Being Indian in Post-Colonial Manila: Diasporic Ethnic Identities, Class, and the Media[1]

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Abstract

How do young people of Indian origin in Manila position their identities? What role do media play in this process? In addressing these questions, this paper draws on studies that conceptualise identities as a positioning in context and a process of defining boundaries. Media contribute to this process by providing (symbolic) frameworks for inclusion and exclusion that either weaken or reinforce boundaries. Following this framework, I analysed how second/third generation members of the Indian diaspora in the Philippines talked about their identities in autobiographical narratives, including experiences with the media. I argue that informants of the study claim multiple affiliations but tend to position themselves based on class and gender. Participants' ethnic affiliations intersect with class and gender positions. Commercial media influence the symbolic environment where these identities are formed. Local entertainment media reinforce stereotypical images of Indian men that promote distinctions between members of the diaspora. Global entertainment media events like beauty pageants provide alternative images that facilitate inclusion in Philippine society especially among females. How these young people positioned their identities could be traced to other contextual factors like class dynamics in the homeland and Philippine society, historical processes like colonisation, the migration histories and trajectories of Indian immigrants and the classed/gendered culture of the Indian diaspora.

Keywords: Indian diaspora, Ethnic identity, Identity positioning, Role of the media

1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the Research Problem

Contrary to an assumption about a pan-Indian, homogenous identity among members of the Indian diaspora, current studies have suggested that the Indian diasporic identity is complex and plural, constructed in gendered (Radhakrishnan, 2008; Warikoo, 2005), classed (Bhattacharya, 2008), ethnic (Lock and Detaramani, 2006), and 'racialised' (Bhatia, 2008) terms. These dimensions may overlap and are complicated by factors like personal and migration histories, levels of integration or assimilation into the host society, and the culture of the Indian diaspora itself in the hostland. Warikoo (2005) finds that media, among other factors like school and family, influence ethnic identity choices among Indo-Caribbean youths in New York City. Recent scholarship on the Indian diaspora has explored the roles media play in the lives and identity formations of its members. On one hand, consumption of media from the Indian homeland indicates a process of reterritorialisation or how migrants 'recraft a

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sense of community and cultural identity in new socio-geographic contexts (Punathambekar, 2005: 151). On the other, it suggests identification with the popular culture of the host society (Gillespie, 1995). Analysing the role of the media in the diaspora, Silverstone (2007) suggests that media offer diasporic groups various competing cultural spaces and alternative imaginaries (Silverstone, 2007: 95-96). However, in relation to identity and community formations, media's influence is premature as identities by their nature are dynamic and changing (Silverstone, 2007: 96). In the same vein this paper takes a critical look at the role of the media in the identity formations of members of the Indian diaspora or peoples of Indian origin (PIOs) who are not in the centre (Global North/Western context), where most studies in this area of study originate, but those in the periphery such as a city in the Global South, Metro Manila.

I am interested in 'patterns in the diaspora that are influenced by the hostland culture' (Safran, Sahoo, and Lal, 2008: 1), in particular media engagements and identity formations of second/third generation peoples of Indian origin in Metro Manila. This inquiry also builds on related studies (Rye, 1993; Thapan, 2002), which have paid little attention to young second/third generation members, including those with only one Indian parent. Instead of looking at consumption of media from the homeland, I turn to this generation's experiences with local and global entertainment media in the host society. During my initial queries and observations, I discovered that these youths are more in tune with either local (Filipino) or global (American) media and less engaged in Bollywood media culture. What made me curious was their constant reference to how Indians were represented in local entertainment media. I decided to take this direction as it presented an opportunity to probe into how Filipinos imagine, represent, and treat its immigrants. In so doing this study also provides a critique of Philippine society as 'host' to diasporas and its orientation towards ethnic difference.

1.2 The Locale of the Study

Metro Manila (hereafter Manila) is a megapolis comprises 13 cities and four municipalities, including the city of Manila, the political capital of the Philippines, and Makati City, a central business district. It has an estimated population of 10 million that include a majority of lowland Catholic Christians and a minority of Filipino Chinese, Muslims, Indians, and expatriate communities.

