

***Narrative Possibilities in a Postcolonial Context:
Exploring Self-Reflexive Film as a Critical Articulation of the Stories
of South African Hindu Women***

**by
Subeshini Moodley**

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Pietermaritzburg**

2015

DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in *Media & Cultural Studies*,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I,, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced
 - b. Where their exact words have been used, then their writing has been placed in italics and inside quotation marks, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the References sections.

Student Name

Date

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following people for their contribution to the completion of this thesis:

- The generations (past and present) of Indian women in my family, whose lives and stories have been the greatest inspiration for this project;
- My late grandfather, whose faith and guidance has endured beyond his passing;
- My mother, Sarasvathie Moodley, for the sacrifices she made, for her support and encouragement, for always making sure we had the right opportunities in life and for her involvement in my film;
- My father; for making me laugh in stressful situations and his support and encouragement;
- My sister, Prevanya, and my best friend, Meena, for always being my personal cheerleaders and the shoulders I cry on when I feel my worst;
- Debbie Bowen, for always being available to assist me and indulging my conversation when I needed to work through personal issues;
- Fiona Jackson and Matthew Beetar, for always being interested in my project and for the stimulating, intellectual conversation;
- Amanda Benecke, for arranging the purchase of equipment, flight and accommodation bookings at the last minute and for sorting out the financial issues related to this project so efficiently;
- My grandmother, Subamma Moodley, and my aunt, Vasanthie Moodley, for their involvement in my film;
- My cousins, Tharini Moodley & Amusree Moodley, for babysitting and assisting me when I was at my most frazzled, and for constantly reminding me that I am one of the role models in their lives and that I owe it to them to never give up;
- My sister-in-law, Anuksha Doorgapershad, and brother-in-law, Travis Beard, for driving me around during my participant workshops, opening up their homes to me when I needed it and generally making life fun and easy when I'm around them.
- Manjini Mestry, Mrs. Yogambal Singaram, Jessica Gounden and Sashnee Naicker, for agreeing to be involved in my project, and without whom this PhD would not be possible. I am eternally grateful for their contributions and inspiration, and for so graciously and willingly sharing their lives and stories;
- Shannon Milojkovic, for being the greatest friend and graduate assistant, and with whom working and learning was just the most rewarding experience;
- My supervisor, Prof. Anton Van Der Hoven, for working beyond his retirement to help me complete this project, for understanding and accepting my reasons for submitting late drafts, for nevertheless offering detailed and thought-provoking feedback and for constantly reminding me, when this project was most difficult, that my work is worth it and has the potential to extend beyond the parameters of a PhD. I am grateful for his support and encouragement, and for having had the privilege of access to his fine mind.

- Most importantly, my husband, Vikash Doorgapershad, and our daughter, Ruhi Doorgapershad, for putting up with a grumpy, distracted wife and mother for a very long time, for understanding the importance of my project, for loving me unconditionally and believing in me when I no longer had the strength to believe in myself, for apologizing every time I cried even if the reason for me crying was unclear, for challenging me at just the right moments, and for bringing joy and delight to every single day of my life. I am incomplete without them.

I would also like to thank:

- the Department of Audiovisual Communication at the University of Johannesburg for allowing me to use their studio for some of my participant workshops;
- The National Research Foundation for their generous financial support, without which I would not have been able to start or maintain a project of this nature.

Disclaimer: *Although this material is based upon work supported financially by the National Research Foundation, any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and therefore the NRF does not accept any liability in regard thereto.*

*For Ruhi (aged 4) and Paige (aged 5¹/₂) –
those two independent, feisty, non-conforming
young women who together provide a constant
source of hope and inspiration...*

ABSTRACT

Comprised of both a written submission and four films (see attached flash drive), the aim of my research is to develop a ‘postcolonial feminist film practice’ as a method for articulating the narratives of South African Hindu women. Based on prior research and the negotiation of my own Indian Hindu identity in a South African context, I argue that depictions of Indian women in mainstream visual media are restrictive and need to be challenged via a process in which women are actively involved in the telling of their own stories and the ‘making’ of their own representation. Drawing on participant research, I propose a combination of autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; 2006; 2011), which argues for greater involvement on the part of the researcher in the research process, and participatory video (Nair, 1994 & White, 2003), a form of self-reflexive filmmaking and a visual ethnographic tool (Pink, 2001; 2003; 2004; 2007; 2008), as a method for both gathering the stories of South African Hindu women and voicing their narratives.

My methodological design is therefore inspired and supported by a critical reflection on two theoretical strands: diaspora and postcolonial theory. In terms of the issue of the diaspora, I embark on a personal journey to contextualize the Indian diaspora in South Africa. I eventually argue, with reference to discussions with my research participants, that the notion of diaspora, in terms of the Indian community in South Africa, should be read as a ‘feeling of being’ – a secondary diasporic consciousness that emerges out of historical socio-political circumstances and collective memory, as opposed to a lived experience.

My discussion of postcolonial theory is devoted to redefining aspects of postcolonial feminism by revisiting the issue of textualism and the positionality of scholar (San Juan Jr., 1998). In this regard, I argue for a broadening of the notion of text in a postcolonial context and for a more engaged postcolonial scholar as communal participant, socially-embedded educator and activist (Freire, 1970).

My thesis thereafter assumes the form of a self-reflexive journal that details my interactions with my research participants, their individual stories and their development as filmmakers through the processes of autoethnography and participatory video. Drawing on aspects of my theoretical

discussion, I provide a critical comparison of the individual films produced by both myself and my participants during the project to illustrate the diverse levels of creative experimentation and resistance accessed through the medium. I conclude the thesis with a discussion of a way forward for the postcolonial feminist film practice as a tool for both social development and education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Theoretical and Experiential Background	1
The Doctoral Context	7
<i>Theoretical Approach</i>	8
<i>Data Analysis and Findings</i>	9
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
<i>Postcolonial Feminist Film (1): Positionality, Self-Reflexivity and the Visual Voice</i>	11
Introduction	11
Selection of Participants	11
The Research Process	14
Why Autoethnography?	15
A Visual Methodological Approach	21
Participatory Video	26
A Question of Ethics	29
Conclusion	32
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	
<i>Diaspora and the Feeling of Being Indian in South Africa</i>	33
Introduction	33
Diaspora Theory	34
<i>A Brief Definition</i>	34
<i>Collective Memory, Media and Diaspora</i>	34
<i>Religion and Diaspora</i>	39
<i>Gender and Diaspora</i>	43
Representations of the South African Indian Identity	45
<i>Literature</i>	46
<i>Theatre</i>	50
<i>Film</i>	52
<i>Kumaran Naidu – A Filmmaker in the Rough?</i>	54
Conclusion	60

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

<i>Speaking Postcolonially: Retrospection, Redirection and Revision</i>	62
Introduction	62
The Problematic of Definition.....	63
Textual Emphasis	66
The Place of the Scholar.....	69
Practical Re-Imagining.....	74
<i>Art & Politics: An Unlikely Affair?</i>	75
<i>The Academic Filmmaker, The Subject, and The Medium (1): Prajna Paramita Parasher</i>	79
<i>The Academic Filmmaker, The Subject, and The Medium (2): Jyoti Mistry</i>	82
Conclusion.....	85

CHAPTER 5: SELF-REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

<i>The Autoethnographic Eye: Storytelling and Visual Perspectives</i>	87
Introduction	87
Episode 1: Manjini - The Feminist Filmmaker Within	87
<i>Initial Interactions</i>	87
<i>Workshop 1</i>	89
<i>Filmmaking Trajectory</i>	95
<i>Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop</i>	101
Episode 2: Mrs. Singaram - This is MY Film: (Re)Claiming the Space of Representation	103
<i>Initial Interactions</i>	103
<i>Workshop 1</i>	104
<i>Filmmaking Trajectory</i>	109
<i>Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop</i>	116
Episode 3: Jessica - Film as Therapy	117
<i>Initial Interactions</i>	117
<i>Workshop 1</i>	118
<i>Filmmaking Trajectory</i>	124
<i>Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop</i>	127
Episode 4: Subeshini - Film as the Journey of Discovery.....	131
Conclusion.....	141

CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

<i>Women with Cameras: Agency through Visual Voice</i>	142
Introduction	142
The Production Experience	142
<i>A South African Sari (Manjini Mestry, 2014)</i>	142
<i>The Story of My Life (Yogambal Singaram, 2013b)</i>	144
<i>Unedited Footage (Jessica Gounden, 2013/2014)</i>	145
<i>A Woman's Promise (Subeshini Moodley, 2014)</i>	146
Participatory Video: Visual Meaning Making	147
Art vs. Politics: Resistance through Creative Experimentation	162
Conclusion	163

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

<i>Women in Conversation: Empowerment through Dialogue</i>	164
The Self-Reflexive Mode: Redefining Positionality	164
Continuing (not concluding) Thoughts: The Future of Postcolonial Feminist Filmmaking	172

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources	175
Secondary Sources	177
Appendix 1: Request for permission to email members	189
Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form	191

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to develop a method for articulating the narratives of South African Hindu women through the medium of film. Based on the principles of postcolonial theory and feminism, the study argues that participatory video, a form of self-reflexive filmmaking, offers a twofold function as both a methodological tool for the gathering of the stories of South African Hindu women and a storytelling device for the voicing of their narratives – a process I refer to as a ‘postcolonial feminist film practice’.

Theoretical and Experiential Background

The journey to this doctoral study has been a theoretically and practically eventful one. The study emerges out of a Masters dissertation that I completed in 2004. My research at the time proposed a framework of analysis comprising the theories of postcolonial feminism and an ‘accented’ cinema for the reading of films made by women filmmakers of the Indian diaspora. Referring specifically to the films of Mira Nair (1991; 2001) and Deepa Mehta (1996; 1998), and drawing on Hamid Naficy’s theory of an ‘accented’ cinema (2001) and the postcolonial feminist ideas of Chandra Mohanty (1988) and Gayatri Spivak (1988), the framework offered a way of reading films made not only by Indian women in the diaspora, but also by women of the Third World in general.

The study concluded that women filmmakers of the Indian diaspora exhibit similarities in the construction of their female protagonists (Moodley, 2004). The significance of these similarities lay in the fact that, at some point in the narrative, the female characters depicted in these films resist conventional representations of Indian women that have persisted in the mainstream media (film in particular). The framework, as a result, proposed the potential for an emerging postcolonial feminist film practice that would allow Third World women to make films for and about themselves and other Third World women within a framework that is flexible enough to capture the ethnic specificity of their struggles and resistance, as well as their individual diversity.

The main features of representation that such a postcolonial feminist film practice would be able to resist and re-define related to the pervasive inscription of the Hindu woman’s identity in a

nationalist politics that marked her inscription in religious myth and simultaneously as a symbol of nationalist ideals (Bhattacharjee, 1998; Goldman & Goldman, 2004). These representations were and continue to be perpetuated in popular Indian cinema, even if just in the subtext of the narratives or the construction of characters (most often based on mythological figures in Hindu epics, but whose experiences are redefined in a more contemporary context) (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 1998: 75; Mittal & Thursby, 2004). Vijay Mishra (2002), for example, explains how the *Ramayana*¹ has been used in popular Indian film (particularly Bollywood) to understand, explain, justify and inform historical occurrences, political behaviour, and cultural and religious practices.

The resultant limited and limiting representations of Hindu women have been the overarching concern of my research interests. I was specifically intrigued by the manner in which these conventional representations play out or impact on depictions of Hindu women in the diaspora. Do these representations change given the ambivalent contentious space between their perceived homeland and the host land that they occupy?

I had an initial opportunity to explore this concern in “*Eastern Mosaic: Shades of Hindu Women in South African Media*” (Moodley, 2009a), a chapter that I wrote as one of the outcomes for a research project I was involved in. The chapter aimed to problematise the issue of the representation of Hindu women in South African media from a postcolonial perspective, using the weekly television magazine programme, *Eastern Mosaic* as a case study. Religion, feminism and diaspora formed the main components of this postcolonial analysis, all of which intersected at the level of textual construction.

In my analysis, I discovered that the representation of Hindu women had not changed significantly even in a diasporic context (Moodley, 2009a). The conventional meanings underlying the depictions proved a little more subtle, having been masked by the formal properties of the show. The attire of the female presenters and some female interviewees, and the placement of Hindu females in religious segments were the most prominent in this instance. I drew the following conclusions (Moodley, 2009a):

¹A Hindu mythological text.

- The construction of dress (crucial to understanding meaning in visual media texts) on *Eastern Mosaic* implied a cultural assumption of Indian women as the carriers of tradition and resonates with conventional depictions of the Hindu woman as a symbol of nationalism. This linked to Mohanty's argument that representations of Third World women/women of colour are homogenized to the extent that an essentially average idea of this particular group is produced (1988). In the case of *Eastern Mosaic*, dress seemed to symbolically align South African Indian women to a particular diasporic, national and religious identity;
- Furthermore, there was no attempt in the construction of the programme to highlight a multiplicity of narratives, as is characteristic of the diasporic experience (Brah, 1996). Hence, even though *Eastern Mosaic* is a cultural text created in the diaspora, it does not take advantage of the potential for postcolonial difference, let alone resistances that may exist in the contentious diasporic space that it occupies. The opportunity to redefine the text of the Hindu woman based on a rejection of previous limiting representations appeared to be secondary to a so-called post-liberation reclaiming of culture (Blom Hansen, 2006);
- In contrast to the women, who tended to symbolize religious loyalty and the protection of cultural knowledge, the men depicted in the show were shown to represent worldly knowledge and the merging of cultures. In addition, the Hindu women's knowledge of religion seemed to exist at the preferred or 'comfortable' level of religious practice; while the Hindu man was more likely to impart a more profound knowledge of Hindu spirituality.

From this analysis I concluded that *Eastern Mosaic* is structured using a set of dichotomies in which "homeland" and "host land" are contrasted, tradition set against the West (or a fusion of India and the West), female against male, and instinctive religious practice against spiritual knowledge. While these representations were at times conflicted they were not resistant, and essentially, even if in a subtle way, played into conventional depictions.

Given this history of the representation of Indian women in popular Indian media, and its accessibility, significance and impact in the diaspora, films, such as those of the filmmakers Nair

and Mehta, that depict Indian women as agents of resistance, were noteworthy and supported the possibility of a postcolonial feminist film practice. However, the success of this proposition at the level of theory and application in analysis was insufficient. In other words, after drawing out the stagnancy of *Eastern Mosaic's* depiction of Hindu women in the diaspora, it became imperative that the framework be tested at the level of application or practice.

The opportunity to explore the proposed potential of the postcolonial feminist film practice arrived when, for various reasons, I completed an Advanced Video Production module. One of the outcomes of this module was the completion of a twenty-minute film using the mainstream Hollywood-inspired format. The writing of the script, using the postcolonial feminist film frame, however, proved infinitely difficult for several reasons. I wrote a script but found that the poignancy of the female protagonist's resistance was lost without a context in which the resistance could be meaningful. I decided to return to the Hindu text that, more than any other, finds itself as the basis for most Bollywood narratives, *The Ramayana* (Dwyer, 2006). This is the story of Rama and his wife Sita, where Sita is constructed as the ideal symbol of duty, devotion and honour.

My research led to an interesting discovery: several different versions of this respected and well-known epic had been produced in a variety of textual forms (Dwyer, 2006; Goldman & Goldman, 2004). The rewriting of the *Ramayana* by Indian women who chose to be professional poets began as their attempt to translate the epic texts into various regional languages in order for them to be read out in the regional royal courts. However, some versions turned out to be severe critiques of Rama from what was condescendingly referred to as a woman's point of view and were not favourably received. Further to this, I learned that village and rural women in Andhra Pradesh, India, had written what they called *Ramayana* songs and poems, which they sing and recite during their work day in the fields. These songs, interestingly enough, reveal a critique of patriarchy and gendered injustices, in addition to expressing the difficulties these women experience on a daily basis² (Web 1). In this way they had charted resistant spaces within religious myth using alternative textual devices such as songs and poems.

From this, I realised that the lack in the script I was writing could possibly be remedied by a

² See Bibliography for full reference: *Web 1*: 'Sita and Ramayana Narratives'

critical re-writing of the Sita myth in a story that ran parallel to my initial narrative. In writing the script this way, I found that I was able to take the space of representation – the film narrative – a marginal space in terms of the representation of Hindu women, and present it as a space of resistance for the redefinition of religious myth. In doing so I drew inspiration from bell hooks who argues

For me [the] space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a ‘safe’ place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance. [...] [I]t [the margin] is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the centre – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds (hooks, 1990: 149–150).

My second discovery was that, in order for the resistance to be informed, I had to return to the ethnic specificity of religion. In this I was following Mohanty, Russo and Torres who argue that acknowledging the ethnic specificity of identity construction will reveal the varied contextual oppressions suffered by Third World women, thereby allowing for the conception and/or adoption of appropriate resistive strategies which will aid in “the creation of a discursive space where (self-) knowledge is produced by and for third world women” (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991: 34).

However, on completion of the film, which I titled *Unwritten*, a critical reflection of the filmmaking process and an analysis of the film text itself, I found that using the standard techniques of Hollywood filmmaking, besides limiting the creative potential for resistance to misinterpretations of religious myth, proved to nevertheless essentialise the specificity of the South African Hindu woman’s experiences (Moodley, 2009b). It was ultimately impossible to marry a redefinition of religious discourse with a dominant mode of film production.

The process also brought to the fore two issues in positionality that I had failed to consider prior to engaging in the filmmaking process (Moodley, 2009b). Firstly, as a South African Hindu woman of Indian descent and, secondly, as an academic with various platforms of expression at my disposal,

I had assumed a superficial similarity to and yet privileged position over those whose story I attempted to tell. The first bias arose from telling a story that I believed needed to be told and re-writing religious myth in a way that I perceived resistance would occur for all South African Hindu women. The second bias, feeding into and drawing on the first, revealed an assumption that I had the skill and knowledge to speak for and on behalf of these women. If my aim is postcolonial feminist filmmaking, should I not be exploring the narratives of other Hindu women in the South African context? This destabilising of my proposed postcolonial feminist film practice therefore highlighted the following questions:

- Who are these South African Hindu women?
- Do they in fact feel confined by representations of themselves in mainstream formats?
- Do they see religion as informing these limited representations?
- Do they perceive religion as central to the construction of their identity?
- Do they consider resistance to these limited representations necessary at the discursive level of textual construction or at the material level of daily existence? In other words, in contemporary society, do they feel that they have overcome or transgressed limited representations? Are these transgressions based on career choices, social positioning, earning potential, or redefinitions of cultural practices such as marriage rituals and conventional family structures?

The lack of respect for context and the unwitting assumption of privilege ran counter to postcolonial feminist thought, and proved to be two crucial flaws in the research that I had conducted thus far and therefore would not provide a suitable framework for a postcolonial feminist film practice. Moreover, working to resist two kinds of hegemony – mainstream film narrative and religious myth – it also became apparent that simply inserting one type of narrative into another would not succeed. Basically, I had not yet achieved *a satisfactory postcolonial feminist practice* and needed to revise my approach based on the failure of my trajectory thus far.

In an attempt to remedy the flaws that emerged in my testing of the postcolonial feminist film practice, I tried to find a method of film making that was not only conducive to both gathering and articulating the stories of the women being studied, but that also offered strategies of creative

resistance to existent, arguably prescriptive, representations of Hindu women through a process of self-reflection for both the researcher/filmmaker and the research subjects/actors. It was in this context that my doctoral research was formulated.

The Doctoral Context

The project began with the following key questions:

1. What potential does self-reflexive filmmaking offer as a method for articulating the narratives of South African Hindu women?
 - a. How would these women use self-reflexive filmmaking to consciously reflect on mainstream representations of themselves?
 - b. What stories would they choose to tell?
 - c. Would these stories subscribe to or challenge conventional depictions informed by religious myth?
2. How does the process of self-reflexive filmmaking problematise the positionality of the researcher as an academic filmmaker?
3. Does the interface between the medium of self-reflexive film, the academic filmmaker and the narratives of South African Hindu women offer a platform for resistance to mainstream representations?

As these questions make clear, this doctoral study incorporates an equal investment in theory and practice and in what could be described as the inextricable and dialogic relationship between the two. If the build-up to the project began with theory informing practice, then practice, when it began, lead to a reconceptualization of theory. The sections that follow briefly explain how theory and practice were combined during the research process as well as how they are dealt with within the thesis itself.

Methodological Approach

Contrary to the conventional thesis structure, I begin my discussion of the project with an explanation of my methodological approach. The main reason for this is that my journey as a researcher prior to the PhD, and as outlined above, seemed to lead as much to questions of *method*

as it did to the *theoretical* framework needed to understand them. The second reason stems from the need to introduce and establish my research participants as voices in this PhD narrative. Indeed, much of what these participants had to say contributed to, supported or challenged the theory that I drew on for my literature review/theoretical framework. For this reason, then, I wanted to be able to discuss the interactions with my participants from the outset.

Chapter 2 therefore offers a methodological approach to the gathering and expression of the stories of South African Hindu women without strictly adhering to the formal and/or traditional conventions of a methodological design. This particular chapter should be read as a response to the theoretical and practical difficulties of establishing and engaging in a postcolonial feminist film practice. The chapter first offers autoethnography, from the perspective of Carolyn Ellis (2004; 2006; 2011), as a viable approach in the attempt to ensure greater involvement of the postcolonial scholar in research. Participatory video, couched in a discussion of the significance of visual methodologies proffered by Sarah Pink (2001; 2003; 2004; 2007; 2008), is then proposed as the most appropriate way of simultaneously gaining access to a range of individual stories and the experience of community.

Theoretical Approach

The key questions mentioned earlier speak to two broad areas: the issue of diaspora and postcolonial theory. I begin in Chapter Three with a framing of the notion of Indian diaspora in a South African context. This discussion is supplemented by a brief explanation of the South African Indian community's unorthodox understanding and adoption of the label/concept of diaspora. I have struggled to come to terms with the description of the contemporary Indian community in South Africa as 'diasporic', and this for several related reasons. Firstly, the majority of the Indian community in South Africa is either the fourth to sixth generation since the initial arrival of indentured labourers in 1860. Secondly, the South African Indian community still tends to buy into constructions of a 'global Indianness' as models of practice/behaviour. And thirdly, representations of South African Indians still tend to exhibit characteristics that are strongly tied to initial diasporic movements. In essence, why have South African Indians not claimed a space of representation that moves beyond diasporic experience? I eventually argue, with reference to discussions with my participants, that the notion of diaspora should be read as a 'feeling of being' enabled by political

context and collective memory as opposed to a lived experience. I then compare this notion of a diasporic ‘feeling of being’ with traditional notions of gender and religion in the diaspora. In this regard, I provide a broad overview of the representation of the South African Indian community in literature, theatre and popular film during and post-apartheid. I highlight the fact that, although several texts in a variety of media have been produced by South African Indians, relatively few critical studies have been produced that discuss the nature of the representation of South African Indians in these texts. Although my investigation here is not exhaustive, given the constraints of a project of this scope, I do provide the key arguments emerging from the studies that are existent and/or available. The necessity of this chapter lies in the background that it establishes for the context in which my participants and I exist.

In response to the conflicted position of the academic filmmaker and the need to redefine the visual representation of South African Hindu women, Chapter Four is devoted to a discussion of three aspects of postcolonial theory in a contemporary context: the emphasis on textualism, the problematic role and place of the scholar, and the redefinition of key concepts. In the first instance, I draw particular attention to critiques that interrogate the ‘over-theorising’ and the limited understanding of Third World textual production characteristic of the postcolonial academy. In my discussion of the context and responsibility of the postcolonial scholar, I support arguments that highlight the lack of engagement on the part of the scholar with the material experiences and conditions of the subjects about whom they write. The implication is that judgments and propositions for a progressive way forward are frequently uninformed by first-hand knowledge. I therefore build on proposals that call for a more engaged scholar. In this regard, I offer the scholar as communal participant, as socially-embedded educator and as activist. These discussions set the foundation for reformulations of key postcolonial concepts in order to establish a context for my study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how my project intends to bring together the notion of the text, scholar and key concepts of postcolonial theory by referring to the scholarly and filmic works of Prajna Paramita Parasher (2002), as one example of a combination of these aspects, and Jyoti Mistry, as a brief example within the South African academic context.

Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter 5 is a rather long chapter that I’ve chosen to divide into four sections or episodes. I have

allocated one section per participant involved in the project, including myself. Again, like the preceding chapters, this chapter does not follow the rules of a traditional data analysis and findings chapter. Given the self-reflexive nature of the project and the research process (which should be evident from the register assumed thus far), the chapter draws on the style and tone of a personal journal. While the aim of the project is not a formal analysis of the films produced by the participants in the project, an understanding of their films as a reflection of a very engaged and collaborative process of filmmaking is important. Understanding the journey that each of these women undertook as amateur filmmakers and their personal development as a result of the process is crucial to cementing my notion of a postcolonial feminist film practice.

Chapter 6, which requires the films to have been viewed by this point, engages in a comparative analysis of the ways in which my participants and I use participatory video to challenge mainstream representations of Indian (Hindu) women. The aim of the chapter is not to establish a pattern of similarity between the films produced but to reflect on the potential for agency, voice, resistance and creative experimentation inherent in self-reflexive filmmaking.

Finally, in Chapter 7, as a conclusion to the thesis, I begin by exploring how the notion of ‘women in conversation’ afforded by an autoethnographic approach enables two layers of narrative production: the first through the sharing of life stories through dialogue and the second through a remediation of life stories through film. Thereafter, I engage in a discussion of the future of postcolonial feminist film practice as a tool for both social development and education. In terms of social development, I argue that the practice enables the voicing of individual experiences of communal issues and thereby affords the opportunity for agency and social change. In addition, I argue that the educative function of the practice is multidimensional – the researcher and research participants engage in a mutual sharing of knowledge and skills, and the filmic output and research findings of the researcher and participants has educational benefits for both the communities to which the participants belong and postgraduate teaching in the areas of film and social development.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Postcolonial Feminist Film (1): Positionality, Self-Reflexivity and the Visual Voice

Introduction

This project seeks to investigate how South African Hindu women choose to tell their stories through the medium of film. Do these women choose to maintain filmic representations that subscribe to their inscription in religious myth or do they choose to challenge and resist these dominant representational modes through a more self-reflexive filmmaking process? The project therefore assumes a qualitative research design that emphasizes the contexts, insider perspectives and in-depth descriptions of events and social actions of the women selected as participants. Drawing on an autoethnographic approach and participatory video as a form of visual methodology, the research focuses on the importance of process, specifically reflecting on the researcher's involvement and positionality in the project (Babbie *et al.*, 2004).

Selection of Participants³

Purposive sampling, a consciously directed selection process (Deacon *et al.*, 1999), was used to identify and access the research participants for this study. Since I required the participation of South African Hindu women of Indian descent, the selection criteria that I used were gender (female), religious affiliation (Hinduism), country of descent/heritage (India) and country of birth, citizenship or residency (South Africa). Age, occupation, social class, language grouping (e.g. Tamil, Telegu, Hindi, etc.) and Hindu denomination (Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, etc.) were not specified as selection criteria. Although these factors are important in understanding the complex diversity of the South African Indian community (as I explain in Chapter 3), they were only evaluated when they emerged as significant aspects of the narratives of these women.

The selection process initially involved contacting the South African Department of Arts and Culture for a listing of the various Hindu organizations that exist across South Africa. Thereafter, these Hindu groups were approached with a request for permission to email their female members

³ Please note that actual names (with signed consent from each of the participants) are used in the discussion of this project's findings.

regarding the nature, purpose and conditions of the project (see Appendix 1). Only female members who were interested in the study and willing to be involved were recruited.

Since this was a deep, practice-intensive study, requiring the use of digital video equipment, my sample of South African Hindu women did not have to be large. In fact, in terms of resource availability, funding and the feasibility offered by a PhD project, I aimed for six participants. I targeted two provinces in South Africa, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, to conduct my study as these two sites hold the largest population of Indians in the country, in the cities of Johannesburg and Durban respectively. Eventually, I ended up with four participants: two in Johannesburg and two in Durban.

Manjini Mestry and Sashnee Naicker, both 37 years old and unmarried, are from Johannesburg. Manjini is a qualified attorney who is employed by a wealthy Afrikaans family to handle the legal affairs of their many businesses. Sashnee is a recruitment manager for the international accounting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers. Although Sashnee completed the first workshop of the project, she was unfortunately unable to see the project through to completion due to work stress and a potentially life-threatening illness. Sashnee's contribution to the project is therefore only included in my literature review chapters as support for or in challenge to the theory discussed.

Mrs. Yogambal Singaram (who we respectfully refer to by title and surname because of her age) and Jessica Gounden are both from Durban. Mrs. Singaram is a 58 year old widow who teaches *Bharatanatyam* – a classical Indian dance form – and works for the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department as a placement officer for newly qualified teachers. She has two daughters who are both doctors (one a dentist, the other specializing in anaesthetics). Jessica, aged 41, is a divorced attorney and a single mother of three young sons.

Interestingly, all of these women had two things in common. Firstly, they all came from Tamil-speaking backgrounds. In the South African context, the Indian community often conflates religious worship with linguistic background. In other words, even though Tamil-speaking, Hindi-speaking, Telegu-speaking, etc. groups may all follow Hinduism, they tend to practice the religion in different ways. These differences are mainly related to ritual practice even though the significance of the rituals is very much the same. This kind of linguistically inflected religious

division has been and continues (in some instances) to be a source of tension in the community, specifically in terms of inter-linguistic marriages. Nevertheless, in terms of this project, I assumed that the linguistic similarity of my participants was a result of the strong commitment and involvement of the South African Tamil Federation (in comparison to the other Hindu Organisations that I'd approached for assistance during my search for participants). However, when two of my participants eventually discovered that all group members were of Tamil-speaking descent, they disagreed with my assumption and reasoned instead that the Tamil community has always been far more liberal in their approach to women's and social issues (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c).

The second similarity between my participants was that none of them had a husband or partner. Being 'un-partnered', they argued, played a further role in their agreement to be involved in a project of this nature. They explained that they had a freedom of choice that not many other Indian women might be privileged to. Many Indian husbands, according to my participants, may not be open to their wives spending whole weekends away, sharing their lives and troubles with a group of unknown women and then making films about it. They argued that they were not bound by duty in the same way that married or partnered women would be (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c).

There's one more person who needs to be mentioned for her involvement in this project. But, before I explain the role that she played, I need to explain the background to her involvement. Since this project required substantial funding for the purchase of equipment and travel around South Africa, I applied for funding from the National Research Foundation (a funding organization that supports and promotes academic research at tertiary institutions in South Africa). My application was successful and I received a generous grant in support of my project. One of the conditions of the grant was that a portion of the money be used to support one Masters student that I was either supervising or co-supervising in an area related to the project. Shannon Milojkovic, a 25-year-old Masters student in my discipline investigating the documentary-making style of the feminist filmmaker Kim Longinotto, was eventually selected to receive the student portion of my grant. The condition of her receiving the funding was that she be actively involved in and contribute to my research process. Shannon was eager to be involved in my participant workshops as a research assistant. Since she had completed the practical film modules offered by

my discipline and had done substantial research on documentary-making, I invited her to teach my participants how to use the filmmaking equipment we would be providing them with and to introduce them to the basics of the different modes of documentary that exist. After the completion of the workshops, Shannon played an advisory role when the participants needed assistance regarding the use of the camera, and, in one instance, was called on to assist with editing. Although my self-reflexive chapter (Chapter 5) does not afford Shannon a separate section for discussion, I do include her contributions at specific moments in the narratives of the various women. In this sense, she is as much a character in my research story as the other participants are and her involvement cannot go unmentioned.

The Research Process

The first stage of the participant research process, referred to as interactive interviewing in the autoethnographic approach (Ellis, 2004), involved both myself, as researcher, and the participants sharing experiences of being Hindu in a South African context, exchanging stories of the role and impact of Hinduism in our lives as women, and how this has been represented through dominant modes of film. In terms of the nature of the autoethnographic process, which is discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, it was also necessary for the participants and I to share our personal and professional backgrounds in order to understand the context from which our stories emerged. As a result, the participants were aware, from the outset, of my research trajectory and, on many occasions, contributed to my more theoretical understanding of postcolonialism, feminism and issues of diaspora. Some of these discussions appear as support to my theoretical arguments in Chapters 3 and 4.

The second stage of the process involved introductory film and filming equipment literacy lessons in order for the participants to have a basic knowledge of how to make a film and use a camera. The actual workshops were covered over three weekends (six days in total), but the post-workshop interactions and consultations with the participants regarding the knowledge that they'd gained and the films that they were producing spanned just over one year. The equipment that they each received was a consumer digital video camera (Canon Legria HFG10), a tripod and a microphone. Their workshop lessons included understanding the concepts of film genres and documentary

styles as well as training in basic skills such as scriptwriting for mainstream classical narrative film, capturing footage and editing. The participants were then shown sample videos of short narrative films and examples of various types of documentary. This preliminary session ended with brainstorming not only the stories we wanted to tell through our individual films but also the various ways in which we could use film and video to tell these stories. This marked the beginning of the participatory video approach in the project. The participants (including myself) were then expected to record our stories over a specified period of time.

The next stage, once we had recorded our footage, involved engaging in discussions held over the course of several months either in person or via email to collaborate on and workshop a full-length film that would incorporate all of our stories. This involved viewing all of our footage, finding the common threads (if any) that emerged from our stories, and deciding on whether the final film should be assembled as an anthology of films, or whether it should intercut various parts of the footage gathered by each of us, or whether an entirely new story should be told that incorporates the various issues highlighted by the footage. In this way, the participants and I attempted to engage the third phase of the research process by co-constructing a narrative (Ellis, 2004) for the final film. By the end of the series of workshops, however, it was decided that, since our stories and ideas about how to put our films together were so varied, we each needed to complete a separate film that could then be compiled as an anthology of narratives or perhaps exhibited as a film or video installation. Sarah Pink (2007), whose work in visual research I discuss in greater detail further in the chapter, argues that this type of decision-making is characteristic of alternative research methods. She explains that participatory approaches develop differently in different contexts. In other words, the end product(s) may be shared or multi-authored. The films produced as the outcome of my project and the process of completing them are discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Why Autoethnography?

Although alternative approaches to traditional ethnography began to emerge quite strongly in the 1970s (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011), the sociologist Carolyn Ellis argues most persuasively for the practice of autoethnography to be accepted and recognized as a distinct and valuable approach

to research (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). She describes autoethnography as “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004: 37). Autoethnographers, Ellis argues, begin with an ethnographic gaze that looks outward on aspects of culture and society that affect their personal experience before “they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (Ellis, 2004: 37). The autoethnographic process is characterized by repeated movement between external culture and personal experience in an attempt to understand and do full justice to the often blurred boundaries between these two aspects of identity construction and lived experience.

Autoethnographic research generally culminates in a first-person narrative that can assume one or more of a wide range of forms: short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, scripts, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, as well as the formal prose usually found in social science research. These formats are usually referred to as personal narratives, although the term is given a more rigorous meaning than is traditionally the case:

The primary purpose of the personal narrative is to understand a self or some aspect of a life lived in a cultural context. In personal narrative texts, authors become ‘I’, readers become ‘you’, participants become ‘us’. Participants are encouraged to engage in personal relationships with the authors/researchers, to think of themselves as co-researchers, to share authority, and to author their own lives in their own voices. Readers too, take a more active role as they are invited into the author’s world, aroused to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. The goal is to write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience, and to write from an ethic of care and concern (Ellis, 2004: 46).

There are two distinct features of the texts that are produced as end products of autoethnographic research that are significant to this project: the dialectical and collaborative relationship that develops between researchers and participants, and the self-reflexivity of the research process and the construction of the text. Each of these features points to a stronger affective dimension to the research which is characteristic of researcher participation. Qualitative research studies in the social sciences and humanities have tended to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher at the outset of the research process with a view to not allowing that very positionality to influence

the research process. The main objective of this is twofold: to ensure that researcher bias does not filter into the process and to prevent the researcher from becoming too personally involved with the research subjects. A lack of personal involvement guards against emotional engagement, which is argued to skew results. Proponents of autoethnography, however, have increasingly argued that the researcher's role, position and involvement in relation to the research participants needs to surpass the traditional hierarchy of the knowledgeable facilitator who controls the data gathering process at a safe, objective distance from the research subjects (Ellis, 2004; Burnier, 2006; Denzin, 2006; Vryan 2006). The focus, rather, is on both the mutual disclosure of information and emotional engagement.

As a result, the autoethnographic approach conceptualizes truth, accuracy, memory, validity and generalizability in research quite differently. Using Ellis (2004) as a point of departure, we can say that:

- the notion of truth should be broadened to speak about multiple truths pertaining to lived experience. Autoethnographers need to acknowledge that truth is relative and will never capture any one experience fully or accurately. Every story you research, write or tell is partial and situated;
- accuracy is not so much an attempt at recounting objective facts that emerge in the interaction between researcher and participant, but rather an attempt at relaying the meaning that the researcher and participants attach to the experience of the interaction;
- memory adds a further dimension to the notions of truth and accuracy because, as an autoethnographer, you write from your current perspective usually emerging out of a particular sensory social experience. The non-linearity of memories is further accepted as part of the process – it is therefore acknowledged that absolute chronology is never fully achievable in the process of remembering or recording the interaction between researcher and participant;
- validity in traditional research refers to how effective the research project has been in measuring and representing the truth and accuracy of the data gathered. Since the notions of truth and accuracy are already destabilized by an autoethnographic approach, the notion of validity is particularly problematic. In the first instance, the affective dimension of the interactive interviewing and co-constructed narrative approach are both, by design, not

conducive to a process of measurement. In the second instance, the collaborative nature of these processes points ideally to a reflexive approach to the representation of results, involving both the affective dimension mentioned earlier and an acknowledgement of the shared authorship of those results with the research participants. In other words, the story of the research process is incorporated into and holds equal significance to the stories that the research participants tell. Validity, in the traditional sense, is therefore thrown into question;

- generalizability should not be viewed as the pattern of results that emerge from participant responses in which common/shared meaning is attributed and applied to large groups of people. Rather, the possibility of generalizing is transferred to the reader of the autoethnographic text who “determine[s] if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (Ellis *et al.*, 2011: 8).

Conceptualizing the researcher as participant therefore requires a level of emotional sensitivity and vulnerability not traditionally associated with research in the social sciences: the aim is to share stories in an attempt to stimulate contributions from all the participants. The advantages of this approach are that (Ellis, 2004):

- an honesty of expression is achieved when research participants feel that their stories are shared by someone who is sympathetic to the contextual factors influencing their stories;
- the researcher’s own understanding of the topic at hand is enhanced through an exploration of their own story as the research participants respond to it;
- greater insight is gained regarding how people commonly talk to each other and share information about particular topics;
- a platform of openness is created between the researcher and participants in which an appropriate textual method for the meaningful “telling”/expression of research findings can be decided upon and co-constructed.

The autoethnographic approach fits squarely with and justifies my research objectives because my positionality as a South African Hindu woman of Indian descent, an academic and a filmmaker forms a major component of this project. It was not enough for me to just acknowledge positionality in an attempt to maintain objectivity. Positionality needed to be problematized and

mobilised. It was no secret that my interest in this project linked to the identity descriptors that I share with the participants of my research. My subjectivity and bias throughout the process were therefore always going to be a major factor. It was the nature of that focus, however, that had to be decided upon. Following Ellis's (2004) argument this was not a bias that needed to be explained away or that I constantly had to remind myself of in order to be objective. In fact, it was a bias that I needed to allow to filter into my research in order to be more self-conscious of my relationship to other South African Hindu women and our experiences of religion, gender, diaspora⁴ and representation. Furthermore, Chapter 4 explains in detail that a significant component of this positionality is informed by the notion of the scholar as activist. It is clear that my research trajectory has been guided by the need to change the oppressive nature of filmic representation for Indian women and offer a more resistant space of representation through self-reflexive filmmaking.

The two autoethnographic research processes that I appropriated for this project were, as already mentioned, interactive interviewing and co-constructing narratives. Ellis views both these processes as types of autoethnographic interviewing. I, however, in an attempt to allow the nature of the research to determine the method, chose to appropriate interactive interviewing and co-constructing narratives as 'stages' in my autoethnographic process.

Interactive interviewing is an interview process where all participants involved in the research (including the researcher) are afforded the opportunity to be both researcher and research participant. In this approach the emphasis is on the narrative(s) that emerges from the interaction between the researcher and participants, the relationships that they develop, and the stories that they each share. Ellis (2004) argues that this interview approach is most appropriate when researchers and participants share experience on a particular topic or are sensitive to the issue being discussed, and is particularly useful when research requires a certain level of reciprocity and trust. The point, then, is not to attempt to mimic the rules about standardized procedures, but to try to understand the meaning of what people think, feel and do.

One person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about

⁴An idea that aligns itself with the postcolonial feminist concerns to be discussed in Chapter 4.

another's plight lead to greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experience offer new insight into both lives (Ellis, 2004: 66).

The resulting mutually-produced narrative(s), based on the connections established through dialogue and joint meaning production works to construct a collaborative a story that is shared by the participants (Ellis, 2004). For this section of the autoethnographic process, I drew on participatory video as a storytelling device. In other words, the co-constructed narrative for this project would be the films/film anthology that we workshoped from our individual footage and the consultation we engaged in with each other in order to do so.

While the merits of an autoethnographic approach to this type of research project are clear, Ellis (2004) highlights challenges that emerge from the not-so-traditional researcher participation in the process. These are challenges that I was forced to address at different stages during the project. The greatest difficulty was attempting to reconcile my training in objective research with the overpowering sense that it had very little place in a study of this nature.

The first challenge involved understanding how my shared identity as one of the research participants (or subjects being researched) influenced my interaction with and reading of the other participants. The main issue in this instance was attempting to straddle the fine line between researcher and research participant with the actual research participants being fully aware of this dual role. Secondly, it proved very difficult to measure when my involvement as researcher-participant was too much or too little. Ellis (2004) argues that, with research of this nature, researchers often find it difficult to judge when they are disadvantaging the research by maintaining a safe distance from the participants' process (so as not to have too great an influence), or at what point they would be considered to be deceiving participants by leading them to believe that they are part of the group during the study, only to write up and evaluate the data independently at the end. As a result, in conducting this research, I often found myself questioning whether it was safe to assume a licensed freedom to represent the data in a way that I saw fit and what the most appropriate narrative format to sustain this would be.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the nature of researcher participation in autoethnographic practice has

been highly contested⁵ even amongst the proponents of autoethnography themselves. According to Ellis *et al.* (2011: 8), “autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful”. Some of these criticisms include a failure to comply with the theoretical and analytical standards of science research, the potential to indulge researcher self-absorption, too heavy a focus on the aesthetic representation of ‘data’, too strong an emphasis on achieving emotional disclosure for therapeutic ends and working with too few participants.

While these criticisms raise valid concerns, they are all based on an underlying assumption that science and art should (and do) exist on opposite ends of the research spectrum. This would defeat the purpose of an autoethnographic approach that attempts to reconcile these differences,

we think of what we do as both evocative and analytical. The difference is that we use stories to do the work of analysis and theorizing. [...] The difference between stories and traditional analysis is the mode of explanation and its effects on the reader. Traditional analysis is about transferring information, whereas narrative inquiry emphasizes communication. It’s the difference between a monologue and dialogue, between closing down interpretation and staying open to other meanings, between having the last word and sharing the platform (Ellis & Bochner, 2006: 436 - 438).

