

**Not All 'Coolies' are the Same: South African Indians and the
Performance of Comedy in Articulating Identity in Post-Apartheid
South Africa**

By

Vidhya Sana



**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Media Studies**

Department of Media Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg

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Supervisor: Dr Dina Ligaga

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acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are
those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the
NIHSS and SAHUDA

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original unaided work and it has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other university. Where other people's works have been used, this has been fully acknowledged. This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Signed



Vidhya Sana

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March 2020

Dedication

For my children.

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Abstract

Post-Apartheid South Africa saw many communities attempt to negotiate anxieties of identity and belonging in the new cultural landscape that came along with democracy. The South African Indian community, in particular, has navigated issues of identity and belonging in a society largely informed by a black/white binary. They have done so in various ways. The rise of comedic acts stemming from this community suggests that comedy is one avenue with which South African Indians are able to perform their identities. In all, this project considers the South African Indian community's rejection of the notion that they are not a diaspora of India, but rather fully-fledged South Africans with no yearning for a mythical 'home'. Comedy, in its proliferation in South Africa, and as a useful medium to be able to speak about issues that are considered taboo, allows for the gathering of a rigorous data set to be able to explore issues of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The study considers the works of Riaad Moosa, Peru and Bala, Karou Charou and the movie *'Keeping up with the Kandasamy's'*. Through an analysis of the various themes that these comedic acts preoccupy themselves with, inferences can be made about the ways in which the South African Indian community addresses issues of identity and belonging in South Africa. Tropes of religion, food and cultural symbols, such as dress and Bollywood, reveal that some members of the community articulate acts of cultural memory in an attempt to create a sense of belonging within the community. The traditional notions of patriarchy that governed Apartheid South Africa and Indian cultures (and still continue to govern), are maintained within the community through notions of gender roles, sexual morality and the maintenance of traditional notions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality. Finally, the increasing influence of neoliberal capitalism has meant that some performances of comedy have adopted an excessive character (the figure of the 'Charou' in particular), along with exploring anxieties of excess and the freedom to consume in their themes. The project ultimately explores how South African Indians see themselves in relation to the global Indian diaspora, in relation to other South Africans, and in relation to each other within the community through the exploration of these themes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

"We Indian South Africans have had to struggle hard to claim our South Africanness, and that is something we jealously guard. We are not a diaspora of India." – Fatima Meer

Laughter is as old as time. Performances of comedy and humour to elicit laughter have been around for centuries. Studies of the significance of humour and comedy in society have been around for centuries, yet there is a general perception of humour as being frivolous and not worthy of in-depth academic consideration. In South Africa, in particular, the study of humour has been even more limited, with much of this lack attributed to the violent history of the country, which limited freedom of expression and repressed dissent. However, in post-Apartheid South Africa, there has been a revitalisation of comedy, with the rise in popularity of, for example, Peter Dirk Uys' character Evita Bezuidenhout, Loyiso Gola's experiences as a Black South African, Conrad Koch's Chester Messing puppet and, most famously, Trevor Noah and the coloured experience. While much of the comedy has been centred on the political, comedy is also used in South Africa as a means of establishing a national identity and what it means to be a South African (Crigler, 2018). This burgeoning of comedy has prompted an interest in the study of how humour can be used by members of a minority community as a means of articulating their anxieties of belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. This project considers the South African Indian community and performances of comedy from within the community in an attempt to articulate a unique South African Indian identity.

In South Africa, the term 'coolie' (or *kulie*) is a derogatory term referring to a person of Indian descent. The term, originally a Hindi word meaning labourer or bag-carrier, was used by slave traders and owners to refer to Indian slaves and indentured labourers. It was adopted during Apartheid as a derogatory, blanket description of anyone belonging to the South African Indian community. While negative connotations around the word 'coolie' are understood worldwide as pertaining to a lower class of people of Indian descent, in South Africa these connotations are felt even deeper due to the violent nature of the country's history.