Since independence from Spain in 1898 and the United States in 1946, Philippine governments have embarked on national development and modernising projects through democracy and capitalism. Evolving from a state-regulated capitalist economy (1950s-70s) to a liberal market economy (late 80s to present), the Philippines, however, remains a society where economic gains are concentrated within the economic and political elites, most of them based in Manila. The uneven sociopolitical development in the Philippines is, according to historian E. San Juan Jr. (2008), compounded by Americanization or the lingering influence of the US in schooling, mass media, sports and music. Success in capitalist Philippine society, characterised by class divides and neocolonialism, could be defined in terms of (among others) wealth or financial security. Acquiring a good education and/or migration to cities in the Global North, especially the US, are means to social mobility or, at the very least, survival.

1.3 Ethnic, Diasporic, and Transnational Contexts of Indians in Manila

To provide a nuanced understanding of the group being investigated, I propose that PIOs in Manila are simultaneously ethnic, diasporic, and transnational. In relation to peoples in their locality, they are considered ethnic groups, defined by Richard Schermerhorn (1978 as cited in Cornell and Hartmann, 1998/2001) as self-conscious populations who see themselves as distinct and have common origin or symbol of their peoplehood. The Indian diaspora in the Philippines distinguishes itself from other ethnic groups like the Filipino Chinese and Muslims. Compared to the Chinese diaspora in the Philippines, Indians pale in comparison in terms of population and volume of economic activities. However, Rye (1993) points out that Indians' reputation far exceeds their estimated number of 31,000. The Indian diaspora here includes mostly Punjabis and Sindhis, and Indian professionals working in multinational companies and multilateral organisations. Majority of Sindhis and Punjabis are permanent residents but not citizens. Sindhis, like their counterparts in other countries, are known as industrialists and traders; Punjabis, on the other hand, who usally come from the districts of Jullundur, Ferozpur and Ludhiana in the Indian state of Punjab, are usually into small-scale money lending business and trading. Unlike majority of Sindhis that tend to live in gated communities in big cities, Punjabis are more integrated into local communities in the Philippines.

To be called part of the diaspora carries many meanings. In its original sense, diaspora had more to do with migration as colonisation rather than with uprooting and deterritorialisation' (Georgiou, 2006: 47). The present meaning of diaspora not only connotes movement from a homeland but also grounding in the host society. According to Clifford (1994) both displacement and dwelling constitute and characterise diaspora communities: For their members '…with varying degrees of urgency, they negotiate and resist the social realities of poverty, violence, policing, racism, and political and economic inequality' (223-229). It is my agenda to identify the social realities the Indian diaspora in the Philippines as they experience displacement and dwelling.

Finally it is important to acknowledge the links or 'social relations formed between the homeland and immigrants' adopted countries' (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992 as cited in Bhattacharya, 2008). Safran, Sahoo and Lal (2008) have argued that 'the transnational context is part and parcel of diaspora' (1). In this study I also accounted for ways informants' contacts or links with their homeland informed their conditions.

This paper draws on studies (e.g., Ray, 2001) that conceptualise identities as a positioning in context (Hall 1990) and a process of defining boundaries (Barth, 1969). Media contribute to this process by (1) influencing the contexts where identities are claimed and (2) 'by creating symbolic communicative spaces of inclusion and exclusion' (Madianou, 2005b). Following this framework, I analysed how second/third generation members of the Indian diaspora in the Philippines positioned their identities in autobiographical narratives; and identified the role media played in this process. I argue that participants of the study claim multiple affiliations but tend to position themselves based on class and gender. Participants' ethnic affiliations are often equated with class and gender positions. Commercial media influence the symbolic environment where these identities are formed. Local entertainment media reinforce stereotypical images of Indian men that promote distinctions between members of the diaspora. Global entertainment media events like beauty pageants provide alternative images

that facilitate inclusion in Philippine society especially among females. How these young people positioned their identities could be traced to other contextual factors like class dynamics in Philippine society, historical processes like colonisation, the migration history of and the classed/gendered culture of the Indian diaspora in Manila.

1.4 Theoretical Approaches and Research Questions

Assuming a plural conception of identity, Hall (1990/2003) argues that identities are contextual, dynamic, and subject to the play of history, culture, and representation. Identities, including diasporic ones, are constituted not outside of but within representation, defined by Hall (1997) as, 'the process by which members of a culture use language…to produce meaning.' Moreover, identities in Hall's formulation are positional and involves a politics of relations between positions. This view is consistent with Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic groups and boundaries that could account for the ethnic dimension of diasporic identities. According to Barth ethnic groups define themselves through the maintenance of a boundary and 'not the cultural stuff that it encloses.' Hence for Barth boundary maintenance is a process of self-ascription and ascription by others. Ethnic groups maintain these 'social boundaries' through interactions or relations with others in a process of 'determining and signalling membership and exclusion.'

