant, but always bounded within the rectangle that is the entire screen – something which Lossau (2009) reminds us about spatial theory always *containing* reality.

A Quantum Concept of (Third) Spaces

How can the idea of quantum physics be used to read third spaces in relation to diasporic films? In understanding identity as the continuous re-shaping of the self based upon identification, desire, and subsequent representations (Figure 1), I see myself undertaking different acts of identification all the time. The same applies for characters in a film, in each specific scene, and for the entire film itself. Each film, scene, character, or utterance might be considered a single act of representation depending on your perspective – just as for Saleem, the characters onscreen are made up of tiny dots, or looking more closely, more microscopically, those dots themselves are their own distinct reality. I wanted to describe a space where all sorts of multiple and simultaneous contingencies could play out. In keeping with my tendency to understand things visually, I have come up with the following diagram for quantum (third) spaces:

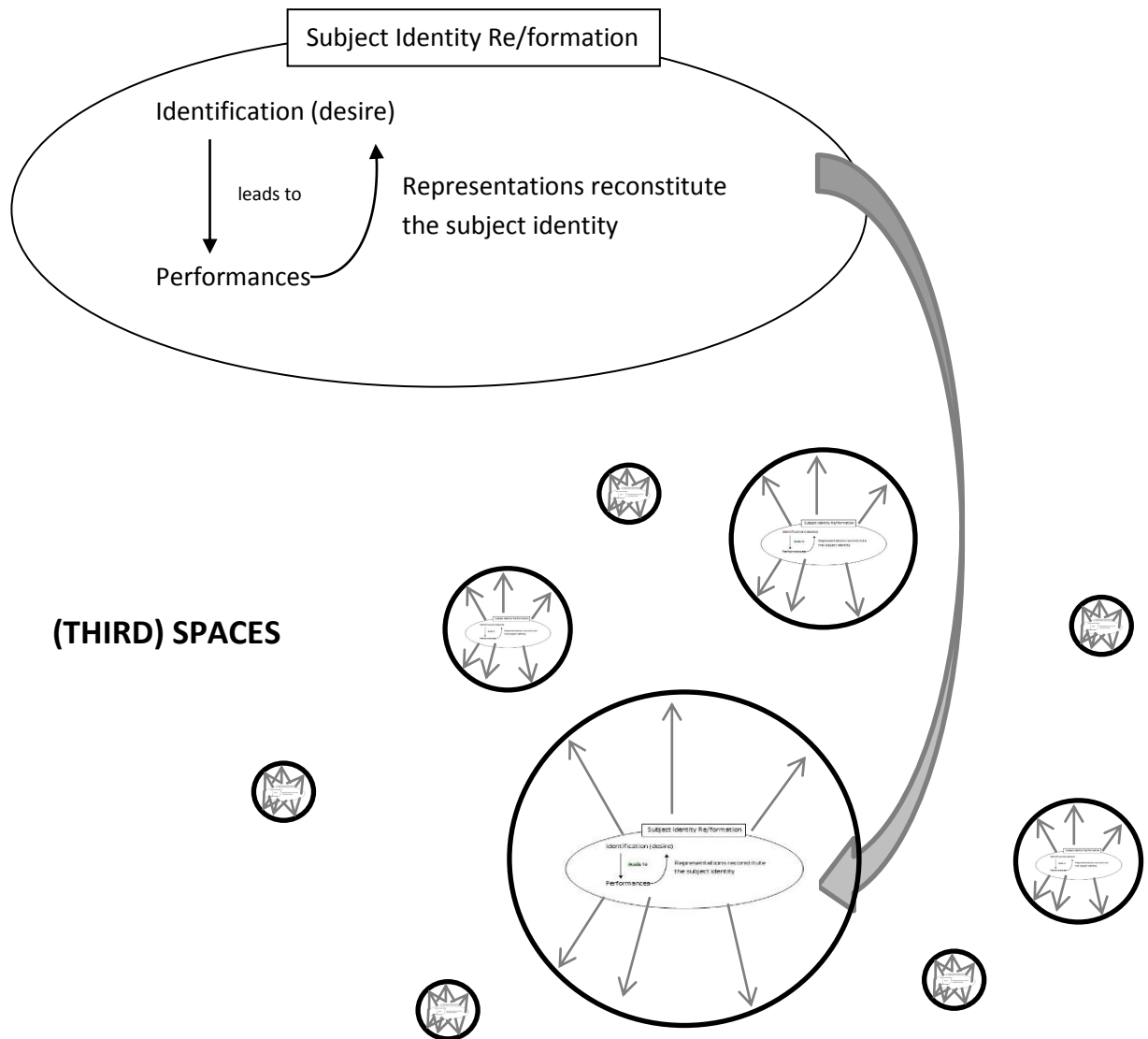


Figure 3: A conceptualization of quantum (third) spaces in three dimensions. Within each circle is my understanding of identity (Figure 1) in which representations are the product of constant identifications and resulting desires. Those representations are pushed to the outside, to the “shell” or the outer perimeter of the circle and it is what people see – whether as films, as writings, as pictures or any other form of representation.

The representations pushed to the outside after each moment of individual identification (shown by the arrows within each circle) are a way of thinking about the things we see and consume – whether they are YouTube videos about desi culture, t-shirts, movies,

books, or poetry. We can produce, recognize, and consume simultaneous representations at once. My understanding of (third) spaces includes the existence of several spaces at the same time, in varying dimensions in 3D space. This is an attempt to break free – allowing me to think of third spaces as both places and the spaces between places (removing the necessity of positionality). Hybrid cultural identities do not volley from one space to another (India/Canada, for example), emotionally or physically. For me, being in a (third) space includes experiencing constant change inside me, with multiple contradictory feelings of belonging/not belonging inhabiting my representation as Indian/Canadian that happen *all at once*. The only theory to which I kept returning to explain this simultaneity of feelings and experiences was quantum theory, where it is both possible and probable for an entity to be two or more places at the same time.

It is also possible to have instantaneous encounters, and fleeting moments of cultural enunciation (Bhabha, 1994; Young, 2009) that exist only for a moment and are gone again. We can look at diasporic films more specifically in relation to this. They can be understood as sites of fragmentation where a person's identification results in a single representation, the outer shell of one of the circles as a single utterance *within a film*, pushed outward from the inner space of identification to become the "shell" of the circle that people see and consume in a single scene. Diasporic films *as a whole* could also be understood as fragmented sites. One circle could be a whole film that includes multiple identifications and representations all pushed outward for consumption. In the process, audiences are able to see translations (some lost, some incoherent), journeys made or not made, exiles unable to return, and diasporas devoid of a motherland – all at

once in a particular kind of (third) space we call a single film. We also bring our own prior experiences to the viewing, each walking away with different perspectives of what a film might be “about.”

Different circles imply that (third) spaces can be a number of things, all of which are evolving and shifting. They can be referential – a circle that emerges from a moment of identification and desire to be another circle, another (third) space – and we see this in real life with fads, knock offs, movies similar to other movies, t-shirts that copy pictures logos from other cultural artifacts, etc. Thus Bhabha’s concept of culture being referential, or the idea that the subject can become the “other of itself,” is not lost. The frames of reference in a quantum (third) spaces are always shifting, as well. This is reminiscent of Saleem’s revelation in *Midnight’s Children* that the “illusion itself is reality” since perspective is everything. One circle might be the translation of another (in the sense Bhabha writes about – as imitation, copy, transformation). But the originary object is fleeting and gone in the next instant. Unlike in Bhabha’s theory, however, the originary object does exist, just in another time. In quantum theory, the past and present can co-exist, and we see this in cultures which try to hold onto values and traditions held deeply for generations, alongside change in modern society.

Ted Aoki (2005) also has a picture describing multiculturalism that uses multiple circles, though not in three dimensions. The diagram is a “curricular landscape” thought of through a metaphor of Bach fugues’ “aparallel polyphon[ies] that refuse closure” (p. 271). What Aoki explains is that the landscape of multiculturalism can be thought of in the spaces between circles, where “Canadian multiculturalism is a polyphony of lines and movement that grow in the abundance of middles, the “betweens” ... that populate

our landscape” (ibid.). I wish for my similar (3D) picture to also open up ways to think about how people might present themselves in society. What better metaphor than a shell to express how people are in front of others? We push certain representations “outward” all the time – our fashion, our speech, our choice of dialogue and emphasis on certain words and subjects. The shell contains some of the turmoil going on underneath – sometimes conflicted experiences of self, self-censorship about being attracted-to or rejecting certain aspects of Indian or Canadian culture, or quite simply the process of working through the choice of what to present to the world after the moment of identification and desire. This “outward self” the presentation of the hybrid self in public, is both a way of attracting the gaze while deflecting it from the personal struggle of identity.⁵ The deflections allow things to ricochet between identities in the spaces “between” that Aoki describes as being vital to his discussion of multiculturalism. The areas “between” in Third Spaces are places of transmission, of porousness between identities in different milieus.

Taken more macroscopically, outside the level of the individual, a circle that represents something like a film encloses the intra-cultural dialogue going on underneath about what to show the public, what representations best encapsulate desi culture, and what subject position to present to desi and non-desi audiences worldwide. These are

⁵ In a Bohr model of the atom (the smallest unit of matter), the “shell” is the place where electrons travel. They have fixed orbitals. In a quantum model, the electrons occupy a space outside the positively charged nucleus, where their negative charge keeps them in vicinity, but they have more random positionality. The quantum model of electron shells are a probability of them being in a given space at a given time but there is no fixity since the act of trying to observe them might alter their position. Regardless, the metaphor of a randomization of what exists in/on our “shells” of representation is pertinent here. Like all people, I pick up, discard, and inhabit identities newly in often unpredictable ways. How I wear my identity is shifting. The act of trying to pin me down to a fixed identity (like the scientist who attempt to observe physical phenomena) necessarily changes me as I resist being fixed, cornered, and identified. I make myself anew in the face of such categorizations.

real conversations going on behind the scenes, in movie production, between those who have an interest in presenting desis to the world in some way on a large scale.

In terms of cultural translation, the idea of translations between cultures linguistically as well as the movement of peoples (translations across geographies) can also be read through the concept of particles in space. Considering Aoki's attention to the spaces "between," the whole sphere is free to move in all sorts of spaces – in cyberspace, in real space, across borders, and to different audiences. Identifications and representations move between cultures (bicultural or multicultural); the particle lacks fixity as it translates across space and time (generations).

The spaces between (third) spaces are also important for another reason. What does *not* get said or represented is also key in this conceptualization of (third) spaces. Trinh Minh-ha (1999) talks about this in relation to the inner space of films: "What exists in a film, for example, between two images? What happens in the interval? The question mark is huge here, for every one of us would come up with a different response" (p. 201). I believe that this space of *possibility* is important. The gaps, spaces where *no* articulations have been made, are also spaces of possibility. I make no attempt to account for what exists there. After all, the circles move through space and time, vacating more spaces as they move, allowing for more articulations of hybrid (third) spaces to emerge.

Chapter Three

Review of Literature

An important question to ask in relation to (third) spaces is whether Third Spaces have been used in educational research in the past. The answer is yes. Educational researchers have used Third Spaces in a number of ways – to describe the unspoken facets of teaching and learning in different cultural contexts, as metaphors for the crossing of boundaries, to describe a curricular journey between places/spaces, and in the real ethnographic project of seeing how hybridity might “look” in the educational setting. As such, in this literature review, I first recall the ways Third Spaces have been used in educational research. Subsequently, I provide a brief summary of Third Cinemas as a form of “migrant” cinema and explain where Indian diasporic movies fit into this category of filmmaking. As well, I review the study of film in educational research since I am studying diasporic films in an education context. I wish to situate my quantum concept within an educational field already using third spaces, but through film analysis.

Third Spaces in Education Research

Returning to the concept at the end of my theoretical framework – the seeming paradox of inhabiting multiple cultural spaces at once – I am reminded of the work of curriculum scholar Ted Aoki (2005) who opens up a dialogue about the possibilities of inhabiting multiple spaces. In “Metonymic Moment #3: Opening up to The Third Space Midst Representational/Nonrepresentational Discourses,” Aoki describes the simultaneity of living in dual spaces in a philosophical rather than physical universe to ask what lies between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived in the pedagogical space.

Employing traditional Chinese wisdom and language, he explains ambivalence through the concept of simultaneous presence and absence using the words *yû-mu*. He explains:

Yû-mu as both “presence” and “absence” marks the space of ambivalence in the midst of which humans dwell. As such, Yû-mu is non-essentialist, denying the privileging of either “presence” or “absence,” so deeply inscribed in the binarism of Western epistemology. As the groundless ground in traditions of wisdom, the ambiguity textured in yû-mu is understood as a site pregnant with possibilities. (p. 323)

This description of *yû-mu* embodies Aoki’s philosophy of curriculum. He explains that learning often happens “in the vibrant space in the fold... at times a site of both difficulty and ambiguity and also a site of generative possibilities and hope” (p. 332). Using a technique of “cracking” words apart, Aoki gives the example of the word “ethnography,” which he cracks in the middle between “ethnos” and “graphy.” With his analysis of how the split reveals how the graphical (writing) informs the ethnos (ethnic identity), Aoki arrives at a formulation of identity through a mechanism of identification inseparable from the act of writing, just as Bhabha (1987) does. However, Aoki suggests that the signifying practice involved in writing “questions the hegemony of ‘presence’ in the contiguous figure of ‘presence/absence’” (p. 324). What this points towards, ultimately, is different ways of understanding ourselves through language. As we learn about how Western ideologies privilege individualism, evidence, and measurable realities we also learn how other cultures, such as Aboriginal cultures “support inclusiveness and connectedness through the life force of all living things” (p. 326). The recognition that language does not operate the same way in different learning environments is symptomatic of what is left to be learned between cultures – what Aoki describes as “mov[ing] into the cracks [to] see curriculum as a living entity” (p. 327).

Nina Asher (2003) similarly argues for moving past a binary of “self” and “other” towards “interbeing” as self-reflexive pedagogy. Working in the field of multicultural education, Asher questions why non-Western representations within the academy still remain marginal – for example, the study of post-colonial literatures versus Western literatures in English Departments. Her (2009) work with Indian-American students is an effort to “decolonize” texts so that social transformation can follow. She looks at the effects of colonization in educational contexts – in texts, in self-representations, and as recursive identity formations at the boundaries between cultures. She encourages students to become “vulnerable observers” (p.73) such as tracing the places where their clothes are made (the global inside the local), so that they can participate in “building coalitions” across different contexts. A consciousness about the self’s hybrid status extends into community spaces, where people strive to move beyond binaries of self and other towards the self-reflexive pedagogy of “interbeing” that draws upon Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of “mindfulness” – a way of being acutely aware of the self in the world (p.238). For those telling their stories – whether as teachers in classrooms, directors of diasporic films, or the characters portrayed in them – remaining mindful of the self’s situatedness in speaking about being hybrid is a process of maintaining one’s integrity foremost. The goal for those with hybrid identities is to teach others about the situatedness of identity, and the possibilities of interbeing – to convey not just “who I am” but also “where I am coming from” (p.241). Asher extends multicultural education discourse by encouraging contemplation of identities that exist at the boundaries between cultures, to the concept of hybridity as “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994).

