Reconceptualising notions of South African Indianess: a personal narrative

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By

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Abstract

The theoretical challenge of conceptualising South African Indianess is suffused with a plethora of variables that suggest complexity. While being misleadingly homogenous, Indian identity encompasses a multitude of expressions. This thesis seeks to reconceptualise notions of South African Indianess through personal narrative. The research context is contemporary South Africa with a specific focus on Johannesburg’s East Rand Reef. Inspired by the dearth of literature on contemporary Indianess this study addresses the gap in the present discourse. Following the autoethnographic work of Motzafi-Haller (1997) and Narayan (1993) the thesis presents a layered narrative by juxtaposing the experiences of research participants with my own.

Using multi-sited autoethnographic data the thesis explores the question of what it means to be Indian in relation to South Africa’s Apartheid past. By drawing on concepts in popular diaspora theory and critiquing their application, the thesis illustrates the inadequacies inherent in the definitions of diaspora and suggests a broader understanding of its application. Through exploring layers of Indianess the thesis illustrates the inherent complexity in reconceptualising South African Indianess. The study suggests that as a result of changing global and local flows, South African Indians are reconceptualising what it means to be South African Indian.
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Obeisance

I prostrate unto that eternal flow of tradition, from teacher to teacher, which starts with Lord Shiva in the beginning, Adi Sankaracharya in the middle, and my own teacher, fully aware that this is not the end of this tradition, it will continue to flow through me into the future.¹

¹ Edited translation from Vedanta Samhita 2010 (http://vedantasamhita.blogspot.com/)
For Michael Walsh
Who taught me how to see
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And finally, I humbly prostrate at the feet of The Great Spirit from whom all things come and return to.
Introduction

The theoretical challenge of conceptualising South African Indianess is suffused with a plethora of variables that suggest complexity. Deceptively homogenous, “Indian” is a classifying term usually given to members of racial, religious and cultural categories originating from India. India has more than two thousand ethnic groups, and every major religion is represented (Library of Congress 20042). Additionally, there are approximately 850 languages and 1,600 dialects spoken in India (ibid.). The underrepresentation of South African Indians in the academy is evidenced by the dearth of literature on contemporary Indianess. This study aims to fill that gap and poses the question; does “Indian” mean “from India”, or have South African Indians begun to define their own unique Indianess?

Indianess as an identity is further complicated by migration (Atal 2004, Radhakrishnan 2003, Raghuram and Sahoo 2008, Singh 2003, Vertovec 1999, 2000, 2004) and in South Africa, the number of South Africans identifying as Indian South Africans is estimated at 1.2 million (Statistics South Africa Census 2001). Largely based in Johannesburg’s East Rand Reef, this research’s primary focus is South African Indianess in terms of its Apartheid past.

Before entering the field, I had the preconception that Hindus understand themselves through ritual. Accordingly my initial periods of data collection were focussed on Hindus, ritual and temples. Through complete participant-observation (Spradley 1980) I soon realised that Hindus do not exclusively understand themselves through ritual. Rather, the constitutive elements of what-Hindus-are lead to ritual. Through questioning these constitutive elements I have found that they can broadly be described as Indianess.

2 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/India
Encouraged by the autoethnographic work of Motzafi-Haller (1997) and Narayan (1993) *Reconceptualising South African Indianess* is a study presented through personal narrative. As an autoethnography, the process of inquiry begins with my socialisation and upbringing in the Indian township of Bakerton, Springs (the context of my research). This context (outlined in chapter one) provides my motivations for conducting the research including the social-processes that led me to ask my research question.

A concept\(^3\) is defined as an idea or notion about something or someone. Therefore reconceptualisation, for the purpose of this thesis, is the process of rethinking ideas or notions which are related to issues of Indianess. In the process towards reconceptualising, I have found an allegory in Draupadi, the wife of the five Pandava brothers in the great Hindu epic the Mahabharata. Tharoor’s (1989) contemporary literary reinterpretation of the Mahabharata, *The Great Indian Novel*, draws its originality and title\(^4\) from the epic. Tharoor’s reconceptualisation of this ancient epic into a contemporary narrative is a source of inspiration in conceptualising this study.

Drawing the same inspiration, Tharoor’s description of Draupadi’s beauty eloquently expresses my enchantment with Indianess. Through substituting Indianess for Draupadi in Tharoor’s descriptions, I find myself drawn to a parallel description of what Indianess is and its allure. Tharoor describes Draupadi as having a beauty that

‘‘...attracted both men and women, both young and old. ... When I saw her ... I wanted the radiance of that flame to spread, to engulf everyone I knew within its warmth. ...Hers was not a beauty that held itself aloof; it was not arrogant, nor withdrawn, nor self-obsessed, indeed not even self-sufficient. ... This was the beauty of Draupadi, a beauty that glowed in the


\(^4\) In Sanskrit, *Maha* means great and *Bharat* means India (Tharoor 1989:Preface)
open, that drew sustenance from the public gaze. The more people behold her, the more beautiful she seemed.” (ibid.:309)

For my purposes, an analogy of Indianess is not solely found in descriptions of Draupadi’s beauty. In her life-story disrobing\(^5\) in the Royal Court of her in-laws a useful allegory for my own process to scrutinise Indianess. Through the exhaustive stripping-away of layers, I surmise that Draupadi’s disrobing is symbolic of my efforts to understand Indianess which nevertheless remains elusive. The aim of this study therefore, is not to present South African Indianess as a concretised set of characteristics and forms, but rather to open up conversations to an Indianess which remains to me; enigmatic. Accordingly, as an “evocative autoethnographer”, I have kept the focus of this thesis on “narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses” (Ellingson and Ellis 2008:445).

In the reconceptualisation of South African Indianess, chapter one is a means of setting the scene. The chapter begins with a focus on the research context. This is presented through a description of life-events, social and thought-processes that have led me to adduce this thesis as autoethnography. As an autoethnographic project, the context provides my motivations for conducting the research including the social-processes that led me to ask my research question; what does it mean to be a South African Indian? The chapter additionally outlines the field of my research. In this section, I describe the initial stages of my data collection and the deep inner conflicts during that time as a means to illustrate evolution of my research question. In so doing, I illustrate the progression of my research topic from ritual in Hinduism to Indian identity. This further serves to foreground my experiences during fieldwork - as

\(^{5}\) Draupadi is disrobed by her brother-in-law (Dushasana) in full view of her family elders. During the incident, she is wearing a sari which is pulled from her body at one end. According to the story, Draupadi prays to God to protect her from appearing naked before her elders and by a miracle, the cloth extends infinitely leaving Dushasana exhausted and Draupadi still-covered.
process - in terms of the ethnography presented. The chapter also outlines the research participants and methods of data collection. It also highlights the challenges I experienced during fieldwork and write-up of my research and outlines solutions employed to overcome them. The chapter concludes with a discussion of ethical issues.

In chapter two, I present the conceptual tools used to unpack and understand my data. In this chapter I outline critical concepts used in understanding and unpacking the research question. This chapter includes an in-depth discussion of the concept of diaspora and discusses its validity as a conceptual framework in understanding South African Indians and their realities. In reconceptualising notions of South African Indianess, I draw on theories and concepts presented by scholars such as; Appadurai (2003), Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (2006), Mukadam and Mawani (2006), Radhkrishnan (2003), and Vertovec (1997, 2001, 2004). I critically analyse the concept of diaspora and its application. Using Vertovec’s three meanings of diaspora (2004), I argue that current definitions of diaspora are too narrow in conceptualising South African Indianess while notions of transnationalism are too broad. Even so, diaspora remains relevant as a form of consciousness; “a collective awareness” (Vertovec 2004:46) resulting in what I describe as tense oscillation between the various factors that constitute South African Indianess. This understanding allows for what Narayan calls “an enactment of hybridity” (1993). I contend that enacting hybridity facilitates an illustration of the inherent complexity in reconceptualising South African Indianess.

Chapter three of this study approaches external expressions and representations of Indianess. Through the story of Raj and Anita’s wedding, Sayali’s experiences and my own encounters I illustrate the challenges in navigating the tense relationship between Indianess and modernity. This relationship, described in chapter two as a tense oscillation, is explored throughout the thesis as layered narrative; jutaxposing the experiences of my research participants with my own. The chapter
further explores difference and similarity between Indians who may externally present as similar, but who are different. The questions that arise out of unpacking difference and similarity lead my discussion to unpacking the impact India has had on my perceptions of Indianess.

The fourth chapter explores internal drivers influencing external expressions of Indianess. The first half of the chapter discusses how identity was driven by institutional mandates of the Apartheid state. Through engaging an in-depth discussion of Apartheid policies that affected identity, the ethnography illustrates the effects of Apartheid policies on the perceptions and expressions of Indianess. Key concepts in this chapter are drawn from Ebr-Vally’s seminal work; *Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa* (2001). The chapter raises issues of representation and further questions whether cultural and religious representation assumes an authenticity which is “a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of the dominant group” (Radhakrishnan 2003:127). The second half of the chapter deals with family-as-microcosm of culture and again in reference to Apartheid policies unpacks “what makes one Indian”. Through the narratives of Hansa Kaki and Villopa Masi I illustrate that simple acts in the work of reproduction are not only informed by notions of tradition, culture and religion, but are underscored by the effects of the past.

To answer the question of South African Indianess thoroughly, chapter five explores complex and inherent contradictions in perceptions of Indianess. Through my encounters with Mahmoud Bhai at the beauty parlour, a discussion of Indian migrants and the events surrounding the 2013 Gupta-family wedding scandal, I explore the inherent contradictions in the deification of India. Layers of Indianess communicate the idea that South African Indians and Indians are similar yet different. Further, by examining the effects of Apartheid instituted boundaries, I demonstrate that past perceptions of South African Indianess were informed by boundaries that were “emblematic of forms of difference” (Bashkow 2004:443-444). This chapter concludes
with the supposition that South Africans may have been living in continual presentations of past but, as a result of global and local flows, are now reconceptualising what it means to be South African Indian.

To facilitate legibility of the text I have opted to differentiate between diasporic Indians and Indian nationals with the use of emphasis. Therefore, when “Indian” appears as un-italic text the word refers to diasporic Indians and when italic refers to Indian nationals.
Methodology

Inquiry is investigation into the nature of the Self, how the world is created, who created it and of what substance it is made. (Adi Shankaracharya, Aparokshanobhuti:Verse 12)6

As the title suggests, this chapter will outline fieldwork methodologies. This chapter delineates the field of research and the research sample. Due to its autoethnographic nature, the research context is presented as a brief narrative of my childhood experiences and later life influences on perceptions of Indianess. Various challenges encountered during fieldwork are reviewed as well as issues arising during my research write-up. Solutions to these challenges are presented conjointly.

Field of Research

“Indian” is the homogeneous term given to members of racial, religious and cultural categories originating from India. The homogeneity of this term is decidedly deceptive. India has more than two thousand ethnic groups, and every major religion is represented (Library of Congress 20047). There are approximately 850 languages and 1,600 dialects spoken in India (ibid.). The vast cultural diversity of the sub-continent questions the seemingly irrational homogenisation of this identity, which is further complicated by migration (Atal 2004, Radhakrishnan 2003, Raghuram and Sahoo 2008, Singh 2003, Vertovec 1999, 2000, 2004). Crossing India’s shores, “overseas Indians are found in as many as 53 countries” (Jain 1993:2-3 in Jayaram 2008:1) and of that, the number of South Africans identifying as Indian South Africa’s is estimated at 1.2 million (Statistics South Africa Census 2001). This research’s primary focus is South African Indians and South African Indianess.

6 http://sanskritdocuments.org/
7 http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/India
**Research Question**

The primary research question for this thesis is: what does it mean to be a South African Indian?

Does “Indian” mean “from India”, or have South African Indians begun to define their own unique Indianess? The challenge of this question lies in conceptualising what it is to be Indian, to whom and why. What is Indian today is not necessarily Indian tomorrow and what is Indian for one is not necessarily Indian for another. As the narrative of my childhood illustrates the research question is bound to the context of my personal narrative and the questions of Indianess I have asked of myself.

**Research Participants**

The sample population of this research is second-generation and onward Indian South Africans (denoted without emphasis throughout the text), Indian immigrants (Indian transmigrants) and Indians I had encountered in India during my travels, which form part of the autoethnography in this thesis.

**Research Methods**

After an unexpected turn of events in the first year of my registration (2010) for my Master of Arts, I was required to change the topic of my master’s thesis more than half-way through the research for my first topic (in a completely different field). I found myself deeply distressed and anxious. My primary interest in reading for a Masters dissertation was the skills and intellectual training I would gain from my studies. Further, I was determined not to let my studies continue beyond the customary two-year period. Accordingly finding the appropriate topic was vital to ensuring that I gained the necessary skills without compromising my time-commitments. After rejecting a number of possible topics that I had a vague interest in, I settled on a topic in the field of ritual within Hinduism because I have always had an interest in my faith and culture. I believed I had sufficient insider-knowledge to
form the basis for a study and would be able to fill the gaps in my knowledge through fieldwork and thus provide a comprehensive study. As this chapter illustrates, my data collection and fieldwork revealed issues of identity I had not anticipated encountering during the planning of my fieldwork. As a result, the evolution of my fieldsite from a single geographic location (Actonville, Benoni) to a multi-sited ethnographic project (Marcus 2006) was propelled by my understandings and conceptualisations of identity and Indianess. Although I draw heavily from my experiences in India, this study is not a comparison of culture between India and South Africa by any means. Here, my experiences in India act as a catalyst in fashioning my initial ideas and research agenda during the latter stages of fieldwork.

Research Setting

I formally began my data collection in the Indian township of Actonville, Benoni on the East Rand of Johannesburg at the end of June 2011 at three mandirs8. These mandirs or temples were the Shree Radha Krishna Mandir, Shree Ved Vidya Mandir and the Benoni Siva Alayam. The pandits9 of these mandirs were also identified as potential key research participants10 – Chetan Bhai Shukla, Mahendra Bhai Bhoola and Vaatiyar respectively. The initial fieldwork period was planned to start at the end of June 2011 which according to the Gujarati lunar calendar is the start of the holy month of Shraavan, continue over the nine-day festival of the Goddess Kali or Durga(Navraatri) leading to the build-up before Diwali (early October) and culminating at the end of October 2011.

8 Hindu place of worship also known as temple
9 Priest/s
10 Having received permission to use their names, Chetan Bhai, Mahendra Bhai and Vaatiyar’s identities have not been obscured.
Introductions to key participants

My initial introduction to the fieldsites was made prior to 2011 when I formally began my fieldwork. I was familiar with the geographical territory of Benoni and I was also well acquainted with Chetan Bhai and Mahendra Bhai – the two pandits at the Radha Krishna and Sri Veda Vidya Mandirs respectively. Not only was I a regular at the temple but my family enjoyed a long association with the pandits through family-hosted prayers and involvement in temple and social activities. The only introduction needed was to the priest at the Benoni Siva Alayam which I procured without difficulty. These three priests were selected because of their knowledge of puja\(^{11}\) (Burgess 1984).

My entry into the temples was unceremonious and a disappointment. As an overly self-conscious neophyte, I suffered from lack of confidence in my research agenda which in retrospect was perhaps the first sign that my true interest lay elsewhere. I vividly recall my introduction to Vaatiyar at the Benoni Siva Alayam. Ahead of going to the temple, I debated whether to call Vaatiyar first or to simply arrive at the temple as a devotee would. Having decided to be “as native as possible” and not to call I arrived at the temple pensive and incredibly nervous. This was unusual because as a Hindu (and certainly not a stranger to the temple) I didn’t expect to feel any discomfort (June 2011). This sense of nervousness would later illustrate the cultural differences between linguistic groups. I prostrated before the primary deity of the temple – Lord Shiva in the form of a Shivling\(^{12}\) – and said a silent prayer asking for His favour. After having greeted the deity, I sought out Vaatiyar who was busy preparing for the afternoon offerings in the inner sanctum.

I stood to towards the side entrance of the temple careful not to sit or lean against a pillar, concerned that I appear sloppy or unprofessional. After a few

\[^{11}\text{Ritual prayer}\]
\[^{12}\text{Symbolic representation of the Hindu deity Shiva}\]
moments, Vaatiyar exited the sanctum and we were able to talk. While I waited for Vaatiyar, I grappled with what I would say to him. Mentally, I questioned how I would explain my study, anthropological data-collection methods (participant-observation (Stewart 1998)) and my research aims. It simply did not seem sufficient to say: I want to observe puja. Finally facing him I found myself fumbling for words and clumsily introducing myself and explaining that I was starting a study of puja\textsuperscript{13} and that I further wanted to observe him. There followed a brief moment of silence as he contemplated my request and looked up at me and said “the temple is open to you”. That was it!

Two months later I had lost a sense of direction. My observations pointed to lived experiences that I had not thought of prior to entry into the field and as a result, the way I approached the field as well as questions of the field that I asked myself changed.

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\textsuperscript{13}Ritual prayer
Multi-sited Ethnography

At the start of formal fieldwork, there were three neatly defined field-sites. As my data collection progressed and with increased interactions with people during and outside of ritual, I began to realise that there was a deeper issue to what I was observing during ritual. My fieldsite ceased to be a neatly defined location but rather environments where Indians interacted. Gupta and Ferguson’s argument towards multi-sited fieldwork asserts that

“space itself becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organisation are inscribed. It is in this way that space functions as a central organising principle on the social sciences at the same time that it disappears from analytical purview”. (1992:7)

Conceptualising the social environments as a “neutral grid” on which I could understand identity I took every opportunity I had as a chance to collect data. I observed and noted wherever I could – at the beauty parlour, Indian restaurants, weddings, social and family gatherings. My work became a multi-sited ethnography which revealed a complex array of issues ranging from politics to the mundane (Markus 2006). Effectively, I had appropriated any topic of conversation or any contact with Indians (or anything Indian) to data-collection. Marcus’ case in favour of multi-sited fieldwork and critiquing the limitations of traditional ethnography allowed me to “reorient... the idea of the social in situated cultural analysis” (2006:620) to one where multiple locations provide a fieldsite for the observation of one thing – Indianess. The evolution of my field-site from a geographically limited environment to a more fluid multipurpose environment allowed me “innovative ways of bounding the potentially unbounded” (Marcus 2006:619). Multi-sited fieldwork also worked well due to the historical effects of the socio-political climate of Apartheid South Africa. Apartheid succeeded in creating self-influencing cultural climates for the various racial groups by largely isolating them from each other via a number of legislated acts including the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Singh 2005). The creation of “Indian townships” such as


Bakerton was one such example of this. With the fall of the Apartheid state these state-imposed boundaries no longer apply. By employing multi-sited fieldwork I gained access to a wider variety of locations while continually observing the same thing. As a result I broadened my fieldsite gradually until I noticed that I was observing and writing about my interactions with Indians wherever I went.

**Participant Observation**

Ethnographic fieldwork is characterised by participant observation as a data collection method (Stewart 1998). According to Steward participant observation is defined as “the up-close involvement of the researcher in some form of participative role, in the natural, ‘every-day’ setting to be studied (ibid.:6). Most of my data collection was done through participant observation.

Approximately two months into data collection it became blatantly clear that I was interested in a deeper issue of Indianess and realised I wouldn’t find the answers to the question I could not yet articulate through observing *puja*. I developed an “explicit awareness” of “the things usually blocked out to avoid overload” (Spradley 1980:55). In an attempt to find a solution to the endless riddle in my head I began to interview people about their everyday practices as Hindus. In an attempt to find deeper understanding – to reach for the deeper meaning I spoke to people about their personal faith practices – what they did in their homes, what they did as a family, what practices were unique to their *jat* and so forth. I still was not satisfied with the answers. Although all my interviewees were welcoming and obliging (and I continue to feel tremendous gratitude to them for their time and efforts to engage) I felt something profound lacking in the direction of my data collection. As my research progressed I further realised that my place in the field as a researcher was highly

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27 *Jat* is loosely translated as caste. The issue of caste and why it has not be included in the research is dealt with later in the chapter under ethics.
intrusive. I was no longer a native and had become an outsider (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987; Strathern 1987) I desperately yearned to reach into the hearts of Indian South Africans and understand what they internalized as “being Indian”. Through reflecting on my informal observations (that is, without my Dictaphone, camera or on-site note-taking), I began to formalise my observations with field-notes and recordings whenever and wherever I had contact with Indians. In so doing, I had embraced “the highest level of involvement for ethnographers” by studying a situation in which I was already an ordinary participant (Spradley 1980:61).

According to my original plan, I was to begin formal interviewing at the end of a month or two of observation. This plan included the taking of life histories as well as doing focus group discussions with age-grouped Indians. By the end of my first month of fieldwork I had conducted in-depth interviews with approximately ten people both within and outside the temples and found these interactions to be unnatural and somewhat orchestrated. It seemed to me that interviewees often censored themselves and because I felt that there were deeper issues in what I was observing and experiencing I very quickly found that I was uncertain and experienced an acute sense of being “out of my depth”. I felt the anxiousness of “missing the point”, this “point” being something I could neither conceptualise nor capture. With the evolution of my ideas and thoughts regarding my research question and data collection, I began to feel the necessity to adjust my methods. In response, my fieldwork plans began to adapt to accommodate the people and the practises in various environments I encountered (Motzafi-Haller 1997).

Throughout the period of fieldwork, I found myself trying to artificially separate my nativeness from my anthropological inclinations/agenda going so far as to keeping two separate diaries – one for field-notes and the other for personal thoughts. I refused to acknowledge that my study could be academic or scholarly while I was so deeply embedded in the research and the field.
Nevertheless, I clung stubbornly to the ego-feeding role of investigator, taking pride in my power to be a voice for “my people” and determined to discover “The Truth” of what seemed a single reality. As Dragez observes of Soviet anthropologists, “[t]here is also a sense of urgency among Soviet anthropologists in their field to record customs and the reminiscences of elderly people before they are lost” (1987:157) and I too felt a responsibility to capture this moment in time not only as an ode to my ancestors but for posterity too (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987). It was only when I let go the sense of responsibility and authority that I was able to confront my data and indeed myself with honesty and a sense of supplication.

Autoethnography

When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture’s relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand their culture (Maso 2001) … when researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011:276)

Autoethnography is described as a method, which is both a process and a product (ibid.). Unfortunately, definitions and applications of autoethnography have “evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult” (ibid.:449). Therefore for the purposes of this thesis autoethnography is understood as a form of self-reflection and writing that explores my life experiences and connects it to wider cultural, social, religious and political meanings and understandings (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011; Ellingson and Ellis 2008; Motzafi-Haller 1997). As a form of self-reflection and writing, autoethnography did not form a greater part of method in terms of process but rather emerged as an end-product process. In a similar manner that “a researcher who had experienced [oppression in her own life] and had become conscious of it in ways that significantly inform her scholarship is more likely … to write critically – to write from a
position of social and political engagement” (Motzafi-Haller 1997:217 emphasis in original); I too had recognised that my own struggle with identity had lead me to approach the data with similar questions of identity. These questions of identity lead me to engage differently with my data during my write-up to when I began data collection.

What follows is a personal narrative that seeks to contextualise myself as a researcher and as a native anthropologist. It seeks to afford the reader an understanding into various physical, mental, emotional and spiritual processes that have informed data collection and analysis. The context is written as a reflexive piece elucidating the pre-existing challenges and questions I have had of Indianess.

**Contextualising Personal Narrative**

I’m a larnie\(^28\). Or so I’ve been told.

