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# Establishing Identity: Gender, race and class in British South Asian cinema

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MA by Research

**Michael Paul Willis**

**5/17/2021**

### **Abstract**

This study focusses on British South Asian diaspora history, specifically diasporic film and its portrayals of class, gender, race, sexuality and generational divide. Using postcolonial and Marxist analytical technique, this research aims to gain insight into way South Asian filmmakers portray their experiences and what this tells researchers about the diasporic community, how these portrayals have changed over time, and how accurately they relay the experiences of the diaspora and are received by audiences. The results are a range of ambiguous hybrid identities and experiences which, whilst authentic, simultaneously reproduce many cultural and class-based stereotypes.

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## Introduction: Methodology and Historiography

British South Asian film has been a primary platform for cultural diasporic experience. However, these films often fall into the same stereotyping tropes that previous western interpretations established in cinematic portrayals of eastern culture. This research aims to explore British South Asian films' stereotypical representations of the diaspora, how these representations emerge through South Asian filmmakers, how they influence historian's understanding of the diaspora, and how these portrayals deal with and help to construct hybrid identities through the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality. I will also analyse what South Asian filmmakers intended to portray with their films, how successful they were and how the films were received by the British South Asian community. For this study I will employ a range of film analysis techniques, coupled with analytical theory developed by Marxist and postcolonial scholars, to analyse eight British South Asian films. I will layout a historical background for the emergence of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, and for South Asian cinema. I will then use these analytical techniques to uncover how issues of race, gender, class and sexuality are treated in British South Asian films, what these portrayals reveal about cultural identities of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, and the wider impact of these films on British society. I have selected a group of films produced from 1980-2011 as they reflect a time after primary migration from South Asia, when hybrid first- and second-generation migrant identities had established themselves, and because there are few films by British South Asian directors or writers from before this period. This allows me to explore how South Asians chose to deal with cultural tropes that 'Other' them in the eyes of western audiences, and use these tropes and the cinematic medium to construct a more nuanced representation of their cultural identities, class, race, gender and sexuality.

### Historical and Sociological Analysis of Film

Films are similar to written sources in the sense that they must be analysed in terms of objectivity, bias, content and aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> History as a discipline inherently prioritizes certain narratives, points of view and key events in order to further understand wider issues. According to Rosenstone, to a degree, films are "visual fictions" just as written sources are "verbal fictions" that serve to represent the past rather than mirror it.<sup>2</sup> It is important as historians to analyse films not just in terms of the historical events presented on the screen, but also in terms of what those events say about the era the media was created in. Events that are displayed in cinema may be ahistorical, unrealistic or overtly vulgar, but this does not mean we should dismiss them. As Rosenstone discusses in his analysis of *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the overt, horrific racism of the film's portrayal of African-Americans reflects many attitudes of that era in the United States, as well as conveying actual historical events from the American Civil War.<sup>3</sup> This is important as this study will focus on British South Asian cinema from the 1980s onwards. The films selected as primary sources are mostly fictional and so the historical value comes less from the events that happen on screen, but what these events - their presentation and their deeper meaning – tell us about the era in which they were produced.

Film does not necessarily need to be historically accurate for it to be a useful tool for historical research. Often, inaccuracies themselves can lend us insight into the history the era presents, or the

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<sup>1</sup> Barber, S. (2015). *Using film as a source*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenstone, R.A. (2009). History in images/history in words. In M. Hughes-Warrington (Ed.) *History on Film Reader*: Routledge. p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> Rosenstone, R.A. (2013). *History on film/film on history*: Routledge. p. 15.

era in which it was made. As pointed out by Barber when discussing the film *Carry on up the Khyber* (1968), although the film is of no use in terms of analysing British India itself, it is useful as a source for exploring the concepts of British imperialism, colonialism, gender, race, etc.<sup>4</sup> Again, as most of the primary sources for this study are completely fictitious, they serve as a useful source primarily for analysing how British South Asians perceive themselves and how these self-perceptions have changed overtime. My analysis keeps in my mind Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to look at how South Asians represent themselves in their cinema. Said pointed out how western representations of South Asians often presented them as an exotic, one-dimensional 'other', which is primitive, violent, authoritarian, and filled with religious fanatics, stemming from its so-called 'traditional' cultural values.<sup>5</sup> This is contrasted with the western representation of itself as embracing of freedom, democracy and tolerance, and espousing 'progressive' values. Whilst my analysis focusses primarily on South Asians self-representation, Said's work is considered whilst analysing the way in which South Asians often portray themselves through western cultural stereotyping and construct hybrid identities within cinema.

Wider audiences require movies to make wider cultural assumptions about their setting and characters. The more popular a movie is, the more cultural assumptions it is forced to make. Therefore, the popularity of South Asian diasporic films is important in understanding to what extent they 'assume' with regard to both the cultures of the home and host nations.<sup>8</sup> The response of the audience is also important when analysing films. It is incorrect to merely assume that audiences will simply accept what they see on screen as historical or sociological fact. In reality, this underestimates not just the audience's capacity to think for themselves, but the filmmaker's ability to produce thought-provoking, nuanced cinema.<sup>9</sup> For studying British South Asian cinema, there is value in understanding how different target audiences reacted to certain films, as it allows us to measure how reflective the film is of that community's experiences or values. It is also useful to measure if these reactions can be seen as changing over time and how British South Asian audiences received cinema from their own demographic, in contrast with each other and white British audiences.

When analysing historical film, it is apparent that historical accuracy is often sacrificed for the sake of ratings at the Box office. In the words of Hughes-Warrington (2007), filmmakers see history as a "story bin to be plundered".<sup>10</sup> In the case of British South Asian film, it is important to consider whether filmmakers and screenwriters choose to adopt more conventional cinematic tropes that will 'hook' the audience and improve ratings and revenue, rather than focus on accurate cultural and historical representation. Whilst this study will explore many aspects of the British South Asian community, it is important to acknowledge that there are many communities within the umbrella of 'British South Asian' and that although there are many similarities, there are also many differences between these groups. 'British Muslim', 'British Indian' and 'British Bangladeshi' are not homogenous entities and within them exist smaller sub-groups, like the Ugandan Asian diaspora in Leicester, or the Punjabi Muslim diaspora in Manchester.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore important to define 'community'. Calhoun's definition prioritizes practice over location, describing a community as a

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<sup>4</sup> Barber, S. (2015). *Using film as a source*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

<sup>8</sup> Bergesen, A. (2016). How to Sociologically Read a Movie. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 57 (4), 585-596.

<sup>9</sup> Barber, S. (2015). *Using film as a source*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes-Warrington, M. (2007). *History goes to the movies*. Abingdon: Routledge. p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Kalayil, S. (2019). *Second-generation South Asian Britons: Multilingualism, Heritage Languages, and diasporic Identity*. Maryland: Lexington Books. p. 3.

“way of living” which although related, also varies.<sup>12</sup> Lave and Wenger argue that it is a shared endeavour that ultimately defines a community, which is the foundation of their “Communities of Practice” theory.<sup>13</sup> In this study I will analyse how, and to what extent the differences between these sub-groups are presented in South Asian film.

For this thesis I have analysed eight British South Asian films – referring to English language films produced, directed or written by British South Asians. The films analysed in this study are *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986), *My Son the Fanatic* (1997), *East is East* (1999), *Bend it like Beckham* (2002), *Banglatown Banquet* (2006), *Brick Lane* (2007), *West is West* (2010), and *Everywhere and Nowhere* (2011). These primary sources have been selected based upon their release dates (one from the 1980s, two from the 1990s, one from the early 2000s, three from the late 2000s and one post-2010) in order to provide a point of analysis spanning across the period 1980-2011. They have also been selected with regard to their representation of different sub-groups of the British South Asian diaspora. They include films about Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants, as well as about Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. I have also ensured that the ethnic background of the collective films writers and directors are as varied as possible. As such I have selected films by British Pakistanis (Hanif Kureishi and Ayub Khan-Din), British Indians (Gurinder Chadha and Tanika Gupta), and British Bangladeshis (Monica Ali and Menhaj Huda). This also provides an adequate gender balance amongst the filmmakers with 3 females and 3 males. These films are ultimately representations of South Asian filmmaker’s own culture. I have chosen to use cinematic sources exclusively as I am primarily interested in how South Asian filmmakers use cinema and cinematic tropes to represent themselves. Some of the films in this study are historical fictions. For example, *East is East* and *West is West* are both set in the 1970s, though were produced in 1999 and 2010 respectively. This is important to keep in mind as the other sources are representations of diasporic experience at the time of their production, whereas as the aforementioned attempt to relay these experiences 30-40 years later.

### Historiography of South Asian Diaspora

Academic literature about South Asian women, particularly in the sociological field, has traditionally focussed on the restrictive cultures of South Asian communities. Less attention has been paid to the exploitation and oppression they suffer at the hands of societal institutions.<sup>14</sup> For this study I will borrow from Yasmine Hussain’s ‘Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity’, which studies the experiences of South Asian diasporic women and their representation in films such as *Bend it like Beckham*.

Academic analysis of British South Asian youth in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century subscribed predominantly to the ‘between two cultures’ mode of analysis, which places emphasis on a cultural clash between the traditional values of Asian cultures and the western values of British society. Studies such as Thompson (1974), Taylor (1976) and Ballard (1976) have written extensively on British South Asians through this paradigm.<sup>15</sup> This approach has been critiqued by Errol Lawrence, who accuses it of perpetuating a victim blaming approach to minority communities, blaming problems on ethnic

<sup>12</sup> Calhoun, C. (1998). Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communication Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere. *Sociological Inquiry*, 68, 373-397.

<sup>13</sup> Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, C. (2006). Imagining the Politics of BrAsian [sic] youth. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 258-271). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd. p. 260.

minorities own communities and attitudes, rather than on wider racism and discrimination.<sup>16</sup> Brah has criticized the 'between two cultures' approach for its assumption that there is a single, uniform 'British' or 'Asian' culture, and argues that its emphasis on conflict ignores the areas in which British and Asian cultures interact or join. Brah also argues that it falsely asserts that cultural change is a one-way process, ignoring the influence that Asian cultures have on native British practices. The very notion of a conflict of identity also paints young British Asians as disorientated and confused, whilst reducing the nature of identity formation to ethnicity only. This ignores the role that gender, class, sexuality, etc play in the formation of identity.<sup>17</sup> In this study I will employ a similarly critical approach to the 'between two cultures' model, focussing instead on racial conflict as a manifestation of class conflict.

My study will also employ Michael Fisher's 'Counterflows to Colonialism', which covers the history of South Asian migration to the United Kingdom, Ali et al's 'A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain', which includes essays by various authors about the history, culture and experiences of British South Asians, and Robert J.C. Young's 'Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction' for an overview of post-colonial theory. These sources provide a useful background for understanding how South Asians settled in the Britain over the second half of the twentieth century and how hybrid cultural identities manifested themselves, and how these identities transferred into British South Asian film. Young's work in particular contributes to a framework of analysis, along with the works of Derrida and Bhabha, allowing me to explore many internalized 'Othering' and stereotyping tropes which are present in South Asian migrants own self-representation.

### Hospitality, Identity and Belonging

In this study I will employ Jacques Derrida's theory of hospitality to analyse the way in which first- and second-generation migrants interact with one another, and how this is portrayed in diasporic cinema. Inevitably, this requires an understanding of diasporic 'identity', which differs not just from the identity of the white British, but also between migrants. According to Stuart Hall, 'identity' is composed of three things: that which does not change (the 'enlightenment self'), that which is formed through interaction with environment/society (the 'sociological subject'), and the post-modern self which alters in composition and expression depending on time and location.<sup>18</sup> It is constructed through recognition of commonalities (origin, characteristics, etc) between oneself and another person or group. Simultaneously identity is constructed through difference – it is only through relation to the Other that identity can be constructed and that commonalities with others can be realised.<sup>19</sup> Derrida's theory of hospitality refers to the relationship between 'host' and 'guest', where the host accepts the guest into their domain (e.g. the home, a neighbourhood, country, etc) on certain conditions. Derrida calls this 'conditional hospitality', where violation of these conditions may lead to the host perceiving the guest as a parasite, thus manifesting into social conflict. Derrida's point is that this relationship of hospitality ultimately reaffirms the differences between the host and guest, despite the act appearing, superficially, to do the opposite. Derrida argues that the only way to truly diminish these barriers between cultures is for the host to embrace the guest unconditionally, which he argues is impossible.<sup>20</sup> I will be using Derrida and Hall's work in order to gain a nuanced understanding of how South Asians portray themselves. In particular, how first- and

<sup>16</sup> CCCS (1982). *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*. London: Hutchinson.

<sup>17</sup> Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London: Routledge.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, S. (1997). The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity. In A. D. King (Ed.) *Culture, Globalization and the World-System*. (pp. 19-40) . London: Macmillan Education UK.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of Cultural Identity*. SAGE. p. 1-8.

<sup>20</sup> Gorman, K. D. (2006). Jacques Derrida's philosophy of hospitality. *Hospitality Review*, 8(4), 50-57.



second-generation migrants interact with one another and how these interactions, and their effects, are represented by South Asian filmmakers.

'Belonging' refers to "an act of self-identification, or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way".<sup>21</sup> How a sense of belonging is formed or manufactured can be simplified into three categories of analysis: social locations, individual identities and attachments, and ethical and political values.<sup>22</sup> Diasporic cinema falls within the realm of individual identities and emotional attachment – which is to say that it is used as a medium by which diaspora can construct narratives of themselves or others, about who they are, or are not. These narratives can be collective or individual, relating both directly and indirectly to themselves or others. South Asian migrants often find themselves having to choose between their home and host communities, in what Kelly refers to as "dilemmas of belonging".<sup>23</sup> This is evident across all variations of British South Asian cinema, particularly with regard to second-generation migrants, who are often forced to choose between the native western British culture and the traditional cultural practices of their parents, most notably in films like *Bend it like Beckham*, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *East is East* and *Everywhere and Nowhere*. As well as this, they also face difficulties in choosing between their diasporic cultures. South Asian migrants face a choice between the religious values, language, regionalism and caste alignments of the established diaspora in their own country, and the wider South Asian diasporic community who place greater emphasis on their origin (be it India, Pakistan or Bangladesh) and which is globally organised.<sup>24</sup> These internal divisions are paid less attention in British South Asian diasporic film, though the subject of religious divide receives some coverage in films like *Brick Lane*, which hints at the division between moderate and orthodox Islamic doctrine as a means for the Bangladeshi community to resist racial prejudice and discrimination. Islamic fundamentalism is also a core theme of the film *My Son the Fanatic*, which subverts the traditional role of the orthodox patriarch and the conflicted son that is prevalent in South Asian diasporic film.

South Asian diasporas in the West reproduce themselves through a sense of 'belonging' to a home culture, representing and vehemently defending that culture in their everyday practices. From this, multiple identities are transmitted to second generation migrants, who are simultaneously taught the values of the western culture they are brought up in, whilst also being socialised into the religious practices, native language and gender roles of their parents' home culture.<sup>25</sup> These identities manifest themselves even without this transmission. South Asian youths that did not adhere to the same cultural practices as their parents often retained a strong 'associational' identity, in which they would identify along the lines of traditional cultural or religious values despite not being fully socialised into them.<sup>26</sup> As well as this, there is also an emergence amongst British Muslims

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<sup>21</sup> Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the Politics of Belonging. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40(3), 197-214. doi: 10.1080/00313220600769331

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly, J. (2018). Dilemmas of Belonging in Fiji, Part II: Shanti, Swaraj, and the problem of political armies. In E. Hermann & S. Fuhse (Eds.) *India beyond India: Dilemmas of Belonging*. (pp. 99-130). Gottingen: University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Hermann, E. & Fuhse, S. (2018). Introduction: Dilemmas of Belonging in Indian Diasporas. In E. Hermann & S. Fuhse (Eds.) *India beyond India: Dilemmas of Belonging*. (pp. 11-26). Gottingen: University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Shirwadkar, S. (2018). Domestic Violence and the Implications of Belonging: Experiences of Indian Immigrant Women in North America. In E. Hermann & S. Fuhse (Eds.) *India beyond India: Dilemmas of Belonging*. (pp. 11-26). Gottingen: University Press.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, C. (2006). Imagining the Politics of BrAsian [sic] youth. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 258-271). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd. p. 265.

of an Islamic identity which transcends that of typical Pakistani or Bangladeshi identity.<sup>27</sup> This can be seen in British Muslim films such as *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *My Son the Fanatic* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

### Hybridity, Mimicry and the Cultural 'Enclave'

Throughout my analysis I will utilise the concept of the 'cultural enclave' – a geographic area with a distinct cultural identity, ethnic homogeneity and enclosed economic activity.<sup>28</sup> These may be large, such as on the scale of a community with a high population of migrants from common backgrounds, or small, such as on the scale of a household. These cultural enclaves provide their members with opportunities for work, training, education and economic advancement through enclave networks.<sup>29</sup> The most prominent example of this is *My Beautiful Laundrette* which provides a relatively detailed overview of both macro- and micro-enclaves. I utilise this concept in order to analyse how British South Asians maintain connection to their home culture, how second-generation migrants construct their unique hybrid identities within this environment, and how this is represented by British South Asian filmmakers.

My study also utilises Homi Bhabha's works on hybridity and mimicry. Hybridity is defined as the colonial subject whose culture has been created through the translations and iterations of the colonizer, producing a space (which Bhabha calls 'Third Space') in which a new subject is created – existing as neither the colonizer, nor the Other, but as if occupying both positions simultaneously.<sup>30</sup> According to Homi Bhabha, "mimicry is... a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the 'Other' as it visualises power".<sup>31</sup> In the case of British South Asian diaspora, mimicry is when the 'host' cultures actions, language, values and practices are adopted by the diaspora as their own. Lacan described mimicry as "camouflage... which is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled".<sup>32</sup> Mimicry is rooted in ambivalence and encompasses migrants becoming the same as the 'host', but not quite. The ambivalence makes it impossible for them to ever truly become the same as the 'host'. Mimicry is highly relevant when discussing British South Asian diaspora and their self-representation in film, and is a core theme of Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*. It may further historian's understanding of the divide between first-generation migrants, who cling to their traditional cultural values, and second-generation migrants who are more likely to adopt the attributes of mimicry as they sit in a state of 'in-betweenness'.

### Marxism: Cultural Hegemony and Capitalism

In this study I will employ a Marxist analysis of British South Asian cinema, with specific emphasis on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's theories of social stratification, class conflict and the role of capitalism in establishing domestic gender roles. Cultural hegemony refers to the way that capitalism perpetuates itself, not just through physical violence and

<sup>27</sup> Anwar, M. (1998). *Between Culture: Continuity and Change in the lives of Young Asians*. London: Routledge. p. 192.

<sup>28</sup> Alejandro, P., & Jensen, L. (1992). Disproving the enclave hypothesis: Reply. *American Sociological Review*, 57(3), 418-420.

<sup>29</sup> Alejandro, P. (1995). Economic Sociology and the Sociology of Immigration: A Conceptual Overview. In P. Alejandro (Ed.) *The Economic Sociology of Immigration*. (pp. 1-41). Russel Sage Foundation.

<sup>30</sup> Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Lacan, J. (1977). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.) . London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis. p. 99. in Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

political and economic coercion, but through a dominant ideology that permeates culture itself.<sup>33</sup> An example of this is the way in which diasporic cinema presents commodities as being synonymous with national or racial identity, which serves to perpetuate subconscious notions of consumerism. As I will analyse in chapters 7 and 8, British South Asian films often serve to unknowingly perpetuate oppressive assumptions about gender, race, class and sexuality, even when they attempt to subvert them.

I will also employ a Marxist understanding of economic gender roles to analyse the similarities and differences between how diasporic film portrays gender roles in South Asian families, and how this deviates from, or perpetuates typical economic gender roles under capitalism. I will also analyse how gender roles, taking note of class, race and sexuality, serve to reinforce oppressive and discriminatory assumptions and values. I will draw on Ashley Bohrer's 'Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Sexuality and Class under Contemporary Capitalism', and Friedrich Engels 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State'.

This analysis will use both Marxist and Post-colonial theory and it is for this reason that it is important to acknowledge some of the tensions between aspects of these two perspectives and how they can be reconciled. Subaltern studies and post-colonial theories placed traditional 'Western' analysis of colonial societies firmly in the firing line. Marxism was not exempt from this and was critiqued by post-colonial theorists such as Partha Chatterjee on the basis that it failed to explain areas of colonial people's cultural life and identity to which capitalism had failed to infiltrate and change. Chatterjee also criticised Marxism as a tool for analysing non-western societies, as it is predicated on class relations which did not apply outside of the western world.<sup>34</sup> Marxist historians such as Vivek Chibber have responded to these criticisms, claiming that post-colonial theorists obscure the way in which capitalism operates and fails to put forward a view that is not 'mythologized' or 'sanitized'. According to Chibber, if it cannot understand capitalism then it is useless as a critical theory of capitalism.<sup>35</sup>

Other post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida believed that social class itself was an anachronistic concept which no longer applied to modern society and believed that Marxism should be deconstructed.<sup>36</sup> However, when discussing issues of politics and materialism, Derrida's approach was always aligned with that of conventional Marxism and it will be these works from which I base my analysis. For example, in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida attempts to adopt the mantle of radical critique from Marx – hence the title of the book which references the *Communist Manifesto*. He analyses many subjects of material conditions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the contradictory elements of globalised market exchange, economic war, and how employment has taken on a new form through 'underemployment'. In his earlier work *Where a Teaching Body Begins* (1976), Derrida describes deconstructionism – and thus the theories that follow from it, such as hospitality – as stemming from a more radical "spirit" of Marxist critical analysis. In this way, Marxist and post-structural analysis may overlap without contradiction.

