Themes of Identity: An Auto-Ethnographical Exploration

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Abstract

The study is focused on understanding identity construction through combining my own experience with the theoretical underpinnings of postcolonial theory, social identity theory and through the examination of two films. The central question that I am interested in is understanding the identity construction and formation process especially as it relates to individuals who have crossed borders and immigrated or moved to countries other than their home countries. The methodology I am employing is auto-ethnography; I am integrating this by using two films as sites of inquiry. Through this introspective, reflection combined with the theoretical framework of identity I uncover themes of identity. These themes include nation, foreignness, community, and home.

Keywords

Identity, Postcolonial Theory, Memory, Social Identity Theory, and Autoethnography

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The study is focused on understanding identity construction through combining my own experience with the theoretical underpinnings of postcolonial theory, social identity theory and through the examination of two films. The central question that I am interested in is understanding the identity construction and formation process especially as it relates to individuals who have crossed borders and immigrated or moved to countries other than their home countries. The methodology I am employing is auto-ethnography; I am integrating this by using two films as sites of inquiry. Through this introspective, reflection combined with the theoretical framework of identity I uncover themes of identity. These themes include nation, foreignness, community, and home. Key Words: Identity, Postcolonial Theory, Memory, Social Identity Theory, and Autoethnography

The foreigner is the other of the family, the clan, the tribe. At first he blends with the enemy. External to my religion, too, he could have been the heathen, the heretic. Not having made an oath of fealty to my lord, he was born on another land, foreign to the kingdom or empire. (Kristeva, 1991, p. 95)

The above quotation from Kristeva's (1991) work embodies the essence of foreignness as being felt and experienced by the outsider. While it may appear to be an anachronism or overstatement in today's world, it nevertheless expresses the underlying dilemma of being the "other", of never really being really part of it, and of being in a state of limbo. It also raises to my mind certain key questions which have been at the forefront at a personal level, not just in an abstract way, but in a very real sense, in experiencing this in everyday living. It brings forth issues of identity, of fragmentation and multiplicity of identity.

In this article, I reflect on my own identity and I also use two films *Mississippi Masala*[1] and *Bhaji on the Beach*[2] to discuss and examine themes of identity. In this auto-ethnographical study, I aim to address the different layers and nuances of identity and the identity construction and formation process especially as it is revealed in and through the experiences of diasporic and different ethnic groups interacting with and in a Western or Eurocentric and European milieu. Through this article, I hope to add to the study and understanding of identity of minority groups. This should be of interest to scholars and students of identity, especially minority identities, as well as to scholars interested in visual and film studies since this is being understood in the context of two films. The expected contribution and strength of this study is in combining the theoretical

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[1] The film *Mississippi Masala* was directed by Mira Nair and was released in February 1991, USA.
[2] The film *Bhaji on the Beach* was directed by Gurinder Chadha and was released in May 1994, USA.

approaches to identity (such as social identity theory and postcolonial theory) with an analysis that is based on combining an auto-ethnographical approach with uncovering identity themes based on the examination of these two films.

Both films were made in the early 1990s and have been chosen as they represent the time when I made my own personal diasporic journey from India to the USA, and began thinking about what my own identity meant to me and then to think of the key themes of identity that were salient for me. I situate and ground this discussion theoretically in social identity theory (Turner, 1982), Giddens' (1991, 1993) discussions, and postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Sarup, 1996) which re-presents identity as important in terms of reference to themes of home, memory, nationhood, or imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), and as well as foreignness or being the other as Kristeva (1991) has captured.

Methodology

Using an auto-ethnographical (Chawla, 2003; Driessen, 1997; Reed-Danahay, 1997) introspective approach, I explore my personal story and two films that together all help examine and uncover themes of identity. Before I detail the methodology for this paper, as this study is using an auto-ethnographical approach and is focused on identity, I would like to explain my own interest in this topic and in taking up this study. I am a woman of colour, whose home country is India, and then I moved across borders first to the United States and then to Canada, as a doctoral student and academic. While making this cross cultural journey, I experienced many shifts and changes in my identity formation process as I had to make sense of the new realities and the new worlds that I was inhabiting. Suddenly, I was a minority and also had a sense of who I was which was not completely at ease in this new environment. This created many challenges and also made me aware of my past my heritage, my identity as an Indian woman in America. That process made me interested in understanding the whole process of construction and formation and reformation of identity, my own and then in a broader sense of similarly placed individuals and what that meant to the whole question of identity. In the context of this study then, I am interested in understanding through the auto-ethnographical lens that I adopt, combined with the analysis of the two films as sites of inquiry, how the process of identity formation and construction takes place when people of different racial, ethnic and social identities meet and interact

Two films and a personal vignette are used to illustrate the themes of identity in interaction and its impact on cross-cultural communication. The films have been chosen for the relevance of their content to the issue of fluidity of social identities. The personal vignette is meant to reflect some aspects of identity which have been outlined theoretically but can be demonstrated methodologically through the power of personal experience. The films have not been described in detail, and only some snapshots or freezes which represent some themes are displayed before the reader. The themes have been grouped based on my personal expression of the theme of identity that is being highlighted in the particular segment. For example, two themes that have been examined and selected for discussion are the themes of identity as nation and identity defined as people of color. The difference between these two themes is subtle yet stark. The identification with nation expresses the emotion that any individual belongs to a

particular nation state as opposed to another nation state. For example, I belong to the Indian nation state and that connotes for me a sense of Indiannness. The fact of being Indian is heightened when I am not with other Indians as well as with other Indians. On the other hand, feeling like a person of color is shared across several nationalities, all of whose inhabitants may feel like people of color because of the color of their skin as opposed to the people of lighter or white skin. Hence the need to separate the two themes which express varying emotions.