Bakerton is the Indian township of Springs town on the East Rand of Johannesburg. Its streets are caked with fine, red dust and the yellow mine-dumps surrounding the town send clouds of sulphurous grit floating into homes at the slightest breeze. The streets of my childhood town are busy and to my naïve eyes everyone knows each other. Bakerton is home to a relatively small\(^29\) community\(^30\) of Indians – Hindus and Muslims combined. In itself, the town is fairly self-sufficient. The shops lining the main-road adequately cater to the needs of the residents and the children attend the government school for Indians. There are basic medical facilities by way of a doctor and a clinic. Recreational facilities for soccer, cricket, squash and tennis have been accommodated at Bakerton Stadium. The Bakerton of my childhood

\(^{28}\)Colloquial term implying the individual is assuming a farcical behaviour, for example, displaying wealth or a sense of self-importance based on adopted practices of the upper-class.

\(^{29}\)In comparison to neighbouring Benoni and Lenasia (closer to Johannesburg).

\(^{30}\)I use community here with full understanding of its contentious use. Additionally, the use of the word illustrates “Indian community” as a self-identification.
is a safe area and its children are free to play in the streets and in the open fields in pockets of the town, some even showing bravado by venturing to the dangerous mine-dumps.

Springs Central, or “town” as it is known, is a 10 minute drive and apart from being the central shopping-area; the post-office, magistrate’s court, home affairs offices and a number of other administrative buildings can also be found. In Apartheid South Africa, co-educational schools for white children lie to the south of town in the “white” areas of Selcourt and Selection Park – about 20 minutes by car from Bakerton. The only Catholic (and private) school in Springs is in town. Known as Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Convent and St. Brendans’s Christian Brother’s College, these Catholic schools31 were the only schools in Springs-town to accept students of all races. While my Indian peers and cousins attended the school in Bakerton, I was sent to the Catholic convent school in “town”. This was an anathema in a fairly conservative Indian society in Apartheid where one stayed out of trouble by following “the rules” (Singh 2005).

31 Veritas College was founded in 1992 with the amalgamation of the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy and Saint Brendan’s Christian Brothers College. Both had been gender based schools but were joined to be co-educational.
As the child of an out-of-caste marriage when caste marriages (and that too, arranged marriages) were the norm, my life seems tinted by the unusual. My story begins with my parents who had met each other at the only university open to Indian students – the University of Durban-Westville. My mother (Ba), the youngest daughter of four children was sent to school in India at five. At that time, my grandmother’s (Ajima’s) brother – Uttam Ranchod, saw a bleak future for South Africa under the Apartheid government. He along with my grandmother’s younger sister and my grandparents decided on the very difficult decision of sending their children to India to study. At that time, Ba was only five years old and the decision was made to send the elder children abroad while making arrangements for the younger children later. Ba, showing conviction of purpose from a young age, protested greatly and wished to join her siblings (my eldest uncle (Mama\textsuperscript{32}) and her elder sister (Masiba\textsuperscript{33})) and her cousins to India. With a heavy heart Ajima relented to the headstrong wishes of her youngest daughter and Ba joined the group journeying to India. After beginning in Shimla in north India, the group travelled through the subcontinent inching southwards – struggling to find an appropriate place where all the children felt comfortable and settled. Finally settling in Bangalore, the group – three boys and three girls, found a place they could call home.

At the end of his schooling, Mama left for the UK to pursue tertiary education and shortly afterward Masiba similarly completed her schooling and returned to South Africa. Ba, who was 12 at the time, could not be left alone in India and had to leave Bangalore to complete her high schooling in Uitenhage. During that time she stayed at her Masiba’s home. After finishing high school and taking a gap year, Ba began her university studies. At that time, the only university open to Indian students without

\textsuperscript{32} Mother’s brother
\textsuperscript{33} A compounded word formed from Masi meaning mother’s sister and Bo indicating a parental-type relationship
obtaining ministerial consent was the University of Durban-Westville. There, Ba pursued a UDESP — a university diploma in Senior Primary and met my father (Bapu).

Bapu, the youngest son of seven children, was born in the Transvaal farming town of Bethal. At that time, my paternal granduncle (my grandfather’s elder brother Jivan Kooverjee) had two shops in Bakerton (Springs) and deeply eager for his younger brother to take over one of his businesses, he invited my grandfather (Dada) to look after the businesses while he was in India. Impressed with life in Springs Dada moved his family to the mining town shortly thereafter though not to take over his elder brother’s business. He had plans to start one of his own. An even greater attraction though, was the Indian school in Bakerton, which was significantly better than the Bethal schools. Even without a formal education, my grandfather realised the importance of a good education.

Dada was a sublime man and a deep thinker. Throughout his life he nurtured a deep love for culture and religious philosophy. According to various family members, his inclination towards religious philosophy began at a young age – even before coming to South Africa (which was at 14). According to Bapu, Dada had a Guru\(^{34}\) and had seriously contemplated avoiding marriage in favour of a religious path. But his family would not allow it and at an equally young age, he was married to my grandmother (Ma), Amba Ratanjee, who was 12 at the time.

After coming to South Africa and settling in Springs, Dada became intensely involved with community activities in Bakerton. The first Gujarati Sunday community prayers were held at his home, which then were taken over by my granduncle, Laloo Lakhoo, and later on by Yashwant Harkison – a member of the Gujarati community. Fuelling his passion for culture and religion, Dada along with Laloo Lakoo entered the

\(^{34}\) A spiritual teacher and advisor
children of the town in a variety of Gujarati Eisteddfods winning a number of accolades and establishing Springs as a hub for vernacular studies not only in the East Rand but in the Transvaal. With the help of Jivanji Maharaj, Dada was instrumental in setting up one of the most well run Gujarati schools in the Transvaal. This Gujarati School was run from the Nehru Hall and Dada was quite adamant that the teacher of the school be given first preference to housing in the apartments upstairs even though most of his compatriots felt otherwise. This strict, often fanatic, adherence to ethics and moral principles earned him the somewhat snide nickname of “Kaida\textsuperscript{35} Sir”.

It was a little later in his life that Dada met Shivaram Maharaj, the Gujarati Kathakar\textsuperscript{36}, and struck up a friendship that changed the rest of his life. Under the guidance and support of Shivaram Maharaj, Dada fed that part of his soul that was longing for nourishment, eventually becoming a teetotaller and a vegetarian – much to Ma’s distress. According to many members of my family, Ma’s distress was explained through the context of the past. Not unlike today, meat and alcohol were expensive and as a result they were seen as luxury consumables. Having experienced poverty in India and South Africa, the ability to afford these luxuries were symbols of wealth and status. Therefore no longer eating meat or consuming alcohol carried with it the possible implication of austerity – the exact opposite of what was sought by leaving India.

Growing up in Springs, Bapu recalls that home was a bustling hub of activity. Visitors, often arriving unannounced and frequently at weekends, were entertained with a variety of foods depending on the time of day and the point in the year (for

\textsuperscript{35}Kaida means law. In this context it would refer to Dada’s meticulous behaviour in matters of the community.

\textsuperscript{36}Kathakar is literally translated as ‘storyteller’ but performs a pivotal role in the continuation of oral tradition as well as recitation of key Hindu texts. During Apartheid, exposure to religious dialogue and debate especially from outside South Africa was scant and so those few individuals from the subcontinent who braved the journey to South Africa were highly respected and valued.
example, if it was *Shraavan Maas* (a holy month) no non-vegetarian\(^{37}\) food would be served). Entertaining was never “just” a cup of tea and a biscuit or two. It was often a full meal and a variety of snacks. Hosting in this manner was a matter of pride and Ma went to great pains to ensure that guests felt welcome and comfortable. This too echoed the Hindu belief “*Atithi Devo Bhava*” or a guest is God embodied. The mistreatment or the dissatisfaction of a guest was undesirable at any cost. Bapu’s fondest memories of his childhood and youth are of the constantly burning coal-stove and the array of fantastical foods emanating from my aunts creative culinary imaginations.

Towards the end of his schooling career Bapu developed an insatiable desire to explore life beyond Johannesburg – indeed Springs. It is at this point in Bapu’s story that I am confronted with the stark injustice of being educated in Apartheid South Africa. The plight of the striking students in the 1976 Soweto riots becomes real as Bapu explains that he had lost his matric exemption after failing Afrikaans – a compulsory subject even in “Indian schools” under Apartheid educational laws. Although wanting to study medicine, Dada hoped that Bapu would become a teacher – studying at the teacher’s college in Benoni which would mean that he would stay closer to home. But even without his exemption Bapu had other plans. With no idea of what he wanted to study or what kind of a career he wanted to follow, Bapu convinced Dada to allow him to go to Durban with a family friend to survey Durban-Westville, a place he had scarcely heard of and had no idea of what he would do there. After matriculating, Bapu left for Durban and grabbed fate by the horns. Through a series of coincidences Bapu ended up studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting. It was at Westville in his second year that Ba and Bapu met. Their student residences

\(^{37}\) Non-vegetarian food is understood as food items that do not contain meat (red or white), fish or eggs. Milk and milk by-products are accepted as vegetarian.
were close to each other and offered the perfect opportunities to meet via social events, religious activities or even via just passing by.

Both my parents enjoyed active university lives. Ba was, for some time, chairperson of the residence house committee and frequently organised food boycotts in protest of the poor quality and preparation of food. Similarly, Bapu enjoyed an active involvement with residential activities as well as self-teaching harmonium for the Hindu students bhajan\textsuperscript{38} group. Meeting in the second year of their respective courses, Ba and Bapu spent two years courting. At the end of their university careers, they boldly committed to a life together and each set out to win over their families.

However, marriage was not meant to be an easy sail for them. Ma and Dada did not readily accept Bapu and Ba’s love, particularly because the match was out-of-caste. All of their children (except for my youngest aunt who is younger than Bapu and is unmarried) had married within caste. Contrastingly, Ajima and Ajabapa\textsuperscript{39} were seemingly more comfortable with the match. Perhaps this was because Ajima’s brother had already married a white German national and settled in America. Ajabapa was the only child between two brothers and as the only surviving member of his family had little to no family pressure at that time. Overcoming family-pressures my parents were married on the 27th of April 1980. Ba’s move from English-dominated Eastern Cape to Afrikaans-predominant Transvaal proved to be more challenging than anticipated and she recalls that she would often find herself unconsciously challenging the established “ways of being”. As the first woman in our family to drive, wear sleeveless blouses and retain her vegetarianism while her husband still ate meat the new daughter-in-law certainly had much to prove. The initial years of Ba’s marriage reaffirmed her fiery

\textsuperscript{38} Devotional song
\textsuperscript{39} Mother’s Father
personality and her no-nonsense attitude to seemingly irrational established norms and values.

A few years after marriage my parents tried desperately to have a child. After a long wait, I was born and Ba resolved not to allow the social norms of how girls should be treated influence her parenting. My Mami\textsuperscript{40} who was trained in Montessori teaching was passionate about the innovative style of teaching promoted by Montessori eventually passing her passion on to Ba during her gap year. Consequently when the time came for me to attend a pre-school the choice was already made. I was sent to a Montessori Pre-School at 2 – extremely unusual for a girl-child in our community. A year and a half into preschool my teacher immigrated to Isle of Man and I began at Veritas College Preparatory school on her recommendation.

I grew up as an only child in a nuclear family with very close relationships to my paternal extended family. Regardless of the closeness of these relationships, my childhood was a lonely time not only because I was the only child in our family to go to a “white” school but the extramurals and activities that were the hallmark of my childhood further singled out my interests. This challenged the nature of my relationship with my cousins significantly. Furthermore, as a one of a handful of Indian children in a predominantly white-English and Christian school my skin colour defined me as Indian, and yet in many ways I was socialised as a “white South African”. I was neither here, nor there. The curriculum at the convent included subjects not offered at government schools such as religious education, swimming as a form of physical training, and speech and drama – all very different from my Indian peers at school in Bakerton. It was an incredibly dual childhood. I was socialised as “white” and “Indian” simultaneously. As a child, I was severely teased by my peers and even family for speaking like a larnie and for going to a school other than the Indian school. My

\textsuperscript{40} Mama’s wife
involvement in “white” extra-curricular activities\textsuperscript{41} such as ballet, speech and drama, synchronised swimming and debating further perpetuated my “larnie” status. I was so severely teased by my peers at that time for my lack-of-conformity that I barely remember my years in Gujarati (vernacular) school – one of the only extra-curricular activities I shared with my Indian peers. Children can be so cruel and the name-calling was relentless. I was called a nun, larnie and whitey\textsuperscript{42}. I recall a particularly disturbing instance during my childhood after I had left Gujarati school where was called a “windian” by one of my cousin’s friends at a fairly large community function. The word, made up from “whitey” and “Indian” rang with a painful truth yet left me questioning my identity for years to come.

Over time and as my schooling career progressed, I became more and more comfortable with who I thought I was – a windian. I revelled in my success with synchronised swimming, debating and as the school newspaper editor – all so-called “white” interests. As a result I developed a defiant sense of self-seeking to assert my Indianess though cultivating a keen interest in religion and spirituality. Even as a teenager I enjoyed reading the great epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata over Enid Blyton or commercially available comics and magazines. This sense of security in my white-Indianess perpetuated throughout high school and at the end of my Matric year I left for a short-term student exchange to India with Rotary International (November 2003 to February 2004). As it happened, I was placed in the city of Surat – not far from Dada’s hometown of Navsari in the western state of India in Gujarat. For me, my exchange was a “going-home” back to my roots, back to Gujarat. I had no idea of how different or foreign I would come to feel in a place I had perceived to be home. Suffice to say, it came as a shock when I realised I was as Indian as my white-South African travel companion. For the first time in my life I realised that the Indianess of

\textsuperscript{41} The mere fact that I participated in extra-curricular activities was also unusual at that time.
\textsuperscript{42} Disparaging informal adaptation of “white” used as an adjective to describe race.
my childhood teasers and the Indianess I experienced in India were vastly different. In other words, the Indianess I longed to be a part of in South Africa and the Indianess in India were not the same. Indians (regardless of nationality) were no longer just-Indian and the definition of Indian in my mind began to shift.

Over the next few years I returned to India on a number of occasions as a student at the University of Mysore, as a volunteer with a rural woman’s development programme in Varanasi and for a friend’s wedding in Mumbai. Each of these trips has challenged and expanded my understanding, imagining and performance of Indianess in some profound way or another. As a result, these trips and my experiences with my identity and understanding of myself have subconsciously driven my data collection. Throughout the fieldwork and subsequent write-up process my preconceived (even conceited) notions of what it is to be South African Indian have been constantly challenged. My interactions with my research participants and later on with my data are the result of a lifetime of accumulated experiences, expressions and impressions. Further to this, as a native anthropologist engaging in fieldwork at home my interactions with my research participants happened and happen continuously – they extend beyond the boundaries of temples, social spaces and indeed the allocated fieldwork time-frame. My research write-up is therefore not only an autoethnography of my experiences during fieldwork but constitutes a life-time’s seeking the self.

Challenges and Solutions

“The move we are calling for, most generally, is away from seeing cultural difference as the correlate of a world of ‘peoples’ whose separate histories wait to be bridged by the anthropologist and toward seeing it as a product of a shared historical process that differentiates the world as it connects it” (Gupta and Ferguson 1988:16)
During Data Collection

During the initial stages of fieldwork I kept constant vigil over the actions, behaviours and interactions between others. My gaze was directed completely outward – I gave little to no credit to my own actions, to my agency in the space. Lost in the “seriousness” of my study, I in turn absorbed myself in the various pujas I was observing or the space and activity I was involved in. I had begun to take my participation for granted. As a result, I completely lost track of being an observer to my own participation and was instead looking for something more, something deeper external to myself and what I was doing. As time passed, I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated with the fieldwork process – ultimately asking myself if I even knew what I was doing. Motzafi-Haller’s (1997) criticisms of the “superfluous and misleading” labels of “native” and “non-native” speak to the role my personal experiences have played in my research and are emphatically echoed by Narayan (1993) and Appadurai (1988) in questioning who is the “native” and who is not.

“A... problem with the way cultural difference has been conceptualized within the ‘cultural critique’ project is that, once excluded from that privileged domain ‘our own society’, ‘the other’ is subtly nativised – placed in a separate frame of analysis and spatially incarcerated” (Appadurai 1988 in Gupta and Ferguson 1988:14).

Similar critiques of the conceptual and spatial incarceration of “the native” include Appadurai (1988), Hall (2006), Motzafi-Haller (1997), Narayan (1993), and Radhakrishnan (2003). In overcoming the conceptual challenges of nativity I had to drop all preconceptions of my own culture, religion and identity and adopted the attitude of a humble seeker (Narayan 1993; Strathern 1987).

During data collection, I encountered a number of challenges, the biggest being my position as “native”. Just as Csordas postulates that “the body should be understood not as a constant amidst flux but as an epitome of that flux” (1994:40) at the start of fieldwork I failed to acknowledge the position and indeed power of my
body as part of the study. My body allowed me access into my research sites and into the most intimate space of interaction and functioning within a group of which I was a part. Even though as a “native” I had the benefit of insider knowledge, I found that when speaking to my interviewees, in many cases, this insider knowledge meant very little in terms of the meanings my participants wished to communicate to me. As a researcher, I felt that I had become a partial-outsider, someone perceived as having enough knowledge to know, but not enough knowledge to need-to-ask (my need for their knowledge evidenced by my note-taking and Dictaphone). My research participants saw themselves as emissaries of culture and/or religion and would carefully script their responses and guard themselves when around me with my Dictaphone and camera. While occupying the role of researcher, I found myself missing out on the uncensored, spontaneous moments when research participants did not feel the need to show, represent or display. Gradually I let go the clutch of my Dictaphone and noticed that entering the space as a devotee as opposed to as a researcher put those occupying the space at ease. This in turn allowed for interactions to be more fluid, spontaneous and candid. As part of my process, I stopped formal interviewing and engaged in as many informal conversations as I could. It is these spontaneous interactions that I largely draw from in the substantive chapters of this thesis.

Writing-up

The challenge with “anthropology at home” (Jackson 1987) is that is potentially never-ending. I have experienced great difficulty writing this text even though I have journeyed away from Johannesburg - away from my “home” environment – to Grahamstown to write. This is simply because I am constantly confronted with the

43 I continued to carry my camera with me which did not prove to be a hindrance provided that I put it away as soon as I had captured what I had needed to.

44 I had returned to Grahamstown in January 2013 to begin my fieldwork write-up.
issues the thesis raises on a daily basis. While living with my Indian grandparents I have nevertheless found that I continue have regular contact with the Indian community in Grahamstown (including exposure to television and social media). It’s simply not a matter of switching off – of putting a full-stop to fieldwork and commencing with writing. When I am here in Grahamstown, I am not completely out of my field – I am still very much a part of it. This challenge was overcome with assistance from Rhodes University Anthropology department in the way of office-space to work.

The greatest challenge I have had to confront while engaging in data collection and the subsequent write-up is my own mental-emotional conflicts regarding the validity of my work as an anthropologist-in-training. Sub-consciously, socio-culturally driven subversive messages of studying my culture as something relegated to the boundaries of spare-time had impacted my impressions of and attitude towards my work. My personal diary reminds me: “it’s (fieldwork) that random thing you do when you have nothing better to do, a pursuit removed from the ‘seriousness’ of daily life” (July 2011). My fieldnotes are similarly peppered with the phrases “I don’t know what I’m doing here”, “why won’t they take me seriously” and so forth. I often received the impression that a study of religion and culture is what is done during one’s spare time and that “real” work was something that was obviously not what I was doing. After meeting my prospective ex-fiancé’s parents a few times my field-notes remind me of the constant sense of justification I felt I needed to make regarding my study; “I’m not sure they take me very seriously. I get the feeling that they’re battling to get me. Like they see my research as some school project. Very nice to know beta but how will you make money?” (January 2011) Surely if I had studied that long I would have wanted to become a doctor instead? These questions and insecurities arose as a result of Indian social norms and practices that hark back to my formative years and my

\[^{45}\text{Child.}\]
unusual interests and pursuits. Keeping the challenges of my own questioned Indianess in mind, as a native anthropologist I understood that going into the field is a process that involves the fulfilment of a number of roles simultaneously (Rapport and Overing 2000). By keeping the focus of my studies, I resolved to “carry on as normal” and at some point in time mentally and emotionally divorced myself from the naysaying internal dialogue. In this way it was more than important to acknowledge the need for physical and mental space away from home in order to “make strange” the normalcy of home in order to balance the roles of “investigator and citizen” (Cheater 1987 in ibid.:21).

Ethics

The foremost ethical concern of this study has been the use of the term Indian with regards to the data collected. While I am keenly aware that Indian identity is not the sole-ownership of Hindus and further Gujarati’s (as my ethnography would seem to illustrate) I am painfully aware that my ethnography does not cover the girth of expressions and interpretations of Indian particularly regarding Muslim Indians. This remains an unavoidable shortcoming. However that being said, my continued use of “Indian” as a descriptive term and not “Hindu Indian” illustrates the self-identification in the lived-experiences of my research participants and indeed myself. As a result of the initial data collection schedule the ethnography in this thesis is largely based on my experiences with Gujarati speaking Hindus and is clearly indicated where the case is otherwise. Furthermore, I wish to clearly state that the data presented in this thesis is not representative of Indians in South Africa nor does it claim to promote The Truth about South African Indians. In Ellingson and Ellis’ terms, as an evocative autoethnographer, I have kept the focus of this thesis on “narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses” (2008:445).

Further to my concerns of religious representation I felt concerned that western academy would demand analysis of the caste system in a study of Indianess. This issue
of caste differences is not dealt with in this thesis because the complexity inherent in caste extends beyond the scope and means of this research project. Through my research, caste remained a third or even fourth level of identity. As my interactions with Villopa Masi illustrates (see chapter four), caste informs ways of doing things (such as ritual) rather than forming the basis of identity.

Conclusion

“Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree Hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court ... He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: ’I’m not sure I can tell the truth... I can only tell what I know.” (Clifford 1986:8). During the process of data collection and data analysis I was obsessed with telling The Truth. However, through engaging with thinkers such as Appadurai (1988), Clifford (1986), Hall (2006) and Narayan (1993) I have come to understand that what I present is simply a “partial truth” (Clifford 1986). Throughout this process I have found that “culture happens to [seize my soul and have learnt] to recognise that [I] will always be working in an area of displacement” (Hall 2006). My own life narrative has inextricably shaped the way I have analysed my data – it is a view-point I cannot escape from (Chang 2008; Motzafi-Haller 1997). As this chapter has illustrated, the challenges of conducting fieldwork in one’s home environment are plethoric and finding creative solutions to those challenges have allowed my mind to embrace the many conceptual possibilities that data presents. The next chapter will engage with the conceptual framing of the research.
Conceptual Framework

What does it mean to be Indian and South African and further to that, are South African Indians forever bound to the norms, values and morals of the “motherland”? In this chapter, I argue that Indianess can be understood as consciousness as referred to by Vertovec (2004). I recognise that even though my study began with the questions I asked of Indianess while studying, working and travelling through India, the aim of this chapter is to emphasise that the experience of Indianess is not dependant or reliant on India (Radhakrishnan 2003; Vally 2012) or contact with India46 (Narayan 1993; Vally 2012).

In the second part of this chapter I ask: how do anthropologists define a diaspora? Is that definition applicable to understanding of South African Indianess to understand diaspora? These questions begin the process of analysis for my own data. Through questioning the relevance of diaspora, I move on to construct perspectives of how particular aspects of diaspora have relevance to the South African context. Due to the dearth of academic discourses on the experiences of the descendants of Indians in South Africa, the conceptual framing of these experiences are un-exhaustive. Further, given South Africa’s segregationist past, case-studies of alternate (non-South African) diasporas are often ill-fitting. Accordingly through unpacking the concept of Indianess with particular reference to the Apartheid past I deconstruct the concept of diaspora.