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<sup>33</sup> Sassen, A. S. (1991). Hegemony. In T. Bottomore, L. Harris, V. G. Kiernan, & R. Miliband (Eds.) *The Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. (2nd ed.) Blackwell Publications. p. 230.

<sup>34</sup> Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton.

<sup>35</sup> Chibber, V. (2013). *Postcolonial Theory and the Spectre of Capital*. London: Verso.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, J. (1994). *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Psychology Press.

## Conclusion

This study will analyse eight British South Asian films in order to understand how their portrayals of race, class, gender and sexuality influence, and are influenced by migrant identities, how British society is reflected in these identities, how these portrayals help and hinder the process of dismantling oppressive and discriminatory values and assumptions within media or British culture, and how amongst these hybrid identities, stereotypes about British South Asians are reproduced. Thus, this study will utilise analytical techniques from film theory developed by scholars such as Rosenstone, Barber, Bergesen and Hughes-Warrington. For my primary analysis on race, class, gender and sexuality, I will draw from a variety of scholars who have specialised or extensively researched the South Asian diaspora in Britain, such as Hussain, Ali, Brah, Sayyid and Kalra. I will also employ theoretical frameworks taken from pioneering post-colonial theorists such as Derrida and Bhabha, as well introductory post-colonial scholars like Young. I combine this with a Marxist critical analysis of diasporic film, drawing from the works of Marx, Engels, Hall and Bohrer, in order to understand the ways in which the portrayal of hybrid identities reproduces stereotypes about class, race, gender and sexuality through diasporic cinema.

## Chapter 1

### Overview of South Asian Cinema

In order to understand South Asian cinema it is important to understand the cinema of the diaspora's ancestral origin. The cinema of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have had an inevitable effect on the development of diasporic cinema in the UK, both in terms of popularity and culture. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi cinema have also practically and culturally influenced each other, making UK desi film a creation not just of one culture, but of many cultures across the Indian sub-continent. Furthermore, South Asian cinema harbours a diverse group of intra-national cultures. It does not merely split along the line of the nation states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but of the regional cultures of the Urdu-speakers, the Punjab, Bengal and others.

#### 'Bollywood': A Brief History of Indian Cinema

The roots of British South Asian cinema begin in the filmmaking industry of the sub-continent – mainly 'Bollywood'. The term is a shortening of the original name *Bombay cinema* and is the famous Indian Hindi-language production industry that is to today, the most significant part of the Indian cinema.<sup>37</sup> It currently boasts the largest collection of feature films of any cinematic industry in the world.

Bollywood's origins can be traced back to as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first recorded works are that of cameraman, Hiralal Sen, who produced *The Flower of Persia* (1898).<sup>38</sup> *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) was produced by Dadasaheb Phalke and is considered the first feature film made in India, with Phalke now considered to be the father of Bollywood and Indian cinema.<sup>39</sup> The industry began to grow into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> The first audible Indian film came around this time in the form of Aldeshir Irani's *Alam Ara* (1931), which triggered the dominance of sound films in Indian cinema.<sup>41</sup> During the 1930s and 40s, India contended with global events like the Second World War, the Great Depression and the Indian partition and independence. Bollywood films in this era were often escapist, though some did use the social and political struggles in India as a focus or backdrop for their films. Irani's *Kisna Kanya* (1937) and *Mother India* (1938) made deep social and political commentaries on Indian society. From the 1940s to 1960s, India experienced what many historians consider to be a cinematic golden age.<sup>43</sup> Many of the films produced in this period further explored Indian society. These included *Awaara* (1951) and *Pyaasa* (1957).<sup>44</sup> The 1950s saw the emergence of another cinematic movement that emphasised social realism. This was led mainly by Bengali cinema and saw the production of films like *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946), which was based on the events of the 1943 Bengal famine.<sup>45</sup> *Neecha Nagar* (1946), written by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, was another pioneering

<sup>37</sup> Mazumdar, R. (2007). *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>38</sup> McKernan, L British Film Institute. (1996). *Hiralal Sen*. Retrieved from <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/sen.htm>

<sup>39</sup> Vilanilan, J.V. (2005). *Mass Communication in India: A Sociological Perspective*. New Delhi: SAGE. p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> Gulzar, G. Nihalani, & S. Chatterji (Eds.) (2003) *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*. (pp. 136-137). New Delhi: Encyclopaedia Britannica (India) Pvt. Ltd.

<sup>41</sup> (2006, March 26). Talking Images: 75 Years of Cinema. *The Sunday Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060326/spectrum/main1.htm>

<sup>43</sup> Gokulsing, K.M. & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* (3rd ed.). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Ltd. p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Rajadhyaksha, A. (2016). *Indian Cinema: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 61.

social realist film that focussed on the class divide in Indian society. Musical romances were the dominant genre in Indian cinema up until 1970.<sup>47</sup> The screenwriting of Salim Khan and Javed Akhtar reignited an industry that had grown stagnant, pioneering Bollywood's first violent, adult crime films with projects like *Zanjeer* (1973) and *Deewaar* (1975).<sup>48</sup> The term 'Bollywood' itself was coined during the 1970s. It came from the emergence of masala film – a combination of action, comedy, romance, drama and other genres – which defined the conventions of Indian cinema.<sup>49</sup> Amongst the pioneers of masala film were screenwriting duo Salim-Javed and director Nasir Hussain, who worked together on *Yaadan Ki Baarat* (1973). Hindi cinema experienced another period of stagnation at the end of the 1980s as a result of increasing violence, a decline in quality of music and the birth of video piracy. Nasir Hussain and Mansoor Khan's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988) reignited the industry again and helped bring back middle class audiences.<sup>50</sup> From the 1990s, Bollywood became increasingly influenced by India's economic liberalisation, leading to the term 'New Bollywood'.<sup>51</sup> In the 1990s, the 'Mumbai noir' genre emerged, which produced films set in the city and reflected social problems faced in Indian urban areas.<sup>53</sup> In the 2000s, the popularity of Bollywood increased as a result of the economic prosperity of desi communities worldwide. The impact on the industries popularity amongst Indian diaspora further transformed Bollywood's financial capacity and gave rise to advancement in production, cinematography, special effects and animation.<sup>54</sup>

According to Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2006), there are six primary influences that have shaped Bollywood cinema since its inception. The first influence comes from two ancient Indian epics. One is the *Mahabharata*, believed to have been written between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>55</sup> The other is *Ramayana*, believed to have been written between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>56</sup> The second influence is Sanskrit drama, particularly the way it combines music, dance and gesture. The third influence is traditional folk theatre, particularly the Jatra of Bengal, the Ramlila of Uttar Pradesh and the Terukkuttu of Tamil Nadu. The fourth is Parsi theatre, noted for its combination of "blended realism and fantasy, music and dance, narrative and spectacle, earthly dialogue and ingenuity of stage presentation, integrating them into a dramatic discourse melodrama."<sup>57</sup> These can be considered to be the traditional influences of Bollywood cinema. The fifth influence is Hollywood, especially popular musicals from the 1920s-50s and finally, western musical television since the 1990s, particularly MTV.<sup>58</sup> These later influences are the inevitable product of globalisation and

<sup>47</sup> Ayaz, S. (2017, June 21). Revisiting Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer*: The film that made Amitabh Bachchan. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved from <http://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/revisiting-prakash-mehra-zanjeer-the-film-that-made-amitabh-bachchan-4714064/>

<sup>48</sup> Ganti, T. (2013). *Bollywood: A Guidebook to Popular Hindi Cinema* (2nd ed.). Routledge. p. 153.

<sup>49</sup> Chaudhuri, D. (2015). *Written by Salim-Javed: The Story of Hindi cinemas greatest screenwriters*. UK: Penguin. p. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Chintamani, G. (2016). *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak: The Film that revived Hindi Cinema*. HarperCollins.

<sup>51</sup> Joshi, P. (2015). *Bollywood's India: A Public Fantasy*. Columbia: Columbia University Press. p. 171.

<sup>53</sup> Jungen, C (2009). *Urban Movies: The Diversity of Indian Cinema*. Retrieved from [https://web.archive.org/web/20090617225942/http://www.fipresci.org/festivals/archive/2009/fribourg/indian\\_cinema\\_chjungen.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20090617225942/http://www.fipresci.org/festivals/archive/2009/fribourg/indian_cinema_chjungen.htm)

<sup>54</sup> Wadhvani, AN (2006). "*Bollywood Mania*" *Rising in United States*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20121020195105/http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2006/August/20060809124617nainawhdaw0.8614466.html>

<sup>55</sup> Brockington, J.L. (1998). *The Sanskrit Epics*. BRILL. p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 379.

<sup>57</sup> Gokulsing, K.M. & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* (3rd ed.). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Ltd. p. 98-99.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 98-99

international capitalism, adopting western traits to increase worldwide popularity for Indian film and increase the profitability of the industry. This has been a demonstrable success, with Bollywood now being the most successful cinema industry in the world.

### 'Lollywood': The Oppressed Cinema of Pakistan

Pakistani cinema has suffered at the hands of political oppression throughout the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when other cinematic industries, such as Bollywood, were growing their international appeal and financial muscle.

'Lollywood' is a short-term for the Pakistani film industry, deriving its name from Lahore, where Abdur Rashid Kardar established United Players Corporation in 1929. The company would go on to become the cornerstone of Lahore's film industry.<sup>59</sup> Kardar produced his first movie, *Husn Ka Daku* (1929), establishing Lahore's film industry and the beginning of a proto-Pakistani cinematic culture.<sup>60</sup> Lahore became Pakistan's centre for cinema after the country was created in 1947. It attained little success early on due to the limited funding available following the partition of India.<sup>61</sup> Pakistani cinema received mediocre popularity throughout the 1950s, with a steady stream of films such as *Do Ansoo* (1950), *Sassi* (1954), *Umar Marui* (1956) and *Jagga* (1958) achieving mild success. It began to take off in the 1960s with the emergence of colour film. Films like *Shaheed* (1962) were a hit with audiences and introduced the Palestinian conflict to Pakistani cinema. Following the 1965 Indian-Pakistani War, Pakistan issued a ban on Indian films. The industry did not suffer, in fact it may have experienced an increase in audience numbers as a result of the ban.<sup>62</sup> In the late 1960s and 1970s, politics became a major player in Pakistani cinema. For his movie *Zarqa* (1969), Riaz Shahid made the controversial move of offering distribution rights to Al-Fatah, the Palestinian guerrilla group fighting the State of Israel.<sup>63</sup> Pakistani cinema fell into steep decline throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s. This came primarily as a result of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's attempts to Islamize Pakistan. Zia-ul-Haq introduced laws that forced film producers to require a degree and forced the closure of the majority of Lahore's cinemas.<sup>64</sup> Pakistan's already crippled film industry had practically collapsed by the 1990s, with only 11 operational film studios across the country producing about 100 films per year. This dropped to 40 films per year in the late 1990s, all coming from a single studio.<sup>65</sup> Controversy surrounded some releases, such as *Jinnah* (1998) for its casting of British actor, Christopher Lee as Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as well as for the casting of an Indian as the Angel Gabriel.<sup>66</sup> By the early 2000s, the industry had collapsed completely, struggling to produce more than two films per year.<sup>67</sup> From 2003, Pakistani film began to resurge, mainly through low budget,

<sup>59</sup> Cinema of Pakistan. (2008). *The Silent Era (1896-1931)*. Retrieved from [https://web.archive.org/web/20081016031758/http://thecinezone.com/Pak\\_Film\\_History\\_1.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20081016031758/http://thecinezone.com/Pak_Film_History_1.html)

<sup>60</sup> IMDb. *Husn Ka Daku* (1929). Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0231768/>

<sup>61</sup> (2008, July 5). Into the great beyond. *DAWN Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/weekly/images/archive/040418/images13.htm>

<sup>62</sup> Armes, R. (1987). *Third World Film Making and the West*. California: University of California Press. p. 129.

<sup>63</sup> Iqbal, S British Film Institute. (2006). *Pakistani Cinema*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20060224141840/http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/imagineasia/guide/contemporary/pakistani.html>

<sup>64</sup> Branigan, T. (2004, February 2004). 'My film is part of the peace process'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2004/feb/13/kashmir.india>

<sup>65</sup> Teale, S. (2005, December 12). Lollywood's newest star is home boy. *Telegraph and Argus*. Retrieved from <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/723177.lollywoods-newest-star-is-home-boy/>

<sup>66</sup> (1998, September 26). South Asia Troubled Jinnah Movie Opens. *BBC News*. Retrieved from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/180736.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/180736.stm)

<sup>67</sup> Bollywhat? (2014). *Pakistani Cinema*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20140727213829/http://www.bollywhat.com/beyond/pakistani.html>

independently produced films made in Karachi.<sup>68</sup> By 2005, Karachi had replaced Lahore as the hub for Pakistani film. Shoaib Mansoor's *Khuda Ke Liye* (2007) became the first Pakistani film to be released in India for 40 years and following its release, the Pakistani film industry began to thrive again with several well-received movies. Mansoor's *Bol* (2011) broke box office records in Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> The film brought with it what some have called a 'new wave' of Pakistani cinema.<sup>70</sup>

### A Brief History of Bangladeshi Cinema

Bangladeshi cinema finds its roots in the country's predecessor incarnations, beginning and developing whilst East Bengal was controlled by the British Empire and later, Pakistan. Hiralal Sen was also instrumental in establishing what would become Bangladeshi cinema, founding the Royal Bioscope Company in 1898. The company produced popular stage productions in a number of cinemas in the city of Kolkata.<sup>71</sup> From 1913-14, sequential bioscope productions began in Dhaka. Started in a jute store named Picture House, it became the first theatre built in East Bengal. *Billwamangal* (1919) was the first Bengali feature film. It was directed by Rustomji Dhotiwala and was released at the Maden Theatre, founded in 1916. A nawab family in Dhaka produced a short film titled *Sukumari* (1928) and following its success, went on to produce the first full-length silent film, *The Last Kiss* (1931).<sup>72</sup> Following the partition of India, producers like Abbasuddin Ahmed began creating production companies in a bid to turn Dhaka into the cultural capital of East Bengal. There were 80 cinemas operating in the country in 1947.<sup>73</sup> *The Face and the Mask* (1956) was the first full-length feature film produced in East Bengal. A.J. Kardar's *The Day Shall Dawn* (1959) garnered international acclaim and was submitted as Pakistan's entry to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Academy Awards for the prize of Best Foreign Language film – though the film was not nominated.<sup>74</sup> Six Bengali films and two Urdu productions were released before the outbreak of the 1971 Bangladeshi Liberation War. Zahir Raihan's *Stop Genocide* (1971) received international acclaim, particularly for drawing attention to the killings of East Bengalis by the Pakistani military.<sup>75</sup> By December 1971, the East Pakistan Film Development Corporation had removed 'East Pakistan' from its name, replacing it with 'Bangladesh'. Under the leadership of Abdul Jabbar Khan, Bangladeshi cinema took off following independence, particularly during the 1990s. The films of the 1970s focussed mainly on war, such as *Ora Eganon Jon* (1972), directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam. Alamgir Kabir and Subhash Dutta were also known for their

<sup>68</sup> (2003, January 28). Lollywood looks for happy ending. *BBC News*. Retrieved from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/2701853.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2701853.stm)

<sup>69</sup> Mughal, D (2011). *Shoaib Mansoor's BOL breaks box office record in Pakistan*. Retrieved from <http://www.pakium.com/2011/07/01/shoaib-mansoors-bol-breaks-box-office-record-in-pakistan>

<sup>70</sup> Paracha, N.F. (2013, September 26). New-wave of Pakistani cinema: Zinda and kicking. *DAWN*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1045365>

<sup>71</sup> McKernan, L British Film Institute. (1996). *Hiralal Sen*. Retrieved from <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/sen.htm>

<sup>72</sup> Khwaja, A *Dhaka Nawab Family and Film*. Retrieved from [http://www.nawabbari.com/main\\_arts.html?string=lastKiss.html](http://www.nawabbari.com/main_arts.html?string=lastKiss.html)

<sup>73</sup> Hayat, A (2000). *A Brief History of Bangladesh Cinema*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20041204114747/http://www.bangladesh.net/cinema/>

<sup>74</sup> Young, C. & Zweiback, A.M. (1959). Going out to the subject [discusses new films seen at the 1959 Flaherty seminar, held at U.C. Santa Barbara]. *Film Quarterly*, 13 (2), 40-49.

<sup>75</sup> (2009, December 19). The making of *Stop Genocide* and disappearance of Zahir Raihan. *The Daily Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/news-detail-67680>



war-themed productions in the 1970s.<sup>76</sup> Bangladeshi cinema declined during the 2000s with decreasing audience numbers and films that were criticised for being 'low quality'.<sup>77</sup>

### Diasporic cinema

Cinematic portrayals of India during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were told exclusively from Christian, Caucasian colonialist perspectives which were overtly racist toward Indian culture and presented it as dangerous.<sup>88</sup> During the 1980s there was resurgence in British colonial film that indicated nostalgia for colonial power. This nostalgia was rooted in Britain's social inequality and rising poverty rates.<sup>89</sup> When Indians were not being presented in racist, colonial narratives by western media, they were not represented at all. This has been coined the 'non-recognition phase' in which minority groups will only be recognized via criticism, remaining invisible until that point.<sup>90</sup> From the 1990s onwards, South Asian filmmakers began constructing their own images of identity, asserting it through their media. This stemmed from the globalisation of western societies which allowed South Asian diaspora greater access to communication tools and funding.<sup>91</sup> Diasporic South Asian cinema serves to subvert both the limiting traditional values of Indian culture and the hegemonic messages of western media, resulting from the fact that South Asian diaspora are in a position to actively interpret the hegemonic messages of both their home and host nations. The produces a unique culture, comprised of both home and host nations cultural elements, and creates what has been coined the 'desi Indian' – an abbreviation of the Hindi word 'pardesi', meaning 'foreigner'. For second and third generation migrants, the lines between home and host cultural identity blur further. As these new identities are based on an amalgamation of cultural heritages, upbringing and personal choices, Indian diaspora have been forced to find new commonalities to forge a sense of community.<sup>92</sup> Indian diasporic films often serve to highlight the cultural divide between Eastern and Western societies, particularly through music, food, attire, religion and customs. Diasporic characters will often embody the clash between these two cultures. By portraying diasporic characters interacting with members of the host nation, these differences are highlighted further. Bollywood movies fundamentally boil down to the demonstration of a fight between 'good' and 'evil'. This dichotomy is perceived by both native and diasporic Indians as a conflict between western values and traditional Indian values.<sup>93</sup> Bollywood movies that focus on diaspora often present immigrants as having a desire to return to, or maintain a connection with their home nation. This desire often manifests as a fear for the loss of cultural heritage, and as nostalgia for their home nation.<sup>94</sup> Bollywood cinema also presents Indian diaspora as being consumerist – often portrayed as

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<sup>76</sup> Hossain, A. (2012). Kabir, Alamgir. In S. Islam & A. A. Jamal (Eds.) *Banglapedia: The National Encyclopaedia of Bangladesh*. (2nd ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

<sup>77</sup> Rowe, H (2004). *Bangladeshis reject "smutty" Bengali films*. Retrieved from <http://thingsasian.com/story/bangladeshis-reject-smutty-bengali-films>

<sup>88</sup> Muraleedharan, T. (1996). Women/migrants/victims in the male empire: The redeployment of racist and patriarchal notions in raj cinema. *Cultural Arts Journal*, 10, 91-104.

<sup>89</sup> Sharma, R. (2011). Desi Films: Articulating Images of South Asian Identity in a Global Communication Environment. *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 127-143.

<sup>90</sup> Mastro, D.E. & Robinson, A.L. (2000). Cops and crooks: Images of minorities on primetime television. *Journal of Criminal Studies*, 28, 285-396.

<sup>91</sup> Smith, A. (1996). Seeing things: Race, image and national identity in Canadian and American movies and television. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 26, 367-391.

<sup>92</sup> Sharma, R. (2011). Desi Films: Articulating Images of South Asian Identity in a Global Communication Environment. *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 127-143.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 127-143.

<sup>94</sup> Kaur, R. (2002). Viewing the West through Bollywood: A celluloid Occident in the making. *Contemporary South Asia*, 11, 199-209.

wealthy urban-dwellers who are well versed in stereotypically western cultural practices, such as celebrating Valentine's Day, and visiting shopping centres and exercise clubs.<sup>95</sup> Males and females in Bollywood cinema fall into certain behavioural criteria depending on their status as hero or heroine. These are usually based on archetypal Hindu religious ideals. Characters whose traits do not align with these archetypes are often negatively received. In particular, they are viewed as a threat to the social stability of Indian society.<sup>96</sup> In the case of female characters, negative traits are considered to be individualism, hedonism and duplicity, due to their association with decadent western behaviours such as smoking, drinking and promiscuity.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Srinivas, L. (2005). Communicating globalization in Bombay cinema: Everyday life, imagination and the persistence of the local. *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, 3 (3), 319-344.