And so I ask: How do young people from the Indian diaspora in Manila position themselves in autobiographical narratives? Following Taylor and Littleton (2006), I analysed autobiographical talk–in the context of a depth interview–of these young people to reveal ways they position their identities. I looked for self-ascriptions (Barth, 1969) or informants' self-assertions (Warikoo, 2005) in their interview responses and narratives.

What do media have to do with identity positionings? The link could be established using Hall's proposition that identities are constructed within representation. Media is a practice of representation that uses image, text, symbol and sound. It involves the production, consumption, reception, and circulation of meanings (Silverstone, 1999) at various levels (individuals, groups, institutions, nations, etc) in different contexts or situations. Roger Silverstone and Myria Georgiou's (2005) argument now becomes relevant: the media are seen not to be determining of identities, but contributing to the creation of symbolic communicative spaces in which identities can be constructed. Media influence this symbolic space through representations of minority or ethnic groups. Silverstone and Georgiou point out that minorities often do not appear in mainstream media. However when they do appear they are often represented in stereotypical and alienating images. According to Hall (1997), stereotypes, a form of representation, 'get hold of the few simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognised characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity' (p. 258).

The media space, where minority groups appear or not, becomes spaces where meanings about them are constructed. Such meanings 'provide frameworks for inclusion and exclusion' (Silverstone and Georgiou, 2005). Indeed media contribute to the process of boundary maintenance through representations of minority groups that elicit either inclusion or exclusion (Madianou, 2005a).

I looked for threads about representations and stereotypes of Indians in the informants' narratives and media experiences and then focussed on how they talked about these representations and experiences. Used by scholars like Gillespie (1995) and Madianou (2005b), this approach assumes that informants are treated as media audiences engaged in the consumption, reception and even production of media.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative design to data gathering. The main method was depth interviews and it was supplemented by participant observation of events of the Indian community (Diwali programme in 2006 and 2007) and visits to temples (Sikh and Hindu) and to a Bollywood-themed club. As social networking sites and online journals are popular among young people in Manila, I also visited the pages of some participants to know more biographical details.

Most of the research participants were recruited through referrals by friends and participants themselves. Ten (five females and five males) youths, whose ages ranged from 19-24, participated in the study. The main criterion for their selection was that they were born of first generation Indian or Indian-Filipino parentage. The informants belonged to middle and upper middle class households, with occupations ranging from a student, social worker to an information technology professional. In terms of ethnic background, three were Punjabis, three were Sindhis and four had mixed parentage, all of them having Filipina mothers and Indian fathers coming from different ethnic and religious backgrounds (Bengali, Konkan, Muslim). All of them knew Filipino, the national language, and English. Only a few, most of them Punjabis, could speak the language of their parents.

I conducted a thematic analysis of their interview narratives and interpreted the data based on the framework and related literature. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the informants' responses. As this work is preliminary, and to some extent ethnographic, results are provisional and tentative. Conclusions apply only to this purposive sample.

3. Findings

3.1 Identity Positionings of Young People of the Indian Diaspora

I argue that informants consciously and unconsciously expressed multiple affiliations and claimed identity positions across dimensions of ethnicity, class, gender and religion. Class was a dominant theme and often intersected with ethnicity and gender. Caste, a relevant identity position in the Indian homeland, was mentioned only once by a Punjabi informant. Participants tended to choose positions, categories or groupings that have high symbolic power. Contradictions in their self-ascriptions were also apparent in the course of the interview.

Participants' self-ascriptions indicate an assertion of their ethnicities (being Indian, Filipino, Punjabi, Sikh, etc). However, initial introductions during the interview revealed that ethnicity was not necessarily asserted as they emphasised other aspects of their identities like gender, personality traits, and occupation. Most participants claimed more than one ethnic affiliation as part of their ethnicities (the use of partial identities, i.e., half-Filipino, half-Indian) or as a matter of personal attachment. On the other hand ascriptions by others–based on

informants' accounts—suggested that Filipinos perceive Indians based on stereotypes that could be traced to occupations and physical traits of Punjabis: tall, dark, hairy, and prominent eyes and nose. These stereotypes and labels include 'five-six,' a local term describing the usual livelihood of Punjabis who would lend money without collateral and charge a monthly rate of 20 percent. The term also conjures an image of a Punjabi male riding a motorbike on his way to collect debts and sell his wares. Indians in the Philippines are also labelled *bumbay*, an appropriation of Bombay. I will return to these representations later when I discuss the role of the media.

