

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

# Identity Conflicts between First and Second Generation South Asian Immigrants in Britain: The Case of *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham*

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2015

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## Introduction

The scene from *Bend It like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002) in which Jess is helped to get dressed in a sari by her football teammates perfectly condenses the take of the film on the topic of immigration and cross-cultural differences in the United Kingdom. Jess has played a football game against the will of most of her family and now she has to hurry if she wants to make her sister's traditional Indian wedding in time. In an idyllic image of trouble-free cultural intermingling, her Anglo friends wrap Jess in a colorful blouse and then she rushes home to the wedding reception. In this way, the film depicts how the two worlds in which Jess has been brought up effortlessly converge, and it seems to put forward an optimistic view not only of the contemporary confluence of different cultures in Britain, but also of the resolution of the generational conflicts faced by immigrant communities.

This essay aims to inquire into the generational gap between the first and the second generation of South Asian immigrants in the United Kingdom and how it has been dealt with in cinema in an attempt to get a better sense of the identity conflicts and of the social challenges faced by these new British citizens. I will combine the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies – most notably its sociopolitical engagement with transnational movement and its emphasis on contextualization – and the narrative and aesthetic analysis of film in an effort to somehow demarcate a research project capable of establishing new relationships and fostering innovative and more critical and satisfactory understandings of the ways in which films and society interrelate. Finally, I will focus on *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and the aforementioned *Bend It like Beckham*, two popular, iconic films that center, among other issues, on the cultural clash between first and second generation immigrants, and that, as I will show, provide us with a complex awareness of the challenges faced by immigrants in contemporary

British society. I will argue that the second generation finds itself at a crossroads due to the influence of two different cultures, that this cultural hybridity is a source of conflict at critical moments like the transition into adulthood and that cinematic representations help us all to understand and assimilate the multicultural nature of contemporary societies.

This essay moves from a general overview in which the theoretical framework and the political, social and cultural context is explained to more concrete aspects pertaining to the actual films and the way they engage with society. More specifically, it takes as a cue, on the one hand, the research into South Asian migration into the United Kingdom and the theories on diaspora and cultural assimilation and, on the other hand, the generic conventions developed in the field of cinema for the representation of immigration. It is my belief that it is essential to have a general, multifaceted knowledge of the issues the films deal with and the sociocultural context from which they spring and that, therefore, it is indispensable to explain and always bear in mind the origins of South Asian diaspora and its cultural background if we are to understand the conflicts between different generations of immigrants in the United Kingdom. The essay concludes by analyzing several scenes from the aforementioned films that illustrate both how these generational conflicts have been tackled in cinema and how they can help viewers understand contemporary multicultural societies. In short, the main purpose of this essay is to explore how the way cinema represents the generational gap between first and second generation South Asian immigrants – the conflicts that arise between parents and children and the ways they conciliate their different cultural upbringing and point of view – can help audiences of all ethnic backgrounds comprehend the challenges that contemporary multicultural societies will have to deal with in the years to come.

In the last few decades, probably as a consequence of the impact of transnationalism, there has been growing interest on migration and diaspora issues, and the amount of research on the subject is overwhelming. However, I will concentrate only on that research that I consider relevant for the understanding of the films in general and generational conflicts in particular. As was noted above, the two films I will focus on are *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham*.

Directed by Damien O'Donnell in 1999, *East is East* takes place in 1971 in Salford, where George Khan, a fish-and-chips shop owner from Pakistan, expects his family to follow his strict Pakistani Muslim ways. However, his children, with an English mother and having been born and brought up in Britain, increasingly see themselves as British and start to reject their father's rules on dress, food, religion and for living in general. The film deals primarily with the children's defiance against their father's rule. *Bend It like Beckham* was directed by Gurinder Chadha in 2002 and it tells the story of Jess, the daughter of a Punjabi Sikh family whose passion for football clashes with her parents' respectful observance of Indian traditions. The film deals with the struggle of the teenager to impose her love for football and resist the social and cultural conventions of her ethnic community. Like *East is East*, *Bend It like Beckham* deals with the conflict between a western upbringing and the moral codes dictated by a South Asian culture and religion. What happens when second generation immigrants do not feel completely identified with the culture their parents try to impose on them? How does the representation of this conflict articulate with the racial issues that affect contemporary western societies? These are the questions that will be addressed in this paper.