In addition to the organization into themes, comments and personal reactions to the films viewed have also been expressed. The reactions represent the heartfelt and subjective responses to the films. As the subject matter of the films and the movement of the individuals involved in the plot are directly intertwined with my own journey across borders, the personal and subjective responses provide a starting point for reflection into the issues surrounding diaspora and the meanings of identity in a globalized scenario.

Furthermore, these comments have been included as they represent the formation of identity in flux and change and in transformation. In other words, even the engagement in the process of viewing of the films and the interaction with them as viewer creates and contributes to the formation of identity, thereby validating the underlying theme of this paper that identities are dynamic and not static. The issues are more complex than a simple categorization into nationalities, or ethnic origin may suggest. The films that have been chosen for the purposes of this paper are *Mississippi Masala* and *Bhaji on the Beach*.

Description of Methodology: Autoethnography

Autoethnography has been used in a number of different areas and disciplines such as education, sociology, and anthropology (Anderson, 2006; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Etherington, 2004; McIlveen, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Roth, 2005). While autoethnography can be varied in terms of its application as evidenced by different applications and studies (Duncan, 2004; Holt, 2001; Pelias, 2003; Sparkes, 1996), largely it privileges the personal narrative and the use of that to understand and probe research questions. Since the topic of inquiry in thus study is identity, I thought it would be relevant to use an auto-ethnographical approach. The key strengths and underlying foundations of autoethnography are the use of personal narrative, the importance of reflexivity and voice (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography used by researchers also spans a variety and range of possible positions, one end of the spectrum being extremely subjective and depending on the researcher's account totally (Ellis, 2004; Paulette, 1993). Others (Duncan) have adopted a more conservative rigorous model of autoethnography.

Another way of examining the different styles of autoethnographic research has been provided by Anderson (2006), with a more analytic autoethnography and opposed to that evocative autoethnography. The former is aligned with a more positivist construction of autoethnography while the latter is more free flowing and the emphasis is on resonance and empathy within the reader (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Sources of Data and Data Collection and Analysis Process

In this paper, I use as sites of data two films as well as my own personal narrative drawn from my own cross cultural journey of identity change and transformation. While viewing the films and also integrating my own personal stories, I examined the data by using a thematic approach thus coming up with the themes of identity discussed later in detail based on the two films and my personal narrative. As the topic of discussion is identity, it appeared relevant to use an auto-ethnographical approach by using the personal stories that I draw from in discussing these themes of identity. Thus autoethnography integrated with the theoretical frameworks that I use provide a very useful and powerful tool to uncover themes of identity and to understand questions of identity especially in a cross-cultural context. My own cross-cultural lived experience provided a useful data mining site and hence I found the methodological tools provided by autoethnography to be very useful and insightful. This process of data analysis is embedded in and derived from the theoretical underpinnings of social identity theory and postcolonial theory. For instance, if we look at the theme, identity as foreignness as well as identity as home, it is very clear that the idea of being constructed as the other and as foreign as well as the heightened awareness of home and longing and memory are very much rooted in postcolonial theory with its focus on notions of displacement and dislocation. In the data discussion section and the discussion of the theories used, I discuss this in more detail.

Rigor and Trustworthiness of the Process

In discussing issues of validity, reliability and generalizability, it is useful to begin with the framework provided by Guba and Lincoln (1981). There are four aspects of methodological rigor that they highlight and what is more interesting, develop an alternate framework from the traditional quantitative oriented research. Essentially, the argument is that research in the qualitative mode also needs to be acceptable and subject to certain standards. However, it is unacceptable to apply the same terms and ways of evaluating rigor to qualitative research as those used to refer to quantitative research. By doing this, it is not the purpose to dichotomize the quantitative and qualitative research techniques, but it is an acknowledgment of the different strengths of each type of research methodology and the need to view these forms of inquiry from a standpoint that is consistent with their overall goals.

The four aspects of methodological rigor that Guba and Lincoln (1981) highlight are: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. In quantitative methodologies, these are described as internal validity, external validity/generalizability, reliability and objectivity respectively. In naturalistic or qualitative research, these same aspects of rigor have been described as credibility, fittingness, auditability and confirmability respectively.

The underlying questions that are posed in each facet of methodological rigor presented are: Truth value poses the question of how confidence can be evoked in the "truth" of the results or findings of the study for a particular context within which it was carried out. Applicability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts or with other respondents or subjects. Consistency asks the question as to

how one can determine whether the findings could be consistently repeated if the study were replicated with the same or similar subjects. Neutrality is the extent to which the results of the inquiry reflect solely the opinions of the subjects and not the biases of the researcher.