I would like to dwell a bit on the issue of class as it is a significant finding in the study. How informants claimed class identities is based on the following definitions by scholars of Philippine society: class as occupation and position in relations of production (Kerkvliet, 1990); class as cultural identity and lifestyle (Pinches, 1999), and class as value of wealth, both in the past and present contexts (Thapan, 2002). Moreover, for Thapan, higher levels of education among members of the diaspora in Manila increase one's social status. Although class and status are theoretically distinct, in practice, they are overlapping terms.

Class boundaries were usually drawn within ethnic groups comprising the Indian community. Sindhi informants tend to distance themselves from Punjabis who are the stereotype of Indians in Philippine society. Sindhis assert their upper class position by virtue of their community's reputation in large-scale trading and manufacturing in contrast to the usual occupation of Punjabis—small-scale money lending and trading. This came out strongly when I asked them to talk about this stereotypcial portrayal of Indians in Philippine entertainment media.

Punjabi participants also distanced themselves from Sindhis. They acknowledged the stereotype and defended the nature of their occupation. For them class as occupation and wealth was not so much important as class as lifestyle and ethnicity. The Punjabi informants belong to middle to upper class households based on family income but they viewed class in terms of lifestyle or performance. Sonny, for example, had a gendered view of class: he pointed out that he is unlike Sindhi men who speak English like women. He asserted his Sikh background and the idea that Punjabi men are "more masculine" than Sindhis. While acknowledging the stereotype, they were however conscious of the fact that their generation has gone beyond money lending and are now pursuing other interests.

Participants from mixed parentage drew boundaries in relation to Sindhis and Punjabis and Indian nationals in the homeland. Aside from the local stereotypes, they usually distinguished themselves from media portayals of Indians in foreign media. Images of poverty attached to Mother Teresa of Kolkata have strong resonance among Catholic Filipinos. Informants with one Indian parent would point out that they have upper class family backgrounds in India.

This class boundary is an indication of the social hierarchy and relations in the Philippines. Ethnic groupings in the Indian diaspora are equated with class categories based on their occupation and positions in Philippine society. Sindhis, a community known in South Asia as traders, have financially established themselves in the Philippines and assimilated themselves into Filipino elites that reside in gated communities in Makati, the capital's financial district. To some extent, their historical context, losing their homeland Sindh during partition in 1947, has also contributed to their establishment and settlement in the

Philippines. On the other hand, Punjabis, by nature of their business, are more in touch with the Filipino masses, their usual clients, and are therefore in the popular consciousness. The migration context of Punjabis also inform their identity positionings. Coming from rural backgrounds, first generation Punjabis usually start as money lenders in the Philippines. Those who succeed would either go back to the Punjab and invest their hard-earned money or remain in the Philippines for a period of time. For those who have settled here, their second generation would acquire education and then migrate to (wealthier) Anglophone countries. A Punjabi informant, who is now in Australia, calls this an 'upgrade.' This statement reflects a similar trend called 'twice migration' among Indians in other countries like South Africa (Singh, 2008). It also implies that for this generation of the Indian diaspora Manila is just a transit point for the final destination, a city in the Global North.

Although Punjabis, in relation to Sindhis, have less symbolic value because of their communal reputation as money lenders and rural folks, their material conditions and transnational relations with the Punjab enable them to be treated as financially successful migrants in their hometowns.

Except for Sonny, a Punjabi who was aware of his caste position, other informants did not make any reference to it. This observation relates to studies (Thapan, 2002; Sharma, 1989/2004) that find caste to have less relevance in the diaspora. Thapan (2002) has observed that for Sindhis in Manila, Hong Kong and Jakarta caste is viewed not so much as a hierarchy but as a category used to differentiate oneself from other categories (p. 79). What came out in this study is the salience of class and its intersection with ethnicity among young members of the second/third generation Indian diaspora. In postcolonial Manila, class affiliation is not only evident and important, but ethnic relations in the diaspora somehow mirrors the relations between the rich and poor in the host society. Indeed Safran, Sahoo, and Lal's (2008) argument resonates: the Indian diaspora has 'developed institutions, orientations and patterns of living specific to the institutional structures and socio-political contexts of the different hostlands.