## **Diaspora and identity**

One of the most important aspects when dealing with migrations is the notion of diaspora. Diasporic studies have provided a complex theoretical framework for the understanding of the concepts of nation, race and identity in the present context of globalization and transnational relationships. As Jigna Desai explains in *Beyond Bollywood* (18), diaspora is a Greek word that meant “to scatter or sow across.” It also appears in the Old Testament to describe the dispersion of the people of Israel to other parts of the world. That is, generally speaking, diaspora originally referred to the idea of leaving one’s own home. Based on this ancient use, it is now often used to refer to a forced exile, but the causes vary from one culture to another and tap into different political and identity issues. Building upon Jim Clifford’s work on diaspora studies, Lawrence Grossberg (92), for example, argues that “the term ‘diaspora’ is a signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggle to define the local – I would prefer to call it place – as a distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement.” Grossberg (92) continues: “diaspora emphasizes the historically spatial fluidity and intentionality of identity, its articulation to structures of historical movements (whether forced or chosen, necessary or desired).”

It is South Asian diaspora that I want to draw attention to. South Asian diaspora developed, mainly, due to economic or political reasons, but it is ultimately experienced in Britain, primarily, as a cultural and racial conflict. Cultural theorists closely related to the experience of diaspora themselves like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have focused on racial issues, although they have adopted slightly different standpoints. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall (235) defines the diaspora experience

not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite,

difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

Hall views the experience of diaspora in terms of an inescapable cultural and identitary hybridity, not as part of a cultural essence that involves the desire to return to one's origins and the attempt to remain uncontaminated by the contact with other cultures. It follows from Hall that this hybridity is articulated in terms of religion, gender, class and sexuality, and diaspora is thus seen as the convoluted experience of bridging these differences. Paul Gilroy, on the other hand, puts the emphasis on a process of identification or dialogue with the nation. In the words of Lawrence Grossberg (101), Gilroy draws attention to the necessity (and the process) of interrogating the nation-state as a homogeneous cultural unity.

Hang Zou ("Language Identity and Cultural Difference") has elaborated on several issues that underlie the concept of diaspora as described by Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*: the shareability of meanings, the role of language and the importance of the context. A culture, observes Hall, produces "shared meanings," which makes the notions of cultural essence and cultural difference highly complex and unstable. "To say that two people belong to the same culture," Hall argues (2), "is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other." Regarding the role of language, Zou notes how, for Hall, it is a sign of cultural difference: "It is a symbolic practice which gives meaning or expression to the idea of belonging to a national culture" (Hall 5).

Other notion that is present in Hall's thinking and that Zou also writes about is the role of cultural differences in the construction of identity. That is, culture shapes individuals and, in a sense, they are capable of creating themselves through culture. Hall

argues that “the word ‘culture’ refers to whatever is distinctive about the ‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group. This word can also be extended to signify the ‘shared values’ of a group or of society” (Hall 2). That is, “members of the same culture must share, broadly speaking, the same ‘cultural codes’” (Hall 4) and, therefore, we can conclude that cultural distinctiveness functions mainly as an element of distinction of a group and of preservation of its identity. On the other hand, as was noted above, cultural identity is an ever-changing concept in constant dialogue with the social, political and cultural context. Finally, we must keep in mind that here we are dealing with representations that, as Hall observes (3), presuppose cultural activities that “carry meaning and value for us, which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others, or which depend on meaning for their effective operation.” In other words, we recognize films like *East is East* or *Bend It like Beckham* as cultural expressions that deal with contemporary social issues but they also enter into the struggle over cultural identity, a concept that is unsteady and bound to contextual forces.

### **Migration, history and social practices**

Keeping in mind all that has been mentioned above, I would like to turn now to the history of South Asian migration into the United Kingdom, how these communities arrived in Britain and how they spread all over the country. Indian migration is one of the most complicated phenomena of all population flows. According to Daniel Naujoks (“Emigration, Immigration, and Diaspora Relations in India”), Indian diaspora “refers to all persons of Indian descent living outside India, as long as they preserve some major Indian ethnocultural characteristics.” Although from a political perspective, citizens from Bangladesh and Pakistan would be excluded (they became sovereign independent nations after the Partition of India in 1947) their migration experiences to the United