The four facets that determine the rigor of any study regardless of the methodology used reflect a fundamental and underlying concern with revealing the nature of human reality however that reality may be constructed or studied. Guba and Lincoln (1981), simply use this overarching theme of rigor to propose another frame of reference when we deal with qualitative research and methodologies.

With regard to validity, one opinion is that by adding quantification wherever relevant or necessary and by making ways of abstracting through the process of theoretical underpinnings, the qualitative data that we gather can be validated. On similar lines is the suggestion that by clearly explicating the design and methods, and by stating that from the raw data will emerge sufficient evidence to justify interpretations and by keeping records of all data collection whether they be transcripts or field and personal notes, the canons and standards are maintained and set down clearly (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In addition, one of the other criteria by which qualitative data are subject to rigorous scrutiny is authenticity (Mertens, 1998). Authenticity refers to the question of fairness, or whether different constructions and value structures are represented in the process of uncovering assumptions and providing information (Mertens).

Some scholars also offer the perspective that all research is from a certain location and standpoint, and hence this needs to be brought into the forefront. Thus, "researchers should acknowledge that all texts are incomplete and represent specific positions in terms of sexuality, ethnicity, and so on" (Mertens, 1998, p. 185). Hence, it follows that no text is universal, as all knowledge is contextual. The voice of the researcher in relation to the topic under research is an important issue that is related to location position and perspective.

Another approach to the issue of validity of such research has been provided by Morrow (2005). Morrow's framework for establishing both rigour and guidelines for reporting of qualitative research can be applied to autoethnography as well. Thus Morrow states that the narrative produced by using the autoethnographic voice and melding that with theory should be a faithful and comprehensive rendition of the author's experience (i.e., fairness, ontological authenticity, and meaningfulness); transform the author through self-explication (i.e., educative authenticity and catalytic authenticity); and inform the reader of an experience he or she may have never endured or would be unlikely to in the future, or of an experience he or she may have endured in the past or is likely to in the future, but has been unable to share the experience with his or her community of scholars and practitioners.

With reference to this study, I have applied an auto-ethnographical approach by incorporating my personal narrative but have integrated it with theory and hence I use the abstractions derived from theory to situate my categories of themes outlined later in the paper. I acknowledge that I come from this personal reflective position and carry that forward into the realm of existing theories to integrate them into building my data analysis and my findings on themes of identity.

Data Discussion

Personal Vignette

The point of the narrative of self that is presented is to remark on the complex interplay of many aspects (i.e. biographical, historical, national, and religious) that are embodied in one individual and are then further re-located elsewhere. In other words, the tension between the local and the global and the re-framing in other contexts does not erase the memories of home and nostalgia. The themes that are revealed are pertinent to the discussion of fluidity of identities.

Identity as home. The hustle and bustle of New Delhi, the Connaught Circus, Janpath, colorful bedspreads and batik wall hangings on display in shop windows, exquisitely carved ivory, filigree, and silver, laughter and sunshine. The corner foodstore, with wonderful spicy delights, hanging out at De Paul's with friends and drinking cold coffee, wearing silk saris in December and crisp cottons in the scorching May sun, mangoes and cool slices of watermelon, bus rides in crowded public transport buses. Neighbors and friends in the apartment block, auntieji and unclejie and hep nose in the air Nita.

Walking down the streets, one is hailed by a friend or friends; then begins a combined shopping journey. Interspersed with this, is a discussion on democratic India's achievements, its failures, and opinions on what the government should or should not do.

Identity as religion. Alongside of this memory is also the etching in the mind's eye of a crowded insurance office on busy Parliament Street, sitting in a partitioned office, surrounded by files and folders. Somewhere in the distance amidst the clickety clack of typewriters and the shuffle of papers and claim cases and insurance policies, attending to a client's needs, one can hear the call of the mullah calling the faithful Muslim. Just a stone's throw away is the famous and very revered temple where Hanuman is the presiding deity, and the faithful throng for worship and to ask of their favorite god a blessing. Around the corner is also the Bangla Sahib Gurdwara, the Sikh worshipping place. The texture of modern India is so complex.

Identity as memory. Childhood memories: playing hide and seek in the streets, running around the block with friends, Amma calling me at dusk to come in, because enough is enough and it is time to eat and sleep ready for another day of school. Memories of playing "pittoo," of Munna of whom it was whispered that his parents were not happy, and this was confirmed by the sounds of crying and drunken shouts of his parents. The cruelty of childhood was unthinking smug in the cocoon of my own happy and secure environment, absorbed in the company of Appa, Amma and kid brother, encouraged to be pampered but not to be spoilt. Also memories of blackout time in 1971 when India was at war with Pakistan over the birth of Bangladesh. Appa's exhortations to always excel in school, of going to a school where nuns ruled the roost and we sang hymns without really "catholicizing" ourselves, and felt privileged because we did not go

to a "government" or "corporation" school. College days, memories of Delhi University, being at the fringe of the "radical" students but never really being ideologically left or Marxist, and attending classes, the eccentric Sikh professor who smoked a beedi and came to class dressed in shorts. Discussions around and in the coffee house with friends, being extremely hungry and eating soggy vadas all the while complaining about the life we were leading, referencing at the Ratan Tata Library, going over to neighboring Hindu and Stephen's College and taking the crowded U Special home.