Also looking at the borderlands between cultures in the educational context, Awad Ibrahim (2008) investigates the role of Third Spaces in theorizing lived-experiences of students in Ontario classrooms. He describes third spaces as “organic,” because they are “historically situated and partially unconsciously executed” (p. 240). Ibrahim goes on to explain that third space is “an indissoluble mixture of two, or more, linguistic, ideological, cultural, and belief systems. It is third because it is found in the inter-geographies, cultures, languages, and memories” (ibid.). He describes a flow between first spaces (“Different Parts of Africa”) and second spaces (“North America”) into the third where the “Old is already in the New and the ‘different’” (p. 240). Ibrahim describes the simultaneity of positions – in his research, the complicated experience of “being assigned *and* taking up both ‘continental *and* diasporic African’ identity” (p. 242). This is an ambivalent process of the diaspora having cultural identity assigned to it, absorbing it, and reproducing it in complex acts of translation.

Many scholars have looked at this aspect of translation as a productive theoretical space to discuss the terrain between cultures (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Bassnett, 2002; Edgerton, 1996; Huggan, 2001; Trivedi, 2005). In its relation to a discussion about Third Spaces, the field of cultural translation studies describes the transactional aspects of language and culture as they move between geographical spaces, and within texts – both of which are part of public pedagogy like films. Postcolonial scholars are particularly interested in the implications of representing the self and/as Other through acts of translation within the contested terrain of the Western academy (Mohan, 1992/1993; Pandit, 1992/1993; Spivak, 1993). Bahri (1997) writes about the normative strategies employed by postcolonial scholars within universities in North

America who are only permitted from the margins within academe to “create a manageable, systematized, and consumable discourse of difference” (p.278). She explains:

As teachers drawn in many cases from the elite ranks of universities in ex-colonies, our dilemma is compounded because some of us both teach *and* embody the margins. We teach, “translate,” and make available through, a filter of postcolonial history and theory the “voices” (nothing less than the “voice” will do, given our rhetoric of speaking and being listened to as if an actual exchange were being enacted that transcended the merely academic) simultaneously reinstated in the periphery as they are introduced into the discourse at the center. (p. 279)

These concerns are about who is doing the speaking, how those doing the representing can stand-in for, and yet be marginalized by both the countries from which they come and the academic traditions originating there. To escape the trap of being both the object and subject of restricted cultural translations which leave the postcolonial speaker on the margins, Lavia (2007) advocates an internationalization of research as necessary to “develop an understanding of the complicated networks of globalized knowledge” (p. 287). Rizvi, Lingard, & Lavia (2006) assert that “it is only through education that it is possible to reveal and resist colonialism’s hold on our imagination” (p. 257). In other words, while educational establishments themselves hold legacies of hegemony and Eurocentric practices of reason and critique as the only ways of “knowing” (Asher, 2009a), awareness of this by students and scholars who are part of the diaspora help to build modes of resistance through the educational establishment itself (undertaking discursive practices to challenge colonizing discourse and educational motifs, for instance), and outside the establishment through cultural forms, including film.

Looking at cultural translation as a mode of representation, it is also important to recognize its origins. The field came into being first as a move beyond linguistic theories of translation (word-to-text) to theorizations about how culture shapes the process of translation, and how acts of translation, in turn, have a deep and lasting impact upon culture (Even-Zohar, 1978; Toury, 1980). As we know, however, culture as the object of translation is neither neutral nor static. As the parameters of culture are always in flux, so are its translations. Thus acts of translation within cultures are both strategic and fluid, and serve to contribute multiple views to cultural “insiders” and “outsiders” alike. As Susan Bassnett (2002) explains, “emphasis has been placed on the inequality of the translation relationship, with writers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Tejaswini Niranjana and Eric Cheyfitz arguing that translation was effectively used in the past as an instrument of colonial domination, a means of depriving the colonized peoples of a voice” (p.4). This imposition of the colonizer’s voice onto the colonized has historically made Otherness recognizable, consumable, and predictable through a systematic mode of (re)configuring other cultures as different but also familiar (but always in ways that are inferior). This is a risk in the educational context of how Others are represented in the multicultural classroom, and is equally a risk in my self-representation and in the act of writing about the Indian diaspora in my thesis.

I hope to work through this “doomed” view of cultural translation as the cyclic reinforcement of colonial power by relating the global movement of peoples (the formation of a diaspora) and the process of translation itself – a “process of negotiation between texts and between cultures, a process during which all kinds of transactions take place” (2002, p.6). Bassnett reminds us of the words of Homi Bhabha on the

subject of translation, who steps away from texts as the central focus of translation to describe the “transaction” in the “etymological sense of being carried from one place to another” (ibid.). These inbetween spaces become the fertile ground for cultural production, where films like *Bhaji on the Beach*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *American Chai* are made and serve to speak “between” cultures in multiple ways – including the multi-dimensional, temporal and spatial ways described in my theorizing of (third) spaces.

Put most simply, cultural translation can be about representing difference as a transaction – an exchange, a movement from one place to another. In films, the ways representation takes place is important to examine. Da Silva (1999) describes representation as both “delegation” and “description.” In the first instance, he questions the politics of representation, asking who has the voice and power to speak for entire cultural groups, and who gives up their own individual voices to allow others to do the speaking. For representation as description, cultural inscriptions come to define culture in the “discourse and images through which a culture represents the social world” (p.9). Both forms of representation are tied together, and Da Silva reminds us that “[h]e who speaks *for* the other controls the forms of speaking *about* the other” (ibid., original emphasis). Huggan (2001) explains that difference cannot be totally domesticated, even if the colonizer seeks total control, else it fails to remain a site where cultural information and knowledge can be violently appropriated and revitalized as seemingly new.

For diasporic films, these concerns about the representation of cultural knowledge are pedagogical. Diasporic films can be thought of as curricular objects that

do the “work” of teaching about cultural difference (Giroux, 2002) through their own complicated conversations (Pinar, 2004). By “complicated conversations,” Pinar (2004) writes about curriculum as situated in time and space, and the complicated interactions between teacher and student and text that intertwine to co-produce self, other, and culture. Working specifically in the field of education, Susan Huddleston Edgerton (1996) describes the “connections, cross-cultural and cross-temporal, among literary texts and readers’ lives” as “aimed at building webs of differences, highlighting overarching commonalities, modes of intersections, so that language becomes embodied” (p.8). She explains that these embodiments are full of possibilities – foremost among them historical translations and “literacies of the imagination” that allow us to consider the world in hopeful ways.

As well, complicated cross-cultural conversations are often translations from margin to centre. In these diasporic films, the language is English: the characters speak it, the movies are marketed to North American and European audiences, and in each story, Western values triumph over (or at least make inroads into) so-called “traditional” value systems from India. By using the word “Western,” here, I point to a binary the films set up. The imaginary “Western” has currency as one half of a binary against which “traditional,” “uncorrupted,” and “moral” practices and values of India are played by the film characters. Ironically, the “language of the oppressor” is omnipotent in all three films. Indeed, the fractured nature of cultural representations in these films – from grandmas wearing sarees to diasporic Indian youth singing rock songs – also makes the acts of translation onscreen part of a multiplicity of contradictory transactions. Many of them occur simultaneously, bringing forth layered conflicts in

single scenes. Being attentive to this kaleidoscope of fractured representations is part of the translation space in that it serves as a constant reminder that “[c]ultural identity is not an absolute entity... identity makes sense only within a discursive chain of differences” (Da Silva, 1999. p.17). I might add that this discursive chain is a multiplicity of different outward *representations* of identity. Diasporic films are also themselves translations, working inside the “in-between space” (Bhabha, 1994), oscillating between, and capturing simultaneously (as per a quantum reading of (third) spaces), Hollywood and Bollywood motifs to reach multiple audiences, all the while presenting complex negotiations and intra/inter-cultural translations as their main plot devices.

One other way that Third Spaces have been used in education research is through spatial metaphors that relate the unknowable condition of having dual or conflicting identities to the experience of journeying (Cary, 2006; Wang, 2004, 2007), and in some cases, negotiating the space of “home” (Blunt & Dowling, 2006; Giroux, 1994; Morley, 2000; Naficy, 1999; Preen, 2006; Silva, 2009). The concept of journeying has been seen within the education field as part of a curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 2005), and as a part of a fluid curriculum “space” (Cary, 2006). The lives captured by the term *diaspora* – transnational migrants – have been conceptualized in terms of “roots” and “routes” (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Blunt and Dowling (2006) tell us that “whilst ‘roots’ might imply an original homeland from which people have scattered, and to which they might seek to return, ‘routes’ complicates such ideas by focusing on more mobile, mutiple, and transcultural geographies of home” (p. 199). Curriculum scholar Hongyu Wang (2007) rejects the idea that there can be a fixed self

that is found through the process of journeying. Instead, she advocates an openness “to creativity through interaction with conflicting doubles in a third space” (p. 389). Employing post-colonial and post-structural positions, Wang reminds readers of her work that the “third space refuses to be fixed upon any point” (p. 390). In travelling between her cultural spaces of China and USA, Wang (2004) looks at curriculum as an intercultural and historical journey. She privileges a view of culture that is transformed through history “by both break and repetition” (p. 167). She asks, “[w]ithout recognizing how one is situated historically and culturally (itself a form of cultural critique), is it ever possible to become an individual capable of critically engaging one’s life and the making of one’s choices, rather than going with the flow of the mainstream?” (ibid.). In other words, Wang asks how one can look at the self in a situated manner – historically (temporally) and interculturally (spatially), and what can be learned from the recognition of the self’s place in a journey along these dimensions.

Peeren (2006) invokes Bhaktin’s concept of the chronotope to talk about the multidimensionality of diasporic identities in quantum terms. She explains that:

[the] chronotope’s main implication is that time and space are intimately connected: time becomes a dimension of space – its fourth dimension – and space a dimension of time. Time is spatial in the sense that the passage of time can only be perceived and given meaning in space, and space is temporal in the sense that movement in space is also always movement in time. (p. 68)

Peeren notices that diasporic identities are always in a phase of “reprocessing,” a “changing same” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 49). Referring to Althusser’s concept of interpellation, she contends that the chronotope might be thought of as an ideology of time-space that interpellates diaspora doubly. Diasporas are “subjected...by home

chronotope, host chronotope, and the thirdspace chronotope of the journey between these two[;] it is the this double or triple interpellation that produces the hybrid communal identity we call diasporic” (p. 71). Importantly, Peeren’s work describes identity through performance (Butler, 1990) that opens up two ways of considering time-space: performances embedded in time-space, and time-space itself as a performance “maintained by social practices” (ibid.). Thinking about time in relation to diasporic identity-formation along an axis of performance that goes beyond living with a sense of “rupture” (Clifford, p. 312), this view acknowledges that “spatial displacement is always also temporal displacement...the homeland is not only *distant*; it is also *past* or *passed*, left behind in space and time” (Peeren, 2006, p. 72, original emphasis). Looking at cultural performances as identities situated in space and time also acknowledges that cultural groups are not merely hanging in the balance at a particular social or historical moment, but rather have shared ways of conceptualizing space, time, and subjectivity, conveyed through performances.

Third Cinema

The diasporic films in this study fall into a category Rajgopal (2003) identifies as Third Cinema. This name comes from the general concept of origins – namely that these are the films made by “people descended from immigrants from the Third World, and hence...they occupy a space somewhere inbetween – which has been categorized as a possible third space that occupies both insider and outsider status” (p.52). Pines and Willimen (1989) describe Third Cinema as “grounded in an understanding of the

dialectical relationship between social existence and cultural practice” (p. 2). Guneratne (2003) emphasizes that “Third Cinema theory is the only major branch of film theory that did not originate within a specifically Euro-American context” (p. 7) In the United Kingdom, films by South Asian (Indian) diaspora are considered part of Black cinema – an intentional move on the part of Indian diasporic directors to “ally themselves with oppressed peoples worldwide struggling to throw off the yoke of colonial/imperialist hegemony” (Rajgopal, 2003, p. 54). Rajgopal (2003) asserts that Indian films have entered the mainstream as media “texts” that can be deconstructed through particular lenses. One central theme that ties diasporic Indian films together, as one of many kinds of diasporic films, are their mobility within the global context. They exemplify the motif of transnationalism as the mobility of people and ideas. Networks tie dispersed people together and international travel is extremely accessible these days. Nevertheless, Koh and Ekotto (2009) ask,

is a “third cinema” still of any relevance in a contemporary world? How can large-scale political questions such as neo-colonialism, the resurgence of postmodern racisms, and the emergence of the global South and regional poverty be addressed by peoples from these parts of the world on their own? Indeed, how do subjects of nations who are consistently described as being somehow “peripheral” to Western modernity envision and address their own conditions? (p. 2)

Ekotto and Koh specifically attempt to answer this question by presenting several essays that expose answers to how the “moving image [can] be utilized to combat forms of exploitation and oppression” (p. 6). They face challenges in this use of film “given our present circumstances of supposed “post”-modernity, “post”-colonialism and “post”-capitalism, along with the increasingly interconnected virtual and technological worlds”

(p.6-7). What is interesting about diasporic and exilic films in general, is that they point out this condition of our increasingly globalized world. Regardless of the fact that goods flow across the world at an unprecedented rate, and there is an increase in diasporas everywhere (especially in the West) – both facts which challenge the concept of national identities and traditions – the fears about losing national heritage and identity largely shape the politics and resulting conflicts occurring worldwide.

This paradox has been taken up by Arjun Appadurai (1996) who asserts that in this time of change due to globalization, media and migration are at the root of shaping subjectivities, and thus social transformations. In his claim that the “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991; Rushdie, 1991) of the world are not national communities, but rather a series of “-scapes” (ideoscapes and mediascapes), he identifies five strands of culture at play: media, capital, ideologies, technology, and people. Appadurai’s ideas resonate more specifically by scholars studying diaspora and film (Hall, 1990; Naficy, 1999, 2001; Shohat and Stam, 1994). Shohat and Stam (1994) comprehensively document postcolonial film, drawing connections between disparate diasporas through common analytic techniques that locate representations of ethnicity and colonialism. Often the films they study recount national and imperial histories and identities. Hall (1990) reminds us that identities are never fixed and there is no “one true self” (p. 393). Rather, identities are always in a state of becoming. While Hall does not draw upon specific films to articulate his case, Mercer (1988) analyses Black British films, asserting that the films do not search nostalgically for lost cultural origins. Rather, they adopt a “critical ‘voice’ that promotes consciousness of the collision of cultures and histories that constitute our very conditions of existence” (p. 56).

Synthesizing theories of diaspora and film, Ghosh and Sarkar (1995/1996) present a “poetics of displaced imagination” through examining the spatial turn in diaspora theory. Drawing upon theories of Naficy, Mohanty, and Said, they trace territories of “home” and “host” in several foreign films, analysing each through filmic representations of “zones of displacement”: panoramic landscapes, bridges, places of transition, “doubled” spaces – all which disrupt concepts of what is home and not-home.

The most complete analysis of diaspora films and their spaces of transition and transnational migration is by Hamid Naficy. In particular, his works *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001) and *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place* (1999) propose the concept of transnational cinema as “accented” and inhabiting an “interstices of dominant culture industries and social formations” (p. 5). Naficy defines diasporic filmmaking as “a cinema of alterity” (p. 128) whose “mode of production may variously be characterized as independent, personal, artisanal, interstitial, third cinema, collective, ethnic, immigrant, or exilic – although no single characterization encompasses it fully” (p. 129). Naficy’s analytic style is to explore the aesthetic, narrative, historical, political, and post-industrial production facets of diasporic cinema. He reveals central themes that are the result of spatial and temporal rifts, such as a sense of homelessness in exile, the expression of the journey, and the importance of immigrant dreams, nostalgia, and memory.

The uses of film in Education Research

The uses of film in educational research are diverse. However, Third Cinema seems to be largely absent from use in education research specifically. The largest body of educational research about film relates directly to the Hollywood portrayal of the “scene” of education, and in particular, its teachers (Bauer, 1998; Edelman, 1990; Freedman, 1999; Paul, 2001). One of many recent works on the subject is by Mary M. Dalton (2010), who draws attention to Hollywood’s role in the public imagination of what constitutes “teaching” and “learning” in United States classrooms. Her book, *The Hollywood Curriculum* employs Dwayne Huebner’s theories of curriculum to examine the (a)esthetic, political, technical, scientific and ethical aspects of schooling in Hollywood films. Dalton examines the frameworks that underpin representations of “good” and “bad” teachers in movies, women teachers, gay male teachers, and administrators. Several similar books exist as collected works devoted to examining popular representations of contemporary educational phenomena such as drop-outs, adolescent rebellion, and educational reform, including Farber, Provenzo, & Holm’s (1994) *Schooling in the Light of Popular Culture*. Ann C. Paietta (2007) chronicles an international filmography of teacher films predominantly focused on grade school teachers, governesses, and day care educators rather than high school teachers, in her book entitled *Teachers in the Movies*. Her list includes 831 films from around the world.

This general area of educational research about films is tangentially relevant to my work in the way the researchers deconstruct the depiction of lives of young people and their perceived needs for freedom in relation to adults who don’t share the same

values. The youth in these films see themselves as liberal-minded, culturally diverse, and technologically adept. In Hollywood films, teachers and administrators are often portrayed as backward, dated, and occupying a stagnant institution of schooling. Indian diasporic films represent similar ongoing negotiations between young people seeking certain freedoms from what they perceive to be oppressive cultural factors, and their parents whom they feel are restrictive and out-of-touch. Educational research about Hollywood films also provides the basis for thinking about how movies might be approached as “texts” which offer public social commentary on the actual life of schooling. I ask questions in my research about how films might be symptomatic (but certainly not wholly representative, or literally reflective) of the lives of the Indian diaspora in Canada.

Looking broadly, films in general and not just those which feature narratives centred around schools and school-life, have been conceptualized pedagogically. Eric Weiner (2001) states about popular culture that it “is one of society’s most effective devices for categorizing our affective and thinking capacities, teaching as it entertains and entertaining as it teaches” (p.434). Depaepe and Henkins (2000), speaking to research revealing teachers’ tendencies to “avoid, tone down or disguise the brutal confrontation with reality that pictures could represent” (p.14), remind us that there is not only “education through pictures” but also “education *in* pictures” (p.15, original emphasis). Weiner (2001) suggests that popular culture media such as films are effective educational tools because of their capacity to entertain, but also political in the ways that they normalize hegemonic representations. Drawing upon Gramsci’s

discussion of the interrelatedness of hegemony and pedagogy, Weiner (p.435) further explains that

we are “schooled” in the logic of dominant formations through a subtle and not so subtle barrage of cultural stimuli. From commercials and sitcoms to Hollywood blockbusters and school curricula, we both learn and acquire the kinds of knowledge that help perpetuate the dominant social order.

Henry Giroux responds to the social phenomenon of popular culture as pedagogy by consolidating the shared goals of cultural studies and critical pedagogy in an effort to “link culture and power to a transformative praxis and...link curricular and pedagogical theories and practices to cultural production, representation, and consumption,” (Weiner, p.435). Locating films as particularly important objects of pedagogical study, Giroux (2002) contends that they carry weight as forms of public pedagogy, “in a way that a three-minute pop song or a 22-minute sitcom cannot do, and by doing so offer a deeper pedagogical register for producing particular narratives, subject positions, and ideologies” (p.7). Specifically, they “connect the personal and the social by bridging the contradictory and overlapping relations between private discourses and public life” (ibid.). This stance is deeply relevant to a study of diasporic Indian films wherein the private lives of its characters stand-in for struggles within diasporic Indian communities, between these communities and the Westernized cultures that surround them, and within the microcosm of the diasporic Indian family.

Another important consideration is the overall literacy component of films as texts. Giroux (2002) describes using films in his classes as ways to connect “students’ experiences in multiple ways that oscillate between the lure of film as entertainment and the provocation of film as cultural practice” (p.8). Giroux goes further to explain that

films are not merely another way of teaching, but themselves “represent a new form of pedagogical text – not simply reflecting culture but actually constructing it – that signals the need for a radically different perspective on literacy and the relationship between film texts and society” (ibid.). In other words, films provoke and mobilize people’s attitudes towards their lived conditions and histories, force them to consider the material circumstances in which they live, and contemplate their position with relation to Others.

Film analysis opens up possibilities for both entertainment but also understanding about how “cultural politics matters in the everyday lives of people and what it might mean to make interventions that are both critical and transformative” (Giroux, 2002, p.13). In speaking about postmodernism’s condition of perpetual uncertainty and reflexivity, Best and Kellner (1991) put the process of analysis another way: “while it is impossible to produce a fixed set and exhaustive knowledge of a constantly changing complex of social processes, it is possible to map the fundamental domains, structures, practices, and discourses of a society, and how they are constituted and interact” (p.260). The analysis of the films *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Bhaji on the Beach*, and *American Chai* help to situate them in a larger cultural context. Analysing film structures and narratives will help me to begin locating what cultural knowledge is conveyed about living with hybrid identities in the contact zones (Pratt, 1991) between cultures.

Another area of educational research about film brings me much closer to my own personal engagements with diasporic movies as a viewer. A substantial body of research in education involves asking pre-service teachers to watch films and then

examine their knowledge and assumptions about educational issues. Dianne Brunner's (1994) research involved Bachelor of Education students viewing films alongside reading "professional texts" such as journal articles and books in order to unravel their "preconceived assumptions about teaching" (p. 69). Brunner asserts that pre-service teachers might have trouble "making the leap" from the abstract notion of what teaching entails to the actual classroom (p. 71). She proposes that unravelling stories about schooling in teacher movies aids in this transition. Judith Robertson's (1995) article "Screenplay Pedagogy and the Interpretation of Unexamined Knowledge in Pre-Service Primary Teaching," also brings educators into the research space where they watch, write about, and reflect upon their own positionality as teachers in relation to popular films about education. Robertson uses a psychoanalytic model to understand the dynamics of spectatorship, whereby "spectators construct meanings during the film viewing (or 'reading') process while at the same time the film constitutes and engenders them as social and psychological subjects" (p. 26). She uses psychoanalytic knowledge "to interpret not only the contents and structures of films, but also how readers incorporate these structures into social practice" (ibid.). Weber and Mitchell (1999) ask pre-service teachers to watch school films and reflect upon whether what they watch relates to any of their real life experiences, as well as if they think the films introduce and/or perpetuate stereotypes. Weber and Mitchell ask students why they think certain films have become popular and whose point of view is represented. The pre-service teachers responded by deconstructing scenes of the films in historical and social contexts. Similarly, James Trier (2001) involves pre-service teachers in research to engage them in "reflections about the issue of the relationship between the personal and professional lives of teachers" (p.131) through the lens of their own limited teaching

experience, and by deconstructing the relationships they see in teacher films. Trier's other work includes a 2003 study examining 'techniques of power' in the film *The Paper Chase*, and a 2005 paper describing pre-service teachers' engagement with stereotypes of urban schools in Hollywood cinema.

Trier and Robertson's research focuses on the engagement by the viewer to ask what knowledge the films convey about the self (in this case, as "teacher") in relation to portrayals of the teachers and students for public consumption in movies. Outside of the field of educational research, Canadian scholar Faiza Hirji (2010) also engages with how the "personal" is portrayed onscreen, not as a teacher or through Hollywood movies, but using Bollywood to examine her own position as part of the Indian diaspora. She explains:

As I moved throughout various regions of Canada during my graduate studies and research, I found that many young people of South Asian descent were grappling with...questions of identity and belonging, regardless of what part of South Asia they were descended from or what religion they practised. Just as I had, these youth were producing responses that were ambiguous, dependent on a number of factors, and in flux... Hybridity, migration, and evolution had occurred in the time of our ancestors and were certainly taking place in our own time, influencing our interpretations of faith, nationalism, and community. (p. 5)

To respond to questions about identity and belonging, Hirji turns to Bollywood because it is "a stalwart defender of local/Indian culture in the face of American media imperialism." Focusing on the link between "Bollywood and identity-construction" (ibid.), her research involves speaking to Indian diasporic students in Vancouver, Ottawa, and Toronto (from Arab, East African, Indian, and Pakistani origins) with different faiths (Muslim, Sikh, Hindu) and asking about their relationship to, and feelings about, Bollywood. Some youth feel that Bollywood does not capture their

identity wholly, giving them “unrealistic expectations” despite the Westernization of the genre, whereas for others, Bollywood becomes a way to construct a “homeland.” In general, diasporic youth negotiate plural identities (articulating national identities with Canada but cultural identities to other “homelands”).

I find myself in a similar situation as Faiza Hirji, questioning my diasporic roots (routes), and the added layer of having mixed (hybrid) cultural origins. I will use reviews and articles that directly critique the films in this study (Chacko, 2010; Donnell, 2007; Grassilli, 2008; Malik, 2007; May, 2010; Silva, 2009) alongside research on Indian diasporic media (Baily, Georgiou, & Harindranath, 2007; Gopinath, 1995; Grewal, 1997; Karim, 2003; Sharma, S, 2009; Sharma, R, 2011) in chapters five through seven, in order to provide an analysis of the film scenes, and their creation and deployment of hybrid identities within diasporic communities.

Chapter Four

Methodology

Employing a two part methodology, I look at the three films, *Bhaji on the Beach*, *American Chai*, and *Bend It Like Beckham*, I follow my instincts when viewing, writing down my interpretations so that I can “take apart” the films as narratives with structural and filmic elements (such as language and dress of the actors), and to locate the moments that strike me deeply. I examine my writing about each film to reveal what attachments to particular readings reside in my notes. To do this, I employ the methodology of screenplay pedagogy (Robertson, 1995). In the following sections, I elaborate on this layered process.

Viewing the Films

Films exist to tell stories. Their purpose, however, is not merely illustrative or to convey a narrow concept or plot line. Hobbs (1998) contends that film structures encourage analytic viewing – activities which include locating frames of reference for interpreting characters’ actions, and looking inward at filmic structures to give meaning to events portrayed onscreen. This has commonly been understood as treating the film as a text that can be “read” (Bentley, 1995). However, this is not a simple process of locating structures and providing analysis. The viewer is implicated in his/her position of viewing. Bennett (1983) refers to the traditional view that “all texts – literary, filmic and televisual, fictional or otherwise – may be ‘productively activated’” as an “inadequate[e]... process of their consumption or reception” (p. 3). Singh (2006) articulates this more directly, arguing that the current way of thinking about media products (i.e. films) as produced by “structures” and consumed is an approach that has

“severely limited the scope of ethnographic study by limiting and fixing people as objects of study to the status of ‘audiences’ in a narrow sense of the term, and more loosely, as a substitute for consumer” (p. 135-6). Singh further explains that treating films as texts that can be read for their total meanings is challenged by the “inter-media” nature of movies – that they “exist in various forms on television, the radio, the Internet, newspapers, conversations, and so forth, as commentary and/or advertisements” (p. 136). This nature of films existing in multiple temporal-spatial dimensions of production and consumption simultaneously is a quantum effect and negates the conventional understanding of a unidirectional experience of film-to-viewer. Singh questions viewers’ interactions with films further:

[W]hat does it mean to engage in an action of consumption? How are the consumers of a particular film identified? Even if we choose to study the responses of a particular group of people, when can we say that the act of consumption is complete? ... [A] film is only reproduced in different contexts and in a Derridean sense; any final or identifiable act of production or consumption is endlessly deferred. (p. 136)

To overcome the concern of homogenizing the audience through its act of consumption (which are actually multiple actions and experiences understood by different viewers), and to tackle the problem of presenting singular analyses of films as representative of the “audience” experience, Singh proposes that films not be regarded as texts, but rather as *utterances*. Drawing upon the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov, Singh asserts that a film is always “placed within larger discursive frameworks” and as such, is a “radically contingent and shifting social construct, which, as an object of analysis, can only be encountered as an utterance” (p. 137) rather than a text.

In this analysis, I employ analytic strategies remaining mindful of my status as only one audience member situated in a particular time and place. Taking account of my particular cultural stance, that of *desi*, I realize that the moments in which I view the films are single utterances within larger discursive chains of the films' articulations and circulations. These films exist in a globalized world where they circulate multi-dimensionally through Internet, video and advertisements.

To conceive of the work I am doing more clearly in the analysis of a film as a single utterance, I turn to Ng-A-Fook, Sheridan & Noble (2011) who describe inter-textual assemblages. Starting with an explanation that films are hybrid curricular spaces where historical narratives are (re)inscribed, taken apart, disassembled, and reassembled (p. 3), they organize their curriculum theory project around the concept of narrative *assemblages*. They clarify that “[m]uch like a Deluzian and Guattarian rhizome, an *assemblage* is non-objective and relational” (p. 3) as it changes and expands. Ng-A-Fook, Sheridan, & Noble refer to the inter-textual assemblages between a collection of essays and a film in their work. I believe that the film reading process can be understood intertextually as an assemblage as well.

Therefore, in this study, film analysis takes on two dimensions. First, I understand the paired experience of screening a film and viewing it critically to be a single *utterance* of the film. Second, a film's multiple utterances worldwide, as experienced by any number of viewers, if taken together, could be thought of as an intertextual assemblage – the representations of the film across different media, in different languages, across generations, and in different time zones. In this sense, my reading is only one part of an assemblage of different possible readings. In particular, it

is a *strand* marked by my position as desi, and I offer particular analyses of each film along trajectories that necessarily involve ways that I understand Indian diasporic culture. This concept of analysis along one strand acknowledges how I cannot remove myself from my position as desi to analyse the films outside of their diasporic messages, since I am part of a diaspora similar to those shown in the film (Indo-Canadian diaspora approximated to British and American Indian diaspora).

Throughout my film analysis, I am aware that my interpretation of scenes is particular to my viewing experience but that much of my analysis might also coincide with what Hall (1997b) calls *preferred meanings* (p. 228). This is the privileged meaning that the text attempts to convey through standard or conventional practices, and it is the work of (in the case of films) the director of the motion picture. Stuart Hall tells us that “[m]eaning ‘floats.’ It cannot be finally fixed. However, attempting to ‘fix’ it is the work of a representational practice, which intervenes in the many potential meanings of an image in an attempt to privilege one” (ibid.). My readings might capture some of the preferred meanings that the directors attempt to convey through the production of their films. However, I doubt that this is always the case and it is impossible to know what each of the directors’ intentions might have been for each scene. Nevertheless, some of my readings might be personal, introspective, or intertextual – relating to experiences not contained by the film itself. For these cases – the spaces of interpretation where the film interpellates my sense of identity as desi to bring forth my personal reflections or experiences, I turn to a second way of understanding the film’s operations – through screenplay pedagogy (Robertson, 1995).

Screenplay Pedagogy

I use screenplay pedagogy as a methodology (Robertson, 1995) as a layer of analysis on top of, and intertwined with the structures and elements in the scenes and narratives of the movies. In its original use, Screenplay is a technique whereby films are used as “vehicles to provide insight into the making of knowledge and meaning in primary teaching...focused on how people learn to think as teachers” (p. 27). Robertson (1995/1997) looks at how Bachelor of Education students become attached to, and read themselves against, particular representations of teachers they view in Hollywood films. In this research, I wish to develop understandings of the way hybrid communities are conceived in films, and by extension in multicultural societies like Canada. Therefore, I employ a self-conscious process of looking at the films to interrogate what constitutes my identification with the Indian diaspora by asking “how the self ... is created and recreated in and through [my own] language and desire, and how words and figures [in the films and in my own writing about them] are readable as displacements of fears and wishes rather than as metaphysical or rational knowledge” (ibid.). I seek knowledge about how the representations in/as films are implicated in identity formation (see Chapter 2) for the characters onscreen, and of diasporic communities as a whole. With the intent to answer the question, “how do I come to know and think *as desi*?” on account of watching these films, I specifically look at how characters in the movies and their stories achieve particular significance for me. I ask myself how recognizing the identity-building process for members of the Indian diaspora onscreen is part of shaping my own, and perhaps by extension others’. There are many different stylized versions of *desi* and diasporic identities in these films with and against which I identify personally.

Taking Note(s)

My method for collecting information about the movies was through journaling. I watched each film several times, taking note of, and interpreting, the elements of plot and narrative, and scene-specific elements such as the characters' dress, choices of music, set locations, and particular uses of language (Hindi, Punjabi, or English). With each film I am aware of three categories of thought through which I documented my responses:

1. how the characters' hybrid identities are shaped in Third spaces (as representations outwardly conveyed; translations and/as movements in space-time)
2. how desi and immigrant characters in diasporic communities are portrayed through these representations
3. how I respond to being "made" as desi through representations in these films

The third point involves a self-reflective practice of considering myself watching the films (observing myself observing a film). I am most concerned with this aspect of the analysis in its relevance to screenplay pedagogy with its attention to the way identities are formed through the film viewing process. Undoubtedly, my sense of self as desi before watching the film is not the same as after. As well, my sense of identity – as understood in Chapter 2 as the process of identification and desire – changes also. As I identify with or against the characters in the films, I form new modes of understanding and representing myself on account of the experience of viewing the movies.

In my analysis section, I remained mindful of my research questions which ask what cultural translations take place in the interstices between cultures (cultures which are simultaneously inhabited by the film's characters), and how these translations might help us to understand the complex representations of hybrid identities in diasporic communities. Therefore, my first process in writing was to narrativize my journal notes into three chapters. This began a process of determining what struck me most about the films, which scenes affected me, and documenting my analytic mindset about the scenes in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. In some cases, I draw upon my knowledge of filmic motifs such as melodrama, or literary motifs such as the carnivalesque to inform my viewing. Reading the world through a postcolonial lens, I also tend to ask about films what they portray as narratives of (sometimes mythic) national and/or cultural cohesion. These viewing mindsets might be thought of as interrupting my movie-watching on account of my previous reading or theorizing experiences. However, I would assert that the lenses I employ are part of what situates my understanding of desi/hybrid identities within the frame of reference of my own life, and in keeping with considering each film viewing experience as an utterance.

Each analysis chapter begins with a section devoted to critical "Viewing Notes" that are narrativizations of my journal entries. After documenting these viewing notes, I looked back to reflect on what central concept emerged from them, and titled each section accordingly. For *Bhaji on the Beach*, I felt that the characters were represented through a construction of carnivalized identities; in *Bend It Like Beckham*, a "softer" film by the same director, I noted that the characters floated within a setting that could be termed a "multicultural pastoral"; and for *American Chai*, a film that seems like pure

parody with caricaturized and underdeveloped characters that nevertheless struck me the most, I questioned its parodic portrayals in my subheading. Following these choices, I returned to two main questions in writing response sections within the chapters. I asked how the films portrayed hybrid identities, and I employed screenplay pedagogy to go back and read my “readings” of the films (again remaining mindful of my belief that a single observer can only contemplate each film as an utterance rather than a text). Subsequent analysis sections of each film thus followed the viewing notes in each chapter.

In my discussion, I engaged the larger questions that this thesis proposes, beginning with engaging my own discourse about a curriculum of cultural translation. I returned to question what it means to hover between and within borders to frame this discussion. The premise of all three films is that boundaries must be crossed in order for hybrid cultural identities to flourish. My project thus became one that arrived at a place where the identity of “desi” needed to (re)new its definition within a paradigm of transgression of cultural boundaries. Reading both the films *and* desi identities intertextually (Appadurai, 1990; Bakhtin, 1986; Gillespie, 1995), I propose ways that quantum (third) spaces might be imagined in relation to desi identities, and suggest that immigrant communities featured in these films are part of fluid identifications across time and space, reconstituting India and the diaspora abroad with each act of cultural translation/transgression. The films remind us foremost that immigration is not one-way. The diaspora is “working at both ends of the migration chain” (Watson, 1977), disrupting the imagined binary of “homeland” (India) and being “away” in Britain, USA, or Canada. The concept of the emergence of new minorities through narrative

articulations of what it means to be desi is explored against linearities that imagine desi identities as growing out of static, traditional “Indian” customs that might not be so fixed after all.

Chapter Five

Bhaji on the Beach

Love, miss and grieve. This I can't simply deny. But I am a stranger to myself and a stranger now in a strange land. (Trinh, 2011, p. 28)

Viewing Notes: A Cultural Carnival

The general plot line of *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) seems quite simple: a group of Indian women of Indian descent – from teenagers to grandmothers – take a trip from their home city of Birmingham, United Kingdom, to the resort town of Blackpool. While there, they confront many issues, including the abuses suffered by a woman at the hands of her estranged husband, teen pregnancy, interracial relationships, and the struggle/need to preserve traditional and perhaps outdated values. They come together in the face of a traumatic event, and return to Birmingham with different perspectives that respect their generational and familial differences.

However, the plot is neither that straightforward nor tidy in the way it represents the Indian diaspora in Britain. When I watched this movie, it was anything but the gently satirical “feel good [film] about everyday life” (Rajgopal, 2003) that reviewers pegged it to be. The movie opens with a Bollywood-esque sequence involving a middle-aged woman, Asha, who works at her husband’s convenience store. Right away, an oversized statue of God, present in a blacked-out set, and clearly a figment of her imagination, speaks to Asha, dominating her emotions and telling her to “know your place!” This early line frames the entire movie, and is reinforced when moments after her hallucination, Asha’s son, daughter, and husband demand ironed shirts and hot breakfast – telling me about Asha’s “place” within the bounds of her culture and her family. Ironically, the overdetermined Bollywood-style sequence locates the movie, set

in a racist English neighborhood in Birmingham (swastikas are spraypainted on the brick wall outside the shop) away from England somehow – emphasizing that even though the movie is British, its actors are Indian first. It also capitalizes on Bollywood’s mass consumerism: the message from God in the Bollywood sequence highlights the carnivalesque culture of consumption of the Indian movie industry in a shop that sells magazines and movies (also a place of consumption), featuring a woman who is pressured to provide items to be consumed by her own family (breakfast and clothes). This powerful message about the use-value of Indian culture opens up the film’s multi-layered narrative. Asha has more headaches and hallucinations throughout the movie, all of which reinforce the need for duty and sacrifice.

The movie next introduces two opposing scenes, the first involves a woman in her thirties named Ginder, and her son, both residing in a women’s shelter. She has just been delivered her divorce papers and consoles her son who wants to see his “daddy.” In the next sequence, we see the father, with his brothers, their wives, and his parents. This presents a scene implying that the Indian immigrant family lives all together even when married with children. Ranjit, the “daddy” of the little boy, looks depressed about the loss of his wife and his son who have run away. His parents miss the child, but complain stereotypically of Ranjit’s estranged wife that “she was too dark,” as though this holds the truth about why she was an inadequate wife and wrong for leaving her husband.

The movie also introduces a cosmopolitan, wealthy woman named Rekha visiting from India and who dresses in Western clothing. She is the antithesis of Asha in her dress, her self confidence, and her accessibility as a character onscreen. She has

everything under-control. Also presented as outwardly under-control is Hashida, a young girl finishing high school who will become the first in her family to enter medicine. However, we soon find out she is pregnant and the father of the baby is her boyfriend Oliver, a Black college student. As well, the film features teenage girls Ladhu and Madhu who swoon over English boys but assert that there aren't any "good ones" in their neighborhood.

All of these women, and others from the community, embark on a day trip to Blackpool, sponsored by the Saheli Women's Centre in Birmingham and led by a woman named Simi who, in true feminist form, declares that the women should shed the "double yoke of racism and sexism" and go off and have some "female fun time" (Chadha, 1993). The trip turns out to be a carnival of identities.

The women set off to tour Blackpool, which feels like a spoof on their identities. After all, these women are first generation immigrants or desi youth who themselves are seen as foreigners in Britain – tourists in their own right. This is made obvious right away by the women working in a restaurant in Blackpool who address two of the most elderly in the group when they bring out their own food to eat. The workers exclaim, "Only English food in here! ...Bloody heathens!...No manners!...They ought to send them all back!" Nevertheless, the women of the Saheli Centre continue to perform as tourists. They rent a tour bus, take pictures, and buy souvenirs. And their mission is to go to Blackpool to see the lights which illuminate the town in the evening – seemingly a play on the "festival of lights" – the largest Hindu holiday, Diwali/New Year.

In order to complete their transformation from tourists at “home” to bonafide “British” tourists, the women work hard to change themselves and defer their status as Other. The location of the tour helps them. The carnival atmosphere of Blackpool is perfect since the boardwalk is full of strange characters. There are “Sons of Liberty” male strippers at Manhattan’s bar where Madhu and Ladhu go to eat, two (white) British men dressed up as Arab snake charmers on the sidewalk (a conflation of multiple cultures, since snake-charming is more popular in India than in parts of the Middle East), and Madhu goes to the bathroom to change her clothes from traditional *salwar kameez* to British attire and makeup to look sexually attractive. (Later, both Madhu and Ladhu win the attention of burger-flipping British boys and make-out with them.) As though this mix-up of cultural signals is not enough, and combined with the baggage of tradition packed along by the elderly women in saris with their judgemental views about all things English, Asha loses her shoes in the sea during another one of her hallucinations. She is rescued by an overly-friendly British man named Ambrose who takes her to a shoe store where she buys plastic sandals that remain hidden under her sari throughout the rest of the film. She defers her moment of cultural transformation to Ginder, for whom she buys a new outfit and hair-do – Asha’s way of making Ginder feel better about having to leave Ranjit.



Ambrose "rescues" Asha, a "damsel in distress" who has lost her shoes after having a hallucination by the sea in Blackpool.

All of these transformations combine with questions about cultural “colors” that cannot be taken off or transferred. The most obvious is the conflict around the intercultural relationship between Hashida and Oliver. He is Black but is reminded by his friend that his girlfriend being “not white” is not the same as being Black, when discussing what to do about Hashida being pregnant. This creates a divide between Oliver and Hashida, and for a portion of the movie, Oliver is conflicted as to whether he should support his girlfriend through the pregnancy or abandon her. The racism works

the other way as well. One elderly auntie⁶ states about Oliver that “it is not the color, it’s the culture.” Even Simi, who is a self-proclaimed feminist and liberal and supports Hashida, is oblivious to all of the lies Hashida is telling in her life. In a chapter of the film aptly titled “So Many Lies,” Hashida tells Simi that she is pregnant, and asks her to take her to see her boyfriend Oliver. Instead of being supportive, Simi exclaims that Oliver is “not exactly Mr. Reliable, is he?” Hashida’s room in this scene shows us how complicated her life is. In the previous shot, her parents talk to each other, saying how proud they are that she will be the first doctor in the family and how she has “never complained” about being directed to this career. We know from Oliver’s room and from the bedroom scene with Simi that Hashida is living a life of many lies. She is an artist foremost, and we see her paintings and sketches lining her walls. The colors of her life are scarred by the interracial biases of her culture and by her own inability to confront her career dreams.

⁶ “Auntie” is a respectful term in Indian culture used to greet and describe a middle-aged woman (who might not be related to you). “Uncle” is used in the same way, to address a middle-aged man who could be your parent but might not have any relation to you.



Simi, on the left, reacting to Hashida's news that she is pregnant. When Hashida asks to be taken to see Oliver, Simi responds that he is "not exactly Mr. Reliable, is he?" Hashida's room shows us she is an artist trapped in the life of a pre-med student.

As well, Ambrose Waddington, the only significant white actor in the movie, is a caricature of British colonial gentry. He rescues Asha from the sea, but then persists with his support of her beyond what she needs, trying to romance her with references to *Gunga Din* and other Hollywood movies that stereotype India in colonial terms. He takes her to a theatre where she has another hallucination. It is clear that for him, Asha is a fetish. Once Asha realizes this, she feels uncomfortable and returns to the group of other middle-aged ladies.

Bollywood-style scenes also return throughout the movie, giving it a contrived feel. On the bus to Blackpool, the women sing a Punjabi song that is a rewrite of Cliff Richards' *Summer Holiday* set to a Bhangra beat (Quart, 1994). The practice of singing songs in a group fashion is a tradition from India. But the idea of an unchanged India

from which the women immigrated is disrupted by Rekha, the only real foreigner on the tour. She dresses in Western attire and constantly tells the women that they would not even recognize the India they left. She reprimands them for living in a fantasy world of an imagined India, yet when she steps off the bus in Blackpool, she exclaims, “Bombay!” Each of Asha’s hallucinations also builds upon the Bollywood motif, culminating in a fantasy where she is singing in the rain in a Bollywood movie sequence with her “lover,” but the fantasy is disrupted when she realizes the lover is Ambrose. The brown make-up on his face washes off in the rain, ruining the scene and the dream.

The end of the film sees a resolution to all of the conflicts presented across each storyline. When night falls and Blackpool lights up, all issues receive closure. In the movie’s climax, Ranjit, who has been tracking his estranged wife’s movements from the beginning of the film, travels from Birmingham to find Ginder, and hits her violently in public. The elderly aunties and grandmas on the bus who had previously condemned Ginder for her love-marriage to Ranjit and her divorce, rescue her in this moment, after seeing Ranjit’s true colors. Asha, despite declaring that it was not her dream to work in a convenience store selling “mags and cigarettes,” returns to Birmingham with the group. Hashida stays with Oliver as they try to work things out with the pregnancy (we are not sure if she will go to medical school). Boarding the bus for the ride home, the women seem to have achieved renewed friendship and group cohesion, across generations, and with new understanding of the perspectives each other holds. In this way, the movie seems to succeed in fulfilling Simi’s message at the outset of the day trip – namely to break free of “racism and sexism.”

Returned to an imaginary homeland

As I look at my viewing notes, I realize that what struck me most about *Bhaji on the Beach* is its ambivalent use of the carnivalesque to show incomplete acts of resistance. Sometimes the women in the film resist English culture (captured in one woman's statement that "this country has cost us our children!") and yet at other times, they embrace it in unexpected ways (when Pushpa, an older woman on the trip dances with one of the male strippers at the Manhattan club). I wondered how such a multiplicity of conflicting women's identities onscreen might represent hybrid identities in the English diaspora. After all, the film's title implies a that it should be read through a hybrid lens: *bhaji*, a light fried Indian snack, is had by the Indian women on the *beach* at Blackpool. (However, we have already seen how the women wanting to eat their "ethnic" foods were treated when they brought them to the wrong cultural context in Blackpool.) Stuart Hall (1988) helps me through this query about what the film offers hybrid identities, providing an analysis of Black/South Asian cinema in Britain:

The diaspora experience is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference... Young black cultural practitioners and critics in Britain are increasingly coming to acknowledge and explore in their work this 'diaspora aesthetic' and its formations in the post-colonial experience. (p. 57)

Hall also quotes Mercer (1988) later in this passage to describe how "[a]cross a whole range of cultural forms there is a powerfully 'syncretic' dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and 'creolises' them, disarticulating given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise"

(ibid.). *Bhaji* seems to be the incarnation of such a “diaspora aesthetic” that operates as a syncretic text. In a carnivalesque assemblage, it appropriates signs from the dominant culture, re-creating their symbolic meanings – including the cultural importance of the *movie* (Bollywood scenes versus the English theatre where Asha and Ambrose end up), the *day at the seaside* (Bombay versus Blackpool), and the *events on the boardwalk* (the lights as festive Blackpool versus Indian Diwali festival). The multiple re-symbolizations are also achieved through the hybridization of the female Indian self-image through the juxtaposition of the Westernized Indian woman living abroad (Rekha), and the “traditional” British-Indian women on the tour. The inversion of beliefs that occurs by the end of the movie is layered on top of these mixed-up identities – namely that the “aunties” no longer believe Ginder is wrong for leaving Ranjit, and that the issue with Hashida’s pregnancy can be resolved if Oliver looks after her. The storyline’s intertwined, non-linear scenes, adds the quantum aesthetic dimension of *feeling* hybrid. I felt attached to the emotions of the elderly grandma in one scene, and then almost simultaneously swept away in the next scene with the emotions of the two younger girls struggling with their outward representations (putting on makeup and ditching their Indian clothes to attract white British boys), or Hashida’s coming to terms with telling her family about her Black boyfriend (which she doesn’t in the film).

Thinking through the movie as a single utterance, and through my vantage as desi, I ask what my feelings about the movie’s unfolding imply for my understanding of my own identity-construction against those portrayed onscreen. I also ask how hybrid communities are constructed through the cultural translations as well. First, it feels like the movie constructs an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991; Rushdie, 1991) of

Indian women that would not otherwise travel together. The concept of cultural translation is thus literal on one level – the women move through England, not quite at home in Birmingham and double outsiders as tourists in Blackpool. This makes the issues they confront while away even harder as the women negotiate a transient sense of place alongside shifting translations of what it means to be appropriately “Indian” as part of the English Indian diaspora. Chadha herself admits that the movies portray bicultural identities, but sometimes in terms that only reflect the “Indianising...or hybridising of Britain” (Bailey, 2003). She explains that her portrayal of difficult situations is meant to raise consciousness about the problems confronting people with “bicultural” Indian identities:

Often when those experiences are shown in movies, they’re shown as a problem. What I’m showing is the way people break through that. It’s the nuts-and-bolts of integration or immigration or diversity or multiculturalism or whatever you want to call it. It actually shows that process at work, how it happens and what are the very personal decisions that people make. That’s a cultural paradigm that we don’t often see expressed, but you’d be surprised how many of us live and breathe it around the world. (Bailey, 2003)

What Chadha says here directs me to reflect on how she shapes her own identity in the diaspora, but she seems confused by the terms upon which she presents her work. She is convinced that the personal stories need telling, but is not sure if what she is doing is within the realm of “integration or immigration or diversity or multiculturalism or whatever.” Following my quantum (third) spaces concept, I feel that Chadha’s mode of *self*-representation takes on the task of representing Indian diasporic struggles in their totality through this film that brings together multiple issues that can feel confusing or artificial. Hussain (2005) seems to sense the same confusion, describing *Bhaji on the*

Beach as a film that presents “essential English characteristics” and “shows how one has to learn to be both British and South Asian and where identity is grounded and energised by both the minority culture as well as the British culture” (p. 73-74). The discrepancy can be felt in the way Chadha asserts that she wishes to represent the personal experiences of Indian women in the diaspora, but the filmic vehicle demands simplistic endings to complex cultural issues.

Reading the film through the lens of screenplay pedagogy, I am aware of the film-watching process as a binding experience – one that links me to other desi-Canadians or desis worldwide engaged with the filmic representations of hybrid cultures. As an Indo-Canadian, and as someone who continues to formulate her Indian identity in a transnational context, I find myself always searching locally for ways to understand my seemingly distant origins. Like many Canadian youth (Hirji, 2010), I (even as an adult), attempt to understand myself through my continual acts of identification with desi culture –not only to uncover clues to my origins but also my current place as an Indo-Canadian within a transnational understanding of what Gilroy calls ‘Asianness’ (Gilroy in Gopinath, 2005) as depicted in Indian popular culture and diasporic movies. I know that I find kinship with other desis, and construct my feelings about Indian popular culture largely through shared knowledge of the “code” of Indianness depicted in these films. Writing about Bollywood, Assisi (n.d.) argues that “people of Indian origin in the diaspora, living in different countries, share similarity of experiences while watching Indian movies, which thus contributes to the construction of a global “public culture” and an “imagined community”.” I feel the same applies for

diaspora born abroad, like me, in the viewing of films that seem to create or reflect diasporic identities.

I can also attest to the fact that my sense of identity is partially grounded in viewing the representations of other diasporic Indians in films such as *Bhaji on the Beach*. While I am neither an “auntie” nor a teenage vamp, I read myself *against* these representations. What do I push outward to the shell of my self-representations (Chapter 2) on account of these viewings? How are these representations formed against filmic representations I seem to resist?

It is obvious from my viewing of the film and my questions above that the resistance is a large part of how I saw the film. So let me begin to describe what I sense has emerged from my viewing notes. *Bhaji on the Beach* presents an ambivalent position on whether Indian culture is positive, leaving me feeling confused about the acceptance of hybrid Indian diasporas in Britain. Chadha, a diasporic Indian director, presents situations in which Indians are self-loathing (for example, blaming Ginder for her troubles because her marriage to Ranjit was a love-match) at the same time as championing arcane “traditional” Indian values (if only Ginder had an arranged marriage – all would be fine!). Ginder’s “Englishness isolates her from the other women, [sic] she is placed on what she herself refers to as the ‘social rejects bench’” (Hussain, 2005, p. 75) Yet the most progressive and confident women in the film are cultural hybrids: Rekha, the western-dressed tourist from India, and Simi, the young tour-leader who feels comfortable sporting leather jacket over *salwar kameez* while promoting feminist ideals. The film seemingly wishes to provoke a realization that hybridization of customs is inevitable at the same time as promoting a reversion to tradition. In the end, I am left

with the first impression that forms the title of my viewing notes: *Bhaji* presents Indian diaspora as a shallow carnival of hybrid representations. Identities necessarily remain fixed even as they are negotiated. The older traditional women are reminded to know their places through the Bollywood God-figure that is meant to “speak” to them (literally in the film). The young women are warned about the dangers of embarking on risky behavior, including the unfulfilling make-out sessions with white boys at the beach, teen pregnancy with a Black boyfriend and loss of a medical career, and abusive relationships on account of a love marriage.

Bhaji on the Beach is no sunny reverie by the shore. It teaches me that the real struggles faced by those with hybrid identities are not addressed or acceptable within the British Indian diaspora. Giardina argues that “while centering the viewer’s gaze on positive representations of marginalized human group actors, the status quo is not challenged in any meaningful way” (p. 70). Giardina and Metz (2001) go further, warning that filmic “proliferation of images and practices into a normalized, non-politically charged discourse ...assume[s] that ethnic minority communities [are] homogenous and somehow representative of an authentic and unified culture” (p. 210). Stereotypical Indian values, had they been followed by the women in the film, would have been a salvation for them: careers left intact, family cohesion with obedient children, and happy marriages. In other words, a day at the beach merely amounts to dressing the part of “stylish hybrids” (Giardina, 2003, p. 70) – taking off the Indian clothes and dressing-up-English for a day, but the film’s constant reminders that the women are outsiders serves to reinforce their status as such in British society at large.

Regardless of the appeal of the possibilities of the spatial-temporal dimensions of the film – its inter-generational cross-talk, and shifts within the geographical space of Britain – both which seem to offer multiple possibilities of negotiating an Indian identity in the Third Space, I find myself refusing the representations which are put forth. Screenplay pedagogy asks how my “words and figures are readable as displacements of fears and wishes” (Robertson, 1995, p. 27). To answer this question through an attempt to observe myself observing a film – a layered quantum exercise of looking at my own analysis, and in doing so, possibly changing it with each (re)reading – I can say that the film presents a fear about hybrid identities that do not match my personal experience. Not only does *Bhaji on the Beach* reinforce stereotypes about Indian cultures that no longer exist – especially aunties who are out of touch with modern culture – it also leaves little room for hope for the characters who stray from traditional Indian values. The diaspora born in England in *Bhaji* are no more English than their parents and grandparents – they are doubly ridiculed, relegated to the margins both by English culture and by their own relatives. As well, even though the movie presents seeming resolutions to the film’s problems, how do we know that Hashida’s family will accept Oliver? Will the aunties support Ginder when she returns to Birmingham a single mother? More importantly, have the views of the older Indian generation truly changed to be more accepting? I am uncertain that the film makes room for the transformation it proposes – a transformation I need it to absorb in order to accept its message.

Chapter Six

Bend It Like Beckham

I refused to wear Indian clothes, and I would always get out of cooking... At the same time, I was extremely outspoken, and I used to say, well mum, look, I'm not cooking, you know it's oppressive. You don't even understand. (Gurinder Chadha, Director of *Bend It Like Beckham* speaking about herself as a youth, in Fischer, 2003)

Viewing Notes: The Multicultural Pastoral

After being somewhat dismayed by *Bhaji on the Beach*'s (1993) carnival of cultural identities, I fast forward to 2002 to the most popular of Gurinder Chadha's films. I have hopes for *Bend It Like Beckham*. I want it to open up ways of understanding hybrid identities for the modern desi.

This movie feels like a classic coming-of-age story with a cultural twist. Jesminder (Jess) Bhamra is an eighteen-year old British-born Punjabi girl who loves soccer (football) more than anything in her life. Her hero is David Beckham. One day, she meets another young woman her age while playing in a local park in her neighborhood of Hounslow in Southall, London (Fischer, 2003). Juliette (Jules) Paxton plays on a competitive girls' team, coached by an attractive Irish-born man named Joe. Jess's Sikh family is close-knit, loving, and supportive, but Jess's obsession with sports does not mesh with their views of an appropriate future for their daughter. Eventually, Jess is uncomfortable sneaking around, and her friendship with Juliette becomes complicated when both fall in love with Joe. The film's climax occurs when Jess's sister's wedding is planned for the same day as the league football final where an American scout will be in attendance to recruit top players. Her father eventually allows her to go to the game, remembering his own lost dreams of being a star cricketer and the racism he endured as a new immigrant to England, including not being allowed to play.

Jess is recruited by the American scout, makes up with her friend Jules, and at the end of the movie, leaves for America on a soccer scholarship.

A mixing of themes struck me as I watched this film, and similar to *Bhaji on the Beach*, one of the most prominent was the Othering that occurred through the use of clothing and food – both within Jess’s Sikh household and Jules’ British one. The film opens with the credits overlaid on a fantasy scene of Jessminder playing soccer with David Beckham, and three famous British sports commentators, Gary Linkeker, Alan Hansen, and John Barnes (Giardina, 2003), claiming that Jess is the player to help England “relive their World Cup glory from ‘66” and that she is the “missing piece to the jigsaw.” However the fantasy is broken apart when Jess’s mother is brought on-set for a commentary. She stereotypically claims, “[Jessminder] shouldn’t be running around with all these men, showing her bare legs to 70,000 people. She’s bringing shame on the family, and you three shouldn’t encourage her!” This moment makes me groan. The mother is dressed in *sari* and speaks with a Punjabi accent. She alienates Jess and the sports commentators in the dream, and I get the feeling that the juxtaposition between Western and Indian cultures will play out throughout the film like this, where the British side looks “normal” and the Indian side looks unchanging and backward.

The fantasy sequence is broken when the mother addresses Jessminder directly from the set of the sports commentary, demanding her daughter to “get back home now!” In seamless transition to real-time, the mother opens the bedroom door, breaks up the dream, and tells her daughter to stop staring at the “skin-head boy,” Beckham.



A moment of cross-cultural identification with Beckham. Jess's mom calls Beckham the "skin head boy" but he is Jess's soccer idol.

We see the objects that mark the family as Sikh quickly in the next few scenes, including short phrases spoken in Punjabi, Jess's father wearing a turban, and the pictures of Guru Nanak and the Golden Temple on the walls of the family home. Later in the film, the father gives his other daughter's fiancé a kara bracelet (one of the five "Ks" that are "symbolic of maintaining proper spiritual order" (Alego, 2007, p. 135) in their home). As well, the wedding of Jess's sister Pinky (a ridiculous name for a young girl that emphasizes her triviality throughout the movie) features the clothing and food of the Sikh culture.

Jessminder always refuses to prepare Punjabi food and this seems to stand in for her refusal of a future position as the wife of an Indian man throughout the film. Her mother asks Jess rhetorically, "What kind of family would want a daughter-in-law who

can kick a football around but can't make round chapatis?⁷” This implies that Jess will have to marry someone of her own culture (which she affirms directly in an exchange with her teammates in the locker room later in the movie). The Indian food motif is carried over to the British side of the movie as well, complicating its place. Jules' mother, Paula, talks to Jessminder when she is over visiting. She delights in having made a “lovely curry” the other night, and assumes that Jess's family will find her a “nice Indian doctor” to marry. Interestingly, later in the film, the international food theme is reinforced when Jules' father explains the offside rule of soccer to his wife using an array of international condiments on their kitchen table (the teriyaki sauce is the goalkeeper, the posh French mustard is the defender, the sea salt is the attacker). Unlike Jess's family, Jules' family is portrayed as immediately accessible - an easily-forgiven cosmopolitan middle class family, reflecting its open-mindedness and absorption of other cultures against the staunch refusal to do the same portrayed in the stereotyped Punjabi family.

Perhaps, however, this is all part of the comedy. Jules is not free from her mother's embarrassments throughout the film either, and I see that both mothers (Jess's and Jules') are parodies of stereotypical, and hysterical female figures. Jules' mother is more interested in bra shopping to make her daughter “feel” feminine, and Jess's mother wants Jess to wear *salwar kameez* and not run around showing off her legs. Both mothers feel their daughters are too masculine, and a desire for heteronormative behavior from their daughters forms one of the central parodies of the mothers throughout the film. Jules' mother, Paula, becomes an extreme case of the hysterical

⁷ Chapatis are round unleavened bread, made from Atta flour, on a hot pan.

mother when she assumes that her daughter is in a lesbian relationship with Jess (not that there would be anything wrong with that). The confusion makes her act silly in the movie, but since the viewers know her assumption is unfounded, they simply need to wait for the mistake to be corrected later in the film. Paula's antics are a foil for the real issues facing Jessminder, whose family is apparently under no false assumptions.

Jess and Jules both "wear" their identities in the movie. Jules refuses to look feminine on and off the soccer pitch (though she is slim and attractive, with her hair streaked with highlights). Even when attending Jess's sister's wedding, and to the dismay of her mother, Jules does not wear a skirt but prefers dress pants. The transition into mainstream British society is more pronounced for Jessminder, who has to sneak out of the house in regular clothes and change into her soccer uniform at the clubhouse. She doesn't own proper soccer cleats and has to lie to her parents to buy them, multiplying the plot device of deception in the movie (her parents think she works at HMV when she is really at all the soccer practices). Jess's cultural difference is most pronounced at the final match of the season when she arrives from her sister's wedding to play in the game. She is dressed in sari with full jewellery. In a scene that reminds us that all the other cultures represented on the team (Black, brown and white players alike) are *one* culture clad in the British colors of a single uniform, the girls re-dress Jess after the match to return her to the festivities at home. They surround her and "make her" Indian again, seemingly accepting her even though she is Other.⁸ This is a scene that seems like a reversal of her "coming of age" as a cross-cultural character. She has

⁸ Interestingly, in a "Google" search for images from *Bend It Like Beckham*, this image was the most popular one on the first three pages of the search. The search was conducted on March 9th, 2012.

to perform a physical abandoning of one culture to literally dress the part of the other when she returns to her family life.



Jess's soccer teammates help her undress from her football uniform and re-dress in sari to return to her sister's wedding after the regional final match.

I find it interesting that the team that Jess plays on seems to have no internal racisms (unlike the team from Germany in which one of the players calls Jess a “Paki”). Similarly, the always-sunny suburban neighborhood where Jess and Jules live also seems to be free from the racism – a stark contrast to *Bhaji on the Beach*. The views of men in the film outline the boundaries of racisms. And they are the most stable figures in the film. The soccer coach, Joe, claims to understand the racism towards English culture that Jess experiences at home through his lens of being Irish. Though his experience is never developed further, Mr. Bhamra’s history with racism is clear. He describes playing high-level cricket in Nairobi – a point which illustrates his status as a

double migrant, first leaving Punjab for Nairobi, then immigrating to Britain. His experience being the “best fast bowler” in the country does not transfer to England where he wanted to play to represent Britain. Instead, on account of his turban, he is thrown out of the club “like a dog.” Mr. Bhamra’s fears for Jess are well founded when he asks Joe how his daughter (an emphasis on the added element of gender) will navigate the racism of English sport culture in order to succeed. The answer lies in the conclusion to the film when a solution is introduced by way of a soccer scholarship to the USA. This reinforces the imaginary belief in the United States being the place of dreams and possibility. Jess and her friend disappear onto the air/plane to a different “promised land” of soccer, camaraderie, and Western cultural ideals.

Transculturation as Class Cohesion and Asian Fabulation

Let me begin with a confession: I actually like the film *Bend It Like Beckham*. This might be considered a guilty pleasure, since on the surface, the film seems to reinforce all sorts of stereotypes in its attempt to enter Indian culture into the mainstream. However, *Bend It* seems to offer more than a mere pushing or tugging at cultural boundaries to represent hybrid cultures in the diaspora. It advocates a full transgression of cultural lines and this is appealing to me because the movie presents a clear rather than ambiguous message about what hybrid youth often do to survive in the diaspora. The film seems to work through two ways of bringing hybrid identities into mainstream “Western” culture as practice of constant negotiation: first, if conceived as part of a suburban, class-cohesive multicultural neighborhood, Indian immigrant families are

deemed acceptable; second, *Bend It Like Beckham* suspends the need for representation of a so-called “authentic” Indian culture through what Rodowick (1997) calls *fabulation* – the production of “collective utterances...whose paradoxical property is to address a people who do not yet exist and, in doing so, urge them toward becoming” (p. 154). This concept of fabulation is Deluzian, a “storytelling function which is related to a minoritarian collective enunciation... [but] is not a form of narration that is determined by a regime of truth and representation” (Sharma, 2009, p. 134). Deflecting the need to answer for whether an ethnicity or hybrid culture can ever be “known” authentically, fabulation “displaces the realist/non-realist problematic of representation framed by a traditional truth/falsity ideological distinction, because the ‘power of false’ refers to the discursive production of truth” (ibid.). I will explore how the concept of fabulation might suspend multiple articulations of South Asian culture temporally through *Bend It’s* introduction of the female body into a history of resentment of the British colonizer in a way that doesn’t just merely bend cultural boundaries, but breaks away from the assumptions that hybrid identities can be conceived of singularly.

I used the term “multicultural pastoral” to describe my viewing notes, and this brings me to the setting and materialist considerations of the film. *Bend It Like Beckham* is set in a British suburban neighborhood in which the Sikh family’s presence is no more than an “unthreatening eccentricity” (Dave, 2006, p. 14). Marked by a mixing of cultural signs, the film allows for the conflation of all essentializing differences between Jules’ and Jess’s families except that of culture. The flattening of class boundaries allows for an easy transgression for Jess from within her close-knit “cultural” family to mainstream British ideals of TV, soccer, and Beckham. Dave

(2006) explains the position of Wayne (2002) who contends that “it is the exclusion of this materialist dynamic that weakens other British Asian films and the cultural politics of difference generally” (p. 16). Cultural differences can be fused along material lines, since “[m]aterial differences/interests will undermine the most promising multicultural rainbows as well as potentially bind together those whose distance from one another, measured in the complex discriminations of cultural difference, seem unsurpassable” (ibid.). In this way, the film uses class cohesion to blend *communities* (rather than individuals) into culturally hybrid structures. In this film, cultural hybridity thus takes on a geographical dimension. The hybridization of cultures is also the hybridization of classes – Jess’ upper-middle class Indian immigrant family shares the material wishes and values of Jules’ white, British upper-middle class family. Boundaries between cultures can be transgressed, and the story of the national pastoral – of Britishness and the soccer pitch – can be comfortably rewritten as a multicultural one. Importantly, this class cohesion takes place linearly, where Jess becomes part of “white” culture – adopting the values of mainstream Britain – dressing in shorts, showing her legs and her scar (against her parents’ wishes), and playing a male sport. Jules’ family is already part of a suburbia that has absorbed multicultural elements in consumerist fashion (Jules’ mom makes “lovely curry”).

Nevertheless, this flattening-out of material values between Jess’s family and Jules’s paves the way for negating the need to represent an authentic “hybrid” culture in a way that *Bhaji on the Beach* could not. It opens up a multidimensional space for different strands of storytelling. The film’s title points us towards this. *Bend It Like Beckham* speaks not just to Beckham’s ability to bend the ball on the soccer pitch, but

also opens up the concept of bending gender identities in this film about women in the traditionally male space of soccer, the introduction of a gay Indian character, Tony, and the parody of an unreasonable fear of lesbianism. Beckham's own media image looms large in the imaginary background. He might have his head shaved in the film, but his many media appearances before and after its release have featured him with long hair and metrosexual dress. In other words, the film moves past the problems of class difference to offer a different concern for female desis: how to achieve transculturation as part of the Indian diaspora *and* as a female in British society.

I search for what film teaches about hybrid identities through these dual lenses of gender and culture. Returning to Sharma (2006), I centre my analysis on the concept of fabulation as the way diasporic films “offer a deconstructive practice of hegemonic culture in their potential to open up radical polyvocal multicultural spaces” (p. 137). This is a way of deterritorializing the storytelling function of the films along multiple trajectories, diffusing the need to represent a single narrative of transgression that stands-in for all desi identities in all spaces and places. While the film presents Sikh culture in broad strokes, it also defines its cultural struggles largely along gender lines and the fear of a painful return to colonial treatment. I might contend that in *Bend It Like Beckham*, being from another country actually confers a sense of identity upon the Bhamra family. The family is part of the diaspora but situated in a white milieu from where it can enunciate its position, its place in the social fabric, *outside* of the limits of class. The father in the film has a position of relative power from which to articulate his expert position about the British colonial legacy – one that has him situated within the colonial metropole while recounting its horrors to the coach, Joe, warning, “None of our

[Sikh] boys are in any of the football leagues. You think they will let our girls? I don't want you to build up Jessminder's hopes. She will only end up disappointed like me." This is a powerful statement from Jess's father, who brings a history of pain of post/colonial times to the future, making it real and present.

Jess's father brings the question of gender to the forefront of the conversation about the possibilities of hybrid women in the Indian diaspora. I wonder whether gender has a place in the conversation about what possibilities exist for women outside the formal space of sports (where women continue to struggle for prominence in media coverage, regardless of cultural background). Rajiva (2010) helps me to understand the complicated relationship between the colonial history of India and the place of desi women now:

If immigrant families and communities are trapped in the nostalgic space of the "time before" – that is, before colonialism and/or migration – then it is second generation daughters who are, potentially, the most painful reminder of the colonial encounter's enduring effects. Struggles between parents and daughters are generated by pressures from the dominant peer culture, whose criteria for belonging is often incompatible with diasporic codes of conduct for women (Rajiva, 2006). In negotiating their own belonging within western cultures, daughters, as the monstrous offspring of cultural miscegenation, come to symbolize the Imperial West's material and psychic rape of the Other, through colonial and neo-colonial practices (p. 217).

This is, no doubt a strong reading. While I do not dispute the psychic significance of the daughter as symbolic of the vulnerability of the Other through the brutality of colonialism, I resist a reading that implies that desi women's choices to adopt "Western" ideals is necessarily akin to cultural rape. There is no doubt that Jess's Western brand of transculturality makes Sikh diasporic culture appear simultaneously stagnant, hilarious, and oppressive throughout the film. However, female transgression against oppressive

traditions is achieved in subtle ways: Jess's family does come to accept her soccer playing enough to send her to America, her sister, Pinky, marries someone she fell in love with (unlike the assumptions from Jules' mother that a "nice doctor" will be found for all Indian girls), and Tony as a gay character is given a hopeful place at the end of the film. (Although we don't know what his revelation will bring in terms of cultural acceptance, the family's eventual acceptance of Jess's soccer playing is his model to be brave.) As well, as Silva (2009) notes:

[O]ne of the most enduring qualities of South Asian films...is that they are filled with moral and social dilemmas that are resolved by, and through, family, with the help of friends, where good triumphs over evil, and perhaps most importantly, elders are revered and looked up to. These qualities, so often considered lacking in the West, are of utmost importance to many of those in the first wave of the diaspora (p. 701).

Reading my viewing notes through the lens of screenplay pedagogy, I realize that my attraction to the film is primarily through its use of fabulation – its possibilities of speaking to a desi generation *still becoming* in its minoritarian status. The film develops multiple modes of narrative articulation that struck me as *possible* – not demanding to be authentic or correct somehow, but at least possible modes of address from desi youth to their immigrant parents. In this way, transculturation through the transgression of boundaries does not seem artificial outside of the contrivances of the art of filmmaking (which is always speculative and contrived to a certain degree). Unlike *Bhaji on the Beach*, where the struggles seemed too much of a stretch to speak to real immigrant youth, and where the characters had strayed so very far from the cultural norm (for example, Hashida doesn't just *date* a Black boy, she gets *pregnant!*), this film was able to collect two trajectories of storytelling: gender and culture, and fuse them

into a generic narrative about sports achievement that is able to reach the feelings of many desi youth, including me.

When I watched the film, I was instantly returned to my dreams as a high school student. I wanted to enter music as a career – and I dreamed about being a bassoonist in a symphony orchestra. I wanted to audition at Curtis Institute, Julliard, or Eastman, as many young musicians dream about doing (whether realistic or not). Naturally, my mother thought I was hysterical even though she was a high school teacher in Alberta for over twenty years and had seen all sorts of students pursue different careers. When I told her my dream, she thought I was having a mental break with reality and suggested counselling. She even blamed herself for having me take music lessons. The struggles faced by diasporic youth to make changes that are real transgressions across cultural boundaries are not always incendiary topics such as abusive husbands, interracial relationships, and clandestine affairs, as in *Bhaji on the Beach*. They are also unconventional career ambitions such as Jess' love of soccer, propelled by her very real abilities to succeed in the sport. My love of music as a potential career was difficult to let go, even in the face of devastating my family, and this is a fear Jess faces in the film as well. The conflict between dreams and family wishes are real barriers, and not the contrivances of filmmakers like Chadha. The fears of immigrant parents who have struggled to leave their homelands to make their lives anew in communities abroad are also legitimate. I remember stories my mother tells me about her difficult integration in Canada, living with her sisters in Toronto and Calgary, and eventually moving to Edmonton alone to study at the University of Alberta. Thinking about her embarrassing

experiences and her naiveté about everyday Canadian life still makes me feel sad. My mother went through a lot when she came here at the age of eighteen.

I look at *Bend It* and I see the fears of parents. Their mental images of successful careers – the stereotypes like engineering, medicine, law – are in many cases, real. These were my career choices. I followed one for my first degree (physiology with a goal of medicine) before having a transcultural break of my own, emerging as a desi female in the study of humanities, and returning to playing music. This was difficult for my family. It would have been even more difficult for desi friends of mine whose parents were more recent, older immigrants, had they made the same career moves as I have. Jess's story, including her respect for parents conflicted with her dreams and wishes, resonates with desis everywhere. I would contend that *Bend It's* success as a film is achieved through its decentred storytelling, tempered by class cohesiveness, a generic inter-generational struggle about career choices and dreams, and its attention to female desi youth as having unlimited possibilities. If I had watched this film as a child, it would have been formative for my self-development, and a model by which I could have approached my own identity formation and self-representation as a desi in Canadian society.

Chapter Seven

American Chai

All my life I've been hiding things from my parents. (Sureel, in American Chai)

Viewing Notes: Desi College Caricatures?

American Chai, directed by Anurag Mehta, is a different type of film from those directed by Chadha. It is meant to be an obvious parody of both college life and Indian culture and, on the surface does not seem to require delving deeper from my standpoint as a viewer. However, I realized as I collected viewing notes that this film has more to it than meets the eye.

The plot of this film is quite straightforward and predictable. *American Chai* (2001) is about a first-generation Indo-American student named Sureel, a college senior who has been studying music despite telling his traditional, controlling father that he has been enrolled in a pre-med program for the previous three years. Despite being plagued by the spying and over-the-top antics of his cousin Raju, an “FOB” Indian (“fresh off the boat”) who attends the same campus, Sureel tries to live freely, pursuing his dreams. He has mainstream desi friends and roommates that have such names as “Engineering Sam” and “Pharmacy Bob” who subscribe, mostly enthusiastically, to the career assigned to them by their parents – always “engineering, law, pharmacy, and pre-med.” Sureel struggles with his attraction to “white girls” and white culture, dating a girl named Jen – a groupie who likes Sureel only for his music and who fetishizes his Indian roots, wearing a bindi on her forehead and hippie-style Indian-influenced clothing. He is also the leader of a band named *Fathead* that mutinies against him and kicks him out because

of his Indian family “baggage.” Jen dumps him unceremoniously because he is not longer in the band.

This is a turning point for Sureel, who begins to contemplate why he resists all things Indian, including the university’s Indian student society and its events. His mind is slowly changed about resisting Indian culture through his attraction to another Indo-American student, a science major and Indian dancer named Maya. After forming a new band, *American Chai*, whose musical focus is also a blend of American music styles and Indian influences (but moreso than *Fathead*), Sureel finally tells his father about his music career as part of a desire to be recognized for who he really is, and also to win the support of his this love interest. His father rejects his son, hitting him for lying for four years and having him pay tuition for a music degree instead of a pre-med program. Sureel relies on the possibility of national recognition for his music in a large competition – a typical “battle of the bands” – to aid in justifying his music career to his family. In a moment of recognition initiated by Sureel’s mother who finally speaks meaningfully in the film about wanting to see her son play and do what he loves, Sureel’s father finally relents and attends the performance. He sees his son’s talent, and recognizes that his own life has been full of sacrificed dreams gone unfulfilled and realizes he does not want the same sense of heartbreak for Sureel.

Even before watching the movie I was brought back to the hybrid food analogy from the title *Bhaji on the Beach*. The movie’s title reminds us that this is an *American* film first, and a blend of Indian cultures second – a *chai*, or tea made of mixed spices. The opening sequence of the film further reinforces this when characters are introduced. We meet Sureel, whose name seems to make a double reference, first to the film

(Su/reel), and to the possible spaces of Indian hybrid identity (Sur/real) where a desi from suburban America would be able to live the fantastical fiction of going to music school in college without parents finding out. The concept of name-labels is carried even further, when we meet Sureel's best friend, Engineering-Sam, the typical Indian good-girl named Maya, and the ridiculously named Raju – a caricatured immigrant whose knowledge about American girls is derived exclusively from American TV (bikinis and loose sexual morals). However, instead of being mere caricatures of desis and immigrant Indians throughout the movie, the characters (including their names) use parody to point to some real issues. The parents are never given comedic names. Sureel's father and mother often use Hindi phrases (untranslated) to address their son, especially when talking about arranging his marriage to a “nice Gujarati girl” and when presenting him with homemade cooking with lots of *ghee* drizzled on top. As well, I am struck by the seriousness and commonsense tones of the parent's concerns. In one scene when the parents are at an Indian party, all of the other parents of medical school and engineering children describe their kids as studious and serious. We see contrasting moments of these students drinking, dancing, and making out with girls. Sureel's parents' fears about their son are articulated at this party when they claim he is probably out with the ladies, doing something stupid. We see the contrasting moment to these fears showing Sureel at home in his dorm room alone, playing Indian classical music on his sitar. Sureel's wishfully speculates, “if only my father knew how much his record collection influenced me.” The film thus presents a discord between parents' worries and assumptions about their desi children and the reality of what their children do while away at college.

I feel that this movie, whose plotline is easy enough to follow, asks serious questions about what it means to have a hybrid identity. On one level this is “the old story of an immigrant [Sureel’s father] who has worked long and hard so that his eldest son can reap the benefits of life in America” (Brussat & Brussat, 2002). Jeffrey Anderson (2002), in *Combustible Celluloid*, points out the film’s release “right on the heels of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* as another story about “a youngster who longs to live his life against the wishes of his traditional parents – a fairly old story.” Lawrence Van Gelder of the *New York Times*, still referring to the film as a “Timeless Tale with an Indian spin,” is more sympathetic. He points out how the film casts a “sometimes satiric eye on the elders and their ways but also on college students and their rites. Mr. Mehta makes merry with the sociology of the subject and has the courage and originality to let the ending grow from character rather than cinematic convention” (p. 1). Indeed, the opening sequence of *American Chai* appears to introduce a theme central to Indian literature and film that is not merely a rehashing of other cultural coming-of-age tales. This theme is the concept of Indians as imposters. I am reminded of a thematically different American film which came out in the same year, entitled *The Guru* (2002) featuring a fake Indian spiritualist living in America who makes a living as a sex guru. This film parodies the culture of self-help, yoga culture, and the kind of escapist solutions provided by Deepak Chopra in his spiritual-health books targeted at middle-aged, middle-class Americans. The idea of Indian as an imposter is not new. V.S. Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) is a similar tale of an Indian who rises to fame as a fake guru and become wealthy. *American Chai* works on the same premise – that the Indian is an imposter – a faker of white culture and of white tastes, a modern twist on Bhabha’s (1994) concept of the mimic man. Sureel’s “real life” takes place away from

home, at his college campus where he does not have to be Indian at all. It is only his family “baggage” (in the words of his *Fathead* band mates) that haunts him. He can discuss the merits of white girls over Indian girls with his roommates, revitalizing the concept of Indian male sexuality for an American audience.

Sureel’s efforts to go incognito begin in childhood on the playground when his friends ask him if he is Jewish or Christian (since everyone is one or the other in the neighborhood). They press him for details, “Are you Negro? What tribe are you from?” He declares as a kid, then, that all he wants to be is “like everyone else.” Thus for Sureel, through his youth and young adult life, the project of blending-in necessarily involves a denial of Indian heritage or its use in propelling self-interests – such as the invention of the band *Fathead* (no Indian name there!) which writes and performs Indian-influenced fusion music. Only during Sureel’s reawakening as a desi – a confronting of his hybrid roots which forms the main plot device of the film, does he name his band *American Chai*. I noted when viewing this film that “American” necessarily precedes “Chai” in this formulation. The Indian in the film has to self-declare, as many second-generation youth in different cultures do, saying, “I’m an American first!” The distance between his family home and college life, and the efforts Sureel takes to remove one from the other (changing his dress, staging his dorm room, letting his dad fantasize about a nonexistent career) serve to amplify the imposter status of the “Indian in New Jersey” – the Indian amongst whites.



Sureel with Maya after his "reawakening" to Indian culture.

This characterization of desi Indians as faking-it, combined with the common victim-hero trope of second-generation immigrant characters in films, gives this movie a sense of internal placelessness. More specifically, Sureel's life is volleyed between his attraction to Jen, the hippie, Indian-clothes clad groupie, and the supposedly "meaningful" attraction to Maya, the "good Indian." He also volleys between home and college, stage, and dorm room, and the identities of desi and imposter (including his efforts to distance himself from Raju). This element of placenessness seemed to me to capture the feeling of being lost between two worlds as a desi youth. While the disconnection became a parody of parents, their beliefs, and "FOB" immigrants, the struggle to articulate the self against the trope of the "proper" immigrant emerges as the major plot device. No doubt, the film is all about a minority-becoming – a finding of the "self," or emergence without a model, what Susan Huddleton Edgerton (1996) calls "translation without a master." The seemingly aimless quality of the film's spatial organization – the bouncing plot that takes place between free college life and strict

home space – actually felt to me to encapsulate the very real struggle to *find* a hybrid identity. Sureel doesn't know what it means to be a desi with the desires he has, the feelings of rejection towards Indian culture and its seemingly outdated or clumsy traditions. One of his attempts to articulate this is at the Indian-American academic student conference in the film where he speaks to other desis, encouraging them to promote Indian culture, not lose sight of traditions, and to remember the value of Indian fine arts. He cultivates a new sense of being Indian through participating in desi student events. Even though the film wraps up in a highly predictable way – through Sureel's partial return to Indian values (the most he has ever felt in his life), and acceptance on the parts of his parents – I felt that the inconsistencies, lags, and B-movie acting actually contributed to the lost feeling and guilt about rejecting some Indian values and practices that many desis, including myself, have felt directly. The sense of placelessness became for me a purposeful element rather than something to be critiqued as a cinematic weakness of Anurag Mehta's debut film.

Cultural Disc(h)ords and Melodrama

One of my first impressions of the film was in relation to Sureel's characterization – namely that he functions as a melodramatic victim and hero. The trope of melodrama, a common Hollywood cinematic motif, is employed in this film to make a moral statement about two things: the onus of desi youth not to abandon their Indian roots, and the responsibility of Indian parents to become part of the American melting pot of cultures and accept their children's career and love choices.

Throughout the film, Sureel is portrayed as a victim of cultural circumstances: it is not his parents' fault that they are immigrants but they just "don't get it" about the fact that he is "American." This is articulated by Sureel himself in the opening lines of the film where he narrates over and above the pastoral neighborhood scene, "I was born here so I am American. My parents were born in India..." Writing about American film generally, Linda Williams (1998) writes that within the mode of melodrama, characters are tested in relation to their "moral legibility" (p. 52), and that the task of protagonists is to "put forth a moral truth in gesture and to picture what could not be fully spoken in words" (ibid.). *American Chai* makes this its primary project – to unravel the struggle of a student who is faced with moral challenges on account of circumstances beyond his control (being born desi) and who triumphs through gesture, through the ultimate act of showing his unforgiving and traditional family that his quest to become a musician has been a worthwhile life endeavor.

As well, the structure of melodrama is meant to "recognize and regain a lost innocence" (p. 61) of its youthful characters. This is the case for Sureel, whose life of lying and deception to his parents is juxtaposed with recurring and often elaborate ways for him to be true to himself – as a musician, as a "regular American" high school student, in his tastes in movies and friends. He is victimized by cultural circumstances but is portrayed as on a journey to reveal himself fully to the world for who he is, perhaps regaining the lost innocence he has had to give up on account of needing to lie. Maya helps Sureel reveal his "moral worth...to the audience and... to the other characters of the film, in the course of the narrative" (ibid.). This revelation takes on complex dimensions. Instead of a shedding of Indian culture and full absorption of his

so-called “American” tastes – a heroic triumph over the “oppression” of Indian culture – Sureel instead experiences a partial return to his childhood when Indian values and morals were impressed upon him by his parents. But this return is only made possible by a love interest. The film needs Sureel to fall in love with a desi girl, or else the regaining of lost innocence cannot be achieved. Sure enough, Maya fits the bill. She is a science student, beautiful, obedient to her parents, and looking for a desi guy to date. Sureel is the unconventional boyfriend, but one who needs rescuing. Thus, Maya lays down the groundwork for the moral legibility we seek in Sureel. His character is not altogether likeable when he is a liar, and defiant son, wasting his father’s money on college. I felt his rescue by Maya provided him a model upon which to lay his own newfound morals, and a character whose self-assuredness, and moral strength would guide him through the difficult journey of revealing his true career desires to his parents.

Reading my viewing notes, I am aware of my desire for the melodramatic ending, and my rejection of Sureel’s parents. However, looking at the filmic structures through screenplay pedagogy, I note that the separation of spaces (different scenes, different locations) for the parents and the college life helps me to situate Sureel’s struggle within the “closed family dynamic.” He only has to confront one space. As well, his parents have redeeming and forgivable characteristics in the film which remind me of my own experience with friends who have strict immigrant parents and to a lesser extent, of my own mother. The father’s concern that Sureel cannot be a “Michael Jackson” and that the American music scene does not have room for Indian artists in the mainstream, are legitimate concerns. More profoundly though, I was struck (as I was by the similar scene in *Bend It Like Beckham*) by Sureel’s father’s brute honesty about his

own dreams lost on account of immigrating. He sacrificed his life to own a business and provide for his children. He did not realize his own “American Dream.” These revelations are part of the darker, sad parts of immigration which haunt the stories which I love by Jhumpa Lahiri in *Interpreter of Maladies*. The father’s depth in these scenes also makes Sureel’s struggle to overcome the stresses of cultural hybridity more real, and more painful. He is at risk of hurting his parents legitimately by choosing a trivial music career.

Thus, the function of melodrama – of the victim/hero overcoming cultural restrictions to earn a new identity (one that is shaped throughout the film, that he forges anew without a model), is deeply entrenched in the process of cultural translation. Sureel’s identity as desi shifts considerably throughout the film. In a reading of identity that takes into account representational strategies pushed outward through identification and desire (Chapter 2), Sureel occupies multiple (third) spaces more profoundly than the protagonists in *Bhaji on the Beach* or *Bend It Like Beckham*. He is a different desi youth at home at his parents’ house than he is at college. And his “white” desi American identity at the beginning of the film is not the same (third) space as his newfound return to a more innocent, “true” Indian-American identity at the end. His creation of complex, contradictory (Third) Spaces which he occupies unclearly (to himself) is the ambivalent space of cultural translation in relation to his parents and to the audience. To use common social studies terms about multiculturalism, the film might champion a “melting pot” ideal for the parents (we wish them to just “get with it”!) but a “mosaic” ideal (a return to cultural “roots”) for Sureel. The translation message thus works in two directions, implying that there is a cultural equilibrium to be found. The return to

innocence experienced by Sureel is matched by the progressiveness of the parents, to achieve a happy cultural medium and resolution to the plot through the highly conventional “battle of the bands” scene.

For me, this film spoke to me most clearly, and (dare I say) “authentically” in relating the cultural aimlessness often felt by desi youth in North America. It best encapsulated my experiences as well. Sureel’s drifting identity, his clinging onto multiple ambivalent identities, is something many desi youth experience. An older, more mature Sureel who returns to cultural roots (facilitated in part by his playing the Sitar and enjoying fusion music already) is also an experience of desis who have made unconventional career decisions. As an adult and part of the first generation of desi youth in Canada, I also often look back to ask, “what kind of *Indian* am I? What kind of Canadian does that make me?” Through the film’s pervasive sense of placeness alongside the project of forging of a cultural path anew, *American Chai* pays deep homage to real experiences of “becoming minoritarian” in a world where there is no guide for desis about how to do so.

Chapter Eight

Discussion and Conclusion

I am in Pakistan. I was traveling from Islamabad (beautiful city) to Jhelum. On the road I saw a sign Sargoda 120. My heart felt a bit of joy and a bit of pain. I think this is my mother's birth place and some of my siblings were also born there. I wanted to go and see the place but work and shortage of time did not permit this side tour. My mother spoke so fondly of this place. Borders are created, life changes and people move on. However, memories stay. Here is to you mom. I promise to you that I will go see it if life permits it. I want to share in your memories. I miss you today more than ever. Love to all. (Facebook status update, Karuna Ausman, April 1st, 2012)

Desi Identities in the Third Space

On April 1st, 2012, as I sat down to write this part of my thesis, I idly checked my Facebook account. My mother was on the road, working in the field of international education as she has been since 1997, assessing student transcripts in countries all over the world to see if they are eligible to study at one of many post-secondary institutions in Canada. She was in Pakistan. As I scrolled down the “home page”, I saw that she posted a status update – the one above. When I read it, I felt a new connection to my mother, and to my grandmother – who I remember from my childhood. I recall her house, her smile, her generous gifts, and her delight in giving my brother and I Coca-Cola and cookies on our trip to New Delhi when I was in grade three. I cannot imagine my mother's feelings about how borders have affected her life but I suddenly feel connected to her and to my own existence in a land amongst people who have crossed many real borders to be where they are in a world we so casually call “global” and “transnational.” The feelings of borders as barriers, the world as segmented, and the dis/connections revealed by travelling through time and space are brought forth through our feelings.

This profound desire to cross cultural borders, and yet never forget the act of crossing and what was, or might be, left behind, is what propels the characters in *Bhaji*

on the Beach, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *American Chai* to test cultural boundaries. One of my research questions asks in what ways these films work as a curriculum of living at the interstices of different cultural spaces. The curriculum I proposed early in this project was one of cultural translation. My reading of these three films has led me to a view of how a curriculum of cultural translation might work.

The concept of (Third) Spaces which I describe in my theoretical framework works through identification with cultural artifacts or O/others, the resulting desire to absorb, consume, or imitate what is seen, and then a performance of identity resultant from the taking-in of that object or person of identification. The films in this project rely on the transgressions of boundaries initiated by identifications outside the (homogenized) cultural group of “Indian”: Hashida is involved with Oliver, Jessminder (who goes by the culturally neutral name “Jess”) identifies with British soccer culture and her white best friend and Sureel rejects all things Indian until he meets Maya. The interstices between cultures are spaces fraught with discontent. Indian culture and religion (whether Sikh in *Bhaji* and *Beckham* or Hindu in *American Chai*) is first presented as a singular “traditional” entity against which all other dynamic identities exist. The films offer us a curriculum that necessarily homogenizes immigrant culture while presenting a multiplicity of possibilities offered to desi youth once that culture has been left or exited. However, it is not that simple. In all three movies, there is a return to Indian roots (through different filmic routes) – a translation of cultures that works in multiple directions. We see in the films that elders are always respected. The characters fear hurting the tradition of the Indian family unit and their immigrant parents. They fear leaving the central value of obedience to family behind. In this way, Indian culture

interpellates the desi who has transgressed borders to become the “Westernized” Indian. Some reminiscent values still remain and inform the desi who takes up so-called Western tastes. As such, (third) spaces of desi self-identification not only amount to a separation of the self across multiple dimensions (how one might act with their “traditional” Indian family versus one’s actions in front of British or American friends), but goes further. In the quantum concept of (third) spaces, the contradictory feelings of being British and Indian at once are possible, as are simultaneous temporal and spatial representations of both. Translation occurs as the possibility of “wearing” both identities simultaneously without being limited to a description of hybridity that is necessarily linear – limited to being along-the-way between Indian culture and Westernized milieu. The desi person interpellated by Western culture likewise brings Indian values and culture to the West through living and identifying with its other cultural forms. From these films, I learned that the function of the desi can be dual – Indian culture is as much hybridized by British or American influences as the characters who are non-desi British or American are influenced by their friendships with desis. Learning happens multidirectionally, simultaneously, and cross-culturally.

To add to this reading, I return to my conceptual framework about (third) spaces to consider the intertextual function of analysing all three of these films together. Thinking of each movie as an utterance, I am reminded of Bakhtin’s (1986) thesis on intertextuality. He explains that “[t]he text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a different text to a dialogue” (p. 162). This assertion is based on the premise that an utterance in isolation is

meaningless without other utterances to contextualize it. I would argue this for both the films *and* the desi identities which they create and represent. Diasporic films form part of a genre with a specific purpose, namely to create the mythology of a particular type of global citizen. The films are consumed worldwide and occupy different spaces and times inter-generationally for their different viewers. This is the terrain Gillespie (1995) explores in her work studying ads that target Punjabi youth in Southall, England. Ads are used to address the desi Punjabi population, creating a particular *kind* of second-generation Punjabi for public consumption – one who conforms to a national (British) view of citizenship but who importantly participates in a kind of aspirational “becoming” as a new kind of cultural citizen in the same space. Similarly, these films ask viewers like me to contemplate my own (third) space positionality when watching the films. Looking intertextually between films and viewer (the kind of relationship Stuart Hall writes about in his explanation of encoding/decoding), my context as middle-class Indo-Canadian plays into my understanding of the films as creating a mode of understanding only decodable through my other acts of media consumption. I “get” the films because I feel they are staging a performance of a certain kind of identity formation in similar filmic vehicles I already identify with and have seen onscreen elsewhere.

In terms of the intertextuality of desi identities in third spaces, the formation is *outward* from the filmic utterances themselves. What this does is creates a static space and identity that is “Indian” and which remains somehow unchanging because it is “traditional.” The films feature desis created newly through their resistance to these “traditional” Indian values. The theme of transgression necessarily implies a casting-off

of home culture and assimilation into an alternate culture (with dangerous implications). Sure enough, the films put forth these fears. The fathers in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *American Chai* relate their real experiences of racism and loss on account of immigration. Just like my mother, whose journey often only spoke to me as a distant story of her past, these parents' experiences remind us of the effects of colonialism that still live inside diasporas. Yet the diasporas themselves develop new identities – pushing representations outwards as stores, street signs, temples, and communities emerge in immigrant locales outside India. Desi films create “mediascapes” (Appadurai, 1990) about such communities:

Mediascapes...tend to be image centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places. (p. 9)

Diasporic films are such mediascapes where mediated images of Indian communities abroad become the foundation for an industry which circulates the symbolic ethnicity of an entire generation – my generation. These films take snippets of our real lives, and fictionalizes them, creating stories around real events that play out in desi families everywhere, thereby universalizing and reinforcing the symbolic function of desis onscreen. The films remind us that we are a global community, in such a way that allows me to watch these three films, all set outside Canada, and yet identify with the sense of “home” and the struggles I see and feel.

The films also crack apart the concept of India as a fixed (cultural) place. We learn that the parents in the films had dreams and aspirations when they were youthful

immigrants. Freezing identities in the (third) space, they create a fiction of a static, traditional India to which they return when raising children in the diaspora, having lost their own dreams (ie. the fathers in *Bend It Like Beckham* and *American Chai*). But as the character Rekha reminds us in *Bhaji on the Beach*, the “traditional” India for which the parents have nostalgia and upon whose imagined values they base their parenting, no longer exists. Moving through time and space also, the work of identification with a modern India is a difficult challenge for those living in the diaspora who might not have been home for many years. Not only are desi identities thus shaped against and out from a *non-existent* traditional India, but we have to recognize the (third) space mobility of that India – one which identifies with and against a multitude of global/Western pressures. Perhaps what the films do best is expose how an imagined India is a pure fiction – the youthful desi characters seem to get this, but the parents hold onto lost dreams and an imaginary homeland.

Furthering this concept of an imagined India, and thinking through the model of quantum (third) spaces and through the circles that represent identities and their representations in time and space, my viewings of the films led me to another way in which hybrid (third) spaces could be conceived. I contended in my theoretical framework that quantum (third) spaces take up the concept of representation on a personal level (identifying with mixed cultural influences and outward self-representation) and through the filmic vehicle (representation on the big screen). They also exist on a national level – as an India (re)shaping itself for public consumption abroad. The choice of parents in the films resides in their pretense that their culture does not transform – that somehow it is immune to working “at both ends of the migration

chain” (Watson, 1977, p. 2). This view’s roots/routes lie in public media and research that even today writes diasporic communities as always “displaced” from a homeland. The binary of “home” and “abroad” makes India a mythical place where so-called “traditional” values reside, and keeps diasporas on the periphery of mainstream Western societies. Denying the movement of India (as a modern evolving nation) in (third) spaces renders Indians abroad as always displaced. “Diasporic discourse in this context,” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1994) explains, “is strong on displacement, detachment, uprooting, and dispersion – on disarticulation. It is appealing precisely because it so easily lends itself to a strategic disaggregation of territory, people, race, language, culture, religion, history, and sovereignty” (p. 339). The immigrant parents in all three films can be read against this motif of representing immigrant communities abroad as static and unmoving but this confounds the real global movements in time and space of Indian culture, products, and people.

As part of learning how cultural translation operates in the films, I ask how the use of screenplay pedagogy as a methodology has helped me along. I return once more to Stuart Hall (1993), who reminds me that films are not mirrors that merely reflect identities already made, or are somehow made static once conveyed onscreen:

We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak. (p. 402)

Like the directors of diasporic films, this project is a mode from which I can speak about desi identity formation for myself through a medium. This project is inherently self-

reflective. I look at the struggles onscreen as representations of a process of *becoming* through the self-representational apparatus of (third) spaces – modes of representation that lack fixity in time (across generations) and space (across countries and continents). Though this might seem like an attempt to universalize the hybrid experience, to reduce it to a single trope, it is not. My responses to the films – those things which struck me most and my identification with *and* against particular representations of desi identity – are part of what forms my self-representation in the very real diaspora in which I live. I am formed by the films through the act of interpretation, and I carry new self-formations with each viewing into the world as an Indo-Canadian woman living in Quebec.

I would finally like to address the underlying reason for studying these films. These are not films whose stories reinforce allegories of nation-building, nor are they narrations of essentialist paradigms of certain “ethnic” identities. They stand in-between, as I do. Even though the body of films is characterized by a certain racialized group (first and second generation Indians), I challenge the view that the films must represent a particular form of multiculturalism – what Mercer (1994) terms the “burden of representation” (p. 92). These are not films whose burden is to represent minority cultures in a strictly positive light in an anti-racist struggle against (white) Western presumptions. Nor do I feel they are meant to speak for communities as a whole. As articulated in my methodology, each film has been treated as an utterance here. My analyses are responses to the act of viewing them in my time and place and space, and this makes them unique not only to me, but to each desi and non-desi viewer alike. These films render both their objects, and viewer subjects, heterogeneous and hybrid in our multiplicity of reactions to filmic representations.

Looking forward in Education Research: Cultural Translation Curricula

The concept of cultural translation as a curriculum is broad and far-reaching. I would like to consider its implications for further research. In this project, I have attempted to delineate how the space of diasporic films can be the places where desi identities are identified, where the characters undergo struggles, whether through modes of carnivalesque, multicultural pastoral, or melodrama – but all in the process of *becoming desi* in a world where there is no model upon which to base identity formations. Cultural translation is thus a curriculum without a fixed end point. We don't know all of the answers. Viewing and analyzing these films has foremost helped to revitalize the concept of curriculum for me. Far from being prescriptive, it is an open journey. It is not a process of minoritarian-becoming in the primordial sense, to be sure. Instead, I have learned that the place between cultures, where multiple identities are articulated at the interstices between moving, multi-dimensional (third) spaces, is messy. Curriculum is messy. It is about learning what is “out there” and entering learning spaces unknowingly and sometimes awkwardly. In one sense, it is a rejection of the conventional wisdom of “backward design” where the answers are known, where we teach from the end to the beginning. Desis everywhere, charting a course through hybrid identity formation, are not entirely sure what lies at the end of our journeys.

With this open-ended concept of curriculum in mind, I wish to suggest that this project could be the foundation for further research into how other desis – first-

generation Indo-Canadians like me – respond to films such as *Bhaji on the Beach*, *Bend It Like Beckham*, and *American Chai*. How might they write or tell their stories against those portrayed onscreen? No doubt Indo-Canadians come from all walks of life and corners of our respective diasporas. I would like to gather the stories of others, to learn about the representational strategies other Canadian desis undertake in creating their (third) spaces, and how they work between generations and places to learn about themselves in a world where there is no fixed model on how to negotiate cultural boundaries. More specifically, this research provides the filmic vehicle to start a conversation – no doubt a complicated one – about what it means to transgress boundaries, and to be “desi” in Canada.

Adding to the existing literature on Third Spaces, I offer a view of cultural identity formations *as* culture itself. My goal is to employ the discourses about translation as a mode of cultural identity articulation to examine the possibilities of looking at films as large sites of differences and struggles within cultures – large, complex utterances that are articulations of multiple cultural identities. Rather than look at desi identities as only emerging from autonomous or localized cultural identities (like some of the homogenized, static cultures portrayed through tropes of immigration/displacement in the films), I seek ways that explore cultural dis/articulations shaped by journeys through quantum (third) spaces where representations of both the imagined world of India/tradition and the real, globalized world co-exist. Quantum (third) spaces take on new dimensions by definition. Their purpose is to allow for exploration of not only what lies between cultures, or within them, but also between imagined cultures and real ones. I wish for this work to draw

attention to the symbolizing force of culture within the teaching and learning context. Quantum (third) spaces are about multidimensional spaces of inquiry and some of the trajectories might include the identifications *and* spaces between images/representations that shape cultural identities and real global cultural flow of people and cultural artifacts worldwide. After all, quantum (third) spaces provide a transformative and empowering way for South Asians to unravel multiple representations of their cultures.

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