Indianess as a State-of-being

My thesis illustrates the Indianess within what is a South African identity. Perhaps one could argue that the purpose of diaspora and indeed Indianess in the South African landscape is more one of heritage. However the lived experiences of Indians suggest that Indianess is not a thing of the past or something that belongs to

46 As is evidenced in the number of South Africans who identify as Indian (vies-a-vies culturally or racially) and have not visited India.
It is rather an integral part of experiencing and interacting with the world which is inextricably tied to living in South Africa and being South African. I cannot think of a more appropriate term (that carries a conceptual mode of analysis) than diaspora and yet am caught in the simultaneous ambiguities of its definition – namely; the notion of exile (or movement from one place to another), relationships with the “homeland” and the notion of a single culture or ethnicity.

Vertovec’s (2000, 2004) construction of diaspora as forms of consciousness provides the closest conceptual framing of what I understand South African Indianess to be. It suggests that; dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there, highlights the awareness of multi-locality and can be understood as a shared state-of-being that is processual, continual and implicitly paradoxical. Even though the ethnography in the thesis illustrates that defining diaspora as a form of consciousness does not neatly apply to South African Indians, drawing elements of relevance from this understanding may help draw one closer to the practicalities of conceptual applications of diaspora in South Africa.

Diaspora as a form of consciousness applies heavily to my perceptions of South African Indianess. Discursive constructions of diasporas draw from both “here” and “there” - that is, ‘host’ and ‘home’. Issues with regard to diaspora are further complicated in the case where home and host are the same. In the case of South African Indianess, “here” and “there” do not neatly refer to ‘host’ as South Africa and ‘home’ as India. Rather, the argument this thesis proposes is for the recognition of South Africa as home. However, choosing to conceptualise South African Indianess as Indian diaspora may imply that it is still not yet wholly South African. This implication is problematic on many levels. I am concerned with the possible (perhaps even dangerous) reification in the social sciences that comes with the territory of accepting traditional definitions of diaspora as the dispersal of a people through migration (forced or voluntary). Further, using diaspora as a conceptual framework presents, for
me, an existential crisis. While I unequivocally identify as a South African, I am simultaneously aware of my Indian heritage. Unfortunately this identification comes at the expense of drawing from a concept that implies a connection to an identity (that is, South African Indian) that in itself implies a degree of not-here-ness (by virtue of the associations between India and Indian). As much as I am well aware of the need to conceptualise Indianess among South Africans within the wider framework of migration and settlement I am concerned with the dangers of over-simplifying the complexity inherent in a multifarious identity. What I am suggesting is an integration of concepts and notions of diaspora, migration and settlement. To assist in navigating a conceptual understanding of diaspora as forms of consciousness, Narayan’s “enactment of hybridity” (1993) calls for the confluence of compelling narrative and rigorous analysis. While I can make no claims to writing compellingly or to rigorous analysis, through my ethnography I navigate the “fuzziness” of the term diaspora while maintaining its conceptual value and in so doing begin a journey to explore one of the many facets of diaspora while simultaneously allowing the narratives themselves to illustrate their fuzziness and complexity.

“It’s Complicated”

An illustration of the interrelation between the components constituting Indianess, which are affected by the decaying effects of time, is the changing perception of India among the diaspora over generations. My grandfather’s India is a home, it is a place of familiarity by virtue of it being connected to my ancestry and yet it is starkly foreign because it is not “mine” (Narayan 1993; Radhakrishnan 2003). The India I know is an exotic other, though significantly same, it is nevertheless different – my home remains South Africa. In these terms, the complexity of my data is deepened by my own biases and personal experiences. As Motzafi-Haller observes,

“a researcher who had experienced in her own life oppression and had become conscious of it in ways that significantly inform her scholarship is more likely, I suggest, to write critically – to
write from a position of social and political engagement” (1997:217).

In a similar manner, as a native anthropologist my understanding of Indianess-as-complex allows me to draw from the plethora of my own as well as research participants’ lived-experiences while critically engaging with the academic discourse on diaspora. In my study Indianess is experienced though an interaction with so-called “Indian spaces” (or rather when one’s Indianess is above all else for example; a temple, family function or social gathering) as well as where one’s Indianess is “secondary” (for example; work or school) (Strathern 1987).

A moot point in the analysis of Indianess-as-complex extends beyond common-sense notions of complexity. By transcending the descriptive use of the word complexity, I venture towards understanding the complexity of Indianess as emergent from the interactions between its other complex constituent components. The interactions between components (in this case eastern and western modalities) result in what I describe as a tense oscillation. As I understand, the lived experiences of individuals present a certain set of deconstruct-able values, behaviours, morals, beliefs, practices, norms and so forth. Perhaps reprieve from this seeming disorder can be found in Morin’s key characteristics of a system as “an interrelation of elements consisting an entity [or]... unit” (1992:98 in Prieser 2012:50). When describing Indianess, I often grappled with the appropriateness of using terms such as “complex” and “complicated” to describe what I was observing and experiencing. Byrne eloquently encapsulates the approach to complexity as “the interdisciplinary understanding of reality as composed of complex open systems with emergent properties and transformational potential” (in Prieser 2012:36). Viewing South African Indianess as “the system” and its expressions as components of the system, this attitude towards complexity allows the mind to conceive of the components of the system as being equally complex while being acutely aware that they are influenced by complex components of their own, which are further influenced by other complex
components and so forth. According to Cilliers “[i]n order to constitute a complex system, the elements have to [interrelate], and this [interrelation] must be dynamic. A complex system changes with time” (1998:3). In the same line of argument, he further characterises this interrelation by the “1) the interrelatedness of the components and 2) the ... whole that is comprised by the interrelated elements” (in ibid.). By adding the decaying effects of time to an understanding of Indianess; perceptions and experiences usually do not remain constant and as a result, each experience and perception compels me to draw from a deeper understanding of the interactions between components.

Thus, in Byrne’s terms the complexity of Indianess by nature, allows one to make room for “emergent properties and transformational potential” (in ibid.). While there is no concise definition of complexity (ibid.), drawing from Cilliers’ conditions for complexity (1998) I have observed that by adopting a “complexity attitude” (ibid.) I am able to avoid the danger of reifying the continually changing and adapting phenomenon of South African Indianess. In my study, Preiser’s argument towards a “complexity attitude” (ibid.) facilitates Indianess as complex by virtue of what Narayan calls “an enactment of hybridity” (1993). Used as an adjective⁴⁷, hybridity indicates a thing of mixed character or composed of different elements. Accordingly, an enactment of hybridity is a call to express “a state that all anthropologists partake of [as individuals and professionals] but may not consciously include in their texts” (ibid.:681). This enactment of hybridity applies particularly to native anthropologists who navigate the field as individuals and professionals simultaneously. In the same way that “Delmos Jones call[s] a genuine ‘native’ anthropology... ‘a set of theories based on non-western precepts and assumptions’” (1970:251 in ibid.:677) I venture to suggest that this enactment of hybridity calls on the native to situate the study in accordance

⁴⁷ http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89809#eid1204994
with *native precepts and assumptions*. With regard to my study, the enactment of hybridity lies in the duality of being South African *and* Indian and not either-or or perhaps exclusively *Indian* as the assumption would be.

This compels me to question and unpack the ways in which South African Indianness is understood, as well as question the entirety of the concept of diaspora and how it is applied to a group who is local enough to be *here* and other enough to have a *there*. While it may be argued that the South African Indian identity may benefit from a theoretical framework and contextualisation drawn from its “country of origin” (India), it remains blatant that this would not serve this hybrid South African Indian identity any justice because its country of origin is in fact South Africa (see also Vally 2012; Mukadam and Mawani 2006; Radhakrishnan 2003).

In the confluences of flows48 between the distinct paradigms of east and west, be they tense, I find what Hall refers to as a “irresolvable but permanent tension” (2006:272). “[H]aving constructed symbolic classifications of the world, Douglas admits, we human beings have to ‘face the fact that some realities elude [the concepts], or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of [them]’” (1966:162 in Rapport and Overing 2000:82). Accordingly, harsh realities of perceiving the field as complex and contradictory as well as identifying a tense oscillation between two primary loci of identity (Indianess and South Africaness) compels me to acknowledge that this study of Indianess in South Africa is essentially a moment-in-time – this is ultimately a tension I am compelled to find comfort with without insisting on “final theoretical closure” (Hall 2006:272). Inherently, South African Indianess embodies paradox and the gross contradictions of something that theoretically “cannot-be”. For example, how can one be South African *and* Indian or fully South African but not solely *Indian*?

48 See chapter five
What is South African Indianess?

As Jain argues in his paper, – *An Anthropological Critique of Indian Diasporic Integration;*

“[South African Indian] integration remains diasporic, first, because in the on-going political processes [South African Indians] retain and deploy fragments of their Indian cultural heritage. And yet, second, their integration is characteristically diasporic in that their internal cultural diversities (those of region, language, religion, caste, etc.) are being progressively subsumed in a racially defined and perceived class structure of an ‘Indian’ ethnic community and the multi-ethnic nation-state” (2012: 122-123)

Jain’s supposition that “Indians are nothing but South Africans in citizenship and legal status” (ibid.:123) is painfully reductionist. Ebr-Vally notes that in the Apartheid past “the Indian population of South Africa was not even considered as a minority, but as a ‘problem’ that, together with so many other similar ‘problems’, needed to be solved.” (2001:80) What follows in this chapter of her rich monograph is an engaging historic account of how Indians came to be viewed as “a problem” beginning with indentured labour in Natal under the British (circa. 1860) through pre-Apartheid policies and further to Apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas and Immorality Act (ibid.; Welsh 2009). What she illustrates is the tedious trajectory of Indians in South Africa to establish an identity and an uncontested status as South African. Ebr-Vally’s account is by no means an isolated case. *Inside Indenture* (Desai and Vahed 2007) is an immaculate narrative of Indian indentured labourers from 1860 through to 1914 drawn from an array of sources including official documentation, various newspaper press and, most importantly, direct accounts via letters or diaries. While Jain (2012) may wish to argue that South African Indians are “nothing but citizens”, evidence to the contrary is blatantly clear. The now regular presence of Diwali and Eid greetings (to name a few) in the media as well as commercial enterprise is testament to South African’s embracing diversity as it is a marker of communal South Africaness. The sheer determination of the South African people to achieve a state of equality
across racial, ethnic, gender and religious boundaries cannot be understated. Beyond physical markers of sacrifice and hardship, South Africans have made concerted efforts to ensure an all-inclusive state beyond the edicts of past legislation and institutional mandate. And so, to speak of the South Africanisation of Indians in South Africa in such a simplistic manner (as citizens possessing a legal status) would be doing a disservice to the complexity of South African Indianess particularly in the case of the generational diaspora. South African Indianess is thus a processual construction that involves residents of South Africa, even as South African Indians remember India through dress, language, religious rites, and religion.

**Is it Possible to be South African and Indian?**

Mukadam and Mawani’s (2006) classification of “post-diasporic” individuals questions the veracity of diaspora and diasporic as a signifier. In their definition, *post-diasporics* are understood as possessing five defining characteristics.

“First, they have not participated in any form of voluntary or forced migration leading to permanent settlement outside country of birth; second, they consider their country of birth as their homeland; third, they hold the conviction that they are full and equal citizens in their country of birth; [not origin?] fourth, they do not envisage migration to and permanent settlement in an ancestral homeland; and, finally, they show loyalty to and are active participants in their country of birth.” (ibid.:109-110)

These characteristics are largely relevant among the current generation of South African Indians and, for the purposes of my study, accurately reflect my research participants. While my ethnography may illustrate that loyalties to the country of birth (South Africa) may be contested through dress-styles and through the retention and rejection of cultural practices – these loyalties remain largely sentimental nostalgia. Fundamentally there is no place to return to because there has been no exit. Similarly Singh postulates, “there is no underlying ‘myth of return’ to the ‘homeland’” (2003:4). In other words - Indianess and South Africaness are not mutually exclusive. One cannot exist without the other. The issue then of Indian South Africans being “nothing but” is
superfluous and reductionist at best. Without indulging in finicky semantics South African Indians are rather *everything-and*. Their integration into South African society extends beyond racial stereotypes to the mundane aspects of life as a South African. These insights lead me to question the relevance of the concept of diaspora to the second and third generations South African Indians’ experience.

**Diaspora: “The Buzzword of the Postmodern Age”**

Voices of dissent are increasingly resounding regarding the definition and application of the category “diaspora” (Atal 2004; Bangstad 2006; Basch, Schiller, Szanton 1994; Cohen 2008; Glick-Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 2006; Hall 2003; Mukadam and Mawani 2006; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2009; Safran 1991; Vertovec 2000, 2004). Cohen dubs diaspora as “the buzzword of the postmodern age” (1999:3 in Vertovec 2004:1) and the presence of the number of publications with the words “Indian Diaspora” in their titles alone provides evidence for the popularity of the classification. Examples of these include: *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora* edited by Bhikhu Parekh, Gurharpal Singh and Steven Vertovec (2006); *Tracing an Indian Diaspora* edited by Parvati Raghuram, Ajaya Kumar Sahoo, Brij Maharaj and Dave Sangha (2004); *The Indian Diaspora* edited by N. Jayaram (2004); *Post-Diasporic Indian Communities* by Anjoom Mukadam and Sharmina Mawani (2006) and *Heterogeneous Diaspora and Asymmetrical Orientations: India, Indians and the Indian Diaspora* by N. Jayaram (2008).

Etymological definitions of diaspora are from its Greek roots. The prefix *dia-* indicates movement, and *spore* means seed. Classical or traditional definitions of diaspora entail a traumatic departure from a “homeland” to a foreign land often accompanied with myths of return (Cohen 1997; Safran 1991; Vertovec 1997, 2001, 2004). Until recently, the term was associated with the traumatic Jewish dispersal even though historiographies of Armenian, Greek and African diasporas are extensive (Butler 2001). Vertovec (2004:7) tables nine characteristics of diaspora from Cohen (1997:26)
and Safran (1991), which draws from common features amongst diasporic groups. These are (Cohen 1997:26, after Safran 1991 in Vertovec 2004:7):

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions.
2. Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions.
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements.
4. An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation.
5. The development of a return movement that gains collective collaboration.
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate.
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group.
8. A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Vertovec adds further “diasporic groups are characterised by a ‘triadic relationship’ (Sheffer 1986; Safran 1991) between

1. A collectively self-identified ethnic group in one particular setting,
2. The group’s co-ethnics in other parts of the world, and
3. The homeland states or local contexts whence they or their forbearers came” (ibid.:7).

These characteristics provide a comprehensive over-all strategy to conceptualise diasporas, however in understanding groups of individuals who do not fulfil all or even the majority of these characteristics this triadic relationship may not be clear-cut. Further complicating this conceptualisation of the definition is the presence of a transnational identity as proposed by Vertovec. He states that
“[d]isaporas arise from some form of migration, but not all migration involves diasporic consciousness; all transnational communities comprise diasporast, but not all diasporas develop transnationalism” (ibid.:12).

The nature of current understandings and applications of diaspora is subject to debate (Mukadam and Mawani 2006; Jayaram 2008; Raghuram and Sahoo 2008; Singh 2003; Vertovec 1997, 2001, 2004). For the purposes of this study “diaspora here is what diaspora does” (Raghuram and Sahoo 2008:7) and to further elaborate – what the lived experiences of diaspora are. Drawing from scholars of diaspora such as Vertovec and Cohen, diaspora as a shared sense of awareness leads us to a closer understanding of what diaspora is within the context of my research. The next section will deal with Vertovec’s three meanings of diaspora in an attempt to clarify this shared sense of awareness.

Three Meanings of Diaspora

The Three Meanings of “diaspora” proposed by Vertovec (1997) are particularly useful in my analysis because they provide a malleable set of criteria for my observations and experiences. These three meanings will be explored below along with a critical discussion of each point’s relevance to the South African Indian diaspora.

Diaspora as Social Form

Notions of diaspora as a social form draw largely from Jewish experiences of traumatic removal from their homeland. Accordingly, critical markers that identify diaspora as a social form are; (1) a group of individuals who share history and geography, (2) a tension of political orientations (specifically contested loyalties) and (3) economic strategies (that is, remittances to the “homeland”). These three markers form what which Sheffer and Safran refer to as a triadic relationship (in Vertovec 1997). As a native anthropologist it is not evident that there is a strong or rather established economic strategy or relationship with India among diasporic South African Indians. Further, immigration from India to South Africa is diverse. Not all South African Indians
share an exact migration history. Even though some arrived as indentured labourers (Bhana and Brain 1990; Desai and Vahed 2007) and others as passenger Indians (Bhana and Brain 1990; Ebr-Vally 2001; Vally 2012) a shared sense of history with Apartheid prevails. Regardless of these discrepancies the first two markers of social form as identified by Vertovec explain the phenomena of diaspora with regards to South African Indians succinctly.

Via the Group Areas Act of 1954 South African Indians shared a sense of community49 through geography. This act ensured racial segregation but the spin-off effect resulted in cultural insulation (Singh 2008). Through the Act, Indians were able to retain their cultural norms, values and traditions without much external influence. Furthermore, as Ebr-Vally (2001), Parkeh (1994), Raghuram and Sahoo (2008), Singh (2008) and Vertovec (1997 and 2000, 2004) concur; religion forms a critical basis of commonality between individuals of Indian diaspora. In my study, Hinduism is the commonality. However, it must be noted that members of other faiths (Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains or possibly Christians) who share history, geography and race are a part of this shared sense of (Indian) community. Due to research constraints, these individuals fall outside the scope of this study though nevertheless as Ebr-Vally (2001) and Vally (2012) note, Muslims share similar experiences and concepts of Indianess. Thus, for the purposes of my study diaspora as a social form refers to a sense of community based on shared history, geography and Hinduism.

The questions regarding tensions of political orientations or rather contested loyalties are fuzzier. The answer to these questions can be found in unpacking and understanding a sense of belonging in the Indian community to South Africanness. Even though the extent of this sense of belonging is likely to differ from individual-to-

49 Togetherness, communal unity. “Encapsulat[ing] both closeness and sameness, and distance and difference” (Rapport and Overing 2000:63)
individual, questions of belonging are not impossible to answer. External markers of integration into a lifestyle other than one which is predominantly Indian is clearly evident. The adaptation of Western dress, use of English as primary means of communication and the varied cuisine of Indians are in some ways markers of a sense of belonging to South Africa (both pre and post-Apartheid). South African Indians have carved a niche for themselves in South Africa by adopting and adapting to local lifestyles while fusing them with Indian cultural idiosyncrasies. It is critical to note that the sentiment “we are same but different” is nevertheless the mainspring of the South African Indian diasporic experience.

An additional note is required with regard to tension in the political orientations among the diaspora. While I do not discount the political involvement of the diaspora in Indian national politics, evidence of the same is scant. If there is any involvement, the political relationships between Indians in South Africa and in India are largely of a cultural and/or religious nature (although the increasing media coverage of the influence of the Gupta family in South Africa may suggest otherwise). An example of religio-cultural political activism is the Hindutva movement, fuelled by India’s Bharatiya Jananta Party (BJP) and its cultural arm Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Forum). This activism is frequently viewed as bordering on fundamentalism (Bhattacharya 2008; Vertovec 2000). The extent and reach of the VHP or even foreign arms of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) such as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) or the Kenyan Bharatiya Swayamsevak Sangh (KBSS) are well beyond the reach of this study. However, a point worthy of noting is the increasing religious fervour amongst some South African Indians. For examples of Hindu activism in South Africa one needs only to observe the rising voices of protest to the controversial Zapiro cartoon depicting Lord Ganesha as the Board for Cricket Control in India with Cricket

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50 For further detail see chapter five.
51 An ideology advocating Hinduism, Hindu solidarity and the establishment of a Hindu state.
South Africa’s Haroon Longat being sacrificed to the deity (Pillay 2013; SAPA 2013b; Zapiro 2013). Without assuming a reductionist view of the issue, whether these voices of distension are being raised in defence of civil liberties in a democratic state (South Africa) or whether they are in response to growing religious fundamentalism among Hindus remains under-researched.

**Diaspora as Form of Consciousness**

Even though South African Indians’ links to India are scant and in many cases non-existent, “the empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there. ... [It is] the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here)” (Clifford 1994:322 in Vertovec 1997:8 emphasis added). While physical, familial, political and economic connections between India and Indians in South Africa may have dwindled over the past few generations, they are simultaneously, viscerally maintained through religion (Parkeh 1994; Raghuram and Sahoo 2008; Singh 2003; Vertovec 1997, 2000 and 2004). The implication of dwelling here and connecting there means that the sameness in state-of-being (or consciousness) is transcendent of purely physical markers of solidarity. As Rajgopal (2000:489-90 in Bhattacharya 2008:350) observes of Indians in the United States;

“[they] tend to seek a religio-cultural definition of their identity, partly because of a desire to side-step [the] issue of their racial marginality, and partly because of a well-established pattern of reformulating cultural difference though religious affiliation”.

Through cuisine, access to temples or places of worship, availability of cultural dress and artefacts, and so forth, those of the global Indian diaspora find their links to each other and their Indianess through means other than material markers. Thus, they are able to “side-step” their marginality through connecting with a wider, international

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52 http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/
53 http://www.timeslive.co.za/
54 http://www.zapiro.com/
network. Similarly religion within the South African Indian diaspora acts as a binder or rather a common thread in creating and maintaining local and global connections.

The “awareness of multi-locality” (Vertovec 1997:8) is a key point in the understanding of diaspora as a type of consciousness. According to Vertovec, “awareness of multi-locality... stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both ‘here’ and ‘there’, who share the same ‘routes’ and ‘roots’.” (ibid.) To expand on Vertovec’s point, this “awareness of multi-locality” allows one to understand the individual as made up of multiples (often contradictory) yet still remaining whole. The same analogy translates to the group – that is, diaspora. Accordingly, in a group consisting of multi-local individuals, the group itself becomes multi-local. However using the term “multi-local”, presents social scientists with a number of challenges. As is, it is used to describe individuals and groups who are indeed whole, integrated and even contradictory. My criticism of “multi-local” is that it implies the coming together of a variety of elements that are “complete” or “whole” in order to constitute a “more-complete” entity. This makes no logical sense. The insinuation “multi-local” proposes is that individuals are fragmented beings constituted of complete-parts of whole-others. In an effort to reach a more wholistic understanding of the individual, I ask if the individual is rather whole, paradoxical and continually in process though ultimately one?

To answer these questions, I draw from the understanding that in some ways culture informs identity (and vice versa). As a result cultural study implies a certain level of identity study. Using Hall’s critique of Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies, I have come to the understanding that in conceptualising identity I will “always be working in an area of displacement” (2006:271). This idea of displacement is critical because it facilitates the necessary intellectual space to accommodate an ideological paradox – or as Hall postulates – a “tension” inherent to cultural studies. Hall emphasises the importance of this tension and
“insist[s] that until and unless cultural studies learns to live with this tension... it will have renounced its ‘worldly’ vocation. That is to say, unless and until one respects the necessary displacement of culture, and yet is always irritated by its failure to reconcile itself with other questions that matter, with other questions that cannot and can never be fully covered by critical textuality in its elaborations, cultural studies as a project, an intervention, remains incomplete.” (ibid.:271-272)

Hall further states that

“because [cultural studies] holds theoretical and political questions in an ever irresolvable but permanent tension [it] constantly allows the one to irritate, bother and disturb the other, without insisting on some final theoretical closure”. (ibid.:272)

In reading “cultural studies” as identity, and “tension” as paradox, we come closer to an understanding of the level of comfort required in understanding and accepting, as I view, the inherent discomfort of identity politics with particular reference to this study’s conceptualisation of the Indian diaspora in South Africa. To use Hall’s terms, through letting go of an “insistence” on final theoretical closure our subjects (indeed ourselves) are rendered real. They are, as we are, living beings, experiencing the world on a processual and continual basis. The awareness of multi-locality therefore cannot be posited as an absolute truth given the tensions in the constant remaking of identity.