Identity as nation. Amidst this serenity and everydayness and ordinariness, October 1984, and the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi stands out, uncertainty and the pall of gloom hanging over the city, people staying home in shocked and numbed silence in front of their television sets as they watched the funeral procession of the Prime Minister. Also, more ugly scenes and tales of horror of Sikh men being accosted and beaten, because Indiraji was killed by a Sikh as revenge for the desecration of the holy Golden Temple in Amritsar, Sikh and Hindu neighbors painfully aware of the difference between them brought home to them in a very sharp way.

1991, Madras: the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, pictures of his horrific death and curfew in the city people talking in hushed whispers, but 1991 is more powerful in memory because of Appa's passing away, suddenly in front of me and Amma, and a chapter was closed. Time seemed to have stopped if only for a second which seemed like an eon.

Identity as foreignness. August 1995: Amsterdam Airport and before that Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi ,farewells and partings with relatives, crossing the seven seas for the first time in adulthood, and finally customs officers and clearance in Detroit, boarding a flight to Providence Rhode Island, and then to the University of Rhode Island, in Kingston. Faces, smells, sights, sounds, and traffic, everything smelt and sounded and felt so strange, and bewildering. People walked by and I felt lost and small, ready to take my bags and get the next flight home. Oh God, where have I landed? Was I crazy to be here? The journey had begun.

Mississippi Masala

Mississippi Masala was a film made in the early 1990s by a filmmaker who was herself Indian by origin, yet found her voice and place in the Western world. Mira Nair, the articulate female director and co-producer of the film, exemplifies in her own persona the embodiment of living in two worlds. *Mississippi Masala* is a film about the romantic relationship between an African American man and a woman of Indian origin, who grew up in Uganda and Mississippi.   Yet, the film provides rich source material for understanding and examining the complexities inherent in cross-cultural interpersonal interactions and the place of history and context in coming closer to that understanding.

The film *Mississippi Masala* at one level is a simple romance and has all the trappings of a film that is entertaining and erotic. However, at another level, what is visible is the allegorical narrative that it presents about cross-cultural relationships. It provides a fertile ground for tuning into the nuances of cross-cultural identity. What is fascinating to me is that it helped me define my own identity by a process of

introspection and self-reflexive awareness. This I was able to do by examining my reactions to the film at certain points. In this respect, the film is a rich source of material and has a number of thick descriptive tracts. What is vital is the intersubjectivity between me and the film, and the self reflexive process that this initialed. I also attempt to select key parts of the movie and to examine the underlying themes, and integrate it with my overarching concern with identity.

Identity as home. *Mississipppi Masala* opens in Kampala, Uganda, in November 1972. During this period Idi Amin was in power and began his campaign to oust the Africans of Asian descent from Uganda. In effect, this meant the Gujarati community, who were all from very wealthy backgrounds (Gujarati refers to a section of people belonging to a state in Western India). Idi Amin felt that the Indian Africans were amassing undue amounts of riches and wanted to tilt the balance in favor of ethnic Africans. The lead female protagonist, Mina is a young child and her parents Jay and Keenu are preparing to leave Uganda. Jay has a close ethnic African friend Okelo who is concerned for their safety and encourages them to leave. Jay tells Okelo, "Why should I go, Okelo? This is my home." Okelo replies, "Not any more. Africa is for Africans, black Africans."

Jay is faced with the task of uprooting his wife and little Mina from their home and extended family roots. Mina is very attached to Okelo Chacha (Chacha in Hindi is a term for uncle, specifically the father's younger brother). Some etching scenes, Okelo bidding farewell to Mina and her mother, embracing them and with tears streaming down his face, and speaking to Mina in Swahili, urging her not to forget her Swahili. Mina speaking to Okelo Chacha in Swahili saying good-bye and embracing him. Jay the father angered by Okelo refusing to acknowledge him. The emotional scenes of these displaced Africans of Indian descent praying and weeping as they must leave their Ugandan homeland. At the airport, chaos as other displaced families also prepare to leave, a woman with her face to the sun and her prayer beads, saying her prayers to the Sun (or Surya as he is called by the Hindus) for possibly the last time on Ugandan soil, a man bending down to the ground to kiss the earth to bid his emotional farewell to the soil that had nurtured him.

This part of the film is perhaps the most moving to me personally. The dominant feeling is one of the ground giving way beneath my feet, and of powerlessness, homelessness. It is amazing that this segment of the film always has me transfixed, watching in fatal fascination, and no matter how many times I view it, it has me with tears welling up in my eyes each time. To explain this further, it evokes a feeling of helplessness, and although my coming into the United States was by choice, I am overawed by a despairing emotion of intense loneliness, isolation and of being somewhat out of everything. A tremendous surge of self-pity and homesickness rushes through.