<sup>96</sup> Sharma, R. (2011). Desi Films: Articulating Images of South Asian Identity in a Global Communication Environment. *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 127-143.

<sup>97</sup> Gokulsing, K.M. & Dissanayake, W. (2004). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change* (New Rev ed.). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Ltd.

## Chapter 2

### The Emergence of British South Asians

South Asians migration to, and interaction with Britain spans back over four centuries, beginning with the lascars under the British East India Company and increasing after the independence of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the post-war period. Upon settling in the United Kingdom, South Asians established a unique set of hybrid cultures which greatly influence social and political life in Britain. The chapter will explore how South Asians came to arrive in Britain, their employment and community involvement, and the actions taken to deal with the racism and discrimination that they experienced, and continue to experience.

#### Early Arrivals: Lascars

The earliest named settler in Britain from South Asia was I'tisam-ud-Din and his servant, Muhammed Muqim, in 1765. He was a Muslim cleric and mushi from Bengal who served as a diplomat for the Mughal Empire.<sup>98</sup> Visits by people from the Indian subcontinent to Britain came in the 17<sup>th</sup> century via the East India Company and the *lascars* – sailors and militiamen from South Asia and the Arab world.<sup>99</sup> All travel by South Asians to Britain was controlled by the East India Company, who operated the ships travelling between Britain and India. The ships were subject to the British Empire and captained by Britons, with crews often a mixture of Britons and Indians. Indians who came to Britain, including wealthy merchants, had to seek permission from the East India Company to return to India.<sup>100</sup> In 1760 there were only 36 lascars that were reported to arrive at British ports.<sup>101</sup> This number increased to more than 10,000 between 1803 and 1813.<sup>102</sup> By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of lascars visiting Britain increased by 10,000-12,000 every year.<sup>103</sup> Port towns were home to some of the earliest Muslim communities, who usually took residence in Christian charity homes, barracks and hostels.<sup>104</sup> Bangladeshis, mainly from modern-day Sylhet, came as naval cooks around the same time, most famous of which was Dean Mahomed, who opened London's first Indian restaurant in 1810.<sup>105</sup> Lascars often resided in cramped living spaces and were punished by whipping or locked in cupboards by their owners for misbehaviour.<sup>106</sup> In 1842, the Church Missionary Society produced a report on the dreadful living conditions of London lascars and by 1856, with the support of evangelical Christians, the *Strangers Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders* was

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<sup>98</sup> Buckland, C. E. (1968). *Dictionary of Indian Biography*. Haskell House Publishers Ltd. p. 217.

<sup>99</sup> Fisher, M., Lahiri, S., & Thandi, S. (2007). *A South-Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of People from the Indian Sub-continent*. Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishers.

<sup>100</sup> Fisher, M. (2006). *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*. Orient Blackswan. p. 48-49.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 137-179.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>103</sup> Behal, R. P., & Van Der Linden, M. (2006). *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labor History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 114.

<sup>104</sup> Nijhar, P. (2015). *Law and Imperialism: Criminality and Constitution in Colonial India and Victorian England*. Routledge.

<sup>105</sup> (2005, September 29th). Curry house founder is honoured. BBC. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4290124.stm>

<sup>106</sup> London Metropolitan Archives. (2016). *Black and Asian Londoners: The Lascars*. Retrieved from [https://web.archive.org/web/20160307001450/http://www.learningzone.cityoflondon.gov.uk/schoolmate/Bal/sm\\_bal\\_timeline\\_detail.asp?ID=24](https://web.archive.org/web/20160307001450/http://www.learningzone.cityoflondon.gov.uk/schoolmate/Bal/sm_bal_timeline_detail.asp?ID=24)

established in order to provide residence for lascars.<sup>107</sup> According to the Indian National Congress 1932 survey of 'all Indians outside India', 7,128 Indians lived in the UK, with around 20,000 migrating between 1800-1945.<sup>108</sup> Most were lascars, though few of them were able to find permanent work. Those who did opted to open shops and involve themselves in political and social community organizations.<sup>109</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, British society was culturally unfamiliar with Indian settlers. 'Indians' were sometimes included with settlers from Africa or South East Asia, and religion was of particular importance – allowing Indians to be emancipated from servitude or slavery if they converted to Anglican Christianity.<sup>110</sup> Indian scholars attempted to pass on their linguistic knowledge and high culture from Mughal Empire to Britons. Four Indians managed to gain a place on college faculties operated by the East India Company where they taught Indian languages and culture to thousands of Britons who would go on to become civil officials and military officers. Ultimately, these four Indian teachers succumbed to debt and career setbacks, and were unable to maintain their social and professional status in British society.<sup>111</sup> Future applications by Indians would be rejected by the East India Company, usually on the basis of the applicants Indian and Muslim identity. However, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, academic institutions began to appreciate Indian scholars more and their linguistic skills and knowledge became sought after. This helped secure employment for many educated Indians in Britain.<sup>112</sup> From 1834-54, the British government had been reducing the East India Company's control over Indians in Britain. This meant that they were no longer regulated, or were only partially regulated. Furthermore, the British working class, especially seamen, were less accepting of the Indian diaspora which they saw as competition for jobs and trade.<sup>113</sup> Violence increased in India in 1857, with British civilians being killed by Indian soldiers and their servants, and the British military responding with indiscriminate extrajudicial executions. This violence served to increase tensions between Indians and Britons in Britain, and mirroring the governments new approach to controlling India, created the view that Indians were fundamentally different and inferior, rather than a group who should be 'moulded' after the British.<sup>114</sup>

### Post-1950 Migration

South Asian migration to the UK began to increase from the 1950s when the country experienced serious labour shortages following the Second World War. Traditional sources of migrant labour such as Ireland and Eastern Europe were unable to satisfy the post-war demand.<sup>115</sup> Simultaneously, Britain's ex-colonies were suffering from the opposite issue – possessing a huge labour surplus and lacking jobs to satisfy the demand.<sup>116</sup> As a result, migration increased primarily from the ex-colonies, with migrants being drawn by the better economic prospects available, with their own newly-

<sup>107</sup> The Open University. *Making Britain: Discover how South Asians shaped the nation, 1870-1950*. Retrieved from <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/strangers-home-asiatics-africans-and-south-sea-islanders>

<sup>108</sup> Panayi, P. (2014). *An Immigration History of Britain: Multicultural Racism since 1800*. Routledge.

<sup>109</sup> Chatterji, J., & Washbrook, D. (2014). *Handbook of the South Asian Diaspora*. Routledge.

<sup>110</sup> Fisher, M. (2006). *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Traveler and Settler in Britain, 1600-1857*. Orient Blackswan. p. 49.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 135-136.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 382].

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 382-383.

<sup>115</sup> Ballard, R. (1994). Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 1-34). London: C. Hurst & Co.

<sup>116</sup> Brah, A. (2006). The 'Asian' in Britain. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 35-61). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

formed countries mired by potentially poverty-ridden futures. The migrants were given little choice but to accept so-called 'unskilled', low-wage jobs with poor working conditions, which in-turn pushed them to the bottom of the British class hierarchy.<sup>117</sup>

**Table 1.1 South Asian population in Britain, 1981-2001**

Year	Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Total South Asian
1961	81,400	24,900	-	106,300
1971	240,730	127,565	-	413,155
1981	676,000	296,000	65,000	1,037,000
1991	840,000	477,000	163,000	1,480,000
2001	1,051,831	746,000	282,000	2,081,251

Sources: Peach, C. (2006). *Demographics of the BrAsian Settlement, 1951-2001*. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 168-181). London: Hurst & Co. Ltd. and Ballard, R. (1994). *Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh*. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 1-34). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

Large numbers of South Asian migrants settled in the UK in the 1950s and 60s, primarily around industrial cities like London, Birmingham, Manchester and Bradford.<sup>118</sup> South Asians also settled in significant numbers around Yorkshire, Lancashire, the West Midlands, Luton and Slough, where they found work in textile factories, car production plants, food processing and manufacturing industries.<sup>119</sup> Bangladeshis settled around Spitalfields and Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets, as the area provided greater job security and better pay.<sup>120</sup> They were encouraged by the British government in a bid to spur on the growth of the post-war economy, however by the 1980s, the demand for industrial labour saw a sharp decline, leading to a swathe of anti-immigration legislation and sentiment throughout Britain which slowed the growth of the South Asian population.<sup>121</sup> The late-1970s also saw the privatisation of many traditional heavy industries, leading to high levels of unemployment amongst working-class South Asians. This also contributed to a decline in migration from the Indian subcontinent, but also directed South Asians towards new forms of income – most notably Indian restaurants or 'curry houses'.<sup>122</sup> The entrepreneurial image is central to British South Asians identity and is often reflected in their cinema, particularly works such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *East is East* and *Everywhere and Nowhere*. From 1971, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government had begun implementing pro-business legislation, had clamped down on Trade Union powers and had garnered a new sense of nationalism following the Falklands War.<sup>123</sup> In 1972, the UK saw a major influx of East African Asians following the expulsion of the Asian middle class from

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 35-61.

<sup>118</sup> Ballard, R. (1994). Maps: 5. Distribution of Britain's South Asian Population. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. xvi-xviii). London: C. Hurst & Co.

<sup>119</sup> Richardson, R., & Wood, A. (2005). *The Achievement of British Pakistani Learners: Work in Progress*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books Ltd. p. 2, 1-17.

<sup>120</sup> BBC. (2014). *Bangladeshi London*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2005/05/27/bangladeshi\\_london\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2005/05/27/bangladeshi_london_feature.shtml)

<sup>121</sup> Ballard, R. (1994). *Introduction: The Emergence of Desh Pardesh*. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 1-34). London: C. Hurst & Co.

<sup>122</sup> BBC. (2014). *Bangladeshi London*. Retrieved from [http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2005/05/27/bangladeshi\\_london\\_feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/london/content/articles/2005/05/27/bangladeshi_london_feature.shtml)

<sup>123</sup> Harman, S. (2016). Stuart Hall: Re-reading Cultural Identity, Diaspora, and Film. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 27(2), 112-129.

Uganda by Idi Amin. An estimated 30,205 refugees arrived from Uganda in 1972, with most settling in London and substantial numbers settling in the West and East Midlands, especially Leicester.<sup>124</sup>

Racism and discrimination were persistent issues for migrants, owing to their low-class status, and were often forced to settle into white working-class neighbourhoods. The white working-class began associating their poverty with the migrants in their areas, using them as the object of their class frustration. The cultural practices of Asian migrants came under attack as being 'dirty', and they were perceived as being untrustworthy and strange.<sup>125</sup> This discrimination has been represented extensively in British South Asian cinema, particularly in films such as *East is East*, *Brick Lane* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. However, as I will discuss in Chapter 6, these representations are not necessarily reflective of the reality of white working-class communities.<sup>126</sup> Racism and discrimination manifested themselves in a variety of ways, both socially and institutionally. In order to deal with racism against South Asians and other ethnic minorities in the 1960s and 70s, numerous organizations and government bodies were established, most notably the Community Relations Committee, Institute of Race Relations, as well dozens of locally situated 'race relations' organizations. Whilst these organizations did help to bring about legislation that attempted to take action against racism and discrimination, this legislation was mostly ineffective. This is in contrast to anti-migrant legislation such as the Immigration Acts of 1968 and 1971, which were highly effective in achieving its goal of reducing the levels of migration to the UK from ex-colonies.<sup>127</sup> The influx of Ugandan Asian refugees increased the amount of hostility towards ethnic minorities in the UK, leading to the Immigration Act 1971, as well as a swelling of support for far-right nationalist groups.<sup>128</sup> South Asians in Britain saw a change in their social life throughout the 1990s and 2000s as a petit bourgeois, entrepreneurial middle-class South Asian began to emerge. This produced a class divide between well-off South Asians and the rest, who are still overwhelmingly working-class, particularly Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.<sup>129</sup> There have also been clashes between the South Asian and white British working-class, such as the Blackburn riots in 2001 and the persistent issue of the wearing of the headscarf in public forums and schools. These stem from tensions which are continually spurred on by the media and political establishment, which I will explore throughout this essay in relation to its portrayal in British South Asian film.

## Conclusion

South Asians first arrived in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as lascars working for the British East India company. Their ill-treatment by the company and its British overseers was severe and their only source of assistance came from evangelical Christian groups, who set up accommodation for lascars.

<sup>124</sup> Willis, M. P. (2019). *Displacement and Discrimination: Racial Experiences of Ugandan Asian Refugees from 1971* (Degree Dissertation). Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/42159500/Displacement\\_and\\_Discrimination\\_The\\_Racial\\_Experiences\\_of\\_Ugandan\\_Asian\\_Refugees\\_from\\_1971](https://www.academia.edu/42159500/Displacement_and_Discrimination_The_Racial_Experiences_of_Ugandan_Asian_Refugees_from_1971). p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> Brah, A. (1979). *Inter-generational and inter-ethnic perceptions: A comparative study of South Asian and English adolescents and their parents in Southall, West London* (PhD Thesis). University of Bristol.

<sup>126</sup> Edwards, J. (2000). *Born and Bred: Idioms of Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 112.

<sup>127</sup> Brah, A. (2006). The 'Asian' in Britain. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 35-61). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

<sup>128</sup> Willis, M. P. (2019). *Displacement and Discrimination: Racial Experiences of Ugandan Asian Refugees from 1971* (Degree Dissertation). Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/42159500/Displacement\\_and\\_Discrimination\\_The\\_Racial\\_Experiences\\_of\\_Ugandan\\_Asian\\_Refugees\\_from\\_1971](https://www.academia.edu/42159500/Displacement_and_Discrimination_The_Racial_Experiences_of_Ugandan_Asian_Refugees_from_1971). p. 17.

<sup>129</sup> Brah, A. (2006). The 'Asian' in Britain. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 35-61). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

As lascars began to settle, they built up significant communities around port towns, but struggled to establish themselves with any meaningful social or political influence. Following the conclusion of the Second World War and the independence of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, South Asians came to Britain in far greater numbers. This was spurred on by labour shortages in Britain and a large surplus of labour on the Indian subcontinent. Despite this demand for work, South Asians were often only able to secure so-called 'unskilled' jobs, for little pay and in poor working conditions. These jobs were often in heavy industry or textile manufacturing and led to the settlement of South Asians around London, the Midlands, Manchester, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Privatization throughout the 1970s and 1980s saw the re-emergence of a labour surplus, leading to high levels of unemployment and poverty. These conditions increased tensions between the South Asian and white British working-classes, who competed for employment opportunities. Racist sentiment and support for the far-right increased, and despite efforts to diminish them in the 1950s and 60s, such sentiments were only stoked by the implementation of anti-immigration legislation. As South Asians were pushed out of work, they were forced to find new forms of income. Many chose to establish their own businesses, especially Indian restaurants, and by the 1990s a petit bourgeois, entrepreneurial middle-class had emerged. Despite this, most South Asians remain working-class and the racial tensions between themselves and the white British population persist. In the following chapters I will explore how South Asians' experiences of life in Britain, and the development of hybrid identities are reflected in their film and television media, with a specific focus on gendered expectations and portrayals in the next chapter.

### Chapter 3

#### South Asian Women: Gender and Sexuality

British South Asian cinema has been a vehicle for exploring and expressing migrant's hybrid identities in a variety of ways, including the exploration of gender. Using Jacques Derrida's theory of hospitality and Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry (as outlined in the Introduction) we can explore how British South Asian film deals with gender and sexuality through clothing, which may help researchers understand how notions of 'modesty' are rooted in colonial power and mimicry. The negotiation of boundaries between second-generation migrant women and their parents reveals a divide that surpasses gender and hints at a host-guest relationship that can be a source of both resolution and conflict. Gurinder Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* is often viewed as the prime example of a desi film that challenges traditional gender roles, expectations and stereotypes, though the extent to which this is true is open to debate. The use of hysterical characters and of gender as a commonality between different characters has also been used to explore and challenge other issues of race, sexuality and class with diasporic cinema, as well as to deal with gendered expectations, stereotypes and discrimination. These lines of analysis allow us to uncover the usefulness of South Asian film in understanding the cultural experiences of the diaspora, and how their self-representation in cinema reproduces many stereotypes about diasporic women.

#### Marriage and Cultural Misconception

Since the 1960s, British South Asians have been involved in football. Most participants were male, due to the fact that women and child migrants did not arrive in the UK until a later. Clubs like Guru Nanak FC and Coventry Sporting FC were established around this time, giving a playing platform to predominantly Punjabi men.<sup>130</sup> In *Bend it like Beckham*, the main character is a young British Sikh girl named Jess Bhamra. The film focusses on Jess's desire to become a football player, something that her parents are opposed to as they want her to follow a path more aligned with their own Sikh Punjabi cultural values and traditions. The use of football, a western sport, as a means of demonstrating multicultural interaction serves to reflect Jess's identity as a second-generation migrant – constructed from both her parents' culture and her home culture. Desi' film often portrays the South Asian diaspora's fears about a loss of cultural heritage which manifests as a result of what are considered to be decadent western ideals and behaviours. These include individualism, hedonism, duplicity, smoking, drinking and promiscuity, of which Jess's sister, Pinky, expresses to varying degrees.<sup>131</sup> These fears are particularly expressed by Jess's mother, who feels strongly about protecting her daughters from these behaviours and attitudes. In western literary and academic presentations, the cultural heritage of South Asian women has been represented in film increasingly since the 1990s. This means that women were presented from the perspective of western cultural values, where cultural norms such as arranged marriages or an economic/emotional dependence on their male spouse were perceived as being oppressive and backward.<sup>132</sup> The 'white gaze', as it is described by Puar, produces an assumption that 'colour equals culture'. This has helped to reinforce

<sup>130</sup> Burdsey, D. (2006). Football. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 108-109). London: Hurst & Co. Ltd.

<sup>131</sup> Sharma, R. (2011). Desi Films: Articulating Images of South Asian Identity in a Global Communication Environment. *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 127-143.

<sup>132</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 22.



the notion that South Asian women are oppressed by their own culture.<sup>133</sup> This conceptualisation leads to a view of South Asian women as being generally passive and submissive. This is despite the fact that South Asian women have been involved in assertive, aggressive action, such as their role in political and social protests and revolutions in both the UK and South Asia.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, there is a severe lack of representation of stories about South Asian women's involvement in social action. As we will see, many British South Asian films place a narrative emphasis on the struggles of subjugated diasporic women, such as in *Brick Lane* and *Banglatown Banquet*, and others such as *West is West* and *Everywhere and Nowhere* hint at these themes. Chadha's *Bend it like Beckham* tries not to fall prey to this. There is never an overt indication that Jess's mother or sister feel that these cultural norms are oppressive. Pinky ultimately completes her arranged marriage with little resistance, and Jess never gives indication that she finds these norms oppressive, despite the fact they constantly clash with her own sense of individualism and immersion in the host culture. Sikh women are more likely to 'negotiate' their identities within their community with regard to marriage, family, religion and language, as opposed to viewing their culture as oppressive.<sup>135</sup> "Negotiation" implies some type of trade-off between parent and child. This can be viewed in terms of Derrida's theory of hospitality. Sikh parents establish conditions to their children's identity, allowing for hybridisation without conflict. Derrida's point is that in arranging this host-guest relationship, differences between the two subjects are affirmed. In the same way, Sikh women negotiation of identity reaffirms the difference between themselves as second-generation migrants and their parents and reinforces their "in-betweenness".

Similarities can be found in British Pakistani film. In Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Omar's uncle wants him to marry a Pakistani girl called for reasons of family honour. However, Omar is resistant to the idea, partly due to the fact that he is secretly in a homosexual relationship with his white friend, Johnny. In this instance, the parameters of the host-guest relationship cannot be fulfilled due to a larger cultural division between the first and second generation – the issue of homosexuality. In Kureishi's later work *My Son the Fanatic*, Fahid is more drawn to the concept of arranged marriage, which although shares parallels with British Sikh notions of marriage in *Bend it like Beckham*, differs in its motivations. For British Sikhs, marriage is a matter of protecting the *izzat* – the concept of honour held across cultures in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Northern India which emphasises the importance of an individual and their family's reputation.<sup>136</sup> Fahid's motivations are different and are rooted in notions of sexual purity and a spitefulness of western cultural values. The relationship between parent and child is reversed as Fahid actively desires an arranged marriage in line with traditional Pakistani customs, where his father does not. As we will explore further in the following chapters, British South Asian film provides many examples as to how the failure to establish this relationship of hospitality between migrant parents and children leads to conflict.

Clothing is also important in diasporic cinema as it allows researchers to better understand the construction of diasporic identity. According to Mani, ethnic identity is produced through performative acts that serve the purpose of breaking down the assumptions made about racial and cultural identity. These performances simultaneously break down the connection between race and

<sup>133</sup> Puar, J.K. (1994). Resituating Discourses of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness' in Northern England. *New Frontier's in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism*, 1 (2), 127-150.

<sup>134</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 24.

<sup>135</sup> Puar, J.K. (1994). Resituating Discourses of 'Whiteness' and 'Asianness' in Northern England. *New Frontier's in Women's Studies: Knowledge, Identity and Nationalism*, 1 (2), 127-150.