As mentioned, term 'coolie' is widely used worldwide but it has also been largely invisible in literary and academic conceptualisations (Bragard, 2005: 221). The work of Karl Torabully, and his conceptualisation of the term 'coolitude' in his poetry is an example of the many ways in which people of Indian descent, worldwide, have reclaimed the word coolie that "acknowledges and gives a voice to the coolies and their transoceanic crossings" (Bragard, 2005: 221). Similarly, the use of the word "coolie" in a South African context is strategically used by some as a way of reclaiming the narrative attached to the word, in an attempt to acknowledge the complex history and shifting nature of the term. That the whole South African Indian community has historically been known as 'coolies' is often used within the community, especially in comedy, as an identifying trait to both reconcile the community with the rest of South Africa (by implication of a shared history of discrimination) and differentiate themselves from other groups. Akin to the reclamation of the term n****er in African American cultural products, the use of the term 'coolie' is a method of reclaiming power over the word.

Through the reclamation of their own narratives using comedy, the South African Indian community is able to articulate a sense of belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. South African Indians in post-Apartheid South Africa have been imagined in very specific ways, both by themselves and others, and it is quite different from the ways in which Indians in the global diaspora have been imagined. This difference inspired this study on the ways in which South African Indians imagine themselves, through performance, in a post-Apartheid context. While there are various ways in which South African Indians perform this imagining – I consider the trope of comedy and humour, for its ability to speak directly about these anxieties through making light of situations. Visibility of the South African Indian community in the post-Apartheid landscape has often come into question, both from those within and outside the community. The study aims to explore how this visibility (or in-visibility) is negotiated in a post-Apartheid context.

A 2019 mid-year population report undertaken by Statistics South Africa places the South African population at an estimated 58.77 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The

South African Indian community constitutes a mere 2.6% of the total South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2013). At just over 1,5 million people, it is still considered one of the largest populations of Indians outside of India. The size of this population is noteworthy enough to validate a growing research interest in this community. The unique positioning and history of the community makes it different from other diasporas of India that exist in countries such as the United States of America, Canada, the United Kingdom and others.

In the transition to post-Apartheid South Africa, the South African Indian community has had to acclimatise to a new system of integration, as have other South African communities, all of whom grew accustomed to the forced separation of groups during the Apartheid dispensation. A large part of this process across all groups is negotiated through cultural expressions; most often, through popular culture. South African Indian popular culture is burgeoning in the age of social media. Skits, songs and dance have been at the forefront of cultural expression throughout. The performance of comedy, both online and in live shows, appears to be the most common form of self-expression within this group, based on the popularity of comedy over other forms of performance that come out of the community. The availability of material of a comedic nature sparked my interest in the ways in which these performances served to explore, negotiate and validate a unique South African Indian identity.

The topic “Not all coolies are the same: South African Indians and the performance of comedy in articulating identity in post- Apartheid South Africa” was conceptualised around the notion that South African Indians see themselves as having a unique identity in three ways. First, South African Indians sometimes do not ascribe to the same characteristics as the global Indian diaspora – more specifically those who have undergone migration to the global North. As Rastogi (2008:2) argues:

Post-colonial scholarship, including trends in both South Asian and South African studies, also inclines to be preoccupied with the relationship between the white colonizers and the non-white colonized, thus unintentionally reifying the dominance of the West and Whiteness.

This study, while interested in the effects of white dominance on South African Indian identities, is also interested in how this plays out in a non-Western country and in how different non-white constituencies interact with each other in non-western geographies. Issues that arise in the EAST/WEST NORTH/SOUTH dichotomy are usually: “unsettling the power of whiteness, challenging the perception of one’s alleged cultural and religious backwardness in the economically developed regions where the migrant has relocated, maintaining emotional and financial ties with the home country, and fearing assimilation into “corrupt” western culture” (Rastogi, 2008: 5). This is complicated in a South African context.

Second, informed by the violent and divisive past of the country, South African Indians, while passionately claiming that they are wholly South African and have no links to the homeland of India, still attempt to maintain some semblance of Indian culture through traditional practices. Third, South African Indians have varied religious and geographical divisions within the group, which many in the group prefer to distinguish and maintain. It becomes apparent through an examination of the history and context of the South African Indian community that these three factors – that South African Indians see themselves as different from the global Indian diaspora, that they see themselves as different from other South African communities and that they are divided from within on the different linguistic, religious and geographical groups under the umbrella of South African Indian – all contribute to the ways in which South African Indians organise themselves and perform their identities.