It is ultimately this opportunity to allow multiple stories to be heard that led me to adopt an autoethnographic approach and in this way articulate the narratives of South African Hindu women. But while Ellis’ work focuses on the creative expression of research through autobiographical writing, her notion of storytelling is broad and open enough to be applied to other media such as film and video making. Sarah Pink’s notion of visual ethnography (2001) offers an appropriate way to explore the marrying of autoethnography and a more engaged film/video-making process.

A Visual Methodological Approach

The use of the visual in research is not particularly new to methodological approaches in the humanities and social sciences, but it is an area that is constantly evolving in terms of ‘how’,

⁵ hooks (1994), Keller (1995), Atkinson (1997), Gans (1999), Buzard (2003), Fine (2003), Anderson (2006), Madison (2006), Delamont (2009)

‘why’, ‘when’ and ‘with what’ the visual may be used. Sarah Pink is an academic researcher who has written extensively about applied practice in research, focusing specifically on the visual as a tool for research, and drawing on a combination of both theory and methodology. Although visual methodologies have been written about and employed by both ethnographers and scholars in various disciplines (as evidenced by the writings of Pink), I find that the work of Pink offers the most comprehensive account of the historical development of the visual in research and a level of openness to understanding the process that makes the work that I am doing possible,

To incorporate the visual appropriately into the social sciences, specifically in terms of anthropology and cultural studies, alternative methodologies and objectives need to be developed rather than attaching the visual to existing methodological principles and analytical frames. This means abandoning the possibility of a purely objective research practice and rejecting the idea that the written word is essentially a superior medium of ethnographic representation. While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work (Pink, 2001: 4–5).

The trajectory of Pink’s exploration of visual research reveals an initial focus on visual ethnography which she describes as the use of visual media in ethnographic and social research as tools for research and methods for representing and analyzing the data gathered. The use of the term *ethnography* in visual ethnography might, at this juncture, appear to defeat the purpose of my appropriation of *autoethnography* which rejects “canonical ideas about what research is and how research should be done” (Ellis *et al.*, 2011: 3), and the limitations of mainstream realist ethnography. One of the main issues of visual ethnography, however, is the growing concern that the centrality of subjectivity and the opportunity to fictionalize content inherent in visual media poses a challenge to traditional positivist and realist approaches to knowledge, truth and objectivity. In this sense, Pink’s conception of visual ethnography ties in more closely with Ellis’ notion of autoethnography than with traditional ethnography,

[...] I shall define ethnography as a methodology; as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. Rather than being a method for the collection of ‘data’, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own

experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or 'truthful' account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. This may entail reflexive, collaborative or participatory methods. It may involve informants in a variety of ways at different points of the research and representational stages of the project (Pink, 2001: 18).

Pink's later work reveals greater emphasis on visual anthropology which she defines as "[...] ethnography as practice and [...] informed by anthropological theory and embedded in anthropological research questions" (Pink *et al.*, 2004: 2). *Applied* visual anthropology, a stronger concern in Pink's more recent work in visual research,

combin[es] visual anthropology with and adapt[s] it in relation to the demands of other approaches and practices. In common with other recent innovations in visual anthropology practice it extends outside academia to collaborate with other disciplines within particular substantive areas. Its distinguishing feature is that its interdisciplinary collaborations have a particular type of outcome in mind – they aim to produce social interventions (Pink, 2007: 11).

The relevance of Pink's work as a whole to my own emerges out of 6 characteristics of visual research that she highlights and develops in various ways over the course of her work: collaboration/participation, reflexivity, social context, content, the materiality of images, ethics and social interventions. These characteristics offer another instance of the points of convergence between Ellis' notion of autoethnography and Pink's conceptualization of visual research. Although each of these characteristics appear to be discreet concepts within research, they are closely intertwined and can't be understood in isolation.

Collaboration, argues Pink (2003), is a necessary part of visual research that goes beyond just the mutual participation of the researcher and research participants to include a deeper, more empathetic interaction between the two. Collaboration should therefore be viewed as a knowledge-generating exercise that emerges from the relationships established and the negotiations that occur between the researcher and research participants (Pink, 2003). The potential for feedback in the process of collaboration enables an understanding not only of the experiences of others but the ways in which they produce knowledge too. Inherent in this kind of cultural awareness is the opportunity for researchers to reflect on their role (Pink, 2007). Reflexivity, then, forms a very

significant component of this process, in which the researcher is not only acutely aware of the impact of their positionality in the research, but the implications of their inevitable immersion in the process and their eventual visual and written expression thereof (Pink, 2003). Drawing on the contributions of MacDougall (1998), Pink *et al.* (2004) distinguishes between explanatory reflexivity and deep reflexivity. Explanatory reflexivity, prevalent in ethnographic writing, offers a *reflection* on the relationships that are involved in the production of visual material of research. In this particular thesis, this is evident in the self-reflexive approach to writing up of the process and the resultant tone thereof. Deep reflexivity, on the other hand, reveals the potential for visual material *to represent* the relationships that were involved in its production. In this way, the traditional research methods of observation and information gathering are respectively transformed into processes of watching *with/together* and *shared* meaning-making. Empowerment, in this sense, is mutual for both the researcher and research participants through an awareness of ‘selves’ (as opposed to ‘the self’). This is made clearer in Chapters 6 and 7, where I illustrate that even though each woman in my project produced their own film or footage, all of our visual materials speak to each other. Pink (2008) later deepens her arguments around reflexivity with the concept of “knowing in practice”, drawn from Wenger (1998: 141), to speak about the researcher’s reflexive engagement at all stages of the research process. I would argue, though, that Pink’s conceptualisation in this regard could be developed further to include the affective dimension that Ellis’ work more evidently points to in order to speak not only of a ‘knowing in practice’ but a ‘feeling in practice’ as well. As I later explain in my self-reflexive chapter, being able to empathise with my participants was crucial to the process of developing trust and sharing life experiences.

Unlike traditional research, the dialectical relationship between collaboration and reflexivity forms a necessary part of ethical conduct in visual research. Pink argues that power relations are inherent in the production of images for research. The researcher and the images may, in some instances, actively participate and, in other instances, be implicated in these power relations. The researcher has to be conscious not only of their relationship to the participant(s) but of their relationship to the image as well. In other words, the researcher would have to have a keen awareness of both the gaze of the image and their own gaze (2003). Collaboration and reflexivity would then have to be informed by the social context, content and materiality of the images produced during the research. Social context refers to the external narrative of the images in terms of the social factors informing

both their production and viewing. Content refers to the internal narrative of the images or the story that they tell. And the notion of materiality returns to the idea of the image's gaze. Drawing on the work of Lister and Wells (2000), Pink links the material properties of the image to social and historical processes of 'looking' (2003). There are therefore several levels of meaning production that are at work in the making of images. In other words, the materiality of the image points not only to the social context of the image or the participant producing the image, but the manner in which that social context together with the content of the image reveal a habitual and/or inherited (yet often unconscious) practice of 'looking'. This practice of looking would also apply to the social contexts in which the images are exhibited. I return to this discussion in the following chapter, where I offer a background to the representation of the Indian community in South Africa across a variety of media (written, visual and performed).

Pink's work in applied visual anthropology strongly emphasizes the potential of the visual to engage in social intervention initiatives, "as social intervention, applied visual anthropology usually takes the form of a problem-solving practice that involves collaborating with research participants and aims to bring about some form of change" (2007: 11–12). One of the main aims of my project is to develop newer visual methods of gathering and telling the stories of South African Hindu women in order that they become agents of their own narratives and (hopefully) resist the limited mainstream representations of themselves. One advantage of using a visual methodological approach, in this regard, is the alleviation of an uncomfortable tension that has tended to characterise the relationship between anthropology and cultural studies in which the former has been accused of objectifying culture and the latter criticized for treating people as textual subjects rather than as agents (Harvey, 1996). As Pink argues,

An interlinking of cultural studies and anthropological approaches seems particularly pertinent to an ethnography that incorporates visual images and technologies. This approach recognizes the interwovenness of objects, texts, images and technologies in people's everyday lives and identities. It aims not simply to 'study' people's social practices or to read cultural objects and performances as if they were texts, but to explore how all types of material, intangible, spoken, performed narratives and discourses are interwoven with and made meaningful in relation to social relationships, practices and individual experiences (Pink, 2001: 5-6).

As I've indicated in my introductory discussion, my research trajectory reached a point where

drawing generalizable conclusions about the identity construction of Indian women in the diaspora from analyses of existing filmic representations lost momentum and credibility. It became necessary to deepen my understanding of their interaction with the medium and how this contributed to a meaningful understanding of their identities. And, in order to do so, it became necessary to put the means of visual representation into their own hands. In other words, it was not enough to merely try to read these women via texts. I needed to understand how they actively constructed themselves and chose to articulate that construction through the very medium that has played such an important role in the representation of Indian women. This is an idea further supported by Pink's notion of applied visual anthropology,

[...] applied visual anthropology is successful in projects that seek to represent how people experience certain dimensions of their everyday worlds and to create platforms on which people can represent their experiences, views or culture. It facilitates aspects of self-representation that can be expressed audiovisually. It encourages use of metaphor and empathetic communication of knowledge and experience that cannot be expressed using only words (Pink, 2007: 17).

The points of convergence between autoethnography and visual ethnography therefore open up the possibility of South African Hindu women owning the means of their representation, and making films for and about themselves. Women as agents of their own stories is ultimately the main aim of my project, and I believe that the experimentation and self-reflexivity of participatory video affords the greatest potential for this.

Participatory Video

Participatory video generally points to the shared production of visual material/footage in which the director/filmmaker/researcher is not solely responsible for the final product,

Participatory video is a special kind of storytelling that ideally involves the community in telling a story, listening to the story, interpreting the story through its own lens and being empowered to retell and change it to create a community – a political reality - that matches one's own desired condition (Bery, 2003: 102).

Participatory video can therefore take several forms. Individuals or communities forming the

central focus of the video may be involved in its production either through on-camera interviews, direct address to the camera, giving permission to be filmed in their own environment, taking the camera into their own hands and shooting footage, or participating in and/or advising on the editing of the visual material as well.

Nair (1994) describes participatory video as a dynamic, dialectical and dialogical process that “brings about transformation in communication competencies and social behaviours among those who engage in the process” (1994: 2). This idea is extended by White (2003) who argues that participatory video is a consciousness-raising methodological tool that creates an awareness of social issues inherent in the lives of its participants and an opportunity for critical reflection on forms of social action that could possibly improve their social well-being. Participatory video projects have therefore had significant impact in Third World contexts as the practice is driven by development and empowerment objectives (White, 2003)⁶. More specifically, many of these initiatives have been successful in highlighting the issues that Third World women face on a daily basis.

K. Sadanandan Nair and Shirley A. White (2003), for example, did experimental research with women in the villages of Maharashtra (India) using video. They concluded that, “putting the cameras into the hands of the women takes participation to a deeper more involving level [...] enabling people to tell their own story” (White, 2003: 23). Previously, the struggles of the women in the community were linked solely to domestic violence in a video produced by a videographer external to the community. Giving the women access to the camera proved differently – they were able to highlight instead issues of economic oppression, social inequalities and sexuality that they battled on a daily basis in their village context.

Carol Underwood and Bushra Jabre (2003) were similarly involved in an extensive project that spanned Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. The project was called *Arab Women Speak Out* and isolated 30 women to be profiled on video as realistic role models for women in the Arab World. These videos were used as discussion points in group meetings with Arab women who were

⁶ Nair & White; Underwood & Jabre; Guidi; and Dudley all offer accounts of the ways in which their projects support this conclusion in White’s edited anthology (2003). These projects are discussed individually in the paragraphs that follow.

experiencing similar issues to those captured by the film, but in their own contexts. It was subsequently discovered that the videos served as a catalyst for the women who watched them “to make dramatic [personal and political] changes in their lives” (Underwood & Jabre, 2003: 250).

Padma Guidi (White, 2003:25–26), in another instance, was responsible for establishing a technology access centre using multimedia, the Internet and video to provide a global platform for the private and rural voices of Guatemalan women. The technical competency that developed amongst these women proved to be an effective way of combating the limitations of illiteracy. Furthermore, the global nature of the project enabled continued dialogue between Guatemalan women and women in similar contexts around the world. The participatory approach of this particular project has established an environment for and a continued process of teaching and learning between the women who complete the programme and those just beginning to enter it.

Mary Jo Dudley’s video project interestingly emerged from Colombian domestic workers who saw the potential of video “to explore their personal stories, and subsequently challenge public stereotypes” (White, 2003: 20). Their interest in video arose as a result of their illiteracy – they argued that they needed a platform of expression that did not require them to be able to read and write first.

In this regard, Pink (2007) argues that development agencies view “audio-visual media as a means to producing and disseminating knowledge that is inaccessible through written and verbal media” (2007: 20) and illustrates, with reference to various projects detailed in her anthology *Visual Interventions: Applied Visual Anthropology*, that community-based participatory video projects “work to constitute identities and empower marginalised people” (2009: 23). For these reasons, participatory video has been viewed as an effective method for foregrounding and/or achieving feminist imperatives. This potential emerges out of the following trends in participatory video practice (White, 2003):

- the power of the visual image to foster positive changes in attitude and social behaviour such that people become agents of their own destinies and identities;
- the possibilities of empowerment with women behind the camera;
- the documenting and sharing of realities, stories and experiences;

- the reclaiming or celebration of culture and heritage;
- the exposure of social injustice and the challenging of public stereotypes;
- a potential voice to the voiceless; and
- the production of social texts with and by the people drawing on knowledge of local conditions, beliefs, cultures and customs, provided that a level of political will exists among the people.

The use of video as a weapon or tool of resistance becomes more and more possible as the ability to record video becomes more and more accessible to the average person. New, social and multi-media technologies have developed at such a rapid pace that devices such as entry level smart phones with standard video capabilities are both largely affordable and easy to use. Images can be recorded, edited and uploaded online at the touch of a button. Furthermore, low-end consumer digital cameras are far more affordable than when they first entered the market, and basic editing programs seem to come standard with the purchase of laptops, tablets, netbooks, etc. Social media sites are also designed to enable an ease of content (visual or written) distribution. Communicating issues with the intent of social development and change is made possible by our contemporary social and technological environment. Transferring the knowledge and skills attached to these technologies, and providing the resources to the communities that require tools for expression, where necessary, enables a greater culture of resistance to restrictive contexts.

A Question of Ethics

On 29 August 2013, I attended a presentation by Prof. Richa Nagar, a feminist activist and intellectual, hosted by the Centre for Adult Education at my institution. During the introductions of the attendees, Nagar asked that we explain the nature of our projects. Her response to my project was that there would be many ethical implications to introducing a camera in contexts where social development and change were most necessary. Although she could see the benefit of using a visual medium, a camera, she argued, can be rather intimidating and could lead to two extreme forms of response. Either people close up for fear of sharing too much or committing to their social critiques, or people perform for the camera and misrepresent their actual experiences. Nagar highlighted an ethical dimension that I previously hadn't considered. Even though the difference

between my project and the activist/NGO work that she's involved in, was that I had invited participants who wanted to share their stories through film, and that the oppressions experienced by my participants were not as strongly linked to economic status (and the issues of power that this implied) as the people that she worked with, the points that she raised nevertheless shed an interesting light on the ethical issues that I needed to address.

The autoethnographic approach and the use of visual methodologies, offering a challenge to traditional research methods, add a level of complexity to the basic and general codes of ethics that any researcher is expected to abide by. Pink argues that in most instances, ethical decisions, although projected before the research begins, will ultimately have to be made in the field, as, in practice, ethics are not only "bound up with power relations between the researcher, informants, professionals, sponsors, gatekeepers, governments, the media, and other institutions" (2001: 37) but with personal engagement as well. "The moral and philosophical beliefs of the researcher and his or her view of reality impinges greatly on the ethical practices that he or she applies in research and representation" (Pink, 2001: 37). She therefore argues that ethical decisions made during the interaction with participants are "always contingent on local circumstances" (2007: 18). Below, I discuss the ethical considerations highlighted by Pink (2001) that are relevant to the convergence of autoethnography and participatory video at the core of this project:

- **Permission and the right to record.** There should never be any compromise on the issue of permission to record participants. For my project, not only did I want to record the stories that my participants had to share about their lives, I also required that they record their own lives (with or without the involvement of significant others in the form of family, friends and community). Although they'd all accepted, via email or telephonically, my invitation to participate in the project, I did ensure that they signed **informed consent** forms (see Appendix 2) that allowed me to use their discussion and material for my thesis, but that also gave them the option of withdrawing from the project if, for some reason, they no longer wanted to be involved. As I highlight in the self-reflexive chapter (Chapter 5), in many instances, the participants themselves eventually brought up the issue of ethics in terms of the films that they were expected to make. This points to what could perhaps be

referred to as ‘participant ethics’ which highlights the levels of ethical consideration that need to be addressed during the course of a project of this nature.

- **Harm to informants.** Harm should be understood as specific to certain cultures. It is therefore the responsibility of the researcher to explore, in advance, the nature of harm and anxiety, and the intricacies of the visual culture of the participants or groups that they’re working with. This is specifically important in terms of how these participants or groups relate to images (or representations of themselves in images) before engaging any visual method. This particular ethical issue is usually said to be resolved through a collaborative approach and joint ownership of materials. For this particular project, the autoethnographic process addressed these types of issues from the outset. Being able to immerse myself in discussion with these women and share equally my personal and professional trajectory contributed significantly to understanding their perceptions of visual representations of themselves.
- **Harm, representation and permission to publish data.** This issue links closely to the permission to record. Publishing visual data is as serious, if not more serious, an issue as publishing written data. When images and footage have been shot, it is very difficult to go back and change material. In addition, it is often difficult to maintain the anonymity of people and places. That’s why it’s always advisable to make intentions clear to the participants in advance. If consent is not gained before and participants claim that they were not informed in advance, the researcher could be accused of deception. Published or exhibited material could also be damaging to the reputation of the participants or the people that they record. In terms of this project, this is particularly significant, since the autoethnographic process does, by its very nature, tend to encourage the sharing of personal, intimate or sensitive experiences (all of which was expected to be committed to video in some way or another). Furthermore, there are moral and legal issues in terms of the ownership of the material that may arise, specifically if the material is opened to public exhibition and display. As I discuss in my concluding chapter, the issue of public exhibition was something that my participants eventually welcomed for the role that they felt their films could play in giving voice to their narratives and in the social development of women in general.

- **Exploitation and giving back.** Research, by its very nature, means that the researcher has something to gain from its successful completion, while the participants seemingly gain nothing. In some instances, like this project, the benefits may not be obvious. What could my female participants possibly gain from the project? At the most immediate (and perhaps superficial) level, the participants gain basic filmmaking skills. At a deeper level, the skills that they gain afford them a platform for expression. And, at the deepest level, as I reveal in my concluding chapter, the process of learning and development that my participants experienced through the project was not only beneficial to their own growth and empowerment, but serves as a possible model for the larger community of South African (Hindu) women.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have proposed a postcolonial feminist film practice emerging from the convergence of autoethnography, visual methodology and participatory video. Based on and drawing impetus from the concerns of postcolonial theory and feminism which will be discussed in the following chapters, this film practice offers engaged researcher participation, and (in terms of self-reflexivity, education and activism) the potential inherent in the use of the visual as a methodological approach and a direct means of knowledge production and representation for the research participants. To a certain extent, my justification for this type of methodological approach provides support for arguments surrounding the rethinking of feminist scholarship through a destabilizing of the privileged academic as the sole producer of knowledge, and the limited representations of women in mainstream film through the capturing of a multiplicity of (local) voices. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 4 as a theoretical background to my methodological approach.

Before turning to these theoretical matters, however, it was important for me to consider the meaning of diaspora so crucial to the identity of the South African Indian community. The methodological frame that I established earlier in this chapter benefitted this journey of understanding in terms of the personal discussions offered by my participants with regard to the issue of diaspora. Their input was crucial to my development of the notion of a diasporic ‘feeling of being’ that I’ve been struggling to articulate since the beginning of my research trajectory.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Diaspora and the Feeling of Being Indian in South Africa

Introduction

This chapter is a personal journey that investigates the concept of diaspora in relation to the South African Indian community. The aim of the journey is twofold. First, to establish the context of representation and identity construction within which my research participants and I exist. Secondly, my aim is to offer a new approach to understanding this context.

The contemporary South African Indian community is between the 4th – 6th generation since the initial arrival of indentured labourers to the shores of South Africa in 1860. This chapter shows, however, that representations of the South African Indian identity continue to reflect characteristics that one would expect to find in earlier generations of diasporic movement. Furthermore, a large portion of the community still subscribes to and uncritically perpetuates these representations. My personal confusion stems from wondering why there hasn't been a greater shift in the construction of identity between the initial and contemporary generations of Indians in South Africa. My confusion is further compounded by the contradiction between the community's imagined sense of diasporic unity and the actual, complex diversity maintained within the community in terms of a variety of factors such as religious affiliation, language grouping, surnames, etc.

I mention this complex diversity in Chapter 2, but should perhaps provide further explanation. Although this study focuses on South African Hindu women of Indian descent, it must be understood that the South African Indian community is comprised of a variety of religions – the most prevalent being Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. These religious groups are further divided by denomination (Hare Krishna, Catholic, etc.) and, in some instances, language (for example, Hinduism is divided along the lines of Tamil-, Hindi-, Telegu- and Gujarati-speaking). In addition, though not as prevalent, there are also class groupings within the different language groups that are usually linked to surnames. Many of the abovementioned divisions, as absurd and unreasonable as they appear in a contemporary context, can be traced back to broader historical tensions and divisions that originate in links to a South or North Indian heritage.

My discussion commences with a very brief definition of diaspora before I delve into more general theory surrounding the Indian diaspora in terms of cultural identity, collective memory, media, religion and gender. These first few sections also serve to introduce the concept of diaspora as a ‘feeling of being’, which I developed during discussions with my research participants, as a more appropriate way to understand the Indian community within a South African context. The rest of the chapter is therefore devoted to providing a brief account of the representations of the South African Indian community in literature, theatre and film in order to illustrate how these representations highlight the uncertainty of cultural identity under the guise of diaspora. This lengthy account emphasizes the necessity of re-evaluating traditional conceptions of diaspora.

Diaspora Theory

A Brief Definition

The word ‘diaspora’ is derived from the Greek and, in its original conception, refers to communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile (Gunew, 2008; Braziel & Mannur, 2003). In terms of identity, it is argued that life in the diaspora is often plagued by uncertainty, confusion and personal conflict. In the process of reterritorialisation, members of the diaspora find themselves negotiating what is referred to as the conflicted pull between desiring to belong to a host society and longing to maintain the cultural identity attached to the homeland. Avtar Brah (1996) explains that a diasporic imaginary, conflicted by the confusion of national identity, is characterised by what is perceived to be marginalisation or rejection at the hands of the host (read: dominant) culture and, as a result, finds itself clinging to cultural artefacts and practices that serve as reminders of ‘home’.

Collective Memory, Media and Diaspora

Memory - often encoded in cultural artefacts - can, according to Arjun Appadurai, be described as a “synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios” (1996: 30). Vijay Mishra argues that Bollywood is one of the strongest and most pervasive examples of such a cultural artefact for Indian communities across the world:

In the diasporic production and reproduction of “India” one of the key translatable signs is Bombay (Bollywood) Cinema which [...] has been crucial in bringing the “homeland” into the diaspora as well creating a culture of imaginary solidarity across the heterogeneous linguistic and national groups that make up the South Asian (Indian) diaspora. [...] Film then may be seen as a crucial determinant in globalizing and deterritorializing the link between the imagination and social life in both negative and positive senses. One imagines not simply what one lives through, but identifies with images that are reconstructed across the international divide. Nevertheless, the global in this case is not to be read as a critical internationalism that transcends difference and creates a decidedly “hybrid” diasporic self overnight; rather it informs a narrow ethnicity that finds its imaginative realism through a particular kind of cinema. [...] There is a remarkable parallel [...] between the way in which reading newspapers defines belonging to a nation and the way in which the consumption of Bollywood Cinema constructs an Indian diaspora of shared cultural idioms (Mishra, 2002: 237 – 238).

As a result, Mishra (2002) continues, for members of the Indian diaspora films of the Indian popular cinema are perceived to be significant links to the country of heritage and are therefore used to inform the maintenance of culture outside of the homeland, even if this may, to a certain extent, encourage exclusion from the mainstream. These films are considered to be models of life in India, the behaviours to which those in diaspora should aspire, and the homeland for which they long when in the host country.

Bollywood films have had a presence in South Africa for several decades. Prior to the early 1990s, these films were distributed mainly among the Indian community via video hire stores or mobile⁷ video hire services. The mid to late 1990s (and continuing into the 2000s) saw greater ‘public’ status for Bollywood films (Naidu, 2012a) in terms of fashion, star visits and concerts hosted solely for the performance of song and dance sequences from top grossing films. By the 2000s, *SABC 3* (a major public broadcaster) began screening older Bollywood films on a weekly basis (every Saturday afternoon) and *Ster-Kinekor* (a major South African distribution and exhibition company) began screening new Bollywood releases at a selection of their theatres (Naidu, 2012a; Mistry, 2004). In addition, the 2003 International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards Ceremony was hosted at the Coca-Cola Dome in Johannesburg (Web 2).

Jyoti Mistry, in a newspaper article titled “Beyond Homeland Nostalgia”, attests to the success and influence of Bollywood films among South African Indian audiences. In an attempt to address the

⁷ I explain the mobile video hire services in greater detail in Chapter 5 as part of my self-reflexive journal.

question of 'Indian media' in South Africa, Mistry argues that "[f]or the Indian minority in the diaspora, the media has been both a platform to secure a space in the new home and to stay connected to the homeland" (2004: 4). Revisiting the history and contemporary status of 'Indian media' in South Africa by means of various interviews with editors and producers, Mistry suggests that even the print media, which played a crucial role in the expression of critical political sentiment during apartheid now seems content to present this Bollywood-inspired content, perhaps in response to market demand (2004). Mistry maintains that although the potential for alternative (and perhaps more localised) representations exists, the Indian community remains largely uninvolved and disinterested. Kumaran Naidu, whose films I discuss towards the end of this chapter, supports Mistry's position to a certain extent. He claims to disassociate himself with the South African Indian community's uncritical consumption of Bollywood films, arguing that the community needs to start making films for and about themselves in order to break the cycle of superficial and stereotypical representations (Naidu, 2012a & b). In this way Naidu and Mistry gesture to two crucial aspects of my project: a critical examination of the strong diasporic sentiment that still characterises the South African Indian imaginary and my proposition of a postcolonial feminist film practice as an opportunity to challenge the limitations of that imaginary. Before continuing down this path, however, it is necessary to first revisit the nature of cultural identity in the diaspora and, second, the role of the media in the maintenance of collective memory.

Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2003) argues that cultural identity in the first instance can be understood as a

collective 'one true self' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (Hall, 2003: 234).

According to this position, diasporic subjects can participate in this perceived 'oneness'/truth/essence through cultural artefacts such as Bollywood films or other forms of representation and social reproduction. In place of this essentialist conception of diasporic identity, Hall proposes an alternative view in which cultural identity is described as a process of being and becoming in which the positioning of contemporary identities within narratives of the past are

inextricably part of the enunciation⁸ of these identities in the present. Cultural identity, in other words, is theorised as an ongoing process of performance or enactment that is also a negotiation with a shared past. From this perspective, cultural identity “is not only seen as linked to the past but [...] can be analyzed as a function of the present” (Möckel-Rieke, 1998: 8). Central to this view is a concept of memory as an always-active process that emerges from the subjective activity of remembering which necessarily implicates the processes of forgetting and re-invention, each of which is characterized and/or influenced by the notion of absence as much as presence. Absence refers to that which is left out or altered in the choice of what is remembered, and presence refers to those factors that constitute the context in which both the memory is constructed and the process of remembering happens (Möckel-Rieke, 1998).

The argument then that “media and cultural memory are obviously interconnected terms [as] cultural memory can only be established by media” (Möckel-Rieke, 1998: 8) bears critical weight in this regard. Naidu and Mistry further suggest that the notion of *media* needs to be revisited in terms of how we define *mediums* as textual forms, and how we understand the media, in an increasingly digital age, as participating in the actual process of remembering. As Möckel-Rieke explains:

Media can participate in the circulation of counter-memory, of traces of lost or suppressed histories of diverse and social and ethnic groups. The digitalization of these media has mainly two effects: it not only changes the storage and distribution of images, sounds and texts, but enters their very structure. [...] For the debate of memory and cultural memory this means that one cannot possibly make a sharp distinction any longer between mind, body, and technical storage devices [raising] questions concerning the positions of the observer, [participant] or user, the constitution of subjectivity, authorship and authority (Möckel-Rieke, 1998: 9–11).

Möckel-Rieke’s observation speaks to the theory of affordances. ‘Affordances’, rooted in the discipline of psychology, was a concept developed by James Gibson (1979) to describe the unique possibilities that emerge from the complementarity of animals to the environment. While Gibson’s theories have since been appropriated, challenged or revised within a range of disciplines and pertaining to a variety of contexts (Chemero, 2003; Heft, 1988; McLoughlin & Lee, 2008; Robin, 2008; Zappen, 2005; Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2013), the general

⁸ Positions from which we speak or write, “what recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name’, of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place” (Hall in Braziel & Mannur, 2003: 234).

understanding is that objects and environments will always offer a range of opportunities to the people, animals or organisms that use or inhabit them and that the specific affordances that are exploited depend on the relationships that are established between the actors and the environments that they inhabit. In much the same way, Möckel- Rieke illustrates that the presence of digital media technologies in the contemporary social context offers very new ways of *making* (collective) memory that surpasses the straightforward recording and storage of cultural identity to include a more conscious and committed process and awareness of how (collective) memories are made, as well as the place of the self within that process. A postcolonial feminist film practice, as I've already motivated and will maintain in the chapters that follow, should be a project about *doing*. It is a project about deconstructing and reconstituting the process of representation; a project about mobilizing action. In other words, how do South African Hindu women represent themselves given the opportunity to do so via film/video? How do they (re)construct memory in terms of their own stories using the resources of digital video?

In many ways, for this project, the availability of digital film technology in an environment of uncritical mainstream film and media representation, enabled a unique set of creative interpretations⁹ for the exploration of individual subjectivity within the context of a diasporic cultural identity and collective memory. In the concluding discussion of "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Hall describes/refers to (2003) an emergent trend in Afro-Caribbean cinema in which cultural identity is presented as fluid rather than essential, as something that is created within existing, often conflicted, regimes of signification. As he poignantly concludes:

We have been trying, in a series of metaphors, to put into play a different sense of our relationship to the past, and thus a different way of thinking about cultural identity, which might constitute new points of recognition [...]. We have been trying to theorise identity as constituted, not outside but within representation; [...] and not as a second order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak (Hall, 2003: 245).

In the process of reconstituting identity through the practice of digital film, my participants and I found ourselves revisiting the issues of religion and gender in the diaspora. Our discussions in

⁹ While I mention a few instances of the creative interpretations that emerged from my research participants and myself further in this chapter, I discuss them in greater detail in Chapters 5 – 7.

these areas were key to my development of the notion of a ‘diasporic feeling of being’ which not only establishes a different way of thinking about Indian identity in South Africa, but provides the framework from which to understand the levels of both personal and social resistance that my participants and I needed to negotiate through the process of completing our films and the final products themselves.

Religion and Diaspora

Historically, the term ‘Hindu’ emerged around the 17th century, a substantial amount of time after the religious practices were already entrenched in Indian society (Lipner, 2004). In fact, Hindu identity prior to this point was characterized by “multiple-identity appellations” (Lipner, 2004: 18) that were defined according to doctrinal belief, specific practices or insignia, occupation, personal names, family descent, particular achievements or qualities, birth or ancestral village. However, over time, as political conquests and religious wars reshaped the social landscape, there grew a greater need for a consolidated Hindu identity that simultaneously developed a sense of unity and belonging amongst those who followed the religion, and marked the difference from or exclusion of those who did not (Lipner, 2004).

Religion, as a consequence, adds a further dimension to life in the diaspora. As Rambachan (2004) explains,

The preservation and transmission of religious values become increasingly difficult when these have to be done in a context where the norms of the dominant culture are different and, in some instances, in conflict with Hindu ideals. [...] [Religious] minorities wrestle, more than others, with issues of identity and carry a greater burden of self-identity (Rambachan, 2004: 407).

Prema Kurien (1999), in her study of Hindu Organisations in the United States, found that the trend amongst the Indian diaspora, particularly where young children are involved, is a return to religion and religious rituals in an attempt to create an awareness of what it means to “be Indian”. This finds an interesting parallel in the South African context where Blom Hansen (2006) has discovered that

[s]ince the demise of apartheid, the tendency for people of Indian origin to define themselves by a religious affiliation rather than race is more powerful than ever. Many young people are looking for more ways of being Hindu in the ever more global world they inhabit. Some seek identity and dignity in the versions of modern Hinduism that are readily accessible through travel and the web. Today, doing the *Bharatanatayam* dance, taking vernacular language classes, visiting new temples, attending lectures by touring lecturers and gurus, and visiting ashrams in India, are common elements of many middle-class Hindu households (Blom Hansen, 2006: 12).

Both Kurien's American research and Blom Hansen's local study reveal that consciousness-raising in terms of Indian identity in the diaspora is enabled through participation in religious and cultural organisations, events and practices. This common trend is justified by a need for a sense of community. However, while in Kurien's study this need for community is linked to the geographic dispersal of immigrant groups across the USA, the participants in my study offer that this need for a sense of community, distinct from the broader national social structures, emerges from over a century of religious and ethnic displacement and separation that has been experienced *within* South Africa (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a, b & c). My participants explain that while the initial arrival of Indians in South Africa saw the movement of people from one context to another (which involved a process of geographical displacement that required people to acclimatise and become familiar with a new physical environment), upon arrival they were faced with further marginalisation in terms of attempting to integrate into a different colonial society with a large population of already colonised subjects (Desai & Vahed, 2010). My participants' observations, in this sense, speak to Ashis Nandy's (1983) identification of the two overarching concerns of colonialism: the "physical conquest of territory" and "the conquest and occupation of minds, selves and cultures" (Gandhi, 1998: 15).

Although their movement to South Africa was based on the promise of an improved economic status in the form of indentured labour, this contractual system was historically oppressive and exploitative in nature, discouraging integration with other groups and augmenting existing levels of indeterminacy and uncertainty (Desai & Vahed, 2010). The subsequent division and separation enforced by decades of the apartheid regime served only to exacerbate the experience of deterritorialisation and interstitiality. The Indian community in South Africa, has not so much, as a result, endured "the physical conquest of territory" (Gandhi, 1998: 15) (even though conquest is

always, at some level, relevant to the subjects of empire) as much as a sense of deterritorialisation in the move from India to South Africa and, subsequently, along with other “non-white” race and ethnic groups, as a result of the forced removal and relocation policies of apartheid South Africa (Desai, 1996). In addition, the Indian community, again similar to other communities in South Africa, has suffered “the conquest and occupation of minds, selves, and cultures” (Gandhi, 1998: 15) through degradation, human rights injustices, limits on personal freedoms and the denial of culture and heritage inflicted by dominant powers of the time (Desai, 1996). The history of Indians in South Africa has, therefore, been marked by the continued effacing of identity; a legacy that is thought to be remedied by a return to or acknowledging of cultural difference and specificity by those who have suffered and their subsequent generations (Moodley, 2009a).

In addition to the political and social drivers that have contributed to the continued experience of diasporic displacement and marginalisation among South African Indians, my participants identified other factors such as religious and cultural practices and stories of the homeland, that have been told to each subsequent generation of the initial Indian immigrants (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a, b & c). These stories seemed to serve two primary purposes: the most obvious is to ensure the continued existence of the culture and religion in subsequent generations; the less obvious is that these practices offer a form of comfort and security amidst a turbulent history. In terms of the former, my participants argued that continued cultural and religious practice aided also in firmly entrenching a code of gendered relations in which Indian males held most power. This is significant in the broader South African context where non-white men held little to no social power.

The discussion with my participants thus lends credence to the notion that the diasporic experience does not always have to be direct in order for the perception of displacement, or marginalisation to be present in subsequent generations. I would therefore argue that we need to supplement the conventional concept of diasporic consciousness with a secondary notion of diaspora ‘feeling of being’. Often conflated with the direct experience of diaspora, the diasporic ‘feeling of being’ can be understood as a secondary (displaced) diasporic consciousness – a consciousness that your existence occupies an ongoing space of lack and discomfort, even if the space is the only home that you or your immediate forbears have ever known. This consciousness emerges, not so much out of

learned behaviour but as an affective response to the experience of your context and history, and as a means of maintaining an awareness of past ethnic injustices as well as a way of preserving a (potentially problematic) group identity. It is a consciousness that is inseparable from the South African Indian imaginary; the ‘feeling of being’ diasporic.

Drawing on Hindu practice and artefacts of the Hindu religion, while in this state of secondary diasporic consciousness, signals to a large extent a displaced reclaiming of Indian heritage and resistance to cultural domination. This is supported by Kurien (1999: 649) when she explains that “religion plays a central role in ethnic construction in [diasporic] communities because it generally serves as a vehicle for the transmission of culture and also provides the institutional framework for community formation”. The crucial misconception in the return to Hinduism as an attempt to understand and negotiate identity in a perceived diasporic context, is that it is impossible to lay claim to an authentic practice of Hinduism (Agnew, 2005). Suryakanthie Chetty (2013), in her study of the relationship between temple worship, the maintenance of religion and the construction of South African Indian identity, elucidates this argument,

It would be a great simplification to assume that Hindu religious practice in India could be simply transported to South Africa and that the Indian diaspora here was a *tabula rasa* on which this form of Hinduism could simply be inscribed. If one considers the construction of Hindu temples in South Africa, local social, economic and political conditions prevented the modeling of these temples as exact replicas of their counterparts on the subcontinent. Furthermore, South Africans of Indian descent while, to an extent, perceiving India as a source of authority for religious practice and constructing a sense of ethnic identity that transcends geographical boundaries, still have a strong sense of being South African and having a unique history that is different from any other populations of Indian origin (Chetty, 2013: 60).

The dispersal of Hinduism through the movement of people across the world has seen transformations of Hinduism in which the basic philosophies of the religion endure but the practices, rituals and roles are adapted to suit a variety of contexts. Chetty’s observations speak to the interminable conflict/contradiction inherent in the diasporic ‘feeling of being’: integrating into the perceived non-homeland space through an appropriation of some aspects of its culture while still attempting to maintain an ideal of Indianness. This is no more visible than in the

understanding of gender in the diaspora.

Gender and Diaspora

The Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA), an international body, argues that in terms of

religious, cultural, social and individual aspects, a woman has the same rights as a man in Hindu society. “Where women are honored, gods are pleased” declare Hindu scriptures. Hindus have elevated women to the level of Divinity. Only Hindus worship God in the form of [the] Divine Mother (FHA, 1995: 6).

While this may hold true in terms of Hindu holy texts and might imply an element of promise and optimism for gender equality in Hindu communities around the world, like Kurien (1999), my research activities have, at the very least, shown that this is not necessarily the case. The revered female in Hindu holy texts is complicated by two versions of Indian womanhood that constantly emerge: the devoted, loyal and submissive wifely goddess and the strong, independent and forceful warrior goddess (DasGupta & Dasgupta, 1996: 390). The latter version generally enjoys less approval in cultural practice and the popular media.

Both these versions of Indian womanhood emerge in Kurien’s study of Hindu Organisations which examines the role played by gender in the creation of ethnic communities and cultures among Hindu Indian immigrants. Her research shows that there is a glaring contradiction in the lives of diasporic Hindu women. On the one hand, migration seems to contribute to the empowerment of Hindu women through more educational opportunities and, as a result, better employment opportunities in both the public and private spheres, thus appearing to further the project of gender equality. On the other hand, however, there is the perception that the maintenance of cultural identity in the home is still the work of the Indian woman. Paradoxically, this often involves a return to models of Hindu womanhood institutionalized in the diaspora that are actually more restrictive and unequal than is characteristic of Hindu practice in India itself. It is argued that one reason for this retreat to more conservative religious practices in the diasporic context is that children in India are believed to be “breath[ing] in the values of Hindu life” (Fenton, 1988: 127), while in the diaspora it is necessary for these values to be *embodied* in order to make them available. Based on the traditional gender roles of the idealized family in Hinduism, this task falls

on the Hindu mother and wife which is also a strong theme of Bollywood films (Mishra, 2002). For this reason, the independent, educated and self-sufficient woman, as modeled on the independent, strong warrior goddess, becomes less desirable than the devoted and submissive wife who subordinates herself to duty.

My research participants provide evidence of this contradiction within the South African context. They argue that while great importance is placed on academic achievement and high status employment in the upbringing of Indian daughters in South Africa, at the same time there seems to be equal pressure placed on ensuring that these daughters are brought up with the traditional values that will ensure marriage post-education/qualification and/or during their career pursuit (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a, b & c). Ironically, education and success are seen to contribute to the marriageability of the Hindu woman in order that she fulfill her life's duty as a wife and mother. As Kurien (1999: 650) reminds us, "the costs of this idealization and contradiction are borne by the women and girls of the community who have to meet these exacting and unrealistic standards". Marriage, in this instance, is not simply an attempt to ensure future companionship but rather an attempt at fulfilling an idealized template of a Hindu woman's life trajectory. The underlying ideology is that the Indian woman, no matter where her life journey has taken her, is never whole or complete without a return to the traditional roles established through religious discourse (which, as I've already discussed in my introductory chapter, manifests in the narratives and character constructions of popular Indian film and media texts).

It appears, however, that this conflict yields interesting forms of resistance from the very women subjected to it. This is true of both my study and that of Kurien. Kurien's first and second generation Hindu female immigrants renegotiated the terms of the traditional knowledge that they were expected to impart and maintain. Two particular examples in Kurien's study stand out: the reinterpretation of the model of patriarchy to emphasise male responsibility as opposed to male authority, and the reinterpretation of stories of Hindu epics to reflect more closely the relationship between men and women in an American context. Resistance to religious inscription in this sense appears to be implied or channeled through revisions of the expectations of gender roles and reinterpretations of Hindu texts as opposed to direct resistance on the part of the women.

Resistance in my study of fifth and sixth generation diasporic Hindu females appears to come directly from the women themselves, particularly in terms of the institution of marriage. Manjini and Sashnee chose not to succumb to the pressure from their respective communities to be married. Manjini argued that the suitors she'd been presented with would never have been the right "fit" for her lifestyle (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a), while Sashnee reneged on an engagement because she refused to be burdened by the conservatism and dysfunction of her fiancé's family (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013b). Jessica made the bold decision to divorce her husband (still considered a stigma in her community) in her mid-thirties after having shared a life with him for about 17 years. She finally realised that his physical and emotional abuse stemmed from his inability to accept her career advancement, his frustration with not being able to 'keep up' and his subsequent need to hold her back from success (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Mrs. Singaram lost her husband to cancer three years prior to the data collection. In her view, they had a wonderful relationship in which she was always respected and given the freedom and independence to do whatever she pleased. However, after his death, she has refused to remove her red dot (a key signifier of marriage for Hindu women) or to wear a white sari as a widow is expected to. This decision has been met with some disapproval from her family and community, who argue that she is being disrespectful to the memory of her husband. As a consequence, she is sometimes treated and received differently. She nevertheless maintains that being a widow is not all that she is (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c).