Identity as segmented group. The camera shifts swiftly to Greenwood, Mississippi, and to August 1990. I want to quickly move to the wedding where the women are gossiping about Mina. "You can be dark and have no money, or fair and have money, but you can't be dark and have no money and expect to get Hari Patel." This is a reference to the eligible bachelor and the ambitions of Mina's mother that her daughter will make a good match. Coming from India, I belong to a different sub-culture, but this

conversation is indeed a prototype of one that may occur anywhere in India under similar circumstances. It reeks of an internalized oppression, dividing a seemingly cohesive group. There is a premium on being of lighter skin even among the shades of brown, and this is especially seen as valuable in the marriage situation. In the context of the film, it is a derogatory reference to reference to Mina's dark skin as well as her parents' economic backwardness. Within the community, it places Mina as marginalized and outside the pale of the mainstream. It thus creates another form of redefining the limits of Mina's identity. What is occurring in the case of Mina is that in this particular instance, one can very clearly see at least two aspects defining Mina as belonging to the Indian community and further as being darker skinned within the group and the associated separation from the rest of the group that this engenders.

When I watch this scene, I am enraged, but tinged with a feeling of déjà vu, and a feeling of empathy with Mina. I was considered of lighter skin to escape the fate of being classified as dark to the point of ineligible. Even though I was deemed lighter skinned than the majority and hence a good catch in the marriage market, I was able to understand Mina's situation as I questioned this state of affairs in the community. Yet it is true that I conformed to it in some way by being relieved that I was of lighter skin and hence in a sense elite and select.

Identity as people of color. Another segment, where after an accident, Anil's uncle speaks to Demetrius and his associate, Tyrone, about this and is immediately reassured. He says "Black, yellow, Mexican, Puerto Rican, as long as you're not white means you're colored" and again "All of us people of color must stick together…power to the people… united we stand."

When I watch this scene, I experience a feeling of comfort. I belong in this society like the Indians in the film, as aligned with people of color, or that is my slot in the social structure, so that I am a part of the community. There is a feeling of comfort and camaraderie generated, because of the intersubjectivity between myself as a "viewer" and the players in the film who represent and embody people of color.

Another meaningful segment of the film is when Mina visits Demetrius and his family. On the way, Mina tells Demetrius "I'm a mix masala," referring to her varied experiences growing up in Uganda, England, and finally coming to reside in Mississippi. The term *masala* is a phrase that denotes a mixture of spices. The conversation is thick with references to Africa. Mina is asked to explain if she is from Africa, and as to how there are Indians in Africa. Mina recounts that Indians came in to build the railroad, and entered as slaves. She also states that she has never been to India. Dexter states "you're just like us, we're from Africa but never been there before" and "I'm going to Africa one day to see Nelson Mandela."

This section of the film evokes in me a sense of community and oneness with African Americans; all people of color share a history of slavery and struggle and oppression. The lines are clearly marked, drawing on the common identity and the intersection between historical events.

Identity as nation. Mina tells Demetrius "How many people come to our motel, they look at us, they say 'not another goddamn Indian,' it makes me so mad." To this, Demetrius replies, "Well, Ms. Masala, racism or as they say nowadays tradition is passed

down like recipes. You got to know what to eat and what to leave on the plate; otherwise you'll be mad forever." This conversation reveals to my mind the shared burden of racism that Demetrius and Mina face together; it is a point where their identities intersect and they are one in this bond. It clearly articulates the part that racism plays in the lives of Mina and Demetrius, and specifies their individual ways of dealing with it and coming to terms with the reality. To me, this echoes and resonates with my own being and consciousness. Having been in the United States for about two and a half years now, I am still experiencing the culture shock of racism as it unfolds itself to me in many ways and at many levels both subtle and more direct, sometimes in the classroom and at other times in a social setting. My reaction still is one of anger and hurt and being mad as Mina articulates herself. I have not been able to come to terms with it and embrace it with the easy nonchalance that Demetrius displays.

      Identity as foreignness. Scenes from the past when Amin plans out a vendetta against all Asians in Uganda. "Africans are poor, Asians are rich. They have refused to allow their daughters to marry Africans." Back in 1990, scandal and outrage break out, and Mina and Demetrius are arrested. Pontiac says, "I saw that carpet cleaning kallu with Mina." Kallu is a derogatory reference to dark skin. Demetrius is bailed out by his friend and associate, Tyrone. He tells Demetrius, "What is wrong with you?…You better leave them f......g foreigners alone, they ain't nothing but trouble…united we stand, divided we fall…but if you fall in bed with one of their daughters, your arse is going to swing."

      I think this whole episode in the film at once separates the black community from their Indian community of color, not only because of ethnic difference but because on the part of the Indian side, they profess superiority due to their being of lighter skin than the African- American community. On the part of the black community, what separates them from the Indian people of color is that they are defined as outsiders both in the case of Amin in Uganda and by Tyrone. To my mind, at my own interpersonal level, not knowing what it meant to be a person of color, as all Indians are brown-skinned, it was a new experience to be categorized as a woman of color. Once I got used to the idea, it gave me fixity in terms of my place in the social scale, although it came with a price. The feeling of being part of an out-group was overpowering and from being part of the dominant community in my home country, I was plummeted to the status of the minority person of color. To relate this to the film, the further split between the black community and the Indian community evokes a sense of being made aware of my foreignness, and although I may have it in terms of skin color to be part of the group, yet at another level I have not made it. I am in a state of disembodied limbo.