This project is primarily concerned with how the abovementioned anxieties of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa are explored using humour and comedy as tools to voice these anxieties. The function of humour is less important than the larger project of exploring identity and belonging through the discourses that comedy and humour uncover in their texts. The terms comedy and humour are used interchangeably in this project to refer to any act that is intended to elicit laughter, be it stand-up comedy, movies, skits or songs, etc.

The remainder of this introductory chapter will explicate the context and history which informs the project. This allows the reader to establish an understanding of the context within which comedy operates. Second, an explanation of the main research questions and research problems are explored in detail. The chapter also offers an outline of the layout of the remainder of the thesis with a brief chapter breakdown of remaining chapters.

History and Context

It is vital to glean an understanding of the history of South African Indians, as it heavily informs almost all cultural productions from within the community. In an effort to understand the current position of the South African Indian, I attempt to trace the history of this group to present day. Indians arrived in South Africa in two waves. First, as indentured labourers who migrated to the sugar cane fields of KwaZulu-Natal in the latter part of the 19th century and thereafter more arrived as traders who sought economic opportunities. Much of the indentured labourers arrived from Southern India and the traders mostly came from the state of Gujarat. Their arrival in South Africa served to “rupture the polarized arrangement of race on which apartheid was predicated and which post-apartheid South Africa has maintained” (Rastogi, 2008: 8). This resulted in a “triangulated relationship between the European settler, African indigene, and Indian diasporic” (Rastogi, 2008: 8). Indentured labourers, at the time when their contracts were about to expire, either opted to stay behind and maintain a piece of land, seek other work or returned back to India. Trading Indians were offered a sum of money to pack up their business and leave or risk losing their livelihood. Despite this, many, including the trading Indians, chose to stay. This has resulted in a large population of second and third generation Indians who are descendants from the early settlers. It is the cultural performances from this segment of the population that are most prevalent and that particularly interests this project.

In addition to discrimination from the colonial British, the Indian community also bore the brunt of the segregationist Apartheid government. Some Indians lost their businesses and livelihood in the government’s attempt to expatriate Indians back to India and, thus, eradicate the Indian population in South Africa. Indians that did stay on in South Africa during Apartheid

went on to suffer a similar, though some may say less stringent, discrimination as black South Africans. Some were even allowed to have businesses that thrived under the Apartheid regime. While there may be people who dispute this, Indians were afforded more freedoms than black South Africans. However, the biggest blow for South African Indians came in 1946 when India became the first country to place an embargo on Apartheid South Africa. This meant that those Indians that remained in South Africa were mostly cut off from their motherland. This embargo lasted four decades, cementing South Africa as the only home South African Indians would have had. Up until 1961 (100 years after arrival), Indians were considered Indian citizens though cut off from the homeland and living in South Africa. They were only granted citizenship after the Indian government complained about the treatment of Indians under Apartheid law. The Apartheid government decided to offer South African citizenship to Indians, thus, preventing the Indian government from protesting against the treatment of its citizens (Rastogi, 2008: 13).

The treatment of Indians during this tumultuous political time impacted on the manner in which Indians responded to their homeland and host country. Rastogi (2008: 9) also suggests:

The questions of diaspora, especially those of national identity, minority belonging, cultural selfhood and multiple allegiance, are refracted through an East-South prism in South Africa as well as complicated by the presence of apartheid.

The presence of Apartheid made South African Indians even more isolated from their home country, but also isolated them from other communities within their host country. The Group Areas Act meant that South African Indians lived and worked mostly in isolation from other race groups. This isolation is significant, and plays an important role in the way South African Indians perform their visibility through their unique cultural outputs. Due to being an 'in-between' race, in-between Black and White and not quite belonging to either group, there was often tension between Indians and black South Africans. "...the hierarchical system of apartheid also offered Indians certain privileges over Africans due to their status as the buffer group" (Radhakrishnan in Rastogi, 2008: 14). It has also been argued that many Indians benefitted from the Apartheid system (Mxumalo & Ngoma, 2016) and continue to reap the benefits of being a part of the "grey" on the population race spectrum. The average income

of Indians in South Africa is the fastest growing income group and makes Indians the second largest earners in the country, second to white South Africans.