Representations of the South African Indian Identity

Although the representation of Indian identity in South Africa has been researched and written about pre- and post-1994¹⁰, very little of that academic work addresses film – a possible consequence of the limited number of films that have been made by and about South African Indians. Furthermore, much of the research is focused on the construction of South African Indian identity in literature and theatre, with particular emphasis on displacement within a South African national context. While it is acknowledged that literature and theatre are quite different media to

¹⁰ Pre-1994: Fatima Meer (1969, 1970, 1975a, 1975b), Frene Ginwala (1977), Surendra Bhana (1990, 1991); Post-1994: Ashwin Desai (1996, 2000, 2002), Devarakshanam Govinden (2008a & b), Pallavi Rastogi (2005, 2008), Thomas Blom Hansen (2000, 2006). The year 1994 is significant in South African history as it saw the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the country's first black president. This event seemed to mark the beginning of a democratic South Africa even though Nelson Mandela's release in 1990 was meant to signal the end of apartheid.

film, representations of cultural identity and diaspora in these forms offer insight into the creative interpretations of the South African Indian community that exist. Understanding these representations establishes an interesting point of departure for assessing whether similar trends perpetuate in filmic representations, or whether these representations change across different platforms of expression.

Literature

Pallavi Rastogi (2005), in an article detailing the difficulty of identity construction in a diasporic space as depicted in the novels of several apartheid and post-apartheid era South African Indian writers, recalls a conference organized by the Indian government for expatriates of the Indian diaspora. At the conference, she remembers that anti-apartheid activist and writer, Fatima Meer, lamented the application of the term “Indian diasporic” (Rastogi, 2005: 536) to South African Indians. Meer’s argument was based on the fact that the Indian community had lived too long in South Africa and had fought too hard to be accepted as part of the country to now return to separating itself once again. In this argument, Rastogi (2005) identifies as the main issue a longing for belonging which she uses as the basis for an analysis of diasporic identity in the novels of four South African Indian authors from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. She is able to isolate three key thematic threads in these works:

- Indians as disturbing the established dichotomy of race (which is often mistakenly understood as synonymous or interchangeable with nation and a sense of imagined community) on which apartheid was founded and which post-apartheid South Africa, to a certain extent, has maintained;
- The contradictory pull between what it means to be Indian (or what one would describe as “Indianness”), and the need to sacrifice that Indianness to form part of a larger non-Indian communal identity in order to find a viable voice. This draws critical attention to two things: how a sense of culture on the periphery is in danger of being subsumed by the dominant national culture; and how minority cultural affiliations have to re-imagine their national identity in terms of the centre;
- A critical examination of the systematic erasure of Indians in public discourse and an desire to integrate more visibly Indian cultural practice into the fabric of the nation.

Rastogi sums up her analysis by arguing,

While grappling with these questions, South African Indian fiction asserts a South African identity that rarely erases the particularity of Indianness, even as it claims a primary affiliation with South Africa. The theme of longing for belonging is particularly germane in this diaspora, as India occupies a place where return is impossible. Even though the mother country is an icon charged with mythic resonances, in the fiction I have examined there is no desire to return even in a spiritual sense. [...] This inability to return to India relates to the century-long existence of Indians in South Africa, the extended periodicity of which ensured that South African Indians no longer had a tangible association with India (Rastogi, 2005: 557).

Rastogi's findings highlight a reconsideration of two key aspects of conventional diaspora theory. Firstly, that clinging to Indian heritage and tradition doesn't necessarily signal a need to return to India as the homeland. And, secondly, that the notion of longing can be applied as much to a desire to belong in a host space as it can to a desire to return to the homeland. Brah (1996: 197) supports this reconsideration when she warns against the danger of oversimplifying or reducing the diaspora experience to what she refers to as a "homing desire" or the "ideology of return" that tends to animate diasporic consciousness. While the notion of a diasporic 'feeling of being' that I've proposed thus far would support a reconsideration of the notion of longing and return, my participants' individual responses indicate a challenge to aspects of Rastogi's findings.

In the first instance, Rastogi's analysis of literature reveals that the inability and/or lack of desire to return to India (in the novels she's analysed) are a consequence of the length of time that the Indian community have been in South Africa. My participants, however, explain that it is precisely the nature of this duration of time that has, to a certain extent, enabled an understanding of their existence as separate within a South African context. The notions of 'longing' and 'return' therefore manifest in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. Manjini, when asked whether she considers herself diasporic, responds with both a 'yes' and a 'no'. She explains that she viewed India and South Africa as two parents – a mother and father respectively – that you could not separate or choose between. Even though India as the mother, represents culture and religion, to whom she returns for spiritual guidance, she maintains that South Africa is her home. She does acknowledge, however, that even though she may exhibit some similarities to women from both India and South Africa, she doesn't fit neatly into either context. She sees herself as a mixture of both (Mestry, 2013a). Jessica, in a slightly different vein, describes people of the Indian diaspora as

sparks of light spread across the world. India, she explains, is the light source to which they all need to return for the restoration of spirituality and emotional energy. She explains, in terms of her own troubled past, that India is the place you return to when you feel isolated because you've either lost your faith or motivation to live. In the same breath, however, she explains that the multicultural nature of South African society is something that the South African Indian community should embrace, together with their Indian heritage (Gounden, 2013). Mrs. Singaram, to a certain extent, concurs with Jessica. Although she'd spent approximately 4 years studying dance in India in her early twenties (by her own choice), she maintains that India is a nice holiday destination but that return to South Africa should not be negotiable. She considers South Africa to be a microcosm of the world in terms of the various cultures and nationalities that have settled here. For this reason, there should be no desire to want to live anywhere else. This, however, is somewhat contradictory to her assertion that she considers herself Indian first (Singaram, 2013a).

Ultimately, contrary to Rastogi's findings, it appears that the desire to return to India *does* exist. 'Return' in these instances, however, assumes a spiritual resonance that transgresses geography or a desire to return to something known or familiar. The idea of 'return' also seems less final than its conventional conception in diaspora theory. In other words, none of my participants speak about returning to India as permanent or as emerging from a deep-seated longing. Even though the diasporic 'feeling of being', at a certain level, resembles characteristics of a direct diasporic experience, its crucial difference emerges both from what I would describe as the notion of 'double-return' and a sense of loyalty to an Indian identity. In the case of the former, my participants' responses allude not only to a return *to* India for guidance and meaning, but a return *from* India to South Africa thereafter¹¹. Interestingly, however, while they all acknowledge their 'South Africanness' and view South Africa as their home, and argue that it is a privilege to be both Indian and South African, there appears to be a need to *work* at their Indian identity. While this applies to a lesser degree to Mrs. Singaram (perhaps a result of her having been steeped in cultural and religious practice through her dance from a very young age), there does seem to be a concerted

¹¹ It's telling also that the notion of return and attempt to learn Indian identity in the case of all three women is very closely tied to religious teaching. Mrs. Singaram's visits to India, both in her youth and in the present, have been linked to learning and teaching *Bharatanatyam* (a dance for the Gods) and its role in promoting Hindu culture. Furthermore, return to India for both Manjini and Jessica comprised visits to ashrams, spiritual centres, temples and locations of religious significance.

and continued effort on the part of Manjini and Jessica to maintain a sense of Indianness: to return to India to understand what it means to be Indian or to renew one's Indianness respectively. Doing identity *work*, as such, is proof of commitment to an Indian identity and is closely linked to the notion of loyalty.

Two possible explanations, specifically in the case of Manjini and Jessica, could be: a perceived safety emerging from an imagined unity amongst members of the Indian community in response to an unfulfilled social integration into a South African context, or anxiety at the prospect of a diluted or lost Indian identity emerging from a greater emphasis on professional integration into mainstream society. This is the nature of the conflict that characterises the diasporic 'feeling of being' and is perhaps more strongly associated with Indian *women* in the diaspora as a consequence of the taxing balance that they have to maintain between the professional advancement and cultural commitment discussed earlier.

Devarakshanam Govinden (2008a) has written extensively about the issue of gender in Indian writing. Although her work doesn't directly point to the notion of a diasporic 'feeling of being', her justification for why the writing of South African Indian women has not enjoyed greater recognition in the realm of South African literature, links strongly to aspects of the conflict mentioned above. Govinden (2008a) points out that the work of Indian women has been neglected on two counts. The apartheid government perceived Indian literature in general to be resistant and since structures had been implemented to exclude texts that appeared to convey anti-apartheid sentiment, a large body of Indian literature was excluded (the work of Indian women, of course, forming a significant part of this). Subsequently, in the post-apartheid context, Indian women find themselves still seeking acknowledgement intellectually, academically and commercially. Her analysis of the works of various South African Indian women writers therefore indicates a need to claim voice in a way that "restor[es] woman to the position of a speaking subject" (Govinden, 2008a: 54) and reveals that "Indian women's writings contribute to new and alternative ways of reading and conceptualising our past and present in South Africa" (Govinden, 2008a: 343). Govinden's contribution, while steeped in a traditional literary perspective, is significant to understanding the limited presence of South African Indian women in different forms of representation in the public domain. While her study argues that the female voice can be claimed

by assuming a ‘speaking position’, my study argues rather for the accessing of voice through the simultaneous claiming of and challenge to conventionally limiting ‘representational spaces’.

Theatre

Thomas Blom Hansen’s study investigates how plays written, directed and performed by South African Indians from the 1960s to 2000 “reflect [...] and contribute [...] to the formation and contestation of identities” (2000: 255) among South African Indians. Although his study does not directly reflect on diaspora theory or a diasporic ‘feeling of being’, aspects of both are implicit in the discussion of his findings.

In the 1980s, although still drawing on comedy and humour, the tone of Indian theatre, distinctly political, drew critical attention to the “clannish” attitude of the Indian community and their racism toward black South Africans, pointing to the impossibility of national integration. His first general observation illustrates a reproduction of the Indian community through what he refers to as a “half-embarrassed, self-mockery of vices and accents” (Blom Hansen, 2000: 258). He also notes that Indian audiences were comforted by the recognition of aspects of their own world through joking, speaking and saucy humour, allowing for what he describes as enjoyment of community and ethnic closure (Blom Hansen, 2000).

The Indian theatre of the 1990s, however, highlighted the interstitial position of the Indian community during the political changes in South Africa pointing to a growing uncertainty of a sense of national identity, and offered critiques of the opportunistic fence-sitting that South African Indians have been characterised by and berated for by other ethnic minorities. Added to this is a sense of non-recognition as individuals and as a group that manifests in depictions of marginality and invisibility. Blom Hansen (2000) seems to suggest, however, that these concepts are reconciled through self-deprecation in order for recognition and visibility to be attained. This contrasts with Govinden’s (2008a) argument that, in general, the efforts of Indian playwrights over time characterized a form of struggle theatre, an attempt to question and draw critical attention to the roles of South African Indians in the broader fight for an integrated and equal South African nation.

Like the Indian South African literature discussed in the section above, the content of Indian theatre seems to have been characterized by a similar set of issues plaguing the Indian diasporic imaginary: the lack of integration into a mainstream society through an unconscious self-separation in an attempt to protect ethnic culture, feeling torn between a mainstream and ethnic culture, and feeling marginalized by or ‘unseen’ within public discourse. Unlike the literature, however, the theatre was used not only to acknowledge and capture these experiences, but to offer a critique of the Indian community and their approach to dealing with the political changes in the country. Theatre, in this instance, not only offers the South African Indian community greater visibility in the public realm but an opportunity to *see* themselves as spectacle; as requiring a counter-reading.

Indian women have further played a strong role in theatre, not only as actors, but as playwrights and directors as well. Adopting a distinctly feminist approach, their plays generally see the larger theme of race and identity in a South African society “subsumed in deeply personal experiences” (Govinden, 2008a: 133). Most of these plays take an experimental approach and foreground the multiple roles of Indian women through the narratives of a variety of Indian female characters. The downplaying of Indian male characters in these plays is significant. Govinden (2008a) shares two examples. In the first example, the male characters are deliberately removed from the stage in order to foreground the stories of the Indian female characters and ensure an uninhibited and uninterrupted speaking space. In the second example, the male characters are played by the same female actors playing the lead women characters pointing to a distinctly female perspective on the events of their lives and the pressures/oppressions that they endure. Interestingly, the films/footage produced by my research participants reveal a similar approach. Chapters 5 and 6 will illustrate that there is a noticeable absence of men in all of the films. When men do form part of the films, they are either spoken about (not for) or they appear in photographs. I will argue that this approach, resistant at many levels, is not so much a retributive silencing of Indian men, as it is about owning the space of representation and foregrounding female stories.

Film

If subjected to a superficial reading, films that have been produced by and about Indians¹² in South Africa do exhibit particular patterns of representation which link to and, to a certain extent, subvert the work of Rastogi, Blom Hansen and Govinden. In so doing, the limitations of singular or essentialist notions of cultural identity that Hall discusses is highlighted in relation to the ‘diasporic feeling of being’.

The more historical films focus on the indenture of Indians in South Africa and the hardships they endured (e.g. *White Gold* [Moodley J, 2010]), or the political awakening and contribution of Mohandas K. Gandhi to the plight of Indians in South Africa and India (e.g. *The Making of the Mahatma* [Benegal, 1996]). These films, serious in tone and covering the period of the initial arrival of the Indians in South Africa or the first generation thereafter, depict the notion of belonging in two ways: the longing for a return to the homeland of India and a longing for immersion into a South African society. The first instance contradicts Rastogi’s (2005: 557) findings in terms of “India as an empty symbol” with there being “no desire to return to the mythic homeland”. One possible explanation for the contradiction would be that the historical period covered by the films is quite different to that of the novels Rastogi investigates.

Comedy seems to be another popular genre for the depiction of Indians on screen. The first type of comedy follows in the tradition of other international films depicting issues associated with the Indian diaspora like *Bend it Like Beckham* (Chada, 2002), *Bride and Prejudice* (Chada, 2004), and *Mistress of Spices* (Berges, 2005). Drawing on aspects of Bollywood and, to a certain extent, characteristics of a ‘feeling of being’, these films tend to fall into the category of romantic comedy and often depict young Indian women who find tradition too stifling and eventually resist the convention of Indian marriages by falling in love outside of their race, religion and culture. One example of this in the South African film industry is a film titled *For Better, For Worse* (Veeran, 2010). These types of films, although not focused on any political imperative or longing for a

¹² Interestingly, in terms of public recognition, these films don’t even feature in online lists or archives of South African films even though they’ve been shown on the mainstream cinema circuit. This lack of recognition is telling as many of the films have either featured in some form of television promotion, been screened at international films festivals and/or been subjected to the Film and Publication Board’s standards of approval. So, poor marketing and lack of due process cannot be cited as reasons for these films not being acknowledged as part of the South African cinema repertoire.

homeland, do seem to push the idea that Indians in South Africa, even after generations of being in the country still see themselves, in an essentialist fashion, as a distinct entity within the general population of society. One of the key indicators of this is the desperate need for the parents of the protagonists to maintain tradition, culture and custom at all costs, including the shunning of interracial and interreligious marriages. In other words, clinging to the spiritual, cultural and symbolic artefacts of 'home' provides security and purpose. And while it could be argued that this type of depiction promotes diversity, it also encourages a continued perception of difference and insertion into a non-home space. For instance, the eventual marriage of the Indian female outside her cultural group also seems to suggest that independence and recognition are only possible once her Indianness is transcended. The implication of this is that Indianness in the diaspora is limited and confining in an attempt to maintain/retain the traditions of the perceived homeland; and integration into the host society is only possible through a subversion of what it means to be Indian. To a certain extent, this links to the anxiety for the loss of Indian identity that I discussed in relation to Manjini and Jessica earlier. The anxiety in this type of film, however, emerges from the parents through whom the loyalty to Indian heritage subsequently filters. In addition, the fact that this film mimics the films of other diasporic Indian communities around the world, points to an acceptance of a global diasporic Indianness which tends to work against Meer's argument (quoted in Rastogi, 2005: 536) that the designate of "Indian diasporic" is nullified by the long history of the Indian struggle to be accepted into South African society.

The second type of comedy, although attempting to venture out of the filmic depictions discussed above by engaging in more creative explorations of genre and the medium of film itself, still falls back on stereotyped portrayals of the Indian community (e.g. *Attack of the Indian Werewolf* [Boomgaard, 2010]). In *Attack of the Indian Werewolf*, Boomgaard uses the horror genre to spoof what is considered the idiosyncratic behaviour of the Indian community. This type of filmmaking has greater links to Blom Hansen's (2000) argument when he speaks about the construction of Indian identity in theatre through the use of accepted "coolie" stereotypes. While some may argue a level of cultural criticism and a challenge to conventional depictions of diasporic identity in defense of Boomgaard's type of filmmaking, much of the film – the action, costuming, dialogue and accents, soundtrack and subject matter – seem to hold the Indian community up for ridicule and scrutiny. The resulting single-minded mockery of the Indian community, does not seem to

exhibit any form of critical introspection.

Besides the films discussed above, which have all enjoyed a degree of local mainstream circuit success, there are two particular South African Indian filmmakers that I believe deserve a space of discussion within my research. At first glance they each appear to occupy opposing ends of the filmmaking spectrum. However, the work that they are each involved in contributes to an understanding of the point of departure for this doctoral study. Kumaran Naidu, a self-taught, self-made, straight-to-video filmmaker will be discussed in this chapter, while Jyoti Mistry – who I would venture to label an ‘academic filmmaker’ – will be discussed in the following chapter as part of the second installment of my literature survey/theoretical framework.

***Kumaran Naidu – A Filmmaker in the Rough?*¹³**

Kumaran Naidu works solely with low budget, digital video to produce his films and argues that no other medium offers the opportunity to produce films as quickly, easily and affordably. It is the flexibility of the digital medium and process, he explains, that enables the capturing of the reality of a particular contextual moment of ethnic identity in South Africa. He strongly believes that the South African film industry would benefit greatly from the development of what he refers to as a Vollywood (i.e. a video Hollywood) for South Africa (Naidu, 2012a). To a large extent, Naidu’s contention here invokes the notion of affordances and offers support for what Möckel-Rieke envisions as the possibilities of digital media for collective memory.

All of Naidu’s films, drawing on Hollywood narrative and genre (although occasionally referred to as South Africa’s version of Bollywood, much to Naidu’s annoyance¹⁴), depict localized stories based in the Indian community in South Africa. In order to understand the potential offered by Naidu’s type of filmmaking, it is necessary to present brief synopses of some of his films. I discuss only four.

¹³ The information for this section comes from a telephonic/email interview with Kumaran Naidu. See bibliography for details.

¹⁴ Naidu argues that he does not identify with Bollywood filmmaking. Although he does acknowledge that they have kept up-to-date with contemporary trends in terms of music and visual quality, he finds their storylines lacking in originality. This is a key point: Naidu’s rejection of Bollywood, a diasporic cultural artefact of the home (mother) land of India reflects the beginnings of a resistance to an imagined national affiliation.

Set in Chatsworth, an Indian suburb in Durban, *Broken Promises* (2004) takes a comic look at the issues that emerge in a South African Indian family after their son, Ruben, decides to marry a girl he's known for only one day. His over-protective mother (Amsugi), already against the idea of a daughter-in-law after experiencing the behaviour of a neighbour's daughter-in-law (Saras), is further anguished by the fact that Natasha, Ruben's betrothed, comes from a Hindi-speaking rather than Tamil background. Once the honeymoon is over, Natasha is subjected to her mother-in-law's excessive demands and judgment. This, of course, leads to much tension and conflict between the newly married couple and Ruben's parents, resulting in some humorous situations and exchanges. The resolution to these issues sees Ruben being forced to 'man-up' by confronting his mother and apologising to Natasha.

Broken Promises 2 (2007), on the other hand, sees a now much improved relationship between Amsugi and Natasha negatively impacted upon by the sudden arrival of Amsugi's younger sister and her two daughters. The three new arrivals to the storyline together form a meddlesome bunch (if not a formidable force) that affect not only the lives of Amsugi and Natasha in a very comic and telling manner, but that of their neighbours as well. The film ends with Amsugi, once again, having to learn a hard lesson regarding her unnecessary interference in her son's life. Natasha, Ruben and their son, Mandoza, claim their independence as a family by moving into their own home.

While the *Broken Promises* series of films addresses issues affecting the Indian family, the *Run for Your Life* series uses humour to deal with serious issues like drugs and gang culture that not only affect the Indian community at large but also filter into family life.

Run for Your Life (2007) follows the events that unfold when Perumal Govender decides to make a journey to Lenasia (Gauteng) to visit his nephew for his 21st birthday. Perumal's excessive drinking lands him in a heap of trouble with both his family and the local mafia, almost immediately as he arrives. An insignificant scuffle with a local gangster, while disembarking the bus he was travelling on from Durban, results in Perumal's bag mistakenly being swopped with that of the gangster's "loot" bag. In a series of comic events, Perumal inadvertently involves his family in the mess and finds himself having to sober up, face the demons of his past and make amends all round.

Run for Your Life 2 (2007) assumes a darker tone in its appropriation of the action/thriller genre. Still humorous on many levels, the film is structured on two parallel narratives that eventually coincide towards the end. Naidu retains a number of the characters from the first film like Perumal, Bushknife Bobby (a street thug) and Mr. “K” (a local kingpin of many vices who ironically doesn’t deal in drugs). Set in KwaZulu-Natal, the film follows the story of Bushknife Bobby who finds himself without work after marrying Perumal’s niece and moving to Chatsworth. In order to make ends meet and desperate to lead a normal family life, Bushknife Bobby decides to sell pirated DVDs to make a living. At first, he is comfortable with the fact that the person for whom he sells the DVDs uses the money to buy and sell a drug called “sugars” to children and teenagers. That is, until his teenage daughter starts using the drug and eventually overdoses on it. The parallel storyline delves into the world of drugs and turf wars. A new mafia boss, “Vicious Vivian” is trying to establish himself in KwaZulu-Natal by getting youngsters addicted to “sugars”. Mr. “K”, who already owns the largest piece of the turf, refuses to allow it to be shared or tainted by drugs. The film is not short of sadness, excitement and deception. The end, however, is not as neatly resolved as in the three preceding films. Although Perumal is nearly killed as a result of his alcoholic behaviour, he never really learns from his mistakes. In the final shot he wakes up out of a coma because his friend Bushknife Bobby places a bottle of alcohol next to his bed. Furthermore, although Vicious Vivian is defeated by Mr. K., it doesn’t mean that criminal behaviour has been completely defeated. It just means that Mr. K. has won the turf war and all of his underworld activities will continue.

These synopses say two things: not only do Naidu’s films deal with the construction of South African Indian identity, but link this construction to the intrinsic connection between the individual, the family and the community. Naidu, although accused of appropriating the same model of humour in his films as that of Boomgaard, argues that the aim of his films is not to make a mockery of the Indian community or to maintain a culture of ‘self-deprecation’ but rather to highlight those aspects of the community that are specific to a South African context in order to encourage critical reflection (Naidu, 2012a). While Naidu makes a credible distinction here, it begs the question of whether he is transcending the imagined borders typical of the diasporic ‘feeling of being’ or whether he is, in actual fact, maintaining them. Naidu’s response to this is that it’s neither a case of laughter for laughter’s sake nor an exercise in shaming the community. He argues that the

ability to laugh at your own idiosyncratic behaviour encourages cultural introspection and enables you to question your often futile engagement in what you perceive to be expected cultural practice (Naidu, 2012a).

This is evident in Naidu's films when the seemingly endless camp humour is often undercut by moments of seriousness that force not only the characters within the narrative to reflect on their behaviour, but the audiences as well. For example, the *Broken Promises* series has as its main theme the eternal mother-in-law/daughter-in-law conflict. Amsugi is depicted as the overbearing mother-in-law who will protect her son at all costs and will never be happy with anyone that he chooses to spend his life with. At first, her concern for her son and her judgment of Natasha is amusing, specifically in scenes when she manipulates Ruben with exaggeration and crying by arguing that it is a son's duty to make his mother happy, or when she interferes with Natasha's cooking by secretly adding more curry powder so that her son may enjoy the food, only to make it completely inedible for the whole family. Here, highlighted by humour, the generalisation that spicy food is the preference of all people of Indian descent reveals not only the silliness of the behaviour but the stereotype as well. Both these scenes are hilarious but it's only a matter of time, however, before Amsugi realises that her competition with her daughter-in-law is destroying not only her son's relationship with his wife but his future as well. The sombre tone that ensues once Natasha threatens to leave and never come back is jarring, given the continuous flow of comic situations and exchanges from the start of the film. Amsugi is forced to reconsider her actions and behaviour. Key also is the moment when Ruben's father, whose perpetual drunken stupor is the source of much comedy, sobers up for fleeting moments to put various situations into perspective and speak sense into all parties concerned. The irony is that the person most on the periphery or excluded from social interaction as a consequence of his addictive behaviour, is actually the person with the broadest view of the situation.

In the *Run for Your Life* series, the immaturity and overblown sense of power and self-worth of street thugs like Bushknife Bobby are held up for ridicule. Bobby is specifically depicted as uneducated, ineffectual, completely devoid of the skills of running any form of organised illegal street operation and downright stupid. However, the humour in this type of depiction is cut short when the larger crimes and social corruption to which he contributes without any conscience

eventually affect his personal and family life. Examples of this in Bobby's life would be the inability to find proper employment when he moves to Durban and the loss of his teenage daughter to drugs.

Naidu makes clear that it is not his interest to depict a global/generalizable Indianness as there is no such thing (Naidu, 2012a). Like Meer, Naidu feels that the Indian community in South Africa have been around for too many generations to not see themselves as South Africans first, whose cultural heritage is Indian second. In his depiction of the specificity of the Indian community in a South African context, Naidu not only emphasises how this community adds to the diversity of South Africa, but also highlights that the South African Indian community is diverse within itself. This is made clear by the variety of accents (if one compares the accents of the characters from Lenasia in *Run for Your Life* with that of the characters from Chatsworth and Phoenix in the *Broken Promises* series), linguistic backgrounds (as highlighted by the Tamil vs. Hindi conflict between Amsugi and Natasha in *Broken Promises*), religious affiliations (the Hindu vs. Christian conflict highlighted by both the contemporary and older generation in *Run for Your Life*), social mobility (in terms of the distribution of power in the *Run for Your Life* series between organised crime rings that deal in drugs, prostitution, robbery syndicates, murder, etc. and street thugs that deal in petty crime like the sale of drugs and pirated DVDS, etc. and the average community member who is trying to negotiate these obstacles and reconcile family-related issues on a daily basis) and economic status (in terms of the living circumstances of Gauteng Indians in *Run for Your Life* set against those of the Durban Indians in the *Broken Promises* series).

On the one hand, Naidu's representations of a South African Indianness lend support to Rastogi's finding that representations of South African Indianness rarely erase the particularity of Indianness. But, on the other hand, his films never depict the typical diaspora tensions associated with longing for belonging as it seems to always be a struggle for existence within the community itself. One critique of his films in this regard is that there is never any indication of the Indian community in relation to the larger South African community. When approached about this, Naidu argues that when it comes to film, the Indian community is perhaps the least represented in South Africa; he wants to give the South African Indian community a storytelling space within film (Naidu, 2012a). As noble as this justification is, there is always the danger that the South African Indian

community is inadvertently depicted as a separate entity to the rest of South African society which ultimately links to the concern of displacement and insertion into a host land. In this vein, the implication of Naidu's justification links strongly to factors that contribute to a diasporic 'feeling of being'. To elaborate, during the apartheid era, the separation of South Africans on the basis of race saw the relocation of Indians to (what could be referred to as) 'townships'. Although this term is rarely referred to in relation to previously allocated and named Indian areas, it is these very spaces that Naidu captures in his films. These spaces, imbued with a history of racial separation and displacement, become spaces of representation (Lefebvre, 1991) for Naidu in a way that ultimately resonates with the responses of my participants who argue that South African Indians have not moved beyond diasporic representations of themselves because they still embody a 'feeling of being' diasporic.

It is necessary at this point to highlight briefly Naidu's trajectory as a filmmaker. When Naidu's passion for filmmaking and lack of funds to pursue it as a career led him to the "wonders" of digital video, he found himself intrigued by the ease with which films could be produced. After completing his first feature, he was eager to have his work exhibited in the public realm. But, mainstream cinema houses were wary of a first-time local filmmaker and what they referred to as the poor quality of his film. He then made the decision to have his film released straight-to-video by approaching a local Indian video hire company to buy the distribution rights for ZAR 5000. Much to his surprise, about 40 000 copies of the film were sold in just over a month. It appeared that there was a hunger for representational content that depicted the South African Indian community. This sparked a piracy frenzy which saw many more copies reach Indian homes in South Africa. While this phenomenon pointed to the nature of the digital revolution which enables the production and consumption of media content to be brought to the privacy of the home, what followed in Naidu's trajectory provides a new angle on this. Sponsorship for the production of his second feature was awarded on the basis of the success of his films through piracy. The sponsorship led to the eventual public exhibition of *Broken Promises 2* at various *Ster Kinekor* theatre complexes across the country. In other words, his initial intention to use film as a storytelling space for the South African Indian community has arguably led to their representation in the public realm.

In this sense, Naidu is redefining Rastogi's assertion that Indian novelists attempt to weave Indian practice into the fabric of the nation. In the first instance, Naidu is creating greater Indian presence/involvement in the South African film industry. In the second instance, he is encouraging greater visibility of Indians within representations of South African cultural identity. Unlike the theatre of the 1980s and 1990s, that depicted non-recognition through marginality and invisibility, Naidu would rather the representational space of film be defined by agency.

The brief analysis of Naidu's films reveals, in the first instance, that in many ways his depictions of South African Indianness redefine or challenge the expected and/or dominant conventions of diasporic representation. In the second instance, his notion of a 'Vollywood' for South Africa on which his filmmaking is based links closely to the arguments offered by Hall (in Braziel and Mannur, 2003), Möckel-Rieke (1998) and the theory of affordances regarding the relationship between cultural identity, collective memory and media formats. Naidu (2012b: 4) argues in this regard, that "digital video makes film-making very possible for nearly everyone with a camera and a computer" and that "there are more stories that can be told".

Conclusion

I began this chapter qualifying that it was a personal journey to understanding the South African Indian community's self-description as diasporic in order to deconstruct their representation across a variety of formats. The aim of this personal journey was multilayered. Besides the subsidiary aims of confirming that representations of Indian women in the diaspora are limited and strongly influenced by religious discourse as well as establishing that different formats of representation constitute South African Indian cultural identity in different ways, this personal journey sought a way of speaking about being Indian in South Africa. The journey, fueled by aspects of diaspora theory and supplemented by feedback from my research participants revealed that the South African Indian community's experience of diaspora is a partly mistaken and a partly imagined one. It is possible, as I argue, that the experience that they perceive to be diasporic is actually a 'feeling of being' diasporic. On the surface, this 'feeling of being' could be mistaken for a direct experience, but is, in actual fact a consciousness enabled by interpretations of historical, social and political events, experiences and stories that promote a sense of separation and marginalization. It

is also a consciousness that is open to challenge in terms of the re-interpretations of certain aspects of diaspora theory through different modes of representation. This re-interpretation is most evident in relation to issues of return and longing, inviting the Indian community to be self-critical, to remember themselves differently in the present, and to engage in moments of gendered resistance.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Postcolonially: Retrospection, Redirection and Revision

Introduction

The broad interdisciplinary character of postcolonial theory poses a challenge to definition. John Comaroff, in conversation with Homi Bhabha, offers that

‘postcoloniality’ does not refer to one thing. [...] the term is now said to describe both a state of being, defined by its place in the passage of epochal history, and a critical orientation toward the reading of the past, not least of its textual traces (Bhabha & Comaroff, 2002: 15).

Comaroff further tentatively describes two broad phases of postcoloniality. The first emerges around the time of Indian Independence in 1947 and is continued by the becoming-independent Third World nations and sees the rise of neocolonialism. The second phase emerges around 1989 with the end of the Cold War alongside, “the ‘triumph’ of neoliberal capitalism, democratization movements, [and] the rise of a new wave of postrevolutionary societies in Central Europe, South Africa and elsewhere [...]” (Bhabha & Comaroff, 2002: 15).

The aim of this chapter is not to provide a background or understanding of postcolonial theory in its entirety. Rather, I attempt to highlight more recent postcolonial scholars’ critiques of traditional conceptions of postcolonial theory, from about the mid-1990s to the early 2000s. I focus specifically on those issues relevant to my study and their potential contribution to a revised postcolonial feminism: the definition of postcolonial theory, the critique of its heavy emphasis on textualism, and the problematic role and place of the postcolonial scholar. The chapter ends with the suggestion of a way forward or perhaps a third phase/wave (following Comaroff’s periodisation) for postcolonial theory, with a specific focus on the practical application of its often over-theoretical orientation (San Juan Jr., 1998; Parry, 2002) through the mode of self-reflexive filmmaking. In this discussion I also consider the postcolonial text as art or politics and, through a brief examination of the work of Prajna Paramita Parasher (1989; 1992; 2002) and Jyoti Mistry (2001a; 2001b; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2010; 2011), suggest that arguments surrounding this tension are in fact reductionist. I propose that this tension within postcolonial texts is beneficial to the voicing

of narratives and the establishment of resistance. This is developed as further justification for the methodological choices that I have made in Chapter 2.

The Problematic of Definition

Definitions around postcolonial theory have been highly debated (Goldberg & Quayson, 2002; Moore-Gilbert, 1997; San Juan Jr., 1998). Many of these debates have emerged as an attempt to understand the value of postcolonial theory in a contemporary context. While most debates have centred on specific conceptual issues, others have focused on the construction of the term ‘postcolonial’. In the latter case, the main source of contention has been the ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’. Understanding the term as theory emerging after the end of colonialism or theory about the aftermath of colonialism is reductive at the very least. The term ‘postcolonial’ should not only be understood as a *reaction* to colonialism or as writing about what comes *after* colonialism, but also everything that happens once colonial rule in a particular context *begins*. Dawn Duncan (2002) draws critical attention to the fact that texts produced during the colonial period have as much to say about experience and identity construction as those produced after colonization. The need to express these issues doesn’t miraculously appear (or become more urgent) after the colonizers have taken their leave. In fact the value of texts produced during colonization is that they “can contribute much to the voicing and understanding of the postcolonial condition” (Duncan, 2002: 325).

The limited value of understanding the ‘post’ of postcolonial as demarcating a timeframe is explained by Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson when they raise the following concern,

is it [postcolonialism] merely a temporal marker suggesting that the effects of colonialism have been superseded? [...] And what about the family resemblances between it and other standpoints and antihegemonic theories such as feminism, gay/lesbian and ethnic studies, and to theories of colonialism, decolonization, and resistance? (Goldberg & Quayson, 2002, xi).

Implicit in these concerns is the fact that the experience of colonialism is not forgotten or discarded once a particular site or group of people has been liberated (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). The experience lingers through memory and remnants of colonial structures in a decolonized society/context.

Further to this, is the question of whether postcolonial theory is only applicable to Third World communities of people who've experienced colonization. In terms of world division/ranking, South Africa is an interesting case. In many instances (for example, political history, poverty, crime, unemployment, disease, etc.), South Africa has been labeled a 'Third World' country, while in relation to the rest of the African continent (and perhaps other 'Third World' countries), South Africa appears to be in a better position and perhaps more 'First World' in character. This conflicted reading of the country's placement in a global context destabilizes both temporal and geographical approaches to understanding issues surrounding identity construction. This has major implications for postcolonial theorizing: is the Third World a physical place with tangible measurable characteristics like economic instability/deprivation, political domination and social inequality, or is it a more abstract space of experience?

E. San Juan Jr. suggests that the Third World should be considered a "domain of subjects-in-process" (1998: 16) that emerges out of social and political praxis whenever groups of marginalized people question the current state of their lives, how the past has influenced this current state and how they conceive of a future state of being. This definition is not an attempt to homogenize the plight of diverse communities of people and collectivities but to refer to "all places in which an actual movement of resistance or opposition to [...] domination exists. [...] 'Third World' then becomes a trope as well as a site of dissent and insurgency, a less fixed setting, that anticipates change and renewal" (San Juan Jr., 1998: 17). This rethinking of the notion of the 'Third World' necessitates a revisiting of a variety of concepts/areas that are affected by its definition and construction. San Juan Jr. (1998) illustrates that, in contemporary society, the experience of domination/subordination, unequal power relations, invasion of space, theft of resources and/or destruction of land is more widely applicable in a variety of world contexts that don't necessarily carry labels such as 'Third World' or 'formerly colonized'. In other words, models of colonization imposed by colonizers (Vergès, 2002) can exist beyond colonization and the Third World. Colonial structures endure even after the end of colonization and can perpetuate beyond the boundaries of colonized spaces through learned or enforced habitual behaviours of both the colonizer and colonized.

Beyond the construction and implied meanings of the term postcolonial, the issue of difference as a characteristic of postcolonial concerns has also come under fire. Linda Hutcheon (1995) argues that the politics of heterogeneity is an appropriate description for the broad project of anti-imperialism and liberation that postcolonialism is characterized by. This is both supported and critiqued by Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge (1994: 276) who offer that “postcolonialism [...] foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery” but that empowerment is often mistakenly linked solely to the embrace of difference.

Postcolonial theorists are therefore often held responsible for maintaining the notion of victimhood through difference. The emphasis on difference forces colonized peoples into a form of continued marginality. Cultural purity and authenticity are argued to be based on falsities that in actual fact isolate the (previously) colonized from mainstream life and full national citizenship (San Juan Jr., 1998). This tendency is linked to the influence of dominant Western paradigms that draw on binary distinctions to maintain power imbalances in Third World societies. Understanding postcolonial feminism, in this regard, is in many ways also problematic. Described as a form/type of non-western feminism, it is seen as supporting the opposition between western feminism and Third World women’s rights. This is an opposition that Spivak (1991) condemns as superficial. She argues that the falsely constructed opposition is disrespectful of history because human rights, which include women’s rights, have “a deep complicity with the culture of imperialism” (1991: 232). By the same token, however, Spivak does critique First World feminism for ignoring the otherness of Third World women by subjecting their plight to a one-size-fits-all feminist approach (1985) and for engaging in an information gathering mission that assumes that these women need their issues to be resolved for them, as opposed to needing the resources to help resolve the issues themselves (Spivak, 1987). This type of feminist strategy tends to maintain the victim status of Third World women and generalizes their oppressions, ultimately hindering the project of empowerment and education (Mohanty, 1988).

Inherent in the critique of postcolonialism’s promotion of victimhood and Western-influenced resistance through the maintenance of difference is an underlying disregard for the unique or original forms of resistance that emerge from (previously) colonized peoples. While difference is

opportunistically or conveniently promoted in some instances, it is neglected in the understanding of other areas of development where it could possibly be more meaningful. Postcolonial theory, steeped in Western institutional practice, tends to disregard historical specificity in its promotion of national popular liberation and social transformation. By failing to investigate how Third World communities actually confront issues like global imperialism in their specified contexts, postcolonial theorists run the risk of supporting the global status quo, thereby maintaining the gap between the North and the South (San Juan Jr., 1998).

Textual Emphasis

Postcolonial theory has also been criticized for its unhealthy emphasis on textualism. Georg Gugelberger's (1994) definition of postcolonialism, as the study of texts that contribute to the domination of groups of people and texts that attempt to rectify or reverse this domination, pays testament to this critique.

Postcolonial discourse tends to obscure, to a certain extent, the political and ideological effects of Western domination by indulging in textualism (San Juan Jr., 1998; Parry, 2002). This is essentially counter-productive to the postcolonial cause of change. One body of work argues that postcolonial scholars have a tendency to write about the problems of the Third World and the oppressions experienced by postcolonial subjects without providing possible options for addressing or correcting these circumstances. When potential strategies of resistance and empowerment are offered, they are done so at the level of theory. Material reparation at the grassroots level is rarely a recommendation and postcolonial discourse is rarely informed by practical experience and knowledge. In other words, there's too much literature on the experiences of colonialism and proposals for resistive action, but not enough actual practical effort to put these proposals into action in order to combat these experiences. Focused on the need to lay claim to a place (both literally and figuratively), and to challenge traditional notions of identity construction, both the postcolonial scholar and writer draw on intertextual devices to reconstruct notions of the past, to foreground the silenced stories, and to give representational space to the postcolonial subject (Newman, 1995: 47–49) to the extent that practical modes and material efforts of resistance take second place.

The next critique levelled at textualism is that postcolonial theory places greater emphasis on the written text as a mode of creative and political expression in the Third World and, by implication, neglects the variety of cultural and other texts that are used on a daily basis in localized communities to articulate their stories and wage their resistance. According to San Juan Jr. (1998), literature is construed as a solid, credible and quality political practice. “Quality” in this instance can be understood as value based on formal conventions of knowledge gain, maintenance and sharing. The written mode is perceived as reflecting more directly the process of democracy and revolution in developing nations than any other textual mode. In fact, even Parry (2002: 71–72), who acknowledges that postcolonial studies has shown that not all resistant texts are “imitations of Western modes” and that variations do exist, still argues for “postcolonial *literatures* as a web of different strands” (my emphasis).

The issue of textualism is also critiqued on the basis that postcolonial scholarship affords too much time and space to the analysis of postcolonial literature and writing, at the expense of engagement with real-life struggles. Often, this is seen as an exercise in postcolonial scholars trying to outdo one another with the analysis of their counterpart’s work or by applying Western modes of textual analysis to texts produced in the Third World, thereby denying the historical and contextual specificity of the texts themselves. Duncan (2002: 323) argues, “[p]ostcolonial critics have not taken into account the evolutionary nature of oppositional writing from the point of colonization and thus too narrowly define the authors and texts considered postcolonial”.

To a certain extent, it could be argued that a strong focus on the textual led to the failure of my original proposition for a postcolonial feminist film practice in my Masters research where I offered an argument in favour of establishing a framework for reading a specific set of diasporic films. In order to do so, I had *analysed* popular Indian films and found the construction of the female characters to be based on Hindu mythology in a way that perpetuated the notion of the Indian woman as a nationalist symbol¹⁵. I had further *analysed* films made by diasporic Indian women and proposed embracing a film practice based on the unconventional and resistant

¹⁵ When I speak here about a nationalist symbol, I am referring to a postcolonial anxiety, within previously colonised Indian communities, to recoup and restore a sense of Indianness through a return to the discourses of religion. Religious discourse, based quite strongly on binary oppositions, perpetuated to a large extent gendered stereotypes, which together with the remnants of patriarchal colonial structures, provided a context conducive to the maintenance of idealistic and dangerous notions of the Indian woman as nationalist symbol (Moodley, 2004).

construction of the female characters offered by these films. When this proposed ‘practice’ was eventually invalidated through *practical application*, I found myself returning to a kind of ‘textual security’ by inserting reconstructed scenes of Hindu myths into the mainstream film structure in a way that distinctly challenged limited representations of Indian women. This too proved unsuccessful. I eventually realized that although I understood film as a variation of the notion of text in the conventional literary sense, my actual approach to understanding and making film was too *textualised*. I seemed to return over and over again to my theoretical knowledge and training in film studies in order to *manufacture* resistance. Producing a resistant film text, in this way reduced the process to fixed steps, rules, regulations and decontextualized bits. In the process, I’d disregarded the *affective* dimension of textual production. I’d inadvertently *de-personalised* the process through my heavy reliance on the comfort of an academic background and, in so doing, contributed to the voicelessness of the women I believed I was representing.