<sup>136</sup> Lynch, O. M. (1990). *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India*. University of California Press. p. 243.

culture, reaffirming essentialised identities on the basis of cultural authenticity.<sup>137</sup> To analyse this in context we must first briefly analyse how this process takes root in the cultural society of colonial India. Under the British Empire, Indian clothing practices, amongst other customs, were stratified as 'traditional' by the imperial regime in an attempt to racialize the use of clothing as an enactment of authority over the colonized people. This was done by dramatically revising the design of the sari and other Indian dress, in such ways that it demonstrated 'advancement' in the eyes of the British Social Darwinian narrative. This also served to impose a nationalist, de-sexualised form of dress upon Indian culture, particularly Indian women. This ultimately shaped the image of the Indian women in the western world into a figure of morality and 'modesty'.<sup>138</sup> For South Asian migrants, clothing oneself in ethnicized attire signifies their cultural identity through the material history of the exchange of commodities, without that identity being contained entirely within that medium.<sup>139</sup> Jess's family are particularly concerned with traditional dress, especially for their family gatherings, such as Pinky's wedding. They are also concerned about the perceived 'immodesty' of Jess's sportswear. Many South Asian diasporic films insert this cultural attitude more subtly, such as when Nankeen insists on pulling down her daughters' skirt before she sets off to school in *Brick Lane*. This concern about immodest appearance derives from the gendered expectation that women must appear modest and desexualized. As we have discussed, these expectations find root in the colonial hegemony of the British Empire, but they have since developed into an important tool for diaspora in the construction of their identity. Jess's simultaneous immersion in both western and Asian cultural practices and values in Chadha's work serves the purpose of constructing a specific diasporic identity that centres around this fusion or 'mixing' of cultures. The same is true of Chadha's writing of Jess's family, who rather than 'mixing' cultures, attempt to reinforce their cultural identity via a strict adherence to South Asian cultural norms that exist in harmony with, but also juxtaposed to, western social values. At the same time, the colonial roots of these expectations make this performative act not just a reinforcement of the diaspora's home culture, but a reproduction of a previously imposed colonial culture as well. There is also a discrepancy between diasporic and South Asian dress. In *East is East*, where Meenah's assumed 'traditional' dress is criticized by the mother of her brother's future wife for not being traditional dress in Pakistan. This demonstrates the discrepancy between traditional understandings of dress amongst South Asian diaspora and the homeland. It also highlights the fact that these understandings differ amongst the diaspora, as both families in the film are diasporic. This can also be perceived as a performative act within diasporic culture. Whereas *Bend it like Beckham* and *Brick Lane* construct ethnic identities subtly through clothing and standards that juxtapose the home culture, *East is East* pitches the multiplicity of cultural practices within Pakistani culture through the same process.

Sociologists and anthropologists of the 1960s and 70s employed the 'between two cultures' approach to Sikh family units in Britain, asserting that traditional Sikh values clashed with modern, secular British society. This view has its roots in the arguments of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century European historians, who portrayed colonial people as products of geography, rather than history. In this way, colonial Empires made their subjects more governable by defining them in terms of the 'Other' whose practices were 'traditional', meaning that they could never be truly 'western'.<sup>140</sup> Capitalism's natural tendency to break down cultural barriers – to direct people's motivations

<sup>137</sup> Mani, B. (2003). Undressing the Diaspora. In N. Puwar & P. Raghuram (Eds.) *South Asian women in the diaspora*. (pp. 117-136). Oxford: Berg.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Pithouse, R. (2016). Review: Define and Rule: Native and Political Identity by Mahmood Mamdani. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 90, 149-151.

towards the profit motive, regardless of race, gender, nation or culture – meant that it presented a threat to the maintenance of cultural identity. Young women were considered to be particularly vulnerable and at a high risk of rejecting their Punjabi Sikh heritage in exchange for individualism and freedom of self-expression offered to them by British society. One such area in which second-generation British Sikhs might reject their heritage is through non-conformity to traditional Sikh dress-codes.<sup>141</sup> Jess and Pinky align with this ‘non-conformity’, rarely being seen in traditional dress unless at the insistence of their parents. Any behaviour considered to be ‘immodest’ is conducted in secret. The reality is a more complex, as evidenced by Drury’s study of young second-generation Sikh women in Nottingham. The majority of participants maintained aspects of their traditional Sikh culture, including their dress-code, especially within their communities. It is worth noting that whilst many did so willingly and were in agreement with their parents, others were less dedicated and cited family or community pressures and a desire to limit or avoid conflict as their motivation.<sup>142</sup> Drury’s study highlights the establishment of hospitality within migrant families in the world outside of cinema, sometimes centred on the issue of clothing. The study also highlights the fact that this relationship can exist between individuals and their communities, taking second generation migrants “in-betweenness” outside of the home. Furthermore, this demonstrates the use of British South Asian film as not just a conduit for the portrayal of general ethnic experience, but for the individual experiences of ethnic minorities growing up in the UK.

#### Misogyny, Stereotyping and Gendered Expectations

Jess experiences gendered expectations and misogyny from multiple vectors throughout *Bend it like Beckham*. Her family impose gendered expectations upon her, encouraging her to take up domestic affairs such as cooking. Her mother tells her that she intends to teach her to cook a traditional Punjabi dinner. She is also eager for Jess to enter into an arranged marriage and often brings it up in conversation. Pinky reinforces these expectations as well. When Jess decides not to tell her parents about her football training, Pinky assumes her secret is with regard to a relationship, rather than a hobby. She follows this up by encouraging Jess to wear make-up to make herself look more attractive. Jess often plays football with her friend Tony, and his friends. His friends on multiple occasions make blatant misogynistic comments about her breasts and refuse to take Jess’s interest in football seriously. The fact that both Jules and Jess’s parents are against their daughters playing football is a reinforcement of patriarchal gender norms that limit women to the domestic sphere. This is highlighted by Jess’s mother, who asks rhetorically “what family will want a daughter in law who can run around all day but can’t make chapatis?” Chadha represents this as something that transcends the spheres of ethnicity and race – these patriarchal norms are fundamentally the same between both the Punjabi Sikh and white British households. As Kaushik has pointed out however, this underestimates the value of Jess and Jules experiences as individuals. There is a lack of recognition of Jess’s experience as a second-generation migrant from a Sikh background, and how this differs significantly from Jules experiences as a white British woman.<sup>143</sup> Jules is merely playing football against her mother’s wishes, whereas Jess faces alienation not just from her immediate family, but also the wider British Sikh community. Whilst Jules mother is casually distasteful of her daughter playing football, she does not actively seek to prevent her from doing so. Jess on the other hand, goes to great lengths to prevent her family from finding out that she plays for a women’s football team. Jess is forced to negotiate her boundaries between her life inside and outside the

<sup>141</sup> Singh, G. & Tatla, D. S. (2006). *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community*. London: Zed Books Ltd. p. 168.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>143</sup> Kaushik, R. (2017). *Homing Diaspora/Diasporizing Home: Locating South Asian Diasporic Literature and Film* (PhD Thesis). University of Sussex, Sussex. p. 136.

home, whereas Jules is not.<sup>144</sup> The the portrayal of Jess's parents also serves to reinforce specific gender roles. In the home, her mother is dominant, often taking care of the domestic affairs and child rearing. It is she who disciplines Jess and Pinky for their over-immersion in western practices. In contrast, the father is either absent or passive – he is often pictured in his work uniform, reinforcing his role as the breadwinner and often takes a backseat in domestic affairs and discipline.

These gender spheres are uniform across all South Asian diasporic film and demonstrate a commonality between the gender norms of traditional South Asian culture and those of the west. After the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962, Sikh wives and mothers reclaimed control over the economy of the household, as they had in traditional Sikh communities in the Punjab. This solidified the psychological norms of Sikh Punjabi society within British Sikh communities, which were enforced through social policing.<sup>145</sup> This 'negotiation' of boundaries between second generation migrant women and their parents is also prevalent in British Bangladeshi film. *Banglatown Banquet* exemplifies the way that first generation migrants are less able to 'negotiate' their boundaries. Sofia is hesitant to divorce her husband in case she is shunned by the Bangladeshi community of which she has been a part her entire life. Here there is a degree of hospitality between first generation men and women, where men establish the conditions of hospitality, and where women are subject to them out of recognition of the fact that breaking the terms of agreement would lead to negative consequences. Negotiating boundaries is easier for second generation migrants, as exemplified in *Bend it like Beckham*, but also in *Brick Lane*, where Nanzeen's daughters are allowed to wear western clothing and use common British working-class terminology. This is less the case for women in British Pakistani films such as *East is East*, where Meenah must force her identity against her families wishes, particularly her fathers. It is important to bear in mind however, that women are less focussed on in British Pakistani film in comparison to British Indian and Bangladeshi cinema. This difference in representation also differs across all female characters. Whereas *Bend it like Beckham* shows Jess's mother as a more central figure in the film than the father, British Pakistani films like *My Son the Fanatic*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Everywhere and Nowhere* place greater emphasis on the role of the patriarchs. Female characters take up a docile background role. In British Bangladeshi cinema, focus is more likely to be on the female lead character, such as in *Brick Lane* and *Banglatown Banquet*. In *Bend it like Beckham*, both Indian and English families in the film are exaggerated and stereotyped, with the former marked by strict traditional values, dress and a love for Punjabi pop-culture, whilst the latter is characterized as a stereotypical white middle-class English family.<sup>146</sup>

Both Jess and Jules parents are presented as being 'hysterical', especially when their daughters are seen to be doing something that might risk their standing within their respective ethnic communities – such as when Jess's mother believes to have seen her kissing a boy (who was actually the short-haired Jules) at a bus stop. The film treats these issues as pieces of light-hearted comedy when the spotlight is on Jules, as if her mother's reaction stems merely from ignorance. The tone is more serious when these same issues are raised with Jess's parents, being perceived as a threat to the family's 'honour' within the wider Sikh community.<sup>147</sup> Further evidence that these types of gendered expectation transcend race and culture come from Menhaj Huda's *Everywhere and Nowhere*, where Yasmin is expected not to indulge in what are seen as typical western behaviours, such as drinking,

<sup>144</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 82.

<sup>145</sup> Singh, G. & Tatla, D. S. (2006). *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community*. London: Zed Books Ltd. p. 166.

<sup>146</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 80.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

clubbing and promiscuity. The point is underlined by the fact that these same expectations are not placed on her brother, and that her brother enforces them upon her. Unlike *Bend it like Beckham*, which focuses on overcoming gendered expectations, *Everywhere and Nowhere* highlights the psychological impact of these kinds of expectations, revealing that Yasmin has resorted to self-harm as a coping mechanism. Ultimately however, the latter only briefly touches on this subject and does not explore it in great detail. This is one example of the contrast between two types of diasporic film that seeks to explore the challenges of diasporic youth – Chadha’s ‘feel good’ comedic approach and Huda’s grittier, darker one. Here we see a different side to ‘hospitality’ – where the consequences of adhering to these strict conditions can be far worse than breaking them. Huda has expressed his hope that films like *Everywhere and Nowhere* will inspire other film producers and screenwriters to focus on the struggles of second and third generation migrants.<sup>148</sup> He states: “[People] have said to me: ‘Haven’t we seen all this before?’ Yeah, but the truth is it’s still going on... I’m not giving it a happy ending and pretending everything is going to be fine at the end. Everything is not fine.”<sup>149</sup> Huda’s motivations reveal a desire amongst South Asian filmmakers, not just to convey the experiences of themselves, individuals and their communities, but also to use their medium as a way to actively encourage a change in attitudes and approaches to issues facing South Asian migrants, in both their own communities and western society in general.

The exploration of traditional gender roles has also been a subject of focus for desi cinema. Similar to *Bend it like Beckham*, *My Son the Fanatic* portrays the father as the bread-winner and the mother as the domestic labourer. There is a clear difference between both movies in that Parvez takes up a more active role in his sons’ life than Jess’s father does in hers. This portrayal of the father being more dominant in the lives of his children is repeated in other British Pakistani films like *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *East is East* and *West is West*. This may indicate that British South Asian experiences of the family unit are not greatly dissimilar depending on religious and culture differences. The reaffirmation of traditional economic gender roles is a clear reaffirmation of the capitalist system, in which there is a division between commodity and domestic labour between men and women.<sup>150</sup> This is prevalent throughout South Asian diasporic film and signifies the fact that the heteronomy of capitalism interferes with and influence the construction of diasporic identity. As we will discuss in the next chapter, this further informs the theory that as migrants attempt to construct a cultural enclave of their home culture in their physical home, they are hindered by influence from the host culture.

Sports films often use the concept of ‘transcendence’ (the act of breaking through all worldly constraints to the individual) as a means of portraying the capacity of sport for minorities to overcome social inequality. This often overstates that capacity of sport to solve these issues. Whilst sport may bring people together at a superficial level, it does not on its own offer a meaningful way by which to tackle and overcome structural racism.<sup>151</sup> “If a society is rife with structural inequality, so too will be the sport of that society.”<sup>152</sup> Chadha does not challenge the social system, but instead uses the film to send the message that it should be “bent” in order to overcome inequalities, rather than broken or subverted. Because of this, *Bend it like Beckham* does not offer realistic means by which to tackle assimilative nationalism or male dominated fields, but merely touches on the fact

<sup>148</sup> Carnevale, R. *Everywhere and Nowhere - Menhaj Huda Interview*. Retrieved from <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/everywhere-nowhere-menhaj-huda-interview>

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Acker, J. (2004). Gender, Capitalism and Globalization. *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 17-41.

<sup>151</sup> Abdel-Shehid, G., & Kalman-Lamb, N. (2015). Multiculturalism, Gender and *Bend it like Beckham*. *Social Inclusion*, 3(3), 142-145.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 142-145.

that they exist as if they were an unfortunate but natural part of society. In the following section we will see how Chadha's film continues this trend when dealing with issues of sexuality, and that the inability of diasporic film to fully tackle homophobia and the homosexual experience is not exclusive to *Bend it like Beckham*. As Rosenstone points out, cinema may "problematize the stories they recount, utilize humor [or] parody" in order to tell stories.<sup>153</sup> This is what many South Asian films attempt to do, particularly *Bend it like Beckham*, *East is East*, *West is West*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *My Son the Fanatic*. Khan-Din and Kureishi's work, in contrast to that of Chadha's, come across as tragicomedies as opposed to traditional attempts at humor. This reflects the harsh environment within which they are located, where conflicts of class, race, gender and sexuality create plot. Chadha's work in contrast is more an attempt to bring people together through commonality and humorous understanding. The result is an unintentional trivialization and stereotyping of gender and sexuality. For films like *East is East* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* these issues are presented more seriously, but also with far lesser hope that they may be resolved.

### Conclusion

Jacques Derrida's theory of hospitality is a useful tool for examining migrant relations between different genders and generations in British South Asian film. The ways in which first and second-generation migrants 'negotiate' their boundaries can be viewed as one such relationship, which also establishes second-generation migrants "in-betweenness" in a literal sense. This relationship is most prominently established between young women and their parents. British South Asian cinema often presents the failure to establish this form of hospitality as a source of conflict, particularly in the work of Hanif Kureishi. This breakdown in relations is portrayed as leading to breakdown in family cohesion or community cohesion and is explicitly gendered – such as in *Banglatown Banquet* and *Bend it like Beckham*. There are a variety of ways in which hospitality is seemingly established in diasporic film, such as through compromising of cultural values, toleration of different practices or traditions, the use of language and through dress-code. How diasporic film deals with misogyny and gendered expectations vary. Films such as *West is West* and *Everywhere and Nowhere* hint at the common portrayal of South Asian women as passive, submissive or oppressed by their own culture. Other films such as *Brick Lane* and *Banglatown Banquet* make these central to the plot. *Bend it like Beckham* is a notable exception to this and avoids presenting its characters this way, which lends evidence to the possibility that British Sikhs do not view themselves in relation to their cultural values and traditions in the same way other British South Asians do. Diasporic films like *Bend it like Beckham*, *Banglatown Banquet* and *Brick Lane* also reinforce many gender stereotypes, particularly the traditional gender roles within the family unit, whilst *My Son the Fanatic*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Everywhere and Nowhere* place great emphasis on the role of the patriarch in their stories. However, *Bend it like Beckham's* popularity and high regard amongst the South Asian community suggests these drawbacks are minor and that Chadha manages to present an authentic portrayal of South Asian diasporic experience. Briefly touched upon was the fact that traditional capitalist gender roles influence the construction of the migrant 'cultural enclave' within their personal domains. Chapters 6 and 7 will explore the concept of the 'cultural enclave', and the ways in which race and class influence its construction. Using gender as a commonality between characters through which others issues of stratum can be resolved ('breaking down barriers') is prominent in *Bend it like Beckham* and *East is East*. As we will discuss in the next chapter, homosexuality is generally pushed to the background of British South Asian films, with the exception

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<sup>153</sup> Westwell, G. (2008, May 2). Critical approaches to the history film—A field in search of a methodology [Review of the book *History on Film/Film on History* by R. Rosenstone]. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 11 (4), 577-588. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520701652129>

of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. We will also explore the ways in which expectations of masculinity are explored and challenged in diasporic cinema and how British Pakistani films often highlight these issues through the use of violence.

## Chapter 4

### South Asian Men: Gender and Sexuality

British South Asian filmmakers have explored masculinity and sexuality in various ways. As touched on in the previous chapter, diasporic film uses themes of sexuality as a means of breaking down barriers through commonalities. On the subject of homosexuality and homophobia, British South Asian films appear to be somewhat timid in their approach, choosing to avoid the issues and restrict the inclusion of homosexual characters to the background. The exception to this is Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which explores a homosexual relationship between two main characters. British Pakistani film in particular has explored notions of masculinity and patriarchy through violence and archetypal patriarchs. These explorations of masculinity and sexuality serve to help researchers understanding, not just of how diasporic filmmakers choose to portray their hybrid identities, but also how these films reflect social conflicts in migrant communities and British society in the past and present, and how they continue to reproduce stereotypes about gender and sexuality.

#### Sex, Homosexuality and breaking down barriers

*Bend it like Beckham* attempts to tackle homophobia through the character of Jules' mother, who is easily the most overtly homophobic character in the film. The 'hysterical' presentation of her character is taken to a degree where she is viewed as ridiculous, both by the cast and the audience.<sup>154</sup> Stuart Hall concludes that the process of filmmakers repeatedly associating a particular type of group or individual with a particular act ultimately leads to an automatic association between the two in the minds of the audience.<sup>155</sup> This attempt by Chadha to link the ridiculousness of Jules' mother to the concept of homophobia is a unique and effective method by which to tackle the issue. However, it also relies on the element of repetition, which although is displayed adequately in *Bend it like Beckham*, must go beyond this single piece of media if it is to have a meaningful impact. *Bend it like Beckham* has been criticized for 'shying away' from addressing the issue of homosexuality and instead pushing a more palatable notion of 'renovated heterosexuality'.<sup>156</sup> Giardina points out that the only real element of progressive homosexual acceptance in the film is when Jules' challenges her mother's beliefs with the statement: "...being lesbian isn't that big of a deal anyway", to which her mother responds disingenuously. Beyond this, homosexuality in *Bend it like Beckham* is treated as the subject of narrative stereotyping. To be "homosexual" is not a character trait, but an accusation made against the heterosexual characters (Jules and Jess) by their mothers, to which their daughters are forced to defend themselves against, rather than tackle the notion of homosexuality as an "accusation" in the first place. This is another example of *Bend it like Beckham* not breaking its boundaries and instead recoiling from the less comedic reality of the diasporic homosexual experience.

Unlike *Bend it like Beckham*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* deals with homosexuality more overtly. It is set in the early 1980s during the rise of neo-liberal capitalism in Britain and the policies of Margaret

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<sup>154</sup> Abdel-Shehid, G., & Kalman-Lamb, N. (2015). Multiculturalism, Gender and *Bend it like Beckham*. *Social Inclusion*, 3(3), 142-145.

<sup>155</sup> Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed.) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. (pp. 13-74). London: SAGE.

<sup>156</sup> Giardina, M. (2003). Bending it like Beckham in the Global Popular: Stylish Hybridity, Performativity, and the Politics of Representation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27(1), 65-82.



Thatcher. Thatcher vehemently attacked homosexuality, primarily through legislation, and the mantra that Britain could only be cured of its social and economic “sickness” by returning to strict adherence to the concept of the nuclear family.<sup>158</sup> Her government used fear-conjuring language about health risks, combined with the prevalent rhetoric surrounding an AIDS epidemic and its association to homosexual behaviour.<sup>159</sup> The introduction of Omar and Johnny, two male protagonists from different racial and class backgrounds but sharing in a homosexual relationship, works to the effect of breaking down barriers through commonalities. Just as in Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham*, Jules and Jess are united in their common struggles against the expectations imposed upon them due to the fact that they are female, Kureishi breaks down the barriers between the white working-class and Pakistani middle-class through a shared sexuality. The fact that Johnny distances himself from a group of working-class white nationalists, and Omar from his middle-class family who are scornful of the impoverished and embracing of many of Thatcher’s social and economic values, serves to represent the further breaking of these intersectional barriers. *West is West* adopts a similar approach, when George’s British wife, Ella, reconciles with his Pakistani wife, Basheera, over a common understanding of each other’s emotions. Despite this, homophobia is never properly addressed in the film. Omar and Johnny’s relationship is almost discovered by Nasser, who walks in whilst the two are undressed, to which they explain themselves by claiming that they were simply resting. Nasser’s reaction is an immediate acceptance of this explanation – either from wilful ignorance or complete obliviousness; as if the thought that any kind of homosexual relationship was taking place never actually crossed his mind. At first glance this would appear to be a missed opportunity to explore how homosexuality is viewed amongst British Pakistanis, but Nasser’s immediately dismissive reaction perhaps reveals a deeper insight – how taboo the subject is. It is a subtle portrayal of homophobia, not as an outright attack upon it, but rather a silent denial of its existence. The extent to which *My Beautiful Laundrette* chooses to explore homosexuality is unrivalled amongst diasporic films, though like the rest of the genre, never fully tackles homophobia, opting for this more subtle approach.