      Demetrius goes to the motel Monte Cristo to meet Mina; he is unable to meet her but Jay, Mina's father, tells him that he cannot meet his daughter. Demetrius says, "Oh I see… so you think I ain't good enough for your daughter is that it?" Mina's father states that he respects his daughter's wishes but states that he does not want Mina to undergo the struggle that he underwent, stating that he at one time had a vision of changing the world, but the world is not so quick to change. Demetrius retorts, "I'm a black man, born and raised in Mississippi and there ain't nothing you can tell me about struggle….I know you and your folks can come down here from God knows where…you can be as black…

and start acting white and treating us like doormats…you're but a few shades from this right here that I know." Jay is left speechless.

This passage reveals the underlying fears of the father for his daughter and Jay's inability to accept a black man as his daughter's lover or spouse are tied into his experience in Uganda when he was dispossessed by the black African. The incident has left him with a distrust of and a prejudice against the entire black community, who are typified in his mind by Amin.

At the close of the film, Mina's father revisits Uganda, makes his peace with the past and discovers to his horror that his brother, who was his childhood playmate, Okelo, is dead, and in fact died way back in 1972, and he regrets never bidding farewell to him. Mina seeks out Demetrius and the lovers elope to a new life. The final shot shows Mina in traditional Indian clothes and Demetrius in African garb, dancing in an abandon of glee to the sound of African music.

The final denouement in the film signals a coming together not just of the lovers but symbolizes the union and peace between two peoples of color. It may be true that the filmmaker had made the ending a prototype in true romantic fashion, nevertheless the film in general is very open to several readings as various texts and sub texts are revealed. As I have attempted to do, the film provides many instances that help to explain, bound and define the limits of cross-cultural identity. Where possible and relevant I have linked it to my own life and shaping of identity, framed by my own cross-cultural lived experience. I think this has made the text of the film personally meaningful.

The themes of inclusion and exclusion revealed in the film may support the thesis of social identification. It is true that this may explain and reveal some insights, however, what is also relevant to the discussion are the cross-cutting interplay of identities, which are contextualized in various settings, and the collapse of space between Uganda, India and Mississippi, and the expression in interactions and translation to communication that is implicit in the film.

Bhaji on the Beach

Bhaji on the Beach is a film which has been directed by Gurinder Chadha, a UK based filmmaker. The film's story is conceived by Gurinder Chadha and Meera Syal and is written by Meera Syal. Certain specific scenes or snapshots from the film stand out.

Identity as segmented group. Thus the scene at the family dining table, where all the sons are sitting down to the family meal. The mother-in-law referring to one of the daughters-in-law (the wife of the second son) who has run away, unable to bear the hardships and tyranny of the situation, states, "Our bad luck never stops. She was too dark. You should never trust the dark-skinned. She has taken away our only grandchild." This reveals the ambivalent attitude towards one's own kind and the premium on being of a lighter skin even among the brown skinned, which operates among many Indian families.

When I watch this scene, I am reminded of my own place when faced with the bridegroom seeking task. As I was declared of lighter skin although not as light skinned as Northern Indians, I was considered luckier and hence likely to find a suitable match.

However, the scene in the movie is a reminder of the continual and continuous manner in which the oppression of color is articulated.

Identity as community.   Another scene that stands out is the revelation of Rashida's pregnancy by her black boyfriend. It creates a stir. Thus the elderly Pushpajee remarks, "It is not color, it is culture, what about the child?" and later "kala kaloota baingan loota" (which is a derogatory reference to black skin, comparing it to an eggplant), and one of the other women says, "Why a black boy? Couldn't you find someone from our own?"

All these are reminders of racism—the relatively lighter skin color of the Indians being seen as superior to or better than that of the black man. Here if one pauses to think, there is an emphasis on the common bond of the Punjabi Indian community against the "other."   Also, there is a little vignette where the old lady Pushpajee, (played by Zohra Segal) gets back to her place on a bench on the beach and quickly checks her wallet and looks suspiciously at the black family sitting on the adjoining seat.

The primary emotion and thought that this evokes is that it is important at any cost to be defined by one's own community, and this is reified by the opposition to the other who is not one's own. The pressure to be with one's own, to marry one's own kind is undergone by many young adults when they are considered by the community to be of an age when they should marry. As I watch this, it brings back memories of aunts, uncles, elderly and respected members of the community counseling one to settle down to having one's own nest, but with one's own community.

Identity as nation.   Ironically, the group of women is plagued by anti-Asian racist demonstrations by a group of white youth who are openly offensive and spit on the leader of the group, the head of the Asian women's center, Saheli. Obviously, several cross-cutting boundaries emerge, where these women are the victims of racism while being racist themselves at another level.   The old lady, Pushpajee, states in bitter revulsion and irony, "These are the cream of British youth."

The dominant response that comes to my mind is one of solidarity with all Indians and anger against the British. It evokes images of the struggle for independence that India underwent and the vision of independent India as a sovereign and free country is the overwhelming feeling.

Identity as foreignness. To follow this theme of racism further, the scene in the café is a very explicit example. Two women from the group, the old woman Pushpajee, and her friend sit down to have a cup of tea. They settle down and open their packets of home made food. An English lady at the next table grimaces, and exchanges looks with the owner of the shop. The teashop owner takes her cue from this, goes up to the women and says, "strictly English food here, you understand!" and "bloody heathens! They want to get back from where they come from, they should never have come to this country, they breed like rabbits."