In this regard, the issue of textualism is addressed by postcolonial feminism through a critical evaluation of the notion of voice. Sachdeva Mann (1995) argues that literary history (and, I would argue, other modes of textual expression and representation) is guilty of implying women’s voicelessness through their silence or relative absence in texts. Drawing specifically on Carole Davies and Elaine Fido’s (1990: 1) use of the term, Sachdeva Mann sees the concept of voicelessness as representing

the historical absence of the woman writer’s text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues [...], the inability to express a position in the language of the ‘master’ and the textual construction of women as silent. Voicelessness could also be understood as articulation that goes unheard, the lack of access to media and exclusion from critical dialogue (Sachdeva Mann, 1995: 74).

The notion of female voicelessness is further poignantly captured by a question once offered by Spivak (1996: 176), “Where is Echo, the woman in the story?” This question forms the basis of Prajna Paramita Parasher’s introduction to her book *Retrospective Hallucination: Echo in Bollywood Modernities* (2002). While Spivak’s question was based on the Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus, the main purpose of Parasher’s intertextual reference was to illustrate that, although Indian women appear in Bollywood films and seem to have a strong screen presence, their stories

are in fact implicit or unspoken. Like the character of Echo in Greek mythology whose echo is not voluntary, the representation of the Indian woman in Bollywood cinema is always subject to the intended representation of the male character. She, the Indian woman, provides the shadow to his, the Indian male's, centered depiction. Parasher reveals that voicelessness in textual representation extends beyond the written to the visual and most likely other textual modes as well. Revisiting the emphasis on textualism has, in the context of this project, therefore provided the foundation for exploring self-reflexive filmmaking as an appropriate mode for the encouragement and inclusion of female voices in textual construction.

The Place of the Scholar

The place of the scholar within the postcolonial studies academy has also raised much concern. This concern links in part to the heavy emphasis on textualism but emerges largely from the actual physical context of the postcolonial scholar. Postcolonialism is argued to emerge from Third World intellectuals in a First World context, specifically in institutions of higher learning (San Juan Jr., 1998) and is further complicated by Aijaz Ahmad's (1992) criticism of the way in which Western intellectuals and postcolonial theorists idealize the plight of 'Third World' peoples and contexts.

Debates have, as a result, centred around whether or not First World scholars have the right to write about Third World communities, or whether Third World scholars (situated in either First or Third World academic institutions) can really argue that they understand the plight of Third World and oppressed peoples, given their privileged access to education and platforms of expression. San Juan Jr. argues that the tendency of the postcolonial intellectual to speak for all the rest, a practice commonly referred to as "postcolonial ventriloquism" (1998, 267), inevitably emerges out of the generalist tradition of imperial culture and in turn works against the aim of postcolonialism to acknowledge diversity and radical alterity.

In this regard, the dilemma of the postcolonial scholar is in need of coming to terms with occupying or forming part of the very systems that have been responsible for the domination and oppression of Third World people. In response to the somewhat conflicted place of the postcolonial scholar, San Juan Jr. (1998) offers that postcolonial initiatives that lead the way for change and

agency are those that begin with the life of the scholar as activist as opposed to the academic/intellectual. The scholar as activist acknowledges that any act of ‘speaking for’ is a privilege on the part of the scholar with consequences for the community. These consequences include the denial of speech (understood more broadly in this project as voice or expression in any form) and, by implication, a denial of agency for those being spoken for. The scholar as activist is therefore driven by the need to immerse him/herself within the community in order to feel with or empathize with the community. Through this affective turn, the postcolonial scholar is able to share his/her own engagement and experience with the community, while simultaneously opening up a space in which the community may participate.

Postcolonial feminist discourse can be situated at the centre of these debates, specifically in terms of the ethical tensions surrounding the positionality and location of both the postcolonial feminist intellectual and the female subjects who constitute the focus of her study. Harveen Sachdeva Mann explains,

The question of who speaks for whom, how, and where, as well as the related issue of who listens and to what end, is one that underlies not only contemporary critical theory in general but also, and perhaps more urgently, overdetermines the specific site of postcolonial feminist discourse. In a consideration of the politics of situatedness and location of the theorist/critic, four key subject positions define themselves: that of the outsider, chiefly the Euro-American white feminist; the interlocutor, the western trained postcolonial feminist interpreting the (ex-)colonies [...], the diasporic feminist who returns periodically to the native country, bringing with her knowledge of imported theories and ideologies; and the indigenous, decolonized/ing intellectual, who ostensibly speaks with an authentic voice but whose position is compromised by its generally elitist, urban locus (Sachdeva Mann, 1995: 77).

A revisioning of the role and place of the scholar is therefore imperative to the feminist approach within postcolonial studies. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1990: 2), two feminist scholars who take a specifically historical-materialist stance, have critiqued isolated feminist theorizing in favour of contextual engagement based on their activist work in women’s and civil liberties issues. They argue that postcolonial feminism demands a research design, strategy and theory that is necessarily appropriate to the special conditions of the groups of women under study. For the postcolonial feminist scholar, this means a more ‘hands-on’ involvement with the subjects of her

work with an aim to suggest strategies of empowerment through knowing their very particular circumstances. Sachdeva Mann advocates this position,

[...] the heterogeneity of postcolonial feminist theories and practices precludes the formulation of any monolithic or grand theory of postcolonial feminism. Similarly, the internal diversity of national/regional feminisms necessitates [...] vigilance against comprehensive totalizing readings or attempted constructions of [...] feminist theory. [...] But the most important task of any postcolonial feminist is to participate actively in the redress of the situation of the gendered [...], the most marginalized segment of the third-world population (Sachdeva Mann, 1995: 76–85).

One of the first steps for the postcolonial feminist scholar, in this regard, would be to understand keenly the positioning of the individuals within the community. The postcolonial scholar, in this instance, is encouraged to ‘hear’ rather than speak (write) the lives of the subjugated people, and acknowledge that these are lives that these people may want to radically change/alter but not necessarily be completely rid of (San Juan Jr., 1998). Communities may want to speak out about issues affecting their lives (such as abuse, oppression and gendered inequalities) and may even want to confront those responsible for the state of those affairs. But, they may still want to remain in their current familial or social structure because it is the only context that they know and are comfortable with. The converse to this may be that communities feel that radical change is impossible due to power structures with great influence working against them. It is therefore not enough that the postcolonial scholar approaches the community with a set agenda of social and development issues to address or fix. This needs to emerge out of the community itself and is only possible through the process of immersion. Neeladri Bhattacharya in conversation with Edward Said, regarding this issue, raises the notion of ‘local participation’ as a method of addressing these concerns (Said, 2002a). There needs to be constant dialogue, he argues, not necessarily resistant, between the postcolonial scholar and the community about which s/he is writing/speaking. In this instance, the postcolonial scholar is dependent on the individuals within the community for knowledge; knowledge that is structured by the community’s frame of reference. Building on this idea, Said (2002b) (appropriating Gramsci’s (1971) notion of the organic intellectual) speaks about the public intellectual who needs to work closely with the collectivities and causes about which s/he is theorizing.

Emerging out of the proposition for local participation is the strong encouragement of “scrupulous self-reflexivity regarding the investigating subject’s position but also, and more productively, [...] activism at the grassroots level” (Sachdeva Mann, 1995: 79). The notion of the scholar as activist here not only refers to the active participation of the scholar in the material resistance to oppressive practices and to the unveiling of the unconscious maintenance of victimhood, but also the scholar’s critical awareness of his/her position and role in this resistance. As Prajna Paramita Parasher explains,

[...] part of the power to speak comes from the recognition of the space that one occupies as a person within a tradition privileged both through intellectual and economic capital as a legacy of class. The attempt is to unravel the very power with which one winds and weaves one’s own position, because every speaking position assumes authority, and to perceive the limitations of speaking at all (Parasher, 2002: 24).

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), in its suggestion of the educative duty of the academy, further complicates the positionality of the postcolonial scholar. Gita Rajan (1995: 145–146) argues that academic institutions, by their very nature, are party to a “plethora of knowledge forms” that offer a “potential montage of meanings in numerous registers”. Postcolonial scholars, as educators, therefore have at their disposal the textual, critical and material skill and experience to educate the subjects of their study through dialogue and interaction. It is this dialogue and interaction that enables these subjects to be aware of their existence and context, and that have the potential to provide them with the platform to critically examine their functioning in society and eventually to express or represent that critique or resistance. The political and resistive power of education lies not only in providing the tools for empowerment but in teaching the subjects how to effectively use those tools and apply them to the specificity of their context. It is therefore imperative that the pedagogical function of the scholar draws on the indigenous and unique characteristics of the subjects or community being investigated. In terms of postcolonial feminism, we are thus reminded by Nawal El Saadawi (1985: 267) that “what really matters is the economics and the policies of the system under which women live. What matters is the interests of the class or classes which hold sway over the system. What matters is the political awareness of women, the strength of their organization and their ability to fight”. Platforms of resistance, spaces of speech and expression, and political awareness and organization necessary for the transgression of

gendered inequality and oppression are therefore achievable through the return to community (Chatterjee, 1993), as ‘organs of new collective life’ (Gramsci, 1919) and education (Freire, 1970). As San Juan Jr. points out,

Conscientization requires the unity of reflection and action, inciting the learning of democracy through collective participation. [...] Pedagogy or education is an integral element in the larger project of political liberation engaged in by whole communities locked in struggle with exploitative power (San Juan Jr., 1998: 106-107).

It is clear that the scholar as activist should work with the intention to encourage agency within the community in which s/he is immersed. Agency, according to San Juan Jr. (1998: 6), is “the intentionality of transformative practice, enunciated in concrete historical junctures”. Enunciation is achieved via the act of utterance. San Juan Jr. (1998), drawing on Bakhtin (1952–1953: 68), argues that utterances, as acts of communication, are important aspects of agency and are necessarily dialogic in nature. For utterances to be meaningful, there has to be an equally “actively responsive understanding” from ‘an other’. Bakhtin sees the process of utterance not so much as a multiplicity of speaking voices as much as a relative arrangement of speaking subjects who acknowledge each other. The “actively responsive understanding” of speaking subjects can be referred to as intersubjectivity. This is the value given to existence of the self, based on the speaking subject’s interpretation of the ‘other’s’ perception of them. He argues that an individual is never able to fully understand himself or herself as a whole and that the ‘other’s’ reading of them is required to create a sense of totality.

Others (collectivities) – participants in communicative action – are thus needed to actualize the dialogic play of utterance, functioning as the transgradient element needed to realize the moment of socially responsive understanding that validates communication. These others who are addressed can range from the immediate participants to what can be designated as a ‘third party’ (San Juan Jr., 1998: 204).

Essentially, agency, utterance and enunciative space are only really possible and meaningful in the presence of an ‘other’. Here, ‘other’ is not read in the reductive structuralist sense of binary opposites where the notion of the ‘other’ is associated with all that is negative:

In Western phallogocentric discourse, the other is often acknowledged as the woman, people of color, whatever is deemed monstrous and enigmatic: all are excluded from humanity (to which, it goes without saying, the definer belongs) by being so categorized. The Other is outside or marginal to the regnant system of beliefs, an amorphous and deviant figure against the background of conventional standards (San Juan Jr., 1998: 83–85).

Rather, in this context, the ‘other’ should be understood as an enabling community or collectivity of which the individual forms a part and from which the individual derives a meaningful (not marginal) sense of self. In other words, the ‘I’ is given meaning and context through the response of recognition from the ‘other’. Accepting the ‘other’ as necessary to the act of utterance in the project of agency therefore requires a decentring of the self (Bhabha & Comaroff, 2002) for both the scholar as activist and the members of the community.

Practical Re-Imagining

Broadening the notion of text, arguing for a more engaged, self-reflexive scholar, and involving both the individual and community in research and self-expression raises the issue of the nature of the postcolonial texts that can be produced. My proposition of a postcolonial feminist film practice argues for film texts that challenge and redefine restrictive mainstream representations of women (and possibly other groups) who have been and continue to be subjected to social and political marginalization and oppression. But the question that still remains is whether these texts, in resisting mainstream representations, hold the potential for aesthetic disruption? In other words, is it only possible for the content of these texts to be political in order to be accessible, educational or consciousness-raising for the groups to which I refer, or can these texts be both politically resistant and artistically experimental? While I argue in the discussion below that the possibility does exist, it must be acknowledged that the counter argument to this assertion is that, while offering an expressive space for the individuals and/or groups that produce them, these texts could prove impenetrable (and, by implication, of little or no value) to the groups for which they’re meant, given the economic, educational and social imbalances that exist. At this juncture, I am reminded of the need for postcolonial theorizing to take into account the diversity of the resistant practices of Third World communities and of Pink’s (2003) argument in Chapter 2 which highlights the importance of researchers understanding the social and historical processes of ‘looking’ that form part of the communities with which they work. Drawing on these points as a basis, I would argue

that aesthetic disruption can no longer be viewed as a First World modernist indulgence that challenges the complacent consumer. Rather, aesthetic disruption, if understood as deeply contextual in its resistive and expressive capacity, is possible for a wider range of communities than originally conceived and is definitely not beyond the Third World imagination.

In the subsections that follow, I examine the possibility for resistant texts to venture beyond straightforward conventional conceptions of political art through an exploration of the experience of pleasure in textual construction and reception.

Art & Politics: An Unlikely Affair?

As highlighted, there appears to be a misconception that art and politics make strange bedfellows. The implication is that any text with a political agenda automatically constitutes propaganda and can therefore never be of any artistic or aesthetic value. And, any creative text reflective of an individual experience cannot be political. Creativity and individual subjectivity are perceived as frivolous activities in the face of more serious projects like social development or resistance. I, however, (like Terry Eagleton [1990] and Frederic Jameson [1986]) argue that the division between art and politics is oversimplified. I see the very interaction between these two seemingly contrasting (perhaps conflicted) aspects as offering the greatest potential for the voicing of narratives and resistance to dominant modes of representation. It is the process of experimentation involved in the interaction of art and politics that perhaps holds the greatest opportunity for critique.

I'd like to begin this discussion with Indira Karamcheti's contribution (1995) to the arts-politics debate. While I don't necessarily agree with her conflation of this debate with the distinction between the First and Third Worlds, her discussion does elicit questions surrounding the role of the artist, the measure of aesthetic value, and the evocation of pleasure in artistic creation. Understanding any form of artistic endeavor, according to Karamcheti (1995), has traditionally stemmed from the aesthetic value and experience of pleasure held by texts. Based on written texts, it has been assumed that artistic or creative literature could be distinguished from other forms of literature for its ability to evoke a level of pleasure. Pleasure, in this sense, is socially constructed in terms of how it is experienced and spoken about and is derived from the formal properties of a

text that are meant to contribute to its aesthetic value. The experience of pleasure, in this instance, is perceived to emerge from the private and the individual, whereas any experience linked to the political is perceived to emerge from the public and collective (Karamcheti, 1995).

Pleasurable texts, in their perceived aesthetic authority, are taken to have a level of permanence, a level of universal beauty or universal human pleasure; while other literatures that acknowledge diversity and attempt to remain true to the unpleasantness of daily experience, are viewed as too local, too temporal, too plural and too contextual to effectively appropriate the formal aesthetic conventions of texts and hold the permanence of beauty and pleasure. The traditional approach that Karamcheti highlights here, is reductionist at the very least and emphasises a glaring disregard for creativity and originality in the process of artistic endeavor. If the measure of art is the evocation of pleasure, and pleasure, a private experience, is derived from aesthetic value, and aesthetic value is achieved through adherence to the formal properties of the text, how then do we begin to understand the role of the artist? Is it only the end-product and its reception that is subjected to a measure of art (if such a measure exists)? What about the process of artistic creation, i.e. that which comes before the end-product and the experience of it? What if the measure of artistic value in seemingly 'political' texts is as much about experiencing pleasure through the process of artistic creation as much as it is about the evocation of pleasure post-textual production? What if aesthetic value is as much about redefining/resisting the formal properties of a text as it is about maintaining them? In this way, does the process of artistic creation not speak to the postcolonial concerns of establishing a speaking space from which to be heard and of diversity, temporality and context?

These questions are supported by the perspective that the artist is necessarily political (San Juan Jr., 1998). Every artist is historically conditioned and can never, as a result, be completely isolated as an individual from society. The artist's activities, the personal creative manifestations of his/her imagination can, as a result, not be perceived as separate from society. The artist, through the process of externalizing, objectifying and historicizing the personal, ultimately politicizes and makes social the internal. It is for this reason that art and politics are inextricably intertwined:

[...] subjectivity is grounded and refigured by its social context, where the metonymy/syntax of personal lived experience ultimately finds intelligible expression in the paradigmatic axis of the community. In the 'Third World' narrative of quotidian existence, the artist is necessarily a political intellectual since the forms of artistic expression assume political valence in all moments of its production, circulation, and reception (San Juan Jr., 1998: 257).

Implicit in San Juan Jr.'s contention here is that any production of the artist in society is necessarily imbued with political engagement at all stages of the process. How then do we begin to conceive of the process of production? At this point, I'd like to draw on the distinction made by Barthes between the text of pleasure and the text of bliss – the latter of which, I argue, offers strong potential for the experimentation between art and politics and holds promise for a postcolonial feminist film practice. Barthes writes:

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts [...], unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with pleasure (Barthes, 1975: 14).

Texts of pleasure and texts of bliss have been labelled *readerly* texts and *writerly* texts respectively. Barthes illustrates that the text of pleasure is a text that is able to maintain for its reader a comfortable standard of enjoyment and understanding. In this instance, the writer writes with the average reader's power of comprehension in mind in a way that makes the intended purpose and meaning of the text obvious and easy to grasp. This is a safe text that expects minimal work and participation on the part of both the reader and writer. The artistic measure of this type of text would be its adherence to what could be considered the routine conventions of content and an aesthetic experience. In many ways, this type of text falls neatly in line with Karamcheti's perspective (1995) on pleasure derived from artistic texts in the art-politics debate.

The text of bliss, on the other hand, is indicative of an excess or overflow of the *readerly* experience beyond what the reader is generally accustomed to find in her engagement with the text. Texts of bliss transcend the blandness of convention in order to disturb and disrupt what could be referred to as the reader's laziness or comfort zone. In this instance, the reader is called on to

work for meaning and understanding. While the construction of the text of pleasure lends itself to an ease of reading and pleasure, the text of bliss, which necessarily embodies the uniqueness of the writer's voice, makes no qualms about neglecting a standard of measure or convention. The text of bliss, once experienced or engaged with, becomes a text that is *felt* and that cannot be tied down to limited descriptions afforded by language. Hence, the excess and overflow. The measure of artistic value then becomes creativity of expression and an experience of textual interaction that is beyond conventional description.

While I am aware that Barthes' text of bliss is usually taken to refer to high modernist texts that embody the unique expression of an individual creator and perhaps demand a considerable amount of time and education (factors not always accessible for the groups to which I refer), I believe that the text of bliss also provides the nexus at which art and politics converge. There are two opportunities that are inherent in the excess or overflow of the text of bliss that speak to a postcolonial feminist film practice: an openness to challenging convention and thereby developing alternative modes of producing texts, and an emphasis on the affective dimension at both the moment of creation and reception. I would further argue that a collaboration of both these opportunities is conducive to the contextual specificity of particular communities, in terms of both individual and participatory modes of resistance and textual production. The measure of artistic value then emerges out of the expression of political resistance through minimal narratives (Kadar in Agnew, 2005) that either offer a redefinition of, or don't subscribe to, mainstream textual production. Therein lies the opportunity for aesthetic disruption and the experience of textual bliss, placing the co-existence of art and politics conceivably within the grasp of the Third World.

Indeed, in development initiatives around the world, there are many examples of such a text of bliss 'practice' (San Juan Jr., 1998), although they are usually brushed aside as further examples of purely political engagement. In "Paulo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism" (1992: 24), Henry Giroux describes Freire as someone whose work is simultaneously scholarly, artistic, pedagogical and activist: his writing "[...] represents a textual borderland where poetry slips into politics, and solidarity becomes a song for the present begun in the past while waiting to be heard in the future". I too, like Giroux, would like to acknowledge the work of scholars who have pushed the boundaries of the aesthetic - in order to forge a more radical engagement with their social

world - and academic positionality with the purpose of enabling voices that have been sidelined. In the next section, I discuss two women who have used their position within the academy as a springboard for opening spaces of expression through a 'revisioning' of visual practice. My aim in discussing their work is to illustrate the possibilities inherent in practical re-imag(in)ing. The difference in each of their approaches and the varied nature of their work provides an appropriate platform for understanding my attempt to develop a postcolonial feminist film practice.

The Academic Filmmaker, The Subject, and The Medium (1): Prajna Paramita Parasher

The practical and scholarly work of Prajna Paramita Parasher, an Indian-born academic and filmmaker located in the United States, examines the interface between the academic filmmaker, the subject, and the medium - a complex relationship characterized by self-reflexivity and resistance. Rajan (1995: 155) explains, "[Parasher's] videos are definitely critiques of power/class structures and intellectual dogmas in what [is called] 'resistance imaging'". It's been suggested that 'reading' Parasher's video work requires an understanding of them as "effective political and theoretical essays" and of "subjectivity as enhancing and informing struggles for change" (Villarejo, 1995: 159). Although the two films on which the discussion of Parasher is based, *Exile and Displacement?* and *Unbidden Voices*, offer interesting perspectives on the gendered experience of diaspora, for this project, I highlight, in addition, those aspects of Parasher's approach that illustrate the resistant potential of a symbiosis between the redefined postcolonial scholar, the redefined postcolonial text and an emphasis on community. I offer this potential as one example of the interaction between these three components. My discussion is based largely on Rajan's interview with Parasher, and Villarejo's analysis of her work.

Parasher allows her academic background to inform but not overtake her videomaking. She argues that her videos are made with the purpose of highlighting particular issues and that she perceives postcoloniality as needing to be addressed within a cultural context as opposed to fitting within a literary map. In this way, Parasher clearly rejects the textualism of the conventional postcolonial project. Amy Villarejo argues,

Parasher also implicitly contests the privilege that literature/writing occupy in speaking the Third World by staging the possibilities and constraints provided by video. [...] Parasher has moved away from the direct citation of theoretical language in her videos. Her sense of intellectual labour has shifted, so that the image itself carries the weight of theorizing. [...] Parasher has proposed a new grammar of video, glances among ourselves and at 'official history', which recodes the space of the postcolonial woman as problematic which is neither exile nor displacement but positions into which one falls, through which one is thrown. In her videos, Parasher tracks the lines of that descent, creating in her turn haunting and powerful commentaries on diasporic colonial experience (Villarejo, 1995: 163–168).

Parasher sees the medium of film as offering an opportunity for history to be redefined as multi-perspectival and contextualized. Her aim is specifically to address the limitations of history by positioning her camera *from the perspective of the subjects* in her films such that *they* do the looking, as opposed to *peering into the world of their lives*. In this way, her subjects *own* the 'telling' of history, as opposed to being subjected to a version of history told on their behalf. Villarejo (1995: 160) sees Parasher's method as "looking at each other [academic filmmaker/subject] rather than seeing the 'Other' as a persuasive and politically enabling alternative to the voyeurism" of most mainstream and some postcolonial filmmaking. This resonates with Bakhtin (1952–1953) and San Juan Jr.'s (1998) redefinition of the notion of the 'Other' in which there is an "actively responsive understanding" of subjects within a community – an acknowledgement of existence as opposed to an act of distancing.

In a similar (but not quite the same) way, in order to ensure that the women in my project are active agents in the telling of their stories, I have chosen *to put the camera into their hands* so that the story is told *from their perspective* and the film ultimately becomes their own. Furthermore, the participants had to meet each other and share their stories through the processes of active discussion, listening and acknowledgement. This set the tone from the outset for how the women in the project, including myself, approached the process of telling our stories through the medium of film and community. The most reflective example of this would be Manjini, who returned to community at the very beginning of her journey through this project. She interviewed and filmed several women in her community and family in order to investigate the significance of the sari in the life of a Hindu women. She saw the sari as a metaphor for her own trajectory as a Hindu woman, and the stories of the women that she interviewed and filmed validated this for her. I, on

the other hand, returned to the women in my family who've had the greatest influence on my development as a Hindu woman. I filmed each of them in their normal environment. I didn't interview them as I wanted to capture how the years of watching them, and understanding their relative silence within my family and community at large has contributed to my understanding of myself. Unlike Manjini, who offered the female subjects of her film the platform to speak, I allowed the stories of the women in my life to unfold through a conscious visual depiction of their voicelessness. While each approach is quite different, both Manjini and I, at the most basic level, saw the necessity to return to a community of women for the validation of our own stories – something that is not common practice in mainstream media or, in my case, academia.

In keeping with the general mood of postcolonial critique from the mid-1990s onwards, Parasher is not comfortable with labels such as 'Third World' or 'Third World Filmmaking' as she finds this form of categorizing to work against a postcolonial imperative. To argue that her work fits into 'Third World Filmmaking' is to allocate it to a generalized group of people and thereby to limit its aims and possibilities. It is never possible to *know* the Third World in its entirety (if such a thing exists), but it is possible to *understand* aspects of it and to acknowledge that any *knowing* of the Third World is local, temporal, subject to change and always negotiated (Rajan, 1995: 154). However, if the latter is held in mind, it is possible to conceive of 'Third World Filmmaking' as a broad and non-prescriptive category that encompasses all types and genres of filmmaking, a practice that is open enough to hold side by side with both artistic creativity and political agency. Third World and the postcolonial thus come to represent a sensibility as opposed to a category, location or period (Rajan, 1995: 154–155) in much the same way that the experience of diaspora can be understood as a 'feeling of being' or secondary consciousness for subsequent generations.

The Third World filmmaker, therefore, should not be perceived as necessarily exotic, resistant or repetitive of previous initiatives in his/her approach to the outcomes of filmmaking. The role of the filmmaker should be seen as reducing the conflicted space between theoretical paradigms/conventions/rules and sustained critique. Parasher deliberately challenges the simplistic West versus colonized opposition in order not to position the Third World filmmaker as already marginalized (Rajan, 1995). Rather, she is interested in involving these filmmakers in the active reinvention of culture and history, and revisiting of the ideologies that generally inform the

construction of these cultures and histories.

Parasher's style of filmmaking is referred to as 'experimental documentary' by *Women Make Movies*, the organisation responsible for the distribution of one of her films (Villarejo, 1995: 161). It is understood as experimental documentary in the sense that "[...] testimony is juxtaposed with theoretical texts and images from Indian films, questioning the descriptive value of each mode of discourse as to the 'truth' of Indian women's experience" (Villarejo, 1995: 161). Her experimental filmmaking has, as a result, offered challenges to popular history and memory by acknowledging that dominant cultural representations (through the mode of popular cinema) maintain false consciousness in terms of class, gender and ethnic practices. In this regard, Parasher addresses the issue of Hindu goddess worship and the role that it not only plays in the construction of women in mainstream representations but also the influence that it has on understanding the roles of Indian women in the diaspora (Villarejo, 1995: 161). My previous chapter highlights this issue when I refer to the expectation that the construction of identity for Hindu women in the diaspora is deeply entrenched in interpretations of Hindu mythology infused into dominant genres like Bollywood films. These representations become markers of ideal womanhood bearing the weight of Indian nationalism. Parasher's approach acknowledges the interplay of discourses that are immanent to the diasporic experience both in terms of the construction of identity and the representation of that experience and identity. The challenges inherent in the attempt to depict an authentic Indian woman's experience are captured through a variety of positions that she includes in her videos and a necessarily self-reflexive critique on the mode and process of documentary-making itself. It is through this process that Parasher's videos offer an oppositional stance to historical norms of identity construction and representative practice.

The Academic Filmmaker, The Subject, and The Medium (2): Jyoti Mistry

Jyoti Mistry is a South African-born internationally qualified academic and filmmaker. Her key research areas include cultural policy, questions of identity and multiculturalism, and her involvement in film is extensive. She not only researches, writes, directs and produces her own short films, but is also co-owner of a production company, making her a forerunner in this field. Her films, which often take the form of documentaries and/or video installations, make critical social and political comment in their coverage of issues related to memory, history, space and

social consciousness. While much of Mistry's written work is available online, in books and journals, my research yielded very little information about her work and very limited access to her films. As a result, I discuss very briefly, in the paragraphs that follow, some of the theoretical arguments emerging from Mistry's published work and the content and style of her filmmaking. Mistry's film work doesn't always focus on the stories of women and can't be described as distinctly feminist (although it could be argued that a feminist agenda is inherent). But it cannot be denied that she is a South African exemplar of the reconceptualization of the postcolonial scholar and text and that her work, together with that of Parasher, illustrates the varied permutations that are possible through the process of this reconceptualization.

Much of Mistry's published work addresses, directly or indirectly, the issues of history and memory which, as I've indicated in previous chapters, is crucial to the articulation of both individual and collective narratives. In an insightful analysis of the role and purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was set up after the release of Nelson Mandela and the collapse of apartheid, Mistry (2001a: 2) draws attention to the fact that storytelling and the sharing of personal narratives not only gives "meaning to the multi-layered experiences of the South African story" but offers healing potential as well. Further in this same discussion, Mistry differentiates the four conceptions of truth on which the commission was based: factual or forensic truth, personal or narrative truth, social or dialogue truth, and healing and restorative truth. While all these distinctions are fairly self-explanatory, it is the latter three that are most relevant to both Mistry's work and my project. Personal and narrative truth, she argues, refers to "creat[ing] a context for people to tell their stories [...] – the rhetoric being to give voice and the power of expression to those historically denied this right and opportunity" (Mistry, 2001a: 3). Social or dialogue truth is described as "the social network of the experiences of truth; the establishment of truth through interaction, discussion and debate. The goal [of which] was to make possible the different registers of perceptions of truth [...]" (Mistry, 2001a: 4). Healing and restorative truth is acknowledgement or affirmation of the story told and shared; knowledge that there has been a witness to the story, and that the story has been heard. Underlying my discussions in Chapters 6 and 7 is the fact that personal and narrative truth, and social and dialogue truth informed both the participant workshops and participatory video process. As a result, healing and restorative truths were able to find voice in the content of the films produced by both the research participants and

myself.

I find it necessary, at this point, to briefly describe the content of Mistry's films before I embark on a discussion of them as evidence of her written academic work in terms of the issues of memory, voice and space.

We Remember Differently (2005) explores the relationship between a white, middle class woman in South Africa and her daughter. The mother is so ill that her daughter has to get into the bath with her in order to clean her. The intimacy between the mother and daughter is enabled and enhanced by bath-time conversations that include "memory, testimony and cross-cultural perspectives" (IMDB, 2005: 1). In this film, Mistry enters a very personal and intimate space to illustrate how differently the stories are remembered and the extent to which these differences shape how each woman understands their future.

In *I Mike What I Like* (2006), Mistry engages in a visual interpretation of the thought-provoking words of young poet, Kgafela oa Magogodi. She uses "words, images, text, music, graphics and performance set to jazz improvisation and action painting" (IMDB, 2007: 1). Using the urban space of Johannesburg city as a backdrop, the film comments on the issues faced by an emerging, young street society. Again, the issue of negotiating space in an attempt to understand identity becomes apparent.

Similarly, her 2010 film titled *The Bull on the Roof* revisits urban spaces as narrative locations. This film, however, spans four international sites, namely Johannesburg, Helsinki, Vienna and New York. Exploring space and sexuality, the film captures very different narratives through movement between the various locations and voice-overs in different languages. These narratives, however, find a common spine in the similarity of the minute details of the lives of the subjects that she captures.

Lastly, one of Mistry's most recent film projects is *09:21:25* which recounts the 9 day, 21 hour and 25 minute space ride on which Mark Shuttleworth, a young South African IT entrepreneur, embarked. By participating in Shuttleworth's new understanding of Earth, the film raises questions

about the meaning of human existence, space and displacement.

In terms of *We Remember Differently* and *I Mike What I Like*, the role that marginality plays in the act of storytelling is quite strong. An invalided white middle class woman and youngsters negotiating their survival and education on the street, respectively, use their marginal spaces to share their stories. Mistry (2001b) speaks about the fact that marginality is an important facet of the work of postcolonial scholars and artists, and contributes to the political nature of their analysis and representation. In the tradition of Hall (1982) and Williams (1981), she perceives the margin as “the revered space of cultural production. Marginal spaces challenge the ideologies of the centre” (2001b: 6). While memory from the marginal position of illness is used as a platform for healing and restorative truth in *We Remember Differently*, the active remaking of history through non-mainstream poetry, art, music, etc. is used as a platform for social or dialogue truth in *I Mike What I Like*.

Social and dialogue truth also manifests in the *Bull on the Roof*, in which seeming disparate narratives from around the world find common ground in the little details of the daily lives of the subjects of the film. Further to this, the idea of movement, spatial disorientation and the search for shared meaning highlights, to a certain extent, a diasporic sensibility informing Mistry’s filmmaking. This comes through clearly in the awkward and intimate space of the bath in *We Remember Differently*, the pace of the city and harshness of the streets in *I Mike What I Like*, the foreignness and frivolity of major international cities in *The Bull on the Roof*, and the gross realization of the insignificance of humanity’s existence in relation to the vastness of outer space and the universe in *09:21:25*. All of these films, although offering platforms of expression to a variety of individuals, capture an underlying sense of displacement and search for identity.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to provide further theoretical context and justification for my many-pronged research approach. Firstly, although I can't rid myself of my 'privileged' position within academia, I hope to explore the possibilities of it through an autoethnographic approach to understanding the experiences of South African Hindu women. This approach forces me to question my positionality, my assumptions, and my privilege. Secondly, I present the women in my study with the visual as a form of self-expression. It is therefore the combination of autoethnography and participatory video as a visual storytelling mode, as the process of a postcolonial feminist film practice, that I offer as a possible resolution to the problems of positionality, textuality and generalizing that beset the postcolonial feminist scholar. Like Duncan, I too am on a journey of postcolonial discovery:

Just as there are some who might prefer a rigidly structured postcolonial space, there may be some who are looking for an answer to what kind of story is emerging from the postcolonial condition, what does the identity look and sound like toward which the postcolonial author speaks. Is there a positive outcome on the other side of postcolonialism? However, as my notion of postcolonial dialogue begins with a series of questions, I am more comfortable with a dialogue that "ends" with more open-ended questions than narrowly construed answers. The cure to conflicted identity probably cannot be a shared one, or we are back to that which is a reflex to empire [...]. For the postcolonial to achieve identity that is genuinely new, old tools must not be used for the shaping (Duncan, 2002: 332).

CHAPTER 5: SELF-REFLEXIVE JOURNAL

The Autoethnographic Eye: Storytelling and Visual Perspectives

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an analysis of the ‘information’ that I’ve gathered from my participants or the final films that they produced. The aim of this chapter is rather to illustrate, in addition to my process of research, the stages of learning and growth that my participants and I underwent through the process of conversation and participatory video. The chapter is therefore written in the form of a self-reflexive journal that captures, through individual episodes, my workshop, email and telephone interactions with each of these women. The point of this structure is to maintain the integrity and uniqueness of each of their voices. The use of the term ‘episode’ is strategic on my part because, while discrete, I also see each of their stories, as diverse as they are, as contributing to the larger narrative of South African Indian women. Furthermore, although each of the workshops began with the story of my life, I have chosen to locate my episode at the very end in an attempt to illustrate that I’ve probably learned as much as my participants, if not more, from the process. While this chapter addresses the first layer of narrative representation for my participants and myself, Chapter 6 will offer a comparative discussion of the narrative construction of each of our films to illustrate the re-presentation of our stories through the medium.

Episode 1: Manjini - The Feminist Filmmaker Within

Initial Interactions

On 25 September 2012, I received the first response to my call for research participants. It had been nearly a year since I’d begun my search. To say that I was excited would be an understatement. I’d started to lose hope that I’d find anybody interested enough to want to be part of my project. The response was an email from a young woman named Manjini Mestry. It was a dear email that read almost like a response to an examination. She had taken the time to read through that initial letter I’d sent to the various Hindu organisations, and had paid careful attention to my request for specific pieces of information. Her response was complete, detailed and

committed. Much like a good student who hopes to perform well in their exam, it was clear that Manjini wanted to be selected for participation in this project.

Besides sharing her biographical data, familial, geographical and religious background, and current professional status, Manjini spoke about her continued research into the meaning, history and philosophy of Hinduism in order to understand and address the many shortcomings in the teachings of her parents' generation. This point piqued my interest – it showed that Manjini, like myself, although devoted to her religious practice and teachings, felt a gap in understanding that she needed to explore. I hadn't mentioned this in my request letter, but here she was already starting to discuss this issue in her first correspondence with me. This suggested that Manjini was hoping to benefit in some deeply personal way from this project. She perceived the project as a way to explore an aspect of herself/life that she'd been questioning for some time. This, of course, excited me further.

Manjini also highlighted in her email a keen interest in assisting me with this project because she saw the topic as worthy of investigation. There seemed to be an underlying sense as well, which was later confirmed through workshop discussions, that she held the further education of Indian women in high regard and had complete respect for the task that I'd undertaken. She was eager to help me achieve my goal as a woman.

Of course, I didn't waste any time calling her. I was greeted by a deep, female voice on the other end that exuded a sense of calm and maturity. After the basic introductions, I explained a little more about my project. It was only at this point that Manjini shared her third personal interest in the project: her long time desire to explore filmmaking. This did not come through at all in her email. I was pleasantly surprised and assured her that she had a place on my project and that she would definitely have the opportunity to make a film.

The call ended with her offering to assist with locating other participants in Gauteng to participate in the project. After several subsequent calls and emails, we were able to find one other participant, Sashnee Naicker, to attend the Gauteng workshop with Manjini. The date for the two-day workshop was set for 12 – 13 January 2013. One day before, however, Sashnee was forced to

cancel because she needed to make an urgent trip to Kenya to resolve a work issue. We, nevertheless, went ahead with the workshop with the hope of finding another date to meet with Sashnee.

Workshop 1

Manjini and I decided to meet at a central spot in Gauteng. I therefore arranged for us to meet at the University of Johannesburg's Audiovisual Studio. I arrived early to set-up the recording and screening equipment. While familiarizing myself with the venue, a knock at the open door caught my attention. Manjini walked in at exactly 9am. She walked straight up to me and greeted me with a hug. I said, "It's so nice to meet you". Her response was "Yes, finally. I'm so excited to be here". If there had been any doubt in my mind regarding her previous expressions of interest in the project, this moment served to discard all of that.

We started almost immediately. As previously mentioned, the workshop began with the sharing of lives and backgrounds. I began with my background in order to break the ice and basically set the conversational tone I was hoping to maintain throughout the participant interactions. I provided details of my personal life and upbringing before sharing information regarding my personal trajectory as a researcher and academic. I wasn't sure how she would react to my autoethnographic approach having had a university education herself. However, she didn't appear to be skeptical, intimidated or uncomfortable. In fact, there was a certain peace and confidence about her (quite similar to what I'd heard on the phone) that actually forced *me* to relax. Usually, in traditional research, it's the researcher that provides assurance to the participants, but here I was drawing assurance from her.

As Manjini spoke, I realized that although we have a similar approach to life and understanding of gender roles, our upbringing had been quite different. Manjini was born in Roshnee, a small Indian town in Vereeniging, Gauteng. Her parents were both born in the "Old Transvaal" (the name for Gauteng before and during the apartheid era). Manjini's father is a businessman. She described him as an "intelligent", "well-read" and "well-exposed" man who brought them (her brother and herself) up in a very progressive manner (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). Manjini's mother was the first Indian ICU nurse in South Africa. Manjini's parents are an interesting case since they were

both brought up in what could be described as conflicted households. Both of Manjini's grandfathers were atheists while each of their wives was a staunch Hindu who had very set ideas about gender roles. In fact, Manjini humorously confessed her confusion regarding how these marriages ever worked out. Manjini's maternal grandfather was, however, what she termed, a "forward thinking" man aware of contemporary trends (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). He insisted that Manjini's mother be sent away to study in order to make an independent life for herself.

Manjini's paternal grandmother, however, lived with them throughout her childhood and schooling. Manjini described the experience as interesting. While her parents encouraged her to be an independent thinker and guided her through the process of reconciling her womanhood with her religious and cultural background, her grandmother took the opportunity to enforce gender restrictions. She says, "My grandmother's understanding of the world was divided by gender" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). For example, her father and brother were never allowed to set the dinner table because that constituted woman's work. In addition, she was told to sit in a certain manner and to speak only at certain times.

There were several levels to the gendered restriction that Manjini experienced in her upbringing. The community of Roshnee comprised of a minority of Hindus and a majority of Muslims. Within the smaller Hindu community, she found that women were limited in various ways. She cynically commented on the restriction placed on where women were allowed to be or worship within the temple, "[...] because God forbid you pollute [the temple]" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). In the larger Muslim community, because of the restrictions placed on Muslim women, Hindu women were expected, partly out of respect but mainly out of fear of judgment, to dress in a particular manner. For example, Indian women wearing a clothing item like short pants in hot weather were frowned upon. Manjini described the negotiation of these levels of gendered expectation as a constant struggle to balance her immediate family's respect for community and extended family, with a sense of her own difference in terms of these ideas.

There were two things that Manjini focused on when I asked her to speak a little more about herself as an individual. She began with the fact that she was 37 years old and unmarried. Although

she didn't say it outright at this point, the stigma attached to being unmarried at her age was clear from her tone. It's a stigma I understand having myself married at the 'ripe old age' of 30, far later than most Indian women in South Africa. When probed whether or not it was a personal choice, she argued that it was a combination of different factors. Firstly, as mentioned in Chapter 3, she explained that she hadn't met the right person even though there had been prospective individuals. But, secondly, and perhaps most importantly, she felt that she had not yet in her journey discovered how to be happy on her own and that it is unfair to place that kind of responsibility on someone else. To this, I responded, "I can respect that. I understand completely" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a).

Our conversation veered into another area of the project. I'd forgotten that she hadn't finished discussing her personal life. But, Manjini was not going to let the moment pass. She understood the process well; that the project was a platform for *her* to speak. So, in a very tactful manner, she reclaimed the space with one question, "Do you know what I do?" "No," I responded, "I know that you mentioned you were an attorney. I'm not sure what type of attorney you are" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a).

She explained that she works across the provincial border in the Free State and pointedly reminded me that Indians were never allowed into the Free State during the apartheid era. I began to understand, at that point, why it was so important for her to complete discussing her personal life. She works for a large, wealthy, white Afrikaans family. They have 5 trusts and own 7 large businesses that employ approximately 200 people each. She is solely responsible for managing the legal affairs of these businesses and trusts in addition to the family's personal matters like divorces, etc. I sensed a sense of pride, achievement and empowerment for the very fact that, as an Indian woman, she'd taken a bold step and broken the historical and political boundaries of race, culture and gender by doing the work that she does.

Next, I asked her to elaborate on some of the reasons that she mentioned in her first email to me for wanting to be involved in this project. We returned to the issue of religion as she explained that being Hindu comes with a certain level of freedom but many levels of restriction. She sees these levels of restriction emerging out human ignorance and misinterpretations of the meaning of Hindu

philosophy and teaching. In many instances, she argued, the restrictions imposed are without basis, often for the benefit of male power. In the last 2 – 3 years, she therefore found herself needing to research the Hindu religion, specifically those aspects left unanswered by her parents in the passing down of religious tenets. As I'd understood from her first email, she hoped that this project would help her to share this journey not only with other Hindu women, but people in general.

In terms of the film component of the project, Manjini said that there were two reasons for her interest. First, she explained that her personal and professional life has been defined by writing. But, as mentioned in Chapter 3, she finds writing to be dominated by what she terms “male thinking”. She explained that words tend to force you into “a male kind of thinking”. She therefore finds it difficult to express herself adequately as woman via this medium. She perceives the intuitive nature of the visual to be more female and therefore wished to explore film as a form of expression. In addition, she generally enjoys watching films on a regular basis. Although she enjoys a broad range of films and will watch just about anything that's available, she has developed a taste for art or alternative films (particularly Chinese) which she feels other people find strange. Interestingly, she saw this project as a platform for exploring her specific taste in films as well.