*My Beautiful Laundrette* focusses on the relationship between neo-liberal capitalism and the heterosexual patriarchy of Omar’s family setting. Gairola identifies the “home” as clearly gendered: the living room (excluding the zenana: area reserved for women) and the bedroom as exclusively male domains. In this way, they are analogous to the values of Capitalism, serving as a form of gendered privatisation.<sup>160</sup> Gairola unpacks Omar’s character in the family home, identifying his ethnic identity and queer sexuality as intertwined. When Cherry criticises Omar for expressing surprise that she has been to Karachi, this reaction draws a divide between Omar and the rest of his family by identifying him with a “home” or place of “belonging” that they do not. In the same way, Omar is physically positioned between the living room’s zenana and the bedroom of his uncle which is dominated by males. According to Gairola, this simultaneously represents Omar’s ethnic and sexual “in-betweenness”.<sup>161</sup> The cultural enclave is a construction through the ‘guest’ which attempts to regain control of their cultural identity and yet, Omar is treated as though he does not really ‘belong’ in the constructed enclave of his own family – the physical home – any more than he does in western society. His sexual orientation lies at the heart of this and in a literal sense; he is as much a ‘guest’ here as Johnny.

<sup>158</sup> Curry, A. (2000). Collection Management of Gay/Lesbian Materials in the UK and Canada. *Libri*, 50(1), 11-22.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Gairola, R. K. (2009). Capitalist houses, queer homes: National belonging and transgressive erotics in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7(9), 37-54.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

### Masculinity, Patriarchy and Violence

A recurring theme of British Pakistani cinema is the masculine gender expectations placed upon men, often in adherence to their perceived cultural expectations, and the way these manifest themselves into violence. According to Connell, masculinity emerged from four developments, beginning with the rise of Protestantism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which lead to heterosexual marriage being perceived as the most honourable form of sexuality, replacing Catholic monastic denial. The second historical development is attributed to the expansion of colonial empires. With the exceptions of Spain's Isabella and England's Elizabeth, European empires were controlled and operated exclusively by men. At this time, political and economic power was one-in-the-same and conquest was the ultimate form of domination and expansion. Conquest required armies, and those armies were made up exclusively of men. The third development that Connell identifies is that of globalised capitalism. Specifically, the emergence of entrepreneurial culture and the division of labour which formulated new concepts of masculinity and gender in the workplace. The final stage is defined through European civil wars, which helped to consolidate the patriarchal order through the institution of the state, which was dominated by males.<sup>162</sup>

The emergence of globalized capitalism and of entrepreneurial culture is of particular interest, as it also creates a link between perceptions of masculinity and economic success, which will be important later when discussing masculinity and violence in British Pakistani cinema. As Connell states,

"Masculinity... is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture"

In this sense, it is an amalgamation of many different vectors – of social norms and expectations, of action and of constructs of gender that produce and reinforce each other. Masculinity exists in contrast to femininity. In principle, if men and women are not treated as holding juxtaposed character types, the concepts of masculinity and femininity do not exist.<sup>163</sup> According to normative definitions, masculinity is 'what men should be', in contrast to femininity: 'what women should be'. It treats masculinity as the expected behaviour of males within the social norm. However, 'masculinity' in terms of the actual attributes that conceptualise it, should be thought of in the plural: 'masculinities' – what 'men should be' differs between different cultures and time periods.<sup>164</sup> Hypermasculinity refers to traits of aggression, ruthlessness, competitiveness and an adversarial attitude – all of which can be linked to Capitalist ideological hegemony, where these characteristics are viewed as attributes of economic success in a 'win or die' environment.<sup>165</sup> For the purpose of this research, the normative view of masculinity is useful as we explore the ways in which violence emerges as a product of a masculinity within British South Asian film, and which is partially defined by the expectation of economic success.

Works like *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *East is East*, *My Son the Fanatic* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* all have varying degrees of violence, often manifesting as family conflicts (especially father against son) or societal race/class conflicts. According to Morris, constructions of masculinity vary through

<sup>162</sup> Connell, W. (2008). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity. p. 186-188.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>164</sup> Acker, J. (2004). Gender, Capitalism and Globalization. *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 17-41.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

social class, with working class constructions of masculinity suggested to be more normative than those of the middle and upper classes.<sup>166</sup> *East is East* and *Everywhere and Nowhere* both focus on British Pakistani families from working class background and often portray family conflicts between a traditional father and his western-influenced son or children. *My Son the Fanatic* subverts this dynamic, focussing instead on a western influenced father and his conflict with his Islamic fundamentalist son. In these films, violence manifests as a result of ethnic/cultural tensions between family members. *My Beautiful Laundrette* focuses on a middle-class British Pakistani family who run numerous businesses. Violence instead manifests itself in the form of class conflict – either between the white working class and British Pakistani middle class, or between members of the British Pakistani family who are attempting to keep each other in their place (i.e. Salim and Omar).

In *Brick Lane*, expectations of masculinity are explored through Chanu. Chanu is initially fascinated by British culture and shows great enthusiasm about the prospect of becoming what he believes to be the ideal male figure – the breadwinner. He identifies the best means of achieving this as being through the adoption of western values and education, which he believes will deliver him economic success.<sup>167</sup> Chanu's desire to be the bread-winner is a manifestation of the 'competitive' trait of hypermasculinity – his desire to live up to the standard of western British cultural expectations of fatherhood.<sup>168</sup> Nanzeen is the opposite of this: confined within the domestic sphere, restricted by the traditional practices and social pressures of the Bangladeshi community, her thoughts are constantly centred around memories of her childhood, her sister and a longing to return to Bangladesh. She purchases a sewing machine so that she can work on garments and sell them for extra money whilst Chanu is at work. Chanu is irritated by this as it serves to undermine his self-image as the bread-winner of his idealised, masculinised household. At the same time, Nanzeen's adoption of extra work in the film serves to perpetuate what Acker describes as a gendered perception of working class and 'Third World' women, where they are seen as "docile, cheap to employ, and able to endure boring, repetitive work".<sup>169</sup> When Chanu loses his job and is forced to take a job as a taxi driver, his illusions surrounding the dream of economic success and the fulfilment of his self-imposed expectation to be the male breadwinner are shattered. At this instant, his own mimicry is also shattered, pushing him towards a new state of longing and appreciation for Bangladesh. Nanzeen on the other hand, who has begun to find a sense of independence and individuality in Britain, transitions in the opposite direction. Her experiences of sexual and social liberation push her towards British society and its values.<sup>170</sup> In this way, Chanu's experiences and expectations as a male directly influence his mimicry of western culture, which is eventually annihilated through the realisation that the goal he pursues cannot be achieved by such means. Similarly, Nanzeen's experiences as a woman and the liberation of her femininity push her towards western culture.

Where gender roles in *Brick Lane* come to a seemingly natural resolution, multiple tensions are developed throughout films like *My Son the Fanatic* that come to a head at its conclusion. Fahid and a large mob of other fundamentalists attack a local brothel, throwing a Molotov cocktail through an upstairs window and hurling abuse and physically assaulting the prostitutes when they exit the

<sup>166</sup> Morris, E. W. (2008). "Rednecks", "Rutters" and 'Rithmetic: Social Class, Masculinity and Schooling in a Rural Context. *Gender and Society*, 22(6), 728-751.

<sup>167</sup> Islam, S (2013). *Monica Ali - 'Brick Lane' - 2003*. Retrieved from <https://www.londonfictions.com/monica-ali-brick-lane.html>

<sup>168</sup> Acker, J. (2004). Gender, Capitalism and Globalization. *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 17-41.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Islam, S (2013). *Monica Ali - 'Brick Lane' - 2003*. Retrieved from <https://www.londonfictions.com/monica-ali-brick-lane.html>

building. A similar scene features in *Everywhere and Nowhere*, where Ash's father attacks him after he reveals his adulterous relationship to his family. Pakistani cinema has often used violence as a means of highlighting the social and political crisis that exist in Pakistani society.<sup>171</sup> Elements of this are seen here in British Pakistani diasporic film, where the clash between the prostitutes and violence of fundamentalist mob come to a head. If western and Pakistani cultural values were incompatible, the clash between promiscuity and religious sexual purity is an example of the extremities of both cultures. Their incompatibility demonstrated through unapologetic violence. Parvez develops of a sexual relationship with Sandra, a female prostitute who he often taxis around. This can be read as an attempt by Parvez to regain his sense of masculinity in a different way to his patriarchal counterparts in *East is East* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. His embracing of western society mirrors a general disconnection from his 'homeland', which is not mirrored in either his son, or wife. For this reason, Parvez is not at risk of succumbing to orthodox religious/cultural values and instead falls back on sexual conquest.

In *East is East*, George hits one of his sons when he refuses to tell him who destroyed the wedding garments that he had bought for Tariq's arranged wedding. He also beats his wife, Ella, when she attempts to stop him from continuing his assault. George later threatens Tariq with a knife if he does not do as he demands and follows through with the marriage. In the sequel film, *West is West*, George expresses to his wife, Ella, and son, Sajid, that "it is a man's job [to be strong]" and provide for his family.<sup>172</sup> This reveals George's perception of a traditional masculinity centred around the principles of self-reliance and the role of the bread-winner. George plays this role doubly, providing both for his family in England and in Pakistan. George and other Pakistani males in *East is East* are depicted resorting to physical force/violence, verbal and non-verbal abuse in order to impose their authority on their children, wives and students. According to Bergen, intimate partner violence refers to behaviour that seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of another, or attempts to punish the other for resisting these attempts at control.<sup>173</sup> The majority of research into intimate violence indicates that violence stems from a frustration as the inability or lack of opportunity to obtain an idealised masculine identity.<sup>174</sup> The desire to achieve this identity often stems from racism or other forms of structural oppression.<sup>175</sup> This is a damning representation of the Pakistani community, which is held in contrast to the white working-class males in the film who are never depicted as entering into this kind of behaviour.<sup>176</sup> Ayub Khan-Din wrote Sajid's character from the perspective of himself – growing up as the son of a Pakistani fish and chip shop owner in Salford, with an English mother and many siblings who rejected their fathers' cultural and religious expectations.<sup>177</sup> *East is East* received positive reviews. Sarfraz Mansoor of *The Guardian* recalled that "The scene where George's son Nazir meets his bride on their wedding day, and then flees because

<sup>171</sup> Khan, A. & Ahmad, A.N. (2010). From Zinda Laash to Zibakhkhana: Violence and Horror in Pakistani Cinema. *Third Text*, 24 (1), 149-161.

<sup>172</sup> DeEmmony, A. (Director), & Udwin, L. (Producer). (2010). *West is West* [Film]. United Kingdom: Icon Film Distribution.

<sup>173</sup> Bergen, R. K. (1998). Intimate Violence: A Brief Introduction. In R. K. Bergen (Ed.) *Issues in Intimate Violence*. (pp. 1-14). Thousand Oaks, C.A.: SAGE.

<sup>174</sup> Mansley, E. A. (2009). *Intimate Partner Violence: Race, Social Class and Masculinity*. LFB Scholarly Publications. p. 29.

<sup>175</sup> Staples, R. (1982). *Black Masculinity: The Black Males role in American Society*. San Fransisco, C.A.: Black Scholar Press.

<sup>176</sup> Klobah, L. C. (2003). Pakistani Englishness and the Containment of the Muslim Subaltern in Ayub Khan-Din's Tragi-comedy 'East is East'. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 1(2), 91-108.

<sup>177</sup> Lewis, P. (1994). *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity amongst British Muslims: Bradford in the 1990s*. London: I.B. Taurus Publishers. p. 1, 4, 24.

he cannot abide the idea of marrying someone he does not know, was watched in silence in that cinema because we knew that one day that could be us”, indicating the relatability of the film to South Asian audiences, particularly youths.<sup>178</sup> Mansoor also praised the film for its social commentary with regard to masculinity – “That, ultimately, may be why *East Is East* remains such a compelling work: it explores race and belonging, but, more than that, it depicts a particular strain of masculinity that has existed across all communities and times – it is about those frightened, flawed fathers who seek to control their families because they cannot control the future”.<sup>179</sup>

Similarly, there are multiple acts of moderate violence in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Early on in the film, Salim pushes Omar to the ground and stands on his head whilst threatening him. There are multiple instances of violence between a gang of working-class nationalist youths and Salim, who cross paths on three occasions. On one occasion, Salim runs one of the youths down in his car. Later, the gang retaliates by bloodily beating up Salim outside of the laundrette, with them only stopping after Johnny intervenes. In this way, British Pakistani cinema is similar to its traditional Pakistani and Bangladeshi counterparts. As we discussed in Chapter 1, Bangladeshi and Pakistani cinema often use violence specifically to draw parallels with general social unrest in society. Salim possesses many hypermasculine traits, particularly ruthlessness and aggression.<sup>180</sup> He becomes aggressive and threatens Omar when he discovers that he has stolen some of the drug money for the laundrette, and his conflicts with the white working-class youths are rooted in his class-based hatred of those he sees as poor, lazy and dirty. Kureishi’s own comments and personal experiences serve to further this point. He was born to a Pakistani father and English mother, who he describes as being from an “upper-middle class” background, in Bromley, South London.<sup>181</sup> In an interview with *The Guardian*, Kureishi stated that “the racism of the 50s and 60s that we... have grown out of, was overt. You were made aware of your differences all the time. So, you began to think, ‘Where does this come from? What does it mean?’” and that he had “denied [his] Pakistani self”.<sup>182</sup> Kureishi’s struggles with identity are channelled into his screenplays in an obvious way. Whether it be the Parvez’s working class Muslim family in *My Son the Fanatic*, dealing with the struggle between embracing western British cultural practices or the values of traditional Pakistani culture and fundamentalist Islam, or the middle-class expectations of economic success and cultural integration in *My Beautiful Laundrette* – Kureishi has used his role as a screenwriter to challenge these questions of race and prejudice to discover answers, not just about wider society, but about his own identity. Kureishi speaks in more detail about his grandfather, who he describes as “terrifying”, as a “hard-living, hard drinking gambler”, “womanising” and that “around him it was like the Godfather.”<sup>183</sup> Echoes of these experiences can be found in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, particularly through Omar’s uncle who is often seen indulging himself and exerting authority over the domains and his economic and culture life. The hard portrayal of violence in these films are presented similarly to that of Khan-Din’s *East is East* and *West is West*, where George behaves tyrannically towards his children and wife. Unlike

<sup>178</sup> Mansoor, S. (2014, October 4). East is East is back: Being a British Pakistani has changed. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/04/east-is-east-20-years-on-restaged-life-british-pakistanis-changed>

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Acker, J. (2004). Gender, Capitalism and Globalization. *Critical Sociology*, 30(1), 17-41.

<sup>181</sup> The World University Rankings. Q&A with Hanif Kureishi. Retrieved from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/people/qa-with-hanif-kureishi/2008915.article>

<sup>182</sup> McCrum, R. (2014, January 19th). Hanif Kureishi interview: 'Every 10 years you become someone else'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/19/hanif-kureishi-interview-last-word>

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

Kureishi's works, Khan-Din's are later retellings of a previous era. Produced in 1999 and 2010 respectively, the films are set in 1970s Britain. Do these films then, as Rosenstone states, contain elements of a nostalgic retelling of the past?<sup>184</sup> There seems to be little evidence that they do. The general portrayal of issues of class, race, gender and sexuality are relatively similar between Kureishi and Khan-Din's works, and their violence equally as unmoderated. Kureishi's work reflects his experiences with male family members, with overwhelming attention paid to the exploration of male characters, particularly middle-aged family patriarchs and the father-son relationship.<sup>185</sup> This often means that the migrant experience of women are underrepresented and overlooked.<sup>186</sup>

*Bend it like Beckham* was written by a British Sikh Punjabi woman, Gurinder Chadha, whilst *My Beautiful Laundrette* was written by a British Pakistani male. They construct their characters and stories through their own identities – Chadha's portrayal of a young British-born Sikh girl struggling with gendered expectations and Indian cultural pressures, and Kureishi's portrayal of a young British-born Pakistani male who grapples with his sexual identity. Both differ in this way, but share common ground in their experiences of dealing with the social pressures of their home cultures against British culture. Most of Kureishi's characters are reflections of himself, as if the case with his other works such as *My Son the Fanatic*. Ayub Khan-Din said that he began writing *East is East* "sitting at my kitchen table pouring out my life story bit by bit."<sup>187</sup> He explained that "the play was entirely autobiographical: my dad was a Pakistani chip-shop owner, my mum a Roman Catholic born in England. There were 10 of us kids (although we're amalgamated down to six in the play), and we were as scrappy and defiant as the play shows, but we were all terrified of my father." The fact that South Asian filmmakers attempt to relay their own identities through cinema is not a surprise, however, the nature of their characters and stories are not just portrayals of vague or stereotyped identities, but strikingly personal and often accurate retellings of their own experiences. Many of these experiences differ based on the authors background – the female experiences differs from that of the male, as the Pakistani experiences differ from that of the Indian. These differences allow us to identify common experiences, such as British Pakistani filmmakers common portrayals of hyper-masculine, authoritarian patriarchs in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East*, or the gendered expectations and pressures placed upon women in *Brick Lane* and *Bend it like Beckham*. Despite the criticisms made about *Bend it like Beckham*, the film received high praise from South Asian critics. *The Times of India* wrote that the film "is really about the bending of rules, social paradigms and lives – all to finally curl that ball... through the goalposts of ambition".<sup>188</sup> It praised the films coverage of discrimination against South Asian women, but also for its more general message that Britain was slowly changing – becoming more tolerant. *Planet Bollywood* praised it for challenging gendered social norms in the South Asian household, notions of sexual promiscuity in the South Asian community, and for bringing a gay Indian (Tony)

<sup>184</sup> Rosenstone, R. (1995). *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. Harvard University Press.

<sup>185</sup> Maxey, R. (2006). Life in Diaspora is often held in a strange suspension: First-generation self-fashioning in Hanif Kureishi's narratives of home and return. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 41(3), 5-25.

<sup>186</sup> Cone, A. (2004). The Politics of Intimacy in Hanif Kureishi's films and fiction. *Literature Film Quarterly*, 32(4), 261-264.

<sup>187</sup> Khan-Din, A. (2009, October 21). East is East: The play I almost didn't write. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/oct/21/east-is-east-ayub-khan-din>

<sup>188</sup> The Times of India. (2002). Review: Bend it like Beckham is like curry.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090302070309/http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/15586848.cms>

onto the screen.<sup>189</sup> *The Hindu* praised offered similar praise, describing the film as “convincing and honest”.<sup>190</sup> Clearly, the film was well received by the South Asian journalistic community, and has an audience score of 73% on film review website *Rotten Tomatoes*, calculated from over 250,000 reviews of which many are from South Asian viewers.<sup>191</sup> Whilst the film does fall prey to some tropes that serve to stereotype South Asians, women and gay people, South Asians in Britain and the west appear to feel that the film is an accurate portrayal of their experiences. One major difference between pre-2000 and post-2000 films is there broader coverage of gender, which may owe to a more liberal attitude present in western diasporic society in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Conclusion

Sexuality and masculinity especially, have been explored throughout diasporic cinema and how they relate to capitalism and cultural identity. British South Asian filmmakers like Gurinder Chadha have used hysterical characters to associate homophobia with ridiculousness in an attempt to transmit a message of acceptance and tolerance to the audience. The effectiveness of this method is questionable however, and can be viewed as somewhat timid when compared with Hanif Kureishi's film *My Beautiful Laundrette*. *Bend it like Beckham* relies too heavily on comedic effect and turns the issue of homophobia and homosexuality into a narrative stereotype, failing to properly challenge stereotypical notions of homosexuality and in many ways reinforcing them through what Giardina calls ‘renovated homosexuality’ and the treatment of homosexuality as an accusation, rather than a sexual orientation. The two films are similar in that both use commonalities to break down barriers – where Chadha utilises gender as a commonality in her film, Kureishi uses homosexuality to break down the class and cultural boundaries between its two main characters, though Kureishi's work is far more effective in its attempt to undermine stereotypical notions of gender, sexuality and masculinity. Drawing upon commonalities highlights the ambiguity of second-generation migrant identities. Whilst Kureishi is not afraid of portraying homosexuality in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the film does not expand on the issue of homophobia greatly and instead portrays homosexuality as so taboo that those in Omar's family who discover his relationship enter into immediate denial. The merit of this subtle approach is it reveals that for Kureishi, homosexuality in the British Pakistani community is so frowned upon that it will refuse to acknowledge its existence, even before attacking it outright. Kureishi explores issues of sexuality and discrimination far more than any other British South Asian filmmaker. *My Beautiful Laundrette* also uses class conflict to explore notions of masculinity, either between the white British and Pakistani working classes, or in the relationships between Omar's family, whose behavior is rooted in a desire to preserve their class status. Similarly, *Brick Lane* uses Chanu's character to explore this behavior where desire for improved class status translates into hypermasculine behaviors in the family unit, with Nanzeen representing his cultural and gendered antithesis. *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East* all draw similar correlations between masculinity, class and culture. These three elements are inherently connected to each other across British South Asian film, with class and culture being at the center of how notions of masculinity are portrayed and constructed. As we will explore in the next chapter, *My Beautiful Laundrette* gives us an insight into how migrant identities are constructed in what

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<sup>189</sup> Planet Bollywood. (2003). Film Review - Bend it like Beckham.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20080502232007/http://www.planetbollywood.com/Film/BendItLikeBeckham/>

<sup>190</sup> Mahesh, C. *The Hindu*. (2002). Bend it like Beckham.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20100825191910/http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/fr/2002/07/19/stories/2002071900910202.htm>

<sup>191</sup> Rotten Tomatoes. Bend it like Beckham (2002).