Thus, diaspora as consciousness can be understood as a shared sense of awareness that is processual, continual and implicitly paradoxical. This shared state-of-being need not be homogenous. Further its expressions need not exemplify similarity (or even parts thereof). However, its internal composites (what makes it “tick”) all echo similarity. Through the processual and continual nature of diaspora as consciousness, I welcome to an understanding that Satre leads me to; “the only true culture is that of the Revolution; that is to say, it is constantly in the making” (in Fanon 2001:Preface emphasis added). This process of being constantly in the making negates
the need for closure and by its processual nature places narratives of diaspora as a dynamic concept.

**Diaspora as Modes of Cultural Reproduction**

Vertovec’s third form of diaspora is one in which “‘diaspora’ is described as involving the *production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena*” (1997:19). This classification places itself within the context of globalisation – which is defined as “the world-wide flow of cultural objects, images and meanings resulting in... back-and-forth transferences, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations and constant transformations” (ibid.).

Diaspora as an expression of cultural reproduction is not simply the translation of a culture from “home” to a “host” context. It extends to the global processes and flows that “have become central to the politics of global culture” (Appadurai 2003:35). Through experiences and expressions which encompass a far wider and varied set of what Appadurai (ibid.:29) calls -scapes, the assumption would be that South African Indians are not simply interacting between (so-called) host and home cultures. In addition, they would assume to be interacting with global process and flows. However, if diaspora is what diaspora does then this is clearly not the case. These -scapes direct critical understanding of global cultural processes and the role of imagination (and creativity) towards an understanding of “the imagination as social practice” (ibid.). Within the discourse of experiences and expressions of Indianess in post-apartheid South Africa; cultural reproduction, the effects of globalisation, diasporic imagination

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55 Appadurai’s *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy* (2003) makes use of five imagined world landscapes in the explanation of the global cultural economy. These –scapes are: *ethnoscapes* – people who move between nations, such as tourists, immigrants, exiles, guestworkers and refugees, *technoscapes* – technology, often linked to multinational corporations, *financescapes* – global capital, currency markets, stock exchanges, *mediascapes* – electronic and new media and *ideoscapes* – official state ideologies and counter-ideologies (ibid.: 25). The application of these -scapes is further explored in chapter five.
and creativity, are muddied. This happens due to the effects of Apartheid policies and the continued consequences thereof on daily Indian life. For many South African Indians, the experience of Indianess is informed by the translations of previous generations’ memories. These memories create what Appadurai calls “nostalgia without memory” (ibid.:28). Questions of the source of authenticity and origin come to mind at this point. In my observations, I have come to understand that “[t]he home country is not “real” in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede [South Africanisation] and the “present home” is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic” (Radhakrishnan 2003:123). Historically, experiences and expressions of Indianess were impacted by stilted global flows (viz. Appadurai –scapes) by the Apartheid state (locally) and the International Community (globally) through various trade embargos.

The historical experiences of Indians who had arrived from India to make South Africa their home are peppered with lived realities of being relegated to the status of permanent visitor in a country they had come to call home. Indeed, these issues are not entirely put to rest even today as the ripple-effects of the Guptagate saga illustrates. The status of South African Indians as “second-class citizens” deeply impacted their interaction within multi-cultural local –scapes effectively culturally isolating and alienating them culturally. An example of this alienation is evident as far back as 1925 when Dr D F Malan commented on the Asiatic Bill. He says:

“[i]f you (the Indians) don’t go back to your home gracefully, I will shoulder you out without your bag and baggage, but if you go like an obedient boy, sell up your goods and chattel on top of it, I will give you ten pounds and quietly go. Otherwise, I will make your life intolerable here but if you choose to remain here, do so as a pauper” (cited in Aiyer 1925:18 in Ebr-Vally 2001:83)

56 This will be addressed in detail in chapter five
57 (Gerbi 2013)
The wounds that were created as a result of this flagrant disregard for a people and their purpose have taken generations to undo. It must be noted that the negative impact of these dismissive policies and practices may have wounded the sensibilities of first (even second) generation passenger-Indian immigrants but were exponentially larger in communities whose ancestors had come to South Africa as indentured labourers and therefore had been in South Africa for a number of generations already (Desai and Vahed 2007). Not only were indentured labourers “second-class” to their British masters but they were then further jilted after the dispensing of indentured labour. This offer of free passage “to go home” by Malan was a colonial history repeating itself through the Apartheid state (ibid.; Ebr-Vally 2001). The crux of the disjunct between the bond felt with South Africa and the repeated eschewing of Indians is eloquently summated by Desai and Vahed and is strikingly relevant now;

“Indians [have] forged new lives that often [transcend] the caste system, [make] their religious practices more flexible, [lead] them to adopt new social customs, [open] new avenues for entertainment and socialising and, most importantly, their children only [know] Africa and its call”. (ibid.:399)

However, I digress from the issue. International trade embargos and immigration restrictions on the Apartheid state made it extraordinarily difficult for cultural artefacts to be imported from the homeland to the diaspora in South Africa at that time. And so, cultural reproduction occurred as a result of memory, imagination and nostalgia (Appadurai 2003). The sense of belonging to the landscape of South Africa had been challenged by the harsh racist legislation of Apartheid. However cultural reproduction within a different landscape that produced it (South Africa) and sparse contact with the home landscape (India), meant that Indians in South Africa developed a distinct and unique cultural identity that was not overly influenced by

58 Passenger-Indians are Indians whose travel to South Africa and settlement were not decided by the edicts of indenture. Their passage was self-funded and arrival in South Africa unassisted by the state.
global flows. As a result, the ability to creatively imagine a cultural identity other than that of the nostalgic past was hampered by South Africa’s isolation from the world and indeed itself.

The Relevance of Diaspora

The concept diaspora indicates a migration or rather movement from one place (a homeland) to another (a foreign land). Is there space in our understanding of diaspora to accommodate being South African and Indian simultaneously?

When unpacking Indianess as a concept, the inclination is to use India as the point of departure. However for the purposes of my study I contend that it may be more appropriate to see South Africa as the point of departure particularly in the case of what Mukadam and Mawani call “post-diasporic” (2006) Indians in South Africa. Vally’s research participant summates the sense of duality eloquently: “we are culturally Indian but our hearts are South African” (2012:76). Within Vally’s study, questions of identity are asked overtly – with a purpose and clear intention of understanding identity at a time when Indian presence in South Africa “celebrated its 150th year” (2010). This particular moment in time allowed Indians to question their identities within the context of their South Africaness while simultaneously celebrating their cultural distinctiveness (as well as internal diversity) from other South Africans. However, not all Indians have exercised the liberty of introspection and reflection nor are these questions, once asked, answered and actioned or internalised.

What this study aims to highlight is the tension between two identities (South African and Indian) and illustrate that the existence of multiple identities is not subject to physical migration. Drawing a broad understanding of transnationalism as “multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (1999:447) I suggest area of consideration for future study is the consideration of a
form of transnationalism without the presupposition of physical migration or movement.

**A Note on Transnationalism**

While Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (2006), Rex (2002) and Vertovec (1997, 2001, 2004) argue in favour of the term “transnational” as opposed to “diaspora” I am inclined to err on the side of caution. As Vertovec delineates, transnationalism can be understood as; *social morphology*, i.e. “social formation spanning borders”; *type of consciousness*; *mode of cultural reproduction*, i.e. “a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices”; *avenue of capital; site of political engagement* and *(re)construction of ‘place’ or locality* (1997: 449-451). Vertovec’s six-point strategy to identify transnationalism may fit many transnational communities. However its relevance to an unpacking of South African Indianess is limited. My experiences in the field suggest that the six characteristics do not align neatly with the experiences of South African Indians particularly with regards to flows of capital to and from India and political engagement between India and South Africa.

In terms of South African history, the Groups Areas Act of 1954 not only ensured racial segregation it additionally, created a figurative “bubble” in which various racial communities were bound. In effect, these “Group Areas” were places of *(re)construction*. However, due to the restriction of trade, travel, communication and information flows between India and South Africa (and between different social spaces within South Africa), these places of *(re)construction* were constrained. The restriction of these flows coupled with a lack of technology translates the *(re)construction of locality* as an “inter-national” process to one based on memory more than access to resources. These bubbles inextricably link the first generation of migrants to those that follow. The concept of a transnational community with global connections to Indian communities across the world was practically non-existent in Apartheid South Africa. Effectively, the question then is: can South African Indianess be conceptualised as
transnational or diaspora having been constrained locally and globally? Therefore, I propose that South African Indians be considered a transnational community which is a diaspora.

**Conclusion**

The theoretical challenges of conceptualising South African Indianess is suffused with a plethora of variables that immediately provoke the retort “it’s complicated”. However the challenge of transcending the fuzziness of Indianess lies in adopting a *complexity attitude* that facilitates simplicity without denying its complexity. The value of drawing from, what is seen as a primarily mathematical, theoretical framework to unpack a socio-cultural phenomenon is that it facilitates an understanding of identity as process. In so doing, seeing diaspora as forms of consciousness allows one to transcend the limitations of diaspora as purely social formation or cultural reproduction towards a process-orientated phenomenon. Through my discussions in the following chapters, I illustrate an understanding of South African Indianess as a complex phenomenon. It is a dynamic, malleable *shared sense of awareness*, which is embodied at times through dress, national identity, food/cuisine, ritual, tradition, religion, history, spiritual practices, socio-cultural norms and values. Though this consciousness is independent of social, cultural, political or economic markers it is expressed through them as opposed to by them. Therefore to see Indianess as complex diasporic consciousness emphasises its nature as processual and context and time specific.
External Expressions of Indianess

During a guest-lecture for Anthropology students at Rhodes University in 2013 I asked the group to share with me by way of one-word responses the first thing that came to mind when hearing the word Indian. As I stood on the platform I realised that seeing an Indian in front of them, their responses, although varied, were guarded. Much to the discomfort of the group, one participant shouted out “business-minded” while another shortly followed with “rich”. While responses referenced to popular culture such as “Bollywood”, “colourful”, “dancing” and “curry” were better accepted by the group these responses reflected little more than external perceptions of Indianess. In this chapter, I explore the notion of Indianess within the context of external markers of Indianess and ask critical questions of what it is to understand Indianess within multiple contexts that are often contradictory and complex.

Drawing from Said’s (1978) magnum opus Orientalism, I argue that in a similar fashion to Orientalist imagery being disempowering for Arabs, popular perceptions and performance of Indian identity disallow South African Indians creativity in conceptualising their identities. This is partly due to antiquated perceptions of cultural capital as well as the socially ingrained importance of social mobility through so-called modernisation. This chapter illustrates that the plethora of external stimuli available in conceptualising an Indian identity is often paradoxical and subject to context. I further explore the changing perspectives of India and cultural artefacts as a means of illustrating the complexity and contradiction between the perception and practice of South African Indianess.

Drawing a hypothetical pyramid, the discussion in this chapter leads from macro to micro factors influencing identity. The section titled “Local differences, global similarities” juxtaposes the internal disjunctures against (perceived) sameness and difference. By drawing from my experiences at the Swami Narayan (or BAPS) Shayona restaurant as an example, I contend that perceptions of sameness sometimes reveals a
different outcome as a South African Indian – that is, being Gujarati, Hindu and South African does not necessarily entail an automatic sense-of-belonging.

The chapter concludes with my own perceptions of India and experiences with *Indianess* as a means to illustrate the thought processes in an attempt to externalise the internal dialogue that has led to this study.

**They Came with Nothing**

![Figure 3: Raj and Anita's wedding](image)

“The wedding, like most Indian weddings is large and noisy. Ahead on the stage, Raj and Anita take the first steps toward married life while the rest of the audience engulf themselves in endless chatter over and above the shrill Bollywood love songs playing in the background. I glance around the auditorium and notice that hardly anyone is looking at the couple let alone paying attention to the sacred rite on the stage. Raj looks uncomfortable as the priest patiently instructs him what to do, how
and when to do it; his face carries a pained expression and he winces with each offering, obviously nervous of the dancing flames as his hands awkwardly thrust offerings of *havan samagri*\(^{68}\) mixed with *ghee* into the *havan kund*\(^{69}\). I find myself feeling deep empathy for him as he tries to keep pace with the priest’s rapid chanting. The bride, Anita, is getting hot. Under the bright, heat-generating lights of the videographer’s equipment and with the red hot *havan*\(^{70}\) blazing in front of her, the heaviness of her *panetar*\(^{71}\) and bridal outfit are heavy on her body. It’s clear she is taking strain. From a door at the side of the stage, several women and men from the groom’s party walk into the auditorium with elaborately decorated gifts for the bride. There are three ornate *saris* creatively gift-wrapped, a parcel of sweetmeats, jewellery and stainless steel kitchenware, all beautifully presented. Anita will change into one of these *saris* once she reaches her in-laws house and the other two on other important occasions as dictated by her family and caste traditions. Anita’s attention is momentarily diverted from the wedding ceremony and she stares intently at the parcels as they place them at the edge of the stage alongside the gifts for the groom from the bridal party. The crowd grows restless as the time for lunch draws near and mothers shush their children into silence and placate them with sweets. It’s hot, the crowd is hungry and there is plenty of noise.

Over the din of the wedding chatter, Sheetal and I speak about being young, Indian and living in South Africa. Sheetal raises an important point regarding our current religious and cultural practices: ‘Our grandparents came with [no material wealth] you know. And now look where we are. We all have homes, cars, everything – and we have our culture too because they worked so hard to maintain it.’” (November 2011)

\(^{68}\) Scented woods, herbs, spices and or seeds mixed according to requirements for the *havan*
\(^{69}\) Vessel to contain the fire for the *havan*
\(^{70}\) Ritual fire offering.
\(^{71}\) Bridal head-covering
In my understanding, Sheetal’s comment holds three critical points. The first is that the forbearers of the present diaspora arrived in South Africa with very little material wealth if anything at all. This point draws my attention to the fact that many immigrants arrived in South Africa with very few (if any) remnants of life in India. Then secondly she acknowledges the material progress that has been made since immigration. The final point is an acknowledgement of past actions in shaping the present. The second point is illustrative of the efforts engaged to maintain some level of contact with Indianess even with the sparse contact Indians had with India under the Apartheid government. And finally, she notes that the mere existence of cultural and traditional systems, even religion, in South Africa today bear testament to the fact that although creativity to imagine and reconceptualise identity in a Christian majority and white-dominated state was stifled, it was by no means obliterated. The described elaborate wedding testifies that. Further, the performance and practise of (for example) a wedding ritual externalises a particular way-of-being that was brought by our forebears to their place of settlement.

Weddings are places where tradition and modernity\textsuperscript{72} intersect. In the case of Hindu weddings, the rituals that are performed (including the rituals preceding the ceremony itself) form part of a complex web of practices in which religion, culture and caste/patrilocal traditions muddily mingle. Often, the distinctions between religious ritual\textsuperscript{73} and caste/patrilocal tradition are mistakenly interchanged resulting in generalised confusion between what “should” be done and what “must” be done. For example, my parents are from different castes and during marriage ceremonies, some traditions may differ even though religious elements of ritual remain constant. In this

\textsuperscript{72} The complex movement of people, goods, money and information (Rapport and Overing 2000:263) which result in a state-of-being that has been influenced and adapted by a number of local and global components.

\textsuperscript{73} For example, obeisance paid to Lord Ganesha (the remover of obstacles) at the start of any undertaking. Also known as Ganesh Puja.
case, my maternal family does not perform the *peno*\textsuperscript{74} ceremony; while in my paternal family, the function is given prominence. The question then arises: are traditions that exclude the *peno* ceremony un-Indian (or worse, un-Hindu) and is conformity to particular practises the basis of Indianess? From India’s vast religious and cultural diversity it is clear that this cannot possibly be the case. The differing practises of Hinduism in India are evident of this vastness (Dalrymple 2009a). Thus the external illustrations of Indianess may be seen to be different or subject-to-interpretation when in fact it is simply the local or caste specific practices that differ. Additionally, contemporary interpretations of these rituals are evident in the way ritual is performed and presented.

During my engagement ceremony, my future ex in-laws presented me with two sweet parcels ornately arranged and beautifully wrapped in cellophane. While showing my grandmother the photos and relating the day’s events to her she burst out laughing explaining that “in [her] day you wrapped up the *sakar*\textsuperscript{75} in newspaper and put it in a brown bag”. While this example may be indicative of the changing economic status of South African Indians, it is also a reinterpretation of traditional practises using modern amenities\textsuperscript{76}. As in the case of Raj and Anita’s wedding, the modernity of these rituals is not only in the latest fashionable dress or décor but it exists in the way the ritual is performed to accommodate modern behaviours. This modernity is evident when the wedding ritual is paused for the photographer to take a photo of the gifts being presented or the repositioning of the bridal couple away from the sacrificial fire for in-action photographs during the ceremony (and/or scenery). This reconceptualisation of the way ritual is performed reminds me of Bourdieu’s (Deer 2008: 199) understanding

\textsuperscript{74} A pre-wedding ceremony performed as a means of communication with those who have passed to inform them of the upcoming nuptials and as a means of remembrance of them

\textsuperscript{75} Rock sugar

\textsuperscript{76} Specifically, the availability of ready-made gift-wrapping materials, their availability and in some cases the ability to out-source gift-wrapping to professionals.
of reflexivity as “… the moving representation of an object through the constant (re)formulation-expression of its use and meaning.” To explain, it may be suggested that South African Indians have made use of the reflexive turn to reconceptualise/reformulate tradition, ritual and culture even as they remain emotionally bonded to the past. In this way, the reflexive turn may allow South African Indians the space to creatively conceptualise their identities; however this reconceptualisation questions the existence of an “authentic” Indianess. Who or what is the real Indian and does this even exist?

Figure 4: An Example of ornately wrapped wedding gifts
Dress and Tradition

“Sayali77 and I sit in the temple chatting candidly about her university and degree course while preparations for the festival continue around us. The meditative sounds of devotional music fill the temple as teams of volunteers set up tables, arrange flowers and decorate murtis78. There is a cluster of women threading flowers onto string for decoration and the mandir-pujaari79 moves between the groups as a project co-ordinator, ensuring that preparations are moving smoothly. He speaks partly in vernacular and in English. Around us, the atmosphere is calm, focussed and productive. My nose fills with the sweet smell of burning incense mixing with the fresh flowers the women are threading. It reminds me of India. We begin talking about travel in India and Indian dress and quickly the conversation gets heated as Sayali vents her frustration with ‘people’s narrow-minded views’ regarding dress-code. Sayali is one of the only young adults I know who wears traditional dress80 as non-formal attire and expresses irritation at being confronted with surprise and confusion as to ‘why a smart, intelligent young woman would willingly want to wear something reserved for traditionalists’” (August 2011).

The perception among South African Indians that Indian dress is a part of tradition (and therefore only brought out during religious or cultural occasions) is common. For young women like Sayali, external perceptions of what the contemporary female looks like overrides the possibility that she may be traditional or culturally-inclined while embracing modernity. Unfortunately culture – indeed tradition – is not something seen as relevant to the “modern Indian” but is perceived

77 Sayali’s identity and the location of our conversation is completely obscured to protect her identity.
78 An image of a deity, which itself is considered divine once consecrated
79 Temple priest
80 Also known as salwar kameez or simply salwar in Hindi. In South Africa it is called a panjabi although this is an erroneous term of reference derived from the origin of the dress-style which is the Indian state of Punjab.
by many South African Indians as a stagnant, concretised set of ideals and values that are by no means negotiable or applicable in contemporary life. Further, the tightly bound connections between cultural identity and social mobility seem almost impossible to unravel. Wearing salwar kameez often provokes the perception that it is reserved for those who do not have the need to assimilate into modern culture and therefore have no need for upward social mobility. This idea is further exacerbated by the impression that wearing salwar daily is a prerogative of older generations or for use at socio-cultural or formal functions. Furthermore, wearing traditional dress has become a woman’s forté as men prefer western dress over eastern attire - even at weddings, social or religious functions especially if they are not key members of the family.

Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital is particularly useful in my analysis of external markers of Indianess. The term cultural capital has been used by a number of disciplines across the academy ranging from economics to social sciences and the arts (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Throsby 1999). Bourdieu’s (1986) definition of cultural capital generously creates space for a wide variety of concepts under the understanding of capital. He (Bourdieu 1986) defines capital as

“material things (which can have symbolic value), as well as ‘untouchable’ but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (referred to as symbolic capital), along with cultural capital (defined as culturally-valued taste and consumptive patterns)” (in Mahar, Harker and Wilkes 1990: 13)

For the purposes of this discussion, I focus on cultural capital and its consumptive patterns. While qualitative data on the consumptive patterns of Indian cultural capital is lacking, a discussion of the behaviour around consumption is possible and assists to understand perceptions of the value and importance of culture and its associated artefacts. A simpler understanding of cultural capital is Throsby’s perspective that cultural capital refers to “an asset embodying cultural value” (1999:3). External markers of Indianess such as dress occupy muddied waters because while
acting as a form of cultural capital, they also communicate a particular perceived identity outside of modernity and upward social mobility. Here I am reminded of Goffmann’s (1969) *Presentation of Self* where the presented-self and the perceived-self may be the same but their projected outcomes towards the future and their impact on broader social relations may be different.

**Constructing an Identity**

“It was a warm spring morning in 2011 and needing a break from writing up my field-notes at home I drove to The Shop (my parents’ business). As I pulled up into the gravel (carpark) I saw Hitu and Kalpana, a Gujarati couple living in Benoni, parking their car too. It had been a while since I’d seen them. Hitu’s cheerful personality and Kalpana’s friendly demeanour always managed to brighten my day and after a few
hours in front of a computer screen I looked forward to some human interaction. As I walked towards the couple, I noticed a puzzled expression on Kalpana’s face and after the usual phatic conversation; she asked me if there was a function at the mandir or if my family had a prayer (ceremony) today. I felt equally confused and answered in the negative, unsure of what would have prompted her question. After a moment of awkwardness, Kalpana pointed to what I was wearing and said “you’re wearing a panjabi so I thought you had gone to mandir or something.” (October 2011)

The Indian identity (as a cultural construct) constitutes itself through a number of varied and often colourful markers. Dress, cuisine, mannerisms, habits, language and even accent mark membership or at the very least identification with this complex and layered identity that is neither bound to a nation-state nor overtly political in the broadest sense of the term. In my encounter with Kalpana I am confronted with the usual question of Indianess that has confronted me throughout my life and continues to spark the question – what is it to be Indian and what is it to be South African? To the non-Indian observer, the connection between dress and identity may seem arbitrary. However to the native a seemingly mundane remark about dress-code speaks to the deeper perceptions and preconceptions of what it is to be Indian, South African and modern. These seemingly mundane remarks beg further questions of perception of the self to the self and others (Goffman 1969). These perceptions and preconceptions, in my experiences, repeat over a period of time and in a variety of contexts and as a result re-establish the need to unpack so-called mundane passing-remarks in search of their deeper implications. Memories of a traditional Indian mother or grandmother wearing salwar kameez and the associated connections with dress and traditionalism are perpetuated by mainstream media particularly the plethora of Indian television serials on Zee TV and Sony Asia (for example) and Bollywood interpretations of “the
good Indian girl”. These representations compel me to ask questions of belonging and South Africaness – can I be South African and Indian simultaneously? Is my modernity negated by embracing tradition and culture?

These questions remind me of an incident between the man who was courting me (in 2012) and his mother. When Praful’s mother had come to know of our courtship, she had no trouble placing who I am (whose daughter I was, family and so forth) due to the close family and caste networks between us. Praful recalls her initial response:

Praful’s Mother: Doesn’t she wear panjabis all the time?  
Praful: Um, ja. How do you know that?  
PM: Ja. She’s a bit old-fashioned isn’t she?