The rest of the workshop, as described in Chapter 2, was devoted to introducing Manjini to the basics of scriptwriting for classical narrative films, genre, documentary making, how to use a digital video camera and editing. It was evident from her level of engagement during this section of the workshop that there were specific issues that she'd previously contemplated and wanted to address. One of the very first issues that emerged was the representation of Indian women in mainstream media (i.e. Bollywood films and South African television). She expressed a mixture of dissatisfaction with the stereotypical portrayals found in these media and their disrespect for the diversity of Indian women, as well as amusement at how uninformed these depictions actually are.

Perhaps because she was such an avid film viewer, working through film concepts and techniques wasn't as difficult as I'd expected it would be. She was able to respond and maintain conversation around issues of genre, character development, and narrative construction. There were two particular questions that she asked during these discussions that made me realize that she'd already started processing the material and thinking about her own filmmaking experience. The first

related to my own journey and research decisions, “Why didn’t you use people with a filmmaking background? Like your film students?” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). My response was that first I wanted to work with other South African Indian women to gauge whether or not there were similarities in our experiences of being Hindu. And second, the purpose of the research was to ascertain whether or not Hindu women without filmmaking experience or a filmmaking background would be as critical about the medium and their representation within the medium as I was. Furthermore, I didn’t want these women to be hindered by the rules of filmmaking, I wanted them to see the opportunity to make a film as an open platform to tell their story in any way they saw fit.

I have to admit that I was a little tentative in my response. Since this was my first experience with the autoethnographic approach, I wasn’t sure just how much information I should give away. I didn’t want her to think that I required a level of critique from my participants or that whatever film she made necessarily had to be resistant. On the other hand, the autoethnographic approach is open enough to allow for these types of discussions to be happening between the researcher and participant. I eventually realized that my honesty as a researcher was key to this project and process. In any case, at this point in the workshop, Manjini had provided me with enough information about herself and her understanding of life to assure me that her approach to religion, the construction of Hindu womanhood and film representation was already critical. I don’t think that my reason for my choice of participants would necessarily have urged her in that direction.

The next question of Manjini’s that captured my interest, particularly since we hadn’t yet touched on documentary, was: “How does one tell her story? By herself or through others?” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013a). Obviously, my response was that it was entirely her choice and suggested that she perhaps let her story dictate the mode. I also attempted to illustrate that she should approach the process of filmmaking like a journey – your original intention may change as you go further in your journey based on the variety of experiences you have along the way. Your initial ideas, I said, can change and grow as your story develops, as you discover more and grow through the process yourself. She seemed content with the explanation. Little did I know that my words would later on play out in her journey as a filmmaker.

As we proceeded with the lesson in scriptwriting, I asked Manjini at different stages to complete a practical exercise that would contribute to the completion of a script. Based on Syd Field's approach to scriptwriting, one of the first tasks that I asked her to complete was to think of an idea for a story that she could free associate on a blank page. The idea didn't necessarily have to be the one she intended to carry out for the rest of the project - the task was merely a step in explicating the process of scriptwriting. I explained to her that her idea needed to be driven by either an issue, an event or a character. The point of the exercise was to distill a storyline that could be taken forward in a script. After half an hour, she emerged with an idea for a fictional film that carried two parallel storylines – a man and a woman in two separate contexts who find themselves living out typical gender roles. However, their storylines converge when, by chance, they are both present at a random encounter with a third character. The incident changes their perception of life as they know it. Once they return to their familiar contexts, they find that the meaning of their regular activities and their existence has changed. This change, Manjini hoped, would be made evident through symbolism in the film. Given the constraints of time and a fairly unnatural setting in which to construct an idea for a film, I felt that she'd done particularly well in terms of understanding the requirements of the task. Her actual idea seemed a little ambitious and perhaps lacking in a critical link between the characters. But, overall, she seemed to grasp the process.

Once the scriptwriting lessons were complete, I screened a few short narrative films made by students. The films were good quality, amateur films that clearly reflected the classic three-act structure with clearly defined characters and storylines. As I screened each one, I noticed Manjini's concentration and interest. She was trying hard to absorb as much as she possibly could. Once all the films had been screened, she was keen to discuss how the structure worked, what the key character motivations were, etc. I was impressed at how quickly she was beginning to make connections between the various aspects that had been dealt with in that first day of the workshop.

The next day began with Shannon's documentary lesson. Shannon presented a portion of her Masters literature review that dealt with the different types of documentary that exist. This immediately surprised Manjini, who seemed only to be aware of the traditional expository-type documentary. Her first comment was that she thought documentary was about information and facts. Nevertheless, as the lesson proceeded, I could read from Manjini's responses that she was

enjoying this new material on documentary. She asked a few interesting questions in this section, the first of which pertained to whether or not documentary needed a story from the outset. In other words, does the construction of a story come before or after the research and/or capturing of footage? Shannon explained that documentary can't really be scripted in the same way that a traditional fictional film would. She suggested that it is best to perhaps begin with a plan to capture footage and information for whatever the original idea of the documentary is. Although the plan is there to focus in on the idea, the documentary maker is not bound to it if additional material emerges through shooting and interviews. The story will eventually emerge from the material.

Next, as Shannon went further into the discussion about the various types of documentary, Manjini very quickly grasped the constructedness of the medium. She made a link between the voice-of-god narration used in expository documentary with that of newsreaders. She argued that specifically female newsreaders seemed to have deeper voices that added to the credibility of the newscast. The connections that Manjini was now making were beginning to span across different media and genres of media. She, in fact, commented at one point, "I feel so manipulated. It [documentary] is a powerful tool". Relatedly, Manjini also enquired about the role of the director in the participatory mode. She wanted specifically to understand how the director is able to direct the documentary while still playing an actual role in the film. Shannon explained that the director's involvement in the participatory form could take several forms. We had just viewed Michael Moore's *The Awful Truth*. In this instance, the director interacts directly with the subjects of the film and to a certain extent is involved with the manipulation of the action. In other instances of participatory documentary, explains Shannon, the director's involvement can be less obvious. One example would be an on-screen interview with the director questioning a subject.

Filmmaking Trajectory

Many of the issues raised by Manjini's questions during the two-day workshop seemed to foreshadow her trajectory as a filmmaker during this project. After the workshop, Manjini and I kept in touch via email and telephone conversations. These conversations were mainly devoted to discussing her filmmaking process. Sometimes, however, the conversations would veer into discussions of films recently watched or issues relating to Hindu worship, ritual and practice. One particular instance stands out: Manjini sent me an email towards the end of April 2013 (Mestry,

2013d). The tone of the email appeared to be a mixture of annoyance, confusion and pride. She'd recently watched a film called *The Impossible*, about a family that was caught in the 2004 Thailand tsunami. And even though it was based on the true story of a Spanish family, it depicted an English family (the two lead characters played by Ewan McGregor and Naomi Watts) at the centre of the action and event.

Manjini found herself frustrated on so many levels. She'd recently, before watching the film, visited Thailand and spoken personally to some of the locals regarding the devastation and destruction caused and left behind by the tsunami. She'd been "deeply moved" by the true stories that she'd heard firsthand and couldn't fathom why the story had taken such a Western turn,

[...] I watched the movie but found it extremely offensive. [...] . The movie seems to almost ignore the Thai people (or people of any colour for that matter) and their loss and suffering. It is like only through the pain and suffering of the foreign Western tourists that the movie [is] told. (I know for a fact that there are more Chinese, Arabian and Indian tourists than Western!) I didn't want to be rash in my opinion and tried to base it on the actual movie - but the movie angles, focus, character and plot support this view. I was really emotional about the disregard for people who suffered as deeply as those tourists. The actual wave of water and the chaos is brilliantly done but could not redeem the bias. I know now that every form of communication and expression is tainted by personal prejudice but seriously!!!! As if their [the Western tourists'] suffering is greater than all others (Mestry, 2013d).

This email correspondence points to several things that had begun to happen during Manjini's development as a filmmaker. Her awareness of the constructedness of the medium, that she'd drawn attention to in the first workshop, had begun to strengthen. She was beginning to apply the concepts and processes of filmmaking and scriptwriting that she'd been introduced to, to her regular viewing practices. This seemed to enable her to not only analyse visual material but to make critical comment as well. Her email highlighted not only technical construction but ideological bias as well. It fascinated me how quickly she'd begun to understand how the various aspects of the medium work together for specific purposes. This of course, as it is revealed in subsequent email responses with her, became central to how she chose to construct her own film. Manjini's email ended with, "OMG – I think you've created a monster (I explain my poor knowledge of films to everyone even if they don't want to hear about it!)" (Mestry, 2013d). I

sensed a little enjoyment in her tone when, in a subsequent email, she wrote: “am really enjoying the fact that I can identify the things we have discussed”. I smiled proudly to myself as I approached the end of the email. My approach to this project had already begun to make a difference in one person’s life. Providing her with the most basic and general introduction to filmmaking had actually begun to develop her visual literacy skills in a way that went far beyond what I’d actually imagined. I tried to contain my excitement at this point since she was only one out of my four participants.

Almost immediately after my workshop with Manjini, she’d begun to keep what she referred to as a “logbook/diary” (Mestry, 2013b) of her own development as a filmmaker and of the development of her film. Even though I hadn’t requested this, Manjini saw it as necessary to recording her own growth. Many of her emails would reflect this development through a discussion of possible ideas for her film or her research into these various ideas. One of her earliest emails spoke about how informative she had found the workshop to be. She stated further that just having the camera and playing around with it had opened up many opportunities for story ideas,

I've met and spoken to a [M]uslim second wife in purdah with a remarkable story, a group of young [H]indu girls exploring their religion through dance and [staff at] a rape clinic in my own city that has the highest number of rape cases in the province (and which started through one man's determination to help these women). So the beginning has been awesome and I hope to continue in this manner. I've so many ideas but am wary of the creative process now and realise the need to organise and expand on each idea - which helps to filter some of the ideas (Mestry, 2013b).

In order to explore these and other ideas, Manjini decided to embark on a process of taking clips. She began to find, through this process, that her attempts to expand these ideas were proving difficult. Admittedly, at this point, although I could see that Manjini’s development was far ahead of the other participants, I was worried that the ideas that she chose to investigate appeared to be veering away from telling her own story. They were good ideas but, in many instances, I couldn’t see how the ideas would eventually work toward telling her story. I drew attention to this by reminding her that, no matter which idea she chose to work on for the duration of the project, eventually her own story needed to filter through.

Yet again, however, I found that I'd underestimated her understanding of the project. Manjini, on several occasions prior, had asked me either to provide her with or direct her to further reading on scriptwriting and filmmaking. As she began to encounter the problem of expanding and structuring the stories she was investigating, she used the additional reading as a guide. Furthermore, she began watching more documentaries and films to become more familiar with the various storytelling techniques and devices of the medium and variety of genres. All the while, she assured me that she would not allow her story to be forgotten or buried by all of this. What I hadn't realized, at this point, was that the stories that she had in mind were stories that emerged from her hometown. In effect, she was returning to her community to work through and understand her story in order to give it voice. In fact, at one point in our email conversations, she speaks about how history and context are so inextricably intertwined with her being, that she could never tell her story without the story of her community or at least some aspect of it. The idea of voicing her narrative through community seemed to be an idea she'd been mulling over even at our very first workshop, as previously mentioned. This form of storytelling persisted into her eventual decision for the subject of her film for the project. This is no more evident than in the following extract from one of her emails,

I would like to do a film about the Stories of Sarees. A saree is integral to the identity of an Hindu woman. It's so symbolic of our repression, modesty, race, sexuality, religion and gender. As South African Hindus - a saree is used when you are born (you are lulled to sleep in your mother's saree when you are given your name after birth), you wear a specific colour saree on your wedding day dependent on your husband's family surname (white is worn by Pathers, yellow by Naidoos, red by Pillays...), your wedding saree is also used to cover your husband's coffin or body when he dies and of course when you become a widow you are required to wear only white sarees, there are the sarees that we offer to the Goddesses as form of sacrifice or request for a boon. But really more than that as a woman there are certain significant sarees that you have - that mark certain important occasions in your life - like an Indian dancer's saree, or a saree you wore at your child's wedding, a Benarasi silk saree inherited from your mother, or the saree you wore when you won the Saree Queen beauty contest. The saree tells an entire life's story of a woman. Through saree I would like to tell the stories of a few women in my immediate community. These are women who have functioned in a difficult country, society and families yet remain positive and some have thrived. They endure their challenges with grace and dignity and this is my tribute to them but more importantly a validation of them and their experiences. [...] I've also decided to document my experiences in making the film to mark my own learning experience and journey (Mestry, 2013c).

With such a well-thought through and articulated idea, nobody anticipated the problems that Manjini would experience. Although the film that Manjini envisaged in the above extract was going to cover the stories of several women in her community, the idea for the film stemmed from one particular woman that Manjini had known for most of her life. Her name is Patma Pillay and she was born in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape in 1943. At the age of 25, she was considered too old not to be married. She was a vibrant young woman who loved to go out dancing. This, of course, was unacceptable for an Indian woman in the 1960s. So, her parents forced her to marry a widower much older than herself who had children of his own. He turned out to be an abusive alcoholic who gave her a very difficult life. He eventually died. She then remarried another, much older, widower with children as well. They had one child of their own, but her life with him was also not a happy one. The interesting thing about Patma is that she never let her troubled marriages or societal pressures stop her from doing the things that she needed to do. For example, she travelled the world and was the first Indian female driving instructor in South Africa. And she did all of these things in a sari.

Manjini had spent many weeks chatting to Patma, getting her permission, explaining the process and preparing her for the interview/shoot. Patma allowed Manjini to do the interview (which Manjini describes as exactly what she was hoping for) only to call Manjini up a few days later to tell her that she no longer wanted to share her story, that she didn't want to reveal personal details of her life and marriage, and that she needed Manjini to delete all of the footage. Manjini, of course, was completely distraught. Patma's story was going to form the spine of her film and, by implication, the spine of her journey. As one would expect, I received a frantic email (titled "OMG" – Mestry, 2013e) from Manjini in which she described how helpless she felt about Patma's decision and she needed to know what to do next. And so with this most difficult obstacle, Manjini was inducted into the world of filmmaking. Manjini had made her first filmmaking mistake and had learned her first lesson.

We had discussed the notion of informed consent for participants during our first workshop. However, Manjini had failed to follow through with this for several reasons. Firstly, with all the excitement about having Patma agree to be interviewed and filmed, Manjini assumed that there would be no issues or concerns regarding the privacy or sensitivity of material. Furthermore, at

Patma's age, she didn't want to scare her off or overwhelm her with the seemingly heavy legal nature of a consent form. This, however, did not work in Manjini's favour. I explained to Manjini that what she needed to understand about signed informed consent forms is that they were as much about protecting the participant as they were about protecting the filmmaker, researcher, etc. Manjini debated the value of the document with me. She wanted to know what the point of the document was, if participants were going to be given permission to express their discomfort and leave the project at any point in the process. I explained that sometimes the inclusion of clauses that offer confidentiality or anonymity, or that acknowledge that participants may want/need to exercise their right not to participate at any given point, can actually work in the opposite way. Participants may feel protected by the document for the very fact that the filmmaker has thought through issues of privacy and put their interests first. I didn't see this particular issue as a failing on the part of Manjini but what I did find interesting was that her background as an attorney didn't seem to influence or filter through to this particular part of the project. It was almost as if these two activities existed as two separate poles: business/profession vs. the personal/creative. Although I'd already started to notice that certain aspects of filmmaking, at many levels, seemed to come naturally to Manjini, the implications of the process still seemed new to her.

The second issue that Manjini hadn't considered was that participants are unreliable and that she should never have placed the responsibility of providing the spine of her film on one particular participant. Nevertheless, the problem had to be (re)solved. I took the issue back to Shannon, one of my colleagues (Fiona) at work who lectures research methodology at postgraduate level, and my supervisor. Strangely enough, they all gave me the same response in a slightly different manner. They agreed that Patma's story was too interesting to allow to just slip away. Manjini owed it to herself, to Patma and to the project to try at least one more time. They suggested she return to Patma and try to find out exactly what the problem was. Why the sudden change? Both Shannon and Fiona said that this would take time, and that Manjini would have to commit to spending that time with Patma. The idea was to establish and maintain a rapport with her that would ease her into sharing the reasons for no longer wanting to be a part of her film. Once Manjini had some idea of her reasons, she would then not only be able to understand Patma's rash decision but also perhaps come up with an alternative plan for her story to still form part of the final film.

Manjini took the advice and tried for many weeks to get Patma to budge. But, being the strong-willed woman (that originally attracted Manjini), she never budged. Manjini, after toying with some of her previous story ideas and not feeling the same level of passion for them, decided to continue with the Story of the Sari but from a new angle.

Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop

A final weekend workshop had been scheduled for the 11 – 13 October 2013 in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. We were going to meet at a quaint little wedding/conference venue that the Durban participants, and Shannon and myself had previously been to. It was called *Sica's Guesthouse*. The aim of the weekend was for all four participants to bring along all of their footage for us to view together, comment on and then provide suggestions of how we should edit our films: either into one film that combined all of our stories, an anthology of films or five separate films. Shannon and I were hoping to leave at the end of the weekend with at least four completed films. This, of course, was a little ambitious on our part since getting our participants to commit to the weekend turned out to be the most difficult part!

Manjini, Sashnee, Jessica and Mrs. Singaram, as previously explained, are all women with very busy lives. They all work, have family commitments and are engaged in ongoing cultural and religious activities. So, to find a common meeting date between them all turned out to be the most impossible task. Eventually, Manjini, Jessica and Mrs. Singaram were able to commit.

Since Manjini had to travel from Johannesburg after a full work day, she arrived at the guesthouse very late the first evening that we were supposed to meet. This did not, however, detract her from her purpose. She was up early the following morning to join the rest of us in conversation. We decided that we would each share our visual material before proceeding with any editing decisions. We were a little concerned that Mrs. Singaram hadn't arrived yet, but continued nevertheless since we were running out of time.

When Manjini's turn arrived we were all amazed at the wealth of material she'd gathered over the last few months. She had visuals of interviews with a variety of women, old photographs and scenery. She talked us through the process and the vision that she had for her film. Her first set of

visuals captured a very dry and harsh environment. She said that this was the environment she grew up knowing in the Transvaal/Gauteng. Her perception of Africa was that it was not an easy place to live in, in terms of its extreme environmental character – very hot and very cold places, very large animals, very dangerous animals, etc. She wanted to juxtapose this with visuals of the softness of a sari, a feeling that she remembers from childhood. She further explained that this contrast establishes right at the very beginning of the film a metaphor for understanding what it means to be a Hindu women in the South African context. These visuals would then also be accompanied by a poem that she found that speaks about the restriction and oppression that the sari represents.

Next, Manjini took us through her interviews. She explained to Jessica, Shannon and myself that once Patma had decided to no longer participate in the film, even after she'd spent weeks trying to convince her otherwise, she decided to change her approach. First, she located two other women who defied conventional expectations. The first was a woman who was widowed at the age of 21 after a year and a half of marriage. Her father told her that she could not return home because it was her duty to remain in the home of her late husband's family and serve them for the rest of her life. She never remarried because of the stigma attached. She did however take over a printing press business in order to help with the family's finances. She ran a successful business for decades and travelled the world while doing so. And all of this was done in a sari.

The second woman that Manjini chose to give prominence to in her film was actually her cousin who is a clinical psychologist. This particular cousin resisted tradition by wearing a white sari (symbolic of a widow) for her wedding.

To supplement these interviews, Manjini then returned to the cultural and religious organisations to which she belongs and spoke to all the female members. She explained that she was making a film and wanted to capture the story of the sari in a Hindu women's life. Thereafter, she told them that whoever was interested should pitch up at a particular venue on a particular date at a particular time. She also asked them to bring along old photographs of themselves in saris. The response, according to Manjini, was phenomenal. She said that she could not believe the number of women that wanted a space to share their story. Furthermore, they took the task quite seriously: they came to the venue dressed up in their saris. Some even brought along samples of other saris that they

owned; saris that represented key moments in their lives.

Interestingly, since the community of Roshnee is not a large one, word of this mass interview reached the ears of Patma. This somehow seemed to catalyse a change of heart and without explanation she called up Manjini in the days preceding our final workshop to say that she would redo the interview. Manjini, of course, grabbed the opportunity.

The last set of visuals that Manjini shared was her old family photographs. She said that she wanted to structure the film in a way that showed how the interviews with the women of the community actually contribute to an understanding of her conflicted sense of culture, religion and gender. Working through their stories gave her perspective on her own. She said that the process of filmmaking was a journey of discovery not only in terms of herself but in terms of the women in her community. Her process of understanding by the end of the film had been a positive one that she wanted to capture at the end through a more positive poem on the sari.

Overall, Manjini's development as a filmmaker was strong: she showed a keen sense for good stories and knew how to successfully elicit those stories; she knew how to tell an interesting story and understood the importance of the visual. Most significantly, she made mistakes through the process, learned from them, problem solved and moved on. Manjini also revealed through the process that the feminist in her is strong. I'm not sure if she was even aware of this. She understood so clearly the principles of agency and expressive space in terms of participatory video, and took full advantage of this opportunity so that the women in her film had a voice. I will discuss these issues from a critical perspective in the following chapter.

Episode 2:

Mrs. Singaram - This is MY Film: (Re)Claiming the Space of Representation

Initial Interactions

Mr. Saths Chettiar of the Tamil Federation of KwaZulu-Natal responded to my call for participants on 22 September 2012. He sent me an email with a list of names of women who belonged to this organization. One of the ladies on the list was a Mrs. Yogambal Singaram. I recognized her name

because both she and her late husband were well-known performers within the South African Indian community. Her husband, Pregalathan, played the *mridangam*¹⁶ and she is a classically-trained *Bharatanatyam*¹⁷ dancer and teacher. I never expected that when I forwarded my call for participants to all the women on Mr. Chettiar's list that Mrs. Singaram would be the first and only person to respond. I knew that she was a very busy woman involved in a variety of activities, so I was quite surprised that she wanted to participate in my project. In fact, her very brief 2 line email (Singaram, 2012) read "Goodmorning. Received your mail concerning your research project. I am able to give you assistance if you still require it. Hope I can be of help. Thank you."

To be honest, I didn't quite know what to make of the email. Was she agreeing to be a part of the project because she was truly interested or because she thought I needed help? Since she was only the second person to show interest in the project, I decided to give her a chance nevertheless. I sent her a response requesting more information about herself; the same request that Manjini had responded to. It was almost a month later before Mrs. Singaram responded to this email. Again, it was a brief email. However, I was able to distill from her message that she was proud of her own achievements and the successes of her family, that dance formed a major part of who she is, that she is completely occupied by affiliations to several cultural, religious and charitable organisations and that she is "a Hindu Woman who motivates other women to make a difference in their society" (Singaram, 2012). I was intrigued by this last comment. Why would she mention that? Did she feel that my project had the potential to fulfill this objective? I decided I would ask her when we eventually met.

Workshop 1

Again, after several calls and emails, I managed to arrange my first Durban workshop with Mrs. Singaram and Jessica. The two-day workshop was held on 30 & 31 May 2013, also at *Sica's Guesthouse*. Due to conflicting schedules and work commitments, Shannon and I were forced to hold the workshop during the evening of 30 May and then during the day of 31 May. Jessica had arrived early, like Shannon and I. The workshop was scheduled to begin at 5pm. However, by the time we began, Mrs. Singaram had not yet arrived. And then, just about an hour into our

¹⁶A South Indian wooden drum played as the primary instrument for Carnatic music accompaniment.

¹⁷An Indian classical dance that originated in South Indian temples as a performance for the gods.

discussion, I heard some tiny but hurried footsteps outside the conference room we were working in. A few seconds later, Mrs. Singaram, a short woman with a rather chic hairstyle, burst into the boardroom completely apologetic for being late and speaking very quickly to explain herself. She immediately rushed up to me, gave me a firm squeeze and introduced herself to Shannon and Jessica. At that very moment, any fatigue that we'd been experiencing from earlier in the day completely disappeared and the energy level of the room increased tenfold. Her presence was effervescent from the moment she stepped into that boardroom until the moment we parted at the end of the following day.

After a brief catch-up on what we'd been discussing before she arrived, we asked Mrs. Singaram to share her background, upbringing and life with us. She was born and brought up in Chatsworth, an Indian community south of Durban. Even though her father's family owned a banana farm, they were not wealthy. On her mother's side, the men were all well-educated but the women were expected to leave school early and either get married or help out at home. Mrs. Singaram argued that her mother was the brainpower in her parents' relationship even though she was only allowed to finish Standard 4/Grade 6 education and was married off to her husband at the age of fifteen. She claims that her mother was an intelligent and enterprising young woman who forced her father to start his own business and then managed the business' books for him. Basically, she was in charge in every sense of the word.

It was also Mrs. Singaram's mother who noticed her love for dance at an early age and sent her off to Indian classical dance lessons when she was in Standard 1/Grade 3. Dance became a central part of Mrs. Singaram's life which eventually led to her being one of only two Indian women in South Africa to graduate in *Bharathanatyam* in the 1970s. Mrs. Singaram attempted a diploma in commerce; she didn't enjoy this and quickly grew bored. She also felt that she'd reached her peak in dance in South Africa and expressed to her parents that she would like to go to India to expand her teaching qualification in the dance form. So, her parents gave her the option of either having a 21st birthday party or going to India to study dance. Her parents warned her though that if they'd be sending her money every month for her lessons and daily survival, they would not be able to visit her in India. She would have to wait out the four years alone in India. She nevertheless made the bold decision to go, a decision which, she argued, was completely uncharacteristic for an Indian

woman in South Africa at that time.

Mrs. Singaram arranged her own *arangetram*¹⁸ in India once her training was complete. Her parents couldn't afford to attend the *arangetram* in India which saddened her. She was alone and forced to arrange the event by herself. Mrs. Singaram is convinced that the crucial life lessons and survival skills that she learned during her time in India is what prepared her for a life of independence, especially after the death of her husband.

I have to detour for a moment now to share my motivation for what I am about to discuss. Since this project is about the stories of South African Hindu women, it would not be expected that their husbands or partners be discussed in any great detail. However, in the case of Mrs. Singaram, I do feel that it is necessary to discuss her husband. They were an inseparable couple who respected and cherished each other. As she puts it, "The only place we never went together was the toilet!" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). A large portion of our first meeting was devoted to her discussing her life and relationship with her husband, almost as if she saw herself through his eyes. Interestingly though, as I reveal later in my discussion of Mrs. Singaram, the way she viewed herself changed as the project progressed. Planning her film led her to a moment of realization.

To begin with, Mrs. Singaram told a very quaint story of how she and her husband met. They were both studying in India at the same time but never met. Mr. Singaram always claimed that he had attended her *arangetram* and that's how he knew of her, but because she was returning to South Africa and he had to stay on in India to finish his training, there had been no opportunity for them to meet. After returning to South Africa, Mrs. Singaram continued with her dance teaching. Mr. Singaram, however, only completed his training a couple of years later. On his return to South Africa, like all other artists, he was expected to do a live performance for the community to show off his training and skill. For this particular performance, he approached Mrs. Singaram with the excuse of needing a dancer in his programme as he didn't want the audience growing bored having to watch him play his *mridangam* song after song.

¹⁸ Commonly explained as the 'graduation' of *Bharatanatyam* dancers who've completed their training, *arangetram* actually refers to the first public performance on stage for any student of Indian classical art. The event signifies the transition of a student in training to someone who can now teach the artform.

Mrs. Singaram, being the feisty individual that she is, requested payment. She told him that she was not prepared to dance for free since she was classically trained. In her words, “I’m not some wishy-washy entertainer jumping about the place!” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). He agreed that he would pay her and asked how much. She very cleverly responded, “I’ll have to think about it and get back to you. It’s not going to be cheap – you have to pay according to my skill and training” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). He was taken by her very candid manner because, from that point on, they developed a business relationship in terms of performing together and they eventually fell in love and married. She described her life with him as a wonderful one. Besides acknowledging her talent, he respected, encouraged and supported her. In their marriage, he placed her on a pedestal. She spoke also about how, even just before his very sudden illness and death, he made all the guests at their eldest daughter’s wedding stand up and applaud her for the role that she’s played in his life and the lives of their two daughters.

As she spoke, I kept thinking of their public profile when I was growing up. Even though she never felt sidelined in her relationship with her husband, she definitely always took second place in the media coverage of the two of them. Mr. Singaram was indeed a very talented *mridangam* player. Watching the speed of his hands, made you wonder whether his fingers were actually touching the instrument at all. However, Mrs. Singaram was equally talented in her dance and, although she was always acknowledged as his wife, she never quite earned the same reputation for her talent as her husband did for his. But, as she later argues, she never noticed or felt this way because of the attention that he paid her in their marriage. At the workshop, Mrs. Singaram never quite made this connection. There may have been several reasons for this. First, at the time of the workshop, it had been just under three years since her husband had passed on: according to her, the feelings of loss and loneliness, still felt fresh. Second, she possibly felt very fortunate to have had such a husband for the time during which they were married as patriarchal sentiment was still strong in the Indian community among their generation. I didn’t highlight the issue of the imbalance in their public representation at that point but I did make a mental note to address it indirectly a little further on in the workshop.

After sharing her story, Mrs. Singaram suddenly realized that she didn’t fully understand what exactly I was doing with this project. I was glad that she’d brought up the issue because I had

also intended to clarify why she had agreed to participate. She said that when she received the email from Mr. Chettiar, all she understood was that the project was a PhD by an Indian woman about Indian women. She agreed to be involved because she is prepared to do anything to contribute to the empowerment of women. After explaining the project to her and the process that would be followed, I discovered that neither Mrs. Singaram nor Jessica had received my initial call for participants. The letter had detailed the aims of the project and what I required of the participants. Mrs. Singaram had had no idea that she would be learning how to make a film or even that she would be getting filmmaking equipment to take away with her. At this point I felt it necessary to ask why she would join a project that she understood so little about. She responded plainly, “I like adventure” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c).

Since we were running out of time for this workshop, Mrs. Singaram and Jessica were not required to complete the practical tasks that had been set during the workshop. The tasks were, however, explained to them and they were urged to complete them in their own time. Although, I have to admit, I was really doubtful whether or not they would actually attempt the tasks, since each of their lives appeared to be so hectic.

Both Mrs. Singaram and Jessica became very quiet once the scriptwriting lesson began. I was not quite sure whether they were very tired since it was almost 8.30 pm on the first day of the workshop, whether they were just trying to be attentive or whether they were completely overwhelmed by the material. Given their reaction to the equipment lessons the following day, I’m inclined to say it’s most likely the latter. Nevertheless, we forged on and concluded at a reasonable hour.

We began the following day of the workshop with Shannon’s presentation on documentary. Shannon began by explaining that much of her presentation, like my own on classic narrative film, lays bare the constructedness of documentary in its various forms specifically and the medium of film itself in general. Mrs. Singaram suddenly interrupted at this point with, “Yes please. I want to learn everything. I know nothing about filmmaking” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). She then proceeded to talk about how she likes watching television shows that take you behind the scenes of a film set and reveal to you how a particular film is made. She was quick to add though that the

entire process appeared to be very difficult.

This was the first incident since we'd begun the workshop with Jessica and herself that she'd actually indicated some form of interest in making a film even though she'd acknowledged the night before how limited she felt by representations of Indian women in mainstream media. Although she didn't indicate at this moment or the night before that she would like to change these representations, there was definitely a clear indication from her that documentary could be a possible means to representing issues of empowerment. Her second interruption came a short while later when she enquired whether or not documentary had to be scripted before the footage was shot and edited. This question seemed to interest Jessica as well. Shannon responded, as she had with Manjini, by saying that it was best to work with a set of guidelines or a basic plan for capturing the footage of whatever topic you were investigating but to remain open to 'chance' footage that may present itself once the process begins. Shannon explained that you should have a basic idea of the story for a particular documentary but that you should not be bound to it. Sometimes, Shannon added, the material you've captured may speak another story to you. They both seemed to understand this, so we moved on. Funnily though, just as Manjini's questions during the initial workshop seemed to foreshadow her eventual filmmaking process, so too did this particular question for Mrs. Singaram's film.

Filmmaking Trajectory

Before the workshop ended that Friday afternoon, I asked Mrs. Singaram and Jessica if they'd come up with any possible ideas for the films that they would have to make for the project. Mrs. Singaram's response was that she would probably do a film for *Soroptimist International*, an international social development organization devoted to empowering young women around the world through a variety of skills like dance, etc. This was a really good idea, but as with Manjini, I worried about where her own story would fit into this. I decided to ask her. She responded without hesitation that her story was embedded in everything that she does. She loves her cultural and charitable work and that that is just who she is. She didn't quite have an idea yet of what angle she would use to approach the story but was certain she would figure it out. It was at this point that Jessica interrupted with, "Well, if you aren't going to make a film about your dancing Mrs. Singaram, then I would like to make a film about you" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Jessica

went on to explain that she could just imagine how beautiful the visuals of Mrs. Singaram dancing would be. Mrs. Singaram's reaction to this was mixed. At first, she seemed a little embarrassed that someone considered her story interesting and worthy of attention. And next, she saw the opportunity of having herself filmed as beneficial to her own film. Her role within *Soroptimist International* is to provide dance education to young women in South Africa, not only as a form of therapy and expression, but also as a skill they could use throughout their lives. She agreed to be the subject of Jessica's film but to perhaps also get some footage of her teaching dance to these young women.

Mrs. Singaram then asked if she could propose a second idea. Of course, at this point, I assured her that she could have as many ideas or films as she wanted, since it was all about *her* story. She reminded us that her eldest daughter is currently pregnant with her first child and would be having the baby in the next two months or so. They knew that it was going to be a boy. They'd been for a scan a couple weeks before that confirmed this. The consulting doctor had apparently also asked them during the session, "So who's got the long arms in the family?" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Mrs. Singaram took this as a sign of the divine working through their lives. Her husband, who'd died almost 3 years before had had very long arms. People had joked that this may have been the reason he played the *mridangam* so well. "I think I'd like to shoot some footage of my first grandchild when he's born and maybe I can integrate it into my film" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Again, I felt a little wary that the film might turn into an ode to her husband. But, I reminded myself that the aim of this study was to allow the participants to express and represent themselves in whatever manner they chose through film. If I constantly drew her attention to the fact that this is her story, would I not be forcing her into a particular direction? Would this not skew my results for this project? Who was I to judge at this point whether or not her story would adequately emerge from the stories of her husband and grandson?

I decided to stop agonising over the issue. I responded, "That's a lovely idea Mrs. Singaram". I then related something that my mother had once told me and that the female priest at my wedding had reiterated. In Hindu philosophy, a person's life is only complete once they have grandchildren. Grandchildren represent that you've completed the circle of life. People who pass on before having had grandchildren are perceived to have had an unfulfilled life. Mrs. Singaram nodded in

agreement as I spoke. So, I offered that perhaps she could keep this in mind when constructing the film around her grandson.

The workshop was drawing to a close and so we had to start getting on with the lesson on how to use the film equipment and editing programme. I have to say that I've never been more amused. Both Mrs. Singaram and Jessica reacted in the most hilarious way possible. They were first extremely excited to be receiving brand new equipment. They rushed to open the packaging, and expressed their wonder and amazement at how beautifully black and shiny the equipment was. However, the moment Shannon said, "Ok lovely ladies, let's switch on these devices!" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c), the panic in the room was palpable. They had no idea what to do with themselves let alone the equipment. They laughed nervously which reminded me so much of my own parents who are so flustered by technology. For example, my father once thought that the floppy disk holder of the old desktop computers was a cup holder! And my mother has recently complained that iPads and tablets have one serious flaw in their design: they have no buttons!

In order to quell their fears, I teased them a little about the generation gap. We all had a little giggle and then went straight into the lesson. It definitely took more time to teach them the basics than it had taken with Manjini. Before they left the workshop they did, however, make sure that Shannon had set all the functions to 'automatic' so that they never had to adjust anything. It would literally just be a matter of 'pointing and shooting'.

After the workshop, unlike Manjini, Mrs. Singaram barely kept contact. When she did get involved in the email conversations, they were very brief. After some weeks, I called Mrs. Singaram just to get some feedback on how she was progressing with her film and capturing footage. She said to me that she actually hadn't done much work because her daughter fell seriously ill a week before the birth of the baby, and then passed the virus she'd had on to the baby. They both had to remain in the hospital's Intensive Care Unit for a few weeks. So, Mrs. Singaram had been busy with that. She mentioned, however, that once both her daughter and the baby had been discharged from hospital, she'd started playing around with the camera and had already captured some of her intended footage.

The correspondence between us slowed down once again. Around September 2013, I was really desperate to arrange another meeting with all of the participants, so that we could view footage and make editing decisions. I decided to text message Mrs. Singaram since I hadn't received any email responses from her. She replied quickly. It was a short, apologetic message saying that her grandchild had been ill again and that she didn't think she was in a position to finish the project. I literally felt the blood drain from my face and torso as I read her message. My deadlines for the completion of the PhD were looming and I didn't have enough time to find another participant and go through the same process. But, besides all of that and the doubts I had about how she would tell her story, I was losing a strong participant whose involvement I knew was going to make a significant impact on this project. There was still so much I needed to learn from her. I couldn't have her participation just end. I now understood what Manjini had been through with Patma: fear of losing a wealth of knowledge, a realization that your final message (Manjini's through film, mine through the thesis) is not going to be as complete as you were hoping – a feeling of hopelessness.

In my panic, I called up my supervisor who advised me, as he had for the Manjini/Patma drama, to actually try one more time with Mrs. Singaram. He made a very good point: I owed it to the research process to try at least one more time. He reminded me that my approach was a participatory one. He asked me to offer to help her complete her film. He said to ask her what she'd already done and what she had left to be done. He said that it might cost me some of the time that I'd allocated to making my own film or writing up my thesis, but, if she agreed to be helped, the time spent would be worth it in the end.

I sent her a second message saying that I valued her contribution to the project, that I understood the pressures and stress of a sick child (having a 2¹/₂ year old daughter of my own at the time), but that I would really appreciate her continuing with the project. I offered for Shannon and myself to drive down to Durban to help her shoot her film and edit it. And, that was all that it took to convince her. She was grateful for the help and revealed that she was just feeling a little overwhelmed by the camera and the process. She also indicated that she had lots of footage of her grandchild and family. It turned out that she'd been working on the project all along. She'd interestingly enough engaged both her daughters and sons-in-law in the participatory process by

involving them in the filming of their lives. It was an interesting mix of footage in which they all captured each other and negotiated the camera as a storytelling device in their lives.

After Mrs. Singaram agreed to the assistance, I called her up to decide on when and where we could meet and a plan for what further material she'd like captured and exactly how she'd like it to be captured. She was a little uncertain – so, I reminded her of some of the ideas that had been discussed at our first meeting. She latched on to the idea of filming her teach one of her dance classes. She admitted that she had remembered discussing this idea with the rest of us but didn't know how she would capture the footage of herself teaching on her own because there were specific shots that she wanted. This, to a certain extent, also contributed to her anxiety about completing the project. I assured her that this would no longer be an issue. All she had to do now was direct us by putting together a plan for the structure of her film and a list of shots that she'd like to use.

The day before we'd arranged to meet, I called Mrs. Singaram again to finalise venue and time details. I also asked about her plan for shooting. I was pleasantly surprised by the effort she'd actually put into thinking about how she'd like to structure her film and capture the visuals. The first thing she asked was if it were possible to use two cameras and if there was a spare that we could bring along. She wanted us to focus one on her teaching the class, and another on the class actually following her instruction. This indicated that she'd started processing the possibilities of the medium – she was beginning to think like a filmmaker, about capturing simultaneous storylines. I assured her that we'd bring a spare camera. She said she'd also like to be interviewed by someone. In other words, she was uncomfortable with direct address to the camera although there were certain bits of information that she wanted to share. She just needed someone to ask her a set of questions that she could answer on camera. She knew what she wanted to say and she would advise us on the questions accordingly. I found this quite fascinating. For this film, there were so many different levels of involvement on her part – not only was she directing the piece, she'd held the camera and captured footage herself, she'd had and wanted more footage captured of her, and she wanted a speaking space that allowed her to address the audience. I'm not sure if she was entirely aware of this aspect of her growth at this point, but she was clearly claiming the space of filmic representation.

There were two more things that Mrs. Singaram wanted included in her video. Her husband had collected newspaper cuttings, photographs, and pamphlets and programmes from each of their performances throughout their lives. He'd stuck them all in a scrapbook, so that they'd have a document of their lives as performers. It was a shared space of history for Mrs. Singaram, her husband and her eldest daughter who is also a classically trained dancer (by Mrs. Singaram herself) and a violinist. She wanted to include footage of some of these images. With this, I could see two things occurring: in the first instance, she was thinking of cutaway footage for her film and, in the second instance, she was thinking of a trajectory for her film. The footage of her grandson spoke to the notion of a future, the footage of her family and dance class spoke to the present, and the scrapbook spoke to the past. Underlying this decision, whether she was aware of it or not, was the fact that history provides a context of understanding and specificity.

Lastly, her late husband used to run *mridangam* classes in the same venue that she ran her dance lessons. Those music classes were now run by his former student. She also wanted us to film some of that.

The next day was Saturday, and Shannon and I left Pietermaritzburg very early with my husband, Vikash, and my child, Ruhi, in tow. Mrs. Singaram's dance class was held at the Cato Manor Road temple hall. It's a well-known temple in South Africa because it was one of the first to be built. It's a quaint little temple and I know it well because my sister had been married there 6 years previously. In addition, the priest that runs the temple conducted the marriage ceremony of my uncle and his wife 23 years ago. The only problem was the location of the temple – it had become a high crime area and is noted for being a hijacking and burglary hotspot. So, my husband had to come along with us to watch the cars, equipment and our daughter (because she's too young for us to leave alone at home), while Shannon and I got on with the business of things.

When Mrs. Singaram arrived, she greeted us in her usual bubbly manner before we went into the venue to set-up the equipment. Once in the venue, my excitement started to surface. I was quite keen to see how my daughter would react to the dance class. At this point, she was close to 3 years old. She loves dancing to all kinds of music (my mother has introduced her to some Tamil music, Vikash has introduced her to some Hindi music and her nanny has introduced her to some Zulu

music), but her main exposure is to English music. I hoped that she would enjoy the experience. I'd always wanted to learn *Bharatanatyam* myself but we could never afford the lessons because my mother was a single working mother. I took ballet lessons instead because they were on offer as an extra mural activity at my school and were vastly cheaper.

The lesson began and Shannon and I got on with the filming. It was a little chaotic with dance and music lessons going on at the same time. Also, Mrs. Singaram teaches several levels of dance at one time. So, you have one group taking instruction from her and another practising on the side. Plus, the parents of the students walk in and out at all times, or sit around wherever they choose. I found this approach and structure to the lessons quite delightful. It really did speak to community behaviour – a sense of understanding and compromise. And, my child thoroughly enjoyed the 'busy-ness'.

Once the lesson came to an end, we sat down to prepare for Mrs. Singaram's interview and to discuss what exactly she wanted to use from the scrapbook to include in her film. One of the first things that Mrs. Singaram said as we started to chat was, "I want this to be *my* film". Shannon and I smiled at each other knowingly. We had just discussed in the car during the drive down to Durban that, given our previous discussions with Mrs. Singaram, her film was probably going to be heavily focused on her husband. This new focus on herself indicated that something had changed in the process and, without provocation, she explained why.