Rashida's relationship with her black boyfriend, Oliver, is the center of the controversy in the film. Oliver's friend encourages him to break away and emphasizes the importance of being in the in-group of a black Jamaican community: "us and them…respect the differences…" The final reconciliation of Rashida and Oliver brings

up some interesting issues about inter-cultural communication. Oliver, who was irritated by Rashida's constant deference and regard for her parents, comes to have an appreciation and understanding of where she is coming from, and agrees "we've got to do it together, 'cos you don't want to lose your folks."

The two scenes described above depict the notion of foreignness in very varied terms. In the second case, foreignness is seen as something to be overcome that the couple can then work with, and live their life together. The first scene, though, engenders emotions of being outside everything, not belonging to the particular frame of reference. I can at the personal level empathize with that emotion having experienced the feeling of being the foreigner on many occasions after entering the United States.

Another cross-cultural encounter that stands out in the film is between Asha and the Englishman, a decadent actor holding on to a dream-like glorious past. Asha is constantly disturbed by visions and hallucinations. She is under pressure to conform to the ideals of Indian womanhood—to hold above all else duty, honor, and sacrifice, and be the patient long-suffering mother and wife. Asha is transported into a magical world with the Englishman, who tells her at the end, "You've kept hold of your traditions, proud, exotic, fascinating, gentle and beautiful." The Indian woman and the proper English gentleman bridge this cultural boundary and come close to each other.

In a ridiculous dream-like sequence, Asha pictures herself as the radiant beauty and the Englishman with dark hair and wearing Indian clothes. There is thus an attempt to see the "other" as closer to oneself by gaining comfort in representing him as being like one of her kind. These are some highlights from the film which represent aspects of cross-cultural and intercultural communication, and illustrate the complexity of the issues.

The themes that are revealed in the segments from "*Bhaji on The Beach*" discussed here distinctly highlight the many and varied layers of individuals' identities in their interactions with others. For instance, although there are obvious references to in group and out group membership, yet in defining the interactions it is clear that there is a tension between the local and the global or the disembedding aspect of relationships that Giddens talks about. This then makes the reduction of communication between these individuals into one based on social identification rather problematic.

Social Identity

The dichotomy between us and them or the identification with one group as opposed to another is one of the main characteristics to describe social identity. Social identity theory with its roots in social psychology continued with this general concept of the individual's self concept derived from group membership (Turner, 1982).

The central aspect of social identity is that identification with and membership in a group helps to define the individual. It is thus focused on the location of the individual in certain social categories, and the perception of the individual of the category to which he/she belongs. The member values membership in the group in an emotional and social sense. Identity is thus defined by who is not a member and who is a member in a particular group, in other words by the patterns of exclusion and inclusion (Turner, 1982).

The construct of social identity has been refined further by relating it to notions of status, role and social degradation and social upgradation (Sarbin & Scheibe, 1983). In

articulating the individuals as members of specific in-groups and out-groups, it is relevant to state the complexity of membership in multiple groups which may be nested or contained within each other and may also heighten the level of involvement or detachment, depending on the perspective of the individual in relation to the group of which he/she is a member (Allen, Wilder, & Atkinson, 1983). How do members then act and react and enact as members not just of groups or in and out groups but as historically, contextually and culturally constituted identities? In this, the argument is re-stated as the importance of the context but not narrowly defined as the in-group or out-group, but inclusive of the context of the entire historical aspects that are implicit in the construction of the individuals' identity. Also, while the in-group and out-group basis for identification provides a useful basis for understanding intergroup relations of a certain kind, what happens when individual identity is transcribed in terms of other realms and worlds?

The work of Anthony Giddens challenges the dualism of the individual and society and focusing upon "reproduced practices" (1993). This approach does not deny that there are social systems which exist outside of the individual. The continuous flow between individual and society is emphasized and hence the imperative to look beyond duality, yet human agency is still not underplayed. Giddens thus stresses meaning making through interaction, constant flow and change. This takes place within the frame of a larger structure, hence the relevance of both structure and agency and the breaking down of the dualism between the individual and society.

Some of the concepts of Giddens (1991) are useful in re-framing the notion of identity. The notion of "disembedding" expressed by Giddens is explained as the lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and their recombination across indefinite time/space distances. Narratives of the self are the stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by individuals and others. The use of postcolonial theory takes this on by exploring the issues of location, place, displacement, and dislocation, which are crucial to an understanding of identity

The idea of identity as being a narrative and self-reflexive, as well as in the stage of becoming rather than being is an important one. It also starts with my own story and journey as a migrant across place and time and space (Sarup, 1996). The importance of place, space and time and history and context are then tied up with this conceptualization of identity and the socially and culturally constructed and situated self and the individual actor. To explain this further and to place it in the context of a historical and political time and space setting, I use postcolonial theory. The difference between this vision of identity and the way identity has been perceived in the social psychological literature is in the varied and narrative nature of the self. That is to say, while the collective, the individual and the personal are all important aspects of an individual's identity, the narrative approach uses these dimensions of the self in a processual film like rendition of the story of the individual's journey through time.