3.2 The Role of the Media in Identity Positionings

Earlier I mentioned how ascriptions by others, in the form of stereotypes and representations of Indians in Philippine society, influenced identity positionings. Following the theory of mediation, I account for this process in detail by discussing the meanings and origins of these representations and relating them to media portrayals of Indians. Through an examination of a media product and a media event, I then show how commercial media influence participants' identity positionings. Informants' experiences with local and global media point to classed and gendered representations of Indians that have contradictory consequences. Local entertainment media exploited an image of a male Indian hawker that in turn reinforced boundaries within the diaspora and between Indians and Filipinos. Global entertainment media, however, presented an alternative image of the Indian woman which facilitated inclusion of female informants in Manila society.

3.2.1 Race and Representation

Informants narratives reveal that Indians are labelled based on the occupational stereotype 'five-six' (small-time money lender) that has low symbolic value in a class and status oriented

society like the Philippines. What this study finds equally interesting and revealing is the connotation of another label, *bumbay*, and its related terms that suggest a 'racialised' and 'pathological' Indian body. Participants' narratives of childhood and school life revolved around this theme of 'racial' difference. Being physically different was a basis for exclusion in Philippine society. They understood their experiences of exclusion as 'racism' or 'the display of contempt or aggressiveness toward other people on account of physical differences' (Todorov, 1986: 370, as cited in Go, 2004). Participants remembered being called five-six or *bumbay* by peers and strangers. Anthias (1990/2001) labels such experiences as discursive racism: a set of representations embodied in daily language, texts, and practices.

Informants, especially those who have mixed parentage, explained that Filipinos classify 'racial' groups based on pejorative labels like *intsik* for Chinese, *arabo* for Arabs, *negro* for Blacks/Africans and *bumbay* for Indians. Use of such labels, especially *bumbay* implies a feeling or attitude of superiority in terms of social class, status or physical attributes. Floya Anthias (1990/2001) describes racial categorisation as often but not always a mode of pursuing a project of inferiorisation, oppression, and at times class subordination and exploitation.

Priyanka disclosed that her classmates picked on her facial and body hair and labelled her as ugly. She explained that being hairy (and a female at that) is not 'normal.' She recalled being excluded from working groups in school because she was foul (*nakakadiri*).

This construction of an abnormal, pathological Indian body takes an overt expression in the experiences of Ahmed and Deepa. When Ahmed was in second grade his peers called him "Aids virus." Looking back, he found his peers' behaviour barbaric, and did not expect such treatment from an exclusive Jesuit school for boys who come from affluent families. Deepa, who studied in an exclusive Catholic school for girls, had a similar incident:

Deepa: I had this classmate in second grade. We had a letter writing exercise to a relative. I have been writing to my relatives in India…to my ima, my grandmother, and so my letter was addressed to Mrs. Bakti George[2]. She grabbed it and said Bakti! Bakti! Bacteria! I was so mad!

Aside from this incident Deepa also got teased by her name which in Filipino means 'not yet' (*di pa*):

Deepa: People also make jokes about my name. Deepa! Di pa naliligo, di pa kumakain, di pa nagtotooth brush (Deepa! Haven't taken her bath, haven't eaten, haven't brushed her teeth). I still get it until now…Not from people who are close to me.

Being called *bumbay*, bacteria, Aids virus and ugly, and being bullied in school generated feelings of isolation, rejection and low self-worth among participants. However, in time they learned to deal with these taunts. Incidents of discrimination became rare as they attended the university or joined the workplace. Distance from the experience allowed Deepa to view teasing as a Filipino's way of establishing a connection: "I just know that Filipinos have these images of Indians. This is just what they know. Sometimes people just want to build a rapport with you. They'll just tease you like "You're so fat! It's just a form of that."

How do we account for these racial attitudes of Filipinos and their 'pathological'representations of Indians? Avtar Brah (1997/2001) suggests that racisms have historical origins. Warwick Anderson's (2007) work on American colonial public health and

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[2] I changed the surname to protect the privacy of the participant.

medical practices in the Philippines is instructive in explaining such racial bias among Filipinos. It reveals a racialised and pathological construction of Filipino bodies, which was the basis for the US colonial policy on public health and hygiene in the Philippines. By extension, I argue that Filipinos have internalised these attitudes and prejudices towards other 'races' or peoples.

The colonisers who regarded themselves as 'clean and ascetic' imagined and represented Filipino bodies as 'dirty and infected,' 'open and polluting.' They institutionalised sanitation and hygiene by setting up sanitary commissions, instructing the local inhabitants in personal hygiene, home cleanliness and the care of the sick (Ibid, 117). According to Anderson in order to become 'self-governing subjects,' Filipinos had to be clean and hygienic in their surroundings and their bodies (Ibid, 109). Victor Heiser, director of public health during the 1910s, found imitation…wherever he went in the colonial Philippines (Ibid, 181).

Filipinos' present preoccupation with hygiene and cleanliness (especially body odour) could be traced to this historical event. To be acknowledged as civilised, modern and Filipino citizen subjects, one has to demonstrate proper hygiene. The case of Preity exemplifies the prevalence and internalisation of such attitude: "Some Indians say they are teased because they smell bad. Since my nanny is so particular about cleanliness, until now I have it in me: (I) brush my teeth after eating, even small things it's just imbibed in me." Preity mentioned in her interview that, compared to other Indian girls in school, she had an easier time fitting in and befriending Filipino schoolmates.

3.2.2 *Media as Agents of Inclusion and Exclusion*

In 2006 Michael V, a popular comedian and gag show host, came up with a compilation of his music videos that make fun of marginalised peoples in Philippine society. Produced by GMA Network, the second largest TV and news organisation in the Philippines, each song from the album features Michael V spoofing gays, Indians, ugly people, etc. In the song *VJ Bumbay*, he mimics a Sikh Punjabi who wears a fake beard and wraps a length of white cloth around his head to resemble a turban. Shot in black and white, and set in rap, the character of Michael V, a hawker, persuades the audience to buy his original but defective wares.

This media product not only identifies groups that Filipino society marginalises, but also points to what Stuart Hall (1997) calls a regime of representation or 'the whole repertoire of imagery and visual effects through which 'difference' is represented at any one historical moment' (p. 232). Taken side by side and as a whole, the different videos that comprise Michael V's album also suggest ways Filipinos or Michael V alone represents these marginalised groups. Images of Indians, gays, or persons with unpleasant looks and odour are produced to mean that they are: objects of laughter; strangers to be feared and suspected; and bodies subject to derision.

The case of Ahmed demonstrates how this regime of representation operates. Being gay and Indian at the same time, he experienced either gender or 'racial' slurs in school. The worst comment he heard came from a jock who followed him from behind and uttered: "You're not only *bumbay*, but a faggot too!" Ahmed's experience shows how gender and race intersect to form a doubly marginalised position in Philippine society.

Most participants responded to *VJ Bumbay* as critical audiences; they questioned the misrepresentation of Indians and the irresponsibility of the media producers. However, others

did not say much about the video and were reflexive of its genre as an entertainment product: "it was funny and not to be taken seriously."

Two Sindhis pointed out that the video generalised Indians as the stereotypical *bumbay* and used this representational strategy to generate humour. Their resistance to these stereotypes suggested class differences and distancing from Punjabis. Implying the high profile of Sindhis, they claimed that not all Indians in the Philippines are money lenders but owners of big businesses that contribute to the country's economy. Punjabi participants also rejected such representations and emphasised that many second/third generation Punjabis are already educated and not necessarily into 'five-six.' Both Sindhis and Punjabis countered this occupational stereotype of Indians by asserting their class and changing status, respectively.

Participants criticised the media for their irresponsible treatment of minorities. Jeet lamented how the production, airing and marketing of the music video by a major media organisation indicated an institutionalisation of racial discrimination. Both Raja and Jeet observed that the music video reinforced stereotypes, especially among the masses. Jeet, who taught street children, shared that they teased him with the song: "They pick up this message from the media which says that it's ok to make fun of people who are different."

The participants' interpretations of *VJ Bumbay* showed how local media influence representations of Indians in the Philippines. The music video reinforces an occupational stereotype that has, according to the participants, racist (and classed) connotations. By emphasising this meaning in a symbolic space that is Philippine entertainment media, it has influenced ways participants position their identities. Participants debunked this stereotype by asserting their (higher) class and status positions.

If local entertainment media contributed to the exclusion of Indians, global media, to some extent, influenced the symbolic environment in their favour. The US-based annual *Miss Universe* pageant, a media event and contest taken seriously in Philippine society, in Thapan's (2002) observation, has helped boost the image of Indians locally. Held in Manila in 1994, the *Miss Universe* organisation partnered with the Philippines' largest TV network, ABS-CBN, which gave full media coverage for three weeks in May, a time of the year when students are on vacation. Sushmita Sen, an 18-year old Bengali and Indian national, won the crown. Female participant shared how this media event helped change Filipinos' perceptions of Indians, especially women. Deepa, who claimed to be half-Bengali, noticed that people were "remarking how smart they were at such a young age…they sounded like philosophers." She felt proud and identified with the Miss Universe's Bengali identity.

There are two ways to understand the impact of this media event on the informants and Philippine society. Radhika Parameswaran (2004) finds that Indian print media's representations of global Indian beauty queens are classed and are constructed in the context of a nation that is renegotiating its marginal position in the global economy (p. 346). The female informants' identification with Indian beauty queens reflected not only an affiliation with an Indian identity but also a desire to be recognised as Indians in a privileged class position. The changing image of Indian women in Philippine society, however, was mediated by the symbolic power of a global media event that is owned and produced by an American media outfit. The sudden warmness experienced by Deepa and other female informants suggests that symbolic inclusion in Philippine society is *still* enabled by American global media. This observation strengthens E. San Juan's argument about the US's continuing

influence on the Filipino imagination. Interestingly, Natasha Warikoo (2005) has found the same gendered experience with the media among Indo-Caribbean youths in New York City. Females benefitted from cosmopolitan represenations of Indian women and males resisted classed and racialised stereotypes (taxi drivers) quite similar to how Filipinos imagine Indians.

4. Conclusion

This study was premised on the need to investigate Indian diasporas in non-Western and post-colonial societies. I wanted to find out how young members of the Indian diaspora position their identities in a post-colonial context and city, Manila, and what media might have to do with this process. Participants of the study asserted and claimed identities in multiple and complex ways. Being diasporic Indian in Manila is not so much about ethnicity alone but a combination of class, ethnicity, gender, and race. Media reinforce classed and 'racialised' representations of diasporic Indians which contribute to their inclusion in and exclusion from Philippine society.

The life stories of participants attest to James Clifford's (1994) argument that the diasporic condition is a classed, gendered, and racialised phenomenon. Race or ethnicity, a primary issue among 'Third World' migrants in Western societies, is apparently present in a post-colonial society such as Manila. Its context as the political and financial centre of a post-colonial, capitalist society, however, renders an analogous position as the cities of the Global North like New York. Informants of the study who are second/third generation members of the Indian diaspora tend to experience contradictory attitudes towards ethnic difference. Such attitudes could be traced to a colonial past that imagined and treated people based on racial hierarchies that privileged white foreigners. On one hand Filipinos have imbibed the racial prejudices of their American colonisers and have treated other ethnic groups such as Indians and 'Muslim Filipinos' accordingly; on the other Filipinos look up to foreigners, especially Americans and Europeans, and provide preferential treatment. Based on participants' accounts, they were both beneficiaries of Filipinos' hospitality and victims of their prejudices. Indeed, the influence of colonisation and the symbolic power of the coloniser still linger and consequently inform the dynamics of the Indian diaspora in Philippine shores.

5. Recommendations

This study focussed on identity positionings of second/third generation members of the Indian diaspora in Metro Manila and the role of the media in this process. Several themes and issues emerged in the the lifestories of informants. This paper only provided a discussion on the role of context (the class orientation and racial biases of Philippine society) and representation (media portrayals of Indians) in the constitution of diasporic ethnic identities (Hall, 1990/2003). Future studies could take up the following themes and issues that were beyond the scope and limitations of this paper, namely:

- Discourses and practices of womanhood, gayness, masculinity, and sexuality in the transnational space between India and the Philippines;

- The experience of 'twice migration' or how Indians from the Philippines negotiate their identities in Anglophone countries or cities in the Global North;

- The discourse and practice of caste and religion among young members of the Indian diaspora in the transnational context of Indian and the Philippines.

As this study is also confined to one locality which also happens to be the political and economic center of the Philippines, it would be important to gather data from the same age group in the provinces, cities, or towns that are considered to be in the periphery of Metro Manila. The comparisons drawn from this set of data would enrich and expand the current findings.

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