Needless to say I was floored by her reaction. Praful’s mother’s reaction presented me with the possibility that the external impression that I communicated through my “old-fashioned clothing” was opposite to the internal feelings I had regarding the presentation of myself and my internal values. This conflict between perceived and projected identity opened up an entirely new avenue of debate for me. It also raised questions of belonging – whom did I belong to and where? I questioned myself further. As a South African born and raised young woman how can I possibly identify so closely with Indianess even “dressing the part” yet embrace modernity wholeheartedly enough to make life-choices defined as a liberal? And of course, as an “educated” woman why would I want to embrace so-called old-fashioned ways of being?

Perceptions of sophistication are not in favour of a modernised or variegated Indian identity. For women like Sayali, external assumptions of her identity drive

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81 As South African Indians.  
82 Praful’s name has been changed.  
83 Liberal here refers to my choice of non-conformative field of study - that is anthropology as well as my decision to study away from home and my frequent solo travels (to name a few)
presumptions that the importance of assimilation into modern culture over-rides the need to express a cultural identity. Yet, as Vally (2012) notes, there is also the desire to express both identities. During the 150 Year Anniversary of Indians in South Africa celebrations in Laudium (Pretoria), Vally (2012) observes a woman dressed in a sari with jeans underneath and a t-shirt as a blouse thus expressing the multiplicities of her identity just as the title of Vally’s monograph suggests: Made in India, Proudly South African. Even though there remained a practical element to her dress – increased mobility – the woman of her monograph reminds me that identity is being challenged and that it is possible – even “ok” – to be, “very South African and a wee bit Indian” (Vally 2012:74). The silver-lining of my figurative identity-cloud lies in instances such as this where individuals (creatively) play with notions of identity and self-conceptualisation to find outcomes that are suitable for them and that are not one-size-fits-all solutions. The majority of Indian women I encountered in the field have two wardrobes – one Indian and one western. While tradition and modernity might not go hand in hand for some, the move towards modernisation is evident particularly among younger generations who are adopting modern ways-of-being. Simultaneously there is a need to express and practice a cultural identity whose norms and values may not neatly integrate with “liberal” “modern”84 ideals. A further marker of this tenuous relationship between modern Indianess and traditional Indianess is language.

**Language**

Among first generation migrants the need to assimilate into the South African host culture through speaking English at the cost of vernacular has fostered feelings of inferiority resulting in what Appadurai (2003) calls deterritorialised people; that is, people living in disconnected worlds. In the case of South African Indians, this would mean neither being not-quite South African nor fully Indian any longer. In many Indian

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84 Often western
families English is spoken in the home and vernacular is reserved for communicating with elders or in religious settings which has eventually led to its disuse. In some families Afrikaans was adopted as the home language (I have noted a few in Lenasia and have been told of others). Among South African Indians, defensive strategies such as speaking English or Afrikaans above vernacular results in what Radhakrishnan (2003) refers to as “the need to authenticate”; the need to be seen as legitimate by the dominant group. The socio-cultural climate created by the dominant group creates an insatiable need in the minority to conform and be accepted. To use Bourdieu’s taxonomy, access to Western intangible capital (that is, fluency in English or Afrikaans) was of greater value than possession of one’s own cultural capital. While the discussion at hand calls to question language, other areas of life were equally conflicted such as dress, dietary preferences, religion, cultural practices and so forth. Maxine Hong Kingston (1976) speaks of a “double depoliticisation” wherein both the home and host country “become mere ghostly locations” (in Radhakrishnan 2003:123). South Africa’s Apartheid state provides an example of relegating non-white citizens to “second-class citizen” status by virtue of their phenotype and as a result these “second-class citizens” being not quite there (India) but not fully here (South Africa) either. As “non-whites” in the Apartheid state Indians occupied the unfortunate position of being completely other in their environment of settlement. Not only was their phenotype distinct but their religious and cultural norms set them completely apart from the rest

85 Although the use and disuse of vernacular among first generation migrants seems to be cut-and-dry, the issue is fraught with complexity as Indians migrating to South Africa could have been fleeing Indianess itself and accordingly any vestiges of cultural identification with India or Indianess were shunned. While Bhana and Brain (1990) do not explicitly express the possibility of cultural shunning, Desai and Vahed (2007) are more suggestive of its possibility. Though Desai and Vahed primarily deal with indentured labour, definitive answers to these questions seem unlikely (regarding indentured and passenger Indians).

86 The use of non-white here is deliberate and seeks to express the brazen realities of double depoliticisation. “Non-white” was the demeaning terminology used by the Apartheid government to classify “people of colour” (sic). By using this term I wish to emphasise the starkness of being classified as a “non-person”.

65
of the population. Further, their language differentiated them from other South Africans. As a result of the no-return intention after migration (Singh 2008:4) double depoliticisation was sealed by their cultural insulation (Desai and Vahed 2007; Singh 2005; Vally 2001). As language was a further barrier between assimilation and acceptance, it may be possible to surmise that the dominant language took over.

**Changing perspectives of Indianess**

Emerging from Apartheid embargos, South Africa’s economy opened to the world and as a result, access to products from India has dramatically increased as compared to the past. It is now commonplace to see Indian-imported goods in Indian shops (and in some others). In the past major cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria were not devoid of imported Indian goods. However when available, they were often in small quantities, of a poor quality and fairly expensive. Although Durban had a significantly larger variety than other cities, the differences between Indian goods available in India and in South Africa were all too obvious to consumers. A typical example of this is the availability of traditional attire particularly for formal wear. During Apartheid and a few years into democracy, brides who could afford to would often opt to do their shopping in India for multiple reasons. These reasons included increased variety, better quality of goods and of course the ease of finding everything in one place. Shopping for a Hindu wedding is more than just the purchase of traditional bridal/groom wear and includes a number of marriage-specific ritual objects as well as traditional wedding invitations, wedding favours and ritual-gifts for sanguine-relatives to name a few. Further, the exchange rate worked in favour of budget-planning and the expenses of travel to India were compensated for by the savings from cheaper prices and the convenience of “finding it all in one place”.

The increased availability of Indian products in South Africa has challenged previously held notions of what it is to be Indian and reconceptualises Indianess through commonly used, familiar items of Indian origin. For example, “modern”
shampoo in packaging similar to local South African brands but with Indian ingredients such as Amla or hair-care specifically for nourishing black hair. The challenge for reconceptualisation comes in the form of reimagining Indianess through imported goods from India that speak to both modernisation as well as “tradition”. An example is Himalaya Herbal Healthcare products. These products are an Ayurvedically formulated range of herbal medicines and personal-care products wholly imported from India. Ayurveda is an ancient-Vedic system of medicine incorporated in Atharva Veda – one of the four pillar texts of Hinduism. Among the diaspora, Ayurveda is seen as a “traditional” healing system. Its status as “from-India” earns it a place as a cultural artefact. With a wide range of Himalaya’s products now available in mainstream retail outlets in South Africa, Ayurveda by association with globalisation and indeed capitalism emerges from antiquity into modernity and presents as a palatable confluence of both.

Over the past 60 years India and South Africa were not unlike each other in their isolation from the rest of the world. In the ambassador-car dominated India of the past, Ba often recalls that as a child studying in the subcontinent during the 1970s, she would stock her bag with “South African treats like jeans, aerosols and chocolates” (to name a few) at the request of relatives and friends when returning to school after the vacation break. Similarly, research participants often speak of travelling to India with their bags full of old clothing and other unwanted items (predominantly western such as clothing, old stationary, even technology) to “pass on to someone who can use them.” However with many “western” or rather American goods becoming freely available in India and the country’s own thirst for modernity there is no longer a need for Indians to request foreign goods from their relatives living overseas.

87 India’s implementation of socialist reforms during the 1950’s to the 1980’s resulted in cultural, social and economic isolation from the west. The Hindustan Ambassador was a locally produced vehicle and regardless of its British origins has become an Indian hallmark (Chopp 2011)
Foreign chocolates, imported fruits and international *haute couture* are freely available in major Indian metropolises. In fact, South African Indians are fast seeing that any class of goods (western or eastern) available in India may even surpass those available in South Africa. The exchange rate in favour of the South African Rand, modifies India from being a shopping destination exclusively for Indian goods to becoming the ultimate shopper’s paradise. The bright florescent signage on streets like Brigade Road in Bengaluru bear testament to the growing demand for foreign products – the ‘Levi’ Jeans Co. signage is ironic given that Ba would take pairs of pants to India from South Africa. Just a generation later I request jeans from India because of a better fit.

![Figure 7: Brigade Road - Bengaluru](image)
Cuisine in India is yet another example of the growing “globalisation”. Countless “Chinese” restaurants boast “Manchurian” spiced vegetables, noodles and paneer (a type of curdled cheese) on their menu. For all the proud proclamation of foreign food at street-side restaurants essentially what one often encounters is a spiced up Indian-interpretation of a Chinese dish. While in Pune, a friend suggested dinner at “a real Chinese restaurant” which drew my attention to the disparity in the commonly available street-side Chinese cuisine and “the real stuff”. I’m sure that an Indian (exposed to the widely available Indian-Chinese cuisine) travelling to China proclaiming Chinese food as their favourite would no doubt be shocked to find that their understanding of Chinese food is in fact Indian (Lewellen 2002; Roudometof 2005). These quirky instances remind me that even though the external presentation of self may be liberal or global, the internal understanding or perception of meaning might be very different.

During a holiday trip to Durban in September 2012 the disparity between external and internal perceptions of self were particularly apparent when I noticed an Indian restaurant boasting “authentic Indian cuisine” in bold letters on a bright neon signboard near our hotel. After a week of Continental hotel food I was eager for a taste of home and with my cousin, investigated the menu options available. The menu boasted “the original” bunny chow, roti\textsuperscript{88} roll and samosas\textsuperscript{89}, all in three varieties; chicken, mutton and vegetarian. I cringed in horror as I imagined South African Indian cuisine being reified in the minds of non-Indians as three lone dishes in a variety of three options (beans, mutton and chicken). The thought that these meal options might become imbedded in the minds of the greater South African public as benchmarks of Indian cuisine had me questioning my presumed Indian authenticity (at this point I hadn’t even thought of its implications on “South African Indian” cuisine). And further,
could these perceptions ever be assessed? My cousin and I stood in muted silence as we placed our order for “one beans bunny and two mutton bunnys”. We were both clearly disappointed and the questionable restaurant fittings and dodgy menu did little to allay our discomfort. As I confronted my “beans bunny”, I wondered if the Gujarati food I was served up as a child had a place in the imagination of an Indian South African. The notion of a homogenous “South African Indian” is problematic and even though it presents as a rich scope of research it grossly lacks investigation within South African academia. Perhaps, as the jeans-and-sari wearing woman of Vally’s monograph shows us, the encouraging prominence of creativity in re/conceptualising identity reduces the mental-emotional pull towards the need to legitimise identity within the dominant culture and in so doing strides towards a heterogeneous understanding of Indianess is possible.

Local Differences, Global Similarities

“My search to understand where I belong [began] at the various Swami Narayan temples and eateries across Johannesburg and Lenasia. The Swami Narayan movement or BAPS (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha) as it is formally known is one of the largest and most active Hindu organizations in the world. The movement supports a number of social and humanitarian activities including a number of worldwide free medical clinics, disaster relief efforts as well as educational and environmental awareness (Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, Swaminarayan Aksharpith 200390). Swami Narayan, the pivot of the organization, was of Gujarati descent and although many followers are Gujarati BAPS is not an exclusively Gujarati organization.

At first sight, the Shayona Restaurant in Mayfair looks like any other Indian restaurant. The entrance to the restaurant seating is through the Shayona store which

90 http://www.swaminarayan.org/
sells a number of *Indian* goods [which are] both local, [that is] made by the Shayona catering group or imported from India. For all its ordinariness, Shayona is not a run-of-the-mill Indian restaurant. The establishment is governed by the strict rules and regulations set out by [the BAPS organisation] in the preparation of food items. To the uninitiated the exclusion of onion and garlic is hardly noticeable, though the lack of meat items (including eggs) on the menu is fairly obvious.

The Shayona chain is one of the largest catering operations by a religious organization and is recognized world-wide for its high standards of hygiene and quality. As a Gujarati, I enjoy the misconception that I have (in a manner of speaking) come home when I walk into a Shayona branch. The food is unmistakably peppered with the sugary undertones synonymous with Gujarati cooking and the Gujarati script on the walls is mercifully legible at my snail pace. However terrible my [Gujarati] grammar, I get an absolute thrill speaking to the cashiers and some servers in my mother tongue. The excitement of taking non-Indian friends into a Shayona branch is as exciting as a trip to an Indian market or even India – I thrive off the enjoyment of sharing my culture. For all its pleasure and excitement, I am painfully aware that I am mistaken and that my enthusiasm is perhaps misplaced. This is because the world of Shayona and Swami Narayan is far from mine and although it is language that binds us, religiously (referring to the taboos and norms of ritual purity strictly observed by followers of Swami Narayan) I am a pariah.

My ignorance of Swami Narayan norms and values was highlighted a few years ago when I returned from India (2008) and visited the Swami Narayan Mandir in Lenasia with my parents at a time of the day when the temple did not have many visitors. During this visit, my parents and I decided to take advantage of the quiet in the temple and embark on a fact-finding mission to understand what it means to be
“Swami Narayan”91. The resident priest was very obliging and after an in-depth explanation of the spiritual concepts and values of the group he further explained the procedures in daily functioning of the mandir. Additionally, the pandit explicitly elucidated the temple taboos as well as the controversial gender separation. Just as we were leaving I bent down to touch the priest’s feet. Having returned from India and eager to show off my advanced (and superior?) knowledge of how “things should be done” I employed the method of greeting respected elders I had seen and practiced in India. He abruptly stepped back and my cheeks flushed red as I recalled the pandit’s explicit instructions not to touch the opposite sex in the temple92. My faux pas served as a gentle reminder that as much as I am similar, I am indeed an outsider to the norms and customs of the group (November 2011).

In the above incident it is clear that notions of belonging extend beyond the macro markers of difference towards more subtle, micro, possibly even subconscious markers of difference. Anderson’s notion of Imagined Communities (1983) is significant in understanding and unpacking the dynamics of this complex situation. As Anderson (1983) suggests, the concept of a nation is an ideological one and the sociological constructions thereof bind individuals in a sense of community. In 1991 a revised version of Imagined Communities was published with additional chapters wherein Anderson expanded on this notion of Imagined Communities to include individuals who perceived themselves as a group. In terms of my experiences with the Swami Narayan group, macro markers of similarity such as language, style of cuisine, broadly-defined religious practices may provide common-ground but micro markers such as group-

91 Followers of Swami Narayan are commonly referred to as “Swami Narayan” just as a Hindu would be referred to as Hindu
92 As a woman, no less not-Swami Narayan, the pandit’s instructions were possibly foresight prompting an explicit warning. While Bapu responded with shock and certain irritation at my lack of attentiveness to the priest’s instructions, Ba patiently understood when I explained that I was merely trying to emulate the behaviour I had learned in India. Later, my parents acknowledged the inherent difficulties in knowing the appropriate behaviour for different religious groups.
specific religious practices, religious philosophy and food taboos emphasise difference. Pocock similarly notes that:

“[t]he Sanstha\(^3\) is faced with a dilemma: to the extent that Gujarati culture becomes the culture of religion and succeeds in establishing this conception in the minds of its youngest adherents, it can ensure its own continuity.” (1976: 362 in Vertovec 2000:32 emphasis in original)

Vertovec goes further to elaborate that “the problem Pocock discerns for the Sanstha is that of ‘disembedding a set of beliefs and practices – a “religion”, from a “culture” which would then be defined as “secular.’” (ibid.) These dilemmas brought to light a particular conundrum for me as a Gujarati Hindu. While group identification as a Hindu and Gujarati may allow me to find common-ground with my Swami Narayan compatriots, I am equally dissimilar in my personal practices of Hinduism such as the inclusion of onions, garlic and eggs in my diet. In these circumstances, the question of “what it means to be Indian” cannot be simply answered by language, cuisine, religion or philosophy. Nor can the establishment of a secular identity answer it. The answer instead points to deeper perhaps more allusive markers.

In a similar situation in 2003, my enthusiasm for local Gujarati dishes at a wedding in Surat, India provoked amusement amongst my hosts as they could not understand why I showed no interest in the continental dishes on offer. I was significantly modern and middle-class enough to wear jeans but “backward” enough to prefer traditional meals over continental dishes. I recall overhearing a conversation between my host mother and another guest during the ceremony, the essence of which alluded to the lack of cultural exposure in South Africa and my need to enjoy as much “culture” as I could while I could. This followed sympathetic tongue clucking, furtive glances in my direction followed by motherly cajoling to eat uninhibitedly. This was for me blatant patronising of my “authentic” Indian status.

\(^3\) Swami Narayan group
A situation provoking similar questions of identity arose while living in Mysore as a student of the University of Mysore in 2006. While getting ready for a wedding, I began to have some difficulty draping my sari and asked my friend’s mother (Indu Aunty) – a Delhi local – for some help. Unfortunately, she had never worn a sari before and I was left to fix the mess drawing from memory what my mother – my South African born mother – had taught me. In the conversation with Indu Aunty that followed my sari-mishap, I alluded to the possibility that South African Indians may have a closer experience of Indianess as opposed to Indians living in contemporary (rapidly globalising) India (Radhakrishnan 2003). I had stood on a figurative land-mine with Indu Aunty. She gently asked me if there was only one way of being Indian and further explained that her family has a long history in the Indian Armed Forces. Furthermore as the wife of an Army Colonel my questions were effectively a question of the epitome of the Indian national-identity.

This incidence, as embarrassing as it was, provoked me to ask the critical question: is there a single, definable Indianess? Does it even exist? My faux-pas brings to light three misconceptions. The first misconception is the existence of a single Indianess (Appadurai 2003; Ebr-Vally 2001; Narayan 1993; Singh 2005) and the second is the deification of India itself or of anything originating from India meaning that India or anything Indian is placed in the highest regard and upheld as incontestable. The third misconception is: the idea that South African Indians have closer experiences of Indianess. The presumption in this misconception is that all symbols of Indianess are engaging “in the same conversation”. For external representations of Indianess, external markers are limited in providing grounds for sameness unless the meanings of symbols of Indianess are the same for all parties engaging “in the conversation”. While this may be seen as a common sense conclusion, in the matter of understanding one’s

94 The deification of India is further explored in chapter five
Indianess I am again compelled to delve deeper into an understanding of what Indianess is towards not-so-obvious markers.

Why India?

The questions arising out of the misconceptions elaborated above are the questions and discomforts that draw me to India’s shores. In India, I see the physical manifestations of my inner contradictions. The physicality of contradiction allows me an analogy to play-out my own mental and emotional musings in a space where I am significantly “other” yet distinctly the same (Narayan 1993; Srinivas 1997). Other
Indian anthropologists experience similar contradictions and challenges with their identities in the field. Nita Kumar’s *Friends, Brothers, informants: a Memoir of Fieldwork in Benares* (1992) as well as the famous Indian Anthropologist M. N. Srinivas’ village ethnography *The Remembered Village* (1976) challenges ideas of sameness and difference from different angles. Over and above the challenges of anthropology in one’s “home” setting, Srinivas’ fieldwork-challenge is further complicated by his father’s departure from the village of his birth when Srinivas was just a child (Narayan 1993; Srinivas 1997). Unlike a member of the diaspora conducting field work in a “native” space such as Kumar, Narayan or myself for that matter, Srinivas did not benefit from the advantages of a generational and extreme geographic distance offering extreme Otherness while in the field. His closeness – that is, his upbringing in India – retained aspects of his native status to a greater degree. What the ethnographies and life-stories of these anthropologists tell me of contradiction is that, apart from it being prolific, to understand identity one has to become comfortable with contradiction.

I am madly obsessed with India. From my first visit to the “Motherland” in 2003 at the end of my matric year, as a Rotary International exchange student, to my latest soiree in 2010 holidaying at a yoga retreat in a secluded hill station north of Mumbai, I find myself enchanted by this paradoxical land shrouded in what is for me ancestral myth and mystery. Indeed, I cannot agree more with E. M. Foster’s (2013) eloquent grasp of the enigma that India is:

“How can the mind take hold of such a country? India ... knows of the whole world’s trouble, to its uttermost depth. She calls "Come" through her hundred mouths, through objects ridiculous and august. But come to what? She has never defined. She is not a promise, only an appeal.”

I too find myself unable to succinctly quantify my experiences and perceptions in and of the subcontinent. The India of my imagination is a mystical land filled with images of grandness juxtaposed with rural simplicity. While Edward Said’s *Orientalism*
(1978) focuses largely on Islam and Occidental unpacking of the socio-cultural, even political views of the Orient, the images of a mystical even mysterious Orient nevertheless echo the same images of India and all-things-Indian. Indeed, Said himself argues that

“Orientalists have traditionally occupied themselves with things Oriental (a specialist in Islamic law, no less than an expert in Chinese dialects or in Indian religions, is considered Orientalist by people who call themselves Orientalist)” (ibid.:50).

While this study makes no claims towards being Oriental or Indian, the images of an exotic-Oriental-other critiqued by Said render themselves to the same rigorous analysis as the enigmatic, enchanted India. In the similar manner that Said (ibid.) argues against essentialising Oriental identity through the use of disempowering imagery, my observations stimulate a similar internal dialogue that rebels against the homogenisation of an identity that is both lucid and enigmatic.

This enigmatic and enchanting India is recreated over time through literary masterpieces such as Rudyard Kipling’s Kim and E. M. Foster’s A Passage to India and in contemporary literature, William Dalrymple’s City of Djinns: A Year in Delhi and Gregory David Roberts’ compelling Shantaram. Stark and engaging – modern Indian literature (authored by Indians or not) paints pictures of a land of paradox – simple and uncomplicated yet layered and complex. Without engaging in a critique of Orientalist texts and political agendas exhaustively (which would be beyond the scope of this study though simultaneously begs review) and looking simply towards the imagery provoked by texts, multiple layers of understanding India juxtapose modernisation with antiquity.

The same juxtaposition presents in contemporary film with Danny Boyle’s multiple Oscar-winning Slumdog Millionaire adapted from the debut novel Q & A by Indian diplomat Vikas Swarup. The book provokes images of a modern-day India still grappling with subaltern, hegemonic challenges through the story of Ram Mohammed
Thomas, the book’s protagonist, lowly-peon and winner of a multi-million Rupee quiz show who is accused of cheating to win. The story traces life-events that provided him with the correct information to win and in so doing challenge the established hegemonies.

Another film disseminating the constant tug between antiquity and modernity is John Madden’s hugely popular *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. In it, five Britons leave England for a “peaceful” retirement in India and find themselves confronted with what can only be described as indiscriminate culture-shock. *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* explores the challenges of the east-meeting-west with tact and empathic simplicity. The movie tactfully grapples with India’s globalisation through the relationship between the hotel owner, his (British) guests and his budding romance with an employee of India’s viral call-centre industry. In the film, the hotel’s antiquity is placed in proximity to the guests expectations of (the internet advertised) “modern” amenities and ultra-modern call-centres. This film provides us with a classic example of the layered realities of contemporary India, that is, an India navigating the permeable boundaries between tradition and modernity and of course, their impact on identity – *Indian* and the other. The list of fiction and non-fiction authors, movies and documentaries exploring the India-Indian-tradition-global dialectic is exhaustive. These novels (and travelogues too) are challenging “Orientalist” imagery (Said 1978) while not completely divorcing from it, they paint what can be seen as a very real picture from my view.

Another adept example of India’s tryst with modernity through technology is India’s growing IT (Information Technology) economy and the rapid growth of IT hubs such as Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. The mass out-sourcing of call-centre contracts from countries around the world to India is rigorously shifting power and class structures. Even so, I am reminded of how fragile these changes are by the
blaring sign indicating the “women’s section” of the busses I used while travelling in Bengaluru.