Kingdom were very similar and therefore I will refer to all of them as South Asian diaspora. Naujoks establishes the beginning of the Indian diaspora 175 ago when India was under the control of Great Britain. Britain needed workers on the plantations so it created an organized scheme to import temporal workers from the Indian subcontinent. As Roger and Catherine Ballard argue (21), in the following years there were four main phases in the settlement of South Asian communities in Britain. The first one took place around the 1930s and it was characterized by the arrival of single individuals, men who worked as door to door salesmen and that eventually developed a small colony of pedlars. The second phase started in the first decades of the British Raj. Workers from the subcontinent, mostly Punjabi Sikhs that were now citizens of the Commonwealth, moved to the United Kingdom as a result of the demand of low-skilled labor after the Second World War. Many established in London, Leicester and Birmingham. Although their aim was mainly economic, Indians coming during this period came from families of medium wealth and wanted to be differentiated from other immigrants who had arrived in Britain escaping poverty. The third phase began in the 1960s and this phase was characterized by the arrival of women and children who joined those men that were already established in British cities. The fourth phase, Roger and Catherine Ballard note, was characterized by the social prominence of a second generation that had been educated in Britain and sometimes even born in Britain. This phase will be further addressed in detail below.

Until the 2000s, the United Kingdom was the preferred destination by South Asian immigrants, and it received around two thirds of all Indian and Pakistani immigrants that arrived in Europe. After all these years, a tight social network and a sense of brotherhood had developed among the South Asian community. What is more, with the arrival of wives and children, things started to change. There was a gradual

shift from saving money to enjoying what British life had to offer, and they started to spend money on leisure activities. Their relationship with Britain changed as they felt that they were in some way involved in the daily life of British society. This sociocultural shift created new challenges. One of them was that the older generation started to fear the loss of their cultural roots; another one was that there arose a kind of struggle for prestige among the families of the same community, which materialized in the attempts to show all their economic might, for example, in the decoration of the house and the ostentatious display of wealth at special religious occasions like weddings.

The families that established in the United Kingdom tried to maintain their traditions alive and, therefore, religious rituals like going to the temple or having a beard and wearing a turban in the case of Sikhs acquired an important sociocultural and identitary functions. However, the idea of going back to their homeland started to disappear. Not only did the older generations want to continue working and making money in Britain, but, as Roger and Catherine Ballard note (41), they also wanted their children to have better opportunities. Thus, one of the most important changes for South Asian immigrants was the emergence of the second generation, those people born and educated in the United Kingdom whose parents – or at least one of them – were foreign born. This new generation experienced two different cultures: one at home and a different one outside home. The first generation, those who had arrived in Britain looking for a better life, had maintained their traditions and beliefs and had avoided contact with British People because they saw them as a threat to their identity. The second generation grew in both spheres. In their homes they were expected to observe South Asian traditions; once they walked out the front door, they lived in a British world, they went to British schools and had friends who belonged to the white British

community. This situation raised the issue of how to deal with two cultures that were so different when not utterly contradictory. In other words, one of the major challenges faced by the second generation was the cultural conflict between their traditional and patriarchal upbringing and family life on the one hand and the freedom that Britain and its culture offered them on the other. They are exposed to different values from two different cultural worlds: at home they are encouraged to preserve the roots of their family while outside home they are educated according to British traditions and, for example, teachers and popular youth culture provide them with different, sometimes conflicting, values about independence and individuality. Too often, what young people experience as a process of maturation and a small shift towards independence, parents may see as a sign of Anglicization. This issue is especially sensitive in the case of girls because parents tend to be stricter with them. Identity issues are a complex process marked by conflicts, links and negotiation, and popular cultural expressions like cinema have to come to play a central role in this process.

One of the most distinct areas of generational conflict is that of arranged marriages. For many parents, their children's acceptance of these marriages is a sign that they have been brought up according to their culture and that they are loyal to their family in the eyes of the other members of the community. Roger and Catherine Ballard (48) point out that even in Britain, sons and daughters are still forced into arranged marriages. Many times, either because they cannot challenge these conventions or because they do not want to disappoint their families, second generation youngsters end up accepting these impositions. This is the topic, for example, around which the generational conflict in *East is East* is built, although it must be noted that, as part of cinema's conventions, it must be taken as a narrative resource that enters into a dialogue, on the one hand, with more general cultural conflicts and, on the other, with

the conventions of representation developed by cinema to deal with teenagers' coming of age and with love relationships.

