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Theorizing identity in transnational and diaspora cultures: A critical approach to acculturation

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the various ways in which the concept of “diaspora” has important implications for rethinking traditional notions of acculturation in Psychology. In this paper, we argue that the idea of a fixed, invariant, and apolitical notion of acculturation dominates much of Psychology, and as such it needs to be revised and reexamined in light of transnational migration and global movements. Drawing on our previous and current scholarship on acculturation and identity [Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2001). Rethinking “acculturation” in relation to diasporic cultures and postcolonial identities. *Human Development*, 44, 1–17; Bhatia, S., & Ram, A. (2004). Culture, hybridity and the dialogical self: Cases from the South-Asian diaspora. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 11(3), 224–241; Bhatia, S. (2007a). *American Karma: Race, culture, and identity and the Indian diaspora*. New York, NY: New York University Press; Bhatia, S. (2008). Rethinking culture and identity in psychology: Towards a transnational cultural psychology. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 28, 301–322], we provide a counterargument to models of acculturation that claim that all immigrants undergo a universal psychological process of acculturation and adaptation. More specifically, we show how members from the Indian diaspora reexamined their acculturation status after the events of 9/11. We use interdisciplinary research to critically examine the role of race in the acculturation process. In addition, we provide a new analytical framework to understand the larger structural forces that shape the acculturation and assimilation process of transnational and diasporic migrants.

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1. Introduction

In Bharati Mukherjee's (1989) well-known novel, *Jasmine*, the female protagonist is an illegal immigrant woman from India. Plotting a linear trajectory, the novel traces the “progress” of Jyoti to Jase and finally to Jane Ripplemeyer as she evolves from a barely educated Punjabi village girl to the lover of a rich Iowan banker comfortable in cooking pot roast and attending Lutheran church quilt exhibitions. This is a narrative of adaptation and assimilation. By decontextualizing and dehistoricizing the migrant experience, Mukherjee offers a tale of serendipity and survival. The Indian immigrant woman is reinvented as cosmopolitan and western, apparently having very little difficulty casting off any trappings of cultural identity. The story of Jasmine parallels much of mainstream acculturation research, where the migrant experience is presented in terms a series of phases that must culminate with a successful incorporation into the host culture. In this article,

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we reconsider mainstream acculturation research in the light of the recent emerging literature on diasporas. Using interview narratives as cases we demonstrate alternative ways to think about the distinct but related concepts of “acculturation” and “immigrant identity.” Our aim is to highlight the larger socio-cultural and political contexts that get implicated in both the dynamics of acculturation and the formation of immigrant identity. Consequently, we call for a shift from conceptualizing acculturation and immigrant identity as an individual process to a more broad, contextual, and political phenomenon.

Traditionally, mainstream psychology has been primarily occupied with developing universal, linear models and theories of immigrant identity, acculturation and adaptation. For instance, cross-cultural psychologists have studied topics such as acculturation and acculturative stress (Berry, 1998), socialization and enculturation (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997) and bicultural identity (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1998). This body of cross-cultural research, though commendable for bringing issues of immigrant identity to the table, has largely presented migration as a series of fixed phases and stages that do not account for the specific culturally distinct and politically entrenched experiences of newer, non-European, transnational immigrants. Given that currently one-fifth of all children in the U.S. are immigrants (Hernandez, 1999), questions related to acculturation, culture, and identity are central to the field of Psychology. Furthermore, questions about migration and the construction of identity are paramount today as the rate of immigrants in the U.S. rapidly increased in the 1990s to “nearly a million new immigrants per year” (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 55). Rethinking acculturation research so that it includes the varied, sometimes contradictory, often racialized and politicized experiences of these newer immigrants provides a very valuable site from which psychology has an opportunity to remake itself as a field that continues to be relevant in a world that is rapidly becoming transnational, diverse, and global.

Prominent in psychology is the model of acculturation strategies proposed by Berry and his colleagues (e.g., Berry, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1997; Berry & Sam, 1997; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989). Their prolific output and the fact that several major introductory books on psychology (for example, see Halonen & Santrock, 1996; Tavis & Wade, 1997; Westen, 1997) cite them extensively, indicate that their model of acculturation strategies is one of the most influential on the subject of acculturation as developed in cross-cultural psychology.

Acculturation strategies refer to the plan or the method that individuals use in responding to stress-inducing new cultural contexts. A fourfold classification is proposed which includes “assimilation,” “integration,” “separation,” and “marginalization.” Berry and his colleagues suggest that *assimilation* strategy occurs when the individual decides not to maintain his or her cultural identity by seeking contact in his/her daily interaction with the dominant group. When the individuals from the non-dominant group “place a value on holding on to their original culture” (Berry & Sam, 1997, p. 297), and seek no contact with the dominant group then these individuals are pursuing a *separation* strategy. When individuals express an interest in maintaining strong ties in their everyday life both with their ethnic group as well as with the dominant group, the *integration* strategy is defined. The fourth strategy is *marginalization* in which individuals “lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society” (Berry, 1998, p. 119). The optimal acculturation strategy for immigrants is integration which “appears to be a consistent predictor of more positive outcomes than the three alternatives” (Berry & Sam, 1997, p. 318).

Integration implies both the preservation of home culture and an active involvement with the host culture. Central to the theory of integration strategy is the assumption of universality. Berry and his colleagues take up the position that although there are “substantial variations in the life circumstances of the cultural groups that experience acculturation, the psychological processes that operate during acculturation are essentially same for all the groups; that is we adopt a *universalist perspective* on acculturation” (emphasis in original, Berry & Sam, 1997, p. 296). In other words, immigrants’ acculturation strategies reveal the underlying psychological processes that unfold during their adaptation to new cultural contexts. Such a position has dominated current research on acculturation and also provided an important theoretical basis for much research carried under the larger rubric of cross-cultural psychology (see Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998).

Drawing and developing upon previous research, Berry and his colleagues maintain that other psychological processes such as “behavioral shifts,” “culture shedding,” “culture shock,” and “acculturative stress” are also experienced in varying degrees by an individual undergoing acculturation (Berry, 1998; Berry & Sam, 1997). So what are these universal psychological processes? What does it mean to say that all groups manifest the same kind of “psychological” thinking during the acculturation process? What is the basis for analytically separating the psychological from the cultural? Are the “psychological processes” similar for individuals who migrate to the U.S. from Western European countries such as England and Germany, as opposed to, say, individuals who migrate from previously colonized countries such as India and Kenya?

In contrast to these psychological models of acculturation, the notion of “diasporas” have become increasingly utilized to understand immigrant experiences and in the last decade there has emerged a distinct area referred to as “diaspora studies” (for a review, see Tölöyan, 1996). The idea of the diaspora refers to immigrant communities who distinctly attempt to maintain (real and/or imagined) connections and commitments to their homeland *and* recognize themselves and act as a collective community. In other words, people who simply live outside their ancestral homeland cannot automatically be considered diasporas (Tölöyan, 1996). Examples of diasporic immigrants in the United States are Armenian-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Asian-Indians, Latino/a and Chicano/a communities in the U.S., and so on. However, while we do have immigrants with German or Swedish ancestry, we might not necessarily have a distinct German diaspora in the United States. Moreover, diasporas are usually formed when the immigrant community in question does not find its culture represented in the mainstream host culture and they experience the erasure and silencing of their culture by the host culture. In other words, there are inherently political ramifications at play in the formation of diasporas. Furthermore, non-European/non-white diasporic communities bring into sharp relief the sense of constantly negotiating between here and

there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other. Such negotiations have not been adequately recognized or understood in many of the acculturation models and the existing current literature on immigrant experiences in the field of psychology.

In contrast to the traditional view of acculturation in psychology, [Hermans and Kempen \(1998\)](#) have made a call for alternative ways of thinking about immigrant identity in the field of psychology. They argue that in a period of increasing globalization, the rapid creation of multinationals, the formation of diasporic communities, massive flows of transmigration, and border crossings, acculturation becomes increasingly complicated. Rather than thinking of immigrants as moving in a linear trajectory from culture A to culture B, [Hermans and Kempen \(1998\)](#) suggest we should think of acculturation and identity issues as contested and mixing and moving. Additionally, other psychologists have also analyzed acculturation issues within the context of migration and global movements of cultures ([Jensen, 2003](#); [Mahalingam, 2006](#)). Our paper amplifies this move by expanding, extending and providing examples of how immigrants who are part of diasporic communities engage with multiple cultures that defy the neat boundaries of acculturation models.

2. Diaspora studies and new forms of cultural identity

Diaspora studies with its emphasis on understanding the construction of self and identity in terms of colonial histories and present day transnational migration and formations of diaspora, has relevance for understanding issues related to acculturation and immigrant identities in the field of psychology (see [Bhatia & Ram, 2001](#)). Theorists such as Stuart Hall who has written extensively about transnational migration and diasporic cultures emphasize that the psychological discourse about the self as having an inner core is a dominant conception in Western culture. Such notions of the “continuous, self-sufficient, developmental unfolding, inner dialectic of selfhood,” ([Hall, 1991a](#), p. 42), imply that there is an “authentic” or “real” self that we potentially could achieve at some given point in time.

Further, as [Gilroy \(1993, 1997\)](#) asserts the view of identity as sameness involves situating identity as outside the periphery of culture, race, politics or power.

Both Hall and Gilroy use the concept of diaspora to challenge such essentialist, fixed, ahistorical conceptions of identity. By analyzing the trajectories and “routes” of slavery that violently inserted a modern African diaspora in the West, Gilroy argues that the concept of diaspora gives us new ways of thinking about identity. Such identities are not, according to him, anchored in the notion of a space, place or nationality. The concept of diaspora as articulated by Gilroy and Hall has implications for reframing our traditional models of the acculturation processes and the formation of immigrant identity. It urges us to define identity not in terms of fixed, absolute essences but rather as creations of cultural discourses, history and the power. Cultural identity is not an essence but a “*positioning*,” says [Hall \(1990, p. 226\)](#). The concept of positioning implies that identity is situated in politics and does not evolve out of some authentic, universal origins. [Hall \(1990\)](#) discusses how Black Caribbean identities are defined “by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference or rupture” ([Hall, 1990, p. 226](#)). One vector reveals to us some connection with the past, and the other vector presents us with violent and traumatic experiences of migration, slavery, colonization and transportation.

The colonized other, such as in the case of Jamaica and other colonies in South Asia, was conceived of and developed in the metropolitan centers of imperial Britain. For example, the portraits of the other as primitive and savage were constructed through the omniscient English eye. The English eye would survey everything that was in its vision, says Hall, but they were not self-reflexive about its own acts of seeing and placing others. This representation of the other via a metropolitan center is a cultural representation that is deliberate, active, and structured. It monitors and places identities through its wide and penetrating imperial gaze. [Hall \(1991a,b\)](#) notes:

Identity in that sense is always a structured representation, which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself. It produces a very Manichean set of opposites. When I speak about this way of being in the world, being English in the world, with a capital “E” as it were, it is grounded not only in a whole history, a whole set of histories, a whole set of economic relations, a whole set of cultural discourses, it is also profoundly grounded in certain forms of sexual identity. (p. 21)

One of the consequences of this creation of otherness through the colonial eyes is that after the process of physical decolonization of the colonies was completed, the people from the native colonies decided to fix their eyes on the colonial centers of powers.

The so-called natives had always imagined the privileged and luxurious lives of their colonial masters in the metropolitan cities such as London and Brussels. It was time to make physical contact with the imperial streets of London, to see, once and for all, the grandeur of the empire. Caribbean and Asian natives, armed with the cultural and linguistic knowledge of and about the English, migrated to England as laborers, skilled professionals and students. For both Gilroy and Hall, this “coming home” to a new “homeland” in London or Manchester had been sitting in the imagination of the native subjects for centuries and represents the beginning of the formation of what [Anthias \(1998\)](#) has termed as the diasporic condition.

The concept of the diasporic condition insists that we situate any idea related to acculturation or the formation of immigrant identity within a historical context, bound up in a set of political positions, and based on negotiation, dislocation

and conflict. Consider how cultural meanings about gender roles have changed in transnational diasporic spaces. Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) conducted a second qualitative study pertaining to the lives of transnational Mexican immigrant men and women in the U.S. Her study shows how the process of immigration brings about complex role negotiations of family and gender roles. In particular, Hondagneu-Sotelo analyzed how the various stages of migration influenced the gender roles of husbands and wives in Mexican families. She found that in the first stage of migration, the husbands were the ones who decided to migrate to the U.S. Many women interviewed by the researcher resisted their husband's decision to migrate to the U.S. and were clearly opposed to migrating.

However, the migration of men brought about dramatic role-reversals in both husbands and wives. Both the husbands and wives acquired skills that crossed gender boundaries. Hondagneu-Sotelo found that the men who had migrated to the U.S. were living independently and were forced to learn cooking and doing household chores that, before their migration, would have been their wife's responsibility. The wives who had to stay behind had become much more autonomous in their everyday life and had taken on the role of being providers and caretakers of their family. When these couples were reunited, they had to renegotiate their sense of place and identity in terms of these reconstituted ideas about culture and gender. The study on Mexican immigration shows the fluid construction of gender and identity in transnational/diasporic spaces. These spaces play a significant role in altering and recreating cultural identity in the host society. Scholars studying issues related to the diaspora ask us to confront questions about the status of "culture" and "identity" in global, transnational, diasporic societies: How does the migration of one spouse influence the acculturation of the other? Who carries the burden of transmitting "culture and traditions" across generations and taking on the responsibility of acculturating their children in the new world? Who do we credit for so-called successful acculturation processes such as "integration" and "assimilation"? Who do we blame for failed acculturation such as "separation" and "marginalization"? How do we account for the larger structures of history, politics, and socio-cultural forces that position individuals and impact their acculturation journeys?

Given the increasing discursive and material emergence of transnational diasporas, we can no longer insist on thinking about culture, race or gender as contained by national boundaries or as reified, polarized entities. Thus, diaspora studies with its emphasis on understanding the construction of self and identity in terms of colonial histories and present day transnational migration and formations of diaspora, has relevance for understanding issues related to acculturation and immigrant identities in the field of psychology (see Bhatia & Ram, 2001). Rather than proceed from the assumption of a fixed, stable, unified cultural self that goes through various acculturation trajectories, we call for a more fluid and politicized understanding of migrant identity. Such an approach brings in the broader sociological landscape that produce material and structural conditions that situate both the acculturation process and migrant identity and is open to continuous engagement and negotiation. In the next section, we turn to specific cases from the Indian diaspora in the United States post-9/11 to demonstrate how the larger political and social conditions shape both the acculturation process and the development of identity.

3. The Indian diaspora in context

There are approximately 1.7 million Indians who live in various diasporic communities across U.S. According to the 2000 U.S. census, the Indian-American community is one of the fastest growing immigrant communities in the United States. From 1990 to 2000, there was a 106% increase in the growth rate of Indian-Americans, compared to the average 7% growth rate in the general population. This shift marks the largest growth in the Asian-American community. By all accounts, the immigration reform of 1965 is considered as being most significant and profoundly influential for the history of Indian immigration. The 1965 Immigrant Act fundamentally changed the background of the Indian migrants in the U.S. Within a very short span of time, the Indian migrants in the U.S. made the transition from being "pariahs to elite" (Rangaswamy, 2000, p. 40). Unlike the first wave of the Punjabi Sikh diaspora, the second wave of Indian migrants are highly skilled professionals. They are trained as medical doctors, engineers, scientists, university professors, doctoral, and postdoctoral students in mostly science related disciplines, such as chemistry, biochemistry, math, physics, biology and medicine.

One such Indian diaspora resides in the suburbs of southeastern Connecticut and is the subject of a larger ethnographic study conducted by the first author (Bhatia, 2007a,b). With the passing of the immigration and nationality act in 1965, the class and socio-economic backgrounds of the second wave of Indian migrant changed significantly. The post-1965 Indian migrants who participated in this study come from middle-class families who use their economic success and wealth to skip the hardships that are often associated with low-skilled, migrant labor. Their membership in competitive, exclusive professions such as medicine and engineering has put them in the company of some of the most elite members of the society. Their economic success, educational accomplishments and membership in professional societies have propelled them straight into the middle class suburbs of Connecticut.

The interviews that are analyzed here are part of this larger study that looks at how the first-generation Indian diaspora respond to varying levels of racism and discrimination that they experience in their communities and work places (Bhatia, 2007a,b). For this article, we use a small subset of interviews that are drawn from a larger ethnographic data set. The interviews used here specifically show how the events of 9/11 made many Indians rethink their place in the American culture and the implications these events had for their acculturation and identity. Fieldwork was conducted by the Indian diaspora for 16 months between February 2000 and June 2001. From August 2001 to January 2002, in-depth interviews with 38 first-generation Indian migrants were conducted. Most of the participants worked for the local, ABC computer company

and lived in the mostly white suburbs of East Lyme and Old Lyme, CT.¹ Since the 1960s, these migrants have lived in small cities and suburbs of southern Connecticut, such as Groton, Ledyard, East Lyme, Norwich, Noank, New London, Old Lyme and Waterford.

4. September 9/11 and the contestation of acculturated identities

Most of the interviews for this qualitative study were conducted in the immediate aftermath of the events of 9/11. Participants were asked to define “Indianness,” or what it means to be an Indian in the U.S. Several participants talked about their Indianness within the context of the events of 9/11 and used this particular event to reconstruct and reexamine their cultural and racial identity.

The first interview occurred about 3 weeks after 9/11 with Raju, a 43-year-old biology professor. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, a Sikh man was killed in Arizona because he was mistaken to be an Arab. Another Sikh man traveling in a commuter train in New England was handcuffed and interrogated by the police because he was suspected of being a terrorist. In the wake of numerous attacks on Sikh families, many Sikh religious groups in New York and around the U.S. waged an expensive public relations campaign to educate the public about how Sikhism is different than Islam. Many Sikh leaders made attempts to emphasize that Sikhism is a peaceful religion that was founded on the basis of opposition to Islam. This public relations campaign also focused on the symbolic significance of the turban in Sikhism and other religions. The reputed weekly magazine, *Newsweek*, also carried news item called “Turban 101” to distinguish the various kinds of turbans that are worn by religious groups across Asia. Raju was aware of all the recent attacks on several Sikh people:

R: It's a concern; it's a concern that you know, we will be stereotyped. *Uh, I would be stereotyped as an Arab, but um, you know, I'm kind of prepared for that, and I always place mirrors in my mind if someone were to come and tell me certain things, how I would react.* The preparation is always to be, first to be very, very calm and not (xxx), and to really try to... so what I've done actually, I just realized... um is, I try to make that extra effort to connect with people. Give everyone and myself a sense that this is, you know all, we're all one, that what you feel is very similar to what I feel regardless of what I look like.

I: And in terms of how it plays out?

R: (xxx) *At the same time I will tell you one thing, I would not hesitate if I find that my life was in danger for any reason, I would not hesitate to (cut my hair), because of, you know because of having— I believe responsibility and making sure that I, you know, (my children).*

During this interview, Raju acknowledged that if his life was in “danger” because of 9/11, he would cut his hair and not wear the *pagadi* (turban). His decision to not wear his *pagadi* would be primarily influenced by the fact that he has family responsibilities. Raju believed that he was a citizen of the world and was well-integrated into the American society, but after 9/11, he was forced to reconcile two conflicting views. On the one hand, Raju believed that he was acculturated in the American society and, on the other hand, 9/11 had recast Raju's cultural identity as suspicious and dangerous by the media and the larger public. Raju was raised in Britain and Canada and had considered himself as well adjusted within the mainstream American culture. He played squash with his American friends and had never doubted his place in the American society. After the events of 9/11, media outlets, magazines and newspapers had repeatedly splashed pictures of Osama bin-Laden with his beard and turban. Raju was afraid that his beard and *pagadi* would become the object of scrutiny from his friends and neighbors – especially from strangers in public places. Immediately after the events of 9/11, he was cautious about not being seen in public places such as the grocery store or the mall. So here, you have an immigrant who in Berry's model would have achieved “integration.” However, the larger structural material conditions at play, has forced him to recognize that despite his sense of being “integrated,” is now positioned as an outsider, an other, and even as a threat. His “Americanness” is now being interrogated because of the symbols he wears to display his Sikh/Indian cultural identity. In other words, his “Americanness” and his “Indianness” are no longer capable of harmoniously co-existing with each other to produce an “integration.” Even though, Raju, might consider himself successfully acculturated, he is now painfully and forcefully reminded that he can never really belong and that he will never really be considered truly “American.”

Interviews with Neelam and her husband, Ranjit, echoed many views articulated by Raju. She observed, “But if this incident, which happened recently, is any indication, a lot of people in our neighborhood didn't even REALIZE that we are any different.” The interesting part of this narrative is that their sense of difference suddenly emerged after 9/11, when Ranjit told his neighbor that they were being cautious about going out in public places. Neelam recalled:

N: And when Ranjit told them “we are being careful not to go to other places, just to be on the safe side,” they all were very embarrassed because they all, said, “oh, we never thought that you could be considered. . .” And then they looked at him. “Yes, you could be, couldn't you? (Laughing)”. So, that was in fact, that was a very hard (xxx) to us, because it did not, so many of them, they all kept, came and said, “we are so sorry, but we just, it never occurred to us.”

¹ We have put “Indianness,” “Indian culture” or “Indian identity” in quotation marks to indicate that there is no fixed, static and essential definition of Indianness. These terms have overlapping meanings and are used by participants to invoke a particular form of “Indianness” that is tied to their identity. All the names of the participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

I: That's right.

N: And that was, I think probably to me, that was much more of an acceptance.

I: Um hmm, uh hmm

N: You know, we know, you are not terrorists (laughing).

The most important part of the conversation occurs when the neighbors look at Neelam and Ranjit and say, "Yes, you *could* be, couldn't you?" The question is what did the neighbors mean when they said, "Yes, you could be, couldn't you?" What do Neelam and Ranjit represent in this context? It suddenly dawns on their neighbors that both Neelam and Ranjit could possibly be mistaken for being Arabs and that mistaken association could invite harm to them. The neighbors apologized to Ranjit and Neelam because they did not go out in the public because of the possible threat of being identified as a terrorist. Why did the neighbors apologize? On whose behalf were they apologizing? Ranjit and Neelam's cultural identity suddenly moves in the zone of being different, of not belonging, of being the other. What is this new sense of difference? How is it that prior to 9/11, Ranjit and Neelam's "Indianness" was not considered as being foreign by their neighbors? Why did Ranjit and Neelam's neighbor apologize to them and then assure them that, "you know, we know, that you are not terrorists." The answers to these questions can be found in the next excerpt of the interview.

R: And I would say for the first time since I joined, came to this country, 16 years, not even during the Gulf War, *after these attacks was the first time that I felt I was not white. For the first time. And it's a very bad feeling*".

I: Why did you feel bad?

R: You know it's hard to explain, I honestly don't know. It's not that anybody even noticed. And in fact people are surprised I even told them, so it's really more of a fear inside me than anything else. And it's not even a fear, it's just that I felt different, a discomfort. And I felt if I go to the candlelight vigils and things which I felt very strongly for that people will look at me and I didn't go. So for the first time.

I: Now that's interesting because you so identify with this unity but...

R: *For the first time EVER that came to me, and it wasn't because anybody said anything or looked anything or did anything. I felt I was different for the first time, it's a very bad feeling. Yes it is, it's a very bad feeling.*

A: Did you feel like that sense of belongingness was shaken?

I: It was definitely shaken, and hopefully not shattered but definitely shaken.

In this excerpt, Ranjit makes it clear that during his 16 years in the U.S., he had always considered himself as white. Now, in the light of the events of 9/11, his racial self-identification as a "white American" was suspect. He was interested in participating in the 9/11 candlelight vigils that were being held in his suburban town, but he could not go to these vigils because he feared that people might "look at him" differently. Ranjit assumed that his neighbors would consider him as a non-white person—a foreigner, an Arab, a Muslim or some who might be a terrorist. He was afraid that his identity as non-white person would suddenly become more visible and that would shatter his sense of belonging in his community. So here, Ranjit, who considered himself integrated and even assimilated is not forced to come to terms that his status has changed. His identity has "Indian" and "non-white" now places him outside the mainstream. He experiences discomfort with this identity.

The events of 9/11 had played a significant role in several other interview narratives. Priya, a 46-year-old woman, is an infectious disease specialist at a local university. When asked to recall, one moment that made her feel different in the past 20 years of her life in the U.S. Priya replied: "...you know and *some of these were subtle and some of these were not subtle*, but the most scary thing that comes mind happened very recently actually after 9/11- umm I think it was the beginning of October and I had gone to drop my son who's at B.C. to the railroad station. . . You know, he's going to Boston by Amtrak. And, umm, you know he's got long hair that he ties at the back a little bit of a beard and stuff- and suddenly I saw and we were waiting- his train was a little late and I saw two "American young men" who were about the same age as my son- he was sort of standing with his back towards him and I was facing these kids- or young men- and you know one of these young folks was draped in the American flag or so it seemed to me and, you know, sort of very nationalist in attitude. And, you know, the whole fervor was against anybody who looked different- was sort of at a peak. And I just remember being very uncomfortable and I stared right back at those kids because I- these are kind of kids my sons had played with- gee! They come to my house- they play hockey, you know, and in a way I- I knew who these boys were, but for that one moment I felt very different".

This excerpt reveals how 9/11 produced "scary moments" for some members of the Indian diaspora. At the railway station, Priya felt extremely threatened and uncomfortable in front of the two men who had visited her house on several occasions. Priya recognized these two young men immediately as they were her son's school friends and she feared that these men might mistake her son for a Muslim and may harm him:

P: "And I felt very concerned for my son's safety. You know, so I told him - when he got off the train to take a cab and go back to college and you know not to wander around and *I've been trying to tell him since then to take his beard off- it looks very Muslim and stuff*, so I would say that was one of the more overt memories I have - but at subtler level I'm sure there are things that have happened that probably somebody like V.S. Naipaul can probably articulate a lot better than I can but at an overt level- no.

Priya was afraid that her son might be mistaken for a Muslim so she had repeatedly asked him to shave his beard. Priya explained to me that, her son's face "... looks very Muslim."

Thus, Raju, Ranjeet, Neelam and Priya's narratives challenge the universal acculturation model that is proposed by Berry and his colleagues. Here are immigrants who believed that they had achieved "integration." Yet, a single, cataclysmic, political event upturned their taken-for-granted acculturation process and migrant identity. Suddenly and quite dramatically, they moved from a comfortable sense of belonging to an uneasy state of being an outsider and a threatening one at that. Understanding development of migrant identity in relation to diaspora cultures and the larger socio-political contexts within which they are inserted forces us to rethink standard models of acculturation. Far from being a linear process that proceeds along a teleological trajectory, immigrants variously experience contradictions, tensions, and a dynamic movement that spirals back and forth. In the next section, we explore these narratives further and examine the disjunctures, divergences, and dislocations that immigrants can experience as they continuously negotiate their place in the host community.

5. Renegotiating identities in the diaspora

These post-9/11 narratives from the Indian diaspora demonstrate some of the cultural specificities involved in the experiences of a diasporic immigrant living with multiple cultures and histories that seem incompatible with each other. Additionally, these narratives show how various structural and sociological forces influence the psychological positions of feeling *simultaneously* assimilated, separated, and marginalized. Recall that Raju was afraid that he might be mistaken for a Muslim because of his *pagadi* and beard. Ranjit feared that after 9/11, he may be mistaken for an Arab and his sense of being white in the community would come under questioning.

Several prominent scholars working in the area of Asian-American Studies have shown that after 9/11 many South Asian American citizens who resembled the enemy were racialized and constructed as non-American (Maira, 2004; Purkayastha, 2005). In particular these scholars have shown that the post-9/11 period has created a new category of identity in the U.S that perceives Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Eastern men as disloyal and non-patriotic citizens or as individuals who are part of terrorist networks (Maira, 2004). The recent work of Bandana Purkayastha (2005), provides revealing insights about how post-9/11 moments produced a heightened state of racialization for many South Asian citizens in the U.S. Her research provides us with a useful analytical framework to understand the larger structural forces that shaped these participants' responses to the events of 9/11.

After 9/11, there has been a conflation of South Asians Muslims and Arabs with terrorism and "Islamic Fundamentalism" and regardless of their nationality or religion many South Asians are being categorized as suspicious and having links to terrorists. Purkayastha (2005) notes that those who are perceived to have non-American traits during sustained period of conflict and political crisis can face extremely dangerous consequences. United States foreign policy toward the Middle East has often provided the framework for directly and indirectly providing the impetus and justification for racially profiling the South Asian Muslim youth and adults in the United States. She writes, "When other countries are seen as "threatening" to the United States, politically or economically, racialized individuals who look like "the enemy" to section of majority group are subjected to higher levels discrimination and hate. Those caught in the spotlight remember their vulnerability at being under a significant level of public scrutiny, while those who turn on the light do not hold the impression beyond that moment" (p. 42). The various responses of the participants – Raju, Ranjit, and Priya – reveal the vulnerabilities they experienced when they suddenly became visible under the spotlight of media and the attacks from the majority.

In her research, Purkayastha (2005) cites several examples of how this vulnerability was experienced by several other South Asians in the post-9/11 period. The Sikh males in the South Asian community became hyper visible because of their beard and turbans and were victims of several hate crimes across the nation. The hate crimes were further legitimized when some radio stations described Sikhs men as wearing "towels," "diaper heads," and "cloth heads." Many other South Asians also expressed a sense of dread or an impending fear as they traveled in public places, such as taking the subway or doing groceries.

The participants of our study were subjected to racial discrimination yet they were reluctant to see themselves as having a racial identity or a racial subjectivity. Recall Ranjit's interview where he expressed his discomfort with being non-white. The interview revealed that Ranjit and Neelam lived in an upper-class suburb of Connecticut. Both the husband and wife were successful professionals who had many friends in the mainstream, white community. They went to summer vacations with their white friends and had regular social interactions with their neighborhood friends. Ranjit and Neelam's daughter had regular sleepovers at their neighbor's house. In short, Ranjit and Neelam had worked hard at integrating in their community as white Americans. In the wake of 9/11, Ranjit's sense of identity was shaken and his place in the community was in doubt. It is important to mention here that none of Ranjit's friends or neighbors had made any comments about his cultural identity or his sense of belonging in the community.

On the contrary, Ranjit and Neelam's friends were being "extra-friendly" to them and were aware there could be a public backlash against Ranjit and Neelam because they looked "middle-eastern." Ranjit acknowledged that 9/11 has made him realize that he was actually different from his neighbors and that he did not share the privileges of being categorized as white American. Ranjit and Neelam were Indians living in a white suburban neighborhood and had convinced themselves that they had assimilated in the American society. However, the events of 9/11 posed a rude awakening, as it were, and forced them to acknowledge that they did not and possibly could never, fully belong to mainstream, white America. Ranjit had remarked that prior to 9/11 he had never considered himself as a "foreigner" or "outsider" in the United States, but the events of 9/11 had ruptured his self-perception as an assimilated immigrant who could pass as white. His perceived proximity to whiteness

was now under interrogation. The crucial question here is: Why did Ranjit feel that he was white or could pass as white, when he is actually racially identified as brown?

One reason that Ranjit felt that he was white because he had achieved what Purkayastha (2005) describes as “structural integration” – a type of integration that can be defined by one’s level of access to economic and educational opportunities. Many Indians living in the U.S. earn high salaries, own large homes, live in middle class suburbs, and have access to the same kind of economic and educational opportunities as that of many white Americans. However, their status as racial minorities prevents them from adopting a “racially neutral” language that is often used by their white peers and friends. Their racial status marginalizes them and marks them as culturally and ethnically different. Living in affluent suburbs with most white Americans, many Indian migrants believe that the American dream can be acquired by working hard and on the basis of personal merit. They often operate on the unconscious assumption that their middle-class standing makes their racial identity irrelevant and protects them from discriminatory incidents.

Ranjit had defined himself as a white American primarily because of his structural or economic assimilation in the middle/upper-class white suburbs. The post-9/11 months had made his racial position much more visible and his phenotypic similarities to “Arab” terrorists had prompted his neighbors to remark, “Yes, you *could* be, couldn’t you?” The post-9/11 spotlight on people who looked like Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern had made Ranjit realize that he could be perceived as being in the enemy camp and his structural integration or assimilation in the American society was being challenged from multiple directions.

The same kind of analytical framework can be used to explain why Priya, immediately after 9/11, felt threatened at the railway station by the young men who were her son’s childhood friends. At the railway station, Priya identified these men as “American young men” rather than just “young men.” She called them “American young men” to clearly demarcate the cultural identity of her son and herself from these American patriotic youth. What is omitted in this excerpt is that Priya’s son is born and brought up in the U.S., but at that moment on the railway station, his “Americanness” or his “American citizenship” seemed to have been erased and his “Indianness” took precedence, with his black hair and beard.

Priya’s emphasis on her son’s “black hair” and “beard” essentially points to the fact that she focused on her son’s “Indian” and “brown” attributes rather than his American citizenship. She feared that his external racial similarities to Arab men would to put him under the spotlight and make him vulnerable to attacks from the public. In particular, Priya, Raju, and Ranjit’s interviews reveal that all three of them had acculturated in America as “model minorities” in white middle-class suburbs and prior to 9/11 and they believed in the idea that their status as middle-class professionals would make their racial identities irrelevant. The events of 9/11 had highlighted the “otherness” of these three individuals and had forced them to consider themselves as racialized. Their difference, which was previously neutralized, hidden or erased, was now suddenly recast as a non-mainstream, marginal, raced identity that was perceived to pose a threat to the larger culture. Their sense of race, place, and what it means to be “acculturated” in American was suddenly destabilized and held up for reexamination.

Considering “acculturation” experiences of Priya, Raju, and Ranjit as individuals living in the diaspora allows us to understand the distinct racialized experiences of non-Western/European immigrants. Moreover, given the existence of racial prejudice in American society, non-European immigrants have been more likely to face exclusion and discrimination than their European counterparts. When a new immigrant – whether Caribbean, Chilean, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, or Vietnamese enters the United States, they are introduced to the stories, legacies and the immigration heritage of their respective ethnic group. Subsequently, through personal remembering and shared histories, tales of discrimination, hardships and sheer exploitation are kept alive in most non-European immigrant communities.

The analyses of the interviews from the Indian diaspora have clearly shown that acculturation in these “First World,” postcolonial diasporas is not a universal, bicultural process. Furthermore, classifying culture as an “antecedent” variable, and the properties of the self as universal, natural and pre-given, is a view that plays an important role in shaping acculturation research in cross-cultural psychology. Thus, for Berry and his colleagues, culture and history are variables that enable the “display” of the pre-given properties of the acculturating self, but these very variables are not taken to be inextricably interwoven with the self. The historical, structural, and political aspects of immigration rarely enter the discussion, and when they do, they are classified as group variables.

6. Conclusion: rethinking acculturation in the context of diasporic identities

Unlike Mukherjee’s protagonist Jasmine, an immigrant’s journey through acculturation is not straightforward, direct, self-evident or ever complete. Even when individual immigrants claim to have integrated themselves into the mainstream host culture, structural and political contexts conspire to combat their assumptions. In other words, it is simplistic to assume that the burden of acculturation whether successful, failed, or reversed, and reworked lies primarily with the individual. Rather, as our article demonstrates the acculturation experiences of Indian immigrants, living in the diaspora, are constructed through a dynamic, back-and-forth play concurrently between structure and self, being privileged and marginalized and is caught in the web socio-political and historical forces. As we reveal, prior to 9/11, participants such as Raju, Priya, and Ranjit had taken their middle class status for granted and their proximity to mainly white suburbs had led them to believe that their racial positions and subjectivities were irrelevant to their larger, professional, classed, self-identities. Their success and upward mobility had allowed them to temporarily “forget” that they were “brown” and that they were part of a pre-existing racialized hierarchy of American society. The post-9/11 spotlight and media coverage had suddenly thrust many South Asian male adults into the camp of the terrorist-enemy and their physical resemblance to

“Muslim/Arab/Middle Eastern” had made them vulnerable to attacks from the public. Their sudden visibility as non-white, foreign, and a potential enemy had interrupted their movement towards being integrated and welcomed on the great American melting pot.

On the surface, it would appear that these professional Indians have “made it” in America and ultimately are structurally integrated within the larger society. Their status as model minorities had ensured them a material slice of the American dream in the suburban enclaves of America, where they owned houses, had the requisite middle-class comforts, and could send their children to expensive colleges and universities. Their experiences with fear, alienation, and racism after 9/11, however, forced them to reanalyze their identities as assimilated citizens of America. If nothing else, this rupture uncovers the tenuous and temporary nature of the acculturation process. At the very moment that an immigrant, particularly one who is non-white rests in the comfort being integrated, the proverbial rug gets pulled. Integration, assimilation, or even marginalization and separation are not end points but rather pit stops in an ever spiraling double helix that moves both ways.

The narratives analyzed in this paper make it clear that the racial and ethnic positioning of these Indian migrants made their acculturation process different from the previous great wave of immigration at the turn of the last century. In 1890, over 90% of immigrants were European, whereas in 1990 only 25% were European with 25% being Asian and 43% being from Latin America (Rong & Prissele, 1998). This striking shift can be largely attributed to the changes in immigration law in the 1960s, when several racially motivated “Exclusion Acts” were eliminated in order to meet the demands of the U.S. labor market (Mohanty, 1991). These new immigrants often find themselves struggling with asymmetrical cultural positions, racially charged contexts and an oppressive political rhetoric. Additionally, in contrast to their turn-of-the-century European counterparts, new immigrants have far better access to transatlantic travel and can take advantage of the accelerations in global communication technology.

To recall, Berry and his colleagues argue that the four main acculturation strategies are integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. An immigrant adopts an integration strategy when he or she attempts to maintain cultural and psychological contact in his/her everyday interactions with both his or her ethnic group as well as the dominant group. Similarly, the concept of “bicultural competence” suggests that an immigrant can possibly achieve a happy, balanced blend that entails “becoming effective in the new culture and remaining competent in his or her culture of origin” (LaFromboise et al., 1998, p. 148). Those immigrants who do not achieve this goal, experience higher acculturative stress (Berry, 1997) and/or are not as physically or psychologically healthy (LaFromboise et al., 1998). Although integration and bicultural competency may be worthy goals to achieve, the narratives analyzed above show that for most people living in contemporary diasporas, their negotiation with multiple cultural sites is fluid, dynamic, interminable and often unstable. Achieving integration may simply not be an option and/or may be achieved temporarily only to be lost at some point and so on. The acculturation journey is not a teleological trajectory that has a fixed-end point but instead has to be continuously negotiated. Thus, there are several conceptual problems with describing the integration strategy as the developmental end goal in the immigrant’s acculturation process.

First, Berry and his colleagues describe the integration strategy as being an end goal of an immigrant’s acculturation without explaining the process by which such a goal would be achieved. Second, missing from their discussion on “integration strategy” is how issues of conflict, power, and asymmetry affect many diasporic immigrants’ acculturation process. For example, integration, at least as discussed by Berry and his colleagues, implicitly assumes that both the majority and minority cultures have equal status and power. Furthermore, it is not clear what the term integration exactly means? How does one know when someone is integrated or not with the host culture? Who decides whether an immigrant is pursuing a strategy of marginalization, integration or separation?

Raju, Neelam, Ranjit, and Priya firmly believed that they were acculturated in the American society. But the events of 9/11 illustrated that becoming acculturated in the host culture has to be explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by the majority members of the culture. The structural forces that came in to play immediately after 9/11 through the lens of race and class have significantly altered the acculturation process of the participants in the study. Our article emphasizes that universal notions of culture and self fails to explain the challenges accompanying the acculturation process within a diasporic world where an immigrant cannot freely choose whether they want to assimilate, become marginalized or integrated within the larger society. Rather, we maintain, acculturation is process that involves continuous, contested, negotiations that will forever be in progress as an immigrant grapples with his/her place in the larger structures of the history, culture, and politics.

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