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Postcolonial identity in a globalizing India: case studies in visual, musical and oral culture

Sangeet Kumar
University of Iowa

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POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN A GLOBALIZING INDIA: CASE STUDIES IN
VISUAL, MUSICAL AND ORAL CULTURE

by
Sangeet Kumar

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Communication Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 2010

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Timothy Havens
Associate Professor Mark Andrejevic

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes three case studies located within the cultural landscape of India in order to explore the multifarious forces at work within the construction of Indian identity. It uses the lens of identity to excavate the interactions between the past and the present and the east and the west within the rapidly changing cultural scene in India. I analyze how diverse Indian identities are represented on the Indian version of the reality TV show Big Brother, I study the ways in which Indian youth playing rock music imagine themselves and explore how employees at Indian call centers negotiate an imposed western accent and cultural garb with their Indianness. Through these studies my project claims that the tensions between the remnants of a colonial past and a globalizing present must be centrally foregrounded in any attempt to understand the ongoing changes within contemporary Indian culture. I show this tension to be at work within the interstitial sites that each of my case studies represents and within which a stable conception of an “Indian” identity becomes increasingly shaky. I show that while the exercise of power and the assertion of agency are crucial components within global cultural flows, the binary is eventually a false one since the two must invariably occur together. It is the ability of power to morph itself in order to better appropriate its counter and become hegemonic that explains the processes of global cultural flows today. I show that in the case of India this morphing crucially relies on certain vestigial structures of colonial rule and in so doing seek to introduce a differentiation of history within theories of cultural globalization.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
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Dedicated to the Loving Memory of Dr. Asha Sinha.
(1949-2009)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors Dr. Timothy Havens and Dr. Mark Andrejevic as well as my committee members Dr. John Durham Peters, Dr. Bruce Gronbeck, Dr. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Dr. Priya Kumar for their continuous help and support in the process of writing this dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION

My dissertation explores the cultural landscape in India through the lens of human identity. Any attempt to engage with the contemporary cultural milieu in India must necessarily analyze the role played both by the processes of cultural globalization underway there and by the continuing influence of India's colonial history. I trace the influence of both these forces through three case studies located at the junction of the past and the present and the local and the global, probing the issue of identity around which these multiple influences converge. Identity, conceived as a meeting point of influences and ascriptions and as an ongoing process of "identification" (Hall 1996) with those forces allows me to engage with issues of power and history that continue to inflect the ongoing global flow of culture. Analyzing the processes by which these traces of the past and the present interact and how one cannot entirely understand the role of one without also engaging with the other is a central goal of my dissertation. I present the contemporary Indian cultural landscape as a unique instance that allows us to see the play of these multiple forces together.

My three case studies represent facets of a globalizing India where the influences of history are inescapable – sometimes by design and often without any conscious effort. The play that results opens up crucial avenues for theories of cultural globalization that seek to understand the changes being wrought in the world due to rapid advances in media and communication technologies. The tensions in the interaction of the past and the present reveal a symbiotic relationship whereby the very processes of globalization would have taken a different trajectory were it not for certain enabling structures put in place due to colonial rule. As a society on the cusp of a transition, India today is an epicenter of the contemporary phase of globalization. It is rapidly integrating into the

global economy and is often touted both as the hub of the back end operations of the western service industry and a scene of rapid cultural changes. These changes have created a situation where the neo-liberal celebrations of globalization coexist alongside scathing critiques of westernization and capitalism.

At stake in these tensions is the very idea of who an “Indian” is, what Indian “culture” stands for and what are the “values” and “worldviews” that are unique to India. While already an immensely diverse nation-space with little commonalities in terms of language or culture, the addition to that mix of the colonial language and culture and its further layering over with western influences due to globalization has created an entangled space whose separate threads are difficult to parse apart. Neither component in this matrix singularly determines the space but the sparks that fly through their interactions illuminate the complex processes of globalization within India and the role that history plays in it. My three case studies show how these forces converge in the construction, representation, and performance of Indian identities across different sections of the cultural scene. By studying how the participants in each of these cases conceive of themselves and challenge assumed notions of who they should be, I hope to unravel the complex role of postcoloniality in a globalizing India.

While global explanations for the consumption, adoption or appropriation of culture are extremely useful, they must also be continually juxtaposed alongside factors that are irreducible to those universal explanations. Qualifying existing theories of cultural globalization with contingent and local factors provides us with a more accurate understanding of how the phenomenon of globalization manifests itself at these different sites. I use India’s historical

experience as a qualifying addition to the existing theories of globalization. In doing so I answer a call made by other scholars within our field.

Addressing contemporary theories of globalization, for instance, Lawrence Grossberg (2002) fears that “globalization is conceptualized in ways that erase issues of colonialism and its continuing legacies and effects.” (p. 369). This erasure obscures the relationship between what these theories seek to address, the phenomenon of globalization, and a history of colonialism. In failing to engage with the role of historical experiences in their analysis of global cultural flows, globalization is often presented as an ahistorical process explained primarily by the intertwining of the world through the rapid advances in the field of communication and technology. While it is clearly the case that the past two decades of global integration would be unthinkable without the overall growth in media technologies and global capitalism, it is also true that in certain cases the changes facilitated by this growth have tapped into pre-existing social and historical structures.

Notably, postcolonial nationalists have also used the historical experience of colonialism to oppose global forces. In India, arguments against multi-national corporations have invariably invoked the fear of a return of colonial rule. These arguments held ground until the opening up of the Indian economy due to a credit crisis in the early 1990s (McDowell 1997). Since then, the gradually liberalizing Indian economy has attracted foreign corporations as well as jobs from the western service industry. During this phase, the existence of structures both in the cultural and linguistic realm and in the politico-legal sphere has provided global forces with a ready ground on which to root themselves. My dissertation focuses on the cultural and linguistic traces and analyzes their role in globalization. I seek to show that the vestigial structures set in place uniquely co-construct the contemporary Indian identity. While I am primarily engaged with

the symbolic structures that can be located through the lens of identity, the differentiation between the symbolic and the material is not an easy one. The colonial language of English would ostensibly be a symbolic structure but its knowledge both requires material institutions such as schools and has consequences in terms of better career and monetary prospects.

This project learns from several similar recent studies that have attempted to understand aspects of contemporary culture in India. All of these studies (Appadurai 1998; Rajagopal 2001; Mankekar 1999; Kumar 2005) have situated Indian media and culture within the context of a globalizing world. These scholars have sought to capture contemporary changes in the cultural and media landscape during the period marked by the emergence of the current phase of globalization. Appadurai (1998) argues that for a large part of the world today modernity and globalization are two sides of the same coin. Citing several examples from India he pushes against the idea that globalization necessarily means homogenization. Rajagopal (2001) on the other hand studies the rise of *Hindutva* in India in the 1990s within the context of the telecast of a religious serial *Ramayana* (based on the life of mythic king Ram) on India's national television network. Rajagopal claims that the liberalizing of the Indian economy created a weakened state and a crisis of legitimation that the religious movement used to its advantage. The movement used a colonial social fissure he calls the "split public" to its own advantage. While Rajagopal (2001), Mankekar (1999) and Kumar (2005) all study television in India their approaches and conclusions are different. Mankekar's (1999) ethnography of television viewers in different neighborhoods of New Delhi unravels how female viewers interpreted narratives of femininity within the different programs of Indian television. Kumar (2005) on the other hand ponders over the rise of satellite broadcasting in India and the construction of a prime-time audience while simultaneously

unraveling themes of newfound postcolonial nationalism in Indian television. These scholars engage with changes in contemporary India while centrally foregrounding its historical experience.

My study similarly seeks to capture a slice of the contemporary Indian cultural landscape by analyzing three phenomena that represent a globalizing India. I conduct an analysis of the second season of the reality TV program *Big Boss*; I study the rock music scene in India and explore the recently growing call center industry, to investigate three representative sections of globalizing Indian culture. In the first case, I study the representation of postcolonial social fissure comprising of conflicting Indian identities on the television program, in the second I analyze the performance of a post colonial identity by young musicians who having grown up speaking English and listening to rock, consider it their own, and in the third I study the linguistic construction of identity as callers seek to masquerade themselves through taking on accents, names and cultural personas. In each of these, the self-conception of the subjects involved in these processes is centrally fore-grounded. The subjects involved in these cases are continuously called upon to justify their Indianness and to make a case for the authenticity of their cultural and linguistic ascriptions. As Indians who have grown up within a messy entangling of the east and the west, the present and the past, the colony and the metropole, the English and the vernacular, these subjects that comprise my three case studies open up fruitful points of suture for the study of postcolonial Indian identities. These identities are hardly a monolithic, unified whole that could be neatly contained within an existing category. Instead they are diverse, fluid and continuously shifting, eschewing any simplistic notions of Indian and non-Indian. They invariably define themselves in opposition to what they are not. They challenge any attempts to essentialize and pigeonhole what an "Indian" identity should be and what it could not be.

Since their analysis reveals a play of similar forces within these seemingly separate instances of identity construction these three cases allow me to show commonalities across different spheres within the cultural landscape of India. While each instance is irreducibly different in some ways, my project focuses on the inherent commonalities in the performance, representation and enunciation of their Indian-ness.

The Case Studies

For this study I analyze three objects that allow me to interrogate different dimensions of postcolonial Indian identities. I begin by studying the second season of the Indian version of reality TV show Big Brother (called Big Boss II given the untranslatability of the Orwellian concept), then I analyze the self-conceptions of the Indian youths performing rock music and finally I look at the processes through which employees working in Indian call centers negotiate their existing Indian-ness with their projected western self. The core idea that animates my analysis of these cases is the question of identity. Exploring postcolonial Indian identities allows me to engage with issues of politics, power, agency and history all of which are recurring themes within these cases. Given these multitude of forces at work, it is clear that I am not working with an essentialist or stable notion of identity but a strategic, provisional and contingent one. I do not presume a continuous self through “the vicissitudes of history” (Hall 1996, p. 17), neither a kernel nor core that lies beneath the superficial layers of multiple selves that we adopt. Rather, I embrace a fractured and fragmented process of subjects constantly becoming who they are. This constant process of becoming is performative (Butler 1990, Bhabha 1994), continuously “remaking the boundaries” and “exposing the limits of any claim to an singular or autonomous sign of difference” (Bhabha 1994, p. 313). If identity were a point of

suture between the discursive structures that seek to interpellate us and moments of resistance against those structures, its analysis allows us to delve into the dialectic of power and agency. In each of these cases I show how subjects push back against pre-existing categories creating a slippage from existing labels. In so doing I challenge notions of stable identities that are based on fantasies of a complete identification (Hall 1996). Instead I show this fantasy to be unrealizable arguing through my case studies that there will always be an excess or a lack. Moreover given the pre-eminence of the category of nation within my analysis it is also clear that I am talking primarily about the construction and imaginations of "Indian" identities. My invocation of postcolonial identity largely denotes a postcolonial Indian identity. In positing the idea of a national identity I seek to continuously problematize the category of the nation as a determinant in the subjects' self-conception within my study.

It is also worthy of qualifying that in its exploration of the cultural landscape in India my study primarily works with the category of identity rather than its closely associated concept of subjectivity. Given that both connote notions of selfhood, the distinction between the two must be clearly laid out. Wetherell (2008) uses Venn (2006) to explain that while identity is usually conceptualized as a relational concept that taps into pre-existing categories of race, gender, nation etc, subjectivity is supposed to provide access to a subject's interiority. In her essay Wetherell seeks to resuscitate the concept of identity providing a strong defense for it against the often more valorized and ostensibly theoretically more nuanced notion of subjectivity. In so doing she also claims that the distinction between the two concepts is no longer as clear-cut and while noting their distinct points of origin, scholars should also allow the two concepts to bleed into each other. Learning from Wetherell's distinctions and layering it with Hall's explication of the concept of identity (1996), I differentiate the

concept of identity as one that by its very definition allows for agency, even if that idea of agency must be continuously qualified. Subjectivity, on the other hand, borrowing from notions of interpellation (Althusser 2001) connotes the idea of the interiorization of a discourse about who one should be. In a broad sense then, subjects are produced by language, institutions, and state apparatuses while identity allows for at least the notional idea of allowing one to identify oneself. It is this distinction that I seek to maintain while invoking these two concepts within my study. The central concern of my study is ways in which identities are constructed, represented, performed and enunciated.

In studying the reality TV show *Big Boss II*, I argue that the show attempted to successfully replicate a social fissure based on conflicting post-colonial identities in order to create conflict among participants. This fissure called the “split public” (Rajagopal 1997) is a colonial legacy that continues to pervade postcolonial India pitting a liberal English speaking Indian elite against the non-English speaking, rural, often-religious masses. Through casting characters that broadly fit one or the other side of this divide, the show reproduced an ongoing tussle that is played out everyday in the social, political and cultural sphere in India. Throughout the season participants entered into conflicts over so-called Indian values and over issues related to language and culture that are all contentious topics in Indian social life. I unearth three different themes around which these conflicts played out on the show. The first revolved around gender and comprised of an episode where charges of un-Indianness were leveled against a female member due to her outspoken behavior, her sexualized prior reputation and her dressing preferences. I show that this conflict reveals a social fissure within the Indian society whereby a patriarchal view of the virtuous and chaste Indian woman is sought to stand in for purity of Indian culture. On the other hand a liberal or “westernized” female

identity connoted by the said protagonist's dress code and outspokenness was labeled as un-Indian. Besides gender, conflicts flared up on the show regarding participants' inability to speak either Hindi or English. Unfamiliarity in Hindi was seen as a sign of un-Indianness and inability to speak good English provided opportunities for humor and ridicule. These three axes of conflict on the show reveal the continuation of a postcolonial residue within contemporary India that the show successfully tapped into. They allow us a glimpse of an entangling of the past and the present that remain imbricated within any struggle to define Indianness.

Rock musicians in India, the subjects of my second case study, face these struggles everyday. Questions of their identity are central to their dream of rock stardom. Through conversations with them and an analysis of their music and the material aspects of rock in India, I show that these musicians' lives represent points of suture of multiple identities that they must continuously juggle in their professional and personal lives. Having grown up speaking English and listening to western music, most rock musicians in India consider rock to be an inseparable aspect of their lives claiming it to be as Indian as any other form of Indian music. They argue that given their upbringing, they had little choice about the kind of music they would want to play. In their stage performances, their lyrics and their self-presentations, these musicians complicate the idea of Indian identity. They occupy a liminal space within the social milieu which, given its English education and its familiarity with western cultural forms, is constantly asked to make a case for its Indianness. Notably, even as they must prove their Indianness, these musicians face similar questions about the authenticity of their music from western audiences that they often try to court. Their negotiation of identities therefore functions at two different levels of

operation – one looking inward to India and another that looks outwards towards foreign rock audiences.

This dialectic of simultaneously looking inwards and outwards – a symptom of postcolonial identity – is clearly visible in my third case study that analyzes the identity of employees working in the call center industry in India. These employees, working for western corporations but based in India, must conceal their location, their names, their accents and their cultural ascriptions as they talk to their western customers. Hired for the job due to their ability to speak English, the callers must subsequently learn to efface their original accents and take on a new one, a task whose difficulty I address in my analysis. While the western corporations demand a westernized accent, that accent is difficult to sustain through long conversations leading to immense confusion among employees and their trainers and disaffection among the customers on the other end of the line. There is a continuous process of negotiation whereby employees, while challenging diktats to take on artificial identities, nevertheless undergo transformations as a result of their training and continuous interactions with western customers. My findings show a spectrum of employee responses with some resisting assimilation entirely while others choosing to immerse themselves within their new cultural and linguistic selves and carrying their garb outside the workplace. Consequently, while they become quite adept at presenting a desirable front for their customers, they become maladjusted to their immediate surroundings when they walk outside their workplace. The affective stress that results from these continuous attempts to carve a space for themselves amidst conflicting pressures is a crucial component of their linguistic construction of identity. As employees deploy the right accent, the correct intonation and culturally appropriate idioms and linguistic nuances to masquerade their true

selves, they also assert themselves against attempts to pigeonhole them in pre-existing categories that best suit the commercial interests of the companies.

The Choice of Case Studies

Given the complexity and the vastness of the cultural landscape of India, any attempt to engage with it must limit its boundaries and its objects of study to representative cases that allow one to explore various dimensions of the cultural scene. The three cases I choose to limit my study to are particularly suitable for the exploration of a postcolonial Indian identity within an age of globalization because each of them has a role of the past and the present within them. These cases represent moments of interaction between India and the west and are clear manifestations of the present age of globalization. They occupy a hybrid space where they are significantly influenced by Western culture even while remaining rooted in India. Big Boss is an adaptation of a successful western reality TV program, rock music in India seeks to Indianize a western genre, and call center employees in India rigorously learn western linguistic and cultural nuances in order to service their western clients better. Each three of these phenomenon have become prominent on the cultural scene of India within the past decade and thus are centrally located within the current era of global integration. Each of them has also been enabled by advances in media and communication technologies that are the hallmark of this age of globalization. The adaptation of Big Brother for Indian audiences exemplifies the globalization and liberalization of the Indian television sector enabled by advances in satellite broadcasting. Rock music in India would not have exploded onto the cultural scene without the access to music and culture that the Internet has provided and the entire call center industry in India is enabled by the revolution in telecommunication technologies. While underscoring the interactions between the east and the west,

each of my case studies also occurs in the mediated realm, a testament to the fact that the current phase of globalization would be unimaginable without the role played by the media in enabling it.

Secondly, each of my case studies is also positioned within the dialectic of India's colonial past and its globalizing present showing prominent traces of India's colonial history. The adaptation of Big Brother in India relied on expediently using a social fissure that has pervaded Indian society and whose roots can be traced back to colonial rule in India. I show that this adaptation was done with considerable success since it allowed the program to create conflicts on the show while doing it in the garb of diverse representation. Indian rock music is centrally tied to the continuation of colonial structures, since in playing it musicians claim to participate in a genre that is as natural to them as an "authentic" Indian cultural form would be for others. Consequently, they complicate the idea of Indian identity subverting the neat divisions of the west and the east. Lastly, the very relocation of the call center industry from the west to India is predicated upon the presence of a large English speaking population there. The pre-existing structure of English allows this global industry to find a ready ground that enables its expansion. Hence, even as they represent a globalizing India, these three case studies also exemplify how its historical experiences continue to define and complicate its cultural scene in contemporary times.

My case studies align themselves along a rubric that allows me to explore identity in the realms of representation, performativity and language – three key dimensions along which global cultural flows manifest themselves. Television showcases identity in the realm of representation, rock music shows the construction of identity through performativity (and its closely associated counterpart of colonial mimicry), and call centers reveal the construction of

identity through linguistic talk. These are the anchors around which I visualize my three cases while simultaneously allowing that traces of each can be found in the others as well. As my analysis shows, television comprises elements of performance and language; rock music is also about language and representation, and issues of performativity and representation seep into the job of call center employees. Hence, while allowing for each of these to bleed in to one another, I centrally locate my analysis in each of the cases around the triad of performativity, representation and language. Each of these is a key contour of cultural practice in a global world. While language remains the primary medium of any expression, culture in the representative realm and its performance for an audience all help us understand its transmuted role at a new site.

Analyzing three different, yet related, objects of cultural phenomena allows me to find commonalities across heterogeneous points within the cultural landscape. Clearly irreducible to each other, my case studies nevertheless show parallel interactions between the local and the global and between the past and the present. I acknowledge that these interactions are specific to the object under study but also show the homology in the processes by which these interactions manifest themselves in the aural, visual and oral media and in the realm of performativity, representation and language. Since each of these cases represents a mediated experience of culture they highlight the importance of media in facilitating global interactions.

Mapping Cultural Globalization

My objects of study exemplify a globalizing India and understanding the process by which they come into being necessitates that I navigate through theoretical attempts to explain how cultures are increasingly being taken up, produced and appropriated in new locations around the world. Existing theories

of globalization grapple with this phenomenon and bring unique insights into our understanding of how instances such as my cases come to be. While located in India, each of my objects also represents a strong influence of the West, a feature that would not be possible without the ongoing phenomenon of cultural globalization. As they seek to understand this process, scholars' attitudes are determined as much by the geographical region they choose to look at as by the particular aspect of globalization they study. Explanations that hold ground in one part of the world or that explain one particular aspect become untenable when translated to another location or object.

However, one can broadly schematize the multifarious debates on globalization along an organizing matrix that Frederick Jameson provides us in his essay *Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue*. His schema is a multi-dimensional matrix of categories and levels that align themselves horizontally and vertically along different axes. To see any one nodal point in isolation from the others would be to ignore the fact that every node is defined in conjunction with and in opposition to other nodes within the structure. To begin with he allows four positions on globalization as; i) globalization doesn't exist, ii) that it has always existed, iii) that it is the ultimate horizon of capitalism and iv) it represents the third (multinational) stage of capitalism. Before delving into the four options, Jameson provisionally bifurcates the "slippery concept" of globalization along the economic and the cultural routes while acknowledging that these cannot remain separated for too long. A cultural path leads necessarily to a postmodern celebration of difference and a benign interplay of heterogeneity. On the other hand an economic path leads us down the route of standardization, integration and what has been called a world-system. Once these two dimensions have been separated and "having secured these initial structural possibilities" (57), Jameson initiates transfers between these separated

paths. Then, transposing the axes of one over the other we see the economic becoming cultural and the cultural becoming economic. When projected onto each other, the cultural realm that began as a site of differentiation (postmodernism, hybridity) can just as well be the site of standardization (Frankfurt School, Cultural Imperialism) and the economic realm that began as the neo-liberal celebration of difference can just as well be exploitation under a world capitalist system. So while cultural globalization could be a productive coming together of differences (Canclini, Bhabha), when the economic is projected on to it we have cultural hegemony (Schiller, Miller, Mattelart). Similarly, while the economic path was one of homogeneity and standardization (Wallerstein), it could just as well be the neo-liberal celebration of human freedom and prosperity (Bhagwati 2004). As we see, when the four nodes of the economic, the cultural and standardization and heterogeneity are played against each other, we get a maddening array of possibilities that explodes the concept of globalization into a multi-nodal matrix. These four nodal points when mapped onto each other show us that difference or standardization can both be empowering and oppressive depending on the specific instances we choose to study. This grid helps us map the global and provides us with placeholders where we can now begin to place the specific theorists and their arguments. Even though my cases are located in the cultural plane of globalization, I cannot eschew the economic dimensions within my analysis. I straddle these inseparable dimensions by engaging with the economic aspects of call centers and of rock music in India as well as of the commercial motives of the diverse representation of Indian identities within the Indian version of Big Brother.

Scholars of economic globalization make both celebratory (Bhagwati 2004) as well as Marxist and critical arguments (Wallerstein 2004; Hardt & Negri 2000) about it. As they do so, they redefine conceptions of power and its exercise in our

world. For Bhagwati (2004), power reaches the multitude through channels of economic prosperity that globalization makes possible. For Wallerstein (2004) however, a division of the world into the monopoly and the non-monopoly production processes ensures that surplus value will continue to flow from the periphery to the core. On the other hand, Hardt and Negri's (2000) reformulation of power in our contemporary world is seminal because they conceive it as an economic and political hegemony that is an absent presence. The transfer of sovereignty from divinity to monarchy, then to the nation state and finally, in the case of the American constitution, to the people means that power, for Hardt and Negri (2000), resides in a network of institutions, associations and agreements. It is this very model, now being exported to the global order through American dominance that Hardt and Negri (2000) call *Empire*. Semblances of each of these positions appear within my case studies. They represent both the unfettered sway of global capital but also clearly show spaces of economic prosperity and mobility. Keeping these perspectives in tension better helps in explaining their role within Indian society.

Moving from the economic to the cultural, we must ask how the contemporary theories of cultural globalization align themselves along Jameson's grid? Broadly speaking, arguments about global culture range along a spectrum that sees globalization as a site of cultural homogeneity on the one hand and it productively enabling hybrid identities and difference on the other. Those making the first case of the homogenizing effects of global culture are further differentiated in the paths they adopt to make their case. One stream among these theorists (Herbert Schiller 1992; Toby Miller 2005) studies the economic aspects of the global media institutions and argues that these institutions are imbricated within a hegemonic economic regime advantageous to certain regions as opposed to others. Others (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971) study the textual

aspects of the media content to argue that within these dominant cultural texts are embedded ideological strains that encourage life choices of consumerism and individualism. Both these approaches, while making a valid contribution in the analysis of global cultural power, are easily shown to be totalitarian when faced with studies that engage with people that consume these cultures (Ang 1985, Liebes and Katz 1989). Closely aligned with the position of foregrounding power while simultaneously attacking celebratory readings of hybridity that the second path takes, are those (Kraidy 2005; Tomlinson 1991) that claim that theorists of hybridity buy into the politically expedient idea that globalization is an innocent interplay of ideas and cultures. These critics of hybridity challenge those who imagine globalization as engendering a productive third space (Bhabha 1994; Appadurai 1990, 1998; Canclini 1995). In their defense, scholars of hybridity claim that attempts to see global culture merely within a schema that pits hegemonic cultures against dominated cultures misses the innovative energy of the interstitial space. This hybrid space could just as well serve as an escape from the tyranny of an already existing homogenous majoritarian culture. For these theorists, cultural hybridity is a site of resistance against the often state-imposed cultures.

As I elaborate on these debates below I do so because they help illuminate some key questions that underpin this study. Is the adaptation of Big Brother in India an instance of cultural imperialism or a sign of productive appropriation of a global television format? Is rock music in India an imposition of an alien cultural form that displaces a pre-existing authentic culture or is its uptake explained by historical factors that totalitarian explanations of cultural flows do not take into account? Is the consequence of the call center industry's flight to India best understood through its production of a derived cultural group that mimics western culture and accent or do we need to complicate those

explanations to introduce agency and empowerment that this industry might also allow? In other words do my case studies allow themselves to be explained by arguments that foreground the role of power alone or do accounts of human beings involved in these objects complicate those explanations? How can we best understand the third, in-between spaces that globalization invariably produces and that each of my cases represents?

I begin from one polar end of this debate that make claims about absolute western cultural dominance over the rest of the world. These claims have been made both from the perspective of political economy of media institutions and from that of a textual analysis of media content. Herbert Schiller (1992) in *Mass Communications and American Empire* takes the first route making the argument that American media institutions broadcasting to the rest of the world were preparing the ground for western-style capitalism by peddling the “ideological ingredient of the affluent society; the concept of the good life.” (2). Schiller identifies the buzzword of “freedom” (of trade, of enterprise, of speech) as the central ideological message being disseminated by American media corporations to the rest of the world. He makes his case by presenting the intricate connections between the American media corporations and the control they exercise over the International Space Communications Consortium (Intelsat), which determines access to audiences worldwide. In so doing he shows the conjunction between the American media institutions and the multi-national corporations in search for new markets by claiming that the former often sold programming at rates so low that the domestic programming had no chance of competing against them. This under-pricing served the dual function of destroying the domestic programming industry and gaining future audience loyalty by creating a market for western consumer products. The influence that western programs held over the developing world was accentuated because these programs presented a

novelty in the industrially, lesser-developed regions of the world and hence altered the priorities of these societies. He claims that: "Resources directed into consumer goods in the poorer countries represent materials channeled away from education and capital expansion." (114). Expectedly, Schiller's arguments that are perhaps the clearest enunciation of what has been called the cultural imperialism thesis, have been critiqued for its ambitious and totalitarian nature. But a strident echo of Schiller's position comes from Toby Miller et al's *Global Hollywood II* (2005) that highlights the existing alliances between Hollywood, the multi-national corporations and the US departments of state and military since the very inception of film making in the US. In making this argument, Miller disputes the myth that the growth and global prevalence of Hollywood is explained by *laissez faire* policies or by the universal themes found in Hollywood movies. His analysis is centrally and unapologetically economic. Citing industry reports and speeches given by business leaders Miller supports Schiller's claim that the popularity of Hollywood around the world has created suitable market conditions for the sale of American goods there. Through the "mis-categorization" of Hollywood movies as intellectual property rather than economic products, access and protection was sought for these movies in the markets of emerging nations. Notably, he shows that a similar protection was refused to foreign films in the US. The Second World War provided a further impetus to Hollywood because of the dismantling of the film industries in the Axis nations and a reciprocal access sought for the European markets in exchange for the Marshall Plan. Through subtle coercion and trade negotiations abroad and subsidies and political support at home, Hollywood has managed to gain a global dominance over the world market. Paradoxically, while the rest of the world increasingly consumes more international cultural products, the share of foreign movies screened in the US is a mere 0.75 percent (Miller et al, 2005 p.

94). This asymmetry does not necessarily support the idea of cultural imperialism, he allows, but it does belie the claim that free global trade exists in the field of cultural goods.

Both Schiller and Miller use the political economy of media institutions to make their claims about the pernicious influence these institutions wield over the global audience. Critics of this position refuse to believe that dominance in the economic/cultural realm necessarily means that these media institutions are shaping the views of their viewers. Tomlinson (1991) claims that to assume that all culture is mediated culture is to ignore that there is a lived life outside of mediated culture. Moreover, Tomlinson elaborates that the mere assertion of the manipulative role of western media does not prove the case of cultural imperialism since a final conclusion can only be drawn from a study of audience responses. This takes the debate to the heart of the perennial question within the field of media studies – that of the effects of the consumption of media products. Tomlinson concedes that while the lack of audience studies in political economic analysis does not help prove their case, it does not disprove it either. Another strident criticism of Miller's position comes in the work of scholars who take the perspective of the cultural-studies tradition by arguing that there were several levels of mediation between the production of culture and its consumption. Havens (2006) for instance has argued that a focus only on the structural entities within global culture ignores the role played by individual agents in determining the programming profile in different cultural regions. He shows that these individual agents that comprise networks of buyers and sellers negotiate and strike deals in the global television marketplace and often play as crucial a role in programming choices as do media corporations. Within the positions of Havens (2006) and Miller et al (2005) we see the semblances of the debate between political economy and culture studies in the British media studies tradition.

The alternative approach to the study of cultural hegemony takes the route of textual analysis, unraveling in a cultural product the embedded themes and subtexts that convey hegemonic cultural messages. This approach underplays the economic and structural aspects of cultural institutions and Dorfman & Mattelart's (1975) *How To Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology In the Disney Comic* is a classic representative of this approach. Written during the socialist rule of Salvadore Allende (soon to be deposed by Augusto Pinochet) in Chile, the analysis focuses on the characters, dialogues and plotlines in Disney comics to argue that hidden beneath the seemingly innocent pictures and entertaining plotlines of these comics were themes of capitalism, colonialism, sexism and patriarchy. The comics therefore were a veritable training in consumerism and the capitalist way of life. By positing the chaotic life of the city with the idyllic life of the countryside where the "savage" natives lived, the comic books were perpetuating the simple-minded binaries of colonial rule. Dorfman & Mattelart's book was subsequently banned in Chile and was perhaps the first such close analysis of cultural text to make an argument for cultural imperialism. Steering away from a deterministic argument that the Disney comics was Americanizing the Chilean society, it instead makes the case that for the young readers whom the comics was targeted to, the plotlines of the comics represented a worldview that mystified societal power relations. But how could a comic book alien to life in Chile become so popular as to pose a threat to societal norms? To this question they concede an economic rationale claiming that these comic book products were imported into the country like many other consumer goods there and hence find an audience. The relationship between Latin America and US was one of dependence and: "Immense economic underdevelopment lies side-by-side with minute mental superdevelopment." (98).

It is true that in Dorfman and Mattelart's model there is little space for an oppositional reading of the text. The presence of certain themes within the text is reason enough for them to assume that the audience consuming them will decode these themes hegemonically. On the other hand, providing space for an oppositional reading (Hall 1980) would allow for agency to the reader who can decode it differently from its dominant encoding. Ang (1985) and Liebes & Katz (1989) challenge this limited view with their study of the American soap opera *Dallas* by introducing audience responses to texts and thus refuting the idea of passive audiences. Both these studies foreground audience responses within their analysis and hence fill a lacuna that existed in studies such as the analysis of Disney comics by Dorfman and Mattelart. In so doing they problematize significantly the thesis of cultural indoctrination of the developing world by the developed world as the prime schema organizing the theories of cultural globalization. By engaging with the people involved in the cultural flows, these challenges to theories of cultural imperialism also help my analysis. I am centrally concerned with what globalization does to people's self-conception and my analyses repeatedly show that while there is power at play, people as active agents, continuously find spaces to re-code texts for their own purposes. As I show later, rock musicians in India must write songs about local issues, call center employees and trainers resist imposition of accents through metaphors such as a "neutral accent" and a western reality TV show can only be successful in India if it reflects the Indian social milieu. In that sense these instances of western cultural imposition are negotiated with and Indianized.

For instance, in studying responses by audiences *Watching Dallas*, Ien Ang (1985) found that different audiences watched the program for different reasons but the affective experience of pleasure was common in all accounts that claimed to have liked the show (some audiences claim to have hated it). Responses

showed two levels of reasoning about people liking the show – she calls them two different ideologies. One was the populist ideology, which was guilt free and “anti intellectual”. The second was the ideology of mass culture that was more “theoretical”. So, even as the latter predominated the letters written by viewers the former is what determined the viewing choices. Deploying a method of “symptomatic” reading of the letters, she unearths the “presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them”. Hence, she concludes that scholarship on mass communication was lacking in its theorization on how audiences derived pleasure out of different cultural products. Even as Ang focuses on the audience reactions, she continuously intermixes her analysis with references to the text of the serial as well. She concedes that American programs had an advantage over others because the audience had become used to “their production values, their style and pace, their language” thus making them familiar. Besides this, the hype generated around the serial functioned as an advertisement for it. As she concedes the advantage American programs have over other programs, Ang positions herself between Schiller’s totalitarian theory of culture hegemony on the one end and a celebration of hybridity on the other.

As opposed to Ang’s tangential critique of the cultural imperialism thesis, Liebes & Katz (1989) challenge it far more directly. They set their study up by positing that “To prove that *Dallas* is an imperialist imposition, one would have to show 1) that there is a message incorporated in the program that is designed to profit American interests overseas, 2) that the message is decoded by the receiver in the way it was encoded by the sender, and 3) that it is accepted uncritically by the viewers and allowed to seep into their culture.” (4). In their study they go on to disprove these three premises. Their analysis shows that the audience members had either a referential (uncritical or taking it as a fact) or a metalinguistic (critical) reading of the serial’s plotline. The predominantly critical

reading showed that the audience members were far from passively receiving the messages in the serial. But what explains the popularity of the serial worldwide? According to Liebes and Katz (1989) the widespread popularity of the serial can be explained by the storyline of *Dallas*. They claim that the storyline of *Dallas* echoes the most “fundamental mythologies” of all cultures. The structure of this myth is also one found in the book of Genesis and the story revolved around the familiar tropes of familial loyalty, love, dynasty, kinship and sibling rivalry. These mythic references recurred among many of the group discussions with their audience members. It was this resemblance to certain universal primordial structures that made *Dallas* such a popular television serial worldwide. While Liebes and Katz support their argument about the polysemic nature of cultural texts through several testimonies from audiences, the reason they proffer for its popularity is clearly untenable for me. Their explanation about a universal core to *Dallas* as a reason for its popularity begs the question of whether it is a mere coincidence that a program originating in the west is being touted as connecting with masses in far flung places that it was not made for? Does a similar claim of universalism explain the immense popularity of other western cultural products, given that there are so many of them? Tomlinson (1991) cautions us that it is hardly a coincidence that claims about universalism are invariably made by those from the dominant culture. Notably, claims about a connection with a universal human nature have been made about two of my case studies - rock music and reality TV. While I engage with these claims in my analysis, I agree with Tomlinson’s (1991) reminder that any study of global cultural consumption must concede the advantage of the western cultural industry in delivering its products around the world and in its popularity. This criticism notwithstanding, it is also fair to allow Ang’s (1985) and Katz and

Liebes' (1989) point that all cultural texts are polysemic and a different reading is just as possible as a literal one, as Stuart Hall (1980) has famously argued.

So, while all the scholars discussed above (Schiller 1992; Miller et al 2005; Dorfman & Mattelart 1975; Ang 1985; and Liebes and Katz 1989) are engaged with the question of cultural hegemony, some among them complicate this idea significantly through audience studies and textual analysis. Moving to the other end of this spectrum is the view about empowering consequences of global cultural flows. This position eschews the binary view of global culture and seeks instead a position of interstitiality that can be a site of imagination (Appadurai 1998) and agency (Bhabha 1994; Canclini 1995). This position begins by disputing the idea of "pure" cultures arguing that all cultural sites are hybrid to begin with. They argue that cultures have always been in a flux and the phenomenon of globalization has only further energized and encouraged that process. The innovative and energetic third space and hybrid identities continuously disrupts the notion of homogenous cultural entities.

For them, the rapid integration of the world as evidenced by globalizing entities such as the burgeoning electronic media has also enabled the imagination of new forms of identities (Appadurai 1998). Imagination, for Appadurai has been fuelled because of the dual factors of media and migration and the ability to imagine is "a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (3). While human migration and the possibility to imagine have always existed in history, today those processes are juxtaposed with the proliferation of mediated images that energize them even further. Imagination today has broken free from the realm of art, culture and ritual and has "now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies." (6) Far from the idea that the mass media indoctrinate their viewers and homogenize cultures, Appadurai claims that they, in fact, often play an emancipatory role in our world. Hence he claims, "There is

growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and, in general *agency*.” (7) Moreover imagination, as opposed to fantasy, is not a realm of escape but the terrain of action. Echoing Saskia Sassen (1999), Appadurai posits that the autonomous nation state being the obvious casualty of the migration of people and the proliferation of mass media had lost its monopoly on the project of modernization.

This enabling power of the in-between space that globalization engenders and that I situate each of my cases within, is emphasized even further by Nestor Garcia Canclini (1995) who calls for a radical rethink in the category of culture arguing that all cultures must be seen as border cultures. To think in terms of authentic cultures is illusory and misleading. Studying the transcultural exchanges on the US-Mexico border where the affiliations one chooses is determined by the moment in question, Canclini shows that cultures around the world are continuously being deterritorialized and reterritorialized because of the proliferation of the mass media. He simultaneously disputes the idea of mass media as hegemonic and argues instead that these cultural products reflect rather than determine the practice of culture. This rethinking of the category of culture is necessitated by a rupture brought about in the past decade or so by the rapidity of the processes of globalization. Canclini’s signal contribution for the purposes of this study is a caution against a simplistic association between place and culture. Critiques of this conflation have famously been offered by Gupta and Ferguson (1992) and Paul Gilroy (1993). Gupta and Ferguson (1992) in their seminal essay challenged the simple and unproblematized assumption within the discipline of anthropology that cultures were defined by place. This assumption was fallacious because “The fiction of cultures as discrete, object like phenomenon occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those who

inhabit the borderlands.” (7) Similarly Gilroy (1993) has furthered this idea by analyzing a pan-Atlantic black subjectivity and cautioning us against thinking in terms of nations as repositories of authentic and discrete cultures. Each of these scholars echo Canclini’s (1995) claim that in a globalizing world, all of us inhabit the borderland.

While theories of interstitiality do not necessary disprove the idea that there are hegemonic cultures, they do problematize one stream within the discourse of cultural imperialism – the stream that imagines a pre-existing purity or authenticity of cultures. This challenge is stridently posed in the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) who staunchly advocates the innovative energy of the third space. Bhabha’s resonance for my work is also underscored by his centralization of the idea of human identity within the global flows of culture and people. Like the subjects in my study, Bhabha proudly stakes claim to the space in between. Similar to my study the question of belonging is key to his work. Unlike the location of my work in the post-colonial space, Bhabha’s third space is created in the metropole (the former colonial power) where it confronts its history in the form of the postcolonial migrant. This third space is the realm of the “beyond”, without a beginning or an end but a moment of transit “where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.” (2) The articulation of this social difference occurs in the process of enunciation and performance and is under constant negotiation. This liminal position is characterized by the experience of anxiety that is a symptom of existing on the borders. Bhabha’s dual subject is Marlow, the protagonist of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, who comes back only to see in every object of life in England, a “daemonic doubling” of the colony. His past continues to reside in him and refuses to recede to become a forgotten past. While this liminal subjectivity is a condition of postcoloniality,

Bhabha also claims that the globalization of culture only exacerbates this condition of a transitional culture and identity. This condition of transitionality pervades each of my case studies as I encounter subjects continuously switching codes and identities. These subjects exist in a space that escapes easy categorization. In explaining this middle space engendered within globalization Bhabha explains: “Cultural globality is figured in the *in-between* spaces of double-frames: its historical originality marked by a cognitive obscurity; its decentred ‘subject’ signified in the nervous temporality of the transitional, or the emergent provisionality of the ‘present’.” (310)

To imagine this space of irreducible difference is also to argue against any attempts to subsume it under a rubric that seeks to erase this difference. The target could be any claim to universalism but its most potent enunciation comes from calls for a universal class subjectivity (Jameson 1989). Positioning himself against Jameson (1989) who in *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* fears that a fragmented subjectivity had been created by the late capitalist postmodern age, Bhabha shows the futility of attempts to resuscitate this pan-class identity since they seek to capture an “*unrepresentable* totality”. Instead,

“What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, ‘opening out’, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to an singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignations of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the ‘future’ where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present.” (313)

Clearly, the theorists of hybridity and their foregrounding of agency in constructing human identity stand as a counter current to claims that the

globalization of culture is standardizing or westernizing the world. By claiming that cultures are always transient and evolving, they dispute the originary myth of pure or authentic cultures. In their models of the third space, audiences are constantly employing oppositional modes to read the dominant cultural tropes. The consumer of mass culture in this model is not a passive receptacle of hegemonic culture but a subversive reader. That these theories too can go too far, fetishizing agency and completely eschewing the imbalance of power relations in our world is not entirely lost on critics and a caution my study embraces. I share the apprehension of critics of hybridity who fear an alliance between theories of hybridity and the forces of capitalism. In this mutual alliance, hybridity becomes the garb under which global capital advances around the world (Kraidy, 2005). By claiming that all cultures are hybrid, this alliance justifies capitalistic expansion producing culturally tailored “hybrid” products targeted for specific markets. Through a content analysis of American newspapers, Kraidy (2005) traces the usage of themes of hybridity and interrogates their deployment to serve purposes of neo-liberal expansion. He concludes that hybridity has become the buzzword employed by American corporations in order to make a case for their propagation around the world. The word is employed to counter the charges of Americanization leveled against these corporations. For him, hybridity has become the logic through which capitalism perpetuates itself. Crucially, Kraidy’s critique is not against the idea of hybridity as such but against its selective deployment in the interest of capitalist expansion.

Moving through this thicket of debates about the globalization of culture helps situate my study within a conversation that continues to ponder over questions of power and agency and its role in constructing human identity in a globalizing world. These debates allow me to situate my study along an existing

spectrum that stretches from unrelenting cultural hegemony on the one end to a subversive negotiation with power on the other. The binary of power and agency that pervades the debate on globalization, while extremely fruitful, is also limiting given that it posits an either/or binary within which instances of cultural consumption must be positioned. It is more often the case that one sees both in operation simultaneously and hence an interactional perspective that keeps the duo in continuous tension helps us get a better grasp at the nature of power in global cultural flows. Extending this perspective, scholars (Foucault 1977, 1978; Deleuze 1992) have argued that the ability of power to concede ground to its countering forces allows for the production of subjects that must be nurtured even as they are controlled. This ability of power to morph itself inflects the identity of subjects within my study in ways that I attempt to show. It allows for the production of differential identities and a space for resistance while still circumscribing that space within its folds.

Postcolonial Studies

The differentia of history that complicates theories of cultural globalization in the Indian case is its experience of colonialism. The residues of this history inflect the cultural landscape, showing up both in unexpected and predictable ways in the quotidian cultural habits of the nation. Most importantly, they influence the self-conception of those caught in the in-between space engendered by colonial rule. The objects of my study, all located in this in-between space, foreground this historical interaction in especially prominent ways. Each of them, while having come to fruition due to forces of globalization, also thrives because of its ability to tap this historical trace. In each instance, this residue exists in the realms that co-constitute the identity of subjects involved in my studies. While my eventual goal is to show the operation of these residues

within the psychic realm of subjects, an adequate understanding of how postcoloniality manifests itself in the material and symbolic realm is necessary before one can understand how it informs subjects' identities. Understanding these continuities and how they inform the present is a central charge of the disciplinary formation of postcolonial studies that gives much needed pointers for my attempts to understand the role of history within my objects of study.

Postcolonial studies traces its lineage to the historical anti-colonial movements and argues that long after the end of direct colonial rule, its after-effects continue. Robert Young (2004) posits that the historical past of colonialism continues to determine the contemporary power structures and only a rewriting of that past from the perspective of postcolonial societies will unravel how these structures continue to operate today. Postcolonial studies is a field rife with contentious internal debates and some argue that if the "post" in the postcolonial were merely a temporal marker to indicate what came after the colonial, it is "prematurely celebratory" in announcing the end of colonialism in our world (McClintock 1992). In announcing the passage of societies from one stage of history to another the discipline buys into the very structures that it is trying to subvert. It subsumes differences between the so called postcolonial societies by assuming that all colonial experiences were the same and reinstates the binary of the colonial/postcolonial and therefore makes futile the desire to challenge the other binaries such as self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery. Along the lines of McClintock, other scholars too have argued for a separate treatment of the differential experiences of postcolonial societies (Mishra and Hodge, 1994). Given the irresolvable disputes around the term, Robert Young (2004) has suggested the alternative term of Tricontinentalism as a discourse that takes into account the divide between Europe and North America on the one hand and Asia, Africa and Latin America on the other. The body's theorization is also

complicated by a continued ambivalence within postcolonial societies on the long-term effects of colonial rule¹. Those arguing for the unintended “beneficial” consequences of colonial rule use among their examples the imposition of a European language and the introduction of modern technology and capitalism to these former agrarian economies. Supporters of this position are often theorists of modernity such as Ernest Gellner (1993) who defend not so much the violence of colonial rule but the processes of modernization that were set into motion due to it. Postcolonial theorists counter this position by arguing that to justify colonial rule under the guise of an “enabling violation” would be a travesty (Spivak 1999). The unintended consequences of colonial rule cannot be used to retrospectively justify it and elide over its violence.

Despite the contestations and ambivalences within it, the field helps me position my work in a tradition that asks questions similar to the ones that drive my study. By looking at history and culture and the interactions between the two, postcolonial studies introduces the variable of history within the over-generalized contemporary global cultural scene. Its central point of intervention is western epistemology and a mode of knowledge production that would be unsustainable without presupposing an implicit Other. This presupposition privileges certain histories, certain cultures and certain worldviews. Instead, a resistant postcolonial mode of historiography must show that European history has invariably been the silent referent for other histories. As an object of implicit comparison, it becomes the yardstick by which to judge other societies and cultures. Terming this the “artifice” of history, Dipesh Chakravarty (2000) calls for a project that returns the gaze to “provincialize” Europe in return.

¹ A controversial speech delivered by the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in June 2005 while visiting his alma mater Oxford University famously exemplifies this ambivalent position on colonial rule.

Postcolonial studies extends this challenge to the universal idioms and theories within European knowledge to show their Eurocentric premises. By perusing over three hundred years of colonial literature Edward Said (1979) challenges this eurocentrism by showing that the European view of the world was an act of self-consolidating negation. Similarly, Spivak (1999) rereads Kant, Hegel and Marx to claim that the central conceptions of European philosophy were arrived through the foreclosures and stark misreadings of the “other” of Europe. These strategies were both a means to subsume difference as well as a means for them to explicate their concepts by marking that very difference.

Given that culture was a crucial terrain within which colonial power was exercised, the interventions made by colonial rule in the realm of culture and its continuities in the postcolonial times are crucial to my project. My case studies occupy the cultural landscape of India and my attempt is to show how these cultural phenomena reflect a continuation of those changes. Scholars have argued that colonial influences in this symbolic realm both prepared the ground for (Vishwanathan 1997) and furthered the coercive use of power in the physical realm. Even though the actual rule was carried out in the material and the physical realm, its justifications were provided for in the symbolic and the discursive arena. The relationship between *Culture and Imperialism* is in fact so closely tied that the latter could not be imagined without the former (Said 1994). A call to re-energize attempts to understand this relationship has been made by Shome and Hegde (2002) as they argue for the indispensable role of a postcolonial perspective in studying contemporary global culture. They elaborate:

“We think that postcolonial scholarship constitutes one of the most central critical lenses through which to name and theorize cultural conditions of contemporary society. This is because postcolonial scholarship theorizes the geographical, geopolitical, and historical specificity of modernities within

which other forms of power – such as race, sexuality, culture, class and gender – are located. This means that any engagement with these others forms of power is, at some level, always an engagement with geographical, historical, and geopolitical relations of modernities, whether these relations are explicitly recognized or not.” (253)

My study shares these scholars’ concerns about engaging with the “historical specificities of modernities”. Given my emphasis on identity as a common thread running through my cases, I must investigate how those specificities manifest themselves within an individual’s ideas of who they are. This investigation of historical specificities must go beyond establishing its existence in the symbolic realm to understand how colonial subjects interacted with that symbolic realm and were transformed in the process. Scholars have argued that these interactions created a dual subject within the colonial period and I hope to show its continuation in the postcolonial era. This creation was at times an inevitable consequence of the very presence of an overarching colonial structure, while at other times it was a deliberate effort to aid colonial rule. Understanding this liminal space is crucial to exploring their continuation within my objects of study.

The Colonial/Post-Colonial Subject

The presence of an over-arching colonial structure invariably creates new social and political rules for the society it rules over. These rules set in place new criteria for being, a new framework of determining legitimate and illegitimate behavior and are bound to percolate within the everyday lives of colonial subjects. Changes in the colonized space arise from implicit responses to these new conventions of legitimation. These impositions often ensure that the pre-existing social frameworks within which the society has imagined itself so far are altered to create new aspirational standards. These new rules function as a

system of reward and punishment and gradually lead to the institution of varying and new modes of existence. Scholars (Bhabha 1994; Nandy 1989; Fanon 1963, 1968) argue that this psychic aspect of colonial rule is more enduring than the material structures that can arguably be more easily dismantled. Hence Ashis Nandy (1989) explains that in contrast to the external and material structures:

“More dangerous and permanent are the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains and losses from suffering and submission under colonialism. They are almost always unconscious and almost always ignored. Particularly strong is the inner resistance to recognizing the ultimate violence which colonialism does to its victims, namely that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter.” (3)

In the specific case of India, sexuality was one such unconscious realm in which new rules for legitimation were constructed. Nandy (1989) claims that the concept of Indian masculinity was redefined as a result of the conquest of India by colonial rule. This redefinition was predicated on a homology between sexual and political dominance that was a part of the colonial ethos. In the Indian case it was traditionally the Brahman (with his “cerebral and self-denying asceticism”) and not the Kshatriya (the martial warrior clan) who symbolized the epitome of Indian masculinity. As opposed to this, the aspects of masculinity privileged in the metropole were those of “aggression, achievement, control, competition and power.” (9). Colonial rule gradually altered the emphasis from the former ascriptions of masculinity to the latter. This alteration reflected desire on the part both of the colonial rulers as well as the colonized. Instituting a new framework ensured that as long as there was an attempt to emulate Western masculinity, the tussle could only be carried out on the terms set by colonial rulers. This new code was instituted due to the colonial rule’s quest for a familiar European structure of masculinity that it could identify with. This search for martial Indianness was

predicated on the need to form alliances and transfer authority to streams of Indian society that they believed characterized a familiar form of masculinity.

In the resulting reordering, the polarity between masculinity (*purusatva*) and femininity (*naritva*) was replaced by the antinomy between masculinity and androgyny (*klibatva*). Nandy explains, "There was an attempt to lump together all forms of androgyny and counterpoise them against undifferentiated masculinity." (8) It was only much later in his struggle against British rule that Gandhi reordered the gender configurations by redefining femininity to have a closer conjunction with power and activism than did masculinity. Hence, in the Gandhian reconfiguring *klibatva* was deemed superior to both *naritava* and *purusatva*.

The psychological alterations within Indian subjectivity that Nandy traces are both useful and problematic. Useful because Nandy de-emphasizes the external, more visible socioeconomic aftereffects of colonial rule while privileging the deeper psychological alterations it engendered. This latter remains a rather under explored area within postcolonial studies but one with crucial implications for my project. Nandy's weaknesses lie in the homogeneity his schema assumes when it posits the category "India". While Nandy draws his examples from literatures and lives of the prominent intellectuals of British India, one can argue that Nandy's attempt at portraying the Indian ethos actually ends up being a Hindu one hence constructing a majoritarian identity of India. The version of ancient India he juxtaposes against British colonial rule invokes largely Hindu terminologies and imaginations.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Nandy's also remains a laudable effort in exploring the psychic consequences of colonial rule in India. While it is often assumed as a given that material and symbolic structures interpellate subjects and transform them as a consequence, an attempt to engage with the intricacies

of that process helps instantiate the theoretical claims. Both Homi Bhabha (1994) and Franz Fanon (1963, 1968), even though studying different postcolonial sites, have attempted to explicate on this very aspect of interpellation of subjects by the colonial structure. The congruities between the writings of Bhabha and Fanon are explained by the fact that as a close reader of Fanon, Bhabha borrows immensely from him while also building upon and extending his ideas.

A practicing psychiatrist during the French colonial rule of Algeria, Frantz Fanon (1963) encountered many psychological and behavioral problems faced by those engaged in fighting the Algerian war of independence. While the psychological problems faced by his patients had much to do with the war, Fanon complicated that simplistic conflation by introducing the variable of colonial rule in his diagnosis. By altering the valences placed on different aspirational roles, colonial rule accentuated the colonized subject's desire to be like the ruler. Since the new regime altered traditional power structures, the new way to attain power was to become more like those who already had it. This eventually futile endeavor led to the subject's inevitable "alienation" from their immediate surroundings. Fanon's conception of alienation is different from the Marxist idea where mechanization and division of labor produce an alienation of labor from their natural world. Instead Fanon (1968) argues in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the attempt to take on a more desirable European garb alienates that desiring native from his immediate social milieu. The learning of the colonizer's languages, the perfecting of the accent and the gradual forgetting of one's mother tongue all comprise the process of colonial alienation. As a specific example, he explains, "A Senegalese learns Creole in order to pass as an Antilles native: I call this alienation" (38). Colonial alienation, in Fanon's conceptualization is the sum total of the psychic and affective consequences of the imposition of a new regime of power during colonial rule. This disconnect is only further entrenched and

exacerbated by the suspicion with which the native community views those from within it that have learnt the colonizer's language. Since there is no acceptance for him in the mother country, he ceases to belong completely to either place, loses his sense of home and exists and becomes the liminal colonial subject. Language, which incidentally plays a crucial role in each of my three studies, is centrally configured in Fanon's idea of alienation. He explains, "Every dialect is a way of thinking, Damourette and Pichon said. And the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation" (25). In his attempts to theorize the interactions between the symbolic and discursive superstructures such as language and the psyche of colonial subjects, Fanon arguably the first postcolonial theorist, provides a crucial launching pad for my project. It is the transmuting of these very interactions from the colonial to the postcolonial time that informs my analysis of my objects of study. One finds in Fanon, attempts to theorize a condition of being at home and yet not belonging.

Fanon's ideas were an inspiration for Bhabha who took his concept of submissive emulation to extend it to subversive mimicry. For Bhabha, the returning native gaze disciplines the colonizers just as the original first gaze attempted to discipline the natives. The reciprocation of the gaze makes Bhabha's mimic subject capable of agency unlike the almost passively interpellated colonized native of Fanon. This difference, while crucial, is also an exemplar of the different time periods during which they were writing. Writing in the 1950s and 60s Fanon was actively involved in the anti-colonial movement and his writings were meant as much to be an inspiration for that struggle as to describe the colonial situation. Bhabha, writing several decades later, when the classical notions of power were being challenged by the introduction of human agency, privileges the interstitial space between the frames as a valid and legitimate

identity marker of belonging. Bhabha locates Fanon's interpellated colonized native within this slippery third space that refuses to be categorized within the binaries of East and West or the colonizer and the colonized. It continuously eludes capture and hence brings "newness" into our world.

Bhabha's subversive subject comes into being as a consequence of empire's desire to dominate by subsuming difference. In *"Of Mimicry and Man..."*, Bhabha (1994) unravels the aporia within the discourse that attempted to legitimize British colonial rule in India. Central to the contradiction within this discourse was the dilemma: How can colonialism be made to fit in with the high ideals of post-Enlightenment Europe? This dilemma was resolved through what Bhabha calls the "forked" tongue of empire and while on the surface there was one law, one rule and one universal subject, beneath it lay a parallel structure. This structure was one of mimicry and its simultaneous co-existence with colonial power captured a struggle between the synchronic and diachronic visions of history. The synchronic vision was the colonial desire for domination, for keeping things the same while the diachronic one was that for change and difference and within these two visions, "mimicry represents an ironic compromise." (122)

Hence, mimicry was the consequence of the colonial desire for a "reformed and recognizable Other." (122) It produces a "subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite." (122) This unrealizable quest instead creates subversive partial subjects that represent a "metonymy of presence" which is at once "resemblance and menace." The desirable European half of the reformed subject is meant to stand for his entirety. It is in this continuous production of slippage and excess that the ambivalence (the forked tongue) of the colonial discourse is highlighted. The existence of this metonymy allowed the continuation of the *raison d'être* that colonialism presented as its legitimating

reason. Bhabha's concept of mimicry differs from a simple act of copying, or a narcissistic identification by the colonized with the colonizer because there is scope for human agency within the site of mimicry. The disciplinary gaze of the colonizer that seeks to ossify the colonized in their place is not returned but refracted. It is a double vision whereby "the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed." (127)

Bhabha's re-theorization of Fanon and Nandy's analysis of the altered subjectivities as a consequence of colonial rule all allow us a starting point to acknowledge and understand the changes that were brought about by colonial rule within the affective and psychic realm of the colonized space. These are hardly deterministic, totalitarian claims about the entire colony but rather specific accounts that seek to draw conclusions about a space that existed on the threshold of two worlds. This site was neither one nor the other and created identities that were a palimpsest where a new formation could not entirely conceal the existence of a prior older one. I move now to the question of how this space transmutes into the post-colonial period? What are the ways in which memory and affective attachments created due to colonial power continue to persist in the period after decolonization? How perennial and permanent were Nandy's altered social rules of being? What traces do we see today in India (my specific site of study) of these colonial interpellated subjectivities?

Inspired by these questions I turn to theorists who have pondered over the seepage of the colonial into the postcolonial, the past into the present, the west into the east and the old into the new. Leela Gandhi (1998), in talking about postcolonial memory and its lingering subconscious after-effects cites Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and M.K. Gandhi to elaborate on the problematic psychic affinities of the colonized towards the colonizer. She traces the roots of this

affinity to the Hegelian lordship-bondage dialectic. Privileging the method of anamnesis (unforgetting) as a postcolonial method, she argues that the forgotten past must continuously be revoked to first resuscitate it and then to show how their erasure from consciousness does not render them incapable of influencing our present through the unconscious. Under the bedrock of conscious memory and the easily visible past lies the submerged unconscious wherein lie residues of memory “causing seemingly inexplicable symptoms in everyday life.” (9) She elaborates,

“that the postcolonial dream of discontinuity is ultimately vulnerable to the infectious residue of its own unconsidered and unresolved past. Its convalescence is unnecessarily prolonged on account of its refusal to remember and recognize its continuity with the pernicious malaise of colonization.” (7)

Discontinuity with a colonial past is impossible, most so in the psychic and affective realm where ironically, its erasure is also most sought. Its residues linger in the unconscious memory, which is the “constitutive bedrock of conscious existence” (9). It inflects the everyday mundane existence without necessarily bringing attention to itself. It creates an inexplicable longing, a “puzzling circulation of desire around the traumatic scene of oppression” (11). Its continuation is based on the premise that if power engenders resistance, the hidden corollary of that relationship is also an affective attachment between the dueling consciousnesses. Its concealed nature makes it easy to ignore and difficult to excavate. Its persistence is also inexplicable for those for whom,

“The desire of the colonizer for the colony is transparent enough, but how much more difficult it is to account for the inverse longing of the colonized. How, as Memmi queries, ‘could the colonized deny himself so cruelly . . . How could he hate the colonizers and yet admire them so passionately?’ (1968, p. 45) (11)

In seeking to understand this longing and the ways in which it manifests itself within the cultural landscape of India today, I only extend Gandhi's (1998) valiant effort. I hope to point out instances wherein the dialectic of love and hate manifests within three cultural phenomena of contemporary India. I hope to peel off the layers of one to show the existence of the other, to show in fact that one cannot exist without the other. In laying out the theoretical fields of cultural globalization and postcolonial identity, I provide the basic foundation upon which my analyses follow. While I do not specifically re-engage with all these theorists within my case studies, focusing on the case-specific theories instead, these two vast fields of theory implicitly inform my analysis. They allow me to both make a case for the importance of my study and provide me with a pre-existing conversation that I seek to contribute to.

Why Is This Project Important?

A study of postcolonial identity in a globalizing India must make a case for its importance, given that we live in a world which may seem to have far more pressing concerns and problems to engage with. I am motivated by the inspiration that questions that propel this study deserve high priority among issues to be analyzed and investigated, both for academic and non-academic reasons. Through this study I seek to add to existing scholarship on postcolonial studies, to scholarship about the postcolonial geographic space of India and to studies on cultural globalization, arguably a defining phenomenon of our age. Issues of culture have invariably been political and have inspired many contentious debates in history. Nightmares of cultural erasure rank high with fears of the annihilation of one's social world. These fears are channeled today in resistances to modernity that one sees around the world. In these struggles one often finds a desire of embracing modernity but of simultaneously preserving an

unchangeable core within. Theories of cultural globalization, by engaging with these fears, foreground a central concern of societies in the face of sweeping changes. In seeking to gain a better understanding of these changes, my study therefore engages with a key dilemma of our times. In seeking to unearth the specificities of the simultaneous influences that inform the process of cultural globalization I seek to instantiate theory. I hope to present corrections, validations and extensions to existing explanations of cultural globalization and in so doing, I seek to bring together two bodies of scholarship that, despite similar concerns, are perhaps not as often in conversation as they should be (Grossberg 2002). In presenting India as a site that allows these two fields to come together in productive ways, given its colonial past and globalizing present, I unearth a relationship between the former and the latter and better understand how the lingering consequences of the past inflect the present.

Beyond the contribution I seek to make to scholarly conversations, my project is also a small attempt to understand the human condition itself. Understanding how individuals imagine ourselves in a world that constantly seeks to place labels on us is a motivation that underwrites this project. The implicit call for neatly contained categories of identity places those caught in between in an anxious state (Bhabha 1994). The fear of not belonging and of being homeless in a changing world is a continuation of the primal human dread of being alone in face of looming threats. It taps into the dialectic that we need a social whole to both belong to it and to differentiate ourselves from. To exist in a world where change is a constant is also to cope with this anxiety of loneliness everyday. In addressing how subjects in my case study cope, I seek to gain a better understanding of the perennial human quest for a community. Hence, understanding the affective aspect of coping within a globalizing world is the second key motivation for this study.

DIFFERENCE AND IDENTITY IN INDIAN BIG BROTHER

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the second episode of the recently concluded Indian reality TV show *Big Boss 2* - the Indian version of the reality TV program Big Brother- in order to unravel the representation of differential Indian identities on the program. The strategy to replicate a postcolonial social fissure on the show by creating a national allegory helped gain higher ratings for the program. I investigate this attempt to link the program to the Indian social structure it arises from and which it seeks to represent and hence show that the program used existing nuances within Indian society to achieve goals of higher viewership. A study of the casting decisions made for the show combined with a close textual analysis of episodes (99 episodes telecast in Fall 2008) show that far from being a portrayal of the authentic private lives of participants Big Boss 2 (henceforth BB2) utilized existing societal conflicts for the expedient purpose of creating controversial and hence dramatic television. Through their casting decisions as well as through contrived situations and activities the producers of Big Boss confirm the widely argued thesis that the show's success around the world is determined by its ability to create conditions for conflict between the housemates on the show.

That BB2's strategy to localize itself within the copyrighted format worked is apparent in the success of the program. Its viewership rose from near the bottom of the ratings chart in its first week of airing on 17 August 2008 (TVR 1.72, Ranked 94th) to being the second most watched program (TVR 3.19) during the final airing of the show on 22 November 2008 (see Figure I at the end of this chapter for a graphical representation of BB2's rise). The program gained audience gradually during the intervening period breaking into the top 30

programs by September and into the top 20 by October. This success is particularly noteworthy in comparison to the show's first season (called *Big Boss*) that, for instance, only managed the highest rank of 48th in the last week of its airing in January 2007. BB2's ratings success came despite it being telecast on a little known and newly launched network *Colors* (Partly owned by Viacom and launched barely a month before the show started) as opposed to its first season being telecast on the well-established popular channel *Sony Entertainment Television* (SET). I explore the crucial differences between the two seasons of the program to explain the success the second season enjoyed.

Through a textual analysis of the episodes I tease apart three representative themes from within the show around which the central conflicts revolved. These themes each arose from the juxtaposition of different postcolonial Indian identities that categorize what scholars (Rajagopal 1997) have called a "split public" within the Indian polity. This divide engendered due to colonial rule, can be broadly characterized as comprising of an elite, urban and English speaking India on the one side and a rural, often non-English speaking and traditional India on the other. In their selection of the participants who were diverse in their backgrounds, their regional-belongings and most importantly their values and worldview, the producers replicated this social split on the sets of the program. Hence in the guise of creating a diverse representation of multiple identities within India, the program in fact contrived those differences to work in their own interest of increasing viewership of the show.

The first theme that my study locates revolves around gender comprising of a conflict between a male and a female member of the house wherein the male member used sexist and condescending language towards the female member making derogatory references to her sexualized image and her supposedly scanty attire. While on the surface this conflict, stretching over several episodes

of the program, could be seen as an interpersonal gendered encounter between the patriarchal and progressive elements of any society, I locate it within a broader societal divide in India and claim that the two participants involved in the conflict represent two sides of the “split public”. The two other themes focus on language with the first one revolving around the dramatic and comical situations that arise from a participant’s inability to speak Hindi – the only language permitted on the show. Language is a crucial contour in my third theme as well where a participant with the least knowledge of the English language is assigned the task of teaching English poetry to the other house-members. A seemingly light-hearted activity predictably evolved into a comedy of errors leading to embarrassing moments that provide promising clues for analyzing how the existing linguistic divide in Indian society was expediently used by the program.

Unraveling the use of this strategy within the genre of reality TV in India serves the purpose of understanding how global culture must localize in order to anchor itself in varied geographical locations. More importantly however it helps us parse apart how global formats such as that of reality TV must make expedient use of cultural nuances in order to become palatable to audiences around the world. In fact, it is the ubiquity of the television format (of which reality TV represents one) that for Albert Moran (1998) is the clearest manifestation of the globalization of television around the world today. Moran (1998) defines a format as a “cultural technology that governs the flow of program ideas across time and space”(23), but more importantly as a “set of invariable elements in a program out of which the variable elements of an individual episode are produced” (13). It is this dialectic between the variable and the invariable that, is a crucial lens through which to study the globalization of culture. This dialectic also re-appears as the one between form and content

where “universal” formats such as sitcoms, talk shows or reality TV are adapted around the world by indigenizing them with local content.

Given that Big Brother has been adapted worldwide (in 42 countries according to Endemol, the owner of the format) since its premiere in the Netherlands in 2000 it makes for a particularly fruitful case study of how the variable and the invariable elements interact with one another when cultural artifacts travel from one milieu to another. Among the countries where Big Brother has been adapted are Germany, France, Denmark, Spain, Poland, Columbia, UK, South Africa, India, Jordan and the USA. In its adaptations the format of the show cannot be changed because of copyright protection but variations are permissible within the program’s broad parameters as long as executives from Endemol approve them. Through experiments from one season to another and through gradually pushing boundaries the program has always sought to fine-tune itself to audience expectations within a particular country underplaying or removing aspects of the program unlikely to resonate with audiences. Despite the lessons learnt and the precautions taken however controversy has often dogged the program. In Bahrain, for instance, a mass demonstration organized by clerics led to the discontinuation of the program. Thus (2007) claims that the charge against this Middle Eastern version of the program was that it was “un-Islamic”. Similarly the first season of the show’s run in South Africa faced criticism for under-representing black Africans and hence in its second season the show responded to this criticism by including more black participants. However, Jacobs (2007) claims, that the show continued to grossly misrepresent the continent by choosing mostly upper-class contestants who were fluent in English, even if Black, thus hiding the real demographic of Africa that neither speaks English nor is upper-class.

However, the infamous controversy that points to the pernicious global ramifications of the program's designs and whose lasting resonances BB2 also sought to capitalize on by inviting its two main protagonists, was the allegedly racist encounter between the Indian movie star Shilpa Shetty and three housemates on UK's edition of *Celebrity Big Brother* aired in 2007. The incident turned into a diplomatic episode between India and the UK as the Indian government lodged an official protest with its British counterpart. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair issued a statement condemning the show, as did the British race-relations watchdog the Commission for Racial Equality and Human Rights. The ongoing Indian visit of the Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown was dogged by repeated questions on the issue by the Indian press (Blair and Brown dragged into TV Racism Row, *The Telegraph* 19 January 2007; *International Herald Tribune*, 18 January 2007). The episode provoked widespread protests in India, more than 40,000 complaints to the British media watchdog (Ofcom) and a withdrawal of the program's main sponsor Carphone Warehouse. Thus (2007) shows the global buzz created by the program by claiming that the issue was covered by channels located in the UK, the USA, India, France, Russia, Belgium, the Middle East and Germany among other places. Clearly, global adaptations of *Big Brother* have hardly been seamless.

The Indian version of Big Brother is yet another example of variation within the patented format of the show. Hence understanding how Indian Big Brother Indianized itself provides us with an understanding of the fulcrums on which cultural globalization must hinge itself. Frederic Jameson (1998) reminds us that the story of globalization is alternatively a story of the creation of sameness or difference depending on the object of our study as well as the geographical location of our study. The dialectic of form and content transposes onto the dialectic of sameness of difference where copyright protected formats

must be creatively localized without changing the basic structure prescribed by the company that owns the format (Endemol in the case of Big Brother).

I seek to show that the Indianization of Big Brother happened through exploiting an existing fault line through bringing into conflict certain “types” of Indian identities within the Indian society. I provide below the basic contours of that fault line as elaborated by Rajagopal (1997) and then analyze the attempt to replicate that social fissure on the program through presenting a larger debate on identity politics between Frederic Jameson (1991) and Homi Bhabha (1994).

Identity and Difference on BB2

The Indianization of BB2 sought to create a heterogeneous and immiscible group in the house bringing together participants that helped replicate the Indian “split public” in the house. I elaborate on this concept before moving to analyze how it was represented on the show. The clearest articulation of this fault line comes from Arvind Rajagopal (1997) who analyzes the rise of right-wing religious nationalism in India in the 1990s. He concludes that the right wing ideologues utilized and accentuated an existing fault line in the Indian society. On one side of this divide is the elite, English-speaking, usually upper class, often urban, ostensibly liberal and secular India. This English speaking India often comprises a “well-networked national elite” (159) that has “a sense of being bearers of the agenda of modernization” (159). The other India is the vernacular speaking, religious minded, rural and traditional India often at odds with the discourse of secular modernity espoused in the liberal English press.

A genealogy of this divide can be traced to India’s colonial history where a mediating class was created through the limited and controlled diffusion of the English language in India, he argues. This colonial elite class continues in the post-colonial times and finds a reflection of its identity in the English language

press. Similarly, the other India is largely represented in the vernacular language press. The two Indias are at loggerheads on crucial policy issues and this conflict plays out within the two competing media. Even as the urbane, English speaking press claims to speak in the name of reason and liberty and other ideals of European enlightenment that discourse is often challenged by the vernacular press read by the rural majority who fail to participate in the idiom of Western modernity represented by the former. This resentment of the vernacular press towards the English media arises because the latter's "inability to access the values and beliefs of the vernacular realm was then a form of sanctioned ignorance, a sign of privilege rather than handicap, portending none of the usual consequences of ignorance" (163). This privilege manifested itself in the unequal political and economic power of the two presses.

Not surprisingly this divide has only been accentuated in the era of economic liberalization in the 1990s where the English press bearing the agenda of progress and modernity has often championed economic and cultural integration with the west. This while it also continued the "colonial practice of aloofness and unfamiliarity with local traditions" (Rajagopal 1997, 16). Overshadowed in political power and in advertising revenue the vernacular press often finds itself sidelined but finds compensation in having larger readerships than the English press. The right-wing forces exploited both this resentment as well as the large non-English speaking readership of the vernacular press. While the rise of Hindutva represents the clearest expression of this fault line, its existence can be seen in most aspects of the Indian society and culture. On BB2 this fault line runs through the three themes I highlight and analyze below.

As we unravel this expedient strategy on the program, one pertinent question worth asking is: How can one find fault with an attempt to represent

the multicultural diversity of India on the program? After all a diverse and multicultural cast on the show is better than a homogenous one. Hence the seemingly irrefutable argument in defense of the program's strategy could be that had it assembled a homogenous group bringing together a less diverse cast they would have been accused of misrepresenting, under representing or over-representing aspects of India. That would have amounted to presenting a hegemonic and inaccurate picture of the Indian society. Given the crucial role of mediated culture in helping construct the "imagined community", shouldn't BB2 be lauded for its effort to present a bricolage of multiculturalism that India is? Hence, shouldn't the privileging of differential identities be welcomed over an artificially imposed universalism? While this question is a fruitful one it is difficult to answer without maneuvering through the thicket of rival positions on the debate on identity politics. I answer this question by taking a brief recourse to a debate between Frederic Jameson and Homi Bhabha on the politics of identity and representation.

In this debate Bhabha and Jameson take opposing positions on the issue of universalism versus difference. Jameson's idea of a universal alliance based on class-consciousness has Marxist lineages while Bhabha's counterpoint claims that any such attempt to make class "the glass of history" denies the innovative energy of the "third space" which is a unique feature of a postcolonial identity.

Representation today is a site of struggle but the emphasis on identity politics that seeks the realm of representation as its end goal displaces the struggle from the conceptual to the mediated realm, claims Frederic Jameson (1991). Understanding the surge in identity politics as a symptom of postmodernity, Jameson points to the dangers of celebrating the fragmentation of polity into "groupuscules". The differentiation of social life to the extent where every individual today belonged to a group was a result of, first, the

misperception that social class had disappeared and secondly of the drive to categorize and collectivize every individual so that there are no “misfits” or “solitary rebels” on the fringes of the social mainstream. What often underpins this politics of difference is merely liberal tolerance - an idea whose obvious flaws are well known. A coalition based on class-consciousness was more material since it was based on a dialectical opposition in society as opposed to imagined group affiliations. A politics of group, after all, was infinitely fragmentary and personified social actors instead of seeing them as manifestation of larger class structures.

The correspondence between social fragmentation and the current phase of advanced capitalism cannot be denied but is the rise of identity politics inherent to capitalism as it enters its advanced stage or does it arise in resistance to capitalism? In other words does social differentiation along groups denote agency for social actors? This question is at the very heart of the voluntarism vs. determinism debate - a dilemma central to Marxism, claims Jameson. However posing it as an either or binary falsifies the inconsistency and the incommensurability of the two ideas. The two concepts, argues Jameson, “must be rigorously separated at the same time that they are deployed simultaneously” (326). He likens this distinction to the Kantian distinction between the noumenon (a thing in itself) and the phenomenon (an external event that is perceived as such by the senses), which both occupy the same space but at any given time “only one can be “intended” by the mind’s eye” (327). Hence the debate between causality and freedom that the politics of identity engenders is based on a false binary. Jameson does not deny the vitality of social movements rising up around the world but cautions against the myth that they arise because of a disappearance of social class. The disappearance of social class can only happen in the case of socialism and even if they are emancipatory, social movements

based on identity politics could not replace class as the pivot of social mobilization. Jameson's larger claim then is to show the resurgence of identity as a symptom of an advanced stage of capitalism, which revels in creating niche products for groups and where "excess of representational consumption" (321) acts a compensation for other more material forms of exploitation.

More pernicious than identity politics is the false belief that the realm of representation was the actual site of struggle that sought equality in the realm of representation as an end goal. Jameson argues that the media are the groups' parliament and identity politics and the mediated realm feed off one another in a symbiotic relationship. Groups function to interpellate and are consumed primarily as images through visibility in the simulacral realm and mediated representation is mistaken for true empowerment.

To sum up then, for Jameson the surge in identity politics and its mediation in mass culture arises out of a fear of consensus or universalism. He explains, "It is felt that something precious and existential, something fragile and unique about our own singularity, will be lost irretrievably when we find out that we are just like everybody else" (343). His quest for a universal class subject elides over divisions of race, language or geography – blindspots that his critics point to. Among those who point out his blinkers is Homi Bhabha who challenges the "autotelic specularity" of the class-category, which denies a "performative agency" to the minorities of the world.

Jameson's idea that class could function as the last arbiter of social organization is countered by Bhabha (1994) who challenges Jameson's formulation that privileges class at the expense of other historically determined identities. To understand global culture and its inseparable relationship with a postcolonial subjectivity one must acknowledge the fluidity of identity and the innovative energy of the space between the frames that migration engenders. By

spatializing cultural difference in order to maintain the totality of the frame, Jameson's move smacks of narcissism.

Reading Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* Bhabha claims that the postcolonial condition necessitated the living of "double lives" and anxiety was the affective residue of this condition. This residue was visible both in the colony as it was in the metropolis. Because as Marlow returns from Africa and tells Kurtz's wife the lie that Kurtz died with her name on his lips, he finds the images of the colony return to haunt him in a mode of "daemoniac doubling". This doubling and the anxiety associated with it cannot be captured through a politics based on class-consciousness alone, claims Bhabha. His defense of performative identity seeks to represent an aspect of the unrepresentable totality that Jameson attempts to capture with his spatializing move.

As a way out of subsumption of all identity by class, Bhabha suggests a politics of social difference that is "genuinely articulatory in its understanding that to be discursively represented and socially representative – *to assume an effective political identity or image* – the limits and conditions of specularities have to be exceeded and erased by the inscription of otherness" (319). Borderline identities are a reality of our lives and acknowledging this space where identities are continuously negotiated while also conceding that this mode will always remain a work in progress is the only way forward for Bhabha.

Not surprisingly this debate between universalism and difference is an old one and Bhabha and Jameson merely its recent articulators. Both sides in this debate inform our understanding of how globalization has sundered older ways of thinking about our world. While Jameson's signifier of a universal class-consciousness takes production as its placeholder, Alain Badiou (2003) has similarly sought to theorize what true universalism could mean using the figure of St. Paul of Tarsus. St. Paul in a different time and for a different purpose

showed us what a truly inclusive universalism would look like. “Differences can be transcended only if benevolence with regard to customs and opinions presents itself as *an indifference that tolerates differences*, one whose sole material test lies, as Paul says, in being able and knowing how to practice them oneself” (99). The Other (the Jews in the case of St. Paul) was re-subjectivated for a larger goal and against a larger enemy (Death). In Badiou’s account, St. Paul subsumed differences to forge a common subject but his eventual goal was to spread the news of the event (Christ’s resurrection) to as large an audience as possible. Hence St. Paul’s attempt at a universal identity was forged around the specific “event” of Christ’s resurrection, just as Jameson seeks to do so using the material signifier of class.

The dilemma of universalism therefore is that it must always be anchored around a pivot, a substance to fill its empty concept with. While Badiou fills it with the “event”, Jameson attempts it through the category of class. The limitations of both are for us to see. Any idea that fills this concept is likely to face a challenge because of its seeming hegemonic imposition. Without this substance however we have a universalism for universalism’s sake, an autotelic concept that only refers back to itself. Hence, while the idea of a universal subjectivity is an attractive one it is also fraught with the demons of hegemony and silencing.

The nodes within this debate foreshadow our analysis of the representation of differential identities on BB2 below. It is not my case that either side in the debate described above would find this television program to be a true site of the struggle between the concepts of universalism and difference. But in order to unravel how the program expediently used differential identities to garner eyeballs, an argument against the claim of diverse representation must be clearly articulated. In untangling the philosophical underpinnings within the

claim that multicultural representation on the program was a progressive move we will see that barely concealed within the claim lies the artifice of the “profit motive”. I move to an analysis of the program beginning with the casting decision and then parsing out three themes crucial to the claim I’m making in this paper.

The Casting of BB2

A close study of the casting decisions on BB2 (as the second season of the Indian version of Big Brother was called) gives us significant pointers about the designs of the show. I dwell here on the overall strategy as well as on each individual contestant to unravel the larger ends of the show. There were a total of fourteen contestants on the show to begin with and one was supposed to be eliminated each week till the end of the show. However a fifteenth contestant was added to the mix through what the producers called a “wild-card entry”. I intend to show that the casting decisions for the show brought together characters with different worldviews with the intention of helping the program’s ratings. The casting decisions, which were obviously made under the guise of creating representational diversity on the show, sought to reproduce on the show a microcosm of middle-class India with a sprinkling of the different categories of citizens that comprise it. This attempt functioned as a dual strategy whereby the claim to have replicated the “real” middle class India functioned simultaneously to create the conditions for good reality television.

The ostensibly different markers of identity of the show’s participants functioned to conceal the more crucial layer of difference that was central to achieving the larger end of creating conflict on the show. These multiple layers of identity intersected at times but for the most part the house appeared to function much like the rest of India where gender, religion or regional affiliation is not

usually the *first* marker of distinction. What is the first marker of difference is what scholars have claimed constitutes a “split public” in India (Rajagopal 2001). It is a fault line on both sides of which two different and parallel Indias exist. One is the elite, English-speaking, usually upper class, often urban, ostensibly liberal, secular and hence progressive India. The other is the vernacular speaking, religious minded, rural and traditional India often at odds with the discourse of secular modernity espoused in the liberal English press. Within the day-to-day activities, conversations and interactions of the house-members on BB2 it is this very fissure that repeatedly emerged. Bringing together these two Indias through casting participants that could arguably belong to one or the other side of this fault line seemed a carefully calibrated strategy. As I briefly describe the individual members on the show I intend to show how this fissure was re-created within the house. In the next section of the paper I will highlight three themes that were symptomatic of the immiscibility of these two Indias on the show.

Any description of the participants on BB2 must begin with the most unexpected entry to the house. What seemed to be the most odd casting decision (but understandable from a ratings perspective) was that of Jade Goody, a Brit, who has participated in Big Brother as well as several other reality TV programs in the UK. She was a well-known figure in India mostly because of her allegedly racist comments against Shilpa Shetty on UK's *Celebrity Big Brother*. Shetty a moderately successful Hindi film actress could be included on the UK version of Big Brother despite being Indian because she spoke English – a common language in India. But, as was expected, language was perhaps the only common ground between her and the other participants on the show who were all British. Predictably her entry to the show almost immediately led to intense conflicts between her and some members of the show.

The main protagonists in the conflict were Shetty and three other participants (among them Goody), who allegedly directed racial abuses at Shetty, deliberately mispronounced her name and made references to the fact that Indians were unhygienic. The media coverage of these racialized encounters on the show was extensive and especially centered around Goody who allegedly made derogatory references to certain Indian foods. Goody later apologized (once the show was over) and even made a trip to India in order to clarify herself to the Indian people and media. While the show was on these encounters led to almost 40,000 complaints being made to Ofcom (the British media watchdog) and the surge in public sympathy for Shetty was so huge that she went on to win the show, thus restarting her virtually dead movie career.

This widely publicized conflict was a global news event that involved interventions from the diplomatic personnel of both countries and that is convincing proof of how contrived conflict can give a program immense popularity. In this case however Britain's race relations watchdog, the Commission for Racial Equality weighed in on the controversy expressing concern about the incident. The media buzz thus created consumed not just the tabloid press but the mainstream media as well (including a page 1 story in the *New York Times* and a segment on BBC's *Newsnight*). Thussu (2007) claims that the incident generated over 1200 stories in the English language newspapers in Britain and India. Even though the publicity that the program received could only be dreamt by television producers it also led to the main sponsor of Celebrity Big Brother Carphone Warehouse pulling out its 3 million (pounds) sponsorship and led to an apology from Andy Duncan, the Chief Executive Officer of Channel 4 that was airing the program (Thussu, 2007).

Goody's casting in the Indian version of the program therefore seemed designed to cash in on the public memory of the Shetty episode given that Goody

had conducted a much-publicized tour of India after the episode to clarify herself. However, given that the required medium of conversation inside the BB2 house was Hindi, a language Goody did not know, she remained completely dependant on the other housemates for translating for her. In the episode that was aired with her still around this language difference aroused the curiosity of the entire house as they sat around her and tried to hear her side of the story. By the very next episode however she had been told that she was diagnosed with cancer and that she would have to leave for England. The news that her doctors back home had asked her to return was broken to Goody in the “confession room” of the program creating immense drama involving Goody crying profusely and house members expressing sympathy.

Another house member Sanjay Nirupam a current Member of Parliament from Mumbai was a self-professed outsider in the house. He is middle aged - much older than most members of the house - and was often uncomfortable with certain household tasks that all other members seemed to enjoy. His open confrontation with another house-member on the issue of her dressing preferences is the first theme that, I claim, highlights the conflict between the two Indias represented on the show.

Ashutosh from a small town in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, who eventually went on to win the show, came to the show having already won another reality show (MTV Roadies). His small town background crept up repeatedly on the show and was most palpable in his discomfort with speaking the English language – something most other house-members showed at least some degree of familiarity with. Not surprisingly the show’s producers used this discomfort to the hilt. An incident where Ashutosh is made a schoolteacher and is meant to teach English poetry to his students is the second incident that I will focus on to unravel the idea of a “split public” on Big Brother.

Ehsan Qureshi, a poet comedian was a popular member of the house because of his frequent jokes and wisecracks. Debojit Saha, an aspiring singer from the North Eastern part of India often invited the admiration and the irritation of the members because of his frequent and loud practice sessions. Raja Chowdhary's claim to fame before the show was a role in a vernacular language film as well as his marriage and subsequent divorce from a slightly better known television actress. He was known for his melodramatic gestures in house that included an open admission of love for another house member and frequent teary-eyed references to his estranged wife and daughter.

Rahul Mahajan, the son of the late politician Pramod Mahajan was the leading favorite to win the show until he broke a rule and refused to apologize for it to Big Boss. Much to the disappointment of many of his fans he was thrown out of the show merely a couple of weeks before the end, thus clearing the way for the victory of Ashutosh. He was perhaps the most well-known celebrity on the show given the much publicized murder of his father by the father's brother, his subsequent involvement in a possible drug possession and then his marriage and divorce amid charges of marital violence.

Sambhavana Seth became a frequent center of controversy in the house because of what some members perceived to be her loud histrionics and penchant for picking fights. She is an actress in real life and is often referred to as an "item girl" in the popular press. This is a term used to describe actresses who make appearances only in the song sequence in a movie. The term connotes a sexualized image and the conflict that I describe below centered on this very image of Seth that was brought up by Nirupam.

Diana Hayden entered the show halfway through a process described as a "wild-card" entry. Hayden is a winner of beauty pageants such as Miss India and Miss World and belongs to the Anglo-Indian community of India. She has a

background in modeling and acting and the little Hindi she spoke was often incorrect. The frequent corrections that the house-members made to her Hindi often interrupting her mid-way and at other times ridiculing her is the third of the three themes I focus on to highlight my claim about the “split public”. Her lack of Hindi led to often funny but also embarrassing situations on the show and I describe these instances in more detail below.

Ketaki, Monica, Zulfi, Alina, Rakhi and Payal were the other members on the show who played an important part on the show in different ways but are not central to the three themes that I highlight in this paper. Ketaki, a middle-aged television actress is a popular figure among the viewers of soap operas in India because of her portrayals of different characters on family dramas. She took charge of the kitchen and was often found giving familial advice to participants. Payal, an aspiring actress was the point of gossip because of her rumored relationship with Rahul and her frequent confrontations with another participant Sambhavana. Monica Bedi was famous before she came to the house because of her marriage to imprisoned gangster Abu Salem. She had an unsuccessful run in the film industry before her liaison with Salem began. Since their arrest in Portugal and extradition to India she has disowned her relationship with him and has frequently been apologetic about it. Rakhi Vijan a former television actress had a really short stint on the show since she was evicted early on. Alina – a wedding photographer - was probably the youngest member in the house and had a largely non-controversial stay given her attempts to keep all members of the house happy with her. Finally Zulfi, a model by profession, was one of the three finalists and had a comparatively non-controversial stay in the house.

Having provided a brief introduction of all the members in the house I now move to a description and analysis of the three themes that I have picked out to be symptomatic of the phenomenon of a “split public” in India. I will go

on to show how deploying this particular layer of difference within their program helped producers create situations that invited conflict, humor, embarrassment or, in short, good television.

The Three Themes

In this section I present conclusions from a close reading of all episodes of BB2 telecast in the Fall of 2008 to unravel the three themes that show us the effect that the casting decisions and improvised situations had within the actual episodes. These threads follow from my claim in the previous section that an attempt was made to juxtapose two seemingly immiscible representations of India within the house. The first thread I focus on centers around a conflict between two characters on the show Sambhavana Seth and Sanjay Nirupam. The second revolves around an incident of a house-member (Ashutosh) being asked to perform the task of a schoolteacher teaching English poems on the show. The third thread comprises of many smaller incidents and interactions where a house-member's (Diana Hayden) seemingly lack of Hindi speaking skills caused some funny, some awkward and other clearly embarrassing situations for her and the housemates. Following from the previous sections, I intend to show that these three themes/threads were hardly coincidences and in fact were clearly anticipated and hence contrived. I pick these three incidents out of the many others after having closely studied the entire season's episodes. Often overt but mostly in the shadows the fault line between the two Indias that these three threads represent is visible in the different aspects of the daily life in the country. These themes that occurred on the show frequently occur in the daily life of the Indian society as well where the two Indias exist despite each other. While the English language is crucial in creating and sustaining this fissure, the language often functions to layer over other more pronounced differences in worldview

itself. I describe in detail the three themes presenting relevant dialogues and background contexts along with my analysis of the incidents that comprise these themes.

Gender As An Axis of Difference

The incident that is central to the first thread of my analysis occurred in episode IV of BB2 when all members of the house were providing brief personal stories to introduce themselves. Sambhavana talked about her background as an actress in Bhojpuri language (a dialect of Hindi spoken in Eastern India) movies and how her move away from mainstream Hindi movies had invited criticism and ridicule from some of her friends. Nirupam responded to this by mentioning that he had heard unflattering descriptions of her being an “item girl”. He condescendingly questioned her, “How can you earn money or fame by displaying your body?” Sambhavana, visibly riled, responds by saying that her chosen profession of dance was a form of art and says, “I don’t have to prove anything by displaying my body”. She continues by arguing against the sexual stereotype of an “item girl” and emphasizes, “I have genuine emotions too. I get angry” as she continues to counter the charge of body display. While this particular incident ended here, with this exchange its repercussions continued to simmer and became a focal point for gossip among house-members. Many other house members got involved in the conflict.

Soon after the exchange Sambhavana was seen justifying her profession to Alina, another participant. She complained about Nirupam’s judgmental attitude and sought to differentiate herself from other so called “item girls” who had made their way to the top through body-display. “I only do my work”, she emphasizes, clearly disturbed. Soon after this conversation with Alina we see Sambhavana venting her anger to another house-member Ketki. She refers to a

new incident where Nirupam on seeing Sambhavana working out in full clothes expresses satisfaction that his comments had caused a change in her attire. Ketaki goads Sambhavana to not let Nirupam's words have an effect on her. She advises her, "Just be true to yourself Sambhavana". Ketaki also claims that Nirupam belonged to a category of men "according to whom women should be fully dressed". She exhorts Sambhavana to respond instead of remaining quiet the next time he passes a comment about her. Besides Alina and Ketki, Sambhavana continues to crib to other house-members as well. In Episode V, the one aired immediately after the first face-off, Sambhavana angrily discussed the topic with Monica and claimed that Nirupam had "insulted" her in front of everyone. She justifies not firing back at him by citing the difference in their ages and claiming that she didn't want to take on him in public because he was elder to her.

This episode created a palpable tension in the house. After the initial face-off between the two contestants, the incident continued to simmer through discussion between the two individuals and other house-members. However it did not completely lose steam and re-ignited with another confrontation between the two protagonists at the end of episode V. Nirupam and Sambhavana encountered each other in the kitchen again and Nirupam wanted to clarify his position on the issue. What seemed to be a conciliatory gesture on his part, however, soon evolved into another conflict with Nirupam trying to justify his comments and Sambhavana her profession. I present the exchange below in order to show the sequence of conversations and how a conciliatory attempt eventually led to another confrontation. Sambhavana's barely suppressed anger at being judged on her attire is clearly visible in this exchange.

Nirupam: Are you angry with me?

Sambhavana: No

Nirupam: I only had a question. If these things are rumored about what is the reason for that.

Sambhavana: But this question has a deeper meaning.

Sambhavana: I feel that politicians are the worst. But I won't insult you by saying that.

Nirupam: I can name the person who told me about you. He belongs to your industry. But I still came to the show in spite of what he said.

Nirupam: I was joking. Why are you taking it so seriously? Don't be so serious.

Sambhavana: A joke can be taken as a joke.

Nirupam: I concede that politicians are bad.

Sambhavana: This is my profession.

Nirupam: To clarify. I have never seen you on TV but some people told me.

Sambhavana: You used the word Ang-Pradarshan (bodily display). What is it that you saw in me to use that word?

(Rahul is loitering around in the kitchen)

Nirupam: Rahul go and take a seat elsewhere.

Nirupam: Sharm (Shame) is a woman's biggest possession.

Sambhavana: But when was I removing all my clothes? I have a family and two brothers.

Sambhavana: Can you get me a role in movies? *(Implying: so that I don't have to do "item" numbers)*

Nirupam: I'll get you one in Bhojpuri.

Sambhavana: I've made a house singing songs and working hard. No one was there to help me then.

Nirupam: Ok baba relax its your profession. Hope you do well. I was a little too honest and I shouldn't have said it.

This exchange above was the last time this issue came up directly between the two protagonists on the show. Sambhavana went up to Nirupam and apologize to him just before he left the house after being voted out in Episode VI. This conflict allows us to interrogate the two positions reflected by the two protagonists. On the surface it is a very predictable tussle between an archaic worldview about the role of women on the one hand and a more liberal and progressive one on the other. In that sense it seems a tussle common to most societies in the world. However lurking behind this predictable interpretation is another crucial layer of difference specific to India. The conflict between the two protagonists is symptomatic of a larger divide between two different worldviews that coexist in India. In terms of sheer numbers Nirupam, with his defined views about how women should dress, seems to represent the majority view in the country. Even though he currently represents the centrist Congress party in the parliament, he was earlier an MP with the radical *Hindutva* party Shiv Sena and quit because of differences with party leaders. Religiosity is a crucial element that defines this more traditional group in India that Nirupam is representative of.

This group is also marked by a pronounced pride in the ancient customs and traditions of the country, an overt emphasis on Indianness and a simultaneous dislike for the “westernized”, English-speaking and urban elites. Not surprisingly Nirupam frequently invoked the “ancient customs of our country” during his interactions in the house. In one instance when giving advise to Monica Bedi about the cycle of happiness and sorrow in life he refers to the Hindu ethos according to which pain is a welcome condition of life because it will invariably be followed by happiness. Nirupam’s position within this particular India is also exemplified by his refusal to participate in a dance competition that the Big Boss had ordered each house-member to participate in. He refused to participate in the activity on grounds that it was “undignified”.

When seen in the light of its placement within these other contexts, Nirupam's diatribe against Sambhavana represents more than merely a clash between the conservative and liberal elements of any society. This conflict, in fact highlights a deeper more consequential division that is specific to the Indian social milieu and manifests itself as more than mere policing along gender lines.

Lack of Hindi as An Axis of Difference

The second thread I highlight foregrounds the politics of language in postcolonial India and the judgments against those considering English their first language. The central protagonist of this thread is Diana Hayden, a model and former Miss World. From the time of her appearance on the show to her final exit Hayden became well known for her gaffes and embarrassing use of Hindi. Often her misuse of the language merely got laughs and giggles but at other times her mistakes caused serious misunderstandings that needed apologies and clarifications. Linguistic diversity is a defining feature of India given that the country has fourteen officially recognized languages. This diversity implies that there are many different vernacular languages spoken in the country. Most Indians know or can speak more than one language, English being one among them. However, English's role is different from the other languages given its colonial linkage. In its daily usage it invariably serves as a marker of cultural identity and functions as a mode of social distinction. Scholars have focused on the lingering uses of a colonial language in postcolonial societies. Rajagopal (2001) sees this split between the English and the vernacular India most clearly play out within the Indian mediascape. Within the Indian media the two Indias exist simultaneously and the English press continues a "colonial practice of aloofness and unfamiliarity with local traditions" (16). The attitude in the Hindi press, on the other hand, is one of antipathy towards the English speaking

secular elites who are often seen as representing a continuation of the colonial structures of domination.

In the theme I describe below, the attitude of the house-members varied from sympathy to ridicule for Hayden's incompetence in the Hindi language. Interestingly, Hayden was not the first house-member to be uncomfortable in speaking Hindi since Jade Goody too had been in the same boat. However, the house-members were far more forgiving towards Goody perhaps given her British nationality. Hayden's problems were in fact compounded by the fact that unlike Goody she could speak a little Hindi. It is the mistakes she made while attempting to speak Hindi that gave the housemates more fodder for making fun of her. I describe below a selection out of the many instances where this language barrier between Hayden and the rest of the house-members came to the forefront.

An early instance of how difficult it would be for Hayden to communicate on the show came about in episode 28 of the show when she took on the task of a news anchor – a task prescribed by Big Boss. As she held the mike and began to prepare for a newscast she suddenly realized the language barrier and asked another house-member if she could do it in English. Rahul responded by saying that she could, clearly a lie and a set-up intended to get her into trouble, given clear instructions from the Big Boss that only Hindi could be a medium of communication in the house. Despite Rahul's assurance and perhaps sensing the trap Diana, switches to giving her newscast in Hindi. Her Hindi is extremely accented and has many inaccuracies leading to giggles from the house-members. She mispronounces words and her grammar seems to be all over the place. In another incident in the same episode Diana has a conversation with Raja, another house-member to whom she tries to justify her attempts at reconciliation between him and Sambhavana. As she tries to explain her reasons in Hindi she is

unable to do so and yells loudly (much to the dismay of Raja) to express her frustration at not being able to speak proper Hindi.

Often when in conversation with other housemates the only way Hayden understands some words is by translating them into English and then seeking confirmation from the others about the correctness of the translation. An instance of this is when Raja talks to her about strategies of living in the house and uses the hybrid word “safety-kawach”. She looks at him puzzled and as he gives her more context she quizzes him with the word “self-preservation”. He confirms that it was, in fact, the meaning he was thinking of.

Another instance of her unsureness on using a word comes up when she uses the Hindi phrase “bhad mein jao” (Episode 49), which could roughly be translated as “go to hell”. Immediately on using the word she senses that she has used an inappropriate phrase and apologizes. “Is that a bad word?” she sheepishly asks the other housemates around her much to everyone’s amusement. In another instance her conversation with Rahul is interrupted when she cannot understand his use of the word “naap tol” that he uses to describe her measured behavior in the house. Yet another instance occurs in episode 33 when she uses the wrong word (“chipkari” instead of “pichkari”) to allude to a water-spraying instrument used during the Indian festival of Holi. She apologizes but causes some laughter in the house in the process.

These are merely a selection out of the innumerable instances of her misuses of the language, mispronunciations and of her being corrected by other housemates since there were enough of these for her to become a center of gossip and jokes. Many of these jokes continued to be made long after she was voted out of the show. For example in episode 82 towards the end of the season Sambhavana used an anglicized accent to speak Hindi and said she was copying

Diana. These references were even made by the host of the show Shilpa Shetty who mocked her accent in the weekly roundup at the end of episode 96.

Diana's lack of cultural context was another cause for her problems in the house. In one particular instance she compared the traits of animals to different housemates. Even though it was done with the best of intentions (since she seemed to be comparing positive traits) her comparison of a house-member to a donkey caused her immense problems and embarrassment. She compared Ehsan Qureshi to a "donkey" and Qureshi made his displeasure at the comparison known immediately. The issue blew up after Raja, another house-member decided to stoke Qureshi's anger by repeatedly asking him how he felt about the issue. In fact in one of the newscasts Raja called on Qureshi to come up to the stage and then publicly asked him to air his feeling on the issue. Qureshi responded by saying, "In our country comparison to a donkey is considered an abuse...when you don't have a worse word to denigrate someone u use *gadha* (the Hindi word for donkey)". To this Diana who was sitting in the audience yelled her innocence by arguing that context must be taken into account as well. However the situation only worsened because of her attempt to explain herself in incorrect Hindi since housemates further used her mistakes to corner her. She continued to protest but it seemed to only compound her problems as she further tied herself in knots. She eventually had to apologize to Qureshi and the matter seemed settled.

Hayden's lack of Hindi was hardly a secret before she came on the show. She is a visible public figure given her status as a former Miss World, a model and an actress. The decision to cast her then can be seen as a clever strategy that anticipated the goof-ups, the embarrassments and the controversies that arose from her presence on the show. Despite Hayden's best attempts, her language barrier came in the way of her reaching out to the house-members and in a

competitive environment where each participant was looking to outdo others, she predictably became an object of ridicule. Through her struggles and embarrassing predicaments the program seemingly gained because it created all the elements of good reality TV. This theme highlights the inherently manipulative structure of this show and underscores my claim that the producers engineered conditions using an existing divide within the Indian social milieu.

Lack of English As an Axis of Difference

This last theme that I focus on occurred in episode 96 towards the end of the season and highlights quite clearly the juxtaposition of what I have claimed are two different Indias on the show. This theme revolves around a situation where Big Boss asks the three remaining housemates to re-enact a school situation where Ashutosh is the schoolteacher teaching English poetry and the other two remaining housemates Zulfi and Raja are his students. Ashutosh was the housemate with perhaps the least knowledge of English. Zulfi and Raja on the other hand seemed to have a better handle on the language. In fact in the few instances when Ashu attempts to use English he has to be corrected by other housemates. An instance of this is a scene where Ashutosh and Diana Hayden are playing chess and Diana hums a Hindi song. She hums the line “Jab hum jawan honge....” and Ashutosh attempts to translate it into English and fails. He mistranslates it as “When we will young....much”. Diana interrupts the game and then correctly translates the sentence for him as “when we get older....when we grow up...”. There are several other such instances that show Ashutosh to be quite uncomfortable with the English language.

Given his discomfort with the language his assignment as a schoolteacher teaching poems in English was bound to create an interesting situation. And it

did. Ashutosh teaches two poems in all to his class. The first is by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore and the second by Shakespeare. As he tries to read out and then interpret the two poems the entire class session ends up being a comedy of errors. The teacher is completely clueless to the subject he is teaching and the students often have to interject and help him out. He tries to keep a stern face even as his students realize and mock his unenviable situation.

He begins with the first poem "Play the Game of Death" by Rabindranath Tagore. As he reads the first sentence of the poem his students ask him the meaning of the word "bride" that appears in the sentence. Taken aback he blurts out the Hindi word for doll, which is "gudiya". He then goes on to interpret the poem using this erroneous meaning and ties himself up in knots as a result. The second sentence of the poem is "The clouds in the sky are capricious". Ashutosh manages to read the entire sentence but gets visibly stumped by the word "capricious". As he tries to pronounce the word with tremendous difficulty his students burst into laughter pitying his predicament. He finally attempts to make meaning of the word by focusing on its sound. He breaks it up into "cap" and "serious" the two words whose meaning he knows. He then interprets the sentence nonsensically as "The clouds in the sky have a cap on and are moving seriously" thus further cracking up his students and, one would assume, his audience as well.

Many such instances of mis-translation occur as Ashutosh continues to teach the poem. For instance he translates the word "storm" to mean a wild bird and "tenderly" to mean "to hold" often going by the sound of the English word to match it with similar sounding Hindi words. As he moves to teach the second poem "Fear No More" by Shakespeare he continues his strategy of phonetically breaking up and then translating words. When quizzed on the meaning of the title of the poem he translates the word "more" to mean peacock since the Hindi

translation of peacock is “mor” (pronounced similar to “more” from the poem’s title). Having zeroed on this meaning he interprets the entire poem along this theme making the peacock the central theme of the poem. He mistranslates words such as “furious” and “chimney” by picking on their sound phonetically and then matching them with Hindi words.

As he continues to struggle to pronounce the words and interpret their meaning he becomes increasingly frustrated and the situation increasingly comical. Finally the tortuous episode climaxes when upon coming across the word “tyrant” in a sentence he just falls to the ground exasperated and exclaims, “Oh God where have you trapped me?” as his students rush to help him get up. He finally stands up and tries to finish the poem by mistranslating “grave” to mean just another form of “brave”.

In this brief summary of a long episode one gets a sense of both the hilarity and the awkwardness inherent in this situation. While Ashutosh laughed at his own predicament during the entire episode it was clear that the laughter concealed an awkward admission that he was the butt of the joke here. The other two participants on the show who missed no opportunity in pointing out Ashutosh’s errors rubbed this point home. In its entirety this episode achieved the program’s goal of humor even if by clearly humiliating a participant in the process. The mode through which this humor was achieved has been the subject of my analysis so far. The strategy here is similar to the one used in the earlier two themes. It depends on a juxtaposition of a difference specific to Indian society in order to create conditions for good television. I ponder over the larger ramifications of this strategy in the section below.

Analyzing Contrived Situations on Reality TV

In order to understand the “reality” in this program we must investigate the dialectic of scripted and unscripted content in BB2. How serendipitous were the encounters described above and the themes that arose from them? To what extent can we see the program’s designs succeed in these themes above? At a micro-level the dialogues and the interactions between participants are clearly not scripted. It is also true that within the framework of the show the participants were free to say or do certain things as long as they did not transgress the rules of the house. However, even in this relatively free-flowing format there is significant manipulation of characters and situations thus creating conditions for, if not outright scripting of, certain events and situations.

The three themes hold sufficient clues for us to see these manipulations and hence demystify the artifice inherent in the program’s strategy. The first theme that arises out of a conflict between Nirupam and Sambhavana while not scripted could have been broadly predicted. Since he is a relatively elderly (in comparison to other participants) politician formerly associated with a radical right-wing party, Nirupam represented a patriarchal figure on the show. His investment in defending the puritan virtues of women makes sense given that when in power the said party Shiv Sena infamously indulged in an unprecedented level of cultural policing at public places and of public events. That he would find Sambhavana’s rather aggressive personality problematic could have been foreseen but that the encounter would specifically morph into an argument around her sexualized image and her attire could perhaps not. His mere inclusion on the show already created conditions for him to stand out amongst the other participants. The signs were clear when he refused to participate in a paired-dance with a female partner on the grounds that it was “below his dignity”.

The second and third themes highlighted above primarily revolved around language. The incidents around these themes could have been anticipated when Hindi was made the mandatory language on the show early on. This instruction was inconsequential for Jade Goody who, at that time was still in the house. One can only conjecture on the shenanigans that would have resulted based on language if Goody continued to remain in the house. During the two episodes that were aired with her still around the house, members treated her with care trying to understand what she said and translating for her what others were saying. However as her novelty was bound to wear out she would soon be ignored by others and was invariably going to feel alienated and hence resentful. This situation would have had all the ingredients of an explosive mix and an ensuing confrontation was inevitable. However, the seemingly clever strategy of casting Goody did not pay off given her unexpected departure from the show.

In Diana Hayden the program's organizers found a close replacement for Goody who came close to sharing Goody's linguistic limitations. That Hayden was an Indian, in fact, obviated the need for any special treatment to be given to her by other participants. After all while Goody could be excused for not knowing Hindi, Hayden having been born and brought up in India, could not. With the veneer of politeness gone the housemates came down harsh on Hayden. The fact that Hayden entered the program mid-way when alliances had already been formed and the initial spirit of bonhomie gone exacerbated this harshness. Hayden's awkward use of Hindi in fact was in all likelihood taken as a sign of her snobbery. Her naïveté seemed to feed the assumption that only those who do not feel the need to mingle with the commoners didn't know Hindi. It was not too difficult to anticipate Hayden's fate on the show from the moment she walked in and while the micro-level unfolding of events could not have been

scripted the larger contours of Hayden's encounters with the other house members clearly were. By including her in the house, BB2 put in place all the conditions that would instigate drama and then merely let the events unfold.

In the extent of its contrivance and its planning the third theme was perhaps most closely scripted. By asking Ashutosh with barely any knowledge of English to teach English poetry the program laid the trap for the participants to walk right into it and consequently for Ashutosh to become a butt of jokes. In his mis-translations, mis-pronunciations and mis-interpretations of the poems, Ashutosh brought to fruition situations that must have been imagined in the minutest details when the assignment was given to him. Utterly clueless and unable to extricate himself from the task, Ashutosh had no choice but to play along and allow the remaining participants (and one would imagine the audience) to ridicule him. Even though he laughed with them, it was clear that his laughter was meant to conceal an embarrassment rather than at something he found humorous.

As we peel off the strategic maneuvers behind the program we must ask: how aberrant or extraordinary were the strategies used on BB2? In other words how do BB2's strategies compare with similar shows around the world? Were the instigated situations and conflicts unique to this Indian version of the reality TV program? As it turns out manipulating situations and characters for encouraging dramatic situations on reality TV is the norm rather than the exception. In fact scholars are quick to dismiss any claims that reality TV is an unscripted and authentic representation where characters in front of the camera determine the course of the program rather than those behind it. Ouellette & Murray (2004) argue that the only element that distinguishes reality TV from other formats is its "self-conscious" claim to the real. Moreover while many scholars trace the origins of reality TV to earlier programs such as the *Candid Camera*, for Ouellette

and Murray (2004) it was not until the 1991 premiering of *The Real World* on MTV that “we began to witness the emergence of many of the textual characteristics that would come to define the genre’s current form” (3). The show comprised of young adults brought together in a manner that was meant to ignite conflict – a strategy with clear resonances in BB2.

Similarly in their attempts to define Reality TV, Holmes and Jermyn (2004) dismiss any authentic claims to the real in today’s version of reality TV. They instead insist that: “Ultimately, and importantly, it is perhaps only possible to suggest that what unites the range of programming conceivably described as ‘Reality TV’ is primarily its discursive, visual and technological *claim* to ‘the real’” (5). Orbe (2008) in fact provides the most direct evidence against fallacious claims to the real when he cites a storywriter on the reality TV show *The Bachelor* who claims to “do everything that a writer does” (347). He says that many writers working on these shows in fact have sought to be included in the Writers Guild of America thus busting the myth that Reality TV is unscripted. Hence he posits, “the reality of reality TV speaks to its unreal nature” (346).

So if the myth of reality is belied, how convincing is the evidence of manipulations on the show? Not surprisingly the conclusion that situations on reality TV are often contrived to produce predictable outcomes is one that scholars commonly arrive at in their close analyses of the program (Orbe 2008; Griffen-Foley 2004; Murray & Ouellette 2004; Bell-Jordan, 2008). Often the primary desired outcome is a conflict that results in controversies leading to higher viewership. However other desired outcomes such as sexual liaisons or comical situations are also often encouraged. The stratagems deployed to achieve this end begin right from casting decisions to the day-to-day activities that participants are asked or subtly encouraged to engage in. Not only does the unraveling of these strategies belie claims about the “reality” of the show but

also raises questions about the ethics of the expedient manipulation of unsuspecting participants towards the goal of higher viewership.

Orbe (2008) claims that the idea that placing participants from diverse backgrounds, worldviews, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation would eventually lead to conflicts is a common strategy across different reality TV programs. He elaborates:

“As such, many reality-based programs rely heavily on the human drama that unfolds when people from diverse backgrounds – based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, age, religion, and sexual orientation – interact with one another (Griffen-Foley, 2004). In fact, the success of many shows (especially docusoaps) hinges on the ability to cast a diverse group of individuals whose cultural worldviews will clash on screen” (349).

Hence not only is conflict created but is often done under the guise of representational diversity. Even as scholars acknowledge that there is growing diversity on reality TV shows, they simultaneously critique the expedient use of the idea of diversity for creating controversies on the shows. An echo of Orbe’s claim made above is found in Katrina E. Bell-Jordan’s (2008) analysis of three reality TV shows to unravel how race is deployed to create conflict and dramatize plot scenarios on the shows. She studies MTV’s *The Real World: Denver*, CBS’s *Survivor: Cook Islands* and the FX network’s *Black.White* to conclude that the producers 1) “dramatize race and racial issues by juxtaposing opposing viewpoints; 2) they promote conflict in the framing of race and racial issues, specifically in terms of interracial and intraracial conflict; 3) they perpetuate hegemonic representations of race by emphasizing violence and anger; 4) they personalize racism by privileging individual solutions to complex social problems and 5) they leave conflict and contradictions unresolved” (357). Hence more than compensating against the charge of under-representing minorities

these programs turn that allegation on its head by making their programs sites for conflict between groups they allegedly under-represented.

Bell-Jordan claims that the show *Black.White* is particularly pertinent in this regard because the very format of the show where a White and a Black family swap lives anticipates racial conflict. As it turns out this presumption is not misplaced since intense feelings about racial insensitivity on one side are countered with charges about exaggerated victimhood on the other. Predictably the white family on the show claims that racism doesn't exist in their society while the black family insists otherwise. These tensions often lead to open confrontations and slanging matches. Similarly on a different show called *The Real World: Denver*, that brings together six people to live together, race unsuspectingly becomes a dominant theme as the two black males in the group often feel the pressure to adopt one of the many dominant identities of black masculinity. As they begin to familiarize with the rest of the group as well as amongst themselves, their identity is constantly under interrogation by the group and most importantly by themselves. Tyrie and Stephen, the two men in question end up representing the two most dominant reductive categories about African-Americans as either well-assimilated or "hood".

It is not merely interracial conflicts that are contrived on reality TV but intra-racial conflicts as well. These conflicts between different racial groups were apparent in the series *Survivor: Cook Islands* that divided the different groups participating in the show along purely ethnic lines. Bell-Jordan claims that as each of these groups defined themselves as homogenous entities in opposition to other groups, there were bound to be "misfits" within them who refused to ascribe to the dominant codes defining each group. The most common stereotypes about racial groups were deployed both by the organizers of the show as well as by the groups themselves to define each other. Hence we see

here the strategy of using difference, often exaggerated difference, to create controversial television played out repeatedly on reality TV.

In accordance with the examples above, the most globally infamous instance of the success of this strategy was the episode involving Indian film actress Shilpa Shetty's introduction to the UK version of *Celebrity Big Brother* where language was the only common ground between her and the other participants on the show who were all British. Predictably her entry to the show almost immediately led to intense racial conflicts between her and members of the show and created a global buzz about the program.

By situating itself on the boundary lines of reality and fiction reality TV liberally borrows from either of the two formats to further its viewership. The ruse of representing unedited and unscripted real lives of participants functions as a foil to make the planned conflicts and encounters even more interesting. Needless to say that these dramatic situations would perhaps not be as interesting if they were already known to be scripted and hence the illusion of serendipity must continuously be maintained. The belief that encounters and events on these programs are unplanned functions not only to conceal their manipulative nature but also to add to the interest in those events because at least in the popular reception of these programs, truth does indeed become stranger than fiction.

But what are the larger consequences of such a strategy? For a diverse country such as India where differences in the cultural realm are only trumped by immense inequalities in the material realm the re-staging of everyday conflicts on television is particularly consequential. I deliberate on the possible larger ramifications of the program's strategy.

Contextual Analysis of BB2

Mediated culture has invariable linkages to the social milieu it arises from and which it often seeks to represent. One cannot study these cultural artifacts as separate from the cultural specificities they locate themselves within. Hence to analyze the larger societal significance of BB2 we must connect the three themes to the social and cultural nuances of the Indian society. The cultural artifact or the text must continuously be positioned within the context and this dialectic is visible within scholarship on reality TV as well. The alternation between the text and the context is frequent in criticisms of the show. For instance, in studying the critical discourse surrounding the introduction of Big Brother in Belgium, Mathijs (2002) claims that the views of the critics changed from a critique of the context of the show and its social significance to an analysis of the intrinsic features of the show. This shift happened gradually and the initial moral outrage about the format of the show gave way to discussions of what Mathijs terms the use/exchange value of the program. He uses David Bordwell's elaboration of the levels of symptomatic critique where contextual analysis looks at the object of criticism as situated within a context while an intrinsic critique looks primarily at the textual elements of the show. Mathijs's claim is that the reception of Big Brother in Belgium moved from a contextual/symptomatic critique to an intrinsic/textual one just when a participant of the show (Katrijn) was evicted and the critics began to focus on the rules of the game to speculate on how the participants could survive their "dehumanizing ordeal". This shift was also characterized by a shift in focus to studying Big Brother as a fictional program as opposed to a factual one. This move helped the critics make comparisons between Big Brother and other docusoaps without compunctions about weighing the moral efficacy of the program.

Similarly Andrejevic (2004) sees the rise of the reality TV format as symptomatic of the social changes around us that require a rethinking of metaphors of consumption and participation and claims that the rise of user-generated content constructs an audience that, under the guise of participation, provides virtually free content for the advertisers and the marketers. By showing the “unscripted rhythms of daily life”, reality TV positions itself as an escape from the hegemonic control of the monopoly media and promises us authenticity – something denied to us by the other traditional formats of television. But since the audience is the arbiter of what is real and what is not, the viewer consumes authenticity while also policing it. The interplay between real and unreal is a shifting boundary here and delegating to the audience the task to determine the authenticity of characters should be seen more as a programming strategy rather than a sign of audience empowerment. Andrejevic (2004) argues that: “The result is that the promise of reality works to background the contrived nature of the show itself” (129). The promise of interactivity and control that Big Brother promises therefore is hardly a sign of audience empowerment but perhaps an indication of how this promise too has ultimately been deployed in the larger interests of the culture industry.

The fact that audience members get to vote each week to eliminate members or determine the course of the show could of course be construed as involvement. However does this participation herald the arrival of the active and involved audience? That conclusion, claim Tincknell and Raghuraman (2004) should not be so easily reached. They use the Birmingham School idea of a resistive reading of texts in order to judge audience participation in the show and claim that an involved audience is not always a radical one but one that is often quite conventional and reinforces stereotypes. Their analysis shows that the dominant rather than the resistant meanings of the show usually gain credence.

This fact corroborates earlier claims that these programs often encourage a certain set of events and through them a dominant meaning. A truly open-ended reality TV show would involve a level of risk-taking that could place the larger goals of the program at ends with the course of events that unfold on it. Hence the program portrays reality and invites audience involvement only to the extent that it furthers its larger goals.

However the ruse of involvement works well since it connotes “choice” - a crucial metaphor of the age of neo-liberal ideals that we inhabit. Continuing a symptomatic and contextual reading of reality TV, McMurria (2008) claims that the rise of reality TV makes sense when seen as a resonance of the neo-liberal dispensation that is gaining credence in the current political order. He analyzes the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* on ABC to unravel a neo-liberal ethos within the program’s narrative. He calls these kinds of makeover programs a version of the “Good Samaritan Reality TV” where individuals are rewarded for coming up with private solutions to social and systemic problems. These private solutions often comprise some form of corporate philanthropy whereby corporations get significant amounts of airtime for helping a family upgrade their home or improve another aspect of their lives. This kind of programming had especially seen a boom in the post 911 scenario that emphasized patriotism, charity and the do-it-yourself attitude. The home-makeover programs particularly benefitted from the channeling of disposable American income from travel to home-decoration. The overall narratives behind these programs could fit in with the idea of the “ownership society” which emphasizes private property as an idea and the market as the solution to most problems. Even though *EHME* was perhaps the clearest exemplar of neo-liberal ideologies, he argues that these strains could be found in many other forms of reality TV.

As a political and social event difficult to ignore, 9/11 functions as the background of other analysts' study of the context around reality TV as well. Reading the rise of reality TV as connected to this event would require making linkages between 9/11 and the lasting social changes it engendered and reality TV. Palmer (2002) situates the success of Big Brother in the post 9/11 culture in the west where the discourse of security and surveillance trump issues of privacy and government intrusiveness. Hence Palmer claims that the format of Big Brother is an exercise in training citizens to the new codes of governance where being under the watch of cameras 24*7 is the norm. The very definition of civil liberties and privacy has undergone a revision under the new regime as Palmer cites the fact of England and Wales being the two most surveilled countries in the world. In this altered scenario, Big Brother functions to legitimize surveillance by using psychologists who interpret the behavior of participants thus making the show an "experiment" in human behavior. This experiment often focused on the sexual identity of the participants thus validating Foucault's claim that the discourse on sexuality was central to the creation of the subject inhabiting the modern nation state. But exploring the sexual identity of the participants also served the purpose of garnering eyeballs for the program. For Palmer then, Big Brother represents a replication of the modern surveillance state within the camera-monitored house.

The interactions between cultural artifacts and the dominant ideologies is a process of mutual exchange where even as mediated culture is a symptom of social clues it also influences it. Hence even as we analyze the representation of the "split public" on BB2 we must interrogate what that representation means for the Indian society. In its representation and in the conflicts and dramatic situations that follow from that representation, BB2 exaggerates the fractures within the Indian social body. While conflicts, misunderstandings and

indifference of one India towards another is a part of the everyday life in India, BB2 accentuated these elements at the cost of other not-so-conflictual encounters that were just as likely to occur.

This happened because in the one-hour capsule that was edited for screening each day, an entire day's recorded footage was compressed to include only the controversial, the salacious and the most dramatic moments that occurred in the day. In this process all the viewers saw was conflict, backbiting, conspiracies and ridicule. While these things did actually occur on the show, they were interspersed with just as many moments and encounters where the house-members cooperated and got along quite well. After all the participants collaborated on many activities in the house including the chores of cooking and cleaning. However as it selectively chose what to show and what to exclude, the show misrepresented the dynamics in the house showing them as a bunch of quarreling and conspiring adults.

Hence the representation of the two Indias on the show is damaging to the larger project of social integration that any multicultural society must deal with. We see on a program a strange mix of resentment, hostility, Othering and awkward coexistence. If anything these consequences lead one to conclude that the separate groups on the show are perhaps best insulated from each other.

Hence the use of conflicts and the juxtaposition of difference on the show reified the real-life immiscibility of different groups in the Indian society. Not only did it attempt to replicate the split India on the show it sought to magnify the divide in order to create drama. It also presented the larger societal divide as instances of personal bickering thus individualizing social problems (McMurria 2008) and in so doing simplified an issue with historical reasons and material ramifications. This simplified representation on the show is perhaps the most pernicious legacy of BB2. As opposed to Bhabha's "performative agency" what

we see on the show is the manipulation of identity politics for the artifice of profit motive. One can also not make the case here that a representation of Jameson's a universal subjectivity or common Indianhood would necessarily ameliorate the existing fractures within the Indian polity since it would need to gloss over some real differences and inequalities that exist. But given that the exaggerated representation of conflict allowed one particular aspect of the "split public" to trump resulted in a falsified image of Indian being presented as the only one.

Conclusion

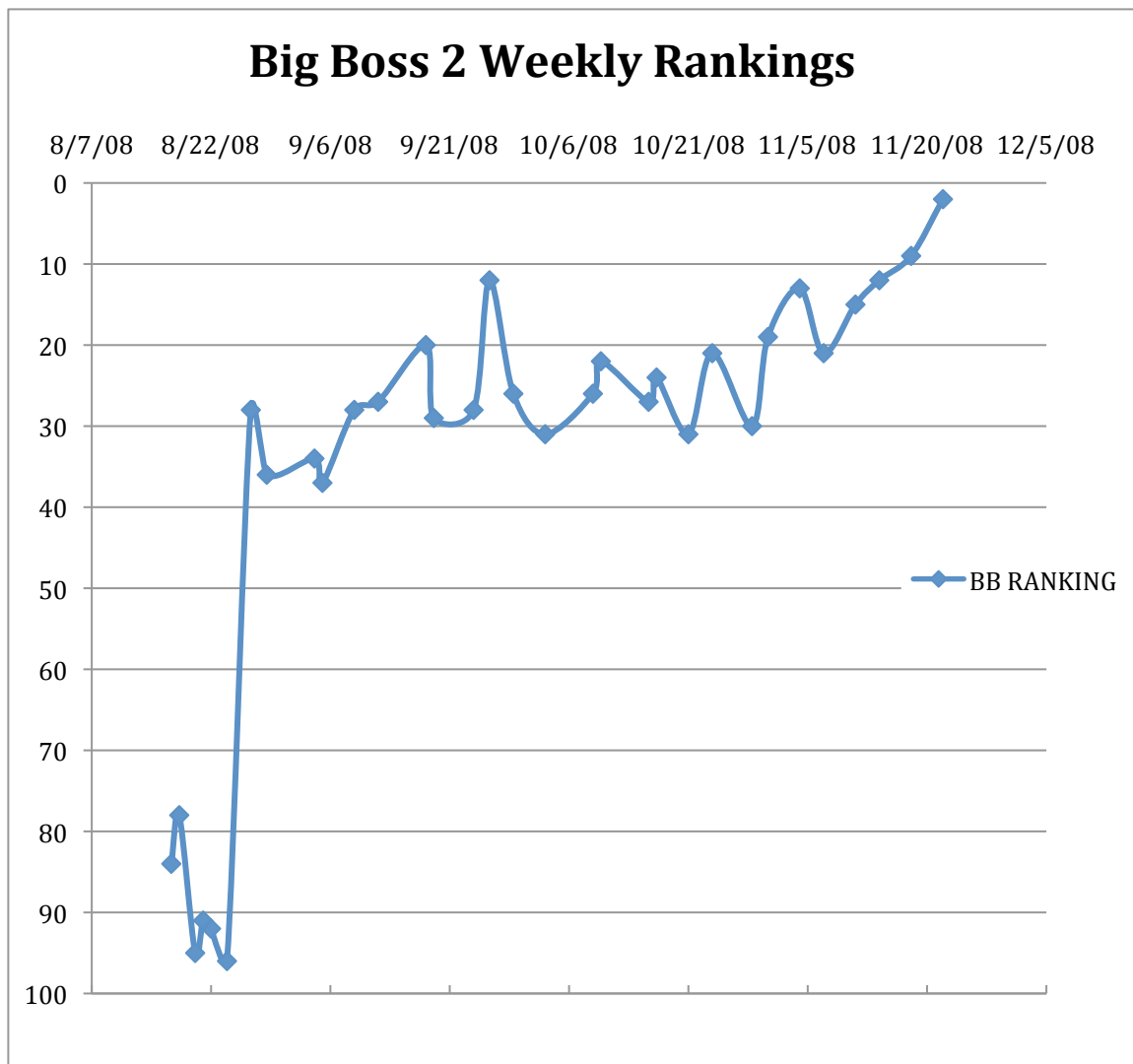
In this article I have attempted to show how a close study of the reality television show Big Boss 2 unravels a carefully crafted strategy that, even as it gives us the impression of representing diversity, deploys different identities to create conflict. Moreover I claim that the difference represented on the program has a specific historical genealogy deeply rooted in India's colonial experience. It arises from a fault line that Arvind Rajagopal (1997) explores in an incisive analysis of the rise of the religious right in India. He calls it the "split public" and unravels the existence of this split in the political, cultural, linguistic and social life in India.

The presentation of this historical divide as interpersonal conflict erases its larger societal consequences. While the divide does manifest itself in the quotidian lives of Indians it is not merely about individuals choosing to pick fights based on language, cultural affiliations and choice of dress. Coded within these seemingly personal conflicts are larger structural issues that have material consequences for those caught up within it. In its attempts to represent that conflict as largely interpersonal to create drama, reality TV must erase that history, presenting people as free actors within an unfolding drama.

After all raw human drama makes for great television and exploiting the everyday lives of participants to manipulate the sequence of events shows its expedient use. Not surprisingly Hill's (2002) investigation of why people liked watching Big Brother in the UK showed that the respondents rated "Seeing people live without modern comforts, e.g. TV" as their top reason (72%) but "Watching group conflict" as the close second (68%). In order to satisfy this craving for real conflict as opposed to scripted ones the program must devise newer and more innovative ways to instigate them on the show and BB2 did exactly that. Why group conflict must be so appealing to audiences remains an open question. Cultural narratives are often script for life and watching people negotiate real-life conflicts could engender empathy from audiences who imagine themselves to be in similar situations.

The seemingly mundane everyday life is what takes up the majority of our living time. And yet the "fundamental enigma" of trivial everyday life is that it is considered both insignificant as well as the source of all meaning at the same time (Scannell 2002). Scannell claims that the everyday "resists" being taken seriously but as is clear from the Hill's analysis of audience expectations it is an object of immense public interest. The dialectic of mundane-ness and meaning is yet another divide that reality TV in general but Big Brother in particular deploys to its larger advantage. BB2 straddles several such dialectical concepts that run through the course of this paper. It inhabits the dialectical interplay of reality and fiction, of form and content, of text and context, of the two Indias it represents on the show, of universalism vs. difference and then of triviality and meaning. Highlighting the interplay of these concepts has been one of the central goals of this paper. But more importantly through focusing on these interplays I have sought to unravel how a text that typifies the process of cultural globalization mutates to denote and produce meaning.

Figure 1. Graphic depiction of BB2's season-long run.



X Axis => Dates at the interval of 15 days starting from mid-August to mid November 2008

Y Axis => Ranking of BB2 out of the top 100 programs for the week

Source: Television Audience Measurement (TAM) supported by A C Nielsen

ROCK MUSIC AND THE PRODUCTION OF INDIAN IDENTITY

Introduction

This chapter explores the cultural formation of rock music in India. Through studying the prevalence of rock in India I seek to understand the processes of identity formation that operate in a necessarily marginal and liminal space within India's cultural landscape. As a non-mainstream form of cultural production that must continuously justify its Indianness, rock music in India is inflected both by India's colonial history and by the global flow of culture. Its practitioners strive to Indianize a genre that is seen as foreign but more crucially seek to do so in the English language, which given its colonial legacy, is seen as both elitist and hegemonic. The uptake of this necessarily western genre in India therefore can only be placed within a map where the multiple forces of history, power, political economy and culture converge. The unique blend of the past and the present that rock allows us to unravel is crucial to understanding the construction of a postcolonial identity in contemporary India. Every charge of its alien-ness is responded to by assurances that for a population that grew up listening to western music, rock is as much theirs as any other form of indigenous music. Every attempt to classify it as essentially western is countered by claims about its universal essence. These assurances by musicians however are complicated by the fact that despite a phenomenally large number of bands, rock is yet to find a commercially sustainable model in India. Even though the scene is changing, a country where English is emerging as the second most spoken language has a disproportionately few number of listeners of the music. In seeking to understand rock music's larger role in Indian society my study takes this discrepancy into account

In understanding rock's position in India my study is animated by different theoretical lenses on it. The field of postcolonial theory allows me to historicize rock's growth by highlighting the role of vestigial structures of colonialism that continue to inform India's present. Rock's presence in India is facilitated both by the presence of the English language and by certain traditions of live western music that were put in place because of colonial rule. The continuation of colonial structures in the postcolonial times, though with significant mutations, is a key terrain for postcolonial theory. Scholars have argued both that the continuation of these structures is a persistence of the older modalities of power albeit in a new guise (Spivak 1999) and that those very continuing structures have facilitated a space for the subversion of the older forms of domination (Bhabha, 1994). Both these positions inform our understanding of rock music's prevalence in India. Those outside it often see rock as a marginal but elitist discourse that deliberately fails to connect with the masses and in so doing maintains a hierarchy within cultural formations. Those involved in its production however seek to claim for it a position within India's cultural landscape arguing for its salience with Indian issues and citing their own life experiences to counter allegations of rock's non-Indianness. These musicians also simultaneously challenge attempts by foreign audiences to pigeonhole them as mimics of a western genre that is best played by western bands. Through extended interviews conducted with musicians, the goal of this study is to analyze their self-conception within these multiple ascriptions that they inhabit and constantly juggle with. Questions of identity – of who they are, of where they truly belong and whose music they seek to play is a centrally recurring theme in these musicians' lives as it is in these interviews. Given the performative aspect of the genre or rock, the processes of identity formation in this case are usefully illustrated by concepts of performance of identity (Butler

1999, Hall 1996)). Butler explicates her notion of performativity as a repetitive ritual that functions to naturalize what may be a construction. Hall's conception of identity similarly sees it as a dialogic process whereby subjects are continuously in the process of identifying with. Both these theorists complicate the idea of identity introducing it as a fluid and contingent process.

Rock music in India is also centrally tied to the issue of the global flow of culture that is arguably one of the most visible manifestations of contemporary globalization. That western music has existed in India in one form or another ever since its independence is well known. However the recent spurt in the growth of rock is significantly explained by the access that transformations in media technologies have enabled. The Internet and television have replaced radio as the primary source of such music for these musicians and have allowed a two-way access of songs by Indian bands by audiences abroad and of non-Indian music to be accessed by Indian bands. Studies of global culture attempt to understand the contemporary nature and process of globalization by locating them on a spectrum that stretches from hybridity on one end and homogeneity on the other (Tomlinson 1991; Jameson 1998). Those that make a case for the homogenizing effect of global culture focus largely either on the political economic aspects of media institutions (Schiller 1992; Miller 2005) or on the cultural texts distributed by these media institutions (Dorfman and Mattelart 1975; Ang 1985). On the other hand studies that make a claim for hybridity argue that globalization engenders spaces that enable an interplay of ideas, ethnicities, and imaginations etc (Appadurai 1996; Canclini 1995). Among the scholars of hybridity also comprise those who employ the tools of Birmingham School culture studies to argue for a resistive role of global culture for the oppressed around the world. All four of these approaches either by themselves or in conjunction with others are extremely fruitful in understanding the processes of

cultural adoption in a globalizing world as well as the specific case of rock in India. The differences in these approaches lie not so much in their conclusions as in the object they choose to analyze. To claim a homogenous influence of global culture is not to negate the hybrid sites created when hegemonic culture is taken up in distant places. One can choose to study the operation of power or the newness of the third space opened up due to its exercise. My study adds to these existing insights by talking about the production by the consumers of cultural products that are inflected or influenced by those dominant cultural idioms they consume.

In an attempt to move from consumption to production I analyze both testimonies from the producers as well as their cultural products i.e. their songs. Analyzing cultural objects produced by those consuming global culture and understanding what those products tell us about their producers is an equally fruitful addition to studies that have primarily analyzed processes of consumption by the consumers of global culture. While this analysis informs us about issues of identity and culture it also centrally informs our understanding of the political economy of global culture. This study seeks to underscore the relationship between the trifecta of political economy, culture and identity. Analyzing why a significant number of Indian youth would take up a genre where the usual gratifications of a career choice such as fame or money are non-existent holds clues towards broader issues of desire and cultural consumption. The motivations at work in this cultural formation help us understand why a cultural idiom “foreign” to the social milieu of India has gained adoption and currency there. The scholarship on subcultures (Hebdige 1979) gives us pointers to the uses that marginality has for the purposes of resistance and subversion. By showing us the uses that marginal groups make of culture Hebdige’s work points to the hidden meanings within the symbolic realm of subcultures. Useful

as those pointers are however, they only tangentially help my study because of the specific contingencies his and other works on subcultures attempt to explain. While the adoption of rock music in India has resonances with the appropriation of punk and reggae by youths in Britain, the historical genealogies of Indian rock and the fact of globalization differentiate the case of Indian rock from the usual categories of subcultures in culture studies. In a study on the spatial components of the consumption of global pop music in the Indian metropolis of Bangalore, Arun Saldanha (2002) argues that “the way global youth in Bangalore construct their sense of place within India’s modernity and globalization can only be understood by interpreting their images of the West within India’s specific geohistory (cf. Rose, 1995)” (344). By highlighting these contingencies this study both learns from and marks a departure from existing scholarship within culture studies, especially those on subcultures.

While my study centrally locates its analysis within the specificities of rock in India, interviews with musicians also unearth the paramount role played by their emotional or affective responses to rock. Foregrounding affect does not necessarily amount to eschewing the role of power and ideology in analyzing popular cultural formations. In fact this study presumes affect to be “the missing term in an adequate understanding of ideology” (Grossberg, 1992, p.83) and by juxtaposing it along with other forces at work I hope to provide a more holistic map of the rock music scene in India. The central question I ask in this study is: How can an analysis of the production and performance of rock music in India help us in understanding processes of formation of identity for the Indian youth? In an attempt to answer this question I begin by tracing the genealogy of rock music in India as well of rock musicians’ early interaction with the genre to show the linkages between a colonial culture of live music and the early growth of rock bands in India. I then engage with musicians’ testimonies about their attraction

to and relationship with rock music. Conversations reveal a multitude of personal experiences associated with rock that show an immensely private relationship with it for most musicians. While each of them encountered it differently and had different reasons for coming to it, there are also striking similarities in their narratives. Themes of seeking an alternative to existing cultural options, of being attracted to rock's aggression and energy, of being mesmerized by its obscure and yet meaningful lyrics frequently recur as they try to recall their earliest attraction to rock. These themes allow me to introduce explanations of affect within the existing theories of cultural globalization. Moving to the material aspect of its prevalence, I focus on the economics of rock in India and highlight the compromises and adjustments that musicians must make in order to pursue their passion for rock. Finally the issue of their identity is centrally fore-grounded in three concluding sections where I analyze their lyrics, their use of English as opposed to other Indian languages and their attempts to position themselves in relation to their audiences both in India and outside.

Method of The Study

This chapter is based upon a series of interviews conducted in the cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata. The interviewees comprised of musicians whom I met both individually and with their bands, journalists who write about rock music and the managers and promoters of rock. A total of fifteen interviews were conducted lasting an average of two hours each. Subsequently I also conducted follow up conversations with some of my interviewees. Besides these interviews, I rely on secondary sources such as print and online magazines, discussion blogs and audio-visual sources to supplement the material that this chapter is based on. The expansion of the rock music scene

in India is reflected in the growth of secondary media around them. Today, there are three magazines devoted exclusively to rock music in India – *The Rock Street Journal* (launched 1993), *Rave* (launched 2002) and *Rolling Stone* (launched 2008). Their existence has helped provide a media platform and connect musicians from around the country who may not have known of each other's existence. A further sign of the growth of the genre is a Hindi film made on rock music in 2008 called *Rock On!* Based on the story of a rock band that is seeking to challenge conventions and play a different kind of music, the movie was both critically acclaimed and a commercial success. Perhaps the biggest secondary media outlet for the rock music scene in India has been the Internet which has not only allowed intra-national networks of musicians to form but has exploded their horizons to an international scene allowing them to access international music and then market their own music to a non-Indian audience.

Even though my project surveys four key cities that are key to the formation of the scene, given the mobility of these musicians, my research also captures a flavor of the scene outside these cities. Some of my interviewees currently a part of the rock music network in large urban centers grew up in smaller towns and provide a sense of what it was like to play music in those towns. In fact, one of the oldest traditions of rock music in India is in the North Eastern part of the country where its huge fan following deserves a separate project of its own. Besides the North East, the uptake of rock by the refugee Tibetan population in India has been studied both as an escape from their current predicament and as a mode of resistance against the Chinese occupation of their homeland (Diehl 2002).

While acknowledging these multiple sites of its existence, my study engages primarily with rock's uptake in the mainstream urban centers of the country. Experts familiar with the scene place the number of professional and

amateur rock bands in India in the thousands. The *Rock Street Journal* (RSJ), the premier rock magazine of India lists over a thousand (1040) band descriptions on its website alone. These include bands ranging from amateur to professionals existing in the smallest of towns to the bigger metropolitan centers of the country. The city with the largest number of bands listed is the capital city of New Delhi with almost 250 bands. This number is perhaps helped by the fact that New Delhi has been both the home base of the *Great Indian Rock* (GIR) show as well as the operational base of the magazine *RSJ*.

In seeking to define the genre, musicians primarily use rock to describe an ensemble of music that has the primacy of the electric guitar. Within its broad rubric are included the softer form of rock that has a simple three chord progression as well as the harsher forms of heavy metal with long guitar solos. Extending the idea of these musicians, I use rock music in this study to describe all music involving the electric guitar that is currently the primary form of western music being played and listened to in India.

Those associated with rock music in India use the word “scene” to describe the general status of the music within the larger cultural landscape of the country. The word brings together the commercial, cultural, professional, spatial and temporal status of rock music. The word is liberally sprinkled within conversations with those within the industry. Most agree that the scene has seen a veritable explosion in the past decade both in the number of bands and in paid attendance at their concerts. This growth has provided tremendous opportunities for bands to play and market their music. Amit Saigal, who is arguably a central catalyst for that change, having founded RSJ and initiated GIR, argues that the culture of rock music was changing from a second hand to a first hand one. From a time a decade ago when most fans listened to western bands and expected even Indian bands to play covers of those bands, the scenario today has developed

into a large fan base for indigenous bands playing their own songs at concerts. This change has required a lot of work from musicians and those promoting their music. Saigal explains that earlier there existed a cycle of blame game whereby fans insisted on only listening to songs they had heard before and bands complained that nobody wanted to listen to their originals. "We knew early on that for a scene to develop in India that situation had to change," he claims. He was partly responsible for that change by starting the Great Indian Rock project in 1995. The project started as a single city festival and within a decade and a half has grown to include a multi-city annual rock festival that showcases the leading and upcoming bands of the country. Each year the GIR festival results in a compilation CD of original songs from bands thus helping take the music to audiences beyond those present at the festivals.

Other than the big festival (GIR), the most common venue for rock bands is the college festival circuit where bands get their most frequent gigs. These festivals are annual cultural events through which colleges compete to outdo each other by inviting the best bands and getting the maximum attendance at their performances. Some claim that there are enough such festivals held annually for a band to be able to make a living merely by playing enough of these concerts. There are several instances of bands that survive merely by playing live shows round the year. One of the musicians I interviewed was Sooraj, the vocalist of Mother Jane, a band based in the southern state of Kerala. The band is quite well known on the concert circuit doing about 30-40 shows per year out of which about eighty percent are college concerts. Formed in 1996 and about to release their second album at the time of this interview, the band has done well for itself by tapping into opportunities to play in the college circuit. Another band Parikrama, based out of New Delhi, has made a profitable franchise playing around the world, running a music school and a music store

selling Indian rock albums. Given the large number of bands willing to play at concerts, however, the competition to play for a lesser fee is fierce and often leads to a price war amongst the bands. Nolan Lewis, from the band Kryptos, explained that bands willing to play for less were constantly undercutting their fee of 40,000 rupees (approx \$900).

A secondary source of revenue is their record sales. Bands that have gained a loyal following as well as those that have signed deals with record companies are obviously profiting more in this realm than others. Tony Das, from the band Karma 6 that recently signed a multi album deal with Columbia Records in the year 2008 sees tremendous growth opportunities in the field of rock albums. He likens the changes to the western rock revolution of the sixties. "There is something similar happening here. People are seeing music as being more than just music. People are realizing that there are all kinds of expressions possible through rock and that there are many things you can do with it". The three-year record deal signed by his band has created a buzz in the market providing a much-needed endorsement for the legitimacy of Indian rock. As the first record deal to be signed between an Indian band and an American label, the deal has given hope to those preparing for a career in rock. The goal of conversations with the record companies was to introduce an Indian sound in rock without it sounding forced or unnatural. The accessory industry has been close on the heels of the record companies in making a beeline for India. Das cites as an example, a commercial endorsement from the guitar-making firm Gibson for his band. Since their signing a record deal with Columbia Records, other bands too have bagged contracts with western record companies. Kryptos, another band based out of the southern city of Bangalore, signed on with a lesser known California label "Old School Metal" in 2007 for the release of their second album (The Arc of Gemini). Nolan Lewis, the vocalist ascribes the deal to pure

chance given the ease with which they landed it, “Bands normally struggle for years to get signed by a label and here they approached us because someone we had sent a demo album to sent it to them”. While these successes are sporadic and do not necessarily indicate a pattern, they are also seen as signs of hope for a large number of struggling and upcoming musicians.

Clearly, everyone does not share the optimism arising from these positive news reports. Older bands that tried to strike the mainstream but failed have come to accept that issues of language, the dominance of the Hindi film industry, and the foreignness of rock will always be insurmountable challenges for Indian rock bands. Members of Skinny Alley, a band based in the Eastern city Kolkata, all of whose members are in their fifties, concede that the scene is changing but that it may never become a financially sustainable industry. They don’t grudge the younger bands their success but once the real pressures of life would confront them they would have to make tough choices about whether or not to continue in an industry that, despite its growth, has a marginal status in India. Notably, two of my interviewees are musicians who made that exact tough choice deciding to leave the world of rock for lucrative careers in the Hindi film industry. While I engage with the issues of the economics of the industry in more detail later, the ambivalent position of rock in the Indian cultural landscape is an important background against which I hope to explore the deeper issues of identity, power and globalization that the presence of rock in India presents us.

History of Rock And Musicians’ Introduction to It

Even though the rock scene is gradually expanding in India today, its emergence can be traced both to structures already in place where such music was played and to serendipity where musicians chanced upon the music through random encounters. Conversations with musicians about their first interactions

with rock reveals a pre-internet, pre-television world where music was exchanged by making copies of audiotapes and lyrics were written down by continuously rewinding and replaying the tapes. Most musicians that comprise the growing rock scene in India today were part of informal networks of music exchange where an audiocassette did the rounds in entire circles till everyone made copies and could then talk about it. Shortwave radio and state owned television channels were the only media outlets that provided access to rock – even if rarely so. It was both curiosity about this form of music and the desire to belong to an exclusive group and have an insiders’ knowledge that propelled the initial drive towards this music. Today when all aspects of rock are abundantly available through television and Internet, these stories of desperately waiting for the latest tape sent by relatives in the west, of sending in letters of request to radio show hosts and remaining awake till late into the night to watch the only rock program on television, draw wistful smiles about an age gone by.

The pre-history of the current rock scene in India can be traced to a period just after independence when social clubs and venues for western music left behind by the departing British continued to exist through the patronage of the new Indian elite. The British who chose to remain behind and the Anglo-Indian community were the chief patrons of western forms of music and even today continue to play a key role on the rock scene. A central role in this continuation was also played by the traditions of music within the military that continued to exist even after the military was passed down to Indian control. Amit Saigal, the editor of RSJ and a key promoter of the rock music scene, traces the history of contemporary rock to “big band jazz” that was played in areas with permanent army cantonments. Private amateur bands were soon inspired by these military and have continued to exist in India since the 1950s and 1960s. However the turn to rock came much later as the music revolution of the west seeped in through

interpersonal and media channels into India. Bootleg copies of music and old magazines began to be available on certain locations in metropolitan areas and were invaluable items for those following these kinds of music. Members of Skinny Alley, a band that has been around for over two decades and most of whose members are in their 50s recall two British magazines *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* that they impatiently waited for each month. Most of the music that came in was British, exemplifying the continuation of existing channels of exchange established during colonial rule. Dire Straits, Pink Floyd and Beatles, were a sampling of the British rock bands that had a substantial following among this early generation of musicians. Skinny Alley members recall receiving a tape of mixed music that they instantly liked and began playing in their shows, without even knowing the details of the band whose music they were copying.

Their experience is similar to that of other musicians. Rzhude David, the bass player of Bangalore based Thermal and a Quarter, recalls growing up in the coastal state of Kerala, which thanks to its history of interactions with the outside world had more western music available than other places. The presence of coastal cities with ports such as Cochin, tapes were more readily available here being brought in by merchant ships that made frequent landings with foreign merchandise. These goods included cultural artifacts and music related merchandise that then percolated inland reaching small townships and villages, one of whom Rzhude grew up in. He had access to live bands as well that often came there to practice and play. Moreover, thanks to the attraction that the state has historically held for western tourists, a significant amount of musical merchandise came along with actual people travelling to Kerala. Its coastal location has also ensured that the state had better access to international media such as non-Indian radio as compared to other places in India. The BBC, Radio

Kuwait, Radio Ceylon and Voice of America are just some stations that frequently played rock music and were listened to by many musicians growing up there. Rzhude uses the term “shortwave buddies” for groups that came together to listen to music and write request letters to radio show hosts such as Dave Lee Travis of *The Jolly Good Show* on the BBC world service.

While few musicians recall a precise moment as a turning point in their attraction for rock, most can recall specific periods; particular songs or experiences related to rock that got them hooked. For Tony Das, the guitarist of the band Karma 6, it was the Guns N Roses’ album “Lose Your Illusion”, for Vipin Mishra, former band member of arguably the biggest rock band in India Parikrama, it was a live show by the very band he would later join, for Rzhude it was listening to that rock anthem of the world Hotel California. Interestingly, almost all acknowledge the importance of this Eagles’ song in rock’s popularity around the world and in their own initial years of listening to western music. “There is something catchy about the song that connects with everyone and one can literally hear it blaring out of tea shops on streets in Kerala,” explains Rzhude as he reminisces how no band could get professional contracts until it showed mastery of the song. The emphasis on this song also shows that with little space for playing anything original, bands had to relentlessly practice and show prowess in playing well-known numbers. Rzhude explains that when he started playing as an amateur, his only hope of playing an original song was if he falsely presented it as a popular song by a well-known musician. “We often played our own song by introducing it as a song by John Lennon or some such musician assuring the audience that they must have heard the song before,” chuckles Rzhude.

Besides these memorable moments and songs, peer-pressure played a key role for some. Mishra, a former rock musician and now a famous composer for

Hindi movies, summarizes this pressure by musing that, “At sixteen you don’t want to be associated with anything uncool”. He also likens his early introduction to rock to one’s introduction to reading because one didn’t want to be left out of conversations that friends were having. The only alternative to rock for many youngsters was music from Hindi movies that, he claims was producing some of its “worst music” in the eighties and the nineties. He credits the recent transformations in the Indian film music to the positive influences from rock.

Among these fond, albeit at times embarrassing, conversations about their early introduction to rock, media outlets and interpersonal relationships recur almost as frequently as specific locations in cities that were the haunt of music lovers. Two sites that prominently figure are the Palika Bazaar, an underground shopping complex in Delhi’s downtown Connaught Place and Free School Street in downtown Kolkata. Far from being upmarket places frequented by the affluent elite, both these locations are known more for bargain prices, disheveled shops and budget travelers. Mishra recalls a shop called “Pyramids” in Palika Bazaar that had “every released album” that one had heard of, even those dating back to the fifties. Similarly, members of Skinny Alley describe frequent visits to the Free Market Street in Kolkata to collect newly arriving records and magazines. While a lot of new merchandise was available at both these places, the real deals were the used music and magazines that band members religiously collected. Mishra claims to have learnt a lot about the history of rock as well as about playing the guitar from these very used magazines, the only he could afford as a young high school student.

These early encounters with western music in general and with rock in particular explain the material dimensions of the process. They show us that even in the age before television and the Internet, informal networks of cultural

exchange were thriving and were allowing for people to experience new music and develop eclectic tastes in India. One can also not ignore the role of pre-existing colonial structures in facilitating these interactions. While these exchanges show easy access to such music, one cannot claim that the mere availability of this music was the reason for its uptake. What was it about rock that attracted the musicians seeking to make a career out of it in India today? Given that there were other forms of western and non-Indian music available too, there had to be something unique about rock that struck a chord deep enough that they charted on this path knowing fully well its pitfalls. It is to these questions of affective attachment to the music and deeper psychological explanations for their choice of rock that I now turn to.

Why Rock?

Interviews with musicians show that descriptions of their attraction for rock music touch, among other things, on their affective experiences while listening to the music. Cutting across the conversations, themes of aggression, energy, freedom, newness and rebelliousness emerge as key explanations for musicians' fascination with rock. For Mahesh Tinaikar, the guitarist of Indus Creed, one of the earliest Indian rock bands and the first to have toured outside India, it was the "energy and aggression" that got him interested and kept him hooked. It was also his attraction for the guitar as a musical instrument that could only be showcased in the genre of rock music. The creativity that the guitar enabled producing different sounds with little effort was a huge attraction given the comparatively longer time it took to master other instruments. In that sense rock was a "no brainer" claims Tinaikar. The ease of playing it is often touted as a key reason for the initial adoption of rock. This ease connotes an openness that made rock more likeable than other forms of music. The guitarist of the band

Skinny Alley explains that as compared to other forms of music, rock by its very nature “reveals itself to you quite readily”. One did not need to know too much about the music or even be very good to begin. Its ease made it more “democratic”, explains Sooraj of Mother Jane while simultaneously qualifying that ease of playing did not obviate the need to be good in it but that it was one less hindrance for new adopters of the music.

Many interviewees also claimed an almost immediate and instantaneous connection with the music the first time they heard it. It was a sense of belonging, claims Nolan, “like when you meet someone for the first time but feel like you’ve known them for ages”. He likens it to a feeling of being hit with something. Rajeev, the guitarist with the band Thermal and a Quarter listened to all kinds of eastern and western musical genres until he discovered rock. He explains his reaction to the first heavy metal songs by Metallica that he listened to as that of “being caught by the testicles”, asserting that it was bound to happen to anyone. For members of Skinny Alley, it was “the energy and the charge” that one got listening to rock, especially from the sound of electric guitar and drums. Sooraj, the vocalist of Mother Jane went “almost berserk” the first time he listened to the album “The Best of Beatles” that his cousin had accidentally left at his place. That the sound of rock would elicit such powerful reactions from them seems to surprise most of the interviewees. But the fact that it was a surprise is also precisely the reason for their fascination with it. The surprise gives to rock an element of discovery and exclusivity since very few of their peers were into that kind of music or even knew of its existence.

The loud sound, the high energy and the aggressive vocals are other universal categories identified by musicians as they discuss their responses to rock. For Sandeep Chatterjee, a former rock musician who has since made a successful career in the Hindi film industry, the high volume of the music was

itself a statement. It conveyed a sense of iconoclasm that resonated with his youthful days growing up in small town India. This rawness and aggression echoed with Tony Das as well who goes back to the GnR album as his reference point to describe his initial reaction to the music. The affective relationship to popular culture narrated in the testimonies above functions at the level of bodily reactions to the music and is a recurring dimension in musicians' explanations. The emphasis on the energy and the implicit aggression in rock's sound unravels a corporeal response to this cultural formation. While the meaning of rock and the connotations associated with it has a crucial role to play in its uptake, the physiological responses to it come through just as clearly in musicians' responses. The presence of this affective dimension does not obviate the need to examine issues of ideology and power within rock in India but instead these testimonies reveal affect to be an equally credible aspect of the rock puzzle. In foregrounding it I echo Grossberg (1992) who concludes that, "Daily life always involves the inseparable articulation of these various domains; it can only be understood as the complex relations among these." While he would go further and provide a determinate role to the affective dimension, the testimonies in my project show affect to be one among other existing explanations.

The realm of signification or the meaning they ascribed to rock is yet another dimension to its uptake. While all musicians recall noting the newness of the sound and its energy upon first hearing it, they also ascribed different connotations to the sound. These different interpretations of the music speak perhaps to the idea that what each took away from the music was determined as much by something inherent within it as it was by their own life situations and desires. Nolan's testament, for instance, reveals how he found in rock everything that was missing in his own life. "I was the thinnest and the weakest guy in class, pretty much a nerd who couldn't associate with most other people," he

reminisces explaining how rock gave him the reassurance that “its okay to be a little weird”. This license for non-conformity was key in a social setting where most students had similar dreams and pressures to succeed academically and professionally. This freedom to “be” vicariously provided to him by rock was further entrenched when he saw stage performances of famous rock bands. The sight of his favorite stars letting their hair down without a concern in the world was liberating. He also counters the idea that rock was music for angry people and instead, a self-proclaimed avid reader of everything from supernatural science fiction to philosophy, his connection with rock was a deeply intellectual one where in its lyrics he found a reflection of the complexities of day-to-day life, something that other means of cultural expression around him were failing to provide. For Vipin Mishra, this intellectual connection arose because rock stood for a politics that was “left of the center”. People doing rock were considered “mad” but in an intellectual sort of way. The songs were unpredictable with multiple interpretations and with weird titles and album names. The totality of it all signified a freedom “beyond what we could ever imagine”.

This freedom went close in hand with the connotations of rebelliousness and iconoclasm of rock. For Sandeep, rock was about a deviation from “accepted norms and principles, social and personal rules” and it connoted a “rebel’s mind”. He considers this to be perhaps the single biggest reason why the youth get attracted to rock music. The symbolic challenge to the status quo that rock represents resonates with the youth who see their dreams repeatedly frustrated by India’s slow changing archaic social norms. The promise of newness and change is a heady mix for many. Sooraj of Mother Jane similarly claims that its radically different sound means that its very introduction signified a change from all that existed. A force of transformation has to have an edginess to it and it must get people’s attention, he surmises, adding that the existing Indian or

Western forms of music such as Jazz or pop would not be able to do what rock could because of the empowering potential of rock.

The signification of rock to mean particular things and its articulation with a left-liberal politics and as a force of change has perhaps little to do with something inherent within it. Globally “There is nothing intrinsic to its practices (including its place vis-à-vis the “mainstream”) that guarantees that it delivers its audience to a specific political position” (Grossberg 1992, p. 137). In the specific instance of India however, its position on the left of the political spectrum betrays in a sense the already existing politics of those taking it up. Coming to it through an English western liberal education, most musicians are predisposed to challenge the existing mores of the Indian society. The labels given to rock are therefore more from the outside than a reflection of something within.

For many on the scene, for instance, rock has merely signified true and honest expression unadulterated by the forces of the market. Given the peripheral position of rock within Indian mainstream, this is an ascription easier to give to rock there than in the west where it is centrally tied to the market forces (Weinstein 1991). Bruce Mani, the vocalist of the band Thermal and a Quarter claims that he was attracted by the uncompromising irreverence of rock. At a time when commercial pressures determined the content of most other forms of music, rock showed that it was possible to not yield and mould one’s music according to the forces of the market. Others acknowledged Bruce’s idea that rock enabled a cathartic release of something within, a pure emotion. For Rajeev of the same band, rock provided an outlet against the key values of deference to power and social hierarchy. Contrary to it being a positive outlet, rock was also attractive for some precisely because it connoted melancholia and darkness. Tony Das of Karma 6 recalls that rock gave him a language for melancholia and darkness at a time when he wasn’t too happy in his life. This

was a period when he was exploring many questions and not all answers were happy ones, a conclusion that rock encouraged him to embrace.

Lastly, most rock musicians in India today laud rock for its ability to relate to places and issues without specifically talking about them. Sooraj of Mother Jane provides an analogy from a zen proverb that a finger pointing to the moon is not the moon itself. When rock music was used to protest the war in Vietnam it was just the pointing finger and even those who were not directly involved in the issue saw that what was at stake was human justice itself. Even though differences exist, human concerns are not that different from those living in different parts of the world. It is that essence of universal spirit that rock seems to connect with. The distortion chords, the amplified vocals, the loud guitar riffs are all externalities in the final scheme of things, he believes, since the key to understanding rock is its ability to tap the core of humanity itself.

The question of the universalism within rock has been one that has been raised before. Its uses as a vehicle of change and resistance around the world have allowed scholars to examine the placelessness of rock. Regev (1997) highlights several examples from around the world such as Russia and Eastern Europe during communism and Argentina during the military dictatorship (1976-1983) where tyrannical regimes were resisted through rock music. He argues that a global idiom has developed within the past forty years or so which makes rock accessible to people around the world. Hence the basic desires that make rock music popular around the world are the same. He explains,

“In their musical tastes, in their fascination with new styles, in their enthusiasm for local concerts by rock stars, in their belief in the ‘authenticity’ and artistic quality of rock – and in their attempts to make local rock music, audiences and musicians in so many countries are not much different from their peers in ‘rock countries’ like the USA and UK” (130).

While there is clearly evidence to support Regev's conclusions, a caution is in order before making too easy generalizations about a universal human spirit that rock connects with. Tomlinson (1991) reminds us that these arguments of universalism discount the power of the western media institutions to distribute their media products worldwide. He conjectures, "The force of this argument is seen when we think that no Mongolian or Balinese comedian has been suggested, by Western critics, as striking the chord of common humanity" (53). The fact that the popularity of rock music around the world is unchallenged by any non-western forms of music gives pause to Regev's claims of universality. This is especially so because not all the fans of rock music around the world are those that are resisting a regime or even have a need to resist one.

The Price of Rock

While attachments to rock music are deeply affective for most of the musicians, the price paid for it is also material. Being associated with what is a marginal form of culture involves sacrifices and adjustments to life that are most crucial for those who having moved beyond college need to become financially independent. In a socioeconomic milieu where extremities of poverty and wealth exist simultaneously and where the material comforts of life are no guarantee, these musicians must often make difficult choices. For the most part, upward social mobility in India still requires success in the academic and professional worlds and alternate avenues of career such as entertainment or sports are seen as risky and unrewarding. Students in India that excel in school and college go through extremely competitive examination processes that continue if they desire a career in the sought after prestigious fields of engineering, medicine, the civil service and business management. Given these social pressures, questions of livelihood and/or social stigma become pressing concerns for rock musicians.

Arguably, the pressures to conform to particular career choices are lesser in the urban centers where most of the bands exist. But since many musicians currently living and playing in the large metropolitan centers had beginnings in the small towns, their struggles to follow their dream had a bigger price.

Sandeep Chatterjee who grew up in the small town of Dhanbad in Eastern India and who has since given up rock music for a successful career as a music composer for Hindi movies counts among his sacrifices, the opportunity to do his parents proud by being a “good” boy. One of two sons in the family he, by his own admission was branded a “bad influence” on other kids because of his desire to pursue something considered alien and corrupting. His choice of career effectively soured his relationship with his family, and while it gave him the freedom he desired, it also extracted a huge emotional and psychological price from him. With no family support available, his financial struggles continued for a while and were partly responsible for his decision to abdicate his career as a rock musician in Delhi and seek opportunities in the film industry in Mumbai.

Those who continue in this field long enough confront these questions everyday and find different ways to balance their desire for artistic expression and their need for financial security. An ingenious way in which many musicians straddle the dual need for an income and creative satisfaction is to hold day jobs that provide them with a secure and reliable source of income. This allows them to free their musical career from the constraints of also becoming their means of livelihood. No doubt this places immense strain on them in terms of time-management since they must devote their time to their work, their family and then to music. Eventually one or the other must suffer and it is a continuous balancing act. Rajeev of the band Thermal and a Quarter who is also an engineer during the day explains that the choice is a tough one but rather than force the band in a commercial direction where it would have to compromise on the

music, they have chosen to take up outside jobs where they are not “emotionally attached” thus freeing the band. “The best reflection of our success is the continuation of the band itself”, he ponders. Similarly Sooraj, the vocalist and songwriter of Motherjane runs a business of installing centralized air-conditioning in buildings. Meeting the band for practice requires him to travel from Bangalore where he lives to the city of Cochin where the rest of the band is based. But this is a sacrifice he is willing to make.