An important concept in postcolonial theory is the notion of self and subjectivity. The work of Anthony Giddens (1993) provides a broad introduction to this. Giddens makes the point that both the agency of the individual in society and the rules of social systems are important. Giddens advocates a complex notion of rejecting the dualism that existed between the individual and society. The focus is on what he calls "reproduced practices" (Giddens, 1993).

This implies that each part of the dyad: the individual and society are to be deconstructed. Human agency is not underplayed despite this recognition of the importance of larger structures that constrain and yet form part of individual actions. Giddens (1993) , thus stresses meaning making through interaction, constant flow and change. Hence, the locus of all social relationships becomes in Giddens' terms; the process of the constitution of all interactions and the totality is a myriad of complex orders and impulsions.

The other notion that Giddens (1991), articulates that is relevant and is very insightful is the idea of disembedding. What does this mean? It refers to the lifting out of social relationships from local contexts and their recombination across indefinite time/space distances. What then occurs is the interpenetration and dialectic between the local and the global (Giddens).

Giddens (1991) provides the foundation for viewing the relationship between the individual and society. Postcolonial theory explains the cross-cultural component. Precisely because of the need to understand the place of history, context and diversity, as articulated by Giddens, postcolonial theory provides a vehicle for situating the diasporic individual in his/her historical-cultural backdrop. Furthermore, it provides a voice for the non-Western other even though it is articulated in the Western academy and confined by the limits of the language of the Western world.

Homi Bhabha (1990,1994) studied the results of neo-colonialism on the individual in the modern and postmodern world. Bhabha focuses on the effect of the relationship between colonized-colonizer on the individual psyche. Furthermore, Bhabha problematizes the relationship at the interpersonal level as being more complicated than just a dichotomous one, and thereby he moves forth from Said's (1978, 1993) oppositional duality. This becomes crucial to understand in an organizational setting, because the relationships between different dyads are dynamic. Yet, this does not take away from the need to understand the historical relationship between former colonies and erstwhile-colonized peoples. It only questions the representation of this relationship in very "either or" terms, and cautions that the "hybrid" nature of the "diaspora" places them in a "third space" of "in-betweenness" (Bhabha, 1990, 1994).

Hybridity, negotiation, in-betweenness—all these and similar terms are used by Bhabha (1990) to focus on the complex nature of the relationship between former colonized and colonizer. Hybridity may be a consequence of the processes of mimicry and catachresis: the creation of new transcultural forms due to the contact with colonization. Bhabha articulated hybridity through the enunciation of a Third Space, which is negotiated. Bhabha (1994) states that the "Third Space" constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture can be appropriated, translated, rehistorocized, and read anew. The interdependence of both colonizer and colonized and the mutual construction of their subjectivities is part of the hybridity. This is in contrast to the notion of diversity and multiculturalism, instead there is a celebration of difference and both the dominant and the peripheral are part of the process and participate in it creating the negotiated space and territory (Bhabha).

Ambivalence is used to underscore the tendency of wanting one thing and then wanting another, which is just the opposite. It also forms the basis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which is ambivalent being both simultaneously one of attraction and repulsion. Ambivalence is a way of decentering the center and

placing the periphery in the center. Through the processes of hybridity and mimicry, ambivalence creates a tension filled relationship that is both reviling and attracting (Bhabha, 1985). Hybridity, negotiation, in-betweenness-all these and similar terms are used by Bhabha to focus on the complex nature of the relationship between former colonized and colonizer.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to share some thoughts on the process of doing this research and writing this study. As the research involved understanding and uncovering themes of identity and used an auto-ethnographical approach, it helped me understand my own identity formation and construction process. Through this exercise it provides a forum and a way of coming to terms with my cross-cultural journey of identity construction and formation. In this paper, I use a reflective autobiographical and auto-ethnographical approach to understand my own identity and themes of identity that are also mirrored in the two films that I have examined. I hope to have through this analysis, also frame it this in postcolonial theory and the works of Giddens (1991, 1993) as well as to have attempted to come to terms with my own journey across borders and to uncover and understand the meaning of identity through categories such as home, memory, nation, and belonging.

The implications of understanding this project are manifold. Firstly, it created a venue for understanding and grappling with issues of identity. By combining the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial and social identity theories with insights from my own personal experiences and journey, this study contributes to an understanding of identity in a lived sense and in the context of cross-cultural and diasporic individuals. By undertaking this project, I was able to reflect and introspect on my own place, movement and journey across borders and to contextualize it in the background of theory and frame it in the theoretical foundations and underpinnings of postcolonial theory as well as social identity theories.

Since questions of identity deal with the interaction of the self and the other, I believe this study contributes by using a very timely and relevant methodological tool of autoethnography. This methodology lends itself well to articulating and uncovering aspects and facets of identity and identity formation.

While this article focuses on looking at personal experience and two films as sites of data analysis, some other questions regarding the impact of the identity formation process that could be answered by future research would include the impact of this process on the communication processes of individuals with others in various contexts: such as the workplace and interpersonal relationships. Other methodological approaches such as using interviews with diasporic individuals as well as undertaking surveys using existing identity questionnaires would help to provide other insights and multiple methodological ways of answering some of these questions. Clearly, using multiple methods of data collection and analysis and triangulating would be some of the ways I would wish to explore questions of identity in future studies.

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