Though Indians had some advantages over Black South Africans, there were many in the Indian community who considered the fight against Apartheid as vital to the survival of the country and their countrymen. At the same time as their black counterparts, Indians also opposed restrictive Apartheid laws and many stood in solidarity with black South Africans against Apartheid. A look at the history of Apartheid would confirm that “Indians have a long history of political activism and fraternity with black Africans” (Rastogi, 2008: 14). These stalwarts in the struggle against Apartheid, along with many who have supported the cause from afar, consider their involvement in the anti-Apartheid project as something that has strengthened and cemented their bond to the country. Rastogi (2008: 1) argues that “Indians desire South African citizenship in the fullest sense of the word” and that this is a strong sentiment, based on “a need for national anchorage that is a consequence of their erasure in both apartheid and post-apartheid consciousness” (2008: 1). The South African Indian yearns to find a sense of belonging, complicated by their invisibility in the Apartheid memory and from the black and white dichotomy in post-Apartheid consciousness. This complexity of belonging is explored through the cultural productions emerging from within the community.

From the above, it becomes apparent that there are distinctions between the South African Indian and the global Indian diaspora as the history of settlement and the political landscape in South Africa differs from other places in which Indians have chosen to migrate to. I refer back to the quote with which I began this chapter, elucidated by Fatima Meer, a well-known activist in the fight against Apartheid. Her statement clearly denounces an identification with India as a home country and implies that “identifying as a diasporic Indian would necessarily privilege the Indian aspect of South African identity” but would also “consequently erase this community’s struggle for recognition in South Africa” (Rastogi, 2008: 1). At this point, I would like to take some to explicate my own position as a South African Indian. Born and raised in South Africa, to parents who were also raised in South Africa, I had always identified as South African first and the term “Indian” related to my religious, culinary and cultural upbringing.

My South African Indian friends and cousins also had similar experiences. On the other hand, some members of the South African Indian community identify as Indian first – this is largely amongst first and second generation Indians, with a stronger yearning to connect to the ‘motherland’. These make up a smaller percentage of the larger population, with third generation upwards making up the majority of the South African Indian population. Within this demographic, the only connection to India is through cuisine, religion and cultural products such as dress and consumption of Bollywood. All this happens alongside a participation in larger South African social, cultural and political landscape. It is deductible then, that a large part of the Indian South African population consider themselves as much South African as their black, white and coloured counterparts. For these South Africans, India exists as an “empty symbol” (Rastogi, 2008: 10) and there is no desire to return ‘home’. There is currently still a reasonable influx of Indians who come to South Africa in search of economic opportunities, resulting in a large first-generation of Indian immigrants. These first-generation Indians consider themselves Indian and a part of the diaspora. They do not have an affection to South Africa as South African Indians do.

The South African Indian community has continued to grow and become an integral part of South Africa’s cultural, political and economic spheres. South African Indians have made their home in South Africa and have continued to find ways to construct their identities, sense of nationhood and belonging in the South African landscape. Post-Apartheid South Africa became a vastly different landscape from the previously segregated country that South Africans had fought to transform. While calls are being made for a ‘rainbow nation’, where racial, cultural and religious boundaries are to be demolished, the past oppositional binaries of ‘self’ and ‘other’ have not completely disappeared (Wasserman & Jacobs, 2003). Indian South Africans, in particular, find themselves caught in a landscape where their sense of belonging is in balance and they feel the need to ‘connect’ to some form of Indian identity yet, at the same time, validate their unique South African identity.

The Indian community in South African is diverse and distributed across many cities as well as smaller towns. During Apartheid, the Group Areas Act (1950), “appropriated Indian property

in prime areas and relocated Indians to arid areas” (Rastogi, 2008: 13). According to the High Commission of India in South Africa (2013):

About 80% of the Indian community lives in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, about 15% in the Gauteng (previously Transvaal) area and the remaining 5% in the Cape Town area. In KwaZulu-Natal, the major concentration of the Indian population is in Durban. The largest concentrations of Indian settlement are at Chatsworth, Phoenix, Tongaat and Stanger in the Durban Coastal area, which covers approximately 500,000 of the Indian origin community. Pietermaritzburg – noted for its link with Mahatma Gandhi - has a community of approximately 200,000.

Lenasia and Laudium have the highest concentration of Indians in the Gauteng region. Much of this concentration of Indians “came about as a result of the Group Areas Act that forced racial division into particular designated areas” (High Commission of India in South Africa, 2013). While this was vehemently opposed, it also allowed for the preservation of Indian roots and endogamy. The Group Areas Act, while a barbaric system, allowed for the