She said that she'd come to realize in the process of planning her film and gathering material to include in it, that she had spent a lot of time documenting her husband's life. She'd assisted in a documentary that had been made about her husband, and she was crucial in the production and publication of a book that her husband wrote, which provides step-by-step lessons of how to play the *mridangam* and *tabla*¹⁹. In addition, there were many CDs of her husband's performances that had been produced (some of which she had collaborated on). There are many documents of his life to ensure that samples of his work are always available and that his legacy endures. She then sadly remarked, "But there's nothing to document my life and my dancing. That's why I want this film to

¹⁹An Indian percussion instrument used in both Indian folk and classical art music. The instrument as a whole usually comprises of a pair of hand drums.

be about *me*. Is that fine?” Of course, it was fine. It was what I’d been hoping would happen all along. Once again, in this project, I felt a sense of pride and affirmation. I could now see the value of the approach I’d chosen.

We then began the interview with Mrs. Singaram. She directed the process by telling me exactly what she wanted to be asked and where she’d like to be positioned in the venue in order to capture an interesting background. Before we left the temple hall, Mrs. Singaram asked us to interview a mother and daughter who’d both been taught by her. Again, she directed the process by suggesting a few questions that they could be asked. She said she thought it might be nice to get some extra material for the film.

Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop

Mrs. Singaram had been very eager to attend the final workshop with the other research participants. Not only did she want to meet Manjini and reconnect with Jessica, but she also didn’t want to be alone for her husband’s birthday on the Friday evening. However, Mrs. Singaram never made it to us – she fell seriously ill on Friday (11 October 2013) while at work and had to be rushed to hospital. The rest of us at the workshop were only made aware of this on Saturday morning when Mrs. Singaram, then stable, sent us a text message from her hospital bed. She had apparently been on the verge of a stroke and was fortunate to have recognized early that something was not right. Her text message was extremely apologetic. She also expressed some disappointment about not being able to spend the weekend getting to know her fellow participants. Since the plan for the weekend was to edit footage, Mrs. Singaram, being unable to attend, was not going to be able to edit her footage. Another plan had to be made. Unfortunately, my child fell quite ill and, once she recovered, I fell very ill. So, there was nothing that I could do for the entire month of November and part of December. Shannon stepped in to assist me. She arranged a meeting with Mrs. Singaram to fetch her footage and discuss how she’d like her film to be edited. And so her film was put together accordingly.

Episode 3: Jessica - Film as Therapy

Initial Interactions

Jessica Gounden, in response to a direct email from Mr. Chettiar, agreed to participate in my project. Like Mrs. Singaram, her email was rather brief, “Hi. Thank you. I will try to assist her” (Gounden, 2012). This message reached me on 25 September 2012. Assuming that she’d read through the whole document requesting participants, I decided to wait a week before I contacted her directly. There was no response to my letter. I then sent her an email requesting the information pertaining to her interest in the project, her religious involvement, etc. Once again, she responded very briefly saying that she would send me the information as soon as possible. I didn’t hear from her for a few weeks. I eventually decided to call her directly to get the feedback I required, to explain the project further and to acquire confirmation of her participation.

Our conversation was quite short. She indicated once again that she definitely wanted to be involved and that she would try to do as much as she possibly could to help me. Over the next couple of months, as I’d explained in the section on Mrs. Singaram, it was quite difficult trying to co-ordinate and arrange a meeting date and venue for a first workshop. In addition, Jessica’s responses to my emails and text messages were few and far between. Eventually, she sent me a Facebook invite. I discovered from her Facebook page that her work was fairly high profile. It was not clearly stated in her background information what exactly she did for a living but she had uploaded photos of herself with well-known local and international politicians. I felt slightly intimidated by all of this and was, yet again, intrigued to find out why someone as established as herself would want to be involved in my project.

Nevertheless, we were finally able to arrange the workshop with Mrs. Singaram at *Sica’s Guesthouse*, but not without issue. After a couple of telephone interactions, I discovered that Jessica was definitely a difficult ‘no-nonsense’ type of woman. She was very specific about her tastes and needs to the point that she often offended people. This concerned and confused me, and eventually her behaviour did begin to hinder my process. She didn’t seem to understand that this was a research project with a limited time and budget. At first, she complained about the venues I’d suggested. So, *Sica’s Guesthouse* was booked on her suggestion. She insisted on a complete hour-

by-hour itinerary which was almost impossible for me to do. I had a plan for the workshop and certain lessons that had to be completed but, given the participatory nature of the project, I couldn't commit, for example, to hour one being solely scriptwriting or hour two being discussion. And lastly, she also wanted to bring her son along which my research grant strictly did not allow for. Undoubtedly, it was frustrating to say the least and I did find myself growing impatient. But, I experienced terrible feelings of guilt at the same time. Should I not be more understanding and accommodating given the research approach that I'd taken? At this point, I made a conscious decision to reserve judgment when it came to Jessica's behaviour and approach. And, I'm glad that I did because so much of her story resembled my own past. I was humbled by listening to her experiences and felt privileged that she was prepared to share them in such an open and honest way.

Workshop 1

As previously mentioned, Jessica arrived at the guesthouse earlier in the day like Shannon and myself. We bumped into her in the passage between our rooms. She'd brought her 15 year-old son, Wade, along but made it clear that she would be paying for him separately. I felt a little awkward about this, but there was no way I could have helped her.

Since Mrs. Singaram hadn't yet arrived, we decided to start the workshop so as not to lose time. Bearing in mind that there was very little that I knew about Jessica because our interactions had been so few and so brief, I began the workshop, as I did with Manjini, with the story of my life as a woman, as an academic, as a Hindu and as an Indian in South Africa. I then asked Jessica to share the story of her life, and what followed was not only unexpected but rather shocking as well.

Jessica initially described the very poor background from which she came. She was born and brought up in Chatsworth. She lived with her parents in a one-room house that they rented. Her father was a door-to-door salesman and since they never had enough money, they often found themselves eating meals at her aunt's house (her mother's sister). Growing up in these circumstances, Jessica prepared herself for a life of struggle after school. She never dreamed of a tertiary education because it was so far outside of their frame of reference. However, she continued to finish school and at the end of matric (Grade 12), much to her surprise, not only did she pass but

she performed well enough to gain entry into university. She spoke to her parents with a heavy heart knowing that they could never afford to send her to university. She was pleasantly surprised when her mother, a woman with only a Class 2/Grade 2 education who could not even sign her own name, encouraged her to grab the opportunity to make something of herself.

Jessica's voice waivered as she spoke about her mother. She was in absolute awe of the fact that her illiterate, largely uneducated mother could see the value of a young woman having an education. I interjected at this point, "Jessica, don't you think that it's because your mother didn't have an education that she wanted better for you? She knew the life of suffering and poverty that she'd led without an education. Perhaps, she didn't want that life for you?" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Jessica thought about it for a few moments and hesitantly agreed. She explained her hesitance by continuing that her mother had never left their context of poverty to know what a better life was. Furthermore, she hadn't interacted with educated women to know that their lives were better. At which point, I interjected again, "Well then maybe she just had foresight or dreams or enough faith and belief in you as *her* child to know that you would flourish if you had the opportunity" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Jessica didn't respond but her silence somehow seemed to suggest that I could be right.

Jessica's father also seemed to be convinced by her mother's enthusiasm. However, there was still much left to sort out. Besides the issue of finances, Jessica had to decide what to study. Her first choice was Hotel Management and Catering and her second choice was Law. The decision to apply for Law stemmed from one of her uncles who belonged to the police force. He told her that she could become a Detective Warrant Officer after three years of a BA Law degree. He advised her to forget about catering because "everybody knows how to cook" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). And so Jessica decided to pursue the Law degree.

Her parents never bothered her with the financial arrangements. They would participate in a community lottery and ensure that their payout coincided with the deadlines for Jessica's university fees. Although she worried about the money, her parents always made a plan to make sure her fees were paid. The one thing her mother did say to her though was that if she ever failed, they would not be able to send her back to university. In other words, she had one opportunity, so she had to

make it work. Understanding and respecting the sacrifice that her parents were making, Jessica ensured that she worked hard every single day. She kept to herself and actually had no sense of her academic performance in relation to the rest of the class. She was just happy to be passing her modules and proceeding to the subsequent year. At one point, when she and her father went to pay her fees, the cashier gave them a portion of the money back. Somewhat confused, they asked why. The cashier was rather amused. She said, “because you’ve done well in your studies, the university will pay for a portion of your fees” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). The unexpected good news convinced the entire family that the decision to let her study was the right one. For the first time in their lives, said Jessica, they had spare cash that was not accounted for by bills and expenses.

As she approached the end of her three-year degree, she noticed that her classmates were frantically trying to decide what they would specialize in over the next two years. She had no idea what they were talking about. When they asked her what she intended to do – she naively and proudly said, “I’m going to become a Detective Warrant Officer” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Her classmates laughed at her. They asked her if she was crazy. They couldn’t understand why she would choose to go into the police force and earn a minimal salary after three years of studying when she could do a further two years and be a proper attorney. She thought about this long and hard. She eventually realized that this was an opportunity she could not afford to pass up. Nobody in her family had and few people in her community have had or will ever have the chance to become professionals of any sort, let alone a lawyer. Her only problem was telling her parents that they would need to come up with money for another two years. But, yet again, they obliged without question.

Sadly, Jessica’s mother passed away before she finished her third year and never made it to her graduation. Jessica’s father did go to the graduation and it turned out to be one of the most special moments of her life. As she reached the podium before the Dean called out her name, she was handed a slip of paper that read “Best Final Year Law Student”.

Jessica’s difficulties did not end with the completion of her law degree. Running parallel to her studies was a rather tumultuous romance. Jessica and Louis were childhood sweethearts. They were neighbours and had grown up together. Louis’ life had been very troubled. Besides the

poverty that characterized his upbringing, Louis was orphaned and grew up with his extended family. In his late teens and early 20s, Louis modeled himself on a 'bad boy' image. Jessica giggles at how she'd been attracted to his bike, tattoos and leather jacket. For a very long time, they both snuck around for fear of family judgment. Eventually, their relationship became public and they married. However, according Jessica, while she had gone to university, gained a qualification, found work and constantly attempted to improve herself, Louis was happy to continue to do the same thing, over and over again every single day. He ran a car spray-painting business. This, together with hanging around with his friends (mostly, according to Jessica, the wrong crowd), was all that he did throughout the 18 years of their relationship (6 years of courtship, 12 years of marriage).

Besides the alcoholism and lack of family commitment, Louis was emotionally abusive. Eventually, this escalated to physical abuse. Even while all this was going on in their marriage, Jessica was moving up in her professional life but still continued to stay with him. She says that she was always reminded about what her mother had said to her when she found out that she had been sneaking around with Louis. She told her that what she was doing was wrong, warned her that Louis was not a good man, and said that if she was adamant about continuing to date him, she must remember that the decision was her own and that she would have to live with it. In addition, after her mother's death, she'd spoken to her aunts (her mother's sisters) about the problems that she was experiencing in her relationship. They brushed it all off as normal. They said that every marriage has these issues and men are always problematic. They then revealed to her that her uncles had also provided a fair share of trouble that they had to endure on their own. Women have to be strong and keep the family together - that is the lesson that they shared with her.

Over time, Jessica realized that Louis, the man that she'd fell in love with and wanted to save, didn't have the emotional maturity to deal with her success. After each abusive incident, he would cry and make her feel guilty by saying that he was a 'nobody' in comparison to her and that he felt isolated by her constant self-improvement. Jessica, of course, would always feel guilty about this and would try even harder to ensure that Louis always felt valued in the marriage. This, however, was never enough. She related an incident that hurt her more deeply than even the physical abuse. When Jessica had finally completed her specialization in family law and conveyancing, she

decided to open her own practice in Chatsworth close to where she lived. She bought a small, old house for her offices. She spent her own time and money renovating and kitting the place out. Louis, who had the strength and skill to help her, never did. On the day of her big opening, she invited her family, friends and community members to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Louis never pitched up. He was so bitter and jealous about her success that he refused to share one of the most significant days of her life and career.

There were many occasions when Jessica tried to leave or kick him out. But these separations never lasted very long because there were children involved and he would always return to the excuse that he paled in comparison to her success. The turning point for Jessica was after one very bad domestic violence incident. She called the police to her home to arrest Louis. By this stage, she'd been practicing family law for a number of years. One of the police officers recognized her from court appearances. He looked at her with sadness and disbelief and asked, "Aren't you that attorney? The one that fights divorce and domestic abuse cases?" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Jessica says that, in that moment, in addition to being embarrassed by the police officer's realization, she felt like a complete failure. This incident is what eventually that led to their divorce in 2007.

Jessica's background speaks both sadness and success. She endured a lot but also overcame a lot. However, what was clear from this first workshop with her was that she had not worked through all of her issues. Once she'd shared her story with us the first time, she kept returning to a discussion of it even after we'd moved onto scriptwriting or documentary, etc. It seemed almost as if she'd never had an open platform with an empathetic audience to share her story. In terms of this behaviour, I find myself thinking about my mother who always claimed that she had moved beyond her troubled marriage with my father and subsequent divorce, but continued to (and sometimes still does) talk about the abuse and affairs that she endured at the hands of my father.

When we broke for dinner the first evening of the workshop, we continued chatting very generally about the project. During the conversation, Mrs. Singaram unexpectedly turned to Jessica and asked, "Which do you think is better: in my case, losing a good husband too early and having wonderful memories as a constant reminder of what you've lost or, in your case, being divorced

from a man who made you unhappy?’” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). And then, Mrs. Singaram burst into tears. Shannon and Wade, Jessica’s 15 year old son who’d been dining with us, looked as shocked and helpless as I’d felt. I felt terribly guilty and hypocritical – here I was promoting an autoethnographic approach for postgraduate study via my PhD, but felt completely paralysed at the first sight of tears. Of course, I went into the project knowing that my participants might share some very sensitive and/or intimate details about their lives. I just didn’t expect it so soon from Mrs. Singaram. We’d only met about two hours before! I didn’t know how to react, so I just reached my hand out and touched her shoulder.

Nevertheless, the purpose of sharing this particular incident in Jessica’s episode (and not Mrs. Singaram’s) links to perhaps the most unexpected response from Jessica. In my head, the answer to Mrs. Singaram’s question was what we would colloquially refer to as ‘a no-brainer’. I would very easily have said to her that it’s better to be divorced and away from the person who abused you and caused all kinds of pain and suffering in your life, than to pine for a wonderful partner who you believe was taken away from you too soon. From my perspective, having lived in a troubled home for the first 5½ years of my life and then in a single parent home for the next 20 years, divorce meant a solution to many problems. Of course, I was speaking as a child in the middle of a problematic relationship. My view of the circumstances is quite different to the woman who actually suffers the abuse. And this is what I learned from Jessica that night.

Her response was that Mrs. Singaram was in a better situation. She explained that Mrs. Singaram was fortunate enough to have been married to a man that loved her unconditionally and who ensured that their life together was filled with happiness. Mrs. Singaram had only good memories of the time that they had spent together. Jessica then explained that even though she is very aware that divorce was probably the best life decision she could ever have made for both herself and her sons, she still cannot overcome the fact that Louis never kept the promises that he had made to her, that she was unable to resolve the issues between them, and that she has to constantly interact with him because they have three sons together. She continued sadly, “maybe it would have been easier to walk away if there were no children involved – you still wonder if you’ve tried hard enough to make it work. I can’t believe that I can’t even have a conversation with him - someone I’d been so intimate with. We only communicate with these short one or two word SMS’ [text messages] now.

We don't even look each other in the eye anymore. That's why your situation is better Mrs. Singaram" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). She then explained to Mrs. Singaram that when a good person dies, the grieving does eventually end and then all you remember is the good. It's not the same with divorce. A poignant response – I had never thought about it in that way and yet I had lived with a mother that probably experienced those feelings every day. I suddenly understood what Jessica meant, why she kept talking about her experiences and why my mother still keeps talking about hers. Besides each of their children being constant reminders of a failed marriage with someone you'd rather forget, there's the issue of accountability. Louis, like my father, has never once taken responsibility for the abuse and the hurt caused. Without acknowledgement of accountability, Jessica and my mother continuously return to their suffering as justification for the decisions that they've made. They need people to know and acknowledge that none of it was their fault.

I learned from Jessica's response that an abusive man can break a woman down to the point that she no longer recognizes herself and her capabilities. Even if she does make the bold step to leave a troubled relationship, it seems that a woman can almost never be whole again. Self-doubt and insecurity are the tint on the lenses through which she will always view herself and the world thereafter.

Filmmaking Trajectory

A large portion of Jessica's involvement in that first workshop was spent discussing her past. She needed the platform to give voice to her issues. I learned from her discussions that she, like Mrs. Singaram, is very involved in the empowerment and education of young girls and women. She is a public figure (in her community and some parts of the larger South African community) who is called on to use her training and experience as an attorney to provide motivational speeches and speak about women's rights. However, it didn't appear as if she ever actually speaks specifically about the abuse she experienced in her marriage. There are probably several reasons for this: the legalities of protecting the reputation and rights of her ex-husband, respecting the feelings of her sons (who may or may not have already experienced the stigma of coming from a broken home), and possibly because these public speaking forums don't necessarily offer her the closeness of

other women or their conversation. Even though we had a lot to go through for the rest of the project, I was glad that Jessica had used the space of the workshop in the way that she had.

There were a few moments during the remaining portion of the project, however, that indicated to me that Jessica had begun to plan her filmmaking process. One of the first issues that she raised related to filming in a public space, “Do you have to get permission from everybody that you capture? And what about the use of the actual location itself?” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). These are important issues that none of the other participants had raised. Shannon explained that if the space was an open public road, for example, permission might not necessarily be required unless someone was caught engaging in a ‘not-so kosher’ activity or a business owner on the road was not happy for the name of his business to be publicized, etc. However, as the location starts to become more and more contained, it is necessary to start gaining the permission of all interested parties. For example, if you were filming at a mall, you would have to gain permission from the mall management, shop owners etc.

In a related query, Jessica asked about how one would deal with highly sensitive issues. For example, personal stories of abuse, rape and terminal illness. I explained to Jessica that this was a difficult issue to negotiate. As I’d explained to Manjini, it is always important to gain the informed consent of the subjects of your film. But, what needs to be taken into consideration is that the informed consent is as much about protecting the subject as it is about protecting the filmmaker. There are several technical ways of dealing with ethical issues on film. One way would be the assurance of anonymity through the blurring of faces and the deepening of voices during personal testimony. But, decisions would have to be made regarding whether or not the integrity and purpose of the film is compromised by these technical solutions. If the story does require a face to be convincing, then the filmmaker will have to commit, as in Manjini’s case, to spending as much time as possible convincing their subjects that their story, however personal, will have an impact. Shannon interjected at this point to talk about what her research on the documentary films of Kim Longinotto revealed. Relating a few examples from Longinotto’s experiences of working with individuals and communities of people, she argued that sometimes we, as filmmakers, and professionals give too little credit to people who experience highly sensitive issues on a daily basis. We assume that they want to be protected from judgment and stigma. However, sometimes, all that

they want or need is a public space to share those highly sensitive issues so that people are made aware and know. Perhaps then, as filmmakers and researchers, we need to approach our participants with a constant reminder of the value of their stories to the greater social good. Perhaps the ethical dilemma that should be highlighted is not so much, “What will happen if I tell my story?” but “What will happen if I *don’t*?”

Jessica’s two questions regarding ethical considerations highlighted two key aspects of her development as a filmmaker. First, her professional background as an attorney made her think about filmmaking in a different way. She understood that people participating in a film always ran the risk of having something to lose. Second, she was considering a story that went beyond herself and that involved other participants. This second issue featured again in another question that Jessica asked later in the documentary discussion (although I’m not sure if, at the time, she was aware of the link), “Who holds the camera if it’s you making the film, especially if you are in the film as well?” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). I found this question critical to the project as a whole. It was almost as if Jessica was proposing a combination of Parasher’s approach - which enables the subject to look back into the camera and address both the filmmaker and viewer, and offer their own perspective on life and their circumstances - and my approach which encourages the woman to be in control of representation by having the camera in her hands. Obviously, this would be a highly complex combination to negotiate if my understanding of “having the camera in her hands” was a simplistic one. However, if I return for a moment to Mrs. Singaram’s filmmaking trajectory, the notion of “having the camera in her hands” was revisited. This, of course, was enabled by the participatory and necessarily self-reflexive nature of the project. Although, Mrs. Singaram didn’t always physically have the camera in her hands, she did direct the type of shots that she wanted, the structure and content of the film and how she wanted it edited. Being in control of representation doesn’t necessarily mean that these women had to always be in physical control of the camera. But, they did have to be aware of how the image works in terms of what it means to be looked at and what it means to do the looking in order to direct the capturing of it. I was glad that Jessica posed this question because it meant that her thinking in terms of film was becoming more and more engaged and critical: is it still my film if I am looking at the camera and not through it?

Jessica's next query related specifically to how documentary is described. She asked Shannon to first clarify why she kept referring to documentary as a film, "Can you call documentary a film?" (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c). Jessica had never heard documentary spoken about in this way and always believed that the crucial difference between documentary and "normal" film was that documentary is educational and informational and that film is purely entertainment. Shannon and I explained that documentary is film because film is the medium on/through which different genres of story find expression. Jessica then understood that documentary, in its various modes, actually broadens normative definitions of the concepts of entertainment, education and information.

Combined (Not-So) Final Workshop

Jessica arrived at the final workshop with her two younger sons: Kent, 12 years old, and Nate, 7 years old. Her husband had refused to look after them for the weekend because it wasn't *his* scheduled weekend in terms of the custody agreement. He agreed to take Wade, the 15 year old, because he had a friend's party to attend and he was old enough to take care of himself. I worried a little about the distraction that the presence of two young children would create since there was so much to complete. But, I decided to look past it - my mother had also battled when we were children to find people to watch us whenever she had to work late or on the weekend. I therefore can't help but have a soft spot in my heart for single mothers.

The plan for the first day of the workshop, as I've already described, was for the participants and myself to show and explain the footage that we'd gathered. We then had to propose a plan for and offer advice to each other regarding the editing of our films. Manjini and Jessica asked that I begin the process since they were a little unsure of exactly what they needed to do. Jessica decided that she would take her turn last.

When Jessica's turn arrived, she admitted in a rather sheepish fashion that her main footage was only shot the day before. She explained that her life had been very busy over the last couple of months and that she'd only been able to capture general handheld footage of her public motivational speaking, weekly attendance of prayer meetings at the temple, and attendance at special functions like weddings, etc. I told her that this was fine as long as she had made the effort to complete her task before the workshop.

Jessica further explained that she had originally thought that she would make a film about Mrs. Singaram. But, this didn't pan out as a result of insufficient time. She then decided that she would try to capture on film the story that she shared of her life during the first workshop with Mrs. Singaram and herself. She enlisted the help of a young friend who she advised on the type of shots that she wanted captured. She decided to capture footage of her typical work day and, like Mrs. Singaram, she also captured an interview of herself in which she appears to be addressing the camera. These two types of footage seemed simple enough to capture. However, the manner in which Jessica decided to capture them was very interesting indeed.

For the scenes of her typical day at the office, Jessica asked her young friend to film each action in a step-by-step by manner, almost as if she was filming with continuity editing in mind. None of the other participants had even thought about this when capturing their footage. And, to add to this process, she had her helper capture shots of different lengths and angles. So, for example, she would begin with a medium shot of herself in her office answering a telephone call at her desk. The following shot would be a low angle long shot of her coming down the stairs to the reception area. She then stopped at the front desk to say something to her secretary before turning to walk out the door. These types of shots continued until she got into her car and drove off.

I found Jessica's process fascinating. She was making a documentary about herself, yet she was choosing to do so by reconstructing and re-enacting scenes of her daily life. Unlike most amateur filmmakers, she didn't just place the camera at a particular spot and allow it to capture her daily activities as they naturally unfolded. She had a specific sense of how she wanted her daily life to unfold on camera. It was almost as if Jessica had taken aspects of my lesson on scriptwriting for classic narrative structure and coupled these with aspects of Shannon's lessons on documentary and the constructedness of the genre. She also seemed to be drawing quite strongly on the self-reflexive and participatory modes of documentary as she seemed to direct her own on-screen presence. I don't think that she thought about in the way that I am describing it here, but the fact that she engaged in this type of process indicates the strength of her new understanding of film. Of all the participants, Jessica had revealed in the workshops that she'd had the least viewing access to a range of films and that her understanding of documentary and the constructedness of the medium of film had been limited.

The next sequence that she captured also intrigued me. She chose to have herself interviewed while driving in her car from her office to one of her friend's homes. She argued that she wanted to capture the 'busy-ness' and routine of her life. There were several things happening with this interesting shot. Firstly, as she spoke, the scenery of the Chatsworth area changed in the background. For instance, she moved from her office which is situated in a rather low-income and unmaintained area of Chatsworth to a more upmarket residential area. The physical background speaks to the levels of social mobility that exist in the area. This shot, although planned more for the interview itself and not for background visual material, provided a poignant backdrop against which Jessica in her mobile interview shares the story of her life, her professional achievements and success, and her growth as a woman. Watching these shots and hearing her say, "I drive this route everyday" indicated to me that she is reminded everyday of where she comes from and of the meaninglessness of her standing in the larger South African context in the face of this social circumstance.

Besides watching Jessica's footage, it was interesting watching her view the footage during the workshop. Firstly, instead of showing us snippets or parts of the different types of footage, she made us watch the full clips. She would be particularly attentive when her interviews were on screen. She had two interviews of herself – one in the car and the other at her friend's home. The content of both interviews was almost exactly the same – in other words, there was a lot of repeated material. However, she watched both sets of footage in their entirety. It seemed almost as if she were working through the content (discussions of her professional success and her troubled marriage) all over again. She seemed, for the first time, to be *listening* to herself talk. It was almost as if she enjoyed the validation and acknowledgement that her onscreen presence provided of the past she endured.

Jessica also seemed to relish the shots of herself interacting with her sons. One in particular seemed to trigger an emotional response which manifested in her physical demeanour: she lifted her one hand off the conference table we were sitting around and covered the side of her face, drooping her shoulders forward almost as if she were closing up. The footage we were viewing was of Jessica and her sons looking at old photographs together. Still facing the screen, Jessica said, "They [her sons] like looking at old photographs of me and their father. Especially the

younger two, because they were very little and have little or no memory of me and their father being together as a family. I enjoy these moments with them... sharing memories” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013d). I realized at that moment, that as much as this project provided an outlet for Jessica, it also seemed to force her to face aspects of her past that she may not have been ready to face. Seeing herself on screen interacting with her children and sharing personal details of her life meant that she had to take ownership of her pain, her fears and her anxieties. In other words, she had to admit that she was still hurting. I wondered, at this point, if she’d realized that too.

When Shannon and I met with Jessica about two months later to assist her with editing her film, I no longer had to wonder. Putting Jessica’s film together had become really problematic because, for some odd reason, her footage ended up being shot on various formats. She was unable to edit on the basic editing programme that came with the camera and we were unable to find an appropriate conversion programme to enable her to edit. Nevertheless, as we started going through the footage again to ascertain the different formats, Jessica suddenly blurted out, “I feel very bad that this film is about me”. “Why?” I asked, “That was the point of the project – to tell your story”. To which she responded, “But when I watch this footage, I seem so self-absorbed. I’ve realized that I had an issue to work through and I used this film for that”. I will not lie – my heart actually fluttered at that moment and I felt goosebumps on my skin. “That’s absolutely perfect,” I said, “the film was meant to fulfill whatever purpose you wanted or needed it to” (Moodley & Milojkovic, 2013c).

My initial interpretation of Jessica’s interaction in the project had been confirmed at that moment. The project, and specifically her film, had become sources of therapy for her to deal with and work through the issues of her past. I explained to her that the reason she felt that she appeared too self-absorbed in her film was probably a result of not being accustomed to seeing herself or women like herself openly sharing their lives as the primary subjects of representation. For Jessica specifically, given her profession and her public role as a motivational speaker, it felt uncomfortable to take centre stage on behalf of herself as opposed to on behalf of others.

After all of this, Jessica was unable to complete her final film by the time this thesis had to be submitted. She requested, however, to be allowed to continue working on her film. I did not see this as a problem since the writing up of the thesis is based more on the process or practice of

postcolonial feminist filmmaking. Furthermore, I do think that this project might have been a little ambitious for a grant-funded PhD which places strong restrictions on the time in which to complete the thesis. However, I do feel that this project does have potential for a more long-term ongoing development initiative which I will elaborate on in my conclusion.

Episode 4: Subeshini - Film as the Journey of Discovery

Deciding how I would begin the workshops with my participants proved more problematic than I'd expected. Whenever I try to think back to how I got to where I am today in terms of my life and research, I'm flooded by memories constructed out of my own experiences and memories of stories shared with me by my parents and grandparents. I was unable to decide whether it would be more appropriate to recall events and memories in chronological order or to share the stories in a non-linear arrangement depending on how engaged the participants were and how often they interrupted to ask a question, clarify something or share a similar story. I eventually decided that I would start at the beginning and then see where the storytelling took me.

On 3 November 1979, I was born to Sarasvathie (Jay) Moodley and Vivekananda (Vivian) Moodley. My earliest memory of life with my parents was a traumatic one – I might have been about 3 years old. It was the middle of the night when I'd been woken by a banging on the window in the lounge. It was a small, one-bedroom, low-cost scheme house that we lived in. So, the bedroom was very close to the lounge. Thankfully so, otherwise I would not have heard my mother's voice calling out to me over the pouring rain that night. I didn't understand why she sounded like she was outside in the rain. She was supposed to be in bed next to my dad. Still a little groggy from sleep and unable to see clearly in the dark, I strained my eyes to see if I could see my mother in my parents' bed. I could see my father's outline on the bed but my mum's side of the bed was definitely empty. As I climbed awkwardly out of my bed, negotiating the safety rails, I began to feel anxiety and panic. I eventually made my way as quickly as possible to the lounge where the tapping and calling grew louder. As I approached the window, I gasped as the silhouette of a human figure appeared behind the curtain against the light of a street lamp outside. Then I heard my mother's voice again – she was calling out my name, "Subesh, my darling, please help...". I didn't understand but I climbed up the sofa without hesitation and pulled back the curtains. The

shock of the image that appeared in the window was enough to cause me to lose my footing and fall back on to the floor. The image was almost grotesque. My mother's face was battered and bruised. Her eyes and lips were swollen, and even though it was raining heavily, there was still some blood dripping down her face. I think she'd tried to take shelter close to the building which prevented it from all being washed away. Her hair was soaking. "Mummy," I cried not knowing what to do. "It's ok," she said in the calmest tone I'd ever heard. She asked me to take the key off the table where my father had left it and to pass it to her through the window. I tried, but I couldn't open the window – it was too tight and I wasn't strong enough. I began to panic and started crying again. I tried so many times but I just couldn't do it. Eventually, my mother told me not to worry and that I should try to unlock the door myself. I stopped crying at this point, happy for another option. But, as I approached the door, I realized that I was too short to reach the keyhole. I still remember standing on the very tips of my toes and reaching as high as I possibly could to get the key into the keyhole, and becoming progressively more anxious when I couldn't do it. My memory blurs after that and I'm not quite sure what happened next. But I do know that my mother was back in the house the next morning wearing a very large pair of sunglasses and sweeps of her very beautiful, straight, black hair covering up the bruises on her face.

This was my first memory of the abuse in my family – all of which my father directed at my mother. Sometimes, I'm not sure if I was lucky to have been spared the physical abuse or guilty that I should have shared my mother's physical pain. However, I was always conscious of the damage and suffering that she endured, and that had its own impact on me. I have many of these memories, all just as vivid, some worse than others. Thankfully though, due to the good sense and strength of my mother, I didn't have to worry about collecting any more of those types of memories from about the age of 5^{1/2}. My mother, my sister and I stole away into the darkness of a very hot summer night with just the clothes on our back and a purse with our most important documents, never to return to that life again. I still remember my dad's drunken voice calling out from the bedroom as we escaped. My mother didn't even close the front door behind us. It had to have been my mother's bravest moment, because we never looked back once.

Once we'd found our way back to my grandparent's home, my mother started divorce proceedings immediately. This time, she was not going back as she'd done so many times before. My dad tried to convince her yet again that he would change, that he was sorry. She wouldn't budge. I think the

turning point for her was the realisation that if she didn't leave when she did, we would all either end up dead or on the street really soon. It was also the best thing for my father as well. During the divorce process, he was forced to clean himself up. For the first time in his life, he joined Alcoholics Anonymous and attempted to 'face his demons'. This enabled my sister and me to have some semblance of a normal relationship with him. It hasn't always been easy, but we managed to work through the difficult parts. To this day, he is still a part of our lives and we are very grateful to our mother for this.

Life at my grandparent's home was an interesting combination of things. My grandmother was a tough woman – an overprotective disciplinarian. We were never punished, but there were always restrictions to whatever we did. My grandfather was a wonderfully gentle man. We hardly saw him though because he worked 6 days a week as a head chef at an Italian restaurant. He'd leave before we woke up in the morning and arrive after we'd already gone to bed in the evening. The time that he spent with us was precious. He only had the opportunity to know his granddaughters before his death because both his grandsons had been born in the United States and lived there. But, my sister and I learned a lot about how a woman should be treated from the lessons he taught his five sons, and the respect and love that he bestowed on us, my grandmother and his two daughters. My immaturity and naïveté led me to believe that my grandfather's behaviour was the norm/standard for Indian men at that time, and not the behaviour of my father. I would only learn much later in life that it was actually the other way around.

Although I'd been introduced to film when I lived with my mother and father (at which point I developed an unnatural obsession with *ET*), my passion for film and my understanding of watching for meaning developed during the time we spent with my grandparents. My grandfather would usually have Sundays off. He would cook us what we referred to as a western meal (i.e. something that was not traditionally Indian) and then, after supper, we would all gather in the lounge to watch a Tamil (South Indian) film with him and my grandmother. These films were made available by a mobile video hire store that ran on a Sunday. This was a common feature of most Indian communities. Regular video stores would run a mobile rental system on the weekend if people didn't want to leave their homes. Men and women would drive a car filled with Indian films of different languages throughout the Indian community announcing via a loud haler as they did so.

Residents would hear their call and come out of their houses to rent a video. Sometimes, because of the regularity of the practice, people would begin waiting outside their homes just before the car would come by. My grandparents were regular customers, so we didn't have to wait outside. The lady would drive into the yard and hoot. She would always have the latest film on the market available for my grandparents because they were such special and loyal clients.

Interestingly, we would all eagerly sit down to watch with my grandparents but could barely (or not even) understand the language (and subtitles were not provided because they were an expensive business). My grandparents understood and spoke Tamil, my mother and her siblings understood enough to make sense out of what was being said. My sister and I, however, were at a complete loss. So, much to the annoyance of most, we would ask for translations regularly throughout the film. And, it would irk my sister and I that five minutes of dialogue could be reduced to one line of translation! As could be expected, we soon learned to watch for visual meaning.

The South Indian film industry, although one of the oldest in India, was also one of the poorest in India. The films were not technically or visually glamorous, but the content that they chose to deal with was always strong, making social and political comment (Vasudevan, 2000). By the time I reached my teenage years, my grandparents had introduced me to the films of Mani Ratnam (thankfully, subtitles had become the norm by then). His films had a significant influence on me for two reasons: he was openly critical about India's political and social affairs, and he afforded greater meaning and significance to the depiction of women. His films worked hard to illustrate how the patriarchal design of institutional structures lead to the suffering of women. The storyline of his female characters always ran parallel to the main story giving them equal importance. In addition, these women were constructed as strong individuals who eventually overcame their circumstances.

Around the same time, Bollywood was becoming more and more popular amongst the Indian community in South Africa. Although Bollywood is more commonly referred to as popular Hindi cinema, people of both North and South Indian descent from a range of linguistic and religious backgrounds appeared to become more and more fascinated with these films. The clothes,

hairstyles and make-up featured on these films would be mimicked at weddings or religious functions. A large majority of the Indian population in South Africa would model their behaviour, cultural practices and family values on what they saw in these films, as if these films reflected a ‘true’ Indianness that all people of Indian descent across the world had to aspire to. I was introduced to this trend fairly late and happened to stumble across some examples of Bollywood films quite by accident. Besides feeling completely physically inadequate in comparison to the women depicted on the films, I found myself shocked (or perhaps horrified!) by the very restricted representation of Indian women. Firstly, I personally did not know any women who behaved in this manner. Secondly, it bothered me that young women like myself were beginning to see these character constructions as reflective of Indian womanhood, the goal that they needed to aspire to in order to be more properly “Indian”. Thirdly, I didn’t understand why the Tamil films I’d grown up watching and the likes of Mani Ratnam had not enjoyed the same success.

By this point, I’d already decided that I wanted to be involved in filmmaking post-school in whatever way possible. I knew this was a ‘tall’ dream given that I wasn’t sure that my mother could afford to send me to university or any form of tertiary institution. But, given my background in an abusive home with my dad and after my film watching experience up until that point, I knew I had to find a way learn how to make films. I could see the potential inherent in the medium – besides the ability to make stories known, there was opportunity to challenge or find new ways of telling those stories. My focus became women and film. I wanted to tell women’s stories through film but in a way that was not oppressive. We couldn’t afford a camera, but I figured that if I read a lot and worked really hard I would increase my chances of being able to study.

Fortunately, after many years of trying, my mother eventually found employment at the University of Natal (Durban, South Africa). She was an intelligent woman who knew that as a permanent member of staff at the institution, she would receive remission of fees for both herself and her family. To say that I was thrilled would be an understatement. Once at university, I decided to major in Media & Cultural Studies and Drama & Performance Studies as these disciplines offered modules that dealt with the theory and analysis of films. At this stage, practical filmmaking was not being offered because of the expense that such a module would incur. I kept my head up nevertheless and tried to get myself involved in film and gender in any way I possibly could

through my degree.

In my first year at university, one of my elective modules, in order to introduce students to the importance and the process of research, required us to draw up a family tree. This didn't turn out to be as easy a task as I'd anticipated. But, I'm glad that I completed the process because I learned through it enough about the generations of women before me to know that I had chosen the right path for myself; that I had to continue on this trajectory of filmmaking to give expression to their stories and make a difference.

One story that particularly inspired me was that of my grandfather's mother – my great grandmother. She was a feisty, strong-willed young woman in the early 1900s. This, of course, did not sit comfortably with her family and larger community. She was supposed to be demure and obedient. In order to contain her free spirit, her father arranged a marriage for her. However, on her wedding night, she discovered that her husband was having an affair with his sister-in-law. She was not prepared to put up with this. She refused to consummate the marriage and insisted that she be taken back to her home. Standing up for herself, however, equated to causing trouble for her husband's family. So, her in-laws took her to the middle of a busy marketplace near her home and just left her there. With no money and no idea of how to get back home, she just stood there and waited. Eventually, a family friend happened to pass by and recognized her. He took back her home and, from that point on, she was considered a burden and an embarrassment. One night soon after, her father sat drinking in a bar. He started a conversation with a stranger from India who'd only been in South Africa a short while. In this conversation, he complained about the shame and disgrace that his daughter had brought on the family and how nobody would want to marry her after the problems that she'd caused. The man from India told my great great grandfather that he was looking for a second wife and was happy to relieve him of his troublesome daughter. And so, without much thought, my great grandmother was handed over to an unknown man over a couple of drinks at a local bar. The product of this marriage was my grandfather and his three siblings. When my grandfather was very young, his father returned to India to take on a third wife and left my great grandmother alone in South Africa to fend for herself and four young children. She worked very hard making savoury snacks to sell in the market place in order to support the family and walked long distances to and from home (sometimes without shoes). She often had to rely on

the extended family to watch over my grandfather and his siblings. She would not see her children for long periods of time and wasn't fully aware of how badly they were treated at their family home. As far as I am aware, in my family, my great grandmother was probably the first example of a single mother, which might explain why my grandfather doted on the women in my family in the way that he did.

I learned a short while after completing the family tree that the surname my family carries, 'Moodley', is actually the surname of this particular great grandmother. It was a surname we continued to retain as women in the family, so I was proud to be part of my great grandmother's legacy and to know that I come from a line of strong women.

As my undergraduate years progressed, I kept trying to become more involved in film. My opportunity came in the form of the Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) hosted by the Centre for Creative Arts, a division of the university at which I was studying. I would save up my money and then buy a discounted student ticket booklet. I would then try to watch as many of the art/alternative films as I possibly could. It was during these first few years of film festival attendance that I was introduced to filmmakers of the Indian diaspora. Of course, I took particular interest in the female directors. It was the films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta that held my attention the strongest. I managed to purchase VHS copies of their films via *Amazon.com* and I watched them over and over again. Their style of filmmaking, although quite different, indirectly offered a critical alternative to the construction of Indian women in Bollywood films. This spoke directly to how I'd imagined the end product of my filmmaking endeavours would look. However, I hadn't yet had the opportunity to make a film and I didn't have any access to a camera, so there was no way for me to explore this. In the last semester of my third year and in the first semester of my Honours year, I had the opportunity, for the first time in my life to make films. However, in both instances, I had to work with a group which didn't leave enough room to explore new ideas. And so, I entered my Masters degree with the sole aim of conducting a textual analysis on the films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta to understand exactly why the construction of their female characters resisted the norms of representation. I believed that this process would take me into practical filmmaking, and as I explained in my introductory chapter, the process eventually did.

During the completion of my Masters, my mother had a complete psychological breakdown. She was diagnosed with a bipolar depressive disorder. The years of suppressing her suffering at the hands of my father and then hiding the emotional aftermath from my sister and me took its toll on her. After many years of treatment and chronic medication, she was able to lead a fairly normal life. But, she never returned to being the strong person that she'd always been. Sadly, although my mother lives with me, our relationship has never been the same since she's been diagnosed. I would perhaps describe our relationship as conflicted. It's a daily struggle trying to reconcile the strong balanced woman I once knew with her now sudden mood changes and lack of control over the things she says and does. I'll never forget, however, the bold step that she took in the 1980s to leave our abusive father, even though the stigma attached was great, and the sacrifices she made thereafter. She wanted her children to have a better life and that was her sole purpose. The pressure and stress of her life experiences has gravely affected her mental health in her old age and I can't hold her responsible for that, as sour as our relationship may be at times.

During the last six months of my Masters, the discipline through which I'd been studying, Media and Cultural Studies, offered me a contract lecturing post in the area of film. This opportunity led to the opening up of many others. The Centre for Creative Arts, the division that hosted the film festival approached me to watch all the films in their documentary section and to write-up their synopses for the festival catalogue. As the years passed, I was eventually asked to be a judge for the documentary section. All of these little steps urged me further toward my objective to develop a method for making resistant films about women. I was fortunate that my education in and experience of film coincided with my growing awareness of issues of gender within my family and community. I realized that the key characteristic between these two issues was representation. In terms of film, it was the potential to represent, whereas in terms of gender it was the need for an opportunity to tell a personal story. I decided I would explore this idea in a PhD.

A year later, however, I was at a function to finally meet my father's biological family. Here I met Vikash, the man I would eventually marry. I was 24 years old, I'd never had a boyfriend and I'd never dated. Meeting Vikash's family was an interesting experience for me. His mother was the epitome of the ideal wife. She spent her day cooking, cleaning and pandering to the needs of her husband. All that Vikash's father did was watch sport all day, yell at his wife, fuss, and insult her.