For me, India was and continues to be an experience of paradoxical plurals. While the drama of a Bollywoodesque India holds my attention superficially, India’s deep and mysterious spiritual history has me enchanted. This spiritual enchantment speaks directly to my own struggles with my identity and the place of faith in informing that identity (Narayan 1993; Radhakrishnan 2003; Vertovec 2000; Parekh 1994). Joining scholars such as Vertovec (2000) and Parekh (1994) I agree that “religion provides an important element that defines the Indian diaspora” (Singh 2003).

India as a visual feast satisfied my senses and on a mental level introduced an intellectual challenge. The question of my identity was no longer an emotional matter but rather an intellectual endeavour encouraging me to question the deepest assumed truths in my socialisation. With my frequent trips to India, childhood sensual imaginings were quickly challenged by images of a dusty country totally out-of-sync with the over-hygienic images I had come to know of as a representation of my “Motherland”, of Indianess and indeed of a deeper part of myself. Further challenging my middle-class insecurities95, I came to realise during my stay as an exchange student that these reproductions of the imagined opulent, vivacious India continue to live on in-part in the imagination of Indians – no less a burgeoning middle class96. As the descendant of migrants, it was difficult for me to imagine an Indian middle-class no less a middle-class that so closely identifies with the images associated with the land of my birth. To me, India was left behind to embrace modernity (and globalisation) through migration. India was certainly not what could be identified with via class similarities.

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95 That I was somehow superior to my Indian-born counterparts by virtue of my foreignness.

96 India has a notoriously poor distribution of wealth with the rich being extraordinarily wealthy and the poor being desperately poor. However, in the past few years post-socialist reform India is now seeing a new class of educated professionals with disposable income and greater social mobility (Giridharadas 2011; Metha 2004).
And yet, a trip to India was considered as “going home”. These seemingly endless paradoxes for me continue culminating in a sense of being not quite other yet significantly the same.

Conclusion

For the most part, one Indian can identify another by phenotype and make certain assumptions about identity from dress, eating mannerisms, behavioural idiosyncrasies and perhaps even religion. Even so, this chapter has illustrated that the conceptualisation of a clearly complex and variegated identity does not exclusively hinge on external markers. While popular culture may seek to indulge the senses in disempowering imagery exoticised by essentialist ideals of “the East”, reality paints a layered picture revealing fundamental complexity. The inclination to pooh-pooh these complexities as a mere technicality should be avoided because it does a disservice not only to the perceptions and presentations of self but more critically to the ability to creatively imagine an Indian identity outside of the norms presented in popular media. The inclusion of my perception of and in India acts as an intellectual spring-board from which my questions of Indianess arise. While South African Indianess can be conceptualised without drawing inspiration from India, I have illustrated that the questions of Indianess that I have asked myself while being disquieted by my experiences on the subcontinent are valuable points of departure. In so doing, I illustrate that even though macro perceptions of Indianess inevitably influence individual experiences of identity, individual agency and creativity is driven by individual choices. To answer what is South African Indianess more fully and deeply, the chapter that follows explores “unseen” influences such as the Apartheid past and local religious practices, and socio-cultural norms of contemporary South African Indianess. In conclusion, the plethora of external stimuli available in conceptualising an Indian identity is often paradoxical and subject to context. However their value in interpreting and creatively unpacking identity cannot be underestimated.
Internal Drivers of External Expressions

2010 was celebrated as the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians to South Africa. Like Vally (2012) I too question whose past was being celebrated. Further questioning the exact period of the arrival to South Africa, a woman known simply as Angela of Bengal or Angela van Bengale was brought, with her husband, to South Africa in 1657 and subsequently sold as a slave to Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company (Jesse Haye n.d; van Wulwen 2007). While the literature does not explicitly state that she was “Indian” (phenotypically), her birthplace is noted as Bengal in India. Angela’s story serves to illustrate the long-standing trade and travel flows between South Africa and India (colonial influences notwithstanding) even though the question of her ancestry and Indianess is beyond the scope of this thesis. Similarly challenging the “official anniversary” of the arrival of Indians to South Africa is the trajectory of Dada’s travel to South Africa as the first generation of our family. His story of migration could certainly not have been 150 years ago. However in contrast, my maternal ancestry dates its South African immigration to the early 1800’s. My mother’s great-grandparents are in fact buried in Grahamstown – an anathema in Hinduism as the dead (save for saints and sages) are cremated.

Regardless of origin, time of migration or settlement, migrant Indians in South Africa during Apartheid (and before) were subject to the racist legislation of the state. Through engaging an in-depth discussion of Apartheid policies that affected identity, my ethnography illustrates the effects of Apartheid policies on the perceptions and expressions of Indianess. Key concepts in this chapter are drawn from Ebr-Vally’s seminal work; Kala Pani: Caste and Colour in South Africa (2001). The chapter further

97 http://www.jesseyhaye.com/angela_van_bengale
98 http://www.family-history.co.za/van_bengale
99 Burial was the only option for Ba’s great-grandparents at that time because Grahamstown did not have cremation facilities and travel to Port Elizabeth (the nearest city with cremation facilities) was not feasible. Even today, cremations are done in Port Elizabeth.
raises issues of representation and questions whether cultural and religious representation assumes an authenticity which is “a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of the dominant group” (Radhakrishnan 2003:127). The chapter concludes with an exploration of; what makes one Indian?

The Cultural Capital of Apartheid

While the anniversary of the arrival of Indians to South Africa may be debated, the long-standing presence of Indians in South Africa points to their status as “more South African” and “less Indian” (Vally 2012). However Apartheid has its own part to play in identity. Succinctly, Apartheid institutionalised identities not just amongst Indians but across races (Ebr-Vally 2001; Welsh 2009). These institutionalised identities (based on phenotype) largely became the foundation for emic notions and perceptions of identity and deeply embedded themselves in the sub-conscious. More mature field participants (specifically those old enough to experience Apartheid at its peak) recall internalising “second-class citizen” status and shared vivid recollections of various levels of racial discrimination with me. These recollections not only speak of awareness of their marginalisation but paradoxically, the awareness of the status quo as something that “is the way it is”. The Population Registration Act of 1950 was, as Welsh aptly expresses, “the linchpin” of the Apartheid system (2009:54). This Act demarcated racial or population categories according to one’s phenotype (Ebr-Vally 2001; Posel 2010; Welsh 2009) and as Ebr-Vally eloquently summates:

“[t]he enactment of the Population Registration Act law gave each South African an ... imposed identity, like the identity given to an object through a name, or through a label stuck onto it depending on its shape and origin. The law determined the membership of a group through the apparent phenotype, and through a wide array of religious, linguistic and cultural criteria, which went as far as clothing and social habits.” (2001:52)

Further exacerbating socio-cultural isolation (regardless of race) was the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Amended Immorality Act of 1950.
(amended from an earlier version in 1927). Together, these acts worked to ensure the reduction or even cessation of cross-cultural mixing. South Africans continue to see the effects of these Acts impact on our society today (Posel 2001) – the simple matter of inter-racial marriage/relationships being greeted with unfamiliarity is an indicator of this, particularly amongst South African Indians. Over and above the aforementioned Acts, the Group Areas Act of 1950 can be identified as the greatest blow to the South African Indian population. Much in the literature suggests that this Act came into effect with the primary (if not sole) purpose of resolving “the Indian problem/penetration” (Ebr-Vally 2001; Posel 2010). The Group Areas Act “provided for the comprehensive residential and business segregation of the different colour groups in every city, town and village” (Posel 2010:55). The Group Areas Act not only isolated racial groups geographically but imposed cultural and social isolation on South African society as a whole. Apartheid succeeded in creating self-influencing cultural climates for the various racial groups largely isolating them from each other (Singh 2005). Although not completely, the system of Apartheid managed to stifle the creativity, freedom of expression and self-determination of individuals seeking to construct their identities. In agreement with the preceding conjecture Gevisser and Cameron delineate Apartheid’s negative impact on the conceptualisation of identity:

“[O]ur identities have been deformed by a system that classified us into those with freedom and those without. Apartheid legislated who we were, what work we could do, where we could live, who we could associate with, what we could read and see and what kind of sex we could have.” (1994:4-5 in Li 2009:10-11)

While this in no way negates or nullifies individual agency in favour of a structural-functionalist argument, many of my research participants express the same sentiments as Gevisser and Cameron (ibid.). My eldest paternal uncle recalls the extent to which racial insubordination extended: “if we had to go to the post office, we had to use the back entrance. There was just no other way. Even if it was just to post a letter we had to use the back entrance. Going to the doctor or the dentist was the same.
White people could even refuse you treatment and there was nothing you could do. Some of the doctors were good, but others just didn’t care. If you were black, you were black.”

The frustration is clear in the way my uncle speaks and yet I sense a tone of acceptance. His shoulders shrug as his voice trails off and the melancholy of being a “second-class citizen” is palpable. I find it painfully frustrating speaking to research participants about Apartheid and resistance to the system. While there is definite agency in the actions of individuals – even groups – within their locus of control outside political structures, there is simultaneously a fatalistic attitude towards the macro-system. The agency of individuals is illustrated (for example) in the economic status of many Gujarati South African Indians. Although in many circumstances wealth is consanguineous, many immigrants in the 1900s arrived in South Africa with little other than meagre savings. The ingenuity of the individual’s agency within his/her micro-socio-cultural space disharmoniously juxtaposes with acceptance of the socio-political hegemony created by the Apartheid State. In direct contradiction to Appadurai’s conjecture in “the ability of the people to confound the established spatial orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination” (1988:17)\textsuperscript{100} the Apartheid state managed to ensure that space and place was \textit{given} (that is state-imposed via the Group Areas Act) and that the ability of the individual to imagine his/her world independently of prescribed norms was stunted. The Apartheid state’s prescriptive practices may have stunted the “ability of people to confound established spatial orders” (ibid.), which in turn impacted their ability to heterogeneously imagine the world.

\textsuperscript{100} Full quote: “the ability of the people to confound the established spatial orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination means that space and place can never be ‘given’ and that the process of their socio-political construction must always be considered” (Appadurai 1988:17)
The first migrants to South Africa imported their culture to their host country as a means of continuation for future generations (Appadurai 2003, Radhakrishnan 2003). Unfortunately international trade embargos placed on the Apartheid economy impacted the importation of goods from India and as a result, trade between India and South Africa became increasingly difficult which created a definite impact on the evolution of experiencing and expressing Indianess in South Africa. While inter-cultural mingling was hampered by the Apartheid government, it also fulfilled the purpose of insulating Indians (and Indianess) from external influences. This environment was effectively the continuation of “frozen moments in time” (that is, memories of India at the moment of immigration) and served the purpose of ensuring posterity in a socio-political environment that treated its members as second-class citizens.

Politics

The issue of representation of the Indian identity within the locus of Apartheid is unquestionably a murky issue. The institutionalisation of identity within the Apartheid state allowed no room for heterogeneity. Just as individuals of the “African” diaspora have been homogenously labelled as “African” without an account of their diversity (Manger and Assal 2006) “Indian” was the homogeneous category applied to any persons originating from the Indian subcontinent. Any markers of diversity, specifically linguistic, were self-created and were not engineered by the state (Ebr-Vally 2001). Therefore questions about who decides what is authentic arise due to the vast diversity of cultural-systems in the subcontinent (that are presumed imported to South Africa at the time of migration (ibid.). The contentious question of representation ultimately becomes a political question. Questions of who speaks for whom arise and institutions such as the South African Hindu Maha Sabha (SAHMS) provide a partial answer (and raises further questions). The SAHMS functions with the sole purpose of being a united voice for Hindus in South Africa regardless of linguistic group. According to its website;
“[t]he South African Hindu Maha Sabha was founded in 1912 to create unity among all Hindus in South Africa ... It is the mission of the South African Hindu Maha Sabha to work towards the advancement of all members of the Hindu faith among all Hindu linguistic groups in a spirit of respect, unity and brotherhood.” (SAHMS 2013\(^{101}\))

Through authoritative spokesmanship organizations such as the Maha Sabha influence the practice, perception and experience of Hinduism and as a result Indianess in South Africa. An example of the Sabha’s efforts towards greater “Hindu” awareness is the Shuddha Certificate. Shuddha certification has been one way of ensuring that the religious rights of Hindus are protected. As per their website, the certificate is explained as follows:

![Shuddha Logo](http://www.sahms.org.za/

Figure 9: Shuddha logo as it appears on certified foods. Source: [http://www.sahms.org.za/](http://www.sahms.org.za/)

“Hindus make up the majority of vegetarians in South Africa and every Hindu is required to abstain from all animal products during fasting. [The Shuddha certificate was instigated as a result of the Sabha receiving complaints] about supposed vegetarian products containing animal ingredients or contaminants... For a product to be accredited by The Shuddha Committee it must meet the following criteria:

• [the product must be] free from animal meat, protein, tissue or fat (meat, poultry, fish or shellfish), or bone stock, animal or carcass fats, gelatine, insect or extracts from insects or any other ingredients resulting from slaughter.

• Any primary packaging material (edible or non-edible) used to protect, sell, distribute food should ...not contain any of the above, e.g. wax coatings on cheese and related foods, sausage casings, etc.

• No pre-treatment of food should contain any of the above material, even if the material is extracted or absent from the final end-product.

• [The product must] contain no eggs

• [The product must be] cruelty free – no animal testing

• [The product must be] free from alcohol

• No cross contamination [should occur] during the production process. If the production line is shared with non-vegetarian products, thorough cleaning must be carried out before vegetarian production commences. This extends to all associated machinery, equipment, utensils, surfaces and clothing, which must remain free from non-vegetarian ingredients before vegetarian products are touched, prepared, produced or packaged. Strict procedures must be in place to ensure packaging mix-ups and other errors do not occur.” (ibid.)

Through the strict requirements of certification, the Shuddha logo offers peace-of-mind for Hindu vegetarians using mainstream consumables as well as other vegetarians. While the Sabha works towards fostering unity amongst Hindus in South Africa regardless of linguistic group (illustrated by the Sabha’s logo which includes three symbols of Aum\(^{102}\)) one questions if they are doing enough to promote Hindu, even Indian, heterogeneity particularly in a country that is as sensitive to

\(^{102}\) Aum is a mystic primordial sound, sacred to Hindus. The symbol of Aum (ॐ) is often regarded as a symbol for Hinduism
essentialism as South Africa is. The pertinent issue with regards to representation is between emic and etic notions of Indianess. Who decides what is authentic Indianess and where and when is this decided? The Indian mother cooking dhal and rice for her family is catering for her family in the way she has been taught by her mother and her mother’s mother before her. For this mother, her understanding and expression of her Indianess is authentic - because it has been handed down from generation to generation. On the other hand, the same dhal and rice may be seen as genuinely un-Indian depending on the interpretation of Indianess (Ebr-Vally 2001:29).

With regard to ritual, during and outside formalised fieldwork, I have been encouraged by many Indians to pursue a study of puja towards serving the greater purpose of achieving conformity-of-practice among Hindus particularly with regard to ritual. As Nagin Kaka emphatically exclaimed “I can’t understand why it is that when

103 Stemming from racial stereotyping.
104 It is interesting to note here that while no-less than five Indians expressed great concern at the so-called “lack of standardisation in practice”, no Indians expressed that same concern or observation. The Indian concern was more towards the perceived “blandness” of the faith experience in South Africa.
105 Gujarati term for paternal uncle, though used in this context as a sign of respect for his status as a non-related elder.
I go to the *mandir* in Springs they do things one way and the Benoni *mandir* does it another and in Lenz\(^\text{106}\) a different way. I mean why can’t they just all be the same, do it all one way?” Without exception, I balk at the concept of a “standardised Hinduism” devoid of the nuances of local culture (“local” here implying context-specific reference to India or the diaspora). Texts such as William Dalrymple’s (2009a) *Nine Lives* explore the vast interpretations and expressions of Hinduism (among others) on the subcontinent clearly illustrating that there is no single-expression of Hinduism – its forms and manifestations are multiple and *very* varied. Narayanan’s (2000) paper further elaborates the key point that multiple expressions of Hinduism play out continuously on the subcontinent. Its anthropological expressions are diverse as are interpretations of sacred texts. Perhaps the need for conformity and standardisation finds its root at what Radhakrishnan calls “reactive authenticity” wherein cultural and religious representation assumes an authenticity that is “nothing but a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of dominant groups” (2003:127).

**Here – Then and Now**

“As the din of the chatter in the living room died down, the drone of the harmonium grew louder sounding through the television. An ethereal voice filled the air as the sounds and sights of a distant past provoked fond memories from my parents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Shivram Maharaj, charismatic and powerful, sang his own composition “*Taari maraji thi duniya chaale re*” - the world operates only according to your wishes. The experience of hearing the Master’s voice singing his own compositions gives me gooseflesh and draws tears from many present, myself included. As the song draws to an end a young girl walks onto the stage and garlands the Master to welcome him. While inwardly amused with the girl’s gawkiness I burst out laughing when I realise that it is me, some 20 years younger. As the song draws on,

\(^{106}\) A Colloquial term for Lenasia which is in south of Johannesburg.
the camera pans around the room and sights of familiar people and surroundings provoke a flood of memories initiating a lively discussion of life-in-the-past.” (October 2011). The recording my family and I had just witnessed had been taken at the Nehru Bhavan Hall in Bakerton, Springs.

The Nehru Bhavan Hall was the first function hall built by Gujaratis in Bakerton. As Bakerton Gujarati’s first formal gathering place, the hall functioned as a place for members of the community to congregate, pray and host family, social, cultural or religious gatherings. Weekly daytime activities included the Gujarati school (vernacular-lessons) as well as other dance, singing practices and evening table tennis matches. At the weekend, the hall was transformed into a venue for pre-wedding ceremonies, weddings and prayer/ritual/religious gatherings to name but a few. In addition to the communal-area downstairs the second floor of the building is apartment-style housing with communal ablution facilities. Although hardly used as a social gathering space now, the Nehru Hall (as it is commonly known) is now used as a food preparation area for weddings (and other functions), a storage area for catering cooking utensils and the upstairs flat-accommodation continues to be housing. The concept that brought the Nehru Hall into reality stemmed from the memories of communal spaces being central to socio-cultural cohesion. Bapu explains how his father’s generation conceptualised their spaces from fragments of memory\textsuperscript{107} of India that they then pieced together in South Africa; “Our parents came to South Africa without a clue. They were basically uneducated and all they knew is they had to do something to keep their culture.” He continues, “They had no idea. But they knew what they saw back home and slowly slowly they got together and put their ideas into

\textsuperscript{107} Memory is defined as “remembrances of past historical events that are structured by culturally defined patterns of meaning as well as the social context in which they are generated” (Bangstad 2006:34)
one. They knew the importance of a place to pray and gather as a community, so they organised a space. At first, it was in peoples’ houses and then when the Nehru Hall came along it was there.” (November 2011)

Ironically, although the Group Areas Act restricted movement and interfered with basic freedoms it ensured that the traditions and values brought from India were insulated due to lack of inter-cultural mingling (Ebr-Vally 2001). As a result, few of the norms and values imported from India were lost (see also Radhakrishnan 2003; Narayan 1993; Ebr-Vally 2001). Further exacerbating this insulation was infrequent contact with India via communication, travel, media and so forth. In this way Apartheid laws played a pivotal role in ensuring the continuation and preservation of cultural and religious practices.
South African Indians are no longer required by law to live in “racially designated” areas as per the Group Areas Act and are moving to neighbourhoods of their choice, largely due to security concerns. As a result, Indian families are spreading out and no longer share the benefits of close-proximity. Hansa Kaki\textsuperscript{108} and her family are one such example. Previously highly involved in community activities and a regular visitor to the Shree Vishveshwar Mandir in Bakerton, Hansa Kaki is lucky now to go to the Benoni mandir (Shree Radha Krishna Mandir) thrice a month if at all. The move

\textit{Figure 11: Nehru Bhavan Hall, Bakerton. Photo taken in 2014}

from Bakerton to Atlasville (a suburb of Benoni) was a security and an investment decision and although she longs for the sense of community experienced in Bakerton she has no regrets about the move with regards to safety and security.

\textsuperscript{108} Gujarati word denoting paternal brother’s wife. Although we are unrelated, I call Hansa “Kaki” as a term of respect for an older woman.
Living opposite the Nehru Hall, Hansa Kaki saw the rapid degradation of Bakerton with crime and violence severely impacting social life. Following the construction of the Bakerton mandir in 1998, the Nehru Hall ceased to become the centre of (Gujarati) community activities and has become something of a white elephant due to increasing levels of violence in the area. Even so, with the building of the Shree Vishveshwar Mandir (Bakerton mandir) community activities did not wane and were in fact boosted particularly during the first eight or nine years of the mandir’s existence. During these initial years, the mandir functioned without the assistance of a mandir-pujaari. Members of the Bakerton Gujarati community assumed daily responsibilities of the temple via a roster system and religious festivals and rituals continued with the added benefit of a formal temple as a venue thus ensuring community cohesion.

Language

As the roster system at the Shree Vishveshwar Mandir illustrates, there is not complete apathy towards maintaining religious practices. Even though many research participants I speak to lament the “loss of culture” in India and proudly claim their authentic Indian status in the same breath, the opinion that the present Indian generation are drifting further and further from their heritage is closely linked to the loss of vernacular. “Young people just don’t speak the language anymore and not many of them want to” laments an elder from the Tamil-speaking community. “Look at the Greeks, the Portuguese; they only speak their mother tongue at home but here, our kids just aren’t interested. Even the parents don’t know how to speak Tamil so how are they going to teach their children?” The concern raised is very real and is by no means restricted to the Tamil community. The lack of vernacular among the diaspora is a cause for grave concern particularly among elders and the lack of initiative among the younger generations to learn the language/s exacerbates the situation drastically. For many of these elders, language is a form of cultural capital which is tied
to many facets of Indianess and the practice of Hinduism. There are multiple concerns regarding the domino effect losing language would create. With the delicate connections to India lost or diluted through migration, the concern is that the connection to religion, ancestors, culture and tradition are at risk of being compromised. A research participant, particularly concerned with the impact that losing language would have on religion remarked that “young people are looking for something more. They’re asking questions, wanting more, they want an alternative and we’re unable to provide that then they’ll go elsewhere for answers. As it is there are so many Christian converts.” Here my research participant refers to concerns that ritual and prayer is more often than not conducted in vernacular or Sanskrit and that a priest’s ability (or lack thereof) to provide an explanation of various ritual and prayers removes religion and faith from daily lived-experience to ceremonial practice. Even though, as Diesel (2003:41) notes, there has been “considerable resistance to change in the patterns of worship, and devotees’ familiarity with the ritual has been faithfully transmitted over the generations” there seems a diminishing commitment from the youth to assume responsibility for the continuation of tradition. It is no longer sufficient to “accept things as they are”. Among past generations, the logic was simple: If your mother did it, you will do it as will your daughter. Asking questions about cultural and traditional beliefs was kept under censure and was far from encouraged. However, the present generation is asking questions – why, how and what for? In my understanding, the ability or inability to answer the aforementioned questions will determine the survival of cultural traditions and practices and ultimately facilitate adaptation into what is seen as a fast globalising society (Radhakrishnan 2003).

**Family-as-microcosm of Culture**

In *Difference and Disjuncture*, Appadurai’s discussion of cultural reproduction in “an age of mechanical art” (2003:41) recognises the family-as-microcosm of culture
and the role of women in this process. He asserts that women are key-players as co-creators and maintainers of

“deterritorialised communities and displaced populations, however much they may enjoy the fruits of new kinds of earning and new dispositions of capital and technology, [they] have to play out the desires and fantasies of these new ethnoscapes, while striving to reproduce the family-as-microcosm of culture. As the shapes of cultures grow themselves less bounded and tacit, more fluid and politicised, the work of cultural reproductions becomes a daily hazard.”  