### **Diasporic cinema and genre**

While the cultural polarization South Asian adolescents sometimes found in their daily lives may lead them to believe that their home culture does not mix well with the one they experience outside their homes, the conventional stories found in films like *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham* provide them (and the worldwide moviegoing community) with a different understanding of society, one that speaks, to use Hall's and Gilroy's words, of cultural hybridity, shared meanings and the questioning of absolutes as regards nation and identity. Likewise, while they may feel isolated because of their mixed identity (born and brought up in Britain but of South Asian ancestry), films like these may help them negotiate their place in society (and may help audiences assimilate the transnational, multicultural nature of contemporary societies).

South Asian diasporic cinema is usually viewed as an expression of multiculturalism that made visible the South Asian diasporic filmmakers and the problems they faced in the western world but also as a form of nostalgia. Although, as Jigna Desai (42) observes, this kind of cinema emerged years before, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that it started to be taken into consideration by the film industry and that found less obstacles to be made and to reach the general public. It is clear that the success of these films lays in the fact that they are made in English and distributed by US companies and, consequently, they reach a wider audience. The films made by British Asian filmmakers (as well as those made about the South Asian community) usually deal with topics such as multiculturalism and racism through a gender or sexual lens. They make minority communities the focus of the story and their main objective is

to explore the difficult experience of the members of these communities that question the worldview of their elders.

In India, cinema has had an important role in the articulation of national identity. The passion for cinema that immigrants brought from their mother country continued in Britain as part of the construction and perpetuation of their identity. These people saw cinema as an artistic expression for new generations to learn what their culture was like. As noted above, the first generation was afraid their roots and traditions were forgotten and regarded movies as a way of maintaining them even in Britain. However, South Asian diasporic cinema in Britain has changed in the last decades and has started to address the experiences of second generation immigrants. This is the case, for example, of films like *My Beautiful Launderette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, 1993), *Brothers in Trouble* (Udayan Prasad, 1995), *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham*.

The representation and exploration of South Asian communities in Britain had already been dealt with in other media. For example, the soap opera *Coronation Street* and sketch comedies like *Goodness Gracious Me* or the different projects of [Sacha Baron Coen](#)'s alter ego Ali G became the gateway of South Asian accents, traditions, music and fashion into mainstream British culture. In that respect, Geetanjali Jha (15) points out that

the truth and objectivity in representation of people and cultures in cinema can be a significant influence on shaping social attitudes of society. Films as a cultural medium may reflect dominant attitudes in society and also play a pivotal role in the shaping of our perceptions and ideas. [...] Films have evolved as an important source of information about the identities and distant cultures for Western audiences.

The cultural industry can be said to have responded to the demands of a hybrid, heterogeneous, multi-ethnic society. It has represented the emergence of a new

generation of immigrants that are in the process of assimilation into British society in various ways, dealing with and blending different perspectives on religion, class, gender and sexuality. That is, popular media plays a key role in explaining the new Britain to the people, and cinema is instrumental in creating opinion trends and in modifying attitudes towards cultural diversity. Srividya Ramasubramanian (243) states that

mass media portrayals undoubtedly play a very important role in influencing people's attitudes towards out-groups, especially when presented in very realistic ways in media such as films. Films play an important role in shaping ethnic and national identities, especially in the absence of much face-to-face interactions with these groups. They help to create and perpetuate national stereotypes. [...] Over a period of time, through repeated exposure to the same or similar stereotypical depictions across films and across narratives in different media sites, we unintentionally and often unconsciously start accumulating these bits and pieces of information about the social group in such a way that we develop a "schema" or a quick short-cut reference for the social group.

Ramasubramanian draws from the work of Ananda Mitra to explain the characterization and *stereotypization* of Indian characters in the Western film industry. The dominant convention is to establish a cultural contrast appealing to the different skin color or to how customs like those related to dress differ from Western traditions. While, as Jha argues (16), Indian people were represented in the West through a very limited set of stereotypes like the belly dancer, the tribespeople and the colonial subjects wearing turbans and saris, recent films have increasingly rejected simplistic caricatures of this sort and have represented South Asian communities in more complex and realistic ways – it is important to note that in cases like *Bend It like Beckham*, which was made by a woman of Sikh Indian origin, it is the South Asian community itself that has taken upon itself the representation of their communities.

In *Bend It like Beckham*, for example, Gurinder Chadha draws from the conventions of romantic comedy plots to address conflicts related to race and love

relationships. In this way, the film, the story of an Indian girl who wants to play football, challenges the dominant traditions of her family, and not only manages to subvert South Asian norms related to the behavior of girls and their place in society, but puts to the test prevailing western taboos like multiracial romances. When dealing with a film like *Bend It like Beckham*, it is important to take into account the use that the director makes of narrative film conventions. In this particular case, Chadha had recourse to recognizable conventions drawn from romantic comedies and adapted them to represent the love story between Jess and her coach Joe. In *Terms of Endearment: Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s*, Peter Evans and Celestino Deleyto underline the adaptability and the social function of romantic comedies. By manipulating conventions from, among other genres, romantic comedies, these films adapt themselves to specific cultural contexts. In particular, discourses on identity and adult responsibilities can be put together through the specific perception of romantic love that derives from the film. At the end, as Evans and Deleyto note (4), “It is the project of a life together for the two characters with which the film predictably finishes is based on the mutual awareness of each other’s new’ selves.”

More recently, by adopting a different, less doctrinaire approach to genre that regards films not as romantic comedies but as texts that reshuffle the conventions of romantic comedy in specific ways, Celestino Deleyto has illustrated how films relate with their context. In her review of Deleyto’s *The Secret Life of Romantic Comedy*, Beatriz Oria (113) lays out the elements around which romantic comedies revolve:

Deleyto provides a revised definition of the genre, which he describes as the intersection of three elements: the articulation of culturally specific discourses on relationships between the sexes, a space of transformation in which this articulation takes place, and a comic perspective which filters the whole narrative.

*Bend It like Beckham* is built upon similar premises: the love relationship is framed within a very specific cultural context (the settlement of Indian immigrants in Britain, the cultural conflicts between different races and between first and second generation immigrants, as well as the taboo of miscegenation) and comedy conventions are used both to explain the cultural challenges faced by multi-ethnic societies and to naturalize and help assimilate these challenges. In *Romantic Comedy*, Claire Mortimer (4) suggests a division of the plot of romantic comedies into several stages:

Boy meets girl, various obstacles prevent them from being together, coincidences and complications ensue, ultimately leading to the couple's realization that they were meant to be together. In keeping with the comedy genre, the narrative concludes with a happy ending, with the final union of the couple.

Although this structure is usually followed by all filmmakers, it is important to note that it is often adapted to the context in which the films are made and, in this way, the story makes a statement about certain issues of contemporary society. In the case of *Bend It like Beckham*, the obstacles to surmount are clear: the couple meet and they fall in love, but as they belong to different backgrounds, they have to overcome the cultural differences that preclude their love.

As will be shown below, for Jess's family, it is unthinkable that she should marry a man that does not belong to her community. So, apart from issues related to the behavior or the attire of girls, the romantic plot brings the issue of race and the generational conflict to the foreground. Jess challenges her parents' traditions when she falls in love with Joe and the two consider starting a relationship. When it comes to questions of personal freedom and women's rights, Jess feels more identified with British culture and that is why she fights to be with Joe, although she knows this will create a conflict with her family.



In terms of genre, *East is East* is more complex than *Bend It like Beckham*. In line with Deleyto's view on genre described above, *East is East* uses the conventions of romantic comedies – along with conventions borrowed from other genres – to depict various cultural and generational conflicts between a Pakistani immigrant and his children. It is noteworthy, for example, that the film starts with the wedding of Nazir, the eldest son. The marriage had been arranged by his father and Nazir walks out of the ceremony before the ritual is completed. Although the film also touches upon other issues and borrows from other genres, this early reworking of romantic comedy conventions brings to the fore the social dimension of the story. The mismatched couple and the aborted wedding are connected with the conflict between two different cultural traditions. The comic tone recurs when the father arranges the marriages of two other sons in the Pakistani tradition and when Nazir reappears with his perfect partner, who happens to be a man.

### **The case of *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham***

I have selected *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham* because both were made roughly at the same time – and therefore the social and cultural context they address is the same – and because both deal with the conflicting views of South Asian immigrants and their UK-born children.

The opening sequence of *East is East* condenses the ongoing conflict in the Khan family between the stern, traditional father on the one hand and his wife and children on the other. It also shows the recurrent pattern used in the film to depict the conflicts between father and children. The scene shows a Christian procession in the streets of Salford. The children of the Khans are taking part in it while the mother,

knowing that his husband would disapprove of it, as it is not a Muslim ceremony, watches attentively. When they see the father approaching, and with the help of their British mother, the children leave the procession, start running and take a detour through a different street to avoid being caught by their father. Then the film cuts to a crane shot in which the screen is divided in two by a row of terraced houses. On the right half of the screen, the procession continues its course; on the left half, the children run to join the procession again once his father has disappeared. In this shot, the row of houses suggests the barrier that separates both the two generations of the Khan family and the Christian and Muslim cultures that live in Britain. This visual composition anticipates the storyline that makes the backbone of the film: a continuous struggle or negotiation for identity in the context of cultural difference and hybridity as well as shifting notions of the nation along the lines exposed by Hall and Gilroy above. This is just the first time that children run away or hide from their father, but the film repeatedly uses this technique to show the gap between the two generations and the different cultural conflicts.

The preparation for the wedding ceremony uses editing techniques such as cross-cutting to show the contrast between the day-to-day life of the mother and the children and the religiosity of the father. All the children are downstairs getting ready for their brother's wedding; they are all fighting and arguing (the way children do) and the environment is noisy. Camera movements are fast and there is not attention to the characters, just an overall impression of haste and carelessness as they get ready. In contrast, the father is upstairs preparing the groom for the wedding in a mystical and ritualistic way according to the dictates of his religion. He observes and handles the garments with pleasure and admiration. The camera movements are slow, which contributes to the solemn tone of the scene, and the music, what we take to be a

traditional folk song from Pakistan, only adds to the spirituality of the moment while suggesting that the father clings to essential concepts of identity as opposed to the heterogeneity and diversity of his wife and children. The dressing ritual ends when the father puts a hat on his son's head. He is exulting because things are being done following the dictates of his religion even though they live in Britain, and, for him, this is something to be proud of. However, the happiness of the father contrasts with the seriousness (if not sadness) betrayed by that Nazir's lost look. Then, one of the younger sons says: "Looks great, Dad"; and the father answers: "Tradition, see, son? All our people wearing this." For the father tradition is very important; it is the element that connects him to his culture and his past in Pakistan. For him, it is also very important that his children follow his religious beliefs and maintain his traditions. What is more, this is the way he reacts against British culture and reinforces an essentialist view of identity that closes the eyes to the cultural diversity of contemporary societies.

The whole scene also touches upon gender issues. It is significant that the roles of the parents are so rigidly separated. While the man, who is supposed to be the head of the family, is upstairs doing those "important" things that are connected with his religious traditions, the mother, white and born in Great Britain, is downstairs in charge of all their children. Cultural and gender discrimination overlap in the film: not only is the mother left out of the ritual that surrounds the marriage of her son, but she is relegated to the traditional role of women as house maker and responsible for childcare. Furthermore, when she steps out of this role, she gets viciously beaten by her husband, plunging the film into the realm of melodrama.

In *Bend It like Beckham*, the generational conflict is plainly depicted in the scene after Mrs. Bhamra sees his daughter Jess playing football with several men in the park. Mrs. Bhamra is very angry with Jess because, according to her, that is not the way a girl

should behave. She accuses her daughter of running around half naked in front of men and tells Jess the things that are expected from her: to get married and learn how to cook dhal.

Mrs. Bhamra's main worries are, first, what other people will say if Jess behaves the way she does, which, according to their traditions, would bring shame to her family, and, secondly, that if she continues playing football instead of learning how to cook, she will not find a husband. "Now exams are over, I want you to learn full Punjabi dinner, meat and vegetarian!," says Mrs. Bhamra. "This is how it started with [our] niece the way that girl would answer back and then running off to become a model wearing small, small skirts!" What is more important for Mrs. Bhamra, due to the reckless behavior of her niece, her sister in law "hasn't been able to set foot in that temple since," and she wants to avoid that kind of shame. Her father is worried about appearances, too. He wants her to forget about football and start behaving like a "proper" woman, or rather, like a proper Indian woman. As he says, now that her sister is engaged, things are different because people will walk.

The conflict is very clearly shown through the different place the characters occupy in this scene. When Jess tells her parents that she is playing in a female football team and they start to argue, Mr. and Mrs. Bhamra are framed together in a medium shot while Jess is alone in the frame. Besides, the power relations surface through the different camera angles. Jess's parents are standing slightly over her and are therefore shot in low angle while Jess, who is sitting in a sofa, is shot from a high angle. These positions stand for the relationship between them at the time, a relationship marked by the conflict between, on the one hand, the Indian culture promoted by her parents, and which is here portrayed in terms of an "honorable" marriage and being able to cook traditional Indian recipes, and, on the other hand, British culture, which is

epitomized by football and, more particularly, by the tearing down of gender barriers that it symbolizes in the film.

Jess's upbringing echoes the experience of second generation immigrants in Britain. Outside her home, Jess has been exposed to a society which contradicts many of the norms she has been taught at home, and vice versa. Playing football, going out with boys and getting divorced is acceptable for a woman in British society, but it goes against the most basic precepts of Indian culture. What the film does is show how diaspora identity, to use Hall's words above, "lives with and through, not despite, difference," and how it is created in spaces and at times of cultural conflict.

This is achieved in several interrelated ways. First, the film is constructed upon conventions taken from the romantic comedy genre that work to signify both the conflict between cultures experienced by Jess and the resolution of this conflict. Secondly, the clash between Indian and British cultures is articulated through the opposition between Hindu marrying traditions on the one hand and football on the other. As was noted above, the lovers of romantic comedies have to overcome an obstacle that precludes their love before they come together and live happily ever after; and this formulaic storyline comments on the challenges faced by society. Jess is in love with Joe and they are repeatedly depicted apart, which indicates that that is how they should remain according to Indian traditions. Jess should follow the dictates of her family, and marry an Indian man. Yet, after her sister's wedding, once her parents give Jess permission to go to a US university with a scholarship, she meets Joe in the football pitch at night to tell him the news. Then, the two embrace and the camera starts revolving around the couple as if sealing their union in what can be interpreted as the conventional happy ending of romantic comedies. This is confirmed with the promise of love with which the film ends.

One particular sequence depicts the two different worlds in which Jess is living and the contrast between these two worlds and the complex connections and hybridization of cultures. The day her sister gets married following the Hindu ritual, Jess plays an important football game. By crosscutting between both events, the film conveys its take on multiculturalism. The narrative alternates by means of parallel editing between the wedding reception, with all the relatives wearing traditional and colorful Indian clothing and dancing to Hindi music and the football game, with the girls wearing football shirts, shorts and boots. In this way, the two cultural expressions that have marked Jess's life are contrasted. However, there are also elements that bridge the cultural and the generational gap. The diegetic music in the wedding scenes continues playing extradiegetically when the narrative shifts to the football game and this reveals how Jess feels about her mixed cultural inheritance. The complex intermingling of cultures and the decision of Jess is also articulated during the football game when she has a free kick at the very end. Before she throws, a subjective shot shows that, in Jess's eyes, the players that have lined up for the wall are the women of her family. This is a very symbolic scene because, in kicking the ball over the wall, Jess metaphorically overcomes the obstacles she has encounters for being of Indian descent.

More significant is the short scene I referred to in the opening lines of this essay. When the football game ends Jess has to dress up in traditional Indian attire and rush to her sister's wedding reception. A wide, high-angle shot in the women's locker room captures how all her teammates warp Jess in a colorful sari. The happy, playful atmosphere and the trouble-free juxtaposition of the two cultures signify the hybrid identities developed in a globalized world and, in general terms, send out an optimistic message.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this essay was to get a better sense of the way cinema has dealt with the generational conflicts between first and second generation South Asian immigrants in Britain. When seen in the context both of the changes in immigration in recent decades and of the narrative resources used to represent these cultural conflicts, we can better comprehend the challenges faced by contemporary multi-ethnic societies. First generation immigrants tended to approach questions of culture, identity and nation in very essentialist ways and they still want their children to follow their religious and cultural traditions regardless of the country they are living in. They saw the culture of the host country as threat to their values and their traditions, and they try to prevent hybridization. Their fear becomes more pressing than ever with the coming of age of their children. Children have been exposed to two different cultures. Like their parents, they belong to the immigrant community. Unlike them, they have been exposed from an early age to a different, sometimes contradictory set of norms and values. As I have tried to show, films like *East is East* and *Bend It like Beckham*, apart from playing a central role in the dissemination of different values within each community, capture all these conflicts and contradictions and help immigrants and non-immigrants alike deal with the challenges faced by contemporary, transnational communities.

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