Vikash and his siblings, all independent adults, became helpless children around him.

My family had moved past all of this, so I had assumed that this type of behaviour was no longer the norm, that his family had been stuck in decades old behaviour. I found the difference very hard to reconcile. This led to disagreements between Vikash and me because I just couldn't understand. Eventually, Vikash said to me, "Subesh, your family is not the norm. Mine is. There are more families like mine than there are like yours. You are very lucky to have grown up the way you did". I had no idea – it seems that I'd been very well-protected. Vikash's parents tried on several occasions to make me fit into the mould of a perfect wife, but I resisted at every turn because their concept of a perfect wife was so far beyond my frame of reference. What hurt the most, was that his mother was most forceful about the issue, reminding me constantly what my role and place as a wife should be. Knowing the kind of restriction she endured as a woman, should she not want better for the generations of women after her? Why would she want to inflict the same sort of oppression and suffering on other women if she knew what it felt like? It helped though that Vikash and his siblings, scarred by their parents' relationship, did not believe in typical gender roles – I'm not sure our relationship would have survived otherwise.

These experiences with my in-laws, coupled with my academic and film trajectory explained in the introductory chapter, strengthened not only my need to explore and give voice to the stories of the phenomenal women in my family, but also to explore my story through theirs. With each workshop that I ran with my research participants, the issue of history, memory and community seemed to be key to understanding each of our stories. We learned from each other that we've all at some point had to negotiate gender bias/inequality either directly or indirectly. Although I didn't feel that we were all the same, I did realize that we all had a common goal – to redefine perceptions of what it means to be a Hindu woman, and Indian woman, a South African woman and a woman in general.

The film that I decided to make for this project had been a long time in planning, as I've explained above. I've known from a very long time that in order to tell my story, I had to tell the story of the women in my family that have made the strongest impact in my life. I just could not decide, however, how I would actually approach this task. It seemed to me that the greater my knowledge of film, the more difficult it was to make a decision on how to construct a narrative. The problem

arose, in the first instance, from the fact that I wanted to capture multiple narratives. In the second instance, I kept thinking back to some of my favourite films over time and found myself attempting to draw together those aspects of each film that I admired. I liked the slow pace of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), the strong visual imagery of Ingmar Bergman's *Cries & Whispers* (1972), the construction of the female characters in Deepa Mehta (1996 & 1998) and Mira Nair's films (1991 & 2001), the strong political message of Mani Ratnam's films (1992, 1995, 1997 & 2002), the photographic storytelling of Chris Marker's *La Jeteé* (1962) and the poetic narrative of Alain Resnais' *Nuit Et Brouillard (Night & Fog)* (1955). However, after much deliberation, I realized that all of this was too much for one film and that the point of my project was to find a way of expressing myself that did not rely on tried and tested methods. I needed to find a mode of storytelling that would give my intended content the most poignant expression.

I decided that I wanted to capture footage of my grandmother, mother, aunt, sister and daughter. For this film, I was not going to include the generations of women before my grandmother because I didn't have enough historical and visual material to sustain their narrative. In any case, for all the suffering they endured for their time, they would each be owed their own film. The women that I've listed above are the women from whom I've learned critical life lessons. I wanted these women in my immediate family to have their own space of representation. I'd spent hours as a child just watching them do what they do, and be who they had to be. I was fascinated by their movements and their hands. Their hands told a story of experience, hardship and love.

I therefore decided that I would, like I did for this self-reflexive journal, tell the stories of the women in my family in episodes. Even though my story would be spoken through what I've learned from each of them, I still wanted to illustrate how each of their stories is unique and worthy of its own space of representation. I wanted to capture footage of each of them in their most natural environment doing the things that either make them happy or that I remember them doing. In addition, I was hoping for the film to play out in a dreamlike way with my voice reciting a poem that illustrates how I've understood the lessons learned from each these women. I wanted to begin the film with my grandmother's episode and then end on my daughter's episode. I hoped that this deliberate ordering of episodes would highlight the importance of history and generation. And although my film would seem to move forward from the older generation of my grandmother to

the future generation of my daughter, I actually intended to illustrate the reversal of the maturation process of a woman. As a grandmother, you've played all the roles you could possibly have played in your trajectory as a woman but as a child you have the privilege of innocence and are yet to experience all of the roles that will eventually lead to a compromise of yourself.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've shared the life stories of 3 inspirational women and myself. It's important, at this point, to note also that a process of narrative double-layering emerged during the course of the project between the conversation that formed part of the autoethnographic component and the actual production of the participant films. When required to share aspects of our backgrounds during the workshops, we each tended to represent our lives as a narrative story that began in the past, reflected on the present and considered the future. Each of our films, however, offers a re-presentation of these workshop narratives. In other words, the stories shared in conversation revealed a process of remediation through film. We chose to interact with the medium in a way that deconstructs the issue that we needed to work through in our respective lives.

The following chapter, in addition to reflecting on this process of translating our conversational narratives into film, will, through a comparative analysis, attempt to respond to the research questions highlighted in the introductory chapter. This chapter will draw together the various strands of the theoretical frame established in Chapter 3 and 4 in an effort to highlight the success, limitations and viability of a project of this nature.

CHAPTER 6: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Women with Cameras: Agency through Visual Voice

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the potential of self-reflexive filmmaking, in the form of participatory video, to effectively articulate the narratives of South African Hindu women. My discussions in this regard are based on the observations made in the previous self-reflexive journal chapter and the content of the four films that have emerged from this project. For this discussion, I focus on the types of stories that my participants and I chose to tell, and how we mediated these stories through a visual format. My discussion is supported by the revisioning of textualism in postcolonial theory in general and of key postcolonial feminist concepts more specifically. These discussions are further supported by information gained through final participant interviews.

The Production Experience

Please note that it is necessary at this point to view (or have viewed) the films and footage that have been provided on the flash drive that accompanies this thesis (the films and footage play best on Quicktime Movie Player).

As I've indicated, much of the discussion that follows is based on the content of the films produced through this project. I do, however, think that it is important, in order to contextualize the discussion, to first introduce the films and briefly discuss a few of the issues and limitations faced by each participant during the capturing and editing of the footage.

A South African Sari (Manjini Mestry, 2014)

Manjini's film tells the story of the sari in a South African context from the perspective of Hindu women in her hometown of Roshnee. Her film begins with an introduction to the South African landscape that she inhabits before providing a description of a sari, its uses and its significance in the life of a Hindu woman. Her film proceeds with several images of a variety of saris and the different ways in which they are worn. The remainder of the film is devoted to several interviews

that she'd conducted with these women. Although some interviews are given more time and space in the film, each of the women interviewed share stories of their life experiences and the role that the sari played in these experiences. Manjini eventually ends the film with a strong statement of her growth as both a Hindu women and a feminist.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, Manjini was most serious about her involvement in the project and was able to state her expectations and objectives very clearly from the outset. She took to the process fairly easily, felt confident enough to experiment with the possibilities of film and generally flourished within the project. Her development as a filmmaker was not without its difficulties though. Although she enjoyed the Canon Legria HFG10 camera and was able to capture good footage, she experienced several problems with sound and editing. The camera was accompanied by very basic editing software that offered very simple 'click, drag and drop into a timeline' editing capabilities. I had assumed that this would be enough for first-time filmmakers. However, Manjini's creativity and imagination extended beyond what I'd expected. As a result, her well-conceived and well-planned film didn't turn out quite the way she'd expected because she found herself limited by the software and technology. For example, the editing programme could not perform simple tasks like the layering of soundtracks, the adjustment of sound levels and shot duration, etc. Furthermore, the microphone that we'd provided her with worked only on a multi-directional setting and did not, in some instances, perform well in outdoor spaces with ambient sounds or indoor spaces with poor acoustics. Consequently, since the editing programme did not allow for it, Manjini was unable to adjust the sound levels of certain interviews. She then decided to use Windows Moviemaker in an attempt to remedy some of the issues but this proved unsuccessful as well. Furthermore, time constraints, distance and work commitments prevented me from either retrieving her raw footage to attend to the problems she was experiencing with the film or to even sit down with her to assist with editing. And then, when she eventually converted and compressed her film to send to me electronically, the duration of her intertitles were affected – while some remain on the screen for an uncomfortably long period, others disappear before the viewer has had a chance to complete reading them. Manjini did ask me to try to sort out her sound and intertitles. However, since I didn't have her original footage, all adjustments that I made to her film compromised the visual quality of the footage. I finally made the decision to submit the version of Manjini's film that she'd edited herself. It is possible, while

viewing, to pause on really quick intertitles, speed up ones that are too long and to increase the volume on some of her interviews. I have assured Manjini, however, that since I view this PhD as an ongoing project post-examination, there will be opportunities to both re-edit her film to meet her expectations and to make more films of a similar nature, and she has responded positively.

The Story of My Life (Yogambal Singaram, 2013b)

Mrs. Singaram's film assumes the form of a mini-autobiographical documentary. She introduces her film with images from her *Bharatanatyam* dance classes, including visuals of the temple hall in which she hosts the classes, the feet of dancing children, her instruction and her late husband's music lessons. Her on-camera interview traces her life as a dancer and dance teacher while she discusses family, her approach to Hinduism, and her understanding of what it means to be a woman, a South African and an Indian. All of her discussion is supplemented with visuals of old photographs, newspaper cuttings and life at home with her children and grandchild.

Except for Mrs. Singaram's brief moment of panic and anxiety when she thought she would have to complete the film by herself and felt that she could not cope with the deadlines, the actual planning and production of her film went smoothly. Once she'd understood that the participatory mode allowed for collaboration, her direction was very clear regarding the style and content of her film. Helping her capture her footage and then edit it into the storyline that she envisaged was therefore quite simple for Shannon and myself. This is quite evident in the final product.

The one problem that we did encounter during editing was that the file format in which the Canon Legria shot was incompatible with the editing programme that we usually use, Final Cut Pro 7. However, Shannon solved this problem by downloading a one-month trial version of Final Cut Pro X. The new programme was able to convert Mrs. Singaram's footage without degrading it. Shannon was then able to proceed with the editing.

Unedited Footage (Jessica Gounden, 2013/2014)

At the time of submitting my project, Jessica was unable to complete her film due to family and work pressures. Her film is therefore still in the process of being edited and I have promised to continue assisting her with this until it is completed. It has been quite difficult for her to negotiate her life as a working single mother with her commitment to this project. For example, retrieving the footage from her was almost impossible because she'd stored different bits of it in several places on her computer and other storage devices, and then found it very difficult to find all these separate bits. I eventually did manage to get all of her footage and I have included several of the most important portions of it (namely, her interview material, re-enacted scenes of her daily life, old photographs, and scenes of her home life with her kids, public speaking and religious worship) on the attached flash drive. Although unedited, I do think it is important to include her footage in order to provide a sense of her development and decisions as a filmmaker.

Ultimately, Jessica wanted her film to tell the story of her life through a re-enactment of a day in her life. She intended her interview material both in her car and at her friend's house to serve as the anchor for the film where she speaks about her life, career and marriage. The supplementary footage of her at the office, at home helping her children with homework or celebrating her youngest son's birthday, at the Hare Krishna temple that she attends on a weekly basis and at community gatherings was meant to serve as cutaway material.

While Jessica's interview material and some of her re-enactments of daily life are well-planned and shot, much of the supplementary material, although interesting and pertinent to her film, was shot handheld by her eldest son. As a result, a substantial portion of the footage is rather shaky and may not be suitable for use in her final film.

Lastly, when compiling Jessica's unedited footage, we experienced, as in the case of Manjini and Mrs. Singaram, challenges with file formats and conversion. The added problem with Jessica's footage was the size of the file, a consequence of the footage being unedited. Once again, I made the decision to maintain the integrity of the visual material – I therefore converted her footage to a file format that would least degrade the footage and I chose not to compress the file.

***A Woman's Promise* (Subeshini Moodley, 2014)**

My film is a glimpse into my thoughts of what it means to be a Hindu woman. Although the film makes no direct reference to Hinduism, it reflects, through a dream sequence, on the roles that I've seen the Hindu women in my life play.

When I received the funding grant for this project, I decided to buy a DSLR camera that would capture both still images and video. After much research and investigation, the best option for my needs and objectives seemed to be the Canon EOS 60D. Although purchasing the camera and a few of its interchangeable lenses may perhaps have been one of the best investments in digital technology that I could ever have made, at the time of shooting the footage for my film, it was all new to me! I nevertheless saw the challenge as placing me somewhat on par with my research participants who had to familiarize themselves with a digital video camera and make a film for the first time. I also had quite a bit to learn by myself in a short space of time. But, I found that 'doing' was a crucial part of learning and found myself having to follow the same advice that I'd given Manjini, Mrs. Singaram and Jessica i.e. to play around with the camera as much as possible.

I experienced very few glitches in the shooting of my film. And where issues did emerge, I tried to accept them as part of the process and attempted to incorporate them as opportunities within my film and the project. This is most evident in both my grandmother's episode and Ruhi's episode. My grandmother, who is now 78 years old, is not always lucid and often very forgetful. The only brief that I'd given her prior to shooting was to go about her daily business as she usually did. The idea was that that I would just follow her around with the camera as I'd done with my mum and aunt. But, the moment I switched the camera on, my grandmother just sat in one spot for two hours and refused to move. Also, she would just keep staring straight into the camera, no matter what angle I chose to shoot from. When I eventually sat down to edit, I realized that some of the footage could work to suit the purpose of the film. But, since I had to leave out quite a bit of footage of her sitting in the same place and staring, it did mean that her episode in my film would have to be quite short.

The difficulty I experienced with my daughter was almost the exact opposite: I just could not get her to stay still for more than half a minute at a time. There was absolutely no way of capturing her with a camera set up on a tripod. I eventually decided to shoot all footage of her handheld. I decided that this would work to establish a sense of her energy and youth.

Participatory Video: Visual Meaning Making

My proposition for a postcolonial feminist film practice, although necessarily requiring the initial autoethnographic self-reflexive grounding, finds its greatest support in the filmmaking process of the research participants. I've realized that several aspects of my theoretical journey found voice in the experiences and development of the participants. As I explained in the previous chapter, each of the women in the project (including myself) followed quite different trajectories when we conceived and produced each of our films. What is interesting, though, is that portions of all our films offer critical comment on the issues of voice, agency, art vs. politics, resistance, history, memory and community.

The issue of voice and agency manifested in very different ways through each of the films and reflects, at times poignantly, on the arguments related to female voicelessness in texts offered by Mann (1995) and Parasher (2002). Separately, Manjini and I had developed storylines that told our stories through other women. While I chose to illustrate my development as a woman through the women in my family who'd had an impact on my life growing up, Manjini chose to tell the story of her conflicted relationship with religion and culture through the story of the sari, as perceived by other Indian women in her community. My intention was not to speak for the women in my family but to speak through them; to illustrate that my life as a woman has no meaning without understanding the roles that they've played in mine. Manjini, on the other hand, wanted to depict the stories of other women for two reasons. Firstly, although her parents had been fairly liberal, she'd grown up believing that as a woman you needed to be silent, that your voice didn't matter and that you existed for the sole purpose of serving others. She argued that, in the initial conceptualization of her film, she somehow could not rid herself of this belief. However, the more she researched the women in her community and heard their stories, the more she realized that her story was inevitably embedded in theirs. Secondly, there were just too many interesting female narratives in her community that highlighted female empowerment in a variety

of ways. She decided that she would take the opportunity of the film project to explore this empowerment through a process of filmic retelling.

Manjini and I took very different approaches to putting our films together. I had filmed the women in my family doing what they do on a daily basis. They never speak in my film, not because I told them not to speak or stopped them from speaking if they wanted to. The issue of speech was just never brought up in the process. This, to a large extent, actually worked in my favour, allowing me to capture the visual essence of their presence in my life and the time that I've spent as a child and an adult watching their movements and learning how the negotiation of space was so key to the roles that they played. I wanted to depict how influential their physical presence had been in my life. In the film, for example, I capture my mother in a medium shot in the garden nurturing her plants and trying to make new plants out the stems of older ones in order to show the level of intimacy involved, and my aunt in a long shot of her kitchen preparing the family meal (in order to illustrate how the entire space is associated with her) (Stills 1 & 2).



Still 1. My mother tending to the garden



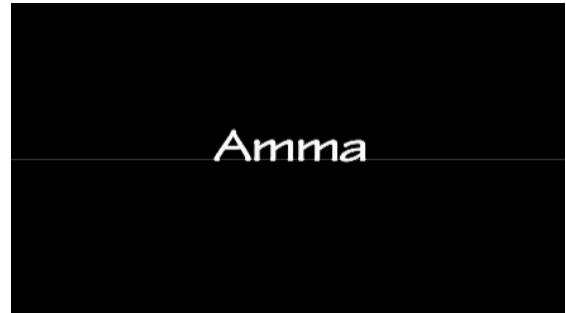
Still 2. My aunt preparing vegetables in her kitchen

My voice-over accompanying my visual perspective served to provide an abstract explanation of these roles. The only time that I reveal myself visually is through photographs of key moments in my life. The purpose of which was to show that I've spent a large portion of my life seeing myself through the eyes of others. I also appear in the final shot of the film, but I'm only seen in an extreme long shot from the back walking away into the distance with my young daughter as an indication of an incomplete story and an uncertain future (Still 3). I do use intertitles in my film to provide the names of the different women I depict before I actually reveal them

individually on screen (Still 4). The names that I provide are the names that I've respectfully called them over the years in order to illustrate a sense of our closeness to one another. (The only relationship that is unclear in my film is that of my aunt whom we refer to as Vasan. She married into our family (i.e. she's my mother's brother's wife) but brought with her such a strong sense of familial and wifely duty).

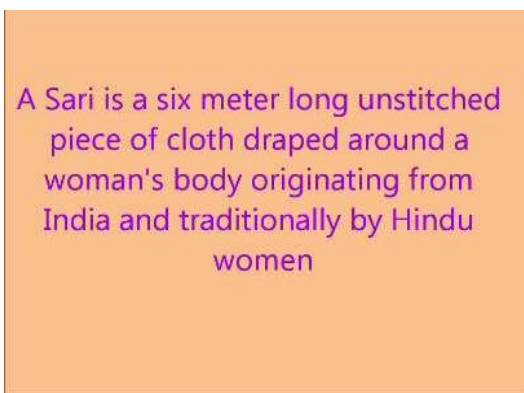


Still 3. Ruhi and I walk off into the distance

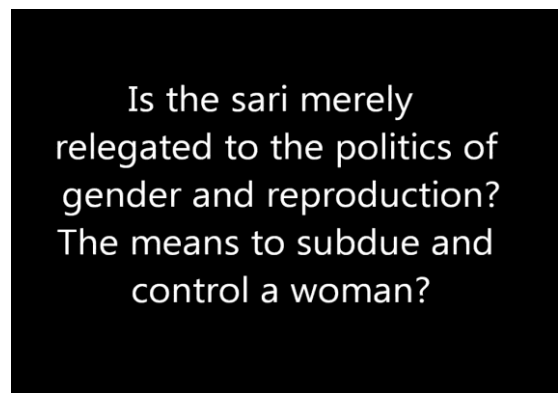


Still 4. Intertitles introducing the women in my film

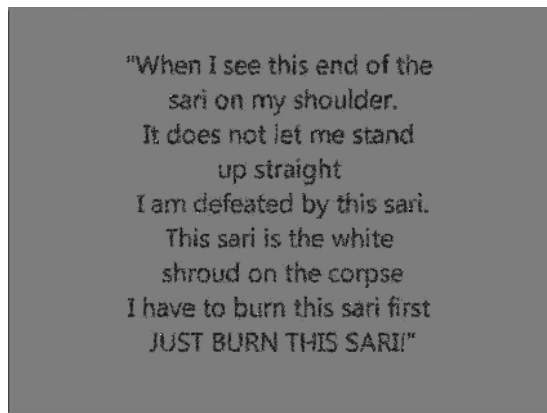
Manjini, however, never reveals herself in the film. Her feminist voice emerges through the intertitles that she includes at various points in the film, to illustrate how her understanding of the sari, as a symbol of the Hindu woman's existence, develops and changes (Stills 5 - 8).



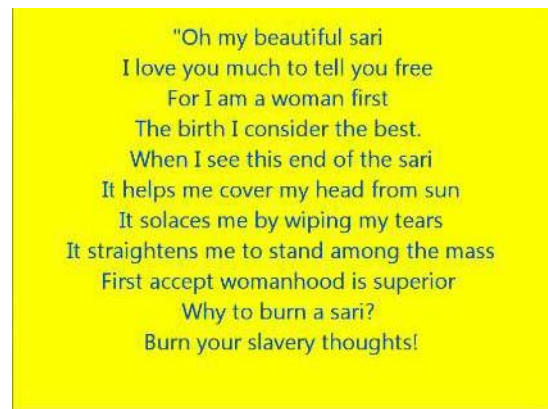
Still 5. Manjini describing the sari



Still 6. Manjini introducing her feminist standpoint



Still 7. Using a poem extract to make her resistance clear



Still 8. Her final intertitle with poem extract revealing the development of feminist ideas

The only time we physically hear Manjini's voice is at key moments during her interviews when she questions a few of the women. Her decision of when to include her interviewing voice is often quite strategic in the sense that her intent and purpose for the film is made unequivocally clear. Manjini also uses footage of old photographs (some belonging to women she's interviewed and others belonging to her family). She appears in some of these photographs but if you don't personally know Manjini, there is no way for you to recognize her in the images. This is yet another instance in which she indicates through the medium how deeply her story is entrenched in those of the women in her community.

What I find interesting in both of our approaches is the interplay between voice and agency, and on-screen presence, absence and silence. Returning to the arguments of Mann and Parasher, female voicelessness in texts often emerges through silence, absence or as the shadow of the male's centred depiction. It appears then that Manjini and I were both attempting to reconceptualise the notion of voicelessness through visual experimentation. Manjini is never seen and almost never heard in her film. I'm always heard in my film, but only seen in a few still images and the final long shot when Ruhi and I are walking away from the camera. The women in my family, on the other hand, are seen as live, moving subjects who don't ever speak. Yet, the resistant purpose of our films is clear: we both wanted to provide spaces of representation for Indian women that don't subscribe to mainstream representations. In other words, just as silence may sometimes be used in protest to make a point, voicelessness and absence in our films are redefined for the purpose of agency and feminist comment. The women in my film didn't need

to speak to be heard – close-ups of their faces and hands, and long takes of their movement within and their physical negotiation of their environments serve to paint a picture of their life experiences: their joys; their sorrows; their uncertainties (Stills 9 & 10). In so doing, the conflicts inherent in my own story begin to emerge.



Still 9. Close-up of my grandmother's face



Still 10. Emphasis on hands

Similarly, Manjini didn't need to have an on-screen presence to be heard – the kinds of stories that she gathered from her community, her intertitle comments, the minimal editing during interviews that often draws attention to what is *not* being said all point to the rich diversity of Indian female experience. In forcing the audience to see and hear these women, Manjini offers female narratives as central to *her* feminist concerns and thereby challenges conventional visual representations (Stills 11 & 12). In this way, the “voicelessness” that both Manjini and I portray, assumes a more resistant function.



Still 11. Community as central to Manjini's story



Still 12. Manjini uses minimal editing during Patma's interview to capture the poignancy of her story

In

In Chapter 3, I argue that inherent in the concept of a ‘feeling of being’ is the opportunity to re-interpret of spaces of representation. I further argued that the potential for this re-interpretation is perhaps stronger for South African Indian women who experience (and quite possibly attempt to reconcile) the tension between professional integration into mainstream society and a commitment to and maintenance of cultural practice in the home space. To a large extent, it is this conflict that Manjini and I capture through the redefinition of voicelessness. In so doing, we have managed to establish an alternative mode of gendered resistance within the very spaces of representation that we (and the women we represent) have been limited by in the diaspora. These spaces of representation include the implied broader South African context (also evident in the work of Kumaran Naidu), religious spaces, private spaces and the medium of film itself.

The films of Mrs. Singaram and Jessica, while less abstract than those of Manjini and myself, are no less resistant in their feminist purpose. They both work within the realm of the feminist argument by ensuring their visual presence and speaking voice on-screen (Stills 13 & 14). While Mrs. Singaram used the opportunity to document her life and create a visual legacy for the generations beyond her, Jessica (unwittingly, at the time) used the opportunity to self-counsel (Stills 15 & 16). Jessica was able to work through the disappointment of her failed marriage through the process of making her film and re-watching it. And, although Mrs. Singaram and Jessica didn’t draw on the lives of other women to tell their story, they did draw on the assistance of their family and friends. Interestingly, the assistance they drew on was ‘on their own terms’ so-to-speak. Both Jessica and Mrs. Singaram directed their immediate community of people on how they would like themselves captured. Often, the footage that they directed, showed them at the centre of visual attention. This footage formed the bulk of their films while cutaways of their public profile, history and interaction with family or friends provided supporting material to their main interviews (Stills 17 & 18). Undoubtedly this practice resists mainstream representations of Indian women in terms of directing their own screen presence, assuming the enunciative space of the visual and depicting themselves as independent and successful career and family women who’ve overcome a variety of obstacles. Quite unlike the depictions of Indian women presented in Bollywood films who, according to Parasher (2002), occupy the role of shadow to the centered depictions of Indian men, Mrs. Singaram and Jessica are always *present*

in the foreground of their films and thereby offer yet another form of challenge to conventional notions of female voicelessness.



Still 13. Mrs. Singaram claiming a speaking space



Still 14. Jessica claiming a speaking space



Still 15. Mrs. Singaram at the centre of visual attention



Still 16. Jessica took the opportunity to reflect on images such as these in order to work through issues relating to her poor background and problematic marriage



Still 17. Photograph of Mrs. Singaram's public profile



Still 18. Jessica's public speaking - offering advice to women on divorce, family, etc.

Even though Mrs. Singaram's final film and Jessica's footage eventually placed them as the focus of attention, they were both at some point uncertain of whether or not it would be acceptable to do this. When Mrs. Singaram had first decided that she wanted it to be *her* film, she asked me if it would be fine. Jessica, after many months of capturing the footage, having decided that the film would be about her life, expressed doubts about how much emphasis had been placed on herself in the footage. I believe this goes back to Manjini's original reasoning for wanting to tell the story of other women as opposed to her own. A majority of Indian women have been brought up to believe that there are limits to your expression. This belief is augmented, firstly, by religious teachings that interpret the role of women in Hindu mythology from a patriarchal perspective and, secondly, by media representations that play into these religious teachings. My understanding is that Mrs. Singaram, Jessica and Manjini are unaccustomed to seeing representations of empowered women like themselves and so believed that they were doing something unacceptable. It is for this reason that moving beyond voicelessness as the default position of Indian women in mainstream representation and claiming a speaking space through the visual are both such bold, admirable, and resistant steps on their part.

It is necessary for me to digress at this point as I am reminded of the reason all three women joined the project. They each expressed at different points, as highlighted in my self-reflexive chapter, a desire to help fellow Indian women achieve both academically and professionally. They were interested in the empowerment imperative implicit in the project. Mrs. Singaram's document of her life and Jessica's process of catharsis through the capturing and viewing of her footage are more stories of inspiration than stories of self-absorption and conceit. So, while Manjini and I have chosen to show how strong women have been role models in our lives, Mrs. Singaram and Jessica have shown how their lives can serve as role models for other women. It could be argued that the reason offered for participation in my project and the resulting content of the films produced suggests an attempt to perhaps transcend the understanding of their existence as occupying an ongoing space of lack and discomfort that is characteristic of a 'feeling of being'. In Chapter 3, I argued that this understanding emerges out of an enduring awareness of a history and context that perpetuates difference and inequality. Foregrounding Indian female narratives, as my participants and have done, with the intent of inspiring further (Indian) female narratives in

the South African context signals a commitment to redefining history and context. If this is indeed the case, the notion of lack and discomfort acquire a less negative connotation. In other words, lack would refer less to a missing element and more to an open space to be claimed, while discomfort would refer less to a feeling of being unsettled and more to a sense of irritation that mobilises you into action.

Furthermore, as I explain in the following chapter, my participants and I all want our films to be exhibited in a public space because we believe that these films have the potential to elicit discussion at several levels of community and society. Ultimately, these two purposes, common to all four films, invoke the notion of empathetic ‘others’ who, in the words of Bakhtin, provide “actively responsive understanding” (1952 – 1953: 68). In other words, we all constructed the space of film as a space of enunciation that would generate “actively responsive understanding” from both those involved in the making and content of the films, and those who eventually watch the films.

Our multi-mode approach to documentary-making revealed a resistance to assumptions about the more typical ways in which Indian women are depicted. The multi-mode approach also afforded an opportunity for us to explore our representation in more creative and less stereotypical ways. For example, although my film captures actual women from my family and shares my actual thoughts about being an Indian woman, I was able to give my film the look and feel of a dream sequence. Not having to adhere to the strict rules of shot duration and continuity editing allowed me to use my camera in a way such that each shot of the women in my family was a meditation not only on their daily life but also a meditation on those activities generally perceived to be mundane yet which hold such significance for each of them (Stills 19 & 20). I was further able to layer meaning in the film with my voice-over by reciting a poem that I’d written to express my thoughts. The formulaic approach to and levels of glamour expected in the depiction of Indian women in Bollywood films would never have catered for the kind of critical introspection I was hoping to incite with my film. I didn’t need any of the women in my film to dress up, wear make-up or perform; I just needed them to *be* in order to make visible the weight of their pasts and the contexts in which they now find themselves. This perhaps resonates with the work Kumaran Naidu and the philosophy underpinning his approach. Even though he draws on a more

conventional narrative structure, it has never had the intention to mask the ‘ugliness’ or ‘sugar-coat’ the experiences of the Indian community. He depicts, in equal measure, their strengths and weaknesses; their idiosyncratic behaviours and their positive contributions to society. This ultimately works against the Bollywood mode which, in its global appeal, romanticises what it means to be Indian and simplifies the expectations placed on Indian women through self-contained characters, elaborate and (‘catchy’), song and dance sequence, and easily-resolved storylines.



Still 19. Gardening as symbolic of the nurturing role of my mother



Still 20. My aunt chopping up onions while cooking as symbolic of wifely duty

Manjini also experimented with the film text in a variety of ways. I would argue, that besides Manjini's ability to elicit interesting stories, her strength lay in her keen sense of the importance of *visual* information. There are a number of examples that stand out. We are introduced to her film with a fast-paced handheld tracking shot of a rather bland environment, most likely captured from a moving car (Still 21). The opening sequence then slowly tightens in on exterior scenes of her hometown. The context she is capturing is harsh, dry and run-down in many instances. As I watched her opening sequence, I was reminded of the title sequence of the television series *The Sopranos* where the camera travelling around New Jersey serves not only to establish the context of the series but the tone as well – rough, fast-paced living (Still 22). As Manjini's film proceeds, however, we understand that her intentions are quite different to that of the Sopranos! Not only is she attempting to establish a sense of geographical location but also a point of contrast to the softness and richness of the sari. At first, it appears that she highlights the contrast as a manifestation of a diasporic ‘feeling of being’ – almost as if she wanted to highlight the distinct difference or separation between the women and their saris, and the harsh South African Highveld landscape. The nature of this contrast, however, later becomes a metaphor for

how the sari has the potential to be equally oppressive and liberating. This is evident in the closing sequence when she repeats the opening tracking shot and, although it is the same shot, it takes on a different meaning after we've been through the journey of the film. To a certain extent we begin to understand how each of the women was able to adapt to the South African context through a redefinition of the sari. In this way, then, Manjini's structuring of her documentary can be seen as an attempt to re-evaluate the diasporic 'feeling of being'.



Still 21. Manjini's handheld tracking shot of the SA landscape



Still 22. One of the establishing shots in Manjini's opening sequence that is reminiscent of the New Jersey sign in the title sequence of the *Sopranos*

Similarly, Jessica's footage of her interview while driving through Chatsworth offers an alternative perspective on the notion of a diasporic 'feeling of being'. Jessica's footage is reminiscent of the work of Abbas Kiarostami; specifically his film *Ten* (2002) (Stills 23 & 24). The film centres around a divorced female driver and her interactions with ten passengers that she picks up as she drives around the streets of Tehran. The film is shot entirely from within her car and provides an absorbing perspective on the socio-economic and political condition of the city and the country of Iran at large. Similarly, Jessica's interview in the car, besides providing visual support for her discussion of how she's overcome very trying circumstances, illustrates the contradiction of her existence in a South African Indian context. To a large extent, she's moved beyond the boundaries or expectations characterised by the diasporic 'feeling of being' by establishing herself as a respected and well-known attorney in her community but, at the same time, she's so deeply

entrenched in the history that the very same community represents for her that it's almost impossible to be completely rid of it.



Still 23. Jessica's interview while driving



Still 24. Abbas Kiarostami's film *Ten* (2002)

In terms of the interviews that Manjini uses, the women forming the spine of her narrative are all captured in their homes and placed strategically against a backdrop of some form of religious representation. Again, this kind of visual construction serves to contrast how even though religion has been used to limit Hindu women, the women that are speaking on-screen reveal an unexpected level of independence and strength of character. However, for the supporting interviews, Manjini specifically created a 'set', reminiscent of a Hindu bridal altar (Still 25). I found this most interesting since marriage is considered key to the development and acceptance of a Hindu woman and has been perhaps the most oppressive institution in the lives of Hindu women. Marriage is also a key component of Bollywood narratives as part of the induction into Indian womanhood and, perhaps more critically, a form of containment. Why then would she choose to construct the backdrop of their interviews in this way? Why would she create an enunciative space so loaded with ritual restriction? I eventually realized that Manjini was trying to capture the performativity of identity; the performativity of assuming roles. The women in this section of Manjini's film all responded to a call for participation – on the set date they arrived in their saris and waited in a queue to be interviewed. Even though Manjini does not include scenes of the queue in the film itself, she did joke later on in the final workshop about the pressure she felt from the women standing with her behind the camera wanting to have a turn. According to Manjini, they all wanted to be seen and wanted a speaking space. Even so, however, as I explain in the two examples below, it is what they don't say

in the interviews that has the greatest impact. It is what they don't perform on the screen for Manjini that is most poignant. It's the silences in their performance that stand out.



Still 25. The 'set', reminiscent of a bridal altar, that Manjini constructed for her interviews

Two particular examples stand out for me. The first is the interview with the woman, Jayshree Perumal, who dresses brides for a living and who came dressed as a bride for her interview (Still 25 above). She was a *bharatanatyam* dancer in her youth but was married off at the age of sixteen. She shared with Manjini off-camera that her life has been very difficult. Besides losing her son in a car accident, she's had a troublesome life with her husband. However, her appearance on-camera depicts a proud woman who still holds her head up high, a woman who wants to be beautiful despite life's problems having weathered her. She is also the only woman who chooses to share her space on-screen with her husband. The shot of them together portrays an image of happiness. It's an interesting contradiction to her actual life and the fact that she makes her living out of preparing women for their wedding day. She argues that they all want to look good for their wedding – almost as if her work provides a glimmer of hope for her. Even though her problematic home circumstance and personal loss is not depicted in the film, the fact that she speaks in the film and that her husband never does points to a level of transgression in her on-screen 'performance'. The bridal altar (usually a potential symbol of oppression for Hindu women), as constructed by Manjini for the interviews, assumes a more resistant quality for Jayshree – a space where she is heard and her husband isn't.

The second example is that of a 17 year old girl, Leshania Pillay, who has never worn a sari before. But, for the film, she put on her mother's engagement sari because her mother told her to. The young woman speaks but her mother, Loshi Pillay, never does. They both look beautiful in their saris sitting side by side (Still 26). In this image, one gets the impression of a process of induction into the life of a Hindu woman. Besides the element of performance coming through quite strongly in this piece, you are left to wonder about the juxtaposition of the speaking daughter and non-speaking mother. The implication is almost a foreshadowing for the daughter who is young and uninhibited up until this point, and her mother who has perhaps been silenced by experience.



Still 26. 17 year old Leshania wearing her mother's engagement sari for the interview

As I've already mentioned, Manjini seems to use intertitles as a substitute for her voice; a form of a feminist counterpoint. Each intertitle screen is loaded with information with some form of key comment made at the end. Generally, prolonged reading on a screen makes for boring and disrupted viewing. Manjini, however, seems to employ the technique as an argumentative tool; a tool for sharing her voice in the lack of her on-screen presence. It is clear from the above discussion that Manjini's experimentation with the possibilities of film and video lends itself to a feminist agenda.

Interestingly, the link between all three participants is the use of prolonged on-screen interviews. I noted that, in the case of Manjini, who interviewed other women, and in the case of Mrs.

Singaram and Jessica, who arranged for themselves to be interviewed, the cutaway material was most often used between the discussion of particular ideas. This differs from mainstream documentary that typically uses cutaways within the discussion of ideas, both to give the audience a break from a lengthy talking heads and to provide a visual description or explanation of the idea under discussion. In the case of the three participants, however, the cutaways served more as a moment of reflection on the longer, uninterrupted 'monologue' of the interviewee. The lack of interruption, in this sense, seems to work towards respecting the enunciative space of the women, affording them the amount of time they require to speak and be heard, and placing a noted significance on the content of their speech. Generally, as sophisticated viewers in a media-saturated environment, we understand where a pause/break is needed to maintain attention. These women, however, tended to experiment with that for the purposes of critical viewing: viewers are made slightly uncomfortable in order to question what they're viewing or what they're *not* hearing.

Another point of similarity between the work of the three participants, that extends to my film as well, is the deliberate return to memory and history. My whole film is a contemplation of what I remember and key moments in my development as a woman. Similarly, the other participants engage in an extended reflection of the past. This manifests in our films as either old photographs, personal retellings of the past or a collection of memorabilia in the subject's living space (Stills 27 & 28). In this way, the viewer begins to understand the inextricable link between history and memory, and the lives of the women represented in or through the film. Mrs. Singaram notes in her final interview that a video camera would have made a significant difference to documenting her life and specifically her career because dance is based on portraying meaning and emotion through movement. In her opinion, a video camera has the ability to capture the entirety of the dance experience. In this sense, this project has both encouraged the eliciting of individuals histories as part of a large communal narrative and offered a revisioning of those histories in the present through film.



Still 27. A photograph of Manjini in a sari in her film



Still 28. An old photograph of Jessica and her brother with their mother that she wants included in her film

Art vs. Politics: Resistance through Creative Experimentation

From the above discussion, I would argue that each woman in the project produced what Roland Barthes referred to as the ‘text of bliss’ or ‘writerly text’ (1975). What the participants in my project produced could be described ‘filmmaker-ly’ or ‘director-ly’ representations, if that weren’t such a mouthful to say! There is no doubt that each of the films emerges from the sole vision of each of the women involved, even if the execution of its production involved the participation of other women. Inevitably, the creative decisions lay with and were made by the filmmakers themselves and the initial level of enjoyment was experienced at the moment of making/production. Each film’s conception, planning and execution worked within the realm of what each woman perceived to be the defining issue in each of their stories. In many instances, the deliberate or unconscious experimentation that each woman embarked on, in order to give visual voice to their story, required some level of deconstructive work on the part of ‘reader’/ viewer. Since the experimentation in each case points to very personal levels of resistance, the average viewer will require more time than usual to make meaning of the content.

The resistance in these film texts manifest as a series of mainstream ‘destructions’. The first broadest level of destruction is arguably the challenging of mainstream representations of Indian women in general and Bollywood in particular. In the South African context of my study, this occurred through the accessing of voice and agency via the medium of film (and the genre of documentary more specifically), using self-reflexivity, participation and creative

experimentation to share individual and communal narratives. Interestingly, as the levels of resistance became more specific, I found that, although religion features in these films as a key point of contextual description and contrast, religious discourse, according to patriarchal interpretation, did not appear to be a defining factor in the construction of the films in general or the female subjects specifically. As I explain in the following concluding chapter, a more spiritual and philosophical understanding of Hinduism is invoked by my participants. This observation illustrates that there appears to be a move away from the hegemonic notion of a global female ‘Hindu-ness’ that is often perpetuated by mass media.

Given the outcomes of each woman’s filmmaking process and film content, I find the art vs. politics debate, as I’d previously indicated, somewhat superficial – perhaps even empty. My participants have proven that it is the interface between the creative possibilities of the medium as a tool of expression/speech, the political stance of the female filmmaker and her engaged interaction with community that contributes to the levels of resistance mentioned above. Texts of bliss are testament to this for the very fact that pleasurable excess filters through in the discomfort that is created through the representation of strong ideas from women who have previously been limited in their representation. Pleasurable excess also emerges from what these women learn about themselves through the process.

Conclusion

It was never the intention of this chapter, although taking the form of a comparative analysis, to chart a pattern of similarity between the four films made as part of this project. Similarities did emerge from the analysis but, more importantly, the analysis highlighted the possibilities inherent in the participatory video component of a postcolonial feminist film practice. In a variety of ways, agency and voice through “actively responsive understanding”, and resistance through artistic experimentation appeared to emerge most strongly from this. This discussion is carried forward into the conclusion of this thesis where I discuss the possibilities of the autoethnographic approach and the future of a postcolonial feminist practice.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Women in Conversation: Empowerment through Dialogue

In this final chapter, I conclude by reflecting critically on the impact of the self-reflexive mode on the positionality of the researcher and the participant. I end the chapter with an argument for the resistant potential of my proposed postcolonial feminist film practice and offer an assessment of its viability in the broader contexts of development, empowerment and social change, and in the teaching of methodological and film practice.

The Self-Reflexive Mode: Redefining Positionality

It's no secret that autoethnography has never enjoyed the same acceptance as traditional ethnographic approaches for the very fact that researcher involvement in the process makes it seem far more subjective. The approach encourages a more engaged, self-conscious negotiation between the roles of researcher and research-participant. Although it was this aspect of the methodological approach that my research trajectory had naturally led me to for the execution of my project, I worried about the manner in which my results would be received in the mainstream research context. In retrospect, I realize that this should perhaps have been less of a concern since my participants have confirmed, through our interactions and the films that they've produced, that the self-reflexive mode was key to their development and growth in the time that we worked together. This, however, did not eliminate the challenges that emerged in implementing this type of approach.

There were two levels of positionality that I hoped to address through this project. The first was my identity as a South African Hindu woman of Indian descent wanting to study other South African Hindu women of Indian descent. In this regard, I wanted to examine specifically the extent to which similarities existed in our engagement with issues surrounding history, religion, cultural practice and gender. The need to explore this aspect of my positionality stemmed from the need to understand why the contemporary Indian community in South Africa is still described (or describes itself) as diasporic. Furthermore, why does the community itself still cling to cultural artefacts and media representations that support this type of description, especially in terms of Indian women where, in most instances, these representations can be quite limiting and uninformed? Did other

South African Hindu women feel the same way? I wanted specifically to examine whether these South African Hindu women felt as limited by mainstream visual representation as I did. In order to explore this, I felt a distinct need to (re)turn to a community of women and begin to communicate openly about issues relating to what it means to be a South African Hindu woman.

The workshop discussions with my research participants eventually revealed that our understanding of mainstream representations of South African Hindu women and Indian women in general were very similar. In addition, our feelings of dissatisfaction toward these representations (particularly Bollywood films, which I discuss in Chapter 6) were also similar. We eventually agreed that religion (a strong contributing factor to the experience of diaspora), although forming a significant part of our identities, should not be perceived as *the* defining component of our identities. Religion, in this sense, appeared to have a stronger spiritual influence in each of our lives, with greater focus on understanding the significance of its philosophy as opposed to blindly following rules and completing rituals. In this way, the practice of Hinduism is less oppressive and restrictive an exercise than is usually perpetuated in community settings and by popular representations. In fact, Mrs. Singaram, in her film, endorsed this idea when she spoke about the importance of understanding the meaning and symbolism of the religion without becoming fanatical about it (Singaram, 2013b). Manjini too, at the very beginning of her film, offered strong resistance to what she referred to as the “indoctrination of Hindu values” (Mestry, 2014) but revealed toward the end of her film, through the various stories of her interviewees, that it is actually the independent individual interpretation of these values that is most liberating.

Our discussions also addressed the issue of diaspora and the South African Indian community. Interestingly, it emerged that even though we accepted descriptions that classed us as diasporic, we were all well aware that technically, in the conventional sense, we were not diasporic. These discussions, supplemented by stories of our history as South African Indians, eventually led me to develop the concept of a diasporic ‘feeling of being’ (discussed at length in Chapter 3) as a way to describe the secondary diasporic consciousness that my participants alluded to during the workshops. The self-reflexive mode of our conversations assisted in a renegotiation of our understanding of why we are positioned as diasporic beings in a South Africa context. This particular observation links closely with the findings in a collection of essays in *Diaspora*,

Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home (Agnew, 2005). The book investigates the construction of identity among several diasporic communities in Canada through a number of essays which have a strong feminist emphasis, and examines how immigrant women overcome the pressures of gendered cultural identity and integration into a foreign context. Marlene Kadar and Ann Hua, in particular, speak specifically of the significance of collective memory (an activity in which participation in shared communal history is acknowledged through a process of actively responsive understanding) as an effective tool/method to begin to voice their narratives. Kadar's study showed that "minimal narratives" or the process of "feminist countertermemorialising" manifest in collective autobiographical genres that "intertwine the individual's life story with the larger story of the life of the community [...]" (Kadar, 2005: 100). Similarly, in terms of my study, the films produced by my research participants offer alternative approaches to exploring Indian female identity in South Africa by re-telling each of their stories through memory and community. For example, in Chapter 6, I discuss how Manjini's film offers a visual contrast between the South African Highveld landscape and the sari in order to illustrate the conflicted levels of identity negotiation for South African Hindu women. Jessica's film, in a more implicit way through the interview in the car, captures the living circumstances of a typical South African Indian community in the background, reveals the contradictions of balancing her identity as a single mother and career woman in South Africa with her identity as a Hindu Indian female. And Mrs. Singaram, as a final statement in her film, speaks about first understanding what it means to be Indian and Hindu in order to find a space in the South African context. Chapter 6 also further highlights the challenges offered to the notion of a 'feeling of being' by my participants and I.

The second level of positionality to be acknowledged and investigated was that of my identity as an academic/scholar who has read and written in the areas of film theory, postcolonial theory, cultural studies, diaspora, feminism, representation and identity construction, and who has some experience and skill in practical filmmaking. I wanted to assess the extent to which my academic background would impact my level of critique in terms of the issue of the Indian diaspora in South Africa and the representation of Indian women. In other words, do I tend to assume an overcritical and resistant stance in terms of these issues by virtue of my academic background and training? In addition, how would/could I reconcile/negotiate this difference through the research process?

Autoethnography provided an appropriate method through which to approach these questions. Admittedly, it was a little disconcerting at first since I, from a background of traditional (specifically textual-analytical) research, wasn't able to slip as easily into a mode of mutual discussion as I'd expected. I was keenly aware in the first series of workshops that I needed to submerge myself in discussion with my participants but found myself constantly asking, "How much is too much?" I understood that this would naturally have been a concern at the beginning because we were required to share our personal stories. However, once these initial introductions into my own and my participants' lives were over, I found that it was far easier to embed myself in the discussions during subsequent workshops. Indeed, I discovered that assuming a more engaged approach to my interaction with my participants, in the tradition of autoethnography, enabled modes of communication that I can now see were more inclusive and empathetic.

As tentative as I had been in the beginning, I did notice that my participants took to the process far quicker than I had. In fact, it appeared almost as if they'd welcomed the approach. My initial letter that called for project participants was, like the informed consent letter that they all had to sign, deliberately formal to maintain institutional standards. However, my telephonic, email and text message interactions were less so, in order to establish and maintain a conversational tone that I hoped would continue into the workshops. The participants tended to follow this lead by providing what Ellis would refer to as "personal narratives" (2004: 46), while I still straddled my insecurities regarding the objective researcher vs. the subjective researcher modes. Nevertheless, as I spoke during the workshops, regarding my background, experiences and reasons for conducting this project, I often found my participants nodding in agreement, interjecting with anecdotes of their own and sometimes even offering advice. This also occurred when the other women in the project spoke about their lives. In this sense, this initial process of interactive interviewing provided each of us with an opportunity to be both researcher and participant through our mutual disclosure of information.

The areas of discussion that the women deemed most necessary to contribute to were the gendered structure of the Indian family, the lack of adequate and/or reflective representations of Indian women (not just in South Africa, but internationally as well), the impact of the patriarchal interpretation of Hindu philosophy on women, memory and the empowerment of women in

general. These contributions showed me that, even though our backgrounds and life experiences had been quite diverse, we concurred in our reading and interpretation of the above issues. This finding, however, did not mean that I, as the researcher, could now draw generalized conclusions regarding our agreement on these matters (Ellis *et al.*, 2011). We had each experienced them differently and held a variety of ideas regarding how these issues may be addressed. This is very evident in the films and footage we each produced (as I've explained in the previous chapter) and points strongly to the postcolonial feminist argument that combating the victimhood of Third World women begins with an understanding and acknowledgement of the diversity of their experiences and forms of resistance (Mohanty, 1988; Sangari & Vaid, 1990; San Jan Jr., 1998).

I realized, as a result, that even though I recount their life experiences and growth in the project through my self-reflexive journal, the level of personal interaction that we had reached in our discussions would never allow me to comfortably speak on behalf of these women. Their voices on these issues were already so strong – I'm not sure that my voice would have done justice to theirs. The potency of their purpose would be filtered/diluted by my (or any other) voice speaking on behalf of them or even just relating their stories. While I attempted, as far as possible through my self-reflexive journal, to relate their stories “meaningfully and evocatively” in a way that mattered and made a difference, and “to include sensory and emotional experience [by writing] from an ethic of care and concern” (Ellis, 2004: 46), ultimately, their stories were most poignant when they reinterpreted these through the medium of film on their own. But, in order for all the participants to reach that point, the dialogue enabled through the autoethnographic approach played a crucial role. Mrs. Singaram commented in her final interview that she didn't think that she would ever have told her story in the depth that she did or even come to the realization that she needed to tell her own story had the project not foregrounded dialogue as crucial to the process. She argued that when she first received the call for participants, she didn't expect to learn so much about herself through other women. Mrs. Singaram confirmed in this observation that while taking an autoethnographic approach enables spaces for dialogue to occur, the self-reflexive nature of the approach allows for both individual and mutual deconstruction of the issues under discussion. This observation certainly contributes to the notion of the “actively responsive understanding” of ‘an other’ (Bakhtin, 1952 – 1953: 68). It is the intersubjectivity established through the process of conversation that enabled Mrs. Singaram to both ‘see’ and ‘hear’ herself.

All three participants further highlighted the notion of enunciative space and utterance when they explained that any other research approach would have limited how they spoke and what they eventually shared. This is not only evident in their final interview responses but in their workshop interactions as well. I think back to the incident when Mrs. Singaram was brought to tears during one of our workshop dinners after asking Jessica about dealing with the loss of husbands (only two hours after we'd all first met). When Mrs. Singaram later reflected on what had happened she expressed embarrassment at how weak she must have appeared to the rest of us. She then rationalized her breakdown by explaining that although she'd wanted to ask these questions many times before, there had never been a space conducive enough.

Jessica's continual repetition of her story of poverty and abuse, in a sense, also speaks to the concepts of enunciative space, utterance and 'actively responsive understanding'. Not only was she comfortable enough to share stories that were obviously very personal and sensitive, but she was also searching for acknowledgement of her pain, suffering and success from what she considered to be a community of women who would understand and not judge her. She understood that the space of the workshop provided her with safety, comfort and an empathetic listening audience.

As the project proceeded it became more and more apparent that any form of enunciative space could only be made meaningful or effective as a space of utterance or expression with the presence of reciprocal dialogue with a community of beings who share a broader cultural history. In other words, in terms of this particular project, having a community of women who understood the religious and cultural context and who understood your background was not only crucial to the process of speaking but to the process of being heard as well. As a criticism, however, it may be argued that successful communication may only ever be possible in small groups of like-minded, gender specific individuals. In which case, what would be the point of this approach? Is it not possible for individuals to be heard beyond the boundaries of the group itself? This was an issue that my participants appeared to resolve without my having to directly address the subject. While a likeness of positionality was necessary in the initial phases of the project in order to elicit each of their stories, a need emerged thereafter for these stories to be heard by a wider community of

individuals, to be meaningful and make a difference. Manjini, Mrs. Singaram and Jessica all enquired at various points during the project about what I intended to do with the information gained through the workshops and about what would happen to their completed films. They were concerned that their contributions to the project would remain within the confines of my PhD submission and not reach any public space. They *wanted* the results of this research and their films to form part of further development initiatives. In other words, they wanted their stories to be shared and heard more widely (beyond the confines of gender, race and religion) with the aim of generating further reciprocal dialogue and knowledge production. Perhaps then, what my participants were alluding to is a reworking of Spivak's argument (1988) that in order for agency to be meaningful, the need to be heard has to be fulfilled. In the instance of this project, this argument could then be developed to include that accessing a space of speech in order to be heard is as important as 'who' you share that space with, and that being heard can have further empowerment potential if it generates conversation beyond the group.

A public exhibition of the work of my participants was something I had been planning all along – I just hadn't expected the participants' themselves to raise the question so early in the process. Nevertheless, I suggested hosting a screening evening for the films or submitting them to the amateur filmmaker section of the Durban International Film Festival. I also shared with them a recommendation that I'd received at a conference where I'd presented the progress of the project – which was to either upload the films to some kind of online repository for future access or have the films stored and exhibited at a cultural museum in the form of video installations. All three participants expressed excitement at the prospect of all the options but were particularly open to the online repository and the museum video installations as forms of visual feminist archives which, they felt, had greater longevity and reach, and, as a result, held the potential for a larger, more diverse audience.

In this regard, the establishment of alternative feminist archives in the form, for example, of recipe or photobooks, short stories and novels to document the lives of women in the diaspora has previously met with some success (Hua, 2005). This is not foreign to the South African context where a recipe book called *Indian Delights* (edited by Zuleikha Mayat) was compiled and published in 1961 by the Women's Cultural Group of Durban. Thembisa Waetjen and Goolam

Vahed trace the trajectory of the book through its various editions in *Gender, Modernity & Indian Delights: The Women's Cultural Group of Durban, 1954 – 2010* (2010) and show how the life of the book became a metaphor for the eventual independence and empowerment of the Indian women involved at every stage of its compilation, during a very turbulent time in South African history. The one thing always ever present in the story of this recipe book and the women's group is the strength of communality and collaboration. Anh Hua (2005: 205), in her discussion of feminist alternative archives, argues that diasporic women's practices of remembering and documenting these memories enable marginalized women not only to resist the colonial tropes of victimization of and Otherness but also to "act as a catalyst for self-recovery and community building". Alleyn Diesel, a South African academic ran a similar initiative in which South African Indian women were asked to write short stories about their lives and histories. The compilation of stories, titled *Shakti* (2007), resulted in a variety of critical narratives, using photographs that shared experiences from spousal abuse, to the difficulties of religious division within the community, to the hardships of negotiating identity during South Africa's troublesome political history. *Indian Delights*, compiled in 1961, and *Shakti* compiled just over four decades later in 2007 reveal two things: the varied nature of the South African Indian woman's story and the hunger for platforms of expression for the articulating of those stories.

Mrs. Singaram also argued that the integration of my presence as a researcher into participant discussions contributed to the uninhibited conversation that allowed her to share her life in such an open and deep manner. Similarly, Manjini supported Mrs. Singaram's observation when she noted that my role as a researcher-participant made the process far easier and more comfortable, knowing that she could interact at the same level as I did. Jessica added that she didn't believe that she would have been as engaged in the project had I adhered to the traditional researcher and participant hierarchy. These responses not only confirm that greater subjective involvement on the part of the research is preferred but point to a culmination of various aspects relating to the redefinition of the postcolonial scholar. The scholar as activist (San Juan Jr., 1998) is perhaps the foundation to the success of this process. As I've explained in Chapter 4, and illustrated through the process undertaken for this project, the notion of the scholar as activist does not begin and end with 'a cause to fight'. Rather, the scholar activist is someone who emerges as a participant in a dialogic process. Such work begins with the immersion of the scholar into the community through

local participation (Bhattacharya, 2002), and it proceeds with an affective and self-reflexive approach (Ellis, 2004) to engaging with the community. The objective of the scholar as activist is to mobilise social development through the empowerment of the members of the community. Empowerment in this instance isn't simply a matter of effecting change on behalf of the community and its members but is accessed through dialogue and education; it is understanding the needs and diversity of the community and offering them the tools to address their own issues. The scholar as activist therefore listens and uses their 'privilege' to enable people to effectively 'fight their *own* fight' by any means of speech, expression and representation deemed appropriate. This, ultimately, was my goal for the project and I strongly believe, based on my participants' responses and visual material, that this has been achieved.

Continuing (not concluding) Thoughts: The Future of Postcolonial Feminist Filmmaking

The day that the women in my project had to return the cameras was not only a sad day for them, but for me as well. They had all enjoyed the process thoroughly and were already constructing new ideas in their head, and making plans to continue with filmmaking. I had enjoyed watching them develop through the process and wanted them to continue as well. Reclaiming the cameras felt cruel, almost as if I'd introduced them to a tool of empowerment and now I was denying them access to it. So, on that day, I asked them if they were now inspired to go out and get themselves cameras. And, without hesitation, the answer was a resounding "Yes, definitely!"

As delighted as I was by their affirmative response, I was keenly aware of the fact that they had all arrived at my project as already empowered at some level. They were all educated women with successful careers and public lives. While I understood that it was these factors that perhaps reduced the gap between their more experience-based consciousness and my academically informed consciousness, and that it was their established level of agency that contributed so strongly and positively to the success of my study, I wondered about my initial expectation of a set of Hindu female participants situated at varying levels of empowerment and oppression. How might my results be different? Would my approach still have worked? Would participants who lack agency or who experience extreme levels of poverty and oppression benefit in the same way?

I decided to address these concerns with my participants. At each of their final interviews, I began by asking them what value they saw in women with cameras. Their response provided support for the kind of feminist activism that I'd hoped to achieve and perpetuate through this project and beyond. Manjini reiterated that there were so many stories out there that needed to be captured and that digital video was perhaps the best way to do this because of its creative and resistive potential. She described the process as liberating. Both she and Mrs. Singaram, in their endorsement of the process, implied that learning how to use the equipment was fairly simple. They were speaking specifically about women of a variety of age groups who found expression through art or writing difficult, or women from a variety of backgrounds who may be illiterate. Mrs. Singaram argued that it wasn't necessary for people to be creative if they didn't want to be – it was important that they knew how to switch on the camera and record their lives. She argued that being able to document your life is a wonderful way of sustaining memory. Jessica, offering an alternative perspective, argued that only good could come of women behind the camera. She described the process of filmmaking as being a moment of release – cathartic. She emphasized that women could only benefit from being able to *see* themselves and explore their issues through film.

The feedback from my participants thus supports Pink's contention that community-based participatory video projects "work to constitute identities and empower marginalised people" (2009: 23). Implied also in the work to which Pink refers and the positive response from my participants to both the objectives of the project and its process and outcomes, is the potential ripple effect that empowerment through dialogue and learning can have. My participants have all expressed a desire to purchase their own cameras and to run similar workshops with the charitable and social development organisations to which they belong. In this way, the process of learning is shared and the participant eventually also becomes the activist.

I believe, as a result, that even though this project was focused on a specific group of women and used the basic principles of postcolonial feminism as its basis, that the possibilities inherent in a film practice of this nature are endless. The process that the practice engages is solid enough to sustain initiatives that have development and social change as their main objectives. It is a process

that can extend to men and women from a variety of backgrounds. But, this pedagogic purpose needs to begin at the ‘institutions’ or the ‘academies’ through a change not only in mindset but approach as well. Parasher and Mistry have, in many ways, begun to chart spaces for academic filmmaking. I hope that the findings of my project contribute to this in some significant way. In terms of my own teaching, I see the value and opportunity in integrating the autoethnographic and participatory video approaches into methodology and practical film modules, and the design of more practice-based postgraduate projects.

So, this project is definitely not *The End* for the postcolonial feminist film practice, but only the beginning of a practice that is *To Be Continued*...

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Benegal, S. (1996). *The Making of the Mahatma*. South Africa/India: Prime Time Television.
- Berges, P. M. (2005). *Mistress of Spices*. United States of America: Balle Pictures, Capitol Films, Ingenious Film Partners, Isle of Man Film, Kintop Pictures & Spices Productions Ltd.
- Boomgaard, M. (2010). *Attack of the Indian Werewolf*. South Africa: Quarter Beans Productions.
- Chada, G. (2002). *Bend It Like Beckham*. United Kingdom: Helkon SK & Redbus Film Distribution.
- Chada, G. (2004). *Bride & Prejudice*. United Kingdom: Pathé Pictures International, UK Film Council, Kintop Pictures, Bend It Films, Inside Track Films & Bride Productions.
- Gounden, J. (2012). *PhD Research*. Email Correspondence. (25/09/2012). Durban – Pietermaritzburg.
- Gounden, J. (2013). *Final Interview*. Interviewed by Subeshini Moodley. (13 October 2013) Durban, South Africa.
- Gounden, J. (2013/2014). Unedited Footage. Durban: UKZN/NRF.
- Marker, C. (1962). *La Jétée*. France: Argos Films.
- Mehta, D. (1996). *Fire*. Delhi: Trial by Fire Films.
- Mehta, D. (1998). *Earth*. Delhi: Cracking the Earth Films Inc., Goldwyn Films.
- Mestry, M. (2013a). *Final Interview*. Interviewed by Subeshini Moodley. (13 October 2013) Durban, South Africa.
- Mestry, M. (2013b). *Follow-Up*. Email Correspondence. (17 January 2013). Vereeniging – Pietermaritzburg.
- Mestry, M. (2013c). *Me Again!* Email Correspondence. (5 March 2013). Vereeniging – Pietermaritzburg.
- Mestry, M. (2013d). *The Impossible*. Email Correspondence. (25 April 2013). Vereeniging – Pietermaritzburg.

- Mestry, M. (2013e). *OMG*. Email Correspondence. (14 May 2013). Vereeniging – Pietermaritzburg.
- Mestry, M. (2014). *My South African Sari*. Vereeniging: UKZN/NRF.
- Mistry, J. (2005). *We Remember Differently*. Johannesburg: Shadowy Meadow Productions.
- Mistry, J. (2006). *I Mike What I Like*. Johannesburg: Shadowy Meadow Productions & Kgafela Productions.
- Mistry, J. (2010). *The Bull on the Roof*. Helsinki, Johannesburg, New York, Vienna: Shadowy Meadow Productions.
- Mistry, J. (2011). *09:21:25*. Western Cape: Shadowy Meadow Productions.
- Moodley, J. (2010). *White Gold*. KwaZulu-Natal: Serendipity Productions.
- Moodley, S. (2007). *Unwritten*. Pietermaritzburg: Accented Films (UKZN).
- Moodley, S. & Milojkovic, S. (2013a). *Filmmaking Workshop 1: In Conversation with Manjini Mestry*. (12 & 13 January 2013) Johannesburg, Gauteng.
- Moodley, S. & Milojkovic, S. (2013b). *Filmmaking Workshop 1: In Conversation with Sashnee Naicker*. (21 & 22 April 2013) Paulshof, Gauteng.
- Moodley, S. & Milojkovic, S. (2013c). *Filmmaking Workshop 1: In Conversation with Yogambal Singaram & Jessica Gounden*. (30 & 31 May 2013) Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Moodley, S. & Milojkovic, S. (2013d). *Combined Participatory Workshop*. (11 – 13 October 2013) Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Moodley, S. (2014). *A Woman's Promise*. Pietermaritzburg: Accented Films (UKZN/NRF).
- Naidu, K. (2004). *Broken Promises*. Durban: Garuda Motion Pictures.
- Naidu, K. (2006). *Run for Your Life*. Durban: Garuda Motion Pictures.
- Naidu, K. (2007). *Broken Promises 2*. Durban: Afri Communications.
- Naidu, K. (2007). *Run for Your Life 2*. Durban: Vollywood Productions.
- Naidu, K. (2012). *Straight-to-Video Filmmaking*. Interviewed by Subeshini Moodley. Telephonic/Email. Johannesburg/Pietermaritzburg.

- Nair, M. (1991). *Mississippi Masala*. Mississippi & Uganda: Mirabai Films, Inc.
- Nair, M. (2001). *Monsoon Wedding*. Delhi: Mirabai Films, Inc.
- Parasher, P. P. (1989). *Unbidden Voices*. USA/India: Women Make Movies.
- Parasher, P. P. (1992). *Exile and Displacement?*. USA/India: Spora.
- Resnais, A. (1955). *Nuit et Brouillard*. Poland: Argos Films.
- Singaram, Y. (2012). *PhD Research*. Email Correspondence. (9/10/2012). Durban – Pietermaritzburg.
- Singaram, Y. (2013a). *Final Interview*. Interviewed by Subeshini Moodley. (13 December 2013) Durban, South Africa.
- Singaram, Y. (2013b). *The Story of My Life*. Durban: UKZN/NRF.
- Tarkovsky, A. (1975). *The Mirror*. Moscow: Mosfilms.
- Veeran, N. (2010). *For Better, For Worse*. Durban: Bright Side Pictures.

Secondary Sources

- Agnew, V. (ed.) (2005). *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ahmad, A. (1992). *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso.
- Anderson, L. (2006). "Analytic autoethnography". *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernities at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Atkinson, P. (1997). "Narrative turn or blind alley?" *Qualitative Health Research*, 7(3), 325-344.
- Babbie, E., Mouton, J, Vorster, P. & Prozesky, B. (2004). *The Practice of Social Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1952–1953). "The Problem of Speech Genres." In V.W. McGee (trans.), C. Emerson and M. Holquist (eds.) (1986). *Speech Genres, and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text*. Hill and Wang: New York.
- Bennett, W. L. & Segerberg, A., (2011). "Digital Media And The Personalization Of Collective Action Social Technology And The Organization Of Protests Against The Global Economic Crisis", *Information, Communication & Society*, 14, 770–799.
- Bery, R. (2003). "Chapter 4: Participatory Video that Empowers". In S.A. White (ed) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage. pp. 102–121.
- Bhabha, H. & Comaroff, J. (2002). "Chapter 2: Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the Continuous Present: A Conversation". In D. T. Goldberg & A. Quayson (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Bhana, S. (1997) *Gandhi's legacy: The Natal Indian Congress, 1894-1994*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Bhana, S. (1991) *Indentured Indian emigrants to Natal, 1860-1902: A study based on ships' lists*. New Delhi: Promilla & Co.
- Bhana, S & Brain, J. B. (1990) *Setting down roots: Indian migrants in South Africa, 1860-1911*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Bhattacharjee, A. (1998). "The Habit of Ex-nomination: nation, woman, and the Indian immigrant bourgeoisie". In S. Das Dasgupta, (ed.) *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of South Asian Women in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Blom Hansen, T. (2000). "Plays, Politics and Cultural Identity Among Indians in Durban" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26(2), 255–269.
- Blom Hansen, T. (2006). "On the Complexities of Being Hindu". *The Wiser Review* 2, 12.
- Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Brazier, J. E. & Mannur, A. (eds.) (2003). *Theorizing Diaspora*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Burnier, D. (2006). "Encounters with the Self in Social Science Research: A Political Scientist Looks at Autoethnography", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 410–418.
- Buzard, J. (2003). "On Auto-Ethnographic Authority", *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 16 (1), 61–

- Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Chemero, A. (2003). "An Outline of a Theory of Affordances", *Ecological Psychology*, 15 (2), 181–195.
- Chetty, S. (2013). "Temple Worship, Hinduism and the Making of the South African Indian Identity", *Journal of Social Anthropology*, 4 (1 – 2), 53–60.
- Davies, C. B. & Fido, E. S. (eds.) (1990). *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- DasGupta, S. & Dasgupta, S. D. (1996). "Women in Exile: Gender Relations in the Asian Community in the U.S.". In S. Maira & R. Srikanth (eds.) *Contours of the Heart: south Asians Map North America*. New York: Asian American Writers Workshop. pp. 381–400.
- Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P. & Murdock, G. (1999). *Researching Communications: A Practical Guide to Methods in Media and Cultural Analysis*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- De Kock, L. (1992). "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: New Nation Writers Conference in South Africa." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 23 (3): 29 – 47.
- Delamont, S. (2009). "The Only Honest Thing: Autoethnography, Reflexivity and Small Crises in Fieldwork" *Ethnography and Education*, 4(1), 51-63.
- Denzin, N. K. (2006). "Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà Vu all Over Again", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 419–428.
- Desai, A. (1996). *Arise ye Coolies: Apartheid and the Indian 1960-1995*. Johannesburg: Impact Africa Publishers.
- Desai, A. (2000). *The Poors of Chatsworth*. Durban: Madiba Publishers.
- Desai, A. (2002). *We are the Poors: Community Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Desai, A. & Vahed, G. (2010). *Inside Indenture: A South African Story, 1860-1914*. Johannesburg: Human Sciences Research Council.

- Diesel, A. (ed) (2007) *Shakti: Stories of Indian Women in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwaterstrand University Press.
- Dudley, M. J. (2003). "Chapter 13: Voice, Visibility & Transparency: Participatory Video as an Empowerment Tool for Colombian Domestic Workers". In S.A. White (ed) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage. pp. 286–308.
- Duncan, D. (2002). "Chapter 17: A Flexible Foundation: Constructing A Postcolonial Dialogue". In D. T. Goldberg & A. Quayson (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Dwyer, R. (2006). *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*. London: Routledge.
- Eagleton, T. (1990). *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Publishers.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Ellis, C. S. & Bochner, A. P. (2006). "Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 429 – 449.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E. & Bochner, A. P. (2011). "Autoethnography – An Overview", *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1)
URL: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>
Date Accessed: 30/10/2013.
- El Saadawi, N. (1985). *My Travels Around the World*. London: Methuen.
- Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA). (1995). *Directory of Temples and Associations of Southern California and Everything You Wanted to Know about Hinduism*. Artesia, CA: No press.
- Fenton, J. Y. (1988). *Transplanting Religious Traditions: Asian Indians in America*. New York: Praeger.
- Fine, G. A. (2003). "Towards a People Ethnography: Developing a Theory from Group Life" *Ethnography*, 4(1), 41–60.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

- Gandhi, L. (1998) *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Gans, H. J. (1999). "Participant observation: In the era of 'ethnography'" *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28(5), 540–548.
- Gibson, J. J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin.
- Ginwala, F. (1977). *Indian South Africans*. London, Minority Rights Group Ltd.
- Giroux, H. (1992). "Paulo Freire and the Politics of Postcolonialism" *Journal of Advanced Composition*. 12(1),15–26.
- Gokulsing, K. M. & Dissanayake, W. (1998). *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. England: Trentham Books Limited.
- Goldberg, D. T. & Quayson, A. (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Goldman, R. P. & Goldman, S. J. S. (2004) "Chapter 4: Ramayana" in S. Mittal & G. Thursby (eds.) (2004). *The Hindu World*. New York: Routledge. pp. 75 – 96.
- Govinden, D. (2008a). *'Sister Outsiders': The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women*. Pretoria: UNISA Press.
- Govinden, D. (2008b). *Of Time and Memory: Reflections on Recent South African Writings*. Durban: Solo Collective.
- Gramsci, A. (1919). "Workers and Peasants". *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 2 August 1919.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers.
- Gugelberger, G. (1994). "Postcolonial Cultural Studies". In M. Groden & M. Kreiswirth (eds.) (1994). *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Guidi, P. (2003). "Chapter 11: Guatemalan Mayan Women and Participatory Visual Media". In S.A. White (ed.) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage. pp. 252–270.
- Gunew, S. (2008). "Serial Accommodations: Diasporic Women's Writing" in *Canadian Literature*. Spring 2008, Issue 196. pp. 6–15.

- Hall, S. (1982). "Culture and State". In M. Keyes (ed.) (1982). *The State and Popular Culture*. London: Open University.
- Hall, S. (2003). "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In J. E. Braziel & A. Mannur (eds.) (2003). *Theorizing Diaspora*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 233–246.
- Harasym, S. (ed.) (1990). *The Post-Colonial Critic – Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge.
- Harvey, P. (1996). *Hybrids of Modernity: Anthropology, the Nation State and the Universal Exhibition*. London: Psychology Press.
- Heft, H. (1988). "Affordances of Children's Environments: A Functional Approach to Environmental Description", *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 5(3), 29 – 37.
- hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hua, A. (2005). "Chapter 7: Diaspora and cultural Memory". In V. Agnew (ed.) (2005). *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hutcheon, L. (1995). *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London and New York: Routledge.
- IMDB. (2005). Plot Summary: *We Remember Differently*.
URL: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2388012/?ref=nm_flmg_dr_4
Date Accessed: 15 August 2013.
- IMDB. (2007). Plot Summary: *I Mike What I Like*.
URL: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1010405/?ref=nm_flmg_dr_3
Date Accessed: 15 August 2013.
- Jameson, F. (1986). "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism". *Social Text*, Fall 1986, 15, pp. 65–88.
- Kadar, M. (2005). "Chapter 3: Wounding Events and the Limits of Autobiography". In V. Agnew (ed.) (2005). *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*. Toronto: University of

Toronto Press.

- Karamcheti, I. (1995). "Chapter 4: Minor Pleasures". In G. Rajan & R. Mohanram (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Keller, E. F. (1995). "Narrative Turn or Blind Alley?" *Qualitative Health Research*, 7(3), 325–344.
- Kurien, P. (1999). "Gendered Ethnicity: Creating a Hindu Indian Identity in the United States", *The American Behavioural Scientist*, 42 (4), 648–670.
- Landry, D. & Maclean, G. (eds.) (1996). *The Spivak Reader – Selected works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lipner, J. (2004). "Chapter 1: On Hindus and Hinduisms: The Way of the Banyan" in S. Mittal & G. Thursby (eds.) (2004). *The Hindu World*. New York: Routledge. pp. 9–34.
- Lister, M. & Wells, L. 2000. "Seeing Beyond Belief: Cultural Studies as an Approach to Analysing the Visual" in T. van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt, (eds.) (2000) *Handbook of Visual Analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 61–91.
- MacDougall, D. 1998. *Transcultural Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Madison, D. S. (2006). "The dialogic performative in critical ethnography" *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26(4), 320–324.
- Mayat, Z. (ed.) (1961). *Indian Delights (First Edition)*. Durban: Women's Cultural Group.
- McLoughlin, C. & Lee, M. J. W. (2008). "Mapping the digital terrain: New media and social software as catalysts for pedagogical change", in *Proceedings: Ascilite Melbourne*, pp. 641 – 652.
- Madianou, M. & Miller, D. (2013). *Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Meer, F. (1969). *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. Durban: Avon House.
- Meer, F. (1970). *Apprenticeship of a Mahatma*. Durban: Phoenix Settlement Trust.

- Meer, F. (1975a). *Black Women Durban 1975: Case Studies On 85 Women At Home And Work*. Durban: University of Natal Press.
- Meer, F. (1975b). *The Ghetto People : A Study Of The Effects Of Uprooting The Indian People Of South Africa*. London: Africa Publications Trust.
- Mishra, V. (2002). *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire*. New York: Routledge.
- Mistry, J. (2001a). "(Hi)Story, Truth and Nation: Building a 'New' South Africa". In Eurozine (01 April 2001)
URL: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2001-04-01-mistry-en.html>
Date Accessed: 18/12/2013.
- Mistry, J. (2001b). "Conditions of Cultural Production in Post-Apartheid South Africa". In *Extraordinary Times*. IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 11: Vienna, 2001.
- Mistry, J. (2004). "Beyond Homeland and Nostalgia". In *Mail & Guardian* (01 October 2004)
URL: <http://mg.co.za/article/2004-10-01-beyond-homeland-nostalgia>
Date Accessed: 18/12/2013.
- Mishra, V. & Hodge, B. (1988). "What is Post(-)Colonialism?" In P. Williams & L. Chrisman, (eds.) (1994). *Colonial Discourses and Post-Colonial Theory*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Mittal, S. & Thursby, G. (eds.) (2004). *The Hindu World*. New York: Routledge.
- Möckel-Rieke, H. (1998). "Introduction: Media and Cultural Memory", *American Studies*, 43(1), 5 – 17.
- Mohanty, C. T. (1988). 'Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses' In P. Williams & L. Chrisman, (eds.) (1994). *Colonial Discourses and Post-Colonial Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mohanty, C.T., Russo, A. & Torres, L. (eds) (1991) *Third World Feminism and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Moodley, S. (2004). *Postcolonial Feminisms Speaking through an 'Accented' Cinema :The Construction of Indian Women in the Films of Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta*. MA dissertation (University of KwaZulu-Natal).

- Moodley, S. (2009a). “*Eastern Mosaic: Shades of Hindu Women in South African Media*”, in D. Brown. (ed.) (2009). *Religion & Spirituality in South Africa: New Perspectives*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press. pp. 191–204.
- Moodley, S. (2009b). “Telling the Stories of South African African Hindu Women: Participatory Video as a Tool for Feminist Research”, *Agenda* (2008), no. 77, 116–125.
- Moore-Gilbert, B. (1997). *Postcolonial theory: contexts, practices, politics*. London: Verso.
- Naficy, H. (2001). *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Naidu, K. (2012a) *Straight-to-Video Filmmaking (1)*. Telephonic Interview by Subeshini Moodley. Johannesburg/Pietermaritzburg (17 September 2012).
- Naidu, K. (2012b) *Straight-to-Video Filmmaking (2)*. Email Interview by Subeshini Moodley. Johannesburg/Pietermaritzburg (17 September 2012).
- Nair, K. S. (1994). *Participatory Video for Rural Development: A Methodology for Dialogic Message Design*. Unpublished Paper. Rome: FAO DSC Information Division.
- Nair, S. K. & White, S. A. (2003). “Chapter 9: Trapped: Women Take Control of Video Storytelling”. In S.A. White (ed) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage. pp. 195 – 214.
- Nagar, R. *Seminar on NGOisation*. (29 August 2013). Centre for Adult Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg).
- Nandy, A. (ed.) (1998). *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*. London: Zed Books.
- Newman, J. (1995). “Chapter 3: The Colonial Voice in the Motherland”. In G. Rajan & R. Mohanram (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Parasher, P. P. (2002). *Retrospective Hallucination: Echo in Bollywood Modernities*. Pittsburgh: Caliban Books.
- Parry, B. (2002). “Chapter 4: Directions and Dead Ends in Postcolonial Studies”. In D. T. Goldberg & A. Quayson (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

- Pink, S. (2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media & Representation in Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pink, S. (2003) "Interdisciplinary Agendas in Visual Research: Re-situating Visual Anthropology", *Visual Studies*, 18(2), 179-192.
- Pink, S. (2007) (ed.) *Visual Interventions: Applied Visual Anthropology*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Pink, S. (2008). "Mobilising Visual Ethnography: Making Routes, Making Place and Making Images". In *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, September 2008, 9(3).
- Pink, S., L. Kurti, & A. I. Afonso (eds.) (2004) *Working Images*. London: Routledge.
- Rajan, G. (1995). "Chapter 10: The Media Scene and Postcolonial Theories: An Interview with Prajna Paramita Parasher". In G. Rajan & R. Mohanram (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Rajan, G. & Mohanram, R. (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Rambachan, A. (2004). "Global Hinduism: The Hindu Diaspora". In R. Rinehart (ed.) (2004). *Contemporary Hinduism*. Santa Barbara: ABC Clio. pp. 381–413.
- Rastogi, P. (2005). "From South Asia to South Africa: Locating Other Postcolonial Diasporas". *Modern Fiction Studies*, Fall 2005, 52(3), 536–560.
- Rastogi, P. (2008). *Afrindian Fictions: Diaspora, Race, and National Desire in South Africa*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Rinehart, R. (ed.) (2004). *Contemporary Hinduism*. Santa Barbara: ABC Clio.
- Robin, B. R. (2008). "Digital Storytelling: A Powerful Technology Tool for the 21st Century Classroom", in *Theory Into Practice*, 47, 220–228.
- Sachdeva Mann, H. (1995). "Chapter 5: Women's Rights Versus Feminism? Postcolonial Perspectives". In G. Rajan & R. Mohanram (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

- Said, E. (2002a). "Chapter 1: In conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul, and Ania Loomba". In Goldberg, D. T. & Quayson, A. (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Said, E. (2002b). "The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals". In H. Small (ed.) (2002). *The Public Intellectual*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- San Juan Jr., E. (1998). *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Sangari, K. & Vaid, S. (eds.) (1990). *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1985). "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism". *Critical Inquiry*, (12(1), 243–261.
- Spivak, G. C. (1987). *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the subaltern speak?" In P. Williams & L. Chrisman, (eds.) (1994). *Colonial Discourses and Post-Colonial Theory*. Columbia University Press: New York.
- Spivak, G. C. (1991). "Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge". *Oxford Literary Review*, 13(1 – 2), 220 -251.
- Underwood, C. & Jabre, B. (2003). "Chapter 10: *Arab Women Speak Out: Self Empowerment via Video*". In S.A. White (ed) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage. pp. 235–251.
- Vahed, G. & Waetjen, T. (2010). *Gender, Modernity & Indian Delights: The Women's Cultural Group of Durban, 1954 – 2010*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Vergès, F. (2002). "Chapter 19: Post-Scriptum". In D. T. Goldberg & A. Quayson (eds.) (2002). *Relocating Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Villarejo, A. (1995) "Chapter 11: 'Retrospective Hallucination': Postcolonial Video as Cultural Critique". In G. Rajan & R. Mohanram (eds.) (1995) *Postcolonial Discourse and Changing Cultural Contexts: Theory and Criticism*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- Vryan, K. (2006). "Expanding Analytic Autoethnography and Enhancing its Potential", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35 (4), 405–409.

Web 1: "Sita and Ramayana Narratives"

URL: <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/sita/>

Date accessed: 22/08/08

Web 2: "International Indian Film Academy Awards"

URL: <http://www.awardsinindia.com/movie-awards/international-indian-film-academy-awards.htm>

Date accessed: 18/12/2013

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

White, S.A. (ed) (2003) *Participatory Video: Images that Transform and Empower*. London: Sage.

Williams, R. (1981). *Culture*. Glasgow: Fontana.

Zappen, J. P. (2005). "Digital Rhetoric: Toward an Integrated Theory". *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 14 (3), 319–325.

Appendix 1: Request for permission to email members



Media & Cultural Studies

School of Arts
Private Bag X01,
Scottsville,
Pietermaritzburg, 3209
South Africa

Dear Members of the South African Hindu Community

I am a lecturer in Media & Cultural Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I am currently registered for a PhD titled "Narrative Possibilities in a Postcolonial Context: Exploring Self-Reflexive Film as a Critical Articulation of the Stories of South African Hindu Women". The purpose of this study is to develop a method of articulating the narratives of South African Hindu women through the medium of film. Based on the basic principles of postcolonial feminism, the study argues that participatory video, a form of self-reflexive filmmaking, offers a twofold function as both a methodological tool for the gathering of the stories of South African Hindu women and a storytelling device for the voicing of their narratives.

To successfully complete this project, I require Hindu female research participants. The first stage of the process, referred to as interactive interviewing, will involve both myself, as researcher, and participants sharing their experiences of being Hindu in a South African context, and stories of the role and impact of Hinduism in their lives, and how this has been represented through dominant modes of film. The second stage of the process will involve introductory visual and equipment literacy lessons in order for participants to have a basic knowledge of how to use a camera. At this point, participants will be provided with digital video cameras and filmmaking equipment with which to record their stories over a specified period of time.

Once all participants, including the researcher, have each had an opportunity to make a mini-video, they will be required to meet several times **over a course of several months** to collaborate on and workshop a full-length film that incorporates all of their stories. This will involve viewing the mini-videos, finding the common threads (if any) that emerge from these stories, and deciding on whether the final film should include various parts of each of the mini-videos or whether an entirely new story should be told that incorporates the various issues highlighted by the mini-videos. Together, the participants and the researcher will engage the third phase of the research

process by co-constructing a narrative for the final film. The participants will also be involved in an advisory capacity throughout the final editing process.

By the end of the project participants would have gained invaluable knowledge and skills in basic filmmaking that they can use beyond the scope and duration of the project.

To participate in the research project, you will have to be Hindu, female and of Indian descent, and be prepared to commit to the duration of the project highlighted above. Your age, language and Hindu affiliation/denomination (e.g. Hare Krishna/Sa devotee, etc.) will not disadvantage you as these factors do not form part of the selection criteria. I am looking for as wide a range of participants as possible. If you would like to participate in the project, please send me an email that briefly describes:

- your interest in or potential contribution to the project (optional)
- your experience of being a Hindu female
- your experience of being Hindu in a South African context
- a formative experience or defining moment in your life.

Please also ensure that you include in your email your name, age, language and denomination (for purely informational purposes), and a telephone/cellphone number by 9 November 2012.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I look forward to your response.

Kind Regards,

Subeshini Moodley (Ms.)
Lecturer: Media & Cultural Studies
Room 126 Old Main Building
University of KwaZulu-Natal
King Edward Avenue
Scottsville, PMB
Email: moodleys64@ukzn.ac.za
Tel: (033) 260-5305/5297
Cell: 072 117 5497

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form



School of Literary Studies, Media & Creative Arts

Private Bag X01, Scottsville Pietermaritzburg 3209

Telephone: 033 260-5305 Fax: 033 260 6213

email: moodleys64@ukzn.ac.za

Agreement to participate in a research project

I am gathering information for my doctoral research project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I would be grateful if you would agree to be involved in the research process.

The project I am working on is entitled "*Narrative Possibilities in a Postcolonial Context: Exploring Self-Reflexive Film as a Critical Articulation of the South African Hindu Woman's Story*". I hope to collect information that will help me find alternative methods of representation and research via the medium of film and video.

I would like you to be involved in a process of interactive interviewing over a course of several months during 2013. I will take notes from the interview, record videos of your responses and require you to make videos pertaining to your experiences as a South African Hindu women; all of which I would like permission to use as information for my research. I will not force you to engage in anything that you are uncomfortable with and offer you the option of withdrawing from the project at any time with a full promise of confidentiality regarding whatever information you have contributed. If you would like to continue with the project, but remain anonymous, every effort will be made to ensure that your wishes are respected. Please note, however, that since this is an experimental project that aims to exhibit the final product of a workshopped film as a statement of the project's findings to an audience, it may not be possible to destroy the data gained through the research process.

If you have further questions after the interview, you may contact me or my supervisor at any time. Our address is listed at the top of this letter and our telephone numbers are as follows: Ms. Subeshini Moodley: 033 260 5305 or Prof. Anton van der Hoven (supervisor): 033 260 5304.

Thank you.

Subeshini Moodley, PhD Student in Media and Cultural Studies
University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus)

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I..... (name of participant) understand the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project, and consent to participating in the research project from January 2013.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, if I so wish.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE
