

British South Asian Cinema and Identity I

‘Nostalgia in the Post-National: Contemporary British Cinema and the South-Asian Diaspora’



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Introduction

Over the next two issues, I shall set out my theories regarding identification in a series of successful British South-Asian hybrid films from *East is East* to *Bride and Prejudice*. The first article centres upon the concept of nostalgia as it is represented in three films which epitomise the way in which contemporary, and hybrid, British cinema has tackled issues of diasporic identities, in these cases, that of the South-Asian diaspora. The second, article, then, will bring some of these issues up to date by discussing the tensions between the aspirations towards American success and specifically Indian familial identities and how these are problematised throughout Gurinder Chandha's British South-Asian films. In collecting these two articles together, as twin sequels to my work on *Bhaji on the Beach* in *Picturing South Asian Culture in English* (Open House Press, 2003), I want to establish a discourse upon British South-Asian films and filmmakers which recognises the subtleties of representing issues which are for many difficult to articulate and to broach. I also seek to illustrate how the hybridity of contemporary British cinema is not simply a matter of cross-cultural representation or fulfilling the 'ethnic minority' criteria by which the Arts Council seem to solely define 'diversity' in recent times but that it is, like all art, the complex combination of the small details which belong to many homes and which adapt to create another. That, in a sense, contemporary British cinema is inherently driven by diasporic and intertextual sensibilities which persistently allude to something lost, 'homelike', in the past.

Nostalgia in the Post-National

In this article, I shall discuss three comparatively recent films about the experience of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain; two of which are set in the 1970s (but in very different communities) - *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999) and *Anita and Me* (Metin Hüseyin, 2003) - and, the third, contemporarily set, *Bend it Like Beckham*

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(Gurinder Chadha, 2002). Each of these films explores the diasporic experience quite differently and represents distinct sub-cultural inflections based upon religion, region and period. However, one of the significant factors in these diaspora films is that they are also rooted deeply in the generic and narrative traditions of British cinema. I shall begin by examining the theoretical frameworks behind recent thinking upon diaspora cinema, the post-national and nostalgia and then move on to analyse the films themselves, seeking to answer the following question through linking the narratives to the generic conventions the films adhere to: why are recent British films, and especially those about the South-Asian community more rooted in the iconographies and ideologies of the past?

Films which represent the South-Asian and other post-colonial diasporas have been little examined as a body for their diasporic properties. Rather, as part of the critical appraisal of the mid-'90s and as part of the renaissance of new British cinema, they have been analysed, limitedly, in terms of a reshaping of the British national cinema. Which is what John Hill claims still exists, albeit transformed by changes in society:

[We should not] underestimate the possibilities for a national cinema to re-imagine the nation, or rather nations within Britain, and also to address the specificities of a national culture in a way that does not presume a homogeneous and 'pure' national identity.

Hill (1997: 252)

However, the very term 'national cinema' makes certain assumptions about commonality and national characteristics, which can be problematic for contemporary British cultural forms. 'Traditional assumptions about national identity and unity [...] have become less and less tenable', wrote John Corner and Sylvia Harvey over a decade ago:

For increasing access to education in the post-war period and the circulation of information and ideas by a public service broadcasting system committed (at its best) to the principles of free enquiry, have created social space for the/ recognition of differences of language, of culture, of class experience and values, of family and domestic life experienced as differentially restful or laborious.

Corner and Harvey (1991: 12-13)

In the last few years, the challenging of these assumptions has contributed towards a debate surrounding the nature of a British national cinema and what it means to discuss British culture more widely. These debates are not, however, local to Britain but can be seen as part of the wider mobility in societies, which is the result of centuries of encroaching globalisation. Globalisation is a term that has a particular postmodernist flavour to it, referring to the pastiche cultures of the west and McDonaldisation. It is a term which expresses concern with the Americanisation of the world as an economic, military and cultural 'superpower' and recognises the colonisation of global cultures which Americanisation has achieved. However, globalisation should be understood as one system by which the Western cultures have

overridden Eastern cultural tropes through waves of Empire building. Consequently, there is a certain irony in Britain's concerns about national identity as the Empire culture it shaped is overtaken by another and the vestiges of the Empire have come calling:

The long history of colonialism and imperialism has brought large populations of migrants and refugees from the Third to the First World. Whereas Europe once addressed Africa and Asia across vast distances, now that 'Other' has installed itself within the very heart of the western metropolis. Through a kind of reverse invasion, the periphery has infiltrated the colonial core. The protective filters of time and space have disappeared, and the encounter with the 'alien' and the 'exotic' is now instantaneous and immediate.

Kevin Robbins, in Corner and Harvey (1991: 32)

Thus, the cultural influence of the diaspora from South-Asia, in Britain, over the last fifty years, should be seen as being just as significant in contemporary British cultural forms as any Americanisation of British youth sub-cultures. Which is why the assumptions surrounding national identity and a national cinema, a homogeneous society and British stereotypes have not only weakened any argument about national cinema and its tropes but have also been built upon false grounding. If there is one thing British cinema has always revealed, even when there have been no characters who might be designated racially 'Other', it is that what makes Britain work as an entity, become more than its component nations, is the co-operation of disparate peoples for a common purpose. Take, for example, the British war films upon which Andrew Higson (1995), Marcia Landy (1991) and Sarah Street (1997) build their arguments for a British national cinema which represented a shared and homogenised culture, such as *This Happy Breed* (David Lean, 1944): many of these films actively use Otherness of class and region, if not nationality, to show how the *system* of Britain is an Empire across its own societies as well as those in South-Asia or Africa. Consequently, the cinema which Britain has produced has always been more and less of a national cinema, it has been Imperial, post-Imperial and, as postmodernism fragments identification with anything other than an American, again false, national identity, it becomes post-national.

The concept of post-national cinema is a comparatively new way of thinking about British cinema but can be traced back to the mid-1990s with the beginnings of a more critical analysis of what has become known as 'heritage cinema' (films such as those made by Merchant Ivory, especially their EM Forster adaptations). This criticism reached a peak in the label 'anti-heritage cinema', which was applied *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1996) and *Elizabeth* (Shepak Kapur, 1998) by writers such as Pamela Church-Gibson (2000), Higson (2000) and Street to describe the changes in political, narrative and editing styles which could be seen in the British costume dramas of the *new* British cinema. These films were less reverent of their source material, be that Jane Austen's novel or the historical records surrounding Elizabeth I, and, like *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998), were more contemporary in their critique of past beliefs through the heightening of proto-feminist characters into visionaries of the future. Also, in purely filmic terms, the pace of editing and use of hand held cameras was increased, making the films, whilst still visually impressive, less about place or space and more about the individuals which filled it. Thus, the

‘anti-heritage cinema’ set about negating the narrative components of nationhood in the costume drama in favour of a hybrid which was more closely related to the Gainsborough and Twentieth-Century melodramas of the 1940s than the biographies and epic landscape films made from the early 1970s to *Howard’s End* in 1992. The hybrid components were contemporary editing and politics, often non-British directors, a pastiche of the past and a focus upon character. The pastiche of the past, however, was not about nostalgia but about a postmodernist, symbolic, imitation of heritage which made it ironic and more active within the film *mise-en-scène* than it had previously been. Consequently, the post-national, as part of the anti-heritage dialectic of contemporary British dramas, seeks to use a pastiche of the past to question the present and is central to any debate surrounding heritage and identity.

The place of the nostalgic within the post-national, however, should be understood as performing another function in terms of the British cinema and those films made from within the diaspora. The term nostalgia means ‘homesickness’ (Tana Wollen in Corner and Harvey, 1991:182) and is not the temporally specific term we use it as most of the time to mean love of the past or the old. Therefore, nostalgia can be witnessed in most films about diasporas from all exoduses. The form this homesickness takes in diaspora films can vary a great deal. It can manifest itself through a literal longing for the home which has been left, an emphasis upon comparing the new and old homes, and a clinging to the iconographies and beliefs of home which is less about any cultural superiority and more about a community which can be said to still share a common culture. Thus, in narrative terms, the key structural devices used to represent nostalgia are memory and formal hybridity. This is one reason why two of the most popular films about British South Asians have been set in the past, in the early 1970s, at a time when *most* adult South Asians in Britain were immigrants and their children the first to battle with cultural conflicts born from generational differences. British South Asian diaspora films *are* hybrid, Higson’s chief identifier of a post-national cinema in his 2000 essay ‘The Instability of the National’. They manifest a complex of mixture of cultural influence through style (British social realism and Bollywood fantasy, for example in *Bhaji on the Beach* – Chadha, 1993), content (the generation divide over religions, as in *My Son the Fanatic* – Udayan Prasad, 1997) and genre (British kitchen-sink, Restoration farce and Road Movie - again *Bhaji on the Beach*) but they are a cinema of immigration and immigrants. These films, made by directors, writers and actors born in Britain but of South-Asian (or Other) extraction, reflect the cultural emphasis, within the diaspora cultures, of the spiritual, if not the literal, ‘home’.

Anita and Me and the peacocks.

In approaching the concept of ‘home’ in the South-Asian diaspora movie it is useful to examine the most recent of the three films I referred to in the introduction, Metin Hüseyin’s *Anita and Me*. Based upon Meera Syal’s successful and semi-autobiographical book of the same title (1997), *Anita and Me* is set in the Black Country village of Tollington in the early 1970s, which is described by the protagonist, Meena (played by Chandeepp Uppal) as ‘the jewel of the black country’. Meena’s summer is spent obsessing about the slightly older, blonde and sassy Anita (Anna Brewster), worrying about taking the 11plus and finding a voice as a writer, inspired by Anita, ‘the Yeti’ hidden in the big house and her grandmother’s stories, in a language Meena does not know, of India. There are certain echoes within the

narrative of Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1990) as Meena wishes she was blonde and writes to Jackie magazine about the problem of being 'brown' but the abusive family is not her own, ruled by the 'film star' and the 'princess', her father and mother, but that of Anita and Anita's mother (Kathy Burke) runs off with a carpet salesman from Cannock, away from the never seen husband who beats her. The sadness within Meena's family (and the extended family, which includes her Auntie Shyla, played by Syal) is instead caused by the frustrations of fighting for recognition as immigrants in a racist country. As Shyla says to Meena and the other children: 'You kids, you don't know what we were'. Meena's mother, meanwhile, played by Ayesha Dharker, spends sad hours looking at the moon ('It is the same moon, isn't it?' She asks her husband for consolation) and dreaming of the peacocks in her home village.

Meena's mother: Where I grew up I pulled sugar cane straight from the fields for my breakfast and squirted milk straight from the goat into my tea. We had a cobra underneath the people tree and peacocks on the roof.

Meena (incredulously): A cobra? Peacocks?

Meena's mother: We were a bad combination back there. Too much brains and no rich parents. At least here there are no bribes to pay to get by and... no peacocks.

Meena refuses to believe her mother's story of the peacocks because, to Meena, they seem fantastic; something from her mother's imagination of home which has little to do with reality. Meena's response to the garden (which she wishes was full of flowers and not herbs) is similar to her vision of herself: she wants to be an English rose, like Anita, and be decorative, whilst her mother sees the beauty in the practicalities of the garden they can eat.

As with many diaspora films, food becomes an important marker of culture and the emphasis placed by Meena's mother upon the edible garden as a memory of home is further emphasised by Meena's pleading for fish fingers and chips rather than a curry or dahl on her dinner plate; to which Meena's mother responds: 'English food is easy, you just boil it and it tastes of nothing but this, this fills more than just your tummy'. Thus, for Meena's mother, the food, the garden and even the sight of the same moon, all become signifiers of home and triggers for happier memories as 'the princess' and the 'film star', the teacher and the philosopher, struggle for equality.

The fact the film is set in the past, is purporting, especially as a semi-autobiographical text, to represent Meena's life as a approximation of South-Asian lives of the early '70s and therefore to represent 'history', is one of the key reasons that the homesickness can be elaborated on fully within the narrative and the novelty of the South-Asian immigrant in Britain experimented with. Indeed, the presence of one South-Asian family in a village which contains variants of British stereotypical characters (the shop keeper, the layabout, the caring but ineffective vicar) is a useful metaphor enabling the film to become a 'state of the nation' text. These 'historical' qualities within the film are principally within the mise-en-scène and the interaction of the Kapoor family, and other characters, with wider issues of the time, such as racial violence, a hippy culture greatly influenced by Indian religions and changes in the British landscape. They are aspects that are written into the text to establish period and political context. As Tana Wollen says:

History belongs to writing. Memory on the other hand is produced by recollection and belongs to the oral transmission of personal or local identities which do not require public or written forms of verification. Whereas history is 'work', and for some a profession, memory in non-selective, it can belong to everyone.

Wollen (1991:187)

Thus, the visual cues of *Anita and Me*, the costumes and other de-politicised elements, just as with the repeating motif of the Space Hopper in *East is East*, are part of the film's attempt to elicit a memory based response from the spectator, the temporal understanding of nostalgia to which I referred earlier. Consequently, the mixing of historical and memory based visual imagery within the film, confuse what is written and what is remembered. Wollen continues:

This is why film and television fictions matter politically, especially when issues of national identity are at stake. How then can we locate screen fictions along these distinctive routes to the past: are they history or memory? Since they are not writing, do they belong to the oral tradition preserved by memory?

Ibid, 187.

There is a certain quality of film spectatorship which can be said to rely upon an oral tradition, or retelling the film narrative to those who cannot go to see the film themselves for whatever reason. It is somewhat similar to reading newspapers to those who cannot read or interpreting the stories the *Police Gazette* of the 1880s was telling about Jack the Ripper to an avid audience but the orality within the film's nostalgia is vital in *Anita and Me* as Meena listens to her mother or, in dreamlike state, seems to understand her grandmother finally as she passes on another story about the peacocks' cries on the village rooftops. The oral aspects of the film's narrative are, however, limited to the scenes where memory is being recollected. Indeed, the medias of history, documents, letters, newspapers, are carefully used by the film to subvert memory and South-Asian cultural tropes. Two key examples illustrate this: when the vicar (Mark Williams), 'Uncle Alan', brings a newspaper to Meena's parents with a report on their engineer friend's murder (by Anita's boyfriend on a night of 'Paki-bashing' and chips) it triggers a brief breakdown for Meena's mother; and later, when Meena and the family return from their neighbours' wedding at the end of the film to discover Meena's 11plus results and another envelope, it is the second, addressed to Sharon de Beauvoir which Meena opens first and jumps in joy to, having had a story accepted by Jackie magazine.

In *Anita and Me*, whilst Meena is confused and struggles against her cultural heritage (which is beautifully emphasised by her description of Diwali to her mother in a rote-learned tone), she is not the character who suffers great homesickness and the nostalgia within the film emanates from the adults, the immigrants. As Meena's mother says to Shyla of their view across the countryside, 'The sky and the trees is the closest we get to home, Shyla'. Nevertheless, as the narrative progresses over about a year and

Meena matures, realises her adoration of Anita was built upon a false grounding, and learns to understand her parents more, so her own sense of cultural identity becomes more secure and the home her mother has created for her the cure for her own sickness, wanting to be blonde.

The film opens with Anita and Meena falling off a slippery lakeside into dirty waters as Anita's white shoe floats away. It is somewhat of a MacGuffin, a red herring to encourage the spectator to think a dark ending, despite the comedy is in store, especially when Meena learns who was responsible, in part, for the engineer's murder. The image, leads you into an expectation that the film may perhaps be more like Peter Jackson's 1994 *Heavenly Creatures* in which two girls form an unhealthy close relationship and murder one of their mothers to stay together (which was based upon a real case); but by the time the film's analeptic narrative comes full circle (which is not quite at the film's conclusion) the fall becomes an accident as a result of a fight: and it also becomes the point at which Meena crystallises who she is in relationship to those around her, the point at which she is both culturally secure and individually independent. Anita says to her, trying to explain, 'You're not like the others'. To which Meena replies 'I am the others'.

The vision of the early '70s explored in *East is East* is somewhat different to that in *Anita and Me*, as is its exploration of otherness and the protagonists' tense relationship with British white society and it is to this film I shall now turn to discuss a different model of nostalgia framed by British-Asian diasporic film.

East is East and half a cup of tea

Whilst *Anita and Me* is set in a mining village outside 'Brum', *East is East* is set in the very different urban sprawl of Salford terraces. However, as in Tollington, the Khans, led by the patriarch George (Om Puri) are the only Asian family in a predominantly white neighbourhood illustrated with posters of Enoch Powell. What is different about this family, compared to the other two films in this paper, is that the Khans are a mixed-race family and the difficulties of cultural conflict are magnified by the half English, half Pakistani children. At the root of these conflicts, however, is George's desire that his wife and family follow Moslem practices and traditions, from arranged marriages to the cultural conformity a move to Bradford might represent.

George never tires of voicing how his family *should* behave but he is a hypocrite in his censures as this scene emphasises, and the narrative elsewhere tells the spectator that George has been married twice. He came to Britain to *escape* an arranged marriage to 'the first Mrs Khan'. At the time of the film's release, the characterisation of George was attacked for being so negative, stereotypical and demonising the Moslem father but the writer, Ayub Khan-Din responds, emphasising the autobiographical (again) qualities of the films, that:

I'm sure people will have some criticism about how I portray my father. But at the end of the day, I'm portraying my father, he's not a Pakistani everyman. To a certain extent, this is a man who abandoned his culture and married an English woman, and then decided that his children should marry Pakistanis. So you know, there was huge hypocrisy there.

<http://www.kamera.co.uk/interviews/ayubkhandin.html> (10/06/03)

In the sense of ‘a man who abandoned his culture’, George Khan could reasonably be said to be not very homesick but his hypocrisy does demonstrate a certain variant of nostalgia that I outlined earlier on, the clinging onto iconographies and beliefs not out of respect for them but out of loneliness (hence George’s violence born from frustration and his eulogising of Bradford).

Yet George is, like his children, struggling with cultural confusion, but on a less obvious scale than running from the Mosque bus when it calls. There are three key points to consider: George’s name, the epitome of Englishness in many ways (but ironically we should remember that St. George wasn’t anymore English than George Khan); the chip shop, ‘George’s English Fish and Chips’; and, finally, George’s beloved ‘half a cup of tea’. Every single one of these signifiers of Englishness is imported; the Jewish and Italian diasporas lay claim to introducing Fish and Chips, tea came from India and China, and St. George was Czech. In other words, these signifiers of English culture, the film emphasises are like George’s children, the hybrid results of Empire or other cultures. Thus, *East is East*, set in 1970, in Salford, represents the post-national and anti-heritage argument within British cinema to just as much of an extent as the contemporary setting of *Bend it Like Beckham* or the costumed delirium of *Elizabeth*. In this sense, there is a difference set up in *East is East*, which contrasts greatly with *Anita and Me*. In Hüseyin’s film, there is a clear sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’ established throughout in the dialogue. Interestingly, this is emphasised on both sides of the cultural divide as whilst overt physical violence comes only from white characters (in the shape of the engineer’s murder), the family, especially Shyla, discuss the differences between English and Indian households with disdain if not disgust and Meena’s line ‘I am the others’ places her firmly on the side of her family. In *East is East*, however, because the family literalises the racial dialectic, what is interesting is the extent to which the children view their South-Asian culture negatively (for example when Sajid cries, running to the door, ‘the Pakis are coming!’) and how his sister Meenah loathes wearing the sari her aunt has sent her from Pakistan.

Nevertheless, George seems out-of-date to contemporary audiences and it is perhaps right to question the extent to which Ayub-Din’s critical representation of his father may have damaged more realistic representations of what many Western cultural critics consider, within their own prejudices, a potentially already harmful patriarchal culture.

In the last section of this analysis, I shall examine how these anachronisms extend into Gurinder Chadha’s 2002 film *Bend it Like Beckham* and how this anachronistic approach to characterisation, especially within the contexts of father-figures modelled on the writers’ own fathers, is another, perhaps even more complex, form of nostalgia.

Bend it Like Beckham and the anachronistic father

Bend it Like Beckham is the one contemporary set film within this article but it is also the one which raises the most questions about nostalgia, memory and diaspora

filmmaking. The protagonist of the film, Jess (Parminder Nagra) wants to play football professionally, dreams of playing with Manchester United and confides her most secret thoughts to a poster of David Beckham on her bedroom wall. She is invited to join the Hounslow Harriers' women's football team after being spotted by their captain, the blonde, athletic Jules (Keira Knightley) whilst playing with her male friends in the park. However, she fails to tell her parents, knowing they will disapprove of what they deem immature and unladylike and so ensues a narrative in which the chief momentum is created by find and not be found scenarios, and misunderstandings around lesbianism; all of which finally culminate in a wedding, a football match and Jess and Jules being picked by an American coach to move to a US college scholarship programme.

In many ways *Bend it Like Beckham* is a film which represents the same themes as *East is East* (the struggle for individualism in the potentially smothering family, the frustrated father, the representation of religion at the heart of familial beliefs). However, unlike *East is East*, *Bend it Like Beckham* does not ridicule religion. If anything, the female lead, Jess (Jasminder) is keen not to offend her family or its religious beliefs and the film goes out of its way to parallel Jess's family's problems with those of her white friend, Jules', family. Thus, whilst *East is East* is a film which literalises multiculturalism in the family unit at a time when multiculturalism meant less a mixing of cultures together and more the presence of many cultures, *Bend it Like Beckham* seeks to represent the multicultural society we wish we had through the commonalities between Joe, Jess and Jules, whilst revealing the prejudices of all sides through the families and thus, the lack of integration and hybridity.

One of the techniques the film uses, consciously or unconsciously, to represent the lack of integration and the prejudices from both families is the anachronistic and stereotypical representation of both Jess' and Jules' parents. Juliet Stevenson's cringe-worthy mother to Jules is rather more like Alison Steadman's grotesque in *Abigail's Party* (Mike Leigh, 1976) than any real working-class Hounslow housewife with an accent you could scrape down a blackboard and she initially responds to Jess as Jules' 'exotic' friend, littering her small-talk with references to 'your people' and curries. Later, when she thinks Jules and Jess may be lesbian lovers she becomes even funnier in her mistakes and Malapropisms – but she is still an out-of-date stereotype which you would never see in Hounslow today (which has one of the largest Asian communities in the South-East and, incidentally, the highest rates of protests against marriages in the country). Jess' father, meanwhile, is depicted as a kindly, if sometimes stern figure and is another autobiographical father, with the film overall dedicated to Chadha's late parent. Given that *Bend it Like Beckham* is set contemporarily and *East is East* 30 years earlier, the question is raised about Jess' father, should he not be more like the rebelling sons of George. However, it is in answering this question that comprehending diaspora filmmaking emphasises the political heart of films about the South-Asian community. These are not films about assimilation, adaptation of settlement, but about the immigrant experience and how difference is sustained and repeated rather than broken down (making it a horrific repetition if Kristeva's theories of abjectivity from *Powers of Horror* (1982) are adapted to this scenario). In this sense, this is how diaspora films fit firmly into the tradition of British social films about class and a film such as Jack Clayton's 1959 *Room at the Top*, with few changes, could be remade with a black or a South-Asian

lead. As Karen Alexander reminds us in her essay 'Black British Cinema of the '90s' (Alexander, 2000: 113), *The Full Monty* was originally about a group of black men.

Jess' father's sadness at his treatment overwhelms the argument that has been taking place before his monologue after the wedding but the film does end on an optimistic note with him, Joe (the Harriers' coach) and others playing cricket on the grass in front of their houses.

Cinemas of the British Others

In his 1994 essay on 'National Cinema and Cultural Identity: Ireland and Europe' (McLoone, 1994: 157-158), Martin McLoone, sets out a series of coherent 'overlapping themes' which I believe can, with adaptation, be as accurately applied to South-Asian diaspora films of Britain as, like the cinemas of Ireland, Wales and Scotland, a minority cultural expression. To open out the potential use of these themes, I shall discuss each of the core themes and how they can be applied to the diaspora cinema produced by British South-Asians.

Firstly, McLoone lists 'an interrogation of the rural mythology which underpinned cultural nationalism and its encapsulation in the use of landscape' as a core thematic within Irish film. When Irish films such as *Waking Ned* (Kirk Jones, 1998), albeit filmed on the Isle of Man, are considered within this context, and against the stereotypical imagery of Ireland as a countryside of white thatched cottages, it is easy to see how rural mythologies are important to any representation of Ireland. However, in diaspora films, the rural mythology needs to be adapted to the situation of the South-Asian communities because the mythology of British spaces leads to a space in which the South-Asian immigrant can only ever situate themselves as Other. The, in particular, English spaces of the farmed land, Yorkshire dales and football pitch (seen in each of the three films) are as potent an evocation of cultural nationalism within the landscape as the green hills of Eire and Ulster: and as such, they are further politicised as spaces in which the young protagonists of the film feel a freedom from the origin culture with which they tussle.

The second point which McLoone raises is 'a new concern [of Irish cinema] to represent urban experience which was largely submerged and ignored by this rural mythology'. Admittedly, some of the adaptations in place above for the diaspora film address this concern but within *East is East* and *Bend it Like Beckham* the urban is the dominant space and the South-Asian communities are signified as being part of what defines the change from rural to urban space. In the film *Yasmin* (Peter Cattaneo, 2005), shown to acclaim on Channel Four, this is particularly powerfully rendered through the heroine's repeated journeys in and out of her small town and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the street in which she lives juxtaposed against the space and speed of her daily drive through the hills. The urban, for some South-Asian characters, becomes smothering, especially those who wish to somehow escape their lives. Yet for others, for example George Khan in *East is East* and Jess in *Bend it Like Beckham*, the urban signifies a space which represents the safety of community (although in significantly different ways for each character because Jess' urban environment is indelibly linked to her football ambitions).

The third, and one of the most significant of McLoone's list, in conjunction with his fourth thematic, is 'a [...] desire to reveal the social and political failures of independent Ireland' – for which can be read England. In *East is East* this is richly rendered through the contextualisation of events with Enoch Powell's racist diatribes of the 1960s and 1970s. In *Bend it Like Beckham*, the social and political failings of England are framed through Jess' father's story of rejection on the cricket pitch: and *Anita and Me* highlights the contradictions of English sympathies through the village collection for 'starving babies in Africa'. These political concerns are then heightened through the engagement of the films with religion, McLoone's fourth thematic of Irish cinema 'especially in relation to education and sexuality'. This aspect is perhaps the most significant within the films problematisation of the protagonists' cultural status because there is always a tension between the largely secular English culture and the religious culture of the families within the three films. Religion, as another marker of difference, is addressed clearly with scenes of worship (or its evasion) by the characters and, in *East is East* the difficulties of assimilation into the English culture are expressed interestingly through the use of the catholic parade as a cipher for the role of religious education in Britain: all ceremony and little meaning. It is only really in *Anita and Me* where religion is tackled head-on via the confused subjectivity of Meena and the role played by 'Uncle Alan' throughout the film as the comedy vicar; who ultimately departs from Tollington to save the world in his VW camper-van.

McLoone's fifth theme, and the one which brings the focus of the analysis back to the concept of nostalgia with South-Asian diaspora cinema, is the 'interrogation of Irish history and Irish tradition, especially the manner in which these have been used to construct notions of identity'. In each of the three texts, the older generations are marked by their constant emphasis upon the link between the past, home and identity: history is home echoed through the stories of grandparents and suckled by the children of the films and it is not without significance that it is only once Meena's machete wielding grandmother has visited that the young girl mysteriously acquires the ability to speak Punjabi overnight.

In the hybridity of the post-national British cinema, the voices of the Other can be heard more powerfully, whether it is Renton's rant in the Scottish hills in *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1994) or Meena plaintively crying 'I am the Others' as Anita falls head first into the river. These voices of the Other are important if British cinema is to develop a voice beyond the stereotypical forms most of the audience recognise: just as the British New Wave of the 1950s and 60s had the ability to shape narration and influence subject matter, so has the hybrid cinema of the post-national.

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