(ibid.:43 emphasis added)

While I do not agree with cultural reproduction being hazardous and rather view it as a creative and ceaseless work-in-progress, the role of women in ensuring this reproduction is irrefutable. Among the mothers I interviewed, Villopa Masi109 observes Vaibhav Lakshmi Vrat – a sacred vow or observance usually accompanied by a fast dedicated to the Goddess Lakshmi110 and observed every Friday. As the following excerpt from my fieldnotes illustrates, embedded in the ritual is a responsibility to her family and her culture towards posterity.

“It is a typical Indian house – the armrests of the couches are covered with plastic, food bubbles away on the stove and an assortment of pets and children amble about the house as a number of other miscellaneous activities carry on in the background. I’m not sure whether to laugh or cry111 – I feel I might as well be interviewing my aunt for all the similarities I observe in the immediate surrounds. The interview starts off well and Villopa Masi is forthcoming and detailed in her

109 Gujarati word denoting mother’s sister. Although we are unrelated, I call Villopa “Masi” as a term of respect for an older woman.
110 Goddess of Wealth, consort to Lord Vishnu.
111 During the initial stages of fieldwork, I noticed a common pattern in the expression and performance of ritual and as a result found myself increasingly anxious to access as wide a variety of Indians as possible. Accordingly, I approached a number of individuals at random in the mandir and asked for interviews. It became a point of frustration that many homes I visited felt like similar replicas of each other.
explanations. The *Vaibhav Lakshmi Vrat* she observes every Friday deeply intrigues me because I know many others who observe the same *vrat*. As with others, the *vrat* involves a period of fasting and abstinence from certain foods as well as a specific *puja* in honour of the Mother Lakshmi. The exact method of observing the *vrat* varies greatly yet retains distinguishing markers. For example, if the *vrat* is introduced via a grandmother or a family member as opposed to learning it from a book or via a priest the ritual (having taken on the personality and style of the teacher) it will be expressed and practiced by the student accordingly. Villopa Masi is unhappy to admit that even caste plays a role in how the *vrat* is performed and reflects that as a *Kori* certain offerings and ‘ways of doing things’ change according to individual and group value systems and traditional beliefs. Prior to marriage, she asked one of her *kakis* about the *vrat* and was taught a simple, uncomplicated way to perform it and continues to do it in the manner she was taught. One of the key characteristics of performing a *vrat* is the recitation of a story which is often an explanation of the reasoning behind conducting the *vrat*. There are many books detailing the *vrat* – that is, the story behind it, who may and may-not perform it, how the *vrat* is to be conducted (rituals upon rising, food taboos, prayer rituals and other observances) and what the benefits of the *vrat* are. Fortunately, Villopa Masi reads Gujarati and is able to read two of the many books that are currently available.

The rituals for the *vrat* start with fasting for the entire day. Then, at about 6pm she has a bath or washes her hands and feet and prepares for the *puja* by covering a small table with a white cloth and places a fistful of rice in the centre and a copper *kalash* on the pile of rice. Masi explains that copper’s lustre is symbolic of wealth.

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112 Caste category – farmer.
113 Family, caste and social
114 Abstaining from food of any kind.
115 A metal (brass, copper, silver or gold) pot with a large base and small mouth, large enough to hold a coconut.
and she further observes that many of the metals used in puja are good conductors of electricity. She further adds that the materials used in puja are decided according to the means of a household. The kalash is then filled with water and a small steel thaali\textsuperscript{116} is placed over the mouth of the kalash. In this thaali, Villopa Masi places a piece of gold (frequently jewellery or a coin) and again notes that the offering here is within the means of the individual/household. Masi then balances a Sri Yantra\textsuperscript{117} against the kalash and places her book on the table as well as a divo\textsuperscript{118}. After lighting the divo, she offers naivedya\textsuperscript{119} in the form of something sweet (sakar, soji\textsuperscript{120} or mithai\textsuperscript{121} – must be vegetarian) to the Goddess and along with that offers water in a steel vessel separate to the water offered in the copper kalash. The blessings of puja are transmuted to the naivedya which then become prasad\textsuperscript{122}. Not accepting or eating prasad is a rejection of the blessings of puja. By consuming this holy offering, the individual figuratively internalises the blessings of the deity and benefits of the puja. For this reason, Masi offers sakar every week and only occasionally makes soji or any other sweet dish. I find it interesting that she is very aware of the kind of offering that she makes to the Goddess, ensuring that the rest of the family will enjoy it too thereby mitigating the risk of rejection by the often fussy palettes of young children. The Yantra and the book are then honoured with a tillak\textsuperscript{123} and rice along with turmeric is sprinkled at the base of the kalash as an offering to the goddess. Flowers are then offered (if flowers are not available, rice is offered) and the book is read in Gujarati

\textsuperscript{116} Plate.\textsuperscript{117} Sacred geometric pattern.\textsuperscript{118} Prayer lamp.\textsuperscript{119} A food offering to a deity begins as naivedya – a holy offering and becomes prasad – that which has been offered to be consumed by the devotee.\textsuperscript{120} A sweet pudding made of semolina and sugar often spiced with nuts and/or cardamom.\textsuperscript{121} Indian sweetmeats.\textsuperscript{122} Food offerings to a deity that have been offered and are then considered to have the deity’s blessing residing within it.\textsuperscript{123} A mark on the forehead in the case of a person or in the case of an object placed anywhere is the individual sees fit.
beginning with a stuti\textsuperscript{124} and one or two of the stories are read from the book\textsuperscript{125} followed by another stuti, then the thaar\textsuperscript{126} and aarti\textsuperscript{127}. Masi then explains to me that she feels that it is important that her children are involved and they sit with her as she goes through the process of preparing for and conducting the puja. “I think when you have kids you come to a realisation that for them to understand they have to participate. Because when they participate they ask questions and when they ask questions, they comprehend. It doesn’t just become a thing of ‘because my mum did it, I will do it’ or ‘I don’t understand it, so why should I do it?’” The involvement of her children is clearly a priority for Villopa Masi. The point-of-view that involvement and questioning facilitates the understanding and acceptance of heritage is echoed by a number of mothers I have spoken to. As the mother of two teenagers emphatically asserted “this is where their education as Hindus begins – not with book or scriptural learning but rather by experiencing and participating.” The process of self-enquiry\textsuperscript{128} begins at the mundane.” (September 2011).

Villopa Masi’s practicing of puja illustrates Appadurai’s premise of women being key-players in the reproduction of culture and of the multiple challenges and considerations they face in balancing personal needs and wants with family duties and responsibilities. From ensuring that individual tastes are catered for in her choice of prasad for puja to making a conscious effort to involve her children Villopa Masi illustrates that what seems like a simple act of worship is large step towards “the work of reproduction” (Appadurai 2003:41)

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{124} Hymn.
\textsuperscript{125} The stories vary from book to book. Even so, each book explains the nature of the vrat and provide a number of examples of people who have observed the vrat and the results they have obtained
\textsuperscript{126} A song inviting the deity to partake in the offerings (naivedya).
\textsuperscript{127} The sacred act of waving a lamp before the deity while singing a song of praise. Aarti is both a verb and noun.
\textsuperscript{128} Self enquiry as understood as a part of the spiritual process as outlined in Hindu scripture.
\end{footnotesize}
Simple Acts in the Work of Reproduction

“Apartheid forced us to live together, work together, pray together, and do everything together. By being together in almost everything we did, communities became incredibly tight knit especially in the smaller towns. Then also because there weren’t many Indians in South Africa and the groups were small, on a caste level it was easy to invite the entire Kumbar community to a wedding and because everyone knew everyone else, the entire Kumbar community would come for a funeral if someone died.” During the quoted informal conversation with a Gujarati man in the field, I realized that the journey to South Africa entailed a certain responsibility not only to the family, but to broader Indian culture as well. My research participant further explained that “our parents brought their culture with them when they came. It was all from memory. If they remembered their childhood home had a Tulsi\textsuperscript{129} plant growing outside, they made sure they got Tulsi seeds and planted Tulsi outside their homes.

\textsuperscript{129} Tulsi is also known as holy basil (\textit{Ocimum tenuiflorum}). It is a sacred plant for Hindus and has a number of medicinal properties.
Same with the prayers. There were no priests in those days to say do like this and do like that. Whatever they did, they did to the best of their memory and if they went back to India and felt like it they learnt more and came back to teach. That’s it. And then *kathakars* like Shivram Maharaj and *Swamis*\(^{131}\) were around so slowly slowly we began to piece things together. Then there was Divine Life Society, and they did a hang of a lot, and Ramakrishna Mission. So like that we learnt more and more. But it all began very basic and from the heart.”

**What Makes You Indian?**

In 2007 I returned to India as a student of the University of Mysore. It was during my stay at the University that I began to think critically about the motivations and intentions behind my grandfather’s migration to South Africa. My perception of India as the "Mecca of Indianess", was influenced by a number of factors; the most relevant being my trip to India at the end of 2003 to the beginning of 2004 as a Rotary exchange student. During this time, I was convinced that there existed a “right” and “wrong” Indianess as well as a binary way of experiencing the world. My experiences in India led me to ask a rather controversial question of South African Indianess (specifically with regards to Hindus) and those who represent or rather express it – where are we going wrong? In retrospect, my insistence on a “right and “wrong” way of being Indian negated the necessity to understand Indianess as a context-specific construct, in other words to accept it as a way-of-being bound to place and time. I imprudently believed that “In order for my Indianess to be rationalised, it must exist against the benchmark of the original and (as a follow-on to the question of originality) - where and what is that original, is it here (South Africa) or is it there (India)?” (September 2011). I have observed (and continue to observe) the constant need to prove, justify and authenticate the South African Indian identity among South African

\(^{131}\) An honourific title given to a Hindu monk or learned teacher.
Indians and this in turn has created an indelible mark on perceptions and experiences of identity (Radhakrishnan, 2003). Post-India, I find it “difficult to determine if the drive toward authenticity comes from within... or if authenticity is nothing but a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of [the] dominant [group]” (ibid.:127) – in the case of South Africa, the white-Christian minority. In other words, is the Christian majority a barometer in understanding our own Indianess?

I began to question what makes me truly Indian and is there such a thing as the authentic Indian? Is what truly makes one Indian the adherence of religious or social norms? The growing rejection of ritual impurity of a menstruating woman is an adept example of the challenges in understanding what makes one Indian? Menstruation is largely seen in mainstream Hinduism as an unclean process and a female is prohibited from entering a temple, preparing items for prayer and in some cases even touching certain foods during her cycle. While many women refrain from attending mandir while they are menstruating there are equally growing numbers of women who are rejecting ritual purity norms and attending religious functions (at mandir or otherwise) whether or not they are menstruating. During the discussion regarding the inconveniences of menstrual taboos I recall the wife of a medical doctor trying to reason her flouting of these taboos. She reasoned that in the past, personal hygiene was more challenging to maintain and the chances of menstrual fluid tainting ritual objects, leaking while sitting/during activity and even unpleasant odour were now mitigated by more sophisticated technologies catered towards making it easier for women to be more mobile (in terms of sanitary pads/tampons) and easily maintain better levels of hygiene. She said: “nowadays we shower every day, wash our hands more often [and] use throw-away pads. I mean what’s the problem? It’s not like we’re dirty (referring to women during their cycle).” Although the topic is scarcely broached – even among women (for reasons ranging from propriety to shyness) – to provoke responses and stimulate dialogue I have often deliberately declined offers to go to the temple or attend a religious function while during my cycle. During these discussions I
am met with surprise not unlike to my choice\textsuperscript{132} of wearing traditional dress outside of religious or cultural functions. Unfortunately the conversations that occur as a result of my provocations are sparse and women rarely offer their opinions or practices however it is possible to infer from their surprised responses that the idea of not attending temple during their cycle is arcane and accordingly their participation in ritual/attendance at temple is not affected by their cycle. As a result of this repudiation those unwilling to perpetuate tradition relegate tradition to the boundaries of backwardness. This happens without fully understanding its place within the greater socio-religious system. My argument is not in favour of or against transcending ritual taboo; my issue is with the reasoning underpinning the alteration of traditional practices. Here we see tradition being rejected as a result of intellectual reasoning that is produced outside of the context that is being judged or altered. Not only is India and anything Indian consigned to the category of “backward” but also becomes a part of the past – a past external to the self and required to be shed. In reality that cannot be. Being Indian entails being linked to the past. The debt to those crossing the \textit{kala pani}\textsuperscript{133} will remain unpaid because it is through their actions that we are able to enjoy the luxury of reflection.

\section*{Conclusion}

In this chapter, I have discussed various internal drivers influencing external expressions of Indianess. The first half of the chapter discusses how identity was driven by the institutional mandates of the Apartheid state. The chapter further delineated issues of representation and questioned if cultural and religious representation assumes an authenticity which is “a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of the

\textsuperscript{132} My reasons for not attending religious functions due to my cycle are not illustrative of blind-faith in traditional norms and values. Rather, they are driven by my own deep-seated philosophical and metaphysical understanding of Vedic cosmology – that is, the oneness of all existence.

\textsuperscript{133} Literally translated as “the dark waters”, a journey across the dark waters signified the shedding of caste and cultural norms (Ebr-Vally 2001)
dominant group” (Radhakrishnan 2003:127). The second half of this chapter dealt with family-as-microcosm of culture and again in reference to Apartheid policies unpacked “what makes one Indian”. Through the narratives of Hansa Kaki and Villopa Masi I illustrated that simple acts in the work of reproduction are not only informed by notions of tradition, culture and religion, but are underscored by the effects of the past.

This chapter delineates underlying drivers of Indianess and presents precursory issues for the final ethnographic chapter; The Complexity of Indianess.
The Complexity of Indianess

Superficially, one Indian can identify another by phenotype and make certain assumptions from external appearances. However, as I have shown, it would be far too simplistic to assume that Indian identity is marked by dress, eating curry and knowing how to fold the perfect *samosa*. The facets of Indianess are multifarious and as the discussion in the thesis illustrates, internal drivers form a critical part of conceptualising Indianess. While popular culture may seek to indulge the senses in exotic disempowering imagery the lived realities of Indians reveal complex phenomenon. These complexities cannot be regarded as technicalities. Even though South African Indianess can be conceptualised without drawing inspiration from India, my experiences on the subcontinent are valuable as personal narrative in understanding what South African Indianess is.

To answer the question of South African Indianess more fully and deeply, this chapter explores complex influencers on the perception and experiences of Indianess such as local Indian views of migrants as well as the inherent contradictions of the deification of India. Through examining the effects of Apartheid instituted boundaries, I demonstrate that past perceptions of South African Indianess were informed by boundaries that were “emblematic of forms of difference” (Bashkow 2004:443-444). This chapter concludes with the assertion that South Africans may have been living in continual presentations of past but, as a result of global and local flows, are now reconceptualising what it means to be South African Indian.

*Indians and Indians in South Africa*

The beauty parlour I go to in Actonville employs Indian immigrants. Female customers are attended to in an adjoining area and access to that area is through the (male) barber-shop section of the salon. I’m reminded of India every time I walk through the doorway as I pass the wall-to-wall cloudy mirror, my shoes tapping lightly on the linoleum tiled floor. I walk in with purpose and a sense of direction and seat
myself on the oversized barber-chair fiddling mindlessly with my phone while I wait for my beautician to come. The wall-mounted television blares a random selection of Hindi film songs and I silently giggle as I hear the hair-dresser next to me complain about his client to his colleague in Hindi (his client is a South African born-Indian and does not understand Hindi). At the same time my beautician walks in and we exchange glances of amusement because the hair-dressers on duty are completely unaware that I understand their foreign-tongue gossip. Among the Indians I have spoken to who are recent migrants to South Africa, many can be understood as economic migrants (Barbali 2009; Owen 2011) and most of my conversations with them are in Hindi.

In South Africa it is unusual for a South African Indian to speak Hindi no less with the fluency and in the style that I do. The employees of the salon, many of whom are in South Africa for over three years, are not at all proficient in English. Nor do they feel the need to be and so I often find it easier to simply start the conversation in Hindi. Many times, my attempts at Hindi are received with enthusiasm and any barriers of self-conscious seem to immediately fall away. While applying oil to my head Mahmoud134 Bhai135 explains to me in candid Hindi, “all I need to know is what number 1 and number 2 mean (referring to the style and length of a hair-cut). I don’t need to bother with styles and cutting. Imagine if I cut, make a mistake and do something different to what the client wants. It would be a disaster. I don’t need to know any more than I do”. This is the case for many economic migrants I encounter in the field even those who open up businesses in business districts away from areas of Indian settlement (where one would assume speaking English would be a necessity). Ironically, during my trips to India I have often found that the locals of whichever area I am in want to practice their English with me. Accordingly, our conversations are in English even though I may want to practice my Hindi. After leaving the parlour, my

134 Mahmoud Bhai’s name and the location of the parlour have been obscured to protect his identity.  
135 Brother. Employed in common-use as a term of respect and endearment.
conversation with Mahmoud Bhai leaves me wondering if our conversation might have been in English had we been in India. Further, how does the use (or disuse) of language shape Indianess?

The prejudices against Indians living and working in South Africa can be hostile. These were brought to my attention during a discussion among Indian 136 friends and family. Economic migrants are sometimes known as IP’s – Indian Pappas – a derogatory term referring to their “not-yet-acculturated” or rather “FOB – Fresh off the Boat” status. Many of these migrants are uneducated, have fled India for better prospects largely for economic reasons and some have definite plans to return or to use South Africa as a spring-board to access America and Europe as in the case of Congolese migrants in Cape Town (Owen 2011) or Senegalese migrants in Port Elizabeth (Barbali 2009). From the conversations I have had with the attendants at the parlour, many can be considered as economic migrants. During this discussion I asked if an immigrant is educated and comes to South Africa as a professional would, would they still qualify as an “IP”. The response was overwhelmingly positive with a participant going as far as to say “if it looks like an IP, talks like an IP, it’s an IP”. Another participant (more sensitive to the subtle aspects of identity) noted “it’s all up here [points to head] and here [points to heart]. In their heads they’re still in India and just doing the same like they do there here (referring to India and South Africa respectively).” I sought to further my understanding and asked if the immigrant was foreign educated (that is, outside of India) and came to work and live in South Africa would that still qualify him/her has an “IP”? Again, the answer came as affirmative though there were voices of discontent rising. Among the discontented, one participant responded; “but it’s different once a person travels and lives in a place. Now that person knows that there’s something outside India. It’s different. It might be

136 Specifically Gujratı
the same because like you still have India in your blood but you know now that what works in India doesn’t work in the rest of the world.”

My discussants speak of “them” and “us” and the othering of Indian migrants in this discussion intrigues me. Throughout the discussion, I often wonder if the same would have been said about my grandfather’s generation (including the forbearers of my discussants). Would they respond with similar hostility if the gaze were reversed or if the familial or even social connections were closer? Not unlike many Indian present-day migrants to South Africa, my paternal grandfather Ranchod Kooverjee journeyed to South Africa with no formal education, money or knowledge of the local language let alone English. At the time, my grandfather docked in Mozambique – then Laurenzo Marques (commonly known as LM). Seeking better pastures for his young bride and inevitable future family, he arrived on African shores when he was just 14 years old and remained in South Africa even though harsh Apartheid policies relegated him to “second-class citizen” status. Would he too have been called an uneducated IP?

Is There Only One Way of Being Indian?

Because the Indian identity is so closely entwined with the notion of India (Narayan 1993; Radhakrishnan 2007; Singh 2008) a discussion of Indianess in South Africa without including India is imprudent yet simultaneously complex. This is because in order to understand what South African Indianess is, one needs to understand what it is not.

In 2009, I made the bold decision to move to the city of Varanasi. Non-Indians saw my decision as an adventure, a journey back to my roots but to my surprise my Indian peers saw my actions as foolhardy and idiotic – a decision that was met with shock and a certain horror. In the eyes of my peers and elders the reasons to return to “that backward country” our grandparents left were irrelevant in the face of the benefits and progress gained by modernization (which would, in their eyes, only be
achievable anywhere-but-India). In many senses my forbearer’s departure from India is seen as a step up the rungs of the class ladder and therefore to return, no-less permanently, was very possibly evolutionary suicide. Many friends and family expressed their concern that I would earn significantly less for whatever job I would take on. The unfavourable exchange rate\textsuperscript{137} or the notoriously poor paying job placements were not in my favour. However, I remained tenacious and determined in my efforts to, at the very least, try.

My work in 2009, had taken me to the outskirts of Varanasi city and I found myself living in a village on the banks of the Ganges in a rudimentary flatlet with a western toilet much to my relief (unintended pun). An enormous adjustment for me at the start of my stay was the absence of running hot water as all the faucets in the dwelling provided only cold water. To heat water for a bath, I would fill a bucket with cold water and place a wire hanger across the diameter of the bucket. Then, precariously balancing an immersion heater on the wire hanger the water would be heated by dangling the (bare) element in the water. This process from start to finish would take about 15 minutes for warm water and 30 minutes for scalding water. The (heated) water is then scooped with a small jug and splashed onto the body. From here on, this method of bathing will be referred to as bucket-bathing. As in the case of many privileged South Africans, I experienced a “western” childhood and early adult life and although the concept of bucket-bathing was not completely foreign to me, in comparison to flicking a geyser switch this water-heating ritual required dexterity.

During the adjustment period I longed for the luxury of hot water on-tap and I often yearned to feel continual water on my body in the way of a shower or even a soak in a bathtub. As luck would have it, a month into my stay I was invited to spend

\textsuperscript{137} The exchange rate at that time averaged at INR5 to ZAR1 as compared to the Pound Sterling or American Dollar rate which at the time was about ZAR15 to GBP1 and ZAR10 to USD1 respectively.
the night with friends living elsewhere and to my delight found that the upstairs guest en-suite not only had a shower with hot running water but also a bathtub. After exhaustively enquiring with the house-help where one would locate the bath-plug, I was politely informed that “nobody has ever used the bathtub to immerse themselves madam” thus explaining the missing apparatus. My enthusiasm was in no way dampened and I took equally great pleasure in my first hot shower after months of longing for one. As I tilted my head towards the shower-head, the warm water splashed on my face and I recall thinking how fantastic it was to have two starkly different experiences in the same context – in Varanasi. Later that evening I used my host’s bathroom and noticed that it accommodated both a shower and additional space for bucket-bathing. Although at that time propriety prevented me from further inciting conversation regarding the presence of both with my host, I began to contemplate the possibility of concurrent multiple ways-of-being.

Figure 13: Bucket-bathing in Varanasi
There are many ways to experience India. One could tour the sub-continent in an air-conditioned luxury by car or private-taxi while taking full advantage of the *Indian* adage “cash is king” or experience the country through the eyes of locals by using local transport and dining on street cuisine. Each experience paints an equally relevant portrait of experiencing India – either through the eyes of the majority or through the luxurious experiences of the wealthy. Often reacting with shock and surprise at “how developed India is” many people return from India with their jaded gazes shattered. India tends to confront the individual with stark, harsh realities of life that are often shooed to the fringes of existence while simultaneously comforting one in the lap of luxury. To travel to India is to experience “The Other” that is significantly same but different. The tacit expectations of my research participants and (potential) visitors to India are not of a modern India where one can go shopping in air-conditioned malls and eat Continental cuisine in plush restaurants. The thrill of India is in her chaos, hooting, fireworks, rabid dogs and street cuisine (Metha 2004). Even if accommodation is in home-equivalent five-star hotels with western comforts,

> “the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world” (Appadurai 2003:33; see also Dalrymple 2000).

While these expectations are completely unrealistic, perceptions of “backward” India (and by association anything *Indian*) are perpetuated by visitors (returning from visits to India) and reporting having to “bucket-bath” and squat to use the toilet. I recall a research participant remarking “I just love going to India. Especially to the *gaam* (village). Eating on the floor, the bucket-baths. It just takes me back to my roots.” I find this sentiment simultaneously ridiculous and painfully condescending. The notion of “returning to your roots” via bucket-bathing or eating on the floor implies a regression, some sort of thrust into the dark ages that creates a non-existent link between cultural practice and modernisation.
The Flows Between -scapes

Appadurai’s (2003) thorough explanation of the disjunctures between the differing landscapes of “imagined worlds” applies to global conceptions of these –scapes. By applying these –scapes to local flows as well as global flows and retaining the concept of a centre-periphery model (ibid.), I argue that the multidirectional flows between South Africa and India during Apartheid were stunted. The effects of this were on the ability to creatively conceive identity. However, the local flows of these –scapes have, through nostalgia without memory (ibid.), resulted in a unique South Africaness. For the purposes of clarity these five –scapes are:

Ethnoscapes: “persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers and other moving groups and persons”

Technoscapes: “the global configuration... of technology”

Financescapes: “currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations [that] move mega-monies through national turnstiles”

Mediascapes: “electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information... available to... private and public interests”

Ideoscapes: “concatenations of images... often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly orientated to capturing state power or a piece of it.” (2003:32-34)

Older generations’ closer links to India passed onto later generations in increasingly diluted doses (Appadurai 2008; Radhakrishnan 2003, Mukadam and Mawani 2006). This resulted in what I call “the deification of India”. This deified ideal is of an all-embracing Motherland. During Apartheid, this was a one-way flow of -scapes between South Africa and India. An Indian businessman, keen to trade with India for sentimental reasons shared his frustrations and ambivalent motivations with me. During our discussion he explained “India’s a mine-field of great ideas and stuff but they’re all just out to get you. You ask for two ply and you get one ply. I’m just a
small guy, if the big guys [chain stores] get caught what chance do I have? I mean, you want to support them but aay, they (sic) different [from South Africans].” The businessman’s concerns reveal deep internal conflict. On the one hand, the businessman wants to connect via the link of sameness and on the other, he realises difference. Similarly, a research participant exclaimed “we are South African!” while equally acknowledging the emotional difficulties in distancing from India (Vally 2012). However, with media travel and business between India and South Africa increasing the deified ideal is breaking down and another side of India that does not match with nostalgic memory is revealed.

Even though the deification of India suggests a glorified and unsulliable ideal, this ideal is nevertheless fallible. The highly controversial “Guptagate” scandal (Gerbi 2013138; Mataboge, Underhill and De Wet 2013139; Trapido 2013140) illustrates this. The spin-off effects of the scandal, in which a passenger aircraft landed at a military air-base transporting guests to a wedding, have been prolific and have garnered much criticism in the diaspora. Many South Africans have emphatically distanced themselves from pervasive stereotypes that are damaging to the South African Indian self-image (Mchunu 2013141; Sewgoolam 2013142). A high-profile example is; Afzul Rehman – the Major of Newcastle who laid a charge of crimen injuria against a Transport Office official after being called “a Gupta” and told to “go back to India” (Jansen 2013143; SAPA 2013a144). Further examples of public debate the Gupta scandal has incited are on Dileep Padgaonkar’s India Times blog145, who commented on the negative impact one

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138 http://ewn.co.za/
139 http://mg.co.za/
140 http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/
141 http://www.iol.co.za/mercury/
142 http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/
143 http://www.iol.co.za/news/
144 http://mg.co.za/
145 http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/
incident has had on the diaspora as a whole and Vashna Jagarnath’s (2013\textsuperscript{146}) satirical commentary towards flouting commonly held stereotypes and perceptions of Indianess. The Gupta-saga illustrates that local flows informing South African Indian identity are overriding the one-way global flow (between South Africa and India). In the public debate that ensued, South African Indians have asserted their own brand of Indianess that is not solely-dependant on or subject to India.

\textbf{Just Remember That You Can Come Home}

Much to my horror, when landing in Mumbai for the first time in 2003 I recall a swelling feeling of pride as the aircraft touched down on the run-way. Irrationally, I felt as if I had come home. My unabashed contempt having observed countless African-Americans coming to South Africa proclaiming it to be a “journey to the motherland” convinced me prior to my departure not to indulge in (what was for my teenage mind) the same misguided, soppy emotional out-pouring. History lessons at school had created enough awareness of the geographic sources of slaves to the Americas and naturally, my awareness of the vast differences between Senegal or Mali and South Africa lead me to impatiently pooh-pooh any notions of an imagined homeland. These soppy out-pourings were promptly squashed when stepping off the aircraft; I walked into a wave of warm humidity and a strange smell. I immediately realised the context I found myself in was vastly different to my home.

Before leaving for India, as much as I (superficially) grasped the complexity of what I shared with India and its bearing on my identity, I had also convinced myself not to get emotional. This resolution not to get emotional about my encounter was provoked by a poignant piece of advice my cousin had given me before I left; “don’t go to India with your South Africa glasses on. Take your glasses off and just experience India. Just look and see and experience. Remember, you have a return ticket so take in

\textsuperscript{146} http://www.ru.ac.za/perspective/
as much as you can.” However, my teenage mind and heart was unable to process the contradictions of being Indian and being Indian. I immaturity assumed I would be able to maintain a clinical level of emotional distance with India and as a result, I hurtled at full speed into an emotional brick wall. Culture-shock hit far faster and harder than I would have ever imagined and I gradually found myself mentally and emotionally separating myself from the land I deified. As my stay in India wore on, the mental and emotional distance between being Indian and being Indian grew. Through the created mental and emotional distances, I began to realise that there are vast differences that separate me from my Indian counterparts.

**Boundaries in Conceptualising Indianess in South Africa**

“[C]ultural hybridities, idiosyncratic identities, and trans-local connections” (Bashkow 2004:444) demand a closer look at contemporary, real-time interactions and happenings within South Africa. Although we are cautioned by Bunzl not to over-indulge in the historical past because “… the present would never appear as a transparent entity, but as the very site of a critical investigation into ongoing processes of historical reproduction” (Bunzl 2004:441) it must be accepted that within the context of South African Indianess, we are compelled to understand the present as self-determinant and informed-by but not subject-to the past. My argument draws me to questioning boundaries, specifically: what are the boundaries in conceptualising Indianess in South Africa? What are the boundaries that allow the past to influence the present? While Bashkow argues that “…boundaries also can be valued in contemporary discourse as the background against which the individuals’ creative transgressions and positively valued mercurial, hybrid identities can be constructed” (Bashkow 2004:443-444) I question if boundaries performed the same altruistic purpose that Bashkow outlines in Apartheid South Africa. Posel (2001) argues that racial categorisation in Apartheid South Africa were effective because they were based on common-sensical assumptions about social status as opposed to biological essence.
As common-sensical assumptions, these boundaries would have done little to encourage the creative conceptualisation of identity. However, the stifling of creativity and hybridity cannot be posited as an absolute truth. By regarding the “notion of boundaries [as] emblematic of forms of difference that are overly rigid, essentialist, and imposed” (Bashkow 2004:444); one allows for the possibilities that boundaries, in some way, hampered creativity in Apartheid South Africa.

Returning to the issue of diasporic Indians visiting India, a rarely cognised probability is the co-existence of multiple ways-of-being within a single context. My hosts in Varanasi observed strict ritual purity taboos; keeping separate seating for menstruating women of the house, prohibiting the cross-contamination of certain types of food and maintaining separate eating utensils for fasts. They also enjoyed fast-foods, store-bought confectionaries and had western ablutions in their home. In this way my hosts concurrently embrace multiple ways-of-being. In the case of South African Indians inherited memories of India are incongruent with contemporary lived realities of Indians living in India. If at all the surprise for Indians such as my research participant enjoying the gaam could be that running heated water is still a luxury in rural homes or that tap water in Mumbai is now drinkable. My point is to illustrate that what is mundane in one culture is exotic in another and yet because the culture in question is that of the land of origin it becomes loaded with meaning and significance (Narayan 1993).

Exploring Multiple Ways-of-being

I find my time in India a fertile questioning-ground for the various puzzles I grapple with while understanding/unpacking the complexities of my identity. In a manner of speaking it is through journeying to India that I have come to the

147 Store bought confectionaries were kept separately from the main kitchen as their preparation methods could not be assured. This was due to the presence of eggs, animal products or impure preparation techniques which may compromise the ritual purity of the home.
understanding that I am Indian and South African; the two can and do express synchronically. During field-work in Benoni, it became apparent that I was not alone in seeking to explore my identity through journeying to India. I recall countless stories of travels to India (or intentions thereof) in order to understand that other part of the self (the Indianess) that is reticent yet strikingly blatant. The stories related to me by my fellow community members bear hallmarks of a journey to self-discovery. Even among those who have yet to travel to India, there remains a wish to understand the past beyond South Africa. After enquiring after my latest trip to India in 2010 Vishal\textsuperscript{148}, a Hindi-speaking Indian store-keeper expressed a strong desire to journey to India saying “I would love to go to India some-day, not to stay, but just to see where [our ancestors] lived – [to understand] where [they] came from.” (June 2011). Vishal’s intentions to visit India echo similar sentiments with my gaam-loving research participant. Both see themselves as understanding a part of their identity by understanding their distant past.

Visits to India maintain a clear and definite intention to return to South Africa\textsuperscript{149}. However they are often tinged with a longing to repeatedly return. A medical doctor\textsuperscript{150} practicing in Johannesburg makes a two-week soiree to India no less than twice a year. For him, time in India is rejuvenating. As the devotee of a well-known religious organisation, his visits remain isolated to the city of Bengaluru and in particular the organisation’s ashram\textsuperscript{151} in the city. Even though Dr Prasad’s visits are not the typical two-week-crash-course through India, they allow him the mental,

\textsuperscript{148} Vishal’s family have been in South Africa for many generations so much so that he is unable to precisely trace his ancestry in India.

\textsuperscript{149} I have thus far only encountered one person who has expressed a serious intention to relocate to India. Here I also make reference to members of the established diaspora and not recent migrants. As in the case of recent migrants, the majority of those I have spoken to regret leaving India and express a strong desire to return. For the majority, their continued stay in South Africa is purely for economic reasons.

\textsuperscript{150} Dr. Prasad’s identity has been completely obscured to protect his privacy.

\textsuperscript{151} A spiritual hermitage
emotional and spiritual space to reflect and renew. There is no doubt in his mind that he would not have the same rejuvenating benefits in any other country in the world. However, it would be grandiose to assume that India’s geography in itself is rejuvenative. Even so, it would be safe to surmise that South African Indians experience similar opportunities for reflecting on their identities as Cypriots returning to Cyprus (Teerling 2011). Equally, there are those individuals who make a journey to India for a number of varied reasons such as; shopping, touring, visiting relatives or religious-pilgrimage. These journeys contrast with Dr Prasad’s deeply spiritual encounters with India and they allude to a detachment not unlike tourists browsing through a museum exhibit. While satisfying a voyeuristic intrigue towards the land of their ancestry, a soiree to India is often labelled as educational or informative; a means of gaining insight into life pre-South Africa. Though the above experiences of India may raise contradictory issues they very often result in deeper (albeit unintended) opportunities for reflection for the individuals involved.

Where can Indianess be Found?

The idea that India is a place of “life before modernization or pre-migration” is complex. While major metropolises on the subcontinent have modernized at an (almost) alarmingly fast pace, many rural areas remain disconnected from the progress in larger cities. Images of rural India, taken out of context perpetuate the India-equals-the-past-equals-backward stereotype. For the majority, migrants to South Africa were from rural or impoverished areas (Bhana and Brain 1990; Desai and Vahed 2007) and so a return to their roots would entail a (often) literal and figurative ride down dirt roads into the hinterlands. By perceiving the national identity as homogenous and discounting cultural diversity there is an inclination within the imagination of the diaspora to homogenise the place of origin (that is, India). As a result, the whole, as opposed to a local context-specific perception, is seen as backward (sic).
Radhakrishnan critiques the American Indian identity challenging that “[w]e should not pretend we are living in some idealised “little India” and not in the United States” (2003:123). However, in the circumstance of South African Indianess in Apartheid I question if Indians were not in fact living in a little India (Ebr-Vally 2001). Accordingly a journey to India would be a trip down an ancestral memory-lane; loaded with historical meaning. As I have previously mentioned, under the Apartheid state, external factors influencing and shaping Indian identity were nominal and resulted in insulation (Singh 2005). As a result of this insulation, presentations of the present in South Africa were continual reproductions of the past (ibid.; Appadurai 2003).

Perceptions of a “backward” India perpetuate in multiple forms. They perpetuate through the imagination of Indians travelling to India on holiday as they return to share stories of their travels as well as through the complex web of media and advertising emerging out of or regarding India. They are further fuelled by stereotyped perceptions of the growing community of recent economic Indian migrants (see discussion earlier in this chapter). Not even India’s own marketing campaign addresses the issue of modernisation. Initiated by the Indian government, Incredible India’s campaign largely features images of rustic towns, show-casing cultural even antiquated aspects of India as opposed to the rapid globalisation that is evident in rural parts of the country. To illustrate this point, the organisation’s homepage152 features a looping slide-show of four images, none of which illustrate India’s many multiplexes, IT Silicon Valley or anything remotely “modern” for that matter. The perception of India (and by consequence anything Indian) is informed by “nostalgia without memory” (Appadurai 2003). To use Appadurai’s (2003) classifications, the interactions of ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes inform global flows, which, I suggest, in-turn informs local flows. In the case of India’s globalisation and global flows, the

152 http://www.incredibleindia.org/
effects are not visible through the stories of holiday-makers or India’s own marketing campaign. The added element of memory to South Africa’s local flows adds a unique layer to South African Indianess which further impact contemporary global flows between South Africa and India. In effect, this means that local flows in South Africa have developed to such an extent that the global flows between the two countries no longer concord.

Conclusion

In order to discuss the complex issues inherent in reconceptualising South African Indianess, I have explored the influence of Apartheid policies on perceptions of self and identity as a means of understanding the ideological processes between past and present. Through my encounters with Mahmoud Bhai at the beauty parlour and a discussion of Indian migrants, there emerges a distinctive binary of “them” (Indians) and “us” (Indians). By presenting the (often contradictory) layers of Indianess, I elucidate the idea that South African Indians and Indians are, in the lyrics of Mir Ali Hussein153, “same-same but different”. The penultimate step in this exploration reveals a Mobius Strip-type argument that is at times contradictory, paradoxical and at others irrational. By questioning boundaries and further deconstructing their implications, I have shown the extent to which the past has informed contemporary Indian identity. In conclusion by drawing on experiences in Varanasi, I have paved the way for the ideological possibility of multiple ways-of-being, making a case for being Indian and South African.

153 Bollywood lyricist of the song Same Same but Different from the movie Bombay to Bangkok
Conclusion

And if the assumption of responsibility for one’s discourse leads to the conclusion that all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity, this need not be cause for gloom. (Spivak 1997:xiii in Preiser 2012:241)

During the process of data collection and analysis I was obsessed with telling The Truth. As a result of the process of presenting my data through personal narrative I have found that “culture happens to [seize my soul and] ... that [I] will always be working in an area of displacement” (Hall 2006). Further, in presenting this thesis as an autoethnography, I am reminded of the Cree hunter who “came to Montreal to testify in court ... He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: ‘I’m not sure I can tell the truth... I can only tell what I know.’” (Clifford 1986:8). I too am able to only tell what I know. My life narrative has inextricably shaped the way I have analysed my data and through the autoethnographic process I have found that the challenges of conducting fieldwork in one’s home environment are plethoric. Finding creative solutions to these challenges have been imperative to embracing the many conceptual possibilities that data presents in the work of reconceptualising South African Indianess.

Could Indianess be understood as a sense of awareness? The challenge of transcending the fuzziness of Indianess lies in adopting a complexity attitude that facilitates its simplicity without denying its complexity. In so doing, I see diaspora as a form of consciousness, allowing me to transcend the limitations of diaspora as purely social formation or cultural reproduction. Indianess is a dynamic, malleable, shared sense of awareness; which is embodied at times through dress, national identity, food/cuisine, ritual, tradition, religion, history, spiritual practices, socio-cultural norms and values. Though this consciousness is independent of social, cultural, political or even economic markers it is expressed through them and not by them. Therefore to
see Indianess as complex diasporic consciousness emphasises its nature as processual and, context and time specific.

Notions of Indianess within the context of external markers of Indianess are often contradictory and complex. This is partly due to antiquated perceptions of cultural capital as well as socially ingrained priorities of social mobility through so-called modernisation. The plethora of external stimuli in conceptualising an Indian identity is often paradoxical and subject to context. The discussion in the thesis leads from unpacking macro factors influencing identity to exploring micro influencers underlying Indianess. In so doing, further layers of Indianess provide an illustration of the complexity of South African Indianess. While South African Indianess can be conceptualised without drawing inspiration from India, questions of Indianess that I have asked myself while in India are valuable points of departure. These are then juxtaposed against the effects of Apartheid policies on the perceptions and expressions of Indianess. Questions of cultural and religious representation raise further issues of authenticity challenging whether these issues of authenticity are “a paranoid reaction to the ‘naturalness’ of the dominant group” (Radhakrishnan 2003:127).

The facets of Indianess are multifarious and as the discussion in the thesis illustrates, internal drivers form a critical part of conceptualising Indianess. Family-as-microcosm of culture forms an integral part of the work of reproduction towards reconceptualising Indianess. The narratives of Hansa Kaki and Villopa Masi provide examples of simple acts in the work of reproduction that are not only informed by notions of tradition, culture and religion, but are underscored by the effects of the past. While popular culture may seek to indulge the senses in exotic, disempowering imagery the lived realties of Indians reveal complex phenomenon. These complexities cannot be regarded as mere technicalities.
The inherent contradictions in the deification of India assist to answer the question of South African Indianess more fully and deeply. Complex influencers on the perception and experiences of Indianess reveal a Mobius Strip-type argument. Through examining the effects of Apartheid instituted boundaries, past perceptions of South African Indianess that were “emblematic of forms of difference” (Bashkow 2004:443-444) are gradually becoming moot in reconceptualising what it means to be South African Indian. Even though South African Indians may have been living in continual presentations of past, as a result of global and local flows these patterns are changing. The layers of Indianess presented in this thesis reveal an argument that is, at times paradoxical and at others irrational. In so doing, I have paved the way for the ideological possibility of multiple ways-of-being, thus making a case for being Indian and South African.

As a point of reflection, the choice of emphasis to differentiate between diasporic Indians and Indian nationals was not only a matter of legibility but also a reflection of the thesis statement that Indianess is inextricably linked to identity, to home – to South Africa.

I find my time in India a fertile questioning-ground for the various puzzles I grapple with while unpacking the complexities of my identity. In a manner of speaking it is through journeying to India that I have come to the understanding that I am Indian and South African; the two can and do express synchronically. My Indianess is inextricably linked to identity, to home – to South Africa. In my understanding, South African Indianess has indeed evolved as a response to the “naturalness” of the dominant group. This is evident in “Sunday school” for Hindu children or the description of Eid as a “Muslim Christmas”. Even so, these defensive strategies assist in asserting a unique “brand” of South African Indianess within the broader diasporic consciousness.
From this thesis a possible area of further study that begs development is Indianess as consciousness; Indianess as a shared sense of awareness. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the limitations of this study are largely representational. By this, I mean that the use of the term Indian is not the sole-ownership of Hindus. As much as I am painfully aware that my ethnography does not cover the girth of expressions and interpretations of Indian particularly regarding Muslim Indians, further study to include this shared sense of awareness across various religions would be an interesting area of investigation.

In presenting the ethnography as illustrative of the layers of Indianess and showing their complexity, I am acutely aware that these layers remain a small portion of a broader South African Indian narrative. This study set itself the goal of presenting an argument for South African Indianess as a complex diasporic consciousness. While this has been achieved, scope for further study remains broad and extensive.
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# Glossary

The following is a glossary of terms used. This list has been specifically customised for this thesis and is in no way a representation of Indian terminology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aarti</td>
<td>The sacred act of waving a lamp before the deity while singing a song of praise. Aarti is both a verb and noun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashram</td>
<td>A spiritual hermitage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhai</td>
<td>Brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divo</td>
<td>Prayer lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaam</td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganesha</td>
<td>Son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, also known as the elephant-headed God. Lord Ganesha is venerated before the start of any puja, prayer ceremony or the like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghee</td>
<td>Clarified butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havan</td>
<td>Ritual fire offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havan kund</td>
<td>Vessel to contain the fire for the havan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havan samagri</td>
<td>Scented woods, herbs, spices and or seeds mixed according to requirements for the havan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindutva</td>
<td>An ideology advocating Hinduism, Hindu solidarity and the establishment of a Hindu state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jat</td>
<td>Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaka</td>
<td>Gujarati term denoting paternal uncle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaki</td>
<td>Gujarati word denoting paternal brother’s wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kala pani</td>
<td>Literally translated as “the dark waters”, a journey across the dark waters signified the shedding of caste and cultural norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalash</td>
<td>a metal (brass, copper, silver or gold) pot with a large base and small mouth, large enough to hold a coconut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathakar</td>
<td>Kathakar is literally translated as ‘storyteller’ but performs a pivotal role in the continuation of oral tradition as well as recitation of key Hindu texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kori</td>
<td>Caste grouping – farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumbar</td>
<td>Caste grouping – carpenter/potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakshmi</td>
<td>Goddess of Wealth, consort to Lord Vishnu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larnie</td>
<td>Colloquial term implying the individual is assuming a farcical behaviour, for example, displaying wealth or a sense of self-importance based on adopted practices of the upper-class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenz</td>
<td>Shortened form of Lenasia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandir</td>
<td>Hindu place of worship also known as temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandir-pujaari</strong></td>
<td>Temple priest</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Masi</strong></td>
<td>Gujarati word denoting mother’s sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mithai</strong></td>
<td>Indian sweetmeats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Murti</strong></td>
<td>An image of a deity, which itself is considered divine once consecrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Naivedya</strong></td>
<td>Food offerings to a deity before they are offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pandit</strong></td>
<td>Priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panetar</strong></td>
<td>Bridal head covering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peno</strong></td>
<td>A pre-wedding ceremony performed as a means of communication with those who have passed to inform them of the upcoming nuptials and as a means of remembrance of them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prasad</strong></td>
<td>Food offerings to a deity that have been offered and are then considered to have the deity’s blessing residing within it. <em>(Naivedya, after being offered, becomes prasad)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Puja</strong></td>
<td>Ritual prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roti</strong></td>
<td>A type of Indian flat-bread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sakar</strong></td>
<td>Rock sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Salwar</strong></td>
<td>Short for salwar kameez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samosa</strong></td>
<td>A triangle-shaped fried savoury pastry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shivling</strong></td>
<td>Symbolic representation of the Hindu deity Shiva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Soji</strong></td>
<td>A sweet pudding made of semolina and sugar often spiced with nuts and/or cardamom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sri yantra</strong></td>
<td>Sacred geometric pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stuti</strong></td>
<td>Hymn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Swami</strong></td>
<td>An honourific title given to a Hindu monk or learned teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thaali</strong></td>
<td>Plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thaar</strong></td>
<td>A song inviting the deity to partake in the offerings <em>(naivedya)</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tillak</strong></td>
<td>A mark on the forehead in the case of a person or in the case of an object placed anywhere is the individual sees fit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tulsi</strong></td>
<td>Holy basil <em>(Ocimum tenuiflorum)</em>, a sacred plant for Hindus used for ritual and therapeutic purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vrat</strong></td>
<td>A sacred vow or observance usually accompanied by a fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whitey</strong></td>
<td>Disparaging informal adaptation of “white” used as an adjective to describe race.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>