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bend\\_it\\_like\\_bekham](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/bend_it_like_bekham)

Bhabha calls the 'Third Space' and how this, coupled with first generation migrants construction of a domestic cultural enclave, effectively creates dynamics of hospitality between first and second generation migrants, making the latter "guests" within their own homes. Notions of masculinity and patriarchy are also explored within British South Asian film, particularly between the relationship between father and son, such as in *East is East, Everywhere and Nowhere* and *My Son the Fanatic*. These films often explore patriarchy through violence, which often manifests at the point where the rules of hospitality, whether domestic or societal, break down. This violence also stems from the filmmaker's own experiences, as seen in Hanif Kureishi's interview, and in Menhaj Huda's interview in the previous chapter. In Chapter 5 we will explore through the lens of Derrida's theory of hospitality and Bhabha's idea of "mimicry" and 'Third Space', the impact of race, culture and generational divide on the construction of migrant identities and how this is channelled and challenged in British South Asian film.



## Chapter 5

### Race, Identity and Generational Divide

Race, identity and generational divide are explored at length in South Asian diasporic film. This chapter will explore how British South Asian filmmakers choose to, and to what extent they portray racism and discrimination in their work. It will also analyse how migrant identity is explored by filmmakers through language, cinematic style and the construction of the cultural 'enclave', by drawing on a longing for one's homeland. Using Derrida's theory of hospitality, we can explore how second-generation migrants construct hybrid identities in contrast to their parents, and what effect this has on the cohesion of the family unit and the reinforcement of cultural stereotypes. By coupling this with Bhabha's theories of mimicry, hybridity and "Third Space", we can analyse how hospitality and hybrid identities interact with the gendered expectations of migrant's 'home' culture, and the class structure to influence social cohesion between migrants and the 'host' culture.

#### Racism in Context

Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968 made clear his resistance to the increasing number of immigrants settling in the UK, and Powell's concern that this would significantly impact the nature of British culture in the following decades. Polls throughout the 1960s and 70s showed that Powell's anti-immigrant views were shared amongst a significant proportion of the British public.<sup>192</sup> The speech has been blamed for giving rise to 'Paki-bashing', which occurred from the 1960s up to the 1990s and included white nationalist organisations committing acts of violence against British South Asians.<sup>193</sup> 'Paki-bashing' and the influence of Enoch Powell's speech are prevalent in films like *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *East is East*, where white nationalist violence against South Asian communities in this period is explored. In *East is East*, Mr. Moorhouse is often seen with placards directly supporting Enoch Powell and his views, as well as far-right organisations like the National Front. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Johnny's friends are white nationalists who engage in acts of racial violence against Salim near the film's climax. In 1985, 20,000 racially motivated attacks were reported by the *Joint Campaign Against Racism* committee against non-white Britons, including South Asians.<sup>194</sup> The British South Asian community were often portrayed as 'passive' and 'weak' by the British media, which served to empower nationalists.<sup>195</sup> South Asian films, whilst far from portraying them in such demeaning terms, does not explore how South Asians organized in self-defence against nationalist violence. Whilst films like *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *East is East* show individual examples of resistance to racism, only *Brick Lane* portrays any collective organisation by South Asian migrants through the 'Bengal Tigers' – a predominantly Bangladeshi organization fighting back against anti-Islamic violence and discrimination. This is despite the fact that South Asians, particularly Pakistanis, organized heavily against racism in the 1970s and 80s (through groups like the Pakistani Welfare Association and Pakistani Workers Union) and worked with other social justice groups such as the British Black Panthers and Communist Workers League of Britain.<sup>196</sup> In

<sup>192</sup> Collins, M. (2016). Immigration and Opinion Polls in Post-war Britain. *Modern History Review*, 18(4), 8-13.

<sup>193</sup> Ashe, S., Virdee, S., & Brown, L. (2016). Striking back against racist violence in the East End of London, 1968–1970. *Race and Class*, 58(1), 34-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396816642997>

<sup>194</sup> Taylor, I. (1987). Law and Order, Moral Order: The Changing Rhetorics of the Thatcher Government. In R. Miliband, L. Pantich, & J. Saville (Eds.), *The Socialist Register*. The Merlin Press.

<sup>195</sup> Ashe, S., Virdee, S., & Brown, L. (2016). Striking back against racist violence in the East End of London, 1968–1970. *Race and Class*, 58(1), 34-53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396816642997>

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

addition, studies on South Asian women through the 1980s and 90s found that they experienced racism and Islamophobia as 'sexual othering' by white society – being perceived as 'passive' or 'exotic'.<sup>197</sup> However, studies in the 2000s found that South Asian women experienced racism and Islamophobia as purely hostile and ungendered, which was seemingly linked to their identifiability as Muslims through their wearing of clothing such as the hijab.<sup>198</sup> This was also true of South Asian men, though to a lesser extent.<sup>199</sup> South Asian cinemas portrayal of racism and Islamophobia varies depending on the time of production. Films like *Everywhere and Nowhere* and *Brick Lane*, set and produced in the 10s and 00s respectively, portray discrimination from white British society as arising primarily from a fear of terrorism. In earlier films such as *East is East*, produced in the 90s and set in the 70s, or *My Beautiful Laundrette*, set and produced in the 80s, discrimination stems more from an anti-migrant sentiment and a desire to "protect" British culture. This shows that the way that South Asian filmmakers experience discrimination shifted between the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

### Experiences and Portrayals of Racism

British South Asian film attempts to deal with racism in various ways. As discussed previously, *Bend it like Beckham* deals with racism by using commonalities to break down barriers between race and culture. As second-generation migrants, Jess and Pinky are not disassociated from their cultural heritage. Pinky is less resistant to the notion of arranged marriage than Jess, and both siblings show a natural concern for the happiness of their family and a desire to please their parents. They also use traditional Punjabi greetings with their immediate and extended family. *Izzat* is a concept of honour that is of great importance to various ethnic and religious communities in South Asia.<sup>200</sup> For Sikhs, marriage is viewed as the absolute culmination of a parent's commitment to their children. It is for this reason that so much emphasis is placed upon it, as it is seen as the primary means by which to uphold *izzat*.<sup>201</sup> This emphasis is often portrayed in British South Asian film, where the parents of second generation migrants will often put pressure on their children to marry, or actively partake in the arrangement of marriage. During the wedding party, Jess's extended family all consume alcohol, whilst wearing dress and dancing to music of their own cultural background. This demonstrates that Chadha views the cultural norms of both the home and host nation to be not just interchangeable, but compatible in many regards, despite frictions existing elsewhere. She represents the hybrid identity of the Sikh Punjabi diaspora, with the home representing the 'Third Space' in which such identities are formed. These hybrid identities are indicative of a globalised setting. Indian diasporic films are sometimes accepting of globalisation, portraying it as a positive rather than a negative to be feared and rejected. In *Bend it like Beckham*, Jess travels to the United States at the conclusion of the film, representing internationalism and expansion of communication as beneficial and desirable to diasporic peoples.<sup>202</sup> Globalisation gives rise to the social attitudes and relations of first-generation migrants, which are shaped by their experience of migration, dispersal and settlement,

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<sup>197</sup> Bagguley, P. (2008). *Riotous Citizen: Ethnic Conflict in Multicultural Britain*. Ashgate. p. 118.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Cheesman, D. (1997). *Landlord power and rural indebtedness in colonial Sind, 1865-1901*. Routledge. p. 99.

<sup>201</sup> Singh, G. & Tatla, D. S. (2006). *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community*. London: Zed Books Ltd. p. 169.

<sup>202</sup> Sharma, R. (2011). *Desi Films: Articulating Images of South Asian Identity in a Global Communication Environment*. *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, 4 (1), 127-143.

coupled with those of discrimination and racism. These experiences serve not only to define the cultural attitudes of South Asian diaspora, but their very concept of self.<sup>203</sup>

There are similarities across British South Asian film in the ways that filmmakers portray and explore racism. In *Bend it like Beckham*, Jess's father expresses his anguish at the fact he was chased out of the local cricket club after moving from India as he was non-white. For this reason, he is reluctant to allow Jess into sport out of fear that she may experience the same disappointment. In the end, his experiences help to manifest his support for Jess's wishes, the message being that one should not allow themselves to be defined by, nor merely accept the way they are treated. A similar portrayal can be found in *Everywhere and Nowhere*, where Ash's father teaches his son to play cricket so that he will be better than other white students at his school, in the hope that this will prevent him from being bullied the same way that he was. Chadha channels much of her own cultural heritage into her films. The impact of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks can also be seen in the way that *Everywhere and Nowhere* deals with racism, when one of Ash's friends, Riz, is arrested for possessing pamphlets linked to a fundamentalist organisation. Huda uses fundamentalist Islam to portray the way that the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks shaped the nature of cultural and institutional Islamophobia in Britain, as well as to highlight the resistance to it within the Muslim community through Ash and Jaz's encouraging Riz to disassociate himself from fundamentalism. The Sikh Punjabi background of the Bhamra family in *Bend it like Beckham* is an obvious observation. Chadha also uses the film to convey her own perspective of diasporic life in the UK. She conveys what she calls her fathers 'spirit', which manifests in part as Jess's father's own experiences of humiliation and discrimination. These experiences are similar to Chadha's fathers, who managed to get a job in a post-office on the humiliating condition that he removed his turban whilst working.<sup>204</sup> Chadha use cinema as a means of conveying, not merely the general struggles of South Asian diaspora that are often focussed on in academia, but also her and her family's experiences as individuals. Despite this, there is little exploration of different regional or caste distinctions between Sikh Punjabis, or Punjabis from other religious denominations throughout the film. This is a view that permeates western understandings and portrayals of British South Asians.

As we have explored, *Everywhere and Nowhere* makes various commentaries on race and religion. However, British Muslim films often fail to explore the complexities of Muslim denominations and sects, allowing the view that Muslims are a homogenous group seeking to create some form of religious theocracy to persist.<sup>205</sup> In the opening of *My Son the Fanatic*, Parvez and his family are guests at Fahid's fiancé's family home. Parvez's wife informs him that she requires the toilet, to which Parvez replies "Not again, they'll think we are Bengalis".<sup>206</sup> This short piece of comedic dialogue is a subtle attempt by Kureishi to break the stereotype of homogeneity amongst the British Muslim demographic and to highlight their individual cultural experiences and beliefs. This is something that has been adopted by most British South Asian filmmakers, who attempt to draw clear lines between differing South Asian cultures along the lines of religion (Sikh, Hindus, Muslims) or nationality (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi). In the case of Parvez's line, the humour is directed at Punjabis who are most likely to understand the joke in its cultural context. The line is drawn clearly between Fahid and Parvez, and between the western embracing Ash, his traditionalist family, and

<sup>203</sup> Hussain, Y. (2005). *Writing Diaspora: South Asian Women, Culture and Ethnicity*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. p. 19-20.

<sup>204</sup> Bedell, G. (2006, July 16). Interview: Gurinder Chadha | Film | The Guardian. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/jul/16/features.review1>

<sup>205</sup> Lewis, P. (1994). Being Muslim and Being British: The Dynamics of Islamic Reconstruction in Bradford. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 58-87). London: Hurst & Co. Ltd.

<sup>206</sup> Prasad, U.(Director), & Curling, C. (Producer). (1997). *My Son the Fanatic* [Feature Film]. United Kingdom.

his nationally and religiously diverse friend group in *Everywhere and Nowhere*. Huda has expressed that his desire was to produce a film about second and third generation South Asian migrants where they were portrayed as something other than “terrorists and villains”.<sup>207</sup> The contrast between Fahid’s increasingly fundamentalist belief system and his father’s more accepting view of western culture is perhaps a more prevalent contrast. This may be an attempt by Kureishi to clearly outline the distinction between the British Muslim community and Salafi fundamentalism. In reality, sectarianism amongst British Muslim communities runs far deeper than can be presented in a single piece of cinema. Religious, regional, and sect differences are complex and multidimensional, extending beyond the general divide between Sunni and Shi’a, as far as the communities of Ahmadiyya, Barelvis, Deobandi and Sufi Muslims, and as deep as individual mosques.<sup>208</sup> Whilst these intricate divisions in the Muslim community are not explored greatly in diasporic film, hints towards these divisions subvert the audience’s expectations of Muslims as a homogenous group, if only in the subconscious.

British Muslim cinema highlights the way in which British Muslims are caught between home and host culture and in particular, how second-generation migrants feel that they are accepted by neither. Fahid’s hatred for western society is not inherent. He was initially enthusiastic about marrying a white British girl, and Parvez explains how his son desired to study music and the arts but that he forced him to study mathematics and science instead. As we will explore later in this chapter, Fahid’s views develop in juxtaposition to his father’s mimicry of western culture. Parvez’ authoritarian hold over his son highlights an issue of class and gendered expectation that permeates Parvez’s character in particular – the desire for economic success amongst South Asian diaspora, especially males. Parvez’s estrangement from family develops as a result of his own feeling of inadequacy. The perception of his masculinity is negated and this is reinforced by his surroundings – fellow migrants who made a success of their lives whilst he continues as a taxi driver on a modest salary. This also demonstrates the way in which the home and host cultures ‘push back’ against second-generation migrants. Some young Asians undergo a rebellious period, from which they eventually return to the traditional values of their parent culture.<sup>209</sup> From this, second generation migrants form new identities, based not just on a rebellion against their traditional values but also against their wider rejection by western society. This forms a ‘reactive ethnicity’ which places emphasis on cultural differences and reinforces pride in second-generation migrant’s cultural heritage as a means of forming a sense of security.<sup>210</sup> This approach is problematic as it reduces the formation of British Asian youth identity down to ethnicity, ignoring the role that gender, class and sexuality play in its development.<sup>211</sup> Regardless, this phenomenon is often reflected in British South Asians films where second and third generation migrant characters are drawn towards traditionalism or religious fundamentalism. Most British South Asian filmmakers attempt to break free from these earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century analyses, portraying the more complex and nuanced factors and events that contribute towards the formation of their identity.

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<sup>207</sup> Carnevale, R. *Everywhere and Nowhere - Menhaj Huda Interview*. Retrieved from <http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/everywhere-nowhere-menhaj-huda-interview>

<sup>208</sup> Lewis, P. (1994). Being Muslim and Being British: The Dynamics of Islamic Reconstruction in Bradford. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 58-87). London: Hurst & Co. Ltd.

<sup>209</sup> Saifullah Khan, V. (1977). The Pakistanis: Mirpuri villagers at home and in Bradford. In J. L. Watson (Ed.) *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*. (pp. 57-89). Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>210</sup> Alexander, C. (2006). Imagining the Politics of BrAsian [sic] youth. In N. Ali, V. S. Kalra, & S. Sayyid (Eds.) *A Post-colonial People: South Asians in Britain*. (pp. 258-271). London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd. p. 261.

<sup>211</sup> Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London: Routledge.

### Identity and 'Home'

British South Asian film often plays on the strong link between migrant identity and homeland, particularly in British Bangladeshi films such as *Brick Lane* and *Banglatown Banquet*. In *Brick Lane*, emphasis is placed on Nanzeen's desire to return to her sister in Bangladesh. The film often uses flashbacks to her childhood in Bangladesh as a means of conveying this desire. *Banglatown Banquet* also uses flashbacks to convey Sofia's own longing for 'home', though this longing is less of a focal point for the film than for Nanzeen in *Brick Lane*. Nanzeen has an affair with a young Bangladesh male called Karim. Karim suggests that they get married and stay in England, after Satish decides to return the family to Bangladesh. Nanzeen tells him that she does not wish to marry him and that she only entered into the relationship with him because she wanted to feel like she was at home. Feeling guilty about her adultery and discovering that her sister has been ostracized in Bangladesh for similar actions, Nanzeen decides to remain in England with her children. Towards the end of the film, Shahna, her daughter, runs out of the house. The scene of Shahna running through the English urban complex mirrors the flashbacks of Nanzeen's childhood running through rural Bangladesh. The parallel between these scenes conveys the characters perception of 'homeland', juxtaposing Nanzeen's vision with her daughters and thus, the perceptions of 'homeland' between first and second-generation migrants. The use of flashbacks is not something that would be found in written sources or oral histories and demonstrates how film can serve as a unique medium by which we can analyse diasporic experience.<sup>212</sup> *Brick Lane* received harsh criticism, sparking protests amongst British Bangladeshis, who accused both the film and Monica Ali's original book of "pro-racist, anti-social stereotypes" and of containing "a most explicit, politically calculated violation of the human rights of the community".<sup>213</sup> *Brick Lane* is based on a novel of the same name by Monica Ali, who is of Bangladeshi heritage. The film itself however is directed by Sarah Gavron, a British director. Researchers must consider the possibility that non-Asian cinematic adaptations of South Asian works may cloud the portrayal of an authentic South Asian experience. In the case of *Brick Lane* however, there is little evidence this occurred. The negative reception and criticisms the film received from the British Bangladeshi community were also largely aimed at the novel. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* the influence of traditional Pakistani cultural values takes a backseat role for Omar's family, who are primarily concerned with economic success and the maintenance of their class status. The primary difference between *My Son the Fanatic* Fahid and Omar is their class, with Fahid being from a working-class background and Omar from a middle-class family. In the next chapter, I explore how this difference in class may contribute towards the view second-generation migrants have towards both 'home' and 'host' culture, and how it is connected to the celebration of the values of western capitalism.

Language and multilingualism are also key factors in the determining and expression of identity which are inevitably linked to the concept of 'home'. It is important to remember that language, although an important factor in understanding identity, is not inherently attached to the identities of ethnic, religious or diasporic groups as single entities. It can be used as a type of symbolism for these social structures, but also as a symbol of self-comprehension and connection to a more personal identity.<sup>214</sup> First-generation migrant characters in *Bend it like Beckham* and *My Son the Fanatic*

<sup>212</sup> Westwell, G. (2008, May 2). Critical approaches to the history film—A field in search of a methodology [Review of the book *History on Film/Film on History* by R. Rosenstone]. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 11 (4), 577-588. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520701652129>

<sup>213</sup> Lea, R., & Lewis, P. (2006, July 17). Locals protest over Brick Lane film. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/17/film.uk>

<sup>214</sup> Parekh, B. (2002). *Rethinking multiculturalism: Cultural diversity and political theory*. Houndmills: Macmillan Press. p. 1.

occasionally use Punjabi between themselves. This is more the case for the Sikh family in the former than the Muslim family in the latter. Although Parvez's use of Punjabi in *My Son the Fanatic* is limited, its use harbours the effect of subtly signalling to the audience that the South Asian community are not homogenous, as discussed previously. In doing this, a more distinct sense of identity is put forward, which separates Punjabi Muslims from Bengalis. *East is East* and *West is West* also display identity through language, with family members often sharing traditional Pakistani greetings between each other between older members of the Pakistani community. Unlike the Sikh family in *Bend it like Beckham*, the Pakistani families are rarely portrayed as having any prolonged dialogue, speaking mostly in English. The same is true of second-generation migrants in *Bend it like Beckham* such as Jess and Pinky, who also limit their use of Punjabi to traditional greetings.

Language then is not only a means by which we can identify the differences in identity between groups and sub-groups of the British South Asian diaspora, but also between first- and second-generation migrants. For second-generation migrants their connection with the heritage language is more complex. According to Kalayil, the use of the heritage language by second-generation migrants varies depending on location – either in private/public, in England/homeland or in the presence of certain individuals. As well as being a matter of cultural identity, this is also a matter of expectation, as proficiency in the heritage language will be judged more or less strictly depending on these factors.<sup>215</sup> In South Asian diasporic film this dynamic is also prevalent. Characters like Jess and Pinky use Punjabi in limited amounts in private, and almost never in public or amongst English speakers. This is likely linked to cultural expectations more than cultural identity, evidenced in the ways in which Punjabi is used when it is spoken (as a greeting or display of respect). It is a condition of their parents' hospitality that Punjabi be used in certain places, at certain times.

#### Mimicry and Hospitality between Generations

It is important to recognize that diverse cultural experiences and the expression of those experiences (art, literature, ritual, etc) can be interpreted in ways that do not reflect the specific contextual and social systemic reality. This process of the migrant experience – through migration, diaspora, displacement and relocation – are cultural transformations that exist not as singular factors but as a temporal whole – one leading into, effecting and transforming the others. Therefore, unifying discourses of 'nationhood' or 'peoples' is not easy.<sup>216</sup> This is evident across first- and second-generation migrants whose experiences of 'home' and 'host' culture differ significantly.