Not surprisingly, the Internet has allowed considerable freedom to bands in balancing their musical interests and professional obligations. The idea of releasing albums online has eliminated their dependence on record labels thus freeing up time and leveling the playing field. Mother Jane, the band based out of Kerala, recently released their second album *Maktub* online in 2008 where it is free to listen and download. Thermal and a Quarter have also sought to eliminate the role of middlemen having placed their third album *Plan B* online for free downloads. Within months their album had seen over 100,000 downloads, eventually causing the site to crash and getting them featured on NPR’s *All Things Considered*. These successes have emboldened the band to diversify their audiences outside of India and they recently accomplished a well-publicized UK tour. Their fourth album *This is It* was released in 2008 and is available for purchase through their website as well. This success has come after some carefully calibrated decisions about the day-to-day management of the band with the members deciding to give up on professional management firms and take on the job of management themselves.

That their choice has a material and logistical aspect is key to understanding the role of rock in their lives. While those pursuing fields such as art and music chart on a financially unstable path the world over, this material

price is more acute in a social setting such as India with its disparities in wealth and its social pressures.

What the Songs Say

The vexed question of the bands' identities and their place of belonging comes through quite clearly in the lyrics they write. Their constant struggles over defining themselves and finding a space within the cluttered space of indigenous cultural production in India is nowhere more apparent than in their songs. The themes of their songs are difficult to classify within existing categories since they are as varied in their content as the members who comprise rock bands in India. While some songs have a distinctly Indian content and flavor, most are about themes, issues and metaphysical ideas that are not cultural or site specific. Their songs also often seek to do a balancing act between projecting them as addressing universal issues while also remaining deeply rooted within the cultural ethos of India. Sometimes this balance is achieved by having a sprinkling of songs on an album, some of which are not culturally specific and others that are.

Sooraj, the chief songwriter of Motherjane explains that irrespective of the content of their songs his inspiration lies in Indian thought. It is this "deep embrace of spirituality" that exists in their recently released album *Maktub* that is a trenchant critique of the concept of predestination and fate so prevalent in India. Translated as "it is written" in Arabic, the album engages with the idea that while there is a tendency for things to happen in a certain way, human beings could change the tendency with their effort. "It is about that God moment in our lives," explains Sooraj adding, "I believe that we can all be Gods in our lives." The last stanza of the song perhaps captures its essence best:

"I say to you, it is written

And by your hands it is rewritten
 In those sacred moments,
 when the creator walks through the creation.”

(From *Maktub* by Motherjane)

Given the deeply passionate discussions that the issue of predestination and fate engenders in India, the band is clearly engaging with an old issue in a new way. In a conversation that ranges from Zen Buddhism to the changeless and yet rapidly changing India, Sooraj emphasizes that even though the band’s ambitions are global, he would rather be an Indian rock band than from anywhere else given the unique balancing act between timeless ideas and modernity that Indians are seeking to strike at the present.

Other bands foreground their Indianness less prominently writing songs that are less focused on Indian ideas. Kryptos, an Indian band with a huge following in the Scandinavian countries writes lyrics that seem like they could be written by any western band. Nolan Lewis, the chief songwriter for the band says that their songs are more about issues and universal human conflicts than specific cultural values. A song of theirs deals with the thoughts of a victim of sexual abuse, another with the futile quest for utopia, another is about a World War II soldier who falls in love with an enemy siren knowing well that it could lead to his death and yet another is about the tough choices and the impossibility of pleasing everyone every time. In describing his general inspiration for these lyrics Lewis explains, “I try to imagine a situation where you are yearning for something but you don’t know what that something is”. While the band is immensely popular with overseas audiences, especially in Europe, an analysis of the songs of Kryptos who define their music as “melodic thrash metal” also shows why they may not particularly resonate with an Indian audience.

Their recently released second album *The Arc of Gemini*, for instance has most songs that are more global in theme than Indian. The song *Liquid Grave* speaks about the looming global catastrophe due to climate change, the song *Sphere VII* loosely based on Dante's *Inferno* imagines Earth at the center of circle seven. Their song *Order of the DNA* imagines the entire planet's population enslaved by a virus that, having enslaved humanity is exploiting the Earth's resources before moving on to the next habitable planet in the solar system. Their song *Tower of Illusions* perhaps comes closest to a critique of the Indian society by drawing comparisons with the vanity of the Mayan civilization and how despite their brilliant advances in astrology and sciences, their superstitious ways led to their demise. When asked if the themes are deliberately non-Indian, Nolan denies it claiming instead that it is not location but ideas that drive the lyrics and that any person from any place around the world would be able to identify with them including Indians.

This quest to strike a universal chord is commonly seen in other bands as well. Among Skinny Alley, the Kolkata based band's songs are those about financial hardships and making ends meet, romantic love and living under the constant threat of terrorism - issues they claim are not country or culture specific. At the same time however they also have songs that are specifically about Indian social issues such as dowry deaths and the position of women in Indian society. Thermal and a Quarter, the Bangalore based band write their songs about varied issues ranging from the ills of advertising to the cynicism that is needed to deal with politicians. Their song *Galactiqua*, speaks of the difficulty of avoiding the clutter of advertising that one encounters everyday as it laments, "Drive out under the country stars, Never get away from the cola wars." Yet another song of theirs called *Paper Pull* mocks the journalists who seek to write about music but come to interview rock bands with little knowledge about the kind of music they

play. It expresses the musicians' frustration when it asks, "But tell me do I really have to talk to you". A song particularly prescient for this project is called *Look at Me* and seems directed to a western rock audience. It brings out the question of a postcolonial Indian identity most clearly and makes a case for Indian rock's authenticity by showing how uniquely Indian experiences could just as well be conveyed by rock music. The song rails against the dismissal of Indian rock and prejudiced expectations that Indian bands had to deal with. It begins by beckoning the listener to, "Look, go ahead, look at me, Black hair, brown eyes, brown man" and then adds,

"Oh yes, I'm from the exotic east,
 The heat and the dust and the burden of the beast
 The smells, the spices and the mystery
 Of people just trying, just trying to be
 I speak four tongues,
 Hell, here we all do
 And we find the space
 To think in yours too

Oh yes, I'm cool and mean
 And I play that rock n'roll"

(From *Look At Me* by Thermal and A Quarter)

The song makes a clear reference to colonialism when it says, "The Empire went back but Skywalker came". Explaining the inspiration behind their songs Bruce Mani, the vocalist and songwriter explains that even if their songs are not necessarily about an Indian issue, they bring a uniquely Indian perspective when talking about them, "Our Indianness is always there but you may at times have

to dig a little deeper to find it". The sound of the band (jazz-rock) is western but their words are driven by Indian philosophy and thought, he explains.

The lyrics written by Indian bands show a simultaneous projection of multiple selves. At one level, their songs show a sense of frustration that leads to a social critique of their surroundings. This critique seeks to preserve what they believe is the best from ancient Indian thought while still embracing certain key aspects of western modernity. At the same time their songs also show an attempt to erase their locational specificity. In so doing they seek to make a mark on the global scene and be recognized not for being Indian rock musicians but for being musicians as such. They protest against labels of theirs being a derived cultural production given that it is not authentic Indian music. In songs such as *Look at Me* one sees a clear manifestation of the postcolonial subject asserting their rights for equality in the metropole, thus resonating Homi Bhabha's (1994) conception of subversive mimicry. They speak in the hegemonic language while simultaneously striking a difference from within that language. This act is a dual level of differentiation where they must fight off charges of inauthenticity both from cultural purists within and stereotyped expectations from without.

The Issue of Language

Their use of English is key to this double level of differentiation. Language is crucially tied to access and fan numbers and by choosing to sing in English the bands are, by default, excluding a potentially large section of the Indian population from accessing their music. But given that no single language could qualify as a pan-Indian language, every choice would invariably imply exclusion. While it has one of the highest English speaking populations in the world, India's English speaking citizens still largely consider it to be their second language. Recently released reports (*Times of India*, 3/14/2010) peg the number

of English speakers in India at 125 million that is far lesser than the largest spoken language Hindi that has approximately 551 million speakers but is still larger than any third language. The politics around English is crucially tied to its ancient role as the colonial language with regional political parties often threatening bans against its usage (Malik 2009). Approximately a quarter of Indians identify themselves as bilingual and given this large number of English speakers, rock bands in India have a readily available audience to tap into but the biggest rock bands in India are those that have moved away from English to singing in native Indian languages. The inability of English bands to do so speaks as much about the relationship between language and affect as it does about the complex role of English in the Indian society. While reading in English is widely prevalent, as testified by the large number of English newspapers in the country, music is still seen as something that must exist within the domain of the mother tongue.

Several Indian rock bands that sing in non-English Indian languages have achieved considerable success though they are fewer in number as compared to the English rock bands. The biggest center of non-English rock in India is the Eastern city of Kolkata where bands singing in Bengali have made rock accessible to a large number of listeners that speak no English. The two biggest bands Cactus and Fossils have a fan base that rival the following of the biggest rock acts in the west and are an envy of the English rock bands in India. Despite these successes of non-English bands however, the persistence of English as the language of choice for most rock bands is key for my project. Studying the choice of English, allows me to explore a liminal space inhabited by a uniquely postcolonial Indian identity, since language is a crucial factor in the construction of this identity.

Most bands using English claim it to be as natural a choice as any other Indian language and express surprise at the constant questions they face about it from the press and record labels. These questions have become more frequent given the huge successes of the non-English rock bands. When asked to prove their Indianness in their music, Bruce Mani from Thermal and a Quarter responds, "This is what I am. I may not be as "Indian" as "Indian" should be but who decides that?" Many other band members empathize with this sentiment explaining that there is a section of Indian population, even if small, that thinks in English and to question their Indianness is having a parochial idea of Indian national identity. Members of the band Skinny Alley as well as the chief vocalist of Motherjane Sooraj identify themselves as "English thinking Indians", as people who grew up reading, speaking and thinking in English. Sooraj who grew up in Nigeria claims to be an avid reader in multiple languages and makes a key distinction between Malayalam, his mother tongue and English, the language in which he talks "to the world". He calls Malayalam, his "language of home" explaining, "If I had something loving to say to my child I would not say it in English but in Malayalam because that is what best conveys my emotions for my inner world. But that is not the language in which I can talk to the world". He finds the repeated questions about the use of English hypocritical and as evidence he cites radio shows where the songs being played are in Hindi but the introduction of those songs are in English. "Who are the show hosts to assume that the listener can understand the introductions in English but cannot understand the songs in the same language?", he questions. The multi-linguality of most Indians is a crucial factor in the musicians' claims that language was hardly a barrier in the popularization of rock. Bruce, for instance, claims to speak four languages including English but claims that the latter is the only language he can write in. "I think in English, I went to an English school and I can't help

it" he explains, claiming that bands who switch to singing in other languages merely for the sake of reaching a larger audience were not being true to themselves.

The bands' position on the issue of language has its skeptics as well. Some musicians still hoping to be commercially successful while singing in English too have their doubts but the skepticism is strongest amongst those who, having tried to make a career in rock music, have now moved on to do more mainstream stuff such as creating music for the Hindi film industry. Vipin Mishra, formerly of the band Parikrama and now a well-acclaimed music director in Mumbai confidently asserts that English rock has a dim future in India. Having travelled the country and outside as a part of the most successful rock band in India, Mishra has earned accolades composing music from his home studio. He claims that while there are many bands that claim to be hits on YouTube and other freely available websites, that success is akin to a restaurant giving free food and claiming that people like the food. Tony Das of the band Karma 6 that is positioning itself as an English band concurs with the difficulties that English bands face but is less pessimistic. He concedes that language is the single biggest challenge to the popularity of rock but one that could be overcome given that India had a huge number of people that spoke and understood English.

The successes achieved by bands singing in languages other than English have provided new insights into the role of rock in India. These successes show that rock as such is not as alien as it is made out to be by some and the problem may lie with the relationship between language and music. This question is posed by Rahul Ray of the band Cassini's Division based out of Kolkata who asks, "Why do English books do well but not English music?" He thinks the reasons have to do with the perception of rock as being alien to India. This perception arises from some clear differences between the two musical styles and

the newness of the sound of rock. The key goal for Indian rock bands seeking to gain Indian audiences becomes the Indianization of rock. While not all bands seek an Indian audience most constantly ponder about translating it to India without compromising on the basic essence of a rock aesthetic.

Who is the Audience?

An attempt to translate rock for Indian tastes presumes that the bands are certain that it is an Indian audience they seek to play for. That issue is far from settled as several English rock bands remain ambivalent about who their audience is. Given that the inspiration for most Indian rock musicians are western bands located outside India, many look to play in front of the very audiences that appreciate their heroes. The presumption is that those audiences are likely to appreciate their music more and some bands openly express their desire to explore non-Indian audiences while talking about the universal elements in their music. On the other hand, others proudly assert that gaining recognition outside is not important for them. Those that do seek to play outside India confront a new set of expectations and prejudices that further complicates issues of belonging for them. Expectations that rock bands from India would have an Indian “flavor” is disconcerting for many of these musicians whose only reason for going outside was their belief in the universality of their music. Even though they claim to have silenced their critics when given a chance to perform, the opportunities itself come to only a few select bands. One of the earliest bands to explore a western audience was Indus Creed who having emerged on the scene in the 1980s toured in India and abroad. The pioneers among the present breed of heavy metal bands, Indus Creed’s dream did not last long. Mahesh Tinaikar, the band’s guitarist concludes that the goal of wowing audiences abroad is the wrong one for Indian bands to have. “You can’t give back to them

what they already have," he posits and introduces a racial reason for his conclusion by adding, "we look different and so are expected to do something different". Tinaikar's sobering assessment is hardly surprising and is shared by many bands that have had the chance to travel and perform in locations abroad. What is surprising however is bands that have proven these conclusions wrong.

Bangalore based band Kryptos would be one such who having given up the quest to Indianize their music are vehemently targeting a western audience and with considerable success. They call themselves a thrash metal band and have recently released their second album through a California label. They unapologetically claim that there is nothing Indian about their music and have their biggest fan base in Europe. Reviews of their music and their performances frequently appear in German and Scandinavian magazines, in languages they don't fully understand. Recently, after the release of their second album, their popularity entered new territory when they began to be requested on heavy metal radio stations in the US, often figuring in the top ten lists of some stations. Explaining the rationale behind their popularity abroad, Nolan Lewis the band's frontman claims that, "It is important for us to be appreciated by people who understand what we are trying to do. Even if only a hundred people turn up for our concerts it is important that those few connect with our music" and adds that, "its easier to find those kinds of fans in the west because the metal scene is much bigger there". Niche-based fans that seek a very specific kind of music are more important for them than a mass audience base. Thinking aloud about the reasons for the band's immense popularity in Europe, he also conjectures that as a non-English metal scene, fans there were perhaps more likely to connect with metal bands who were from non-English speaking places. The relative obscurity of the band within the Indian rock fans, and its immense popularity abroad gives us interesting insights about the processes of global cultural flows. Clearly, it is

difficult to conceal Kryptos' Indian identity but as Nolan explains western fans and reviewers alike find it difficult to categorize them given their Indian looks and their overtly western sound. Their eschewing of Indianness has predictably earned them critics from within the rock community at home. But since finding a middle ground through Indianizing rock has worked for so few, their fan base abroad is also the subject of envy.

Those who, having started out as rock musicians and having given up on it altogether and have moved on to other forms of music inhabit the other extreme on the spectrum. While a painful decision, their move has been brought about by the harsh realities of life and impatience with the endless wait for the rock scene to improve. Many of these former rock musicians continue to remain within the larger field of music using their skills in composing music for the film industry. One such is Sandeep Chatterjee, who having once rebelled against his family to play music is today riding the crest of success in Mumbai's film industry. When asked about his move away from rock he retorts with a question of his own, "Whom was rock invented for? Was it you or someone else? You cannot make a name in a genre that does not belong to you." He refers to the "harshness" of metal's sound that he thinks is quite unpalatable to the Indian ear. The only way forward is to introduce it gradually, perhaps in the form of fusion with existing Indian traditions so that audience tastes become used to it. As a part of the film industry himself, he credits many contemporary scores from the industry as having made a good attempt at such fusion. He explains that he is experiencing the "joy of creating something new", a feeling of "groundedness" that he had not experienced while he was doing rock. "Rock musicians in India are destined to be compared with western musicians and be complimented for playing *like* one or another famous band", a realization that disillusioned him. Vipin Mishra, yet another former rock musician turned famous film composer

similarly concludes about rock that, “It is not our form of music”. The way forward was to use the skills that a genre like rock can train one in to create better music within the existing structures of Indian film and popular music, a goal he seems to be successfully accomplishing. The most prominent global exemplar of successfully fusing these two traditions, and a current role model for musicians such as Sandeep and Vipin is A R Rahman, the Oscar winning music composer of the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. As a musician trained both in Indian and western traditions, Rahman has achieved what composers like Sandeep and Vipin – former rock musicians turned film composers – think is an ideal blend of the west and the East. Despite his successes however it is not lost on anyone that his successes have only happened from within the structure of the film industry, the very structure that they as rock musicians sought to challenge.

Between the extremes of bands such as Kryptos who have forsaken the idea of an appreciative Indian audience and former rock musicians turned film composers such as Sandeep and Vipin, lie an entire array of rock bands that continue to keep the faith about finding acceptance at home without making too many compromises. This middle range is also critical of taking either of the extreme approaches terming the quest for a western audience as a convenient disconnect with one’s surroundings and the move to the film industry as “selling out”. Skinny Alley, the older Kolkata band for instance, believe that their future lies in striking a chord, even if with a fraction of the huge population of music listeners in India. Sooraj of Mother Jane echoes this sentiment by countering the idea of niche, fragmented audiences that bands such as Kryptos have settled upon. “A mass audience for your music is a sign that you have been able to share the pleasure you felt while creating that music with others,” he explains, adding the adage that it is the joy of sharing an emotion captured in the song that makes the process even more worthwhile.

In their continuous attempt to Indianize rock, these bands ponder over the differences between Indian and western musical styles and cultures in order to bridge that very gap. For instance, one key difference they seek to surmount is in the very culture of making music. Given the predominance of the film industry over the Indian musical scene, the idea of bands remains quite alien to the Indian cultural landscape, a fact that is gradually changing. The collaborative effort that the idea of a band connotes is a novel one for the prevalent film music culture in India where credit for the music was generally given to the singer and the composer while the lyricist and other performers remained relatively unknown. Changing that culture whereby every aspect of the music is created through a combined effort is a crucial difference that bands sense. “There is something magical about a band”, explains Sooraj, adding, “It is about the joint ownership of a work of art”.

Yet another key difference lies in the sounds that one is used to hearing. Bands that seek an Indian audience are conscious that given the new and unfamiliar sound of rock for an Indian ear, adaptations are necessary. The process of making these adaptations requires a nuanced differentiation between what they call an Indian musical aesthetic and a western one. Rahul Guha Ray of the Kolkata based band Cassini’s Division explains what he considers to be a crucial contrast between the two styles. The difference he explains is between linearity and verticality, between melody and harmony. While the idea of melody (called *sur* in Indian classical music) has historically been important in Indian music, western music is characterized by “vertical thickness”. Rock, explains Ray, could go either way but if it had to be accessible to an Indian audience it required a more horizontal plane as opposed to a vertical one. “We need more bands like U2 and not like Dream Theater”, he asserts adding, and “eighteen minute long guitar solos would not connect with an Indian audience”.

Understanding these differences is key to adapting without going to either extremes of giving up either on the Indian audience or on rock altogether. In fact, if there is any place where this nativization of rock can happen it is in India, argues Sooraj given "India's openness to newness". While these generalizations about a national sensibility do not necessarily stand the test of credence, the recent numbers at concerts where Indian bands are playing their own music have been encouraging. This changing situation is signified by events such as the GIR, which has a combined audience in the range of 80,000 people and now plays sold out concerts in multiple cities in India. More crucially, with tickets priced at rupees 150 (approx \$3), the large attendance is a sign that people are willing to pay for the music they like to hear.

In their ideal world cultural differences would not be a hindrance to the acceptance of good music. In that world bands would be judged by some universal criteria of good and bad music. In this world rock would also find ready acceptance in India and their Indianness would not be a barrier to their acceptance by non-Indian audiences. Their experiences unfortunately belie this ideal conception of the music world. The baggage of race, of history and of disparities in the realm of political economy weigh down on their imaginations of a friction free global flow of culture.

Conclusion

In this study I have sought to explore the cultural formation of rock in India. Through an analysis of their self-conceptions, their affective relationship to rock, their songs and the audiences they seek, I have sought to show the complex web within which Indian rock is located. Rock music in India allows us to introduce a historical differentiation within the existing theories of cultural globalization. While theories of cultural globalization attempt to explain the

global flow of culture, that flow is complicated when the historical experience of colonialism is added to the mix. Given the vehemence with which rock musicians challenge any labels of inauthenticity and given that most of them grew up speaking the language that they now seek to create their music in, rock's existence in India cannot be explained merely through technological and mediated transformations wrought by globalization. In that sense analyzing rock music allows us to study what is a unique manifestation of a postcolonial Indian identity.

History is not presented as a determining factor in this case but rather one among the other existing explanations of rock's presence in India. The growth of rock in general and heavy metal in particular around the global sites of resistance and struggle certainly gives pause to scholars who seek to explain it merely through theories of cultural imperialism or political economy. In each instance the locational contingencies are a central reason for its uptake. In the case of India that contingency is its historical experience of colonialism. The access that globalization has enabled through technological changes functioned to release an already present undercurrent that had continued to simmer in post-independence India. These changes were exactly what the long subdued cultural formation needed in order to explode into a full-scale scene that it is in the process of becoming.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN INDIA'S CALL CENTERS

Introduction

This essay analyzes the construction of employee identity within the call center industry in India. The outsourcing of the call center industry from the West has been a prominent focal point around which discussions on globalization have revolved. For critics, the shift of the service industry to far off places such as India and Philippines has stood for the extremities of globalization. The shift problematizes ideas of space and time, de-territorializes work and necessitates the assumption of new identities thus decimating boundaries of nation and culture. From the very outset this industry has faced widespread criticism, first from workers who have lost their jobs and politicians representing them and then from scholars who see it as the clearest manifestation of the homogenizing effects of global capital. The former debate carried out largely within the western media and the political sphere has argued for protectionist economic policies critiquing the profit motive that outsources jobs in the permanent quest for cheaper labor. The debate conducted within academic circles has highlighted the oddities of the industry pointing out that its novel form of exploitation necessitates new theoretical tools for understanding the modalities of power within the industry.

My study locates itself within these debates and seeks to add to the existing scholarship on the subject. Through interviews with employees, trainers, managers and owners in the industry I seek to portray different aspects of the nature of work within the workplace. I explore how Indian employees construct their identities while working in this industry and analyze the transformations that employees must undergo in order to succeed in it. Unlike the acquisition of technical skills for other industries, a call center job requires a cultural and

linguistic performance by employees who must be adequately trained in the cultural and linguistic codes of the culture they service and that they must pretend they belong to. This training is premised on the belief that the cultural and linguistic barriers that pose a hindrance to a seamless transfer of work from one country to another can be smoothed over. These hindrances can be overcome by educating employees in the nuances of the culture they are servicing as well as by giving them linguistic skills that will allow them to have a conversation “as if” they belonged to that culture. Unlike technical and work-related skills needed in other industries, call center work involving employees from one cultural setting servicing another and hence requires training that facilitates a cultural transformation.

This cultural and linguistic training is not akin to acquiring merely another technical skill because issues of culture and language are invariably political and entrenched within relationships of power. While critics of global capital have long warned against its homogenizing tendencies, the call center industry, by making that homogeneity a pre-requisite for success, brings to fruition the worst fears of the anti-globalization scholars. Indian call center employees take on western names, talk in an American accent and feign knowledge about mundane cultural details that they have rigorously memorized. In so doing they seemingly vindicate fears about the Americanization of the world. By unselfconsciously requiring its employees to think and speak as Americans, the industry only hastens a process that critics believe Hollywood has long tried to accomplish surreptitiously. While there are many examples in my study that validate such an evaluation of the call center industry, there is sufficient evidence to challenge it as well.

Understanding the modality of power operating within the industry is crucial to evaluating the social and cultural effects of this industry. My study

attempts this understanding by exploring the different ways in which employees are policed and disciplined during their training sessions and after it. Training sessions invariably and unknowingly valorize the culture and the accent that employees are supposed to imbibe. In so doing they make distinctions between cultural codes and the accent that employees already possess and those they are supposed to learn. These distinctions affect employees' identities as they disconnect their material realities from an imaginative realm that encourages them to escape those realities. This disconnect functions to reify existing global structures of power by making normative and aspirational, certain cultural and societal norms that are contingent and arbitrary. The process of cultural and linguistic training therefore is a mechanism of the assertion of soft power that, in line with the nature of power in the present age, is far more effective in policing global subjects than coercive corporeal power. It functions by inculcating desire and regulating imagination through the training sessions for employees that both educate and entice.

Scholarship on the call center industry so far has largely emphasized power over resistance (Basi 2009, Mirchandani 2007). This emphasis concludes that the employees involved in this process are helpless cogs in the wheels of global capital. While showing that to be partly true, my study also challenges that depiction by showing innumerable instances when the employees assert themselves within the process by creating spaces from where they can subvert the homogenizing forces of global capital. These acts are often solitary, frequently surreptitious and often only have a symbolic effect, but their mere existence introduces agency within this narrative of globalization. Taking care not to romanticize resistance in a manner that may reinforce the interests of power, my study nevertheless foregrounds these moments of subversion and

negotiation as is crucial in understanding the processes by which identities are constructed within this industry.

A study of the call center industry in India allows me to study a liminal sphere within the Indian society comprising of an upwardly mobile and young population. Despite significant growth within a relatively short time period, the call center industry employs a miniscule percentage of the overall population. The industry has had a steady growth since its beginnings in the late 1990s. According to Taylor and Bain (2005) the growth of the call center industry in India can be traced back to 1995 when several western companies (AmEx, GE, British Airways) established customer and transaction support services in India. The first voice-based operations were relocated to India in the late 1990s and despite the events of September 11th, 2001 the industry continued to grow exponentially. While some scholars claim GE's operations in 1997 to be the first instance of outsourced call centers in India, others cite earlier attempts (Basi 2009) such as a planned call center by Murdoch owned STAR TV in 1996. Taylor and Bain (2005) estimate between 75,000 and 115,000 people employed in the industry in 2003. That number had increased to 350,000 by 2007 (Poster, 2007) and was projected to grow to 1 million by 2008. However, it has grown faster than expected with the current estimates of employment in the industry at 1.5 to 2 million (Basi 2009) and direct revenues from the industry amounting to over \$ 50 Billion for 2008. The significant growth notwithstanding, the employment numbers represent a minor fraction of the overall population of India that is close to a billion.

While the transformations being facilitated by the industry are hardly representative of widespread changes throughout India, a study of this milieu allows me to explore the interactions between a colonial past and a globalizing present. The historical experience has led to the formation of what scholars have

called a “postcolonial condition” (Basi 2009, Gandhi 1998) where psychic and social structures of the past continue to inflect the present. The crucial role played by the presence of the English language in the shift of this industry to India is an instance of how the past continuously inflects the present within this industry. Despite allowing a section of the Indian population a chance at upward mobility, the teaching of a particular kind of English in this industry also raises the hackles of theorists of linguistic imperialism (Philipson 1992) that I explore later in this study. Enmeshed between these polar positions of empowerment and subjection, the issue of the English language in the Indian call centers is a crucial lens that my study uses to understand the larger societal implications and process of identity construction within this industry.

In the sections below I deliberate briefly on my process of data collection for this study before moving to explore the process of cultural training of the employees. This training progresses from an initiation into basic trivia about American culture to deeper discussions about American “values”. The goal of these sessions is to provide work-specific cultural knowledge to the employees in order for them to succeed at their job. Economic aspects of the US culture as well as values such as privacy are key recurring themes within these training sessions and I survey how these themes are presented to the employees. I then move to the issue of language within the call center industry in India focusing on the accent and linguistic training provided to employees. I conclude this essay by deliberating on the modalities of the affective and corporeal regulation of the employees and the means they deploy to resist those impositions of power. These different aspects of call center work help us understand how Indian employees conceive of themselves while working in the industry.

A Note on Method Adopted for the Study

This chapter on call centers in India is based on fieldwork conducted in India during the summer and winter months of 2008. The outsourced service industry based in India can be broadly divided into voice and non-voice based operations that are clubbed together under the acronym BPO (Business Process Outsourcing). Voice based operations involve direct interpersonal contact between agents in India and customers in the West. On the other hand non-voice based operations are software operations that do not require real time interpersonal contact. An instance of non-voice based operations is a firm in Bangalore that processes claims for health insurance companies in the US. As hospitals make claims for payment on the insurance company, the firm in Bangalore evaluates those claims and determines whether or not they are covered by the plan of the insured individual. The Bangalore firm also calculates the co-payment that the individual must pay. Besides these types of services, operations that involve bookkeeping, accounting and engineering services and solutions comprise the major non-voice based operations that have been outsourced to India. My project however is not about the non-voice based operations but about those involving real-time interactions between human beings or what are also called voice-based operations. As they necessitate human contact, these operations foreground issues of language, accent and culture – three things that I focus on in this chapter.

The nature of job being performed at these voice based call centers varies from selling products, to providing customer service to debt collection. Each job has a specific set of skills that trainees learn during the training process. In New Delhi, several of my interviews were conducted at a call center that is focused on debt collection alone. This call center located in one of the suburbs of Delhi (called Gurgaon) is a wholly owned subsidiary of an American debt collection

firm. Agents here call up Americans to advise, cajole and at times mildly threaten people to pay off their debts. Part of their job also requires that they take on the role of financial counsels, as they must suggest different avenues for their customers to get out of debt. Providing this kind of advise requires agents to be updated about the latest political and economic developments in the US such as tax rebates, health care reform and changing employment patterns that agents then use to advise people about their possible financial options while simultaneously seeking to collect money from them. While a worldwide recession has affected the business for call centers in India, debt collection has been the only segment of the industry that has grown, given the rise in overall debt in the US. Besides debt collection, a major part of the call center industry in India is also focused on sales and marketing. Most of these call centers are franchisees of American firms involved in telemarketing. Agents are involved in selling a wide-range of products from consumer goods to credit cards and loan programs. The third kind of business that call centers in India are involved in is customer service. In this business, call centers are either captive firms that are completely owned by the American company they are providing customer service for or independent non-captive firms that are contracted by an American company. An example of a captive call center would be one that is fully owned by an American firm such as GE or American Express that calls new customers on behalf of the American firm as well as service the existing customers of their parent American company. The second type, a non-captive call center is not fully owned by any American firm but could be contracted by any of them to provide a service for a fixed duration. While the call center industry largely began with the setting up of captive firms, there has been a move towards non-captive firms, given the flexibility it provides to American firms.

The overall training process of call center employees within these voice-based call centers comprises of two kinds of training that insiders like to call process and non-process training. Process training educates employees in the specifics of the job they must perform during the calls. For instance, if the call center is catering to a client in the US that sells insurance, employees must be trained in the details of the American insurance laws as well as the general financial environment in America that may be drastically different from India. The non-process training, on the other hand, is aimed at imparting what insiders call “soft-skills” to the employees. It could range from training purely in cultural norms and behaviors to simulating a particular accent. Cultural training is conducted with the goal of informing employees about American culture and is based on the premise that efficiency and success of callers would increase manifold if they could relate to their customers better. Since the larger goal of the corporations is to have a seamless transition of this industry to India, employees must sound as American as possible on the phone displaying the cultural knowledge they have gained from training sessions. This performance necessitates the temporary adoption of an identity, including a western name that is both inauthentic and difficult to pull off. Each training program is tailored differently and just as they make improvisations in voice and accent training, each call center has managed to innovate and create a module best suited to its needs.

A significant part of the information collected for this chapter was through interviews conducted during visits to these call centers. I conducted about a dozen interviews, besides sitting in during several training sessions for employees. The interviews were conducted in the cities of Delhi, Bombay and Bangalore - three cities where the call center industry has seen tremendous growth. My interviewees comprised of employees within the industry, their

trainers, managers, owners, as well as independent observers and media analysts. The interviews were open-ended typically lasting 2-3 hours each where I sought to engage my interviewees primarily on the subject of language and cultural training. I attended both process training as well as cultural and linguistic training that all employees must undergo. Given the interest that this industry has generated among scholars and the media, call centers have developed a cautious approach towards allowing access to outsiders. This approach has been adopted after adverse publicity in the Indian media that focused on the odd nature of the job in this industry. I gained access to insiders in the industry partly through my former contacts amongst journalistic community in India that I was once a part of. Despite these contacts however I had to ensure my interviewees that the nature of my research was scholarly and would not result in journalistic stories of the kind that are frequently written about them. In accordance with promises made to my interviewees I have also changed their names in the text.

Besides these interviews I also rely on several secondary sources of information for exploring different aspects of the industry. I rely on news stories, documentaries as well as works of fiction that have addressed the subject of call centers in India, using them to supplement my research while also contrasting their representations with my own findings. The abundance of cultural production on this topic points to the interest the industry has generated. The documentaries I use for this chapter are *John and Jane* by Ashim Ahluwalia, *Nalini by Day Nancy by Night* by Sonali Gulati, *The Other Side of Outsourcing* by Thomas Friedman, *1800 – India* by Safina Uberoi, and *Sixth Sheikh's Sixth Sheep's Sick* by Bharath Murthy and Sreejith Karanavar. Among my interviewees was Ashim Ahluwalia, the director of the documentary *John and Jane* who besides becoming a source for contacts within the industry also talked to me at length about the

process of making his documentary. Besides the spate of documentaries on the subject, my analysis includes a recent best-selling novel in India called *One Night at a Call Center* focused on a workplace romance involving two call center employees and that has also been made into a Hindi movie.

In exploring the details in the industry I use callers, agents, employees and workers to refer to those who make and receive calls from customers in the West. I use the term customer to refer to those who are receiving their calls on the other end. I use the term client to specifically refer to the Western firms that these call centers are working for.

Cultural Training

The goal during cultural training sessions is to provide a general sense of the American life to trainees. While approaches may vary, the attempt is largely to contextualize beforehand the possible responses that agents may receive and address issues before they crop up in conversations with customers. This attempt to contextualize is as much a prevention against inappropriate responses as it is a way to help agents navigate cultural nuances and improve their success rate. But as scholars (Poster 2007, Mirchandani 2007, Taylor and Bain 2005, Basi 2009) have shown, this training interacts in complex ways with the identities of the employees thus bringing about transformations that have significance for my project.

To begin with, most training sessions provide factual information that is supposedly necessary for understanding America. For instance Tahir Rao, a call center employee who worked for Accenture in the southern Indian city of Bangalore recalled that his cultural training sought to pack in a substantial amount of factual information within a very short period. A quick run of all the American states, a review of the food habits and the current tastes and historical

background of the various music traditions provided an initiation into American culture, a process that was mostly redundant for Rao since he went to an international school with many American students and teachers. Creating a classroom environment that complements the contents of the class often reinforces this standardized factual information. Maya Singh, a trainer for a call center located close to Delhi explains that in order to reinforce her lessons, her classrooms often have symbols such as American flags, maps and clocks that show different time-zones in America. The clocks perhaps signify best the idea that forces of global capital that the trainees will soon become a part of are no longer hindered by constraints of time and space. Discussion about the centrality of the national flag to American life often seeks to draw differences in attitudes between Indians and Americans towards their flag. This is illustrated in questions a trainer in the documentary *John and Jane* asks her students "Do we hoist our flag everywhere? Have our flags pasted all over?" (*John and Jane*)

Providing factual information goes hand-in-hand with general discussions in American values in these training sessions. Under the broad category of American values are placed ideas and norms that agents are expected to recollect while talking to their customers. At Maya Singh's workplace this emphasis on American values is a recent change when managers only recently realized that as opposed to a more general understanding of American culture, the success of employees hinged on cultural knowledge that was specific to their work. For instance, since their jobs invariably required dealing with personal information, callers have to be trained in the appropriate responses to information that might be personal or sensitive. Details of American family life or different arrangements within romantic relationships are types of personal information that frequently come up during interactions. Singh explains that since the idea of living-in with a partner before marriage would be antithetical to Indian cultural

sensibilities, trainers specifically discuss different conjugal arrangements Americans may enter into. The goal is to ensure that when confronted with this information from customers, callers do not display shock or surprise but treat it as matter-of-fact. Similarly, the issue of divorce comes up frequently in training sessions given its direct relationship with one's financial situation. Trainees are specifically asked not to express remorse or regret or even ask further questions about divorce related issues as they would in an interaction with someone from India. Discussions about values go beyond discussions related to family and romantic arrangements. Trainers frequently run through a list of words that define American-ness and Singh's list includes a disciplined work-ethic, the importance of greetings (Hello, Good Morning etc) and waiting for one's turn in a queue (practiced during meals served in call-center cafeterias). Yet another trainer lists American values as individualism, a quest for success, patriotism, privacy, progress, achievement and pursuit of happiness (*John and Jane*).

Simplistic discussions about values are meant to produce stark contrasts between the worldview that employees are used to living in and one they will confront and interact with during their phone calls. Generalizations about American values are juxtaposed against similar generalizations about India implying that those values don't exist here (or else they wouldn't need to be taught). For instance, while discussing different perceptions about time between India and the West, conversations often lead to essentializing discussions about people in the US. A trainer featured in the documentary *Sixth Sheikh's Sixth Sheep's Sick* emphasizes how people in the US "don't have time for you", adding, "These are very busy people. Even if it's the weekend they are very busy going out. They go out...they go for a nice holiday... They in fact on the whole enjoy themselves....they make use of every minute of theirs." These kinds of conclusions are commonly repeated within training sessions that aim to provide

a snapshot of American culture within a few weeks. The stereotyping is more pronounced if the trainees are fresh out of college with little or no work experience and with only popular culture as their reference point for knowing about the US. Very soon, as if in response to this mode of categorization, the agents themselves begin to talk in similar generalizations about people from different countries they are calling up. Agent Gabriel from Kolkata says, "... to make conversation I think the Canadians are the best... the British are very intelligent you can't fool them, the Americans are dumb. You can tell them that it's free...and in the automated system they can hear its being charged and yet they'll believe it." (*Sixth Sheikh's Sixth Sheep...*) Such evaluations of people based on nationalities are commonplace among the call center employees who, not surprisingly, often contradict each other in describing the general characteristics of different nationalities. Trainers often attempt to juxtapose these generalizations with constant reminders against using simplistic categories to define national characteristics. Sanjana Dey, a trainer in a Gurgaon based call center explains her attempts to complicate these "airtight categories": "Something like values are dicey," she says, "You might say an American is honest but so is an Indian, you may say Americans are punctual but so is an Indian". Problematizing these generalizations leads to a more nuanced understanding of the customers they are likely to interact with. It also emphasizes the deeper similarities between cultures once the layers of difference are peeled off. Moreover, callers who tap this commonness are often more successful than those who focus on the differences. For the most part however and for most young employees entering the industry, the dominant stereotypes supersede the more nuanced explanations about cultural differences.

As is to be expected, continuous engagements with the idea of American-ness and a frequent valorization of those values mingles with the existing values

that employees bring to the workplace. They are continuously negotiating their identity, as they must pass off their cultural knowledge as well as their American accent to their customers. Scholars analyzing the process have focused on this adaptation by employees as they try to inhabit two different worlds, wearing two different garbs. Das et al's (2008) study of the relationship between employees' existing identity and their adjustment at the workplace found that the higher the centrality of employees' national and religious identity in their self-conception, the lesser the ease with which callers could adapt to the new identity they had to take on. A strongly entrenched sense of identity moored within an Indian cultural ethos prohibited agents from slipping easily into the new persona they were required to take on. There is a range of reactions from employees to the cultural training they are subjected to. Poster's (2007) ethnography finds a spectrum of responses to the need for identity change within these workplaces. She finds that the employees could be either assimilators, accommodators, objectors or resisters, these four types representing a gradually increasing resistance to cultural adaptation required of the employees, with the last three categories comprising of 87 % of the employees. She argues that even as globalization leads to a multiplicity of identities, the specific manifestation of globalization within the call center industry is a process where the employees stand to lose the most because of the correlation between identity transformation and success at workplace.

Most researchers also conclude that the management of identity is a significant cause for stress on the job for employees. While the conflictual mode of resisting assimilation would understandably give rise to psychic stress, this stress is equally present in those who choose to assimilate. This is so because assimilation is usually preceded by a valorization of American culture and a simultaneous denigration of the Indian cultural and social milieu leading agents

to walk out of the doors of their air-conditioned office into a world and a home they have implicitly learnt to devalue. Agent Oaref working in a call center in Mumbai and featured in a documentary is perhaps undergoing this process when he says, "Indians you know...certain parts of India are not civilized...America has always been ahead of all nations...anyone and everyone who goes to the states becomes rich...that has registered in my mind" (*John and Jane*). While these comparisons are not necessarily a unique characteristic of call center workers since they are commonplace in a country such as India, Oaref's job allows him to juxtapose a snapshot of America that he encounters in training sessions to everyday life in India. Something similar can be seen in the comments of another agent Nikesh, when he says about the Americans, "The way they speak English is great. It was like oh man...I don't want to be an Indian anymore. I've never been to America but I imagine this country to be a beautiful country with snow. Cold. Big highways where cars zoom up and down and up and down. No dust...those beautiful buildings. That culture has gone into me" (*John and Jane*). Nikesh's fantasy of an America shows an affective attachment with an image of the country that he has encountered at the workplace. This fantasy shows that it is in the realm of imagination that the globalization of culture most clearly resides. The realm of fantasy and imagination conflicts with the realm of materiality and experience producing a dissonance that is arguably stressful. This conflict is perhaps best exemplified by agent Namrata (who is given the alias Naomi) also featured in the documentary above who has internalized American-ness to the extent that she begins to dye her hair blonde and talk in an Americanized accent even when outside of work. Such instances of a deeper level of identity transformation seemingly justify fears about the formation of new subjectivities within the call center industry due to the valorization of a dominant culture. Cultural differences that have distinct historical genealogies

are presented as aspirational goals for a society such as India. One such value that continues to recur in these training sessions is that of privacy and confidentiality. In training sessions the reasons for the prevalence of this cultural norm, its linkages with the private-public divide in the west and its close relationship with the growth of capitalism is rarely discussed as trainees are presented this value as being ethically superior.

The Education of Privacy

The concept of privacy and the premium placed on it in the western culture is a prominently recurring theme in conversations with trainers and callers. Given the personal nature of information that callers are dealing with, they are repeatedly reminded of the sanctity of that information and the laws that govern the misuse of a customers' personal information. Specifically, awareness of the Fair Debt Collection Practice Act (FDCPA) as well as cultural notions around privacy become crucial to their training, says Sanjana Dey, who must teach her students conventions for the protection of consumer rights that are not yet commonplace in India. Given the protections a consumer enjoys, no matter how difficult the situation, rudeness on the phone cannot be reciprocated by callers on the other side of the line. The imposition of the FDCPA on callers from India makes them defenseless against abuse and rudeness from their customers, which frequently includes racist comments. This is so because while the act protects clients from harassment it does not protect those who do the calling from abuse. Since callers in India represent the American company, they are given strict warnings against talking back to customers, as it would be a violation of the FDCPA. This aspect of the training, claims Dey, poses a problem because it must weigh against the idea that the employees had a right to defend

themselves in case of derogatory comments made against them. Employees do have the option to cut short the conversation but must do so politely.

But besides the legal issues surrounding privacy, training sessions also focus on the cultural and interpersonal manifestations of the idea of privacy. Ray, for instance, was specifically told that as opposed to interactions in India where conversations even with acquaintances could include private details, conversations even between close friends in the US often steered clear of issues that may be deemed personal and off-limits. Consequently, in his training he was encouraged to draw a fine line between relating with their customers and getting too personal. "We were asked to empathize and not sympathize", explains Ray adding, "if someone said that they wanted to cancel their card because of a divorce we were not supposed to say sorry but if someone had lost their wallet it was okay to sound apologetic for them." Hina Bisht, a trainer for a call-center in Delhi adds, "If I meet a friend after a very long time it is okay and within my bounds to jokingly comment on their receding hairline. But a similar gesture could offend someone in the US". Tahil Rao's training in Bangalore continuously harped on the word "professional" when describing the attitude of Americans towards social interaction. "We were told that as opposed to India you can't just drop in at someone's house in the US. You either call and check if its okay or you let them know before hand," explains Dey. The topic of confidentiality of customers' information is often couched with a subtle threat about the possible repercussions in the case of a breach of confidentiality. Similarly, Singh clarifies, "We explain to them that a customer may be hassled by immense personal problems but would still respond "fine" when asked how they are doing. They do not carry that baggage into their conversations". These observations, while obviously superficial, function to initiate agents into a worldview that is often at odds with what they are used to. The construction of this worldview touches on

the symbolic elements (such as values) as well as at the material element (such as economic practices) thus expanding the idea of “American culture” significantly.

Economic Culture/Consumption Practices

The evolution of the call center industry in India has led to a gradual incorporation of accumulated wisdom about the training methods and practices. For instance an emphasis on the general economic culture and consumption practices of Americans is a result of years of observation to see what works and what doesn't in terms of caller success. While information about American culture is meant to provide context to different issues, discussions about economic culture are key to their success. Training sessions focus a substantial amount of time on educating callers about patterns of consumption and the debt driven lifestyle of an average American. Ranjit Ray's training at IBM, for instance, included information about the consumption practices of average Americans such as the names and details of places they were likely to shop at. Since the idea of large departmental stores was still new to India at the time of his training, it included a description of the experience of shopping in department stores such as Target and Costco. Visuals of large chain stores that display choices available to an average American accompanied these discussions. Displaying photographs of what the aisles of these stores look like, a trainer featured in *John and Jane* asks, “Do we have a lot of variety when we go to the corner store? Which do you think has more variety? India or America?”. Specifically focused on a photograph that displays towels, she probes, “Do we get our towels looking like these?”. Clearly, these discussions both educate and entice. They function to create a longing for America that feeds off the scarcity that call center employees will notice when they walk out of their offices.

The equation of choice with freedom pervades these discussions. The fact that Americans can have access to the best consumer products and that they can do so without moving out of their houses, thanks to the Internet and shopping catalogues, draws awestruck appreciation from students. Naming the average American as John and Jane, a trainer at a call center in Bombay repeatedly emphasizes that they “can order everything they want over the Internet” (*John and Jane*).

As in most other aspects of cultural training, trainers are working against the grain of lessons learnt from the powerful culture industries about the economic aspects of American life as well. Having watched Hollywood movies and popular television shows, most students come in to training with “an extreme view of Americans”, claims Sanjana. One of the jobs of the training process then is to mitigate some of those extreme views. Unlike fresh college graduates, employees at Sanjana’s call center come with prior work-experience and hence pre-conceived notions about Americans. Her task is to make those notions, formed through earlier interactions as well as through consuming American popular culture, more realistic. For instance, one commonly held assumption that Sanjana must continuously fend-off and which has serious consequences for their work is the idea that all Americans are rich. This assumption significantly impedes their work because it misleads the agents to conclude that the inability to repay debt by Americans is as an act of evasion. Hence, instead of working with them, agents enter into a conflict mode leading to an early termination of the call. Changing these deeply held notions requires that callers are educated about the debt-driven economic culture in America where people may have all the luxuries of life and yet not have much cash flow in their bank accounts. The idea that someone can own a car and a palatial house and yet be living from one paycheck to another is a realization that requires some

getting used to. Another common myth about America that trainers like Sanjana must counter is the supposed irrelevance of family in the life of an average American. This myth, if not corrected, leads agents to make fallacious presumptions about the role of the family in the financial planning of American citizens. The discussion of family life also includes conversations about the difference in social structure and the access that families and individuals have to sources of funds in time of need. This knowledge comes useful when dealing with customers that seem obdurate about their inability to pay off their debt. With the additional cultural knowledge agents can suggest financial avenues that their customers had not considered hence increasing the chances of collecting money.

Cultural training of the kind described above dovetails with speech and language training that teaches agents to speak in the right accent. Voice and Accent training, as it is called, engages with the realm of language, a crucial aspect of employees' identity construction. The complex process of training callers to speak in a desired way, that I turn to now, has been a subject of much scholarly debate and discussion.

Voice and Accent Training

While there are several commonalities across the call centers in terms of voice and accent training methodologies and approaches, each company has also managed to tailor its training process for the specific tasks it is engaged in. In the initial years of the industry in India there was a strong emphasis on developing and inculcating an American accent. However, the pitfalls of the singular attempt to impose an American accent have gradually become evident. This awareness has been buttressed by widespread criticism of these methods by scholars and the media. Consequently companies have altered their goals somewhat in favor

of a focus on clarity and more neutral sounds allowing the task being performed by the call center to determine the approach for language and accent training. For instance, jobs that involve sales and marketing where the onus lies on the agent to convince a consumer to buy a product have more need for Americanized accents than others such as customer service where agents solve problems, or debt collection where it is in the interest of the customer to be patient and work with the caller to clear off his debt. On the whole, outbound calls that comprise about 60% of the revenue of call center industry in India (Das et al, 2008) require more proficiency in language than do inbound calls.

Describing the details of his language training, Ranjit Ray who started work at IBM's call center in Delhi, recalls that voice and accent training comprised about one week of the three months or so of the entire training process. During this week the emphasis was primarily on intonation, correct emphasis, fillers, idioms and grammatical rules such as tenses and sentence construction. This training often involved role-playing wherein students delivered dialogues from popular Hollywood movies. Tahil Rao, who worked with a call center in Bangalore, claimed that the reason for the transition away from an American accent occurred because it resulted in a mutated/hybrid accent that was incomprehensible. "They soon realized how much damage they were doing by imposing an American accent. Neither could we understand each other nor could the Americans understand us," explains Rao, clearly amused. The new approach instead emphasized clarity and sought to create what industry insiders call a "neutral" accent. This process emphasized the erasure of "mother tongue influence" or what is more popularly known by its acronym MTI. This gradual shift away from imposing an American accent is common across different tasks being performed by the call centers. Trainer Sanjana Dey with the Delhi based debt-collection firm has concluded that teaching an

American accent to her students is futile and instead has shifted her focus on “neutral” sounds and cultural awareness. This transition from speech to cultural training came about after the realization that the best performers at her company (i.e. employees collecting the maximum money from debtors) were not necessarily people with the best speaking skills but those who had the more basic knack of connecting with another human being.

There are only rare instances of agreement between Indian trainers and American clients on the issue of linguistic training. One such aspect of consensus is the rate of speech as most trainers recognize it to be an issue and attempt to rectify it. Sanjana Dey claims that the rate of speech is a problem no matter how clear the accent, since Indians tend to talk faster than most westerners. Scholars from socio-linguistics who have compared the two speaking styles concur with this assessment. Saloni Priya’s (2009) analysis shows the difference between the two rates of speech to be about 60 words per minute. While Indians speak at an approximate speed of 180 words per minute, Americans speak at a slower rate of about 120 words per minute thus necessitating the required change in agents’ speech. Training in this aspect teaches Indian callers to adapt their speech to the American speed.

However, such points of agreement are rare and far outnumbered by the disagreements. For instance, Claire Cowie’s (2007) study of a language-training firm hired by a call center to train its employees discovered immense dilemmas about the correct approach to be adopted. Even though trainers proclaimed as their goal the inculcation of a “neutral” accent, there remained little consensus on what that term actually meant. She compares the desire for cultivating a neutral accent with academic debates about an “international regionless accent” that have largely been inconclusive. Given the floating nature of the concept, the key question Cowie asks is, “is accent training about eliminating stigmatized Indian

features, in the direction of “educated Indian English”, or is it about introducing features of another accent?” (321). This question largely remains unanswered in her study because of her conclusion that the ambiguous concept of “neutrality” has allowed each node within the chain to define the term to its own advantage. After all, within the industry “trainees have to convince trainers, trainers have to convince managers, managers have to convince directors, and directors have to convince clients that change can be wrought in an unrealistically brief three-week period.” (319). In this continuous process of negotiation between each node and the one above it, each link in the chain has some agency to define the terms of the engagement. Hence, while one describes the process as an attempt to remove MTI (Mother Tongue Influence), another perceives it only to be a euphemism, adopted after adverse publicity, and still being used to describe an Americanized or British accent. Moreover while clients often do not explicitly ask for a westernized accent they do request an “enhanced” accent or one that is “as close to native as possible”. Poster (2007) validates these findings about client requests by claiming that requests for accent change, taking on fake names or concealing the location of the call center are usually made and policed in indirect ways. However trainers subvert those requests by interpreting “neutral” on their own terms. Cowie’s answers to the phenomenon lie in Accommodation theory that explains how speakers make adjustments/ accommodations in their communication depending on their end goal. The theory, for instance, explains how accents perceived to be associated with higher socioeconomic groups are more desirable than those not associated with those groups.

My findings support those of scholars above about the ambiguity of the term “neutral”. This ambiguity also leads to conflicts between different groups involved in the training process. Conflicts show that power is not being unilaterally exercised upon trainers and employees but is being actively resisted.

Clashes result when local experience accumulated by trainers from training sessions confronts fixed notions about accent and the efficacy of one linguistic approach over another. This divergence often surfaces during weekly meetings between Indian trainers and American clients where the clients evaluate agents and make decisions about their ability to begin the job. The extent of a student's MTI frequently appears in their evaluation by American clients. In one such conflict Maya Singh, a trainer working for a call center in Noida, a suburb of New Delhi walked out of a meeting when the American client failed a student cleared by her for the job without giving a reason. Recalling the episode and explaining the process of evaluation, she laments, "It is entirely based on their whims as they think that not failing anyone is tantamount to lowering their standards". In this case her high opinion of her student's skills was finally vindicated when, within a week of being failed, the said student was adjudged the best performer in the simulated mock-calls that students must make before beginning their on-the-job-training (OJT). Singh laments that not allowing certain students to begin the job was often an exercise of power and not necessarily driven by the intention of sifting out those with poor communication skills.

While Singh concedes that MTI continues to be a major hindrance preventing students from being understood, these problems are often exaggerated by the pre-conceived notions of American clients who presume the inadequacy of all Indian speakers of English. As a result even though Singh's modules comprise of two months of rigorous training where students meet for eight hours everyday, they cannot begin their jobs without being certified by the western client that they are making calls on behalf of. This policing from the clients, while done in the garb of their overall business interests, simultaneously imposes normative ideas of accent and culture on agents under the premise that it works better. Besides being the ultimate arbiter of who gets to go to the floor,

clients in the US can listen in on calls as a part of a larger process of quality control. They can also retrieve random calls from the database long after they have occurred in order to scrutinize them.

The difference in the extent of technical linguistic training provided to students is yet another manifestation of the difference in opinion surrounding the best training method. While trainers in some call centers are merely native (western or Indian) speakers of English, in other centers linguists are hired to help students explain the mechanical process of sound and accent formation. This kind of technical training is more common in centers that simultaneously service both American and British clients since callers must be able to tailor their speech style accordingly and switch between two accents. A linguistic expert trains students in what linguists call the “articulation of segmental sounds, i.e., consonants, vowels and diphthongs as well as the suprasegmental features like stress, tone, intonation, etc.” (Priya, p.31). A narrator in a training tape featured in a documentary illustrates this strategy to differentiate between the British and the American accents:

“British English divides vowels into long and short vowels. For example “a” as in Last, “aw” as in Law, “o” as in Load and “oo” as in boot are long vowels made by the movement of the lip...And “A” as in day, “ee” as in “knee” and “ie” as in Lie are long vowels made by the movement of the tongue. “ee” as in Bid, “e” as in bed, and “a” as in bad are example of short vowels. American English divides these into tense and lax vowels. Tense vowels, like long vowels, are made by the movement of the lips or the tongue or both. Lax vowels like short vowels are made without much muscular effort.”
(*Sixth Sheikh’s...*)

This kind of technical differentiation between the two kinds of accents is commonplace in the training sessions at call centers servicing both American and British clients. It is also accompanied by a technical explanation of the process by which sound is produced in the human throat, the assumption being that

somehow understanding the mechanism through which we create different sounds will help us better control our accents. The narrator in a training tape illustrates this mechanism by naming the different parts involved in sound production:

“The area immediately behind the tip of the tongue is called the blade. Together the tip and the blade are called the crown. The part of the tongue under the hard palate is called the front and below the soft palate is called the back. The body for the tongue is called the dorsum. ...pear shaped ovula....when the speaker articulates the sound aaaahh..”.
(*Sixth Sheikh's...*)

Talking about the difference in two accents while also discussing details of sound-production is meant to work in tandem and help students have better control of their accents. This kind of linguistic training is expanded upon by the use of popular culture in classrooms that illustrates the differences. Trainer Singh explains that despite British written English being taught in Indian schools, the British accent is not easy to train for hence necessitating the use of movies and other cultural products that make the trainers' task a little easier. Her favorite for teaching the British accent is *My Fair Lady* and that for the American accent is *Pearl Harbor*. The former based on the process of accent and diction change narrated through the often sweet, often-bitter relationship between linguist Henry Higgins and flower girl Eliza Doolittle entertains while also inculcating the value of an authentic British accent. Singh claims that the movie helps students learn the subtle aspects of the British accent (for e.g. the British never pronounce the “r” when it comes at the end) by carefully watching the jaw movements of the characters.

While training students to differentiate between two foreign accents and erasing the influence of their original accent is complex enough, an additional layer of complexity is added to it given that, mostly located in the major urban

centers, these firms attract agents from all over India. As a result there are students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and hence different accents in the classrooms. So while the trainers are coaching for multiple simultaneous accents (in terms of teaching both American and British accents) they are also dealing with different starting points for each student thus further complicating their efforts. Training therefore requires individual attention where the specificity of one's existing accent must be taken into account while training them for the new one. The goal of achieving universally neutral accent requires "a process of modification which varies according to the strength of regional accents"(Taylor & Bain 275). Existing accents lead to inevitable comparisons between the different regional accents and their suitability to the industry. Making one such claim about the advantage of the Eastern state of Bengal over others, VVR Babu (ITC Infotech India Ltd) asserts in *Sixth Sheikh's...* that, "I think Bengal has an advantage in that sense I think people of this region are accent neutral. So...for you to move into the Westernized accent, American accent...it becomes that much easier. While if you have a very predominant Indian accent then first you have to neutralize that and then move to the region- specific accent". Another agent working at a call center in the same city counters babu's flattering portrait of the Eastern accent. Steven (Assistant Manager Operations, Convergence) claims that English speakers from the eastern region "go hard on our words" and that the problem was worse for students who went to "non-convent schools". These competing claims about the relative superiority of one accent over another seek to reproduce the same power relation that American clients impose on their Indian trainers when they privilege the Western/ American accent over the Indian one. Claims of neutrality and invisibility of an accent conceal the normative assumption that, like white privilege in the racial context, there exists a hegemonic norm against which other accents are being evaluated. It also

conceals the arbitrary processes and the role of power in making any one accent normal and inaudible and others abnormal and audible.

The protracted conflicts over the appropriate accent, while showing the ways in which power is exercised and contested also misses the point about whether the search for the right accent is worth all the effort. How crucial is one's accent in determining whether or not one succeeds in getting business from a customer? Both employees and trainers ponder over whether or not the emphasis on an appropriate accent is worth it. Nipun Khosla, who started off as a caller moving up the chain as a team leader and is now an assistant manager with Encore Capital thinks that the debate completely misses the point. Having spent over five years in the business, Khosla surmises that there is little relationship between language skills and success as a caller in the industry. According to him communication skills were never important in the industry but they are even less so now when it is common knowledge that many of the marketing calls Americans receive originate from India. When this fact was little known even the best communicator would rankle the customer who would insist on speaking to an American. Khosla concludes that what distinguishes a successful caller from others is their ability to tap commonalities as opposed to speculating on their differences. Elaborating on this he cites the cases of his most successful team-members who he claims are "straight-talkers". "They are soft-spoken, never raise their voice and they stick to the point assuring the customers that they are there to help fix the problem". There are members in his team who make a mistake in each sentence they speak and yet "they get the job done". Specifically he talks about a member of his team who has the highest success rate – the reason for which he ascribes to her soft-spokenness. While he does not rate her communication skills highly, what distinguishes her is the ability to always be in a helpful mode and come across as interested in the problems of her

customers. Khosla's conclusions come from practical experience too since in his current job as an Assistant Manager he must frequently take over calls when a customer demands to speak with a supervisor. As valuable traits that help one succeed in these calls, he cites confidence, sticking to the point, trusting the customer's words and never showing aggression. Similarly, Sanjana Dey talking specifically about debt-collection says, "It helps to have a neutral accent but it is certainly not the most important thing. Success in debt-collection requires quick-thinking".

Within testimonies of Dey and Khosla, we find affirmation of the fact that tapping universal human notions are the crucial determinants of success in the industry. While incidents of outright hostility, rudeness and racism focusing specifically on callers' accents and nationality challenge their claim, it is also true that the idea of outsourcing of call centers is considered more of a fact today than it was when jobs first went to India. Analyzing the issue of the appropriate language and accent in call centers in India requires engaging with the politics of the colonial institution of English in the country, something that I turn to now.

The Politics of English in Indian Call Centers

India's colonial experience uniquely complicates the debate about appropriate language and accent given that an entire generation of young Indians does not consider English to be a foreign language. Critics of the call center industry have rightly focused on the imposition of foreign accent and linguistic norms within this industry. That negative publicity has made executives at these call centers as well as their western clients more cautious about the training process they adopt. As scholars have claimed (Cowie 2008), the very introduction of terms like "neutral" and MTI are a response to criticism that the industry has received from the general press as well as from academics.

Teaching Indian employees the “correct” accent, grammar and intonation of English raises the hackles of scholars who see in it a manifestation of linguistic imperialism being driven by the larger forces of global capital (Ramanathan 2008). Others dispute this claim about homogenization to argue that the fluid and amorphous nature of a linguistic system means that there is enough space within it to be localized and allow for the unique particularities of a culture to seep in (Sonntag 2008).

The concept of English linguistic imperialism has found its most definitive theoretical elaboration in the work of Robert Phillipson (1992) who defines it as a particular case of linguistic imperialism. Linguistic imperialism is defined as “ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (47). While the global domination of English is the most prominent example of this concept at play, most multi-lingual nation states witness a struggle over different linguistic groups. Crucial to this struggle is the interplay between the concepts of dialect and language whereby language spoken by certain groups of people, usually native residents of colonies, were defined as dialects while those spoken by the dominating group was termed language. The modalities by which a dialect becomes a language has more to do with power than with the inherent properties within a language. Deploying the concept of linguistic imperialism to study the global rise of English helps Phillipson define English linguistic imperialism as a process where “the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (47). This continuous reconstitution is enabled by the structures of global capital that has assumed English to be the primary language of global interaction. The dominance of English is worth studying because

linguistic dominance invariably has material, social and cultural consequences too. Elaborating on this, Phillipson claims, "Linguistic imperialism is also central to social imperialism, which relates to the transmission of the norms and behavior of a model social structure, and these are embedded in language" (54). It is this very idea of a language as a carrier of cultural and social codes that critics of the call center industry refer to when highlighting the pernicious effects of language and accent training in these centers.

For Ramanathan (2008), the training within the call center industry in India represents a conflict between those educated in the English medium schools as opposed to those with an education in a vernacular medium. According to her, the industry is privileging a particular westernized form of English diction that is primarily being determined by the market forces that ignore larger cultural, historical and societal issues. As the details of cultural and voice and accent training above show, Ramanathan's claim that call centers are privileging a certain form of spoken English over the multiplicity of existing Englishes and accents is not without evidence. However this pre-eminence of one form of the language over the others is significantly complicated when juxtaposed with the co-optation of that very westernized form of English by an elite in India in order to maintain its power.

Hence for Sonntag (2005) the politics of language in India should be seen as much through the global lens of linguistic imperialism as through the lens of a national politics whereby the English/non-English divide often replicates an elite vs. masses divide. Her study of the use of "global English" within the BPO industry in India posits the binary of "optimistic hyperglobalizers" and "pessimistic hyperglobalizers". The former like Thomas Friedman see the growth of call centers in India as a welcome embrace by India of the forces of global capitalism/modernity and for whom the idea of mimicry is an evolutionary

natural human phenomenon and not necessarily a manifestation of power. The “pessimistic hyperglobalizers” on the other hand see the use of “global English” as a validation of the cultural imperialism thesis. In helping us understand these positions with respect to call centers in India, Sonntag locates the politics of English within a historical trajectory of pre and post-independence India. When the Nehru-Patel version of Sanskritized Hindi won over the Gandhian idea of a more vernacular Hindustani, there was a simultaneous distancing of the official language from the language of the masses. This distancing was exacerbated in the case of non-Hindi regions that resented the imposition of a sanskritized Hindi on them. She cites the language riots in South India (Tamil Nadu) as examples of this resentment. A simultaneous policy against the education and use of English in government run schools, even though done with the intention of challenging the hegemony of the elite, had the opposite effect of consolidating the elite’s linguistic capital. It accentuated the linguistic difference with repercussions in the material/political realm. Hence claims about linguistic imperialism that see the appropriation of English in India must continuously engage with the claim that the use of English is also a means for upward mobility for people long denied that avenue.

While applying the concept of linguistic imperialism to language training in Indian call centers allows us to see the operation of power there, locating the imposition of westernized English within the socio-historical specificity of India also helps us significantly complicate the claim of a unilateral imposition of power. A lens that keeps the duality of power and resistance/empowerment in continuous tension provides us with a more accurate representation of the role of English within this industry. Hence as opposed to linguistic imperialism or even linguistic cosmopolitanism, Sonntag (2008) finds the metaphor of linguistic hegemony to be far more fruitful. The idea of linguistic hegemony that

introduces agency and consent while always claiming that relations of power circumscribe the agency is a fruitful descriptor of the politics of language within the call centers. It implies a negotiation and a ceding of ground by the dominant cultural force and is more in line with nature of power in the global realm today.

Conceptions of identity must continuously engage with the subject's relationship with modalities of power. A crucial aspect of the formation of our subjectivity is determined by how we negotiate and engage with structures that seek to interpellate us. An interactional perspective that continuously keeps the imposition of power in tension with resistance to it is increasingly the most fruitful theoretical position from which to understand identity. That position informs my study. While language is one realm where this interactional perspective can be seen in play, it functions in other forms of regulation of the employees as well. The disciplining of call center employees polices the material/bodily realm as well as the psychic/affective realm. The nature of this disciplining is unique to the call center industry in many ways as are the forms of resistance that employees deploy against those modes of disciplining.

Regulating the Psychic and the Corporeal in Indian Call Centers

The distinguishing factor of the call center industry from the other service-related industries is the extent of regulation of the employees' bodies that the former requires. This regulation includes providing a well-organized transportation mechanism to carry employees to and from work, inverting the natural biorhythms of the workers as well as policing their emotional connection with their customers. This regulation becomes necessary because the nature of the industry requires that employees come to work at times that are against the natural working hours. After all, one of the key reasons for the off shoring of

these jobs to India is that it is located at an exact 12-hour time difference from the US. This shift to India solved what Poster (2007) calls “capitalism’s temporal quandary in the post-industrial (i.e., service) age” (73). This quandary results from the need “to accelerate production and overcome the limitations of local time” (73). During the daytime, software experts in India can take care of the unsolved problems that workers in the US left behind as they finished their work-shifts. During the nighttime Indian call center workers can talk in real time with customers in the US for whom it is the daytime.

For this process to go smoothly a strict regimen of shifts is instituted and employees are picked up from their homes in company cabs to be in time for the shift they are slated to work for. For an employee involved in calls to and from the US, a typical day turns out as follows (Srivastava, 2008). She usually gets up from sleep at 7 PM in the evening, is picked up by the office cab by 8 PM and reaches office around 10 PM. Within half hour of arrival she is expected to log in and begin work. She is allowed her first break of fifteen minutes at 12:30 PM and then continues to work till the next half-hour breakfast break at 3:30 PM. The last stretch of the work continues from 4 AM up to 6 AM when she can log off. The cab usually picks up employees for the return journey home at 7 AM. On the other hand for employees who are handling calls from the UK, the workday starts earlier given the shorter time difference between UK and India. They usually leave home at 2 PM and must be logged in and dialing by 4:30 PM. They get the first 15 minute break at 6:30 PM, the next half hour break at 9:30 PM during which they have dinner and the last fifteen minute break at midnight. The shift usually ends around 1:30 AM and they get home between 3 and 3:30 AM. Large fleets of vehicles entering and departing the suburbs of Delhi where these call centers are located have become a veritable signature of the presence of this industry there.

That this work schedule is extremely stressful and difficult to sustain for long periods of time is evident in the high attrition rates at these call centers. Scholars have placed the level of attrition in the industry to be as high as 60% (Sen Gupta & Gupta, 2008) and claim that out of those who leave their jobs, almost 50% leave the industry entirely. Other insiders claim that there are phases within the industry when more people are quitting than joining. This high level of turnover is unique to this industry and is explained partly by the fact that it has a young workforce that often looks at this job as a temporary stop before going for higher education. However, for many, the mechanized nature of the job, the stress involved and the odd hours of work are the reasons for leaving. Explains an employee at a call center in Kolkata, in the eastern part of India, "I think in the call center industry... you can work there max (sic) 3 to 4 yrs... Basically you work there make your money and leave... you can't work there ten years or something as your health is definitely going to deteriorate... I mean it won't affect the guys that much but it definitely affects the females" [*Sixth Sheikh's....*].

The experience of expatriate American Derek Foster, currently living in Mumbai is perhaps a convincing explication of the damage that interference with biorhythms could inflict. Foster was in between jobs when he walked into a BPO job-fair with his resume. His American accent quickly got him a job, first as a cultural trainer and then as a voice and accent trainer. His experience of working for six months was harrowing enough for him to have a nervous breakdown. "It really fucked me up. I nearly took my life," he recalls, four years after he abruptly left the industry and went back to America to seek residential therapy. Now, back in Mumbai as a music and film teacher, Foster describes his experience as that of working in a "digital sweatshop". The odd hours, the bad diet and the artificial built environment that continuously recycled stale air

added to the tyranny and politics of the work place was all dehumanizing. But when work was over, the journey home was equally painful as he often had to wait hours for the return cab (he calls them the equivalent of modern day slave ships) since it could not leave until all employees supposed to be on the cab were done with work.

Foster's experience is hardly exceptional or unique. These unusual working hours combined with the added stress of sales targets have widespread consequences for the employees' health, their family life and their future career paths. Poster (2007) notes that workers at these call centers frequently report sick and the resident nurse at one of the companies reported up to 50 daily visits for different kinds of ailments. While fever, colds, sore throats, nausea, dizziness, asthma and rashes are common, a recurring complaint of the workers is their inability to get enough sleep. The inversion of the work schedule for this industry is premised on the fact that human beings can sleep just as well during the day as they can during the night. Testimonies from employees question that assumption. Vipul, who worked at a call center in Delhi for a brief period narrates that the entire call center experience is quite exciting in the beginning but within a few weeks the effects of the inverted working hours begin to show on the body. "Two weeks into work I realized that my body was not responding normally and I was lethargic all the time. But in order to participate in the excitement I started relying more and more on coffee and tea which only added to the problem", he says adding, "After all you have to realize that no matter how hard you try your body cannot sleep as well during the day as it can during the night".

Besides these physical manifestations of the work-schedule, there are affective and psychological consequences of the work as well. Workers frequently complain about feeling disconnected from their families and more

importantly from their partners. This kind of disconnection has led to what has also been called the trend of “BPO families” (Srivastava 2008). A leading business magazine in India, *Business Today* recently profiled seven such families where two or more members were working for the same BPO firm. The profiles described family members, sometimes spanning across two different generations, working for the same company. Working together had its advantages, as the members were able to see each other several times a day besides riding to and back from the office together. Another instance of this affective consequence is the disproportionate number of workplace romances at call centers. Since they spend virtually the entire working time in the same group while also commuting together, employees inevitably get involved in romantic and sexual relationships that, since they clash with traditional values about marriage and relationships, increase the stress level for employees. It is not surprising that almost 50% of those approaching the in-house counseling service set up by a BPO firm went there to discuss relationship issues (Srivastava 2008). The problems arising from these workplace relationships gained national attention when a call center employee, Gururaj Kishore murdered Tanya Bannerjee, his coworker at the call center Aviva in Bangalore. Kishore was miffed after Bannerjee refused his proposal to marry him. While this incident could have happened in any other industry what gave it national attention was that it came to stand in for many similar cases of what the media called “crimes of passion” in the call center industry. The trend of relationships between call center coworkers caught the national imagination enough for a recent novel *One Night at The Call Center* focused on one such romance becoming an all time bestseller. The novel has also been made into a Hindi movie.

The psychological and affective issues within the industry are complicated due to the requirement that no matter what their state of mind, employees must

present a pleasant and cheerful voice to their customers. While this kind of “emotional labor” is a part of any sales and marketing job, it is made more tiring in the case of Indian call centers because of additional factors. An instance of being trained to perform this emotional labor is the trainer Anjum’s admonition, “You should always smile on the other line...when you smile here the other person will hear it... sense it. You should not sound dead and dull. From the first call to the last one you need to be full of life and full of energy...full of smile and happiness...no matter how frustrated...how tired you are you shouldn’t sound that on the floor” (*Sixth Sheikh’s...*). Emotional labor also requires empathizing and relating with the joys and sorrows of the customers that one is talking to. Nikki, a caller working in a Mumbai call center narrates an incident when the person she had asked for had actually died the previous week. She recalls her sadness upon being informed of his demise by his wife who answered the call, “I never had a dad so I did become sad. Its like when I see families...you know those kinds of things what I have missed...that makes me sad”. For her the call center job is an attempt to recreate that sense of family in the workplace. She says, “You just want to be there for the people...its that love. It’s just giving...so beautiful. That love...you look at somebody you look with love” (*John and Jane*).

However unlike a real family, affective investments at the workplace must continuously be circumscribed by the fact that the people one is talking to are a mere statistic in the sales targets that have to be met. Relationships with customers, therefore, must always be professional. This anxiety about meeting sales targets is quite real for the employees given the role sheer luck plays in success in this industry. Gabriel, an agent at the call center Infinity in Kolkata explains this pressure of meeting targets, “We are all expected to achieve our targets. And there are good days...there is a lot of luck involved too...(for

instance) if you get the right person who has been waiting for you call. There are days when I've got 21 and there are days I've got 1", he explains (*Sixth Sheikh...*).

The inversion of natural working hours, psychological and affective investments and pressure of sales targets all add to creating a rather stressful workplace in these call centers. The nature of the work regulates the corporeal as well as the psychic and the emotional realm and is a factor in the high attrition rates in the industry. But this attempt to discipline the mind and the body of the employees also engenders resistance that is a crucial aspect of the identities of the workers in this industry. Often overtly but mostly covertly, employees within this industry devise ingenious ways to create a breathing space for themselves. They then use this space to subvert the structures of power that seek to police them.

Agency Within Indian Call Centers

While there is enough evidence to support claims about the corporeal and affective disciplining of call center employees, there are also aspects of this industry that interrupt this dominant narrative. These features within the industry are perhaps not the predominant ones but need to be noted nevertheless. Highlighting them will give us a better picture of the social complexities that the growth of this industry is entangled within.

To begin with, many working in this industry concede that it has provided a means of upward mobility for a section of the society that would largely have remained unemployed without the growth of this industry. Maya Singh, a voice and accent trainer with a call center in Noida, Delhi disputes the representation of the call centers as sweatshops claiming that the critique comes from a position of privilege. "This industry has created a new middle class," claims Singh. "Most kids working in this industry come from small-town India,

who have learnt English and have a real shot at upward mobility. I had a trainee whose father was a vegetable vendor and who would not have a chance of getting a job and making a career if it were not for this industry". Most crucially, says Singh, the industry has provided a space for women to go outside the traditional confines of their home and work. "They often have to fight against huge odds to do the job but this possibility would not have existed without this industry," she argues. One such woman profiled in the documentary *1800 – India* is Santosh Kohli who having come from a lower-middle class background knew little English and faced staunch opposition from her family when she chose to work. That opposition gradually gave way to acceptance and then enthusiastic support, as Kohli became the sole breadwinner of the family, even supporting the education of her younger brothers. As opposed to having been married off, as was the plan, Kohli today has learnt English and is a caller. Her being a part of the workforce is not entirely a celebratory move given the newer set of power relations that she is inscribed within and the newer ways in which her gendered body is still policed by global capital. In that sense she has perhaps only moved from one modality of patriarchal regulation to another. However, in her assertion of her right to step out of her house and be treated equal to the men in her workplace, she manages to assert agency.

In complicating the picture of the call center industry, we must be wary of romanticizing any idea of empowerment and resistance. My point is that while testimonies of empowerment can in no way counter the pernicious structures of regulation and discipline within the industry, they do present us with moments that problematize the dominant narrative of power. Keeping in tension the twin ideas of structure on the one hand and continuous challenges to it on the other gives us a clearer picture of the role that this industry has come to play within

the Indian society. That these challenges exist in different forms, of course, is clear to any scholar of the field.

For instance, when Derek Foster, the American expatriate in Mumbai, was given the task of training employees in American cultural norms, he set about presenting a view that soon positioned him at odds with the managers at his call center. Having given up the American way of life for India, Foster sought out to bust the myth prevalent among the trainees that the culture they were going to cater to was inherently superior to theirs. "I tried to tell them that the society they were going to cater to was a highly dysfunctional one. It privileged a lifestyle that got people into debt so that the predators could then come and suck on them," he explains adding, "The students needed to know what their own culture had to offer to the world". Foster's subversive training did not last long and his immense popularity among his students when combined with his teaching methods soon got him transferred out of training to providing "floor support" where he had to swivel around in a chair moving from one caller to another supervising their accent, a job he despised. While Foster's brief attempt to challenge conventional training methods may not have made a huge difference to the larger structures within the industry, it does provide us a moment within global capital where agency was asserted. Foster's case was not unique since interviews with several trainers revealed that they sought ways to assert themselves within the standardized training modules provided to them by the Indian company and the western clients.

These acts of resistance appear not only within the experiences and testimonies of the trainers but that of the callers as well. The pressure to meet targets and do it while keeping high customer satisfaction ratings is one of the most strenuous aspects of their job. Customers voluntarily choose to rate callers and a bad rating can be caused by anything from the inability to provide correct

information to an accent. Hence, perhaps the most ingenious, even though clearly unethical, act of resistance performed by these employees is in devising ways to give themselves high ratings from their customers without them knowing about it. Tahil Rao who worked with a call center in Bangalore narrates how this was common enough a practice in his call center for there to be a widespread investigation of the employees. "They learnt how to figure out the loopholes and hack into accounts," he explains adding, "It was a huge breach of confidence". Rao was a part of the investigative team set up to find out the extent of the "malpractice" and his inquiry led to several people getting fired. While the compromising of customers' personal information is clearly difficult to defend, this collective and planned strategy to circumvent the requirement for high customer satisfaction scores highlights a situated challenge to power.

And while a collective breach of customer information such as the above is usually quelled before word gets out, there are cases when such acts make the news as well. Such acts of resistance can often be termed "unethical" and "unprofessional" in business parlance. However, they help buttress the point that employees working in these centers are not submissive cogs in the capitalist machinery. When George Bates of Bristol had an unpleasant experience with an Indian call center operator regarding his bank account last year, Bates decided to rate the operator poorly in the customer satisfaction survey. The reason for the poor scores was the agent's "strong Asian accent" and the fact that he was "unhelpful, rude and arrogant" (IANS, 10/30/08). Refusing to take it lying down, the said employee (whose name was not released by the bank) hacked into Bates account and changed his identity with "a Ugandan divorcee ten years his senior". News accounts said that, "The next day, Bates could not access his account while an ATM machine swallowed his debit card. When he went to Abbey Bank's branch he was shocked to know his identity had been changed to

that of an Ugandan divorcee 10 years his senior" (IANS, 10/30/08). Despite him being compensated monetarily for the harassment, Bates switched his account to a bank "with call centers in Britain". This incident of identity theft - arguably a recurring nightmare in this age of digitized capitalism - must be located within the networks of power within globalization. The harassment faced by Bates in the case must be juxtaposed with the conditions that led the employee to seek revenge.

Episodes such as the above show empowered individuals who are continuously seeking ways to create a space for themselves even as the structure of the industry seeks to pigeonhole them. That they must resort to "unethical" means to create that space is perhaps a pointer to the fact that the scales of power are heavily weighing against them leaving them with little choice in the means of resistance. But resistance need not always take the form of so called unethical or illegal actions.

Conversations with callers show that far from being cowed down by hostile customers they find subtle ways to coerce and even bully their customers to get a desired result. Having gradually discovered cultural nuances about the American life, callers become experts in exploiting the weaknesses of their customers. Nipun Khosla who heads a team of agents in a collection firm provides an instance of this strategy. "For the religious minded Sunday is important because it is God's day and having the first call in the morning come from a debt collector is extremely distasteful to them. We use that to hit their ego by giving them the choice of paying up if they wanted us to stop calling". Another strategy used by callers to "keep the conversation going" is to show their power in offering discounts to customers. While these discounts are usually miniscule they help give the callers an edge over the customers thus shifting the power balance. Scholars have only infrequently studied these ingenious

strategies of turning the tables on customers. These narratives however must be placed alongside critiques of global capital since these juxtapositions help us move away from a binary view of global power. This position is supported by scholars such as Mirchandani (2004) who conclude that, "Rather than assuming that certain forces automatically represent 'power' and others represent 'resistance', I identify the ways in which individuals are intrinsically connected and embedded within what could be understood as a web of diverse resistant forces". This complicated analysis helps her see agency in the role of managers, customers as well as the employees of call centers in India. From figuring out mechanisms to discover when a phone call is being listened into by their bosses to finding out ways to distance oneself from the conversation and terminate it, employees are constantly negotiating and pushing back against the imposition of power within these call centers.

Highlighting instances of agency and resistance furthers our understanding of the construction of identities within the call center workplace. If identity construction is a work of negotiation between discursive and material structures and subjects positioned within those structures, instances of power must be juxtaposed with those of resistance. The former invariably creates conditions for the latter to exist.

Conclusion

Given the innumerable dimensions of the nature of work within the call center industry any study of the industry in India cannot be a comprehensive one. I have chosen to focus on issues of cultural and linguistic training, corporeal and affective regulation as well resistances to those modes of regulation in order to understand the process of identity construction by the employees. I assume identity to be a process of dialogic construction (Basi 2009) whereby we are

continuously in the process of identifying with positions, histories, cultures and structures (Hall 1996). This process of identification is inherently contingent and fluid. I have sought to show that the multifarious aspects of work in the call center industry allows for a multitude of possibilities of identity construction. By no means does the existence of these possibilities call for a celebration of enabling forces of global capital. But their existence does show that globalization is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to capture through the classical notions of power. Newer conceptions of power that show its ability to morph and hegemonize itself (Hardt & Negri, 2000) are far more fruitful in understanding how subjects are constructed by transnational forces such as the move of the call center industry from the west to India. Hence while subjects are co-opted by global power structures to serve its interests, that co-optation is continuously subverted. Keeping these simultaneous movements in tension responds to the need for newer theoretical tools in order to understand what scholars such as Hardt and Negri (2000) have called "network power".

In analyzing the construction of employees' identities my study works with the implicit assumption that the category of "Indian" identity was never stable to begin with. But that the experiences of workers in these call centers introduces an entirely new level of complexity to the already multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural construction of an Indian identity. It has been the goal of my study to show how this new level of complexity interacts with psychic residues of history deposited through traces of language and culture in the conscious and the subconscious realm of subjects (Gandhi 1998). Working in the call center industry necessitates tapping those residues of language and culture and layering those with newer ones to form a palimpsest that results from the interaction of the past and the present. While the English language is the most obvious realm where this interaction occurs it operates just as powerfully in the

realm of culture. The interrelationship of language and culture ensures that the training of the employees in either one allows seepage of the other. As they seek to push against discursive structures that seek to define them, subjects in the Indian call center industry show that any true analysis of global changes must keep structure and agency in a continual productive tension.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have explored the Indian cultural landscape with the goal of unearthing the role played both by India's history and the ongoing process of globalization within it. By conducting an in-depth study of three distinct cultural phenomena that represent both a globalizing India as well as showcase the influence of India's colonial past, I have sought to argue that India's emerging central role within the ongoing process of globalization is explained as much by rapid advances in media and communication technologies as it is by a continuation of historical structures that facilitate that global integration. I have shown how each of these cultural phenomena reveals traces of a colonial history in the cultural and linguistic elements within them. My study finds a manifestation of these traces in the ways in which subjects within these cultural practices imagine themselves and negotiate their identities. I show that in each of these instances individuals are continuously constructing their Indian-ness as they participate in the cultural flows that comprise the phenomenon of globalization. They are continuously switching codes, simultaneously inhabiting multiple worlds and resisting labels that seek to situate them within pre-existing categories.

While this negotiation is an invariable part of life for citizens living in the "scapes" (Appadurai 1997) that global interchanges have brought about, its unique manifestations in India provide a rich case for the study of processes by which power is exercised and resisted within globalization. By exploring how young musicians playing rock music in India must perform their Indian-ness in their singing and their lyrics, in studying the representation of Indian social identity on the Indian version of Big Brother, and finally by analyzing how employees within Indian call centers must continuously switch between their

Indian and western selves, I hope to have shed light on what cultural globalization means for those involved in the consumption, production and transmission of culture. In these negotiations and re-articulations of their identities, these subjects resist attempts by pre-existing structures to interpellate them. By defining themselves on their own terms and reconfiguring the boundaries of authentic Indian-ness these actors are representative of the conditions of living within the flux of global flows.

In each of these instances a norm of what Indian identity should be is subverted as global culture must acknowledge the local specificities of the site of its adoption and must Indianize. In the case of rock, even as the musicians carve a space for themselves within the cultural landscape of India, they can only do so by introducing uniquely Indian social and cultural motifs within their music. In the case of the Indian version of Big Brother, the program learns from the failure of the first season to adapt its second season to more accurately reflect the Indian social landscape. In so doing it also replicates a social split thus perpetuating conflicts on the show that allow it to garner much higher ratings than the first season. In my last case of call centers in India I show how the concept of a “neutral accent” allows employees to define it on their own terms and thus introduce agency within a structure that seeks to impose an artificial accent on them. The ingenious ways in which employees negotiate attempts to impose a western cultural garb on them allows me to show the dialogic construction of identity.

By showing instances of localization in each of these cases of global culture, my study also seeks to add to the dominant theories of global cultural hegemony. I show that mere access to and availability of cultural products is no guarantee of its success in a new cultural location. In particular the cases of rock and Big Brother in India reminds us that the translation of culture from one

location to another is a far more complicated process than those fearful of a standardization of the world would have us believe. While I do not entirely negate the role of power and political economy within global culture, my case studies give pause to arguments about people embracing a new form of culture merely because it is available. Availability is clearly a factor but cannot on its own determine the uptake of a cultural product in a new setting. The next step of localization is far more difficult and must be able to tap into key cultural nuances that allow a global cultural product to resonate with pre-existing cultural expectations. A survey of the global flow of culture would undoubtedly show that there are as many instances of successful translation as there are instances of unsuccessful ones. While cases of failed cultural adaptation are sober reminders to theorists that posit cultural flows as a unidirectional and hegemonic process, examples of successful localization of culture allow scholars to probe the dialectic of power and agency within them. It is within this second category that I position my three case studies.

The operation of power and resistances against it visible in each of my case studies also show the power/agency binary to be an unstable one within the arena of cultural globalization. That power exists in the global cultural realm presupposes that those caught within its folds will necessarily push back against it. Hence my case studies disprove imaginations about a unilaterally imposed dominance within global culture. They show that repetition of culture is impossible without the production of difference and in that production of difference a space for movement opens up. Power and agency appear as two sides of the same coin and are necessarily inseparable. One can choose to study the operation of power or the presence of agency but to claim that the arena of global culture is determined by one or the other is to work with a false binary that unravels as soon as it is posed. This realization is true as much for the arena

of global culture as it is for the morphing nature of power in contemporary age itself.

As Foucault shows us in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) as well as in *A History of Sexuality* (1978), this ability to morph signifies the move from the classical to a disciplinary notion of power when its ability to brutally take life gives way to a modality where power asserts itself by investing in life. Analyzing the transformation in the systems of punishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Foucault sees a shift from punishment of the body to a targeting of the soul. This shift goes alongside an alteration in the goal of the judicial system from punishing the crime to understanding the nature of the crime itself. Consequently, this shift is also accompanied by a growth in disciplines that made the human an object of knowledge production. The growth of a “scientifico-legal complex” (23) made “man an object of knowledge for a discourse with a ‘scientific’ status” (24) leading to Foucault’s claim that power and knowledge become crucially tied together. The growth of this epistemic field ensured that the goal of power changed from taking life to having a stake in nurturing it. He explains, “It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility” (1978, p.144).

This change is epochal because it heralds a new mode of subject formation. The subject of disciplinary societies must be simultaneously nurtured as well as dominated over initiating a technology that has been called bio-power. In this new relationship, power “invests them, is transmitted by them and through them, it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them” (1977, p. 27). Its *raison d'être* is the very subject that it must both nurture and control. It is “bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to

impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (1978, p. 136). This "micro-physics" of power operates locally and is contingent on the specificities of the site of its operation, always risking its own inversion through counter struggles. It is distributed and diffused, an absent presence that takes on different forms at each site of engagement with its counter.

This prescient analysis of the mutation of power is further extended by Gilles Deleuze (1992), who proclaims the transcendence of disciplinary societies into societies of control. Societies of control are marked by the arrival of a digitized environment and are symbolized by the age of the computer and the Internet. Here power becomes even more slippery and its ability to inscribe bodies more total. Control societies move from the factory to the corporation where "Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt". As opposed to the prison (a crucial aspect of disciplinary societies) which is an enclosure, "controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point". Its ability to metamorphose makes it more pervasive and ubiquitous.

In their re-theorization of power, both Foucault and Deleuze provide us with a vocabulary that helps complicate contemporary understandings of how global subjects negotiate their identities within transnational flows of culture. This new understanding cannot speak of power without simultaneously taking into account resistances posed to it. Notably, the fact that this conception of power allows a space for negotiation by subjects does not make it any less pernicious. The key question is not whether the classical or the newer modality of power is more oppressive but rather which of the two is more effective in regulating subjects. As it appropriates its countercurrent within its folds and hegemonizes itself, power within disciplinary and control societies is more devious and covert. So much so that its perfection renders "its actual exercise

unnecessary" (1977 p. 201). Resistances to it challenge it but also allow it to mutate, change in form and hence operate in newer ways. Just as forces of resistance need a locus to operate against, power continuously needs its counter in order to prevail. It continuously produces its Other in order both to operate upon and to mystify its mode of operation.

These attempts to engage with the nature of power allow me to transcend the dialectic of power and agency that run through my case studies. They give me new categories to understand the experiences of subjects within my case studies. They help explain the idea that subjects could both be interpellated within structures of global capital while still creating spaces for subversion within it. That global culture must localize in order to find new audiences is a necessary condition for its propagation. Meeting that condition both shows its ability to morph but also simultaneously creates space for movement by subjects. My case studies show the power/agency binary to not be an either/or one but to be a both/and one. It is a symbiotic relationship and my attempt has been to show the interaction of the two poles of that binary within the identity construction of subjects.

In so doing, my analysis is an addition to similar attempts to understand the phenomenon of global cultural integration that the past two decades have heralded. In their localization, my case studies and the subjects participating within them inhabit the third space. The lives of those dwelling within this interstitial site challenge notions of a permanent and stable idea of belonging. Clearly, since there remain very few places untouched by the global sway of capital and culture today, India is not the only site where the existence of this liminal space is visible. Hence, even while located in India, I believe the lessons of my study can be tailored to speak to other sites as well. My study provides pointers for similar attempts at in-depth exploration of locations that face a pull

of multiple forces. The effect of this multitude of influences on humans caught within their crosshairs remains an untapped aspect for research on the globalization of culture. While celebratory accounts of globalization highlight its liberatory potential for allowing new possibilities for citizens around the world, and bleak prognoses tell us accounts of imposition of a hegemonic culture over pre-existing “pure” cultures, the intricacies of the human dimension involved in these changes often remains lost in these studies. By bringing a first-hand account about how those caught in the thick of these changes negotiate with it, my study seeks to complicate earlier attempts. I show that irrespective of whether they resist it or choose to embrace it, the mere fact of engaging with difference changes those involved in the process. In that sense the idea of an unsullied pure culture is as much a myth today as ever. No doubt, imbalances within structures of global cultural institutions ensure that not all sites encounter difference equally. The practices of code switching that subjects in my case study participate in may not be just as visibly prevalent everywhere but the ability and the requirement to do so is an increasingly widespread phenomenon.

In seeking to trace the influence of history in determining the present moment, I have also made a gesture towards a psycho-social formation that I seek to explore in my future work. The subjects of my study simultaneously participate in and constitute this formation. This cultural sensibility is characterized by the inability to belong and is destined to keep those within it in a state of perpetual flux. Claims for the existence of a formation must engage with empirical questions of its existence. How widespread is this formation and what evidence can one present for its existence? In seeking to make a case for such a social structure, I situate it within the psychic realm of the subjects involved in its formation. It is within this space that traces of the past continue to exist and inform and influence the present. This analogy of the simultaneous co-

existence of the past with the present in the human mind is a key contribution of *Civilization and Its Discontents* where Sigmund Freud (1961) locates the origin of neuroses to the coming into being of human civilization itself. He sketches a portrait of the human mind as a palimpsest where the new cannot entirely conceal the presence of the old. The key reason for human misery is an old struggle between the individual and the society. Tracing the history of this struggle he elaborates that, “a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals” (49). This clash, that the society invariably wins, nevertheless ensures a perpetual insatiability of human desires – a yearning that continues long after the struggle had been resolved. The society, the very necessity of human existence, is also the source of most human miseries. He explains,

“Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains united against all separate individuals.” (49).

Having learnt to tame those instincts that militate against the society’s cultural ideals, humans nevertheless continue to display symptoms that arise from having repressed those instincts through the old struggle. Human behavior has been gradually disciplined and even though aberrations to that disciplining continue to crop up, the imposition of social “order” necessitates that “a regulation has been laid down once and for all” (46) and it must be obeyed in the future. These unthinking repetitions of social norms remain rooted in a history that sought to subdue an individual’s desires for the larger social good. The irruption of these suppressed desires as neurotic behavior is a sign that the past continues to persist in the present. While Freud’s theorizations frequently vacillate between incisive insights and speculative prose, his attempts to think deep into the human mind is akin to Leela Gandhi’s (1998) method of anamnesis

and useful for my future work. To seek in the cultural patterns of the psycho-social formation of the liminal post-colonial space in India, traces of its historical past is an attempt to unearth a “shrunk residue” (15), a sediment beyond the realm of the visible.

My dissertation is inspired by the motivation to analyze this state of being, this postcolonial condition. This condition destines one to cohabit two simultaneous worlds. It allows its inhabitants the psychic flexibility to switch from one modality of being to another. It comes into being due to the continuation of a subjectivity created due to the institution of a new regime of power. Scholars (Bhabha 1994; Nandy 1989; Fanon 1963) have elaborated on the nature of these changes in the colonial times and its continuation within the postcolonial period (Gandhi 1998). My study builds upon the foundations laid by these scholars to argue that, “in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances...it can once more be brought to light” (Freud 1961, p. 17). While scholars have conclusively established the formation of a unique colonial subjectivity among the colonized natives, its continuation in the postcolonial times is a project that requires interrogation. The predictable and the unpredictable ways in which these traces continue to manifest themselves within the mundane cultural practices of Indian subjects is a project that requires much work. By using Freud’s theorization of the human mind as an analogy for the psycho-social formation of postcoloniality I do not intend to present the latter as a neurosis. Instead I seek to use his argument about the simultaneous co-existence of the past and the present to make a case for a similar simultaneity within the postcolonial condition.

Exploring this co-existence more vigorously would necessitate a closer analysis of different aspects of the cultural formation in India. While my project

has been limited to analyzing three cases of global culture in India, the vastness of the cultural scene opens itself up for many similar explorations of the interactions between the past and the present. The condition of postcoloniality is palpable throughout the social landscape of a globalizing India. While its appearance in the realm of post-colonial literature has been well analyzed, my goal is to extend this exploration of the continuation of the past in the psychic space of the postcolonial subject. In order to be able to explore this condition more convincingly one could interrogate the existence of this split-subjectivity within other social spaces such as the predominant realm of Indian cinema, the realm of sports (Appadurai's analysis of the uptake of Cricket is a crucial pointer), the realm of politics, and the realm of education. How does the postcolonial condition become visible within these separate yet interconnected aspects of Indian life? What are the ways in which we can unearth the existential conflicts exhibited by the subjects of my study within these other theaters of identity negotiation and construction?

While ambitious, any larger project that seeks to make a claim for a social whole must explore as many representative aspects of that social milieu as possible. While each of these aspects will be irreducible to another, there will also be similarities in the ways in which the past and the present interact within them. Unraveling these interactions, while eschewing both entirely celebratory and entirely bleak readings of globalization, provide us a far more accurate portrayal of the intricacies within a globalizing site. To ignore the role of this historical aspect would be to allow one aspect, that of rapid technological changes, to determine explanations of global cultural flows. Instead, a far more nuanced explanation of these changes juxtaposes these recent changes with the historical specificities of the sites. To invoke a phrase from Michel Foucault, such a project

does not view the past from the vantage point of the present but instead seeks to write a "history of the present" (Foucault 1977, p. 31).

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