Derrida makes the distinction between 'unconditional' and 'conditional' hospitality, the former of which he considers to be impossible as 'hosts' must allow 'guests' to behave as they desire. As restrictions or obligations are always placed upon the behaviour of the 'guest' by the 'host', hospitality is always conditional.<sup>217</sup> *My Beautiful Laundrette* mirrors this distinction – Johnny is a 'guest' in Omar's family's house, which is itself a cultural 'enclave' of Pakistan in Britain, constructed by Omar's family. This notion of 'conditional' hospitality takes place both on the level of the individual (the domestic home) or on the level of a community (the 'host' country).<sup>218</sup> Derrida also makes an important distinction between the 'guest' and the 'parasite', predicated on possessing (or lacking) the right to be in the hosts domain. Guests are granted this 'right', whereas parasites are

<sup>215</sup> Kalayil, S. (2019). *Second-generation South Asian Britons: Multilingualism, Heritage Languages, and diasporic Identity*. Maryland: Lexington Books. p. 79-80.

<sup>216</sup> Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge. p. 173.

<sup>217</sup> Derrida, J. (1999). *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

<sup>218</sup> Gorman, K. D. (2006). Jacques Derrida's philosophy of hospitality. *Hospitality Review*, 8(4), 50-57.

not, making them “illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest”.<sup>219</sup> In contrast to Johnny’s position when in Omar’s family home, Omar’s family are viewed as ‘parasites’ by Johnny’s white nationalist friends. This gives us insight into why migrants construct ‘enclaves’ of their own cultural identity within the host nation. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the family home of Omar’s uncle serves as this ‘enclave’. It derives from the perceived loss of control over one’s own cultural identity stemming from hospitality – “...that is the condition of unconditional hospitality: that you give up the mastery of your space, your home, your nation.”<sup>220</sup> In this sense, the act of acceptance of the ‘other’ by the ‘host’ is the very thing that alienates the ‘other’, forcing them to cling to a semblance of their lost identity. In doing this, the host nation increasingly views the ‘other’ not as a guest, but as a parasite that has broken the restrictions and obligations of hospitality.

‘Hospitality’ implies an inherent, self-imposed distinction between ‘host’ and ‘guest’, whereby the very act of imposing conditions upon hospitality is an affirmation of the differences between both.<sup>221</sup> Are second-generation migrants, existing in a state of cultural ‘in-betweenness’, guests, or ‘half-guests’ in their own home? When Ash brings his white girlfriend back to his parents’ house she is met with overt rejection by Ash’s family. In this instance, the host-guest relationship is never established. She is perceived by Ash’s family as an intruder in the Pakistani cultural enclave of the family home. This leads to an escalation of tensions between Ash and his father and contributes to the continued breakdown of their relationship. Ash himself is also clearly differentiated from the rest of his family. He has little interest in the traditional dress, language and customs of Pakistan which his family regard highly. He embraces many customs and values of the ‘host’ society – sexual freedom, clubbing and consumption of alcohol, and is an aspiring DJ whose music is a combination of traditional pieces from the Indian sub-continent and western club music. In the act of judgement, his family not only reject his girlfriend but also Ash, making him the ‘guest’ in his own home. The failure to establish the host-guest relationship leads to hostility, a breakdown in the family unit and on a wider scale, social cohesion itself, making the host-guest relationship not just desirable, but necessary, despite the fact that it is itself a reaffirmation of difference.<sup>222</sup> It is through the reconciliation of this difference that different cultures and peoples are able to establish boundaries for coexistence. This is demonstrated in British South Asian film through the breakdown of social cohesion between the white working class and Pakistani middle class in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and in the breakdown of Ash’s relationship with his father and wider family in *Everywhere and Nowhere*. Similarly, George’s attempts to force arranged marriages on his sons ultimately destroys the cohesiveness of the family unit in *East is East*. Tariq and Abdul do not share their father’s desire for arranged marriage. Here, they diverge from George’s Pakistani cultural norms, which as the patriarchal male, he establishes as the effective conditions of hospitality. Instead, they are more inclined towards the serial monogamy and sexual freedom of western society.<sup>223</sup> By resisting their fathers demands, Tariq and Abdul effectively break the conditions of George’s hospitality and the host-guest relationship breaks down, resulting in conflict. Conflict in this instance is justified as the two sons struggle to overcome or escape the patriarchal, hypermasculine authoritarianism of their father. This conflict manifests through George’s attempts to reassert his own sense of masculinity through violence.

<sup>219</sup> Derrida, J. (1997). *Of Hospitality: Amme Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. p. 59.

<sup>220</sup> Derrida, J. (1999). Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida. In R. Kearney, & M. Dooley (Eds.) *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*. (pp. 65-83). Routledge.

<sup>221</sup> Gorman, K. D. (2006). Jacques Derrida's philosophy of hospitality. *Hospitality Review*, 8(4), 50-57.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Walton, D. (2007). *Introducing Cultural Studies: Learning Through Practice*. SAGE. p. 275.

In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, both first- and second-generation migrants are distinct hybrid subjects. Omar's uncle, who celebrates many traditions of Pakistani culture, has constructed a cultural enclave of Pakistan within his family home, whilst simultaneously criticising his homeland as being "sodomized by religion" – a view shared by the culture of the western colonizer which regards traditional Islam as backward. The colonizer is perceived as translating Omar's uncle's culture back to him through its own cultural lens, which he mimics. At the same time, he has constructed this cultural enclave through economic success which he attributes in part, to his belief in the Thatcherite neo-liberal agenda of the colonizer. In this way, Omar's uncle's family home is not just a cultural enclave of Pakistan in Britain, but is also the physical manifestation of the 'Third Space' – where the ambivalence of the identity of the new colonial subject is created. This nod to Islamic fundamentalism by Kureishi also reveals that the issue of fundamentalism in Muslim communities pre-dates the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and seeks to shatter the western perception of Islam as fundamentally radical by highlighting his characters distaste for fundamentalism in their home country.

As discussed earlier, *Bend it like Beckham* shows Jess and Pinky as 'negotiating' their cultural practices between British and Sikh Punjabi cultural norms, turning the domestic home into the physical manifestation of the 'Third Space' – where hybrid identities are produced through contact with both 'host' and 'home' culture. It can be said that the establishment of hospitality between migrants and their children is what turns the home into the 'Third Space'. Jess and Pinky's parents follow practices more deeply rooted in their home culture. The conditions of their hospitality are rooted in their own cultural values and traditions. For the British Muslim family in *My Son the Fanatic*, the opposite is true. Parvez shares far more in common with Jess than with Fahid. The conditions of his hospitality are rooted in his mimicry of the host culture. Parvez has spent his entire life in Britain "mimicking" the voice of the colonizer – the British. Fahid's character is constructed in juxtaposition to this. He is not merely rejecting British western values, but is in this way presented as the emancipatory voice of the colonized against the voice of the colonizer, which manifests through his father.<sup>224</sup> Parvez's desire to mould his son into a character deemed acceptable to British society comes into direct conflict with Fahid's fundamental Islamist views.<sup>225</sup> In this way, Parvez's own construction of self-identity, defined by an embracing of British western values and customs, is deconstructed by Fahid's identification with the opposite. Fahid exposes his father as being dominated by the colonizer. Parvez's unrealisable desire to pass his values onto his son is something he sees as a failure of his own masculinity. The result is that he turns to violence, lashing out at Fahid and attacking him in an attempt to regain a sense of control and authority that fulfils an idealised vision of what a "male" should be. Similarly, Parvez's assault of Fahid can also be read as a wider social commentary by Kureishi – an attempt to highlight the fact that radicalism can manifest, or be accelerated by the unwavering will of the colonizer to dominate the colonized. Conversely, Fahid is also effectively mimicking Pakistani culture. As we have established through both the primary sources and secondary literature, second generation migrants exist in a state of ambivalence, not truly existing as part of their home or host cultures. Just as Parvez can never truly harmonise with British society, Fahid can never truly harmonise with Pakistani society – he is a second-generation migrant who had never been to Pakistan. Where Pakistanis adopt their home values as a result of being raised in that cultural environment, Fahid adopts these values precisely because he does not live there. This diverges somewhat from Bhabha's original idea of mimicry as a copying of the

<sup>224</sup> Nayeypour, K. (2018). The Ambivalent Nature of Colonial Mimicry in Hanif Kureishi's "My Son the Fanatic". *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 31(1), 55-60.

<sup>225</sup> Gilman, S. L. (2006). The Fanatic: Phillip Roth and Hanif Kureishi confront success. *Comparative Literature*, 58(2), 153-169.



attitudes and behaviour of the colonizer, but is nevertheless a form of mimicry in the broader sense – that of copying the culture of the ‘Other’. Both Parvez and Fahid can only mimic other cultures, either out of a rejection of their ‘home’ culture, or as an attempt to avoid the hybrid identities formed by second-generation migrants in the Third Space of the domestic setting.

It is debatable to what extent this reflects the experiences of second-generation Pakistani migrants. According to a study on second-generation British Pakistanis in Bradford aged 16-38, a cultural connection to Pakistan was found not to be a major factor in the subjects’ identity. Pakistan was viewed more of a place of ‘roots’, but identified Britain as their country.<sup>226</sup> Conversely, Islam was found to be a core element of the subjects’ personal and political lives, even for non-practising Muslims. However, Islam was not viewed as something that conflicted with British values.<sup>227</sup> Fahid’s identity is moulded more by a tendency towards an idealised view of Islam, rather than of Pakistani culture. The point about Fahid’s own mimicry is still relevant however, as it is still adopted as the perceived position of anti-colonial resistance, juxtaposed to his father. Parvez is a non-practising Muslim and the fact that Islam is generally viewed by British Muslims as being non-conflicting with British culture is possibly the reason Fahid is pushed towards a fundamentalist ideology. Pakistan then, is a lens through which Fahid can further his entrenchment into fundamentalist Islam, demonstrated through his association with other British Pakistanis of similar ideology and a fascination with returning to Pakistan. *My Son the Fanatic* was released in 1997, four years before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks which altered drastically the way that Muslims were portrayed in western media and how their own identities are constructed. The fact that Kureishi focusses on radical Islam demonstrates firstly that the issue of religious fundamentalism within the Muslim community existed before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, much like his nods to fundamentalism in his previous work *My Beautiful Laundrette*. It may also serve as an unintentional warning about the dangers of colonialism and radicalisation. Although the west at the time of release had not yet come under a wave of terrorist attacks, its involvement in the political and economic affairs of the Middle East had persisted for centuries. The way that Fahid attempts to resist colonialism through radicalism mirrors the way many in the Muslim world viewed the west, and which gave rise to fundamentalist groups. Nevertheless, *My Son the Fanatic* received some critical reviews from South Asian critics. Zarminae Ansari of *The Tech* wrote that the film was filled with “cardboard characters” and accuses Kureishi of stereotyping British Muslims. Ansari also writes that Kureishi is “patronizing in his implication that tradition, culture, and religion can only be manifested in extremes and are “backward” - or that it is the natural result of the failure of modern society”.<sup>228</sup>

### Conclusion

British South Asian cinema uses migrant experience as a means of exploring race, cultural identity and generational divide in a variety of ways. All of the films explore experiences of racism and mechanisms of dealing with discrimination in British society. As covered in previous chapters, Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham* uses commonalities to break down cultural and racial barriers, particularly through sport. As well as *Bend it like Beckham*, Pakistani films such as *My Son the Fanatic* use specific cultural humour as a means of highlighting the religious and cultural differences between British South Asians. In this way they present to western audiences the diversity of the diaspora, in hopes that it may relieve racial assumptions, prejudice and

<sup>226</sup> Alam, M. Y., & Husband, C. (2006). *British Pakistani men from Bradford: Linking narratives to policy*. York: York Publishing Services. p. 29, 38.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 39-44.

<sup>228</sup> Ansari, Zarminae . *The Tech*. (1999). MOVIE REVIEW: *My Son the Fanatic*. <http://tech.mit.edu/V119/N30/MySon.30a.html>

discrimination. The portrayal of racism and discrimination are rooted in the historical background of the films setting, when anti-immigrant sentiment was high as a result of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech, as well as the increasingly anti-immigrant policies of the Thatcher government in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The impact of 9/11 on Islamophobia is also prominent, particularly in *Everywhere and Nowhere*. Despite this, filmmakers rarely portray the organizational power of South Asian migrants in resisting racism through direct action and community work in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century's, with the exception of *Brick Lane*. Nevertheless, filmmakers retain a strong connection to British South Asian audiences and their culture. Identity is often explored through a longing for 'home', particularly in *Brick Lane*, *East is East* and *My Son the Fanatic*. Flashbacks are used in *Brick Lane* to convey this longing, as well as to convey the divide between first- and second-generation migrants with regard to their perception of 'home'. A connection to 'home' is also portrayed through the use of language – where native regional languages like Punjabi and Bengali are used intermittently by first generation migrants. Second-generation migrants occasional use of words and phrases from their parent's languages conveys their hybrid identities and demonstrates the establishment of hospitality between the two. Using Derrida's theory of hospitality to analyse interactions between migrants and the 'host' culture, and between first- and second-generation migrants, we can find a variety of ways in which cultural hybridity is navigated and managed. Establishing hospitality is presented in diasporic cinema as preserving social harmony within the family unit, as well as in wider society. Hospitality between first- and second-generation migrants turns the home setting into the physical representation of the 'Third Space', where hybrid identities are created. When hospitality is not established or breaks down, as seen most strikingly in *My Son the Fanatic* and *East is East*, conflict emerges. This conflict often leads to the breakdown of cohesion in the family unit and to wider social conflict, such as that seen in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. In *My Son the Fanatic*, the role of 'mimicry', as defined by Bhabha, is as a catalyst for the exploration of social and domestic cultural conflict which intersects with the generational divide between migrant parents and their children. In the next chapter we will further analyse the influence of capitalism over cultural identity and the ways in which class is explored by British South Asian filmmakers.

## Chapter 6

### Class and Capitalism

Class and capitalism are aspects of British South Asian cinema that feature more in the background of film narratives, but are nevertheless fundamental to historian's understanding of the migrant experience. Class's role is not surprising considering it serves to influence social reality primarily in the background - through culture, accents, clothing, etc. However, its secondary treatment in British South Asian film links to a more prominent issue – that these films reproduce class assumptions, injustices and exploitation. This chapter will explore how class is treated within British South Asian film, using Derrida's theory of hospitality and a traditional Marxist understanding of capitalism to uncover how migrants construct their hybrid identities in relation to their class, how capitalism effects the diasporic experience and its representation in cinema, and how British South Asian cinema continues to perpetuate many established and often false racial and class stereotypes.

#### Portrayals of Class and the Cultural Enclave

Across British South Asian film, class is often pushed into the background. In *Bend it like Beckham*, little attention is paid to the struggles of working class British Asian women in sport. Films like *Brick Lane*, *Everywhere and Nowhere* and *Banglatown Banquet* locate themselves in predominantly working-class settings, but do lend overt attention to issues of class within the plot. Class is the bedrock on which issues of gender, race and sexuality emerge and yet, limited emphasis is placed upon its influence. According to Adorno, film is a part of mass culture, and thus is a medium by which the capitalist system reproduces itself. The working classes have their labour exploited by the film industry in the pursuit of profit, with the ultimate product of that labour replaying back to them that exploitation in their leisure time. Film can serve as a means of accustoming people to their own subjugation, making them complicit in it.<sup>229</sup> This phenomenon is at the core of every film we have discussed. Each deals with issues of gender, race, culture, sexuality and to a less overt extent, class. I have discussed in Chapter 3 how *Bend it like Beckham's* seemingly useful themes of female liberation and independence are offset by gender and racial stereotyping that reinforce pre-existing structures of subjugation and discrimination. *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *East is East* do the same and often serve to mock the white working class – presenting them as xenophobic, ill-mannered, hysterical and sometimes violent.

Emphasis on class and the economic is prevalent throughout *Everywhere and Nowhere*. The success of the family business is often discussed. Whilst at a family gathering, Ash's parents converse with other family members about the success of their children and their future careers, in what is seemingly a display of superiority. The film reflects the feeling of hopelessness surrounding the lives of the South Asian working-class. Whilst Ash is from a middle-class Pakistani background, his friends are from poorer families and have less economic opportunities than he does. His British-Bangladeshi friend, Zaf, discusses his own experiences of poverty - how he was bullied for having less than other white students in school. Pakistani and Bangladeshis in the UK aged 16-24 are nearly twice as likely to have no qualifications when compared with White, Indian or African-Asians in the same age group. Unemployment rates amongst Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are also twice as high compared

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<sup>229</sup> Leslie, E. (2005). Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, and Film. In M. Wayne (Ed.) *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*. (pp. 34-57). Pluto Press.

to Indian males and three times as high compared to White British.<sup>230</sup> This reflects the fact that Pakistani and Bangladeshi filmmakers portray their struggles as being rooted in class, as well as religion or ethnicity. Racism or other forms of discrimination/bullying experienced in school may manifest itself in conjunction with class, rather than alongside it.

Class is a less prominent theme in *Bend like Beckham*, though it is evident that both Jess and Jules families belong to, at least lower-middle class backgrounds. It is made clear that class is of some importance to Jess's mother. Before Pinky's wedding she expresses a desire for a lavish party, stating that she "will show them [the husband's family] that they are not poor." Sikh communities have formed a strong sense of unity and solidarity with one another in a way that other South Asian diasporic groups have not. As a result, Sikhs have established themselves as a relatively economically prosperous group within the UK, owing to their philosophy which emphasises political, economic, religious and spiritual cooperation under a single *panth*.<sup>231</sup> Whilst this is true to a degree, it is a mantra often used as a means of keeping up appearances to outsiders, with the reality being that factional conflicts still take place within Sikh communities. The purpose of this fiction is a means of self-protection, stemming from the knowledge that economically prosperous ethnic groups have often been treated with envy, distrust and hatred.<sup>232</sup> As discussed throughout this essay, such economic prosperity can be viewed by the 'host' population as a violation of their conditional hospitality, leading to migrant populations being viewed as 'parasites'.<sup>233</sup> This tight-knit, homogenous image of the Sikh community, whilst not strongly reinforced in *Bend it like Beckham*, is instead taken for granted. The film focuses on the equally legitimate issues of racism and gender, and the challenges these present to young British Sikhs. At the same time, the lack of attention paid to the long-standing internal conflicts of the Sikh community reflects the fact that Sikhs would prefer to keep such matters away from the eyes of outsiders.

It is important to note that both are from middle-class families and that whilst experiences of race and gender are prevalent in the film, its exploration of class is somewhat one-dimensional. There is no reference or analysis of urban-dwelling working-class British South Asians and the dynamics of racism and sexism within those communities. *Bend it like Beckham* also serves to promote capitalist ideology through the home setting, which is presented as being filled with symbols of Indian identity, especially Indian food and television.<sup>234</sup> Similarly, Jess's bedroom is covered with posters of David Beckham. This reinforces consumerist ideology by linking the consumption of culturally specific foods and media with the "authentic" diasporic experience – whether that be of the 'home' culture of the first-generation migrant or the hybrid identity of the second-generation migrant.

### Gendered Division of Labour

As we have seen in *Bend it like Beckham*, *Brick Lane* and *East is East* most prominently, the gendered division of labour in British South Asian film is portrayed as if it were a cultural phenomenon, rather than a product of economic relations. The expected role of women as unwaged domestic labourers (cooking, cleaning, child rearing, etc) is portrayed as being a part of first-generation migrant's 'home' culture. The 'host' culture is presented as the antithesis that second-generation migrants gravitate

<sup>230</sup> Modood, T., Berthoud, R., Lakey, J., Nazroo, J., Smith, P., Virdee, S., & Beishon, S. (1997). *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and Disadvantage*. London: Policy Studies Institute.

<sup>231</sup> McLeod, W. H. (1989). *Who is a Sikh?*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>232</sup> Ballard, R. (1994). Differentiation and Disjunction among the Sikhs. In R. Ballard (Ed.) *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Presence in Britain*. (pp. 88-116). London: Hurst & Co. Ltd.

<sup>233</sup> Gorman, K. D. (2006). Jacques Derrida's philosophy of hospitality. *Hospitality Review*, 8(4), 50-57.

<sup>234</sup> Chacko, M. A. (2010). Bend it like Beckham: Dribbling the Self Through a Cross-Cultural Space. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 12(2), 81-86.

towards, despite the fact that this gendered division of labour is equally as prominent in both cultures. These economic gender roles are precisely a result of western capitalism. Just as Adorno points out that the film industry replays subjugation back to the working classes, so too does British South Asian film, which replays capitalism's gendered division of labour back to the diaspora. According to Bohrer, those who are confined to undervalued domestic labour become undervalued in social, cultural and political settings also, which serves to further confine these groups to undervalued labour.<sup>235</sup>

Some, particularly those in the school of subaltern studies like Chatterjee, might argue that the continuation of traditional gender roles within migrant communities exists as part of the cultural enclave in order to ward off the homogenizing effects of global capitalism.<sup>236</sup> However, as shown in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, the concept of the cultural enclave itself is in fact a manifestation of the capitalist mode of production and so cannot exist without it. Enclave networks provide their members with opportunities for employment and economic advancement.<sup>237</sup> In this way, enclave networks are mechanisms by which the economic interests of the petit-bourgeoisie are protected by providing them with a readily trained and geographically situated workforce. At the same time, it serves to reproduce the workforce and provide it with employment opportunities.

The diasporic home as portrayed in British South Asian film, serves to replicate and reinforce capitalist social norms, despite the fact that it is often portrayed as attempting to resist them. British South Asian filmmakers often place emphasis on the role of marriage, arranged or otherwise, in the cultural identity of migrant families. First-generation migrants encouraging their children to find partners, or arranging marriages for their children can be witnessed in *My Son the Fanatic*, *East is East*, *Bend it like Beckham* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. As I have touched on in previous chapters, these scenarios often serve to represent the cultural divide between first- and second-generation migrants and the influence of the host culture over diasporic identity. However, capitalism as a western phenomenon is replicated through these portrayals, not resisted. Marriage and the bearing of children serves to reinforce the nuclear family, which ultimately came to prominence as Europe developed from feudalism into capitalism.<sup>238</sup> Similarly, many British South Asian filmmakers begin with the nuclear family as the base for their characters setting. Most notable amongst these are *My Son the Fanatic*, *Brick Lane* and *East is East*.

#### Identity and class conflict in *My Beautiful Laundrette*

There are strong themes of class in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, with Nasser reiterating constantly his love of England for its economic opportunities and his admiration of Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister at the time of the films setting. Likewise, Thatcher had expressed praise for Indian and Pakistani migrants, calling them the new 'meritocrats'. This was primarily because she believed that Indian and Pakistani migrants upheld some of the traditional conservative values her neo-liberal

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<sup>235</sup> Bohrer, A. J. (2019). *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality under Contemporary Capitalism*. Verlag, Bielefeld: Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH. p. 132.

<sup>236</sup> Historical Materialism Conference 2013. (2013, May 6). *Debate: Marxism & the Legacy of Subaltern Studies - Historical Materialism NY 2013* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbM8HJrxSJ4&t=4019s>

<sup>237</sup> Massey, D. S. (1999). Why does immigration occur? A theoretical synthesis. In C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, & J. DeWind (Eds.) *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*. (pp. 34-52). New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

<sup>238</sup> Engels, F. (2010). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. UK: Penguin.

agenda advocated - capitalism, entrepreneurship and the nuclear family.<sup>239</sup> *My Beautiful Laundrette* therefore immediately establishes the hybridity of the British Pakistani family, who have embraced the predominant political and economic culture of British society. Nasser and Salim can be viewed as mimicking the western neo-liberal values of British society. The film opens with Johnny and his friend, Genghis, being forcefully evicted from a building that they are squatting in. The men hired to remove them are both black, which can be viewed as representing a reversal of typical colonial power structures. As Gairola points out however, these black males are not vengeful. There is a demonstration of familiarity with the experiences of poverty and homelessness between the two characters.<sup>240</sup> In the previous chapter we discussed how South Asian filmmakers often use commonalities as a means of breaking down the barriers between characters from different race and class background on screen. This is another example of such a technique in Kureishi's work. This scene establishes class as the fundamental bedrock of the film's social commentary – demonstrating its ability to nullify the ultimate importance of other social aspects. Johnny is evicted by two black males who sympathise with his class position, thinking little of their racial differences.

Multiple characters in the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* predicate their desire to live in England on the financial opportunities that it offers them. Salim states at one point that “we [Pakistanis] are nothing in England without money.” Mathison identifies the construction of a Pakistani cultural enclave by Omar's family as a means of maintaining a connection to their place of origin. At the same time, his uncle denies Omar his own sense of “Britishness” whilst simultaneously owing his economic success to the fundamental values of Thatcherite Britain.<sup>241</sup> The means of control is arranged marriage, which his family use in order to keep Omar within the family unit and to keep him closely connected to their ‘homeland’. The Pakistani ‘homeland’, as perceived by Omar's family, is a concept that is alien to him. He pursues economic success as the rest of his family have, adopting some of the values of Thatcherite Britain. By mimicking neo-liberal values, Nasser has been able to construct the Pakistani cultural enclave within his own home. A strong longing for a return to the homeland has been presented in diasporic cinema, particularly representations of British Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. In this instance, Nasser's own longing for home is presented as being overridden by a desire to maintain his family's class status. As well as expressing the constant importance of wealth, Nasser verbalizes his distaste of the idea of returning to Pakistan, which he describes as having being “sodomized by religion”. This is in contrast to Omar's poorer father, who shares a deep longing to return to Pakistan, as is also observed of characters in *Everywhere and Nowhere*. Racial identity appears to be of secondary concern to Nasser and his family compared with maintaining their class status.

Salim is quite vocal about his distaste for the white working class in the area, seeing them as dirty and disrespectful, and even going as far to run one of them down with his car. This portrays class conflict between the poor, white working class, and wealthy Pakistani middle class. *My Beautiful Laundrette* reflects the reality of 1980s Britain, where recession had led to a sharp rise in unemployment, the collapse of traditional industries, dislocation and social alienation, and

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<sup>239</sup> Ogden, C. (1990). *Maggie: An Intimate Portrait of a Woman in Power*. New York: Simon and Schuster. p. 175.

<sup>240</sup> Gairola, R. K. (2009). Capitalist houses, queer homes: National belonging and transgressive erotics in *My Beautiful Laundrette*. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7(9), 37-54.

<sup>241</sup> Mathison, Y. (2006). The second generation British South Asians search for an intersitial identity in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* and Farrukh Dhondy's *The Bride and Romance*, *Romance*. *South Asian Review*, 27(1), 233-248.

increasing income inequality.<sup>242</sup> This class conflict often manifested itself under the guise of racial tensions, emerging from the relative deprivation and income inequality seen between the British and Pakistani groups in the film. It served to further the view of South Asian migrants as economic 'parasites' by the white working class. Thatcher and the Conservative Party have also been accused of pushing an ideology referred to by Martin Barker as "New Racism", in which racial identity and multiculturalism were constructed as an existential threat to British culture and identity.<sup>243</sup> This furthered the white working classes perception of South Asian migrants 'Otherness' and helped to bring about racial conflict. Salim views the white working class through a class perspective, considering them "dirty" and beneath him, whilst the white working class seemingly view Salim and his family through a racial perspective – taking up anti-migrant, white nationalist stances. In reality, these stances reveal the true class conflict beneath the racial tensions. The white working-class view Salim's family as an infiltrating Other, to who they show no hospitality, or who they see as having violated the conditions of their hospitality, and have thus become economic parasites. The middle class standing of Salim's family is, for the white working classes, proof of their economic parasitism, exacerbated by their experience of relative deprivation. In a wider sense, *My Beautiful Laundrette* subtly highlights the true nature of racial conflict in 1980s Britain – one that goes beyond the migrant experience, but is in fact a campaign of class-focussed divide and conquer by the Conservative Party. Through this conflict, Nasser and Salim ultimately look up to Thatcher, whilst Johnny's compatriots sing the praises of Enoch Powell – the two sides of the same coin.

#### Representations of the white working-class

British South Asian films tend to portray the white working-class as racist and intolerant, stemming from a belief that state funding and resources are been directed towards their immigrant neighbours, rather than them. This leads to a feeling of abandonment, which manifests as support for far-right nationalist groups.<sup>244</sup> These portrayals are echoed in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *East is East* and *Brick Lane*, where the white working-class are often portrayed in support of far-right organisations, sporting imagery of anti-immigration figures like Enoch Powell, or committing acts of vandalism or violence against non-whites.

White working-class estates are also presented as being rife with criminality, ignorance and violence, and these films often push the 'chav' stereotype.<sup>245</sup> This is seen best in the portrayal of Johnny's friends in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, but also amongst the multicultural working-class setting of the estate in *East is East*. These portrayals distort the reality of white working-class constructions of identity and echo the portrayals of the British media and political establishment.<sup>246</sup> This may serve to perpetuate the division between the white British and immigrant working classes and thus assist in the fulfilment of the material interests of private business, who benefit from lower wage demands of immigrants, and from the absence of a unified and organized working-class. Taken together, the films relay a collectively negative view of the white working class, especially highlighted when looking at the portrayal of the white middle class in *Bend it like Beckham*. In stark contrast to the working class in *My Beautiful Laundrette* or *East is East*, the film portrays the white middle class to

<sup>242</sup> Hammerton, A. J. (2017). *Migrants of the British Diaspora since the 1960s: Stories from Modern Nomads*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

<sup>243</sup> Barker, M. (1981). *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe*. Junction Books.

<sup>244</sup> Tyler, K. (2013). Attachments and Connections: A 'white working-class' English family's relationship with their BrAsian 'Pakistani' neighbours. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(7), 1169-1184.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> McKenzie, L. (2013). Narratives from a Nottingham council estate: A story of white working-class mothers and mixed-race children. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(8), 1342-1358.

be polite but ignorant, and hysterical but non-violent. Ethnographic studies by Taylor (2015), Walkerdine (2010) and Edwards (2000) show that these are oversimplifications of the white working-class experience and attitudes towards immigrants. Edwards study found that South Asian migrants were more likely to be accepted within white working-class communities if they were seen to be forming positive social relationships. Qualities of ‘friendliness’ and ‘neighbourliness’ were seen as positive traits. Alternatively, if migrants were seen to be exploiting the community for its resources, they would be met with a more negative reception.<sup>247</sup> In this way we may link back to Adorno’s understanding of film as a relaying of working-class subjugation to the viewer in the form of entertainment.<sup>248</sup> In this case, the stereotype of white working-classes xenophobia is transmitted back to both the white British and the immigrant viewer, and shapes their perceptions of each other.

A study by Tyler (2016) of inter-racial interactions between residents of Southtown, London, found that social relationships between white British and British Pakistani residents were more common than that indicated by residents in interviews. Residents would form social relationships through common places of work or by attending the same schools or universities, and it was not uncommon for non-Muslim residents to attend events at the local Mosque.<sup>249</sup> This is reflected to some degree in British South Asian film, most notably through George’s relationship with Ella, a white working-class woman in *East is East*. Also notable is Omar’s relationship with Johnny in *My Beautiful Laundrette* which as we have discussed, is formed mostly through their common sexuality. Similarly, white working-class people can be “reflexive actors” towards racist sentiments expressed by fellow white peers. Young white working-class people in their late teens and early twenties are able to critically reflect on the racist attitudes of their older family members, friends and acquaintances.<sup>250</sup> Tyler argues that this change is prevalent in post-industrial working-class areas where the dissolution of the traditional culture of the industrial working-class has opened the door for a generation of young working-class people who harbour more tolerant and enlightened views of issues of race, gender and sexuality.<sup>251</sup> There are some examples of white working-class people exercising “reflexive” critiques of their peers in the films. One such example is Stella Moorhouse’s differing attitudes towards her Pakistani neighbours, which are contrasted with her grandfather’s overt racism and love of Enoch Powell. Ella’s understanding of racial prejudice is also portrayed as more liberal than other white characters due to her constant interaction with Pakistani culture through her husband. Nevertheless, these examples of positive social interaction are largely overshadowed by the themes of racial conflict that are presented at the forefront of the films.

It is important to state that misrepresentation of the white working-class is not the intention of the filmmakers, who are merely portraying and exploring their own experiences of discrimination and prejudice on-screen. Rather, it is more likely that these experiences are reinforced and converted into a generalised view by the narrative of the mainstream media and British political establishment, who have often characterised the white working-class in terms of intolerance, xenophobia and

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<sup>247</sup> Edwards, J. (2000). *Born and Bred: Idioms of Kinship and the New Reproductive Technologies in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 112.

<sup>248</sup> Leslie, E. (2005). Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht, and Film. In M. Wayne (Ed.) *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*. (pp. 34-57). Pluto Press.

<sup>249</sup> Tyler, K. (2016). The suburban paradox of conviviality and racism in postcolonial Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(11), 1890-1906.

<sup>250</sup> Tyler, K. (2012). *Whiteness, Class and the Legacies of Empire: On Home Ground*. Palgrave Macmillan. p. 111-113.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 114.



racism.<sup>252</sup> The result is that filmmakers present the white working-class in a mostly negative and stereotypical way.

### Conclusion

Although less overt than gender, race or even sexuality, class plays a fundamental role in the narratives and purpose of British South Asian film. The secondary role of class stems from the fact that it is not critiqued in the same way as race or gender. The films critique these issues on the basis of social injustice, whilst notions of class, social injustices, assumptions and exploitation are reproduced. As seen in *Everywhere and Nowhere*, class is often deployed as a social background which underpins many of the more overt conflicts within the film's narrative. In *Bend it like Beckham*, class interlinks heavily with traditional Sikh cultural and religious values, though it fails to present any perspectives of working-class Sikhs. It also serves to promote consumer ideology through the use of cultural symbolism and the identity of migrant characters. There is also a clearly gendered division of labour presented in British South Asian cinema, with traditional economic gender roles presented as being part of migrants' home culture or as part of first-generation migrants' cultural enclave. This serves to present migrant cultures in juxtaposition to the western host culture, which is portrayed as being based upon liberation from economic gender roles. In reality, these economic gender norms are equally as prevalent in the western host culture and are produced by the capitalist mode of production. Instead, this use of gender roles serves only to perpetuate the perceived conflict between the 'traditional' home and 'liberal' host cultures. *My Beautiful Laundrette* perpetuates these economic gender norms, as well as various other class relations. It also provides a strong basis for analysing the cultural enclave, which can be easily identified as the product of the host culture, specifically Thatcherite neo-liberal values which allowed for the characters economic prosperity. The cultural enclave, aside from being the ground for the construction of hybrid identities, is also a product of the capitalist mode of production which helps to provide a workforce for business-owning migrants and a stable, situated consumer base. British South Asian film also presents the white working-class as being xenophobic, intolerant and violent, which is not reflected by the studies undertaken by Taylor, Edwards, etc into white working-class communities and their social interactions with non-white immigrants. *My Beautiful Laundrette* also portrays the white working-class in this way, perpetuating conflict through racial tensions and the portrayal of the white working-class and synonymous with the views of figures like Enoch Powell and the far-right. *Brick Lane* and *East is East* also portray the white working-class in this way. British South Asian cinema generally fails to challenge this manifestation of class conflict as a conflict between races, cultures and religions, which has been perpetuated by the media and political establishment.

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<sup>252</sup> McKenzie, L. (2013). Narratives from a Nottingham council estate: A story of white working-class mothers and mixed-race children. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(8), 1342-1358.

## Conclusion

British South Asian filmmakers have utilized the cinematic medium in order to convey their cultural, gendered and class experiences in a way that is more nuanced and representative than typical orientalist portrayals of South Asians in the west. Cinema allows South Asian filmmakers to put forward the complicated cultural relations between diverse sub-sections of the diaspora, to present the multifaceted nature of their hybrid identities, to challenge stereotypes about South Asians in Britain, and to highlight and propose solutions to discrimination against minority groups. However, South Asian cinema often ends up reproducing many stereotypes that have traditionally accompanied portrayals of South Asians in western media, and many of these films serve to reinforce ideas that contribute towards injustice and discrimination.

As explored in chapter 3, young second-generation South Asian women 'negotiate' their boundaries with their parents, such as in *Bend it like Beckham*, which serves to reaffirm their hybrid identities, as outlined by Derrida's theory of hospitality. In the film, the Sikh Punjabi girls Jess and Pinky establish conditions along the lines of participating in select cultural activities or practices, such as attending cultural events or using phrases in Punjabi in certain instances. This is also done through clothing in films like *Brick Lane* and *West is West* and serves to hint at second-generation migrants hybridity by contrasting it with the language and dress of their parents. 'Negotiation' is essentially conditional hospitality in this regard, and can also be found at the core of conflict and violence in films like *East is East*, *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *My Beautiful Launderette* and *My Son the Fanatic*. These films explore the breakdown in hospitality between first- and second-generation migrants and present conflict as the result of a violation of hospitality's conditions. These conditions differ from those presented in *Bend it like Beckham* and are underpinned by tradition, family honor and economic success. Many British Pakistani films also center on a single male patriarchal figure. Challenges to the conditions of hospitality result in conflict as they are perceived as a threat to the patriarch's idealized perception of his own masculinity – a perception which is fueled by these same notions of cultural tradition, family honor and economic success which form the conditions, as well as male gendered expectations based on hyper-masculinity. Some films like *My Son the Fanatic* subvert this concept and instead focus on a male father figure who rejects his home culture in favor of immersing himself in western society. Using Bhabha's concept of mimicry to analyze the film reveals an interesting take on how second-generation migrants may gravitate towards religious fundamentalism as a backlash against their parents' 'mimicking' of the host culture. As outlined in chapter 5, this can be seen as a form of 'reverse' mimicry where second-generation migrants immerse themselves in their parents' home culture. Ultimately both are attempting to merge into cultures that are not their own and in doing so reveal their own hybrid identities. The conditions of hospitality reveal that second-generation migrants are often treated as 'guests' in their own home, just as migrants are described by Derrida as 'guests' in the host community. Hospitality then is both a product and signifier of second-generation migrant's hybrid identity and their parent's lesser immersion in the host culture. At the same time, conditional hospitality can be read through diasporic cinema as being key to social cohesion in the family unit. However, as seen in Hanif Kureishi's work, conditional hospitality is undesirable in instances where conditions are established along the lines of discriminatory and unjust notions of hyper-masculinity, patriarchy and other supremacist attitudes.

The violation of conditions of hospitality can also be applied to wider society in British South Asian film. Just as first-generation migrants may set conditions for their children in the microcosm of the family home or local community, so too are these conditions set for migrants in the macrocosm of

the nation. Class conflict often manifests itself as racial conflict between diaspora groups and the white working-class, where one group perceives the other as violating the conditions of hospitality, and this is presented in all of the films I have analyzed. As British South Asian filmmakers often treat class as a social backdrop, rather than an overt area of injustice and discrimination as with gender, race and sexuality, the role that class plays in producing and perpetuating other forms of injustice is not always clearly represented. In *Bend it like Beckham*, the role of class is marginal and presents a one-dimensional, exclusively middle class perspective of racial and gendered experiences. The work of Hanif Kureishi is more nuanced and often explores white working-class backgrounds and their interactions with the migrant middle classes, as do films like *Everywhere and Nowhere*, *Brick Lane* and *Banglatown Banquet*. However, many South Asian filmmakers fall into the trap of perpetuating many tropes of capitalist society and stereotypes of the working class. *Bend it like Beckham* subtly pushes a consumerist attitude which places value of material products by equating them with cultural identity. Other films, such as *East is East*, *My Beautiful Launderette* and *Brick Lane* present the white working-class as violent, xenophobic and ignorant – sometimes portraying them exclusively as part of far-right nationalist groups. As I discussed in chapter 6, these portrayals are not in agreement with ethnographic research conducted into how white working-class communities treat incoming migrants. The perception of migrants as violating their conditions of hospitality is one often pushed by bourgeois media, government and far-right nationalist groups as a means of conjuring racial conflict between these two groups. In portraying the white working-class in a stereotypically racist way, many British South Asian films inadvertently help to perpetuate this conflict. South Asian filmmakers also appear to place an emphasis on conflict between the ‘traditional’ gender roles of migrant’s home culture and the ‘liberal’ gender roles of the host culture. This is a common stereotyping of South Asian diaspora groups as being ‘traditional’ versus ‘progressive’, but also overlooks the fact that, as outlined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, economic gender roles themselves are a product of the capitalist mode of production and are prominent in both western and eastern cultures. Similarly, the portrayal of diasporic women as being weak, dependent on their husbands, subjugated by traditional values, or confined to domestic work by economic gender roles is prevalent amongst the cinema of the diaspora and is a typical orientalist view of South Asian culture. The effect of this is to deflect the audience’s attention away from issues of class and capitalism, and towards issues of culture and gender. Whilst issues of culture and gender are equally as valid, they are nevertheless more difficult to solve when detached from their underlying causes situated within capitalism.

As outlined in the Introduction, there are numerous advantages to using film sources to analyze diasporic experience. However, there are also a number of limitations to these types of sources. The films I have studied are ultimately fictions and so the degree to which they are truly representative of their filmmaker’s experiences is questionable. However, many South Asian filmmakers have stated that their films are attempts to represent their personal experiences as first- and second-generation migrants. South Asian filmmakers also tend to be from middle-class backgrounds, which may make these films class-centric representations of the diaspora. There are also fewer Bangladeshi filmmakers than Indian or Pakistani, which makes drawing conclusions about Bangladeshi diasporic experience more difficult. Analyzing how these films were received within their respective communities can also be challenging as there are limited reviews available for the less well-known or more dated films studied in this research. Similarly, there is limited information on some of the films authors and directors which makes analyzing their motivations and intent difficult. Future avenues of research may help to alleviate some of these drawbacks. For example, this research may be useful as a basis for comparison with oral and written sources from the South Asian diaspora, which may be more inclusive of working-class and Bangladeshi experiences. Beyond

South Asian diaspora history, this research may also be useful as a basis for comparison without the film history of other diaspora groups, such as Black British film or with other diaspora groups outside the United Kingdom. This research ultimately provides an important insight into how South Asian filmmakers assert their hybrid identities through cinema, how race, class, gender, sexuality and generational divide intersect to form these hybrid identities, how these films reproduce many of the stereotypes they seek to challenge, and how cinematic portrayals of migrant identities have changed since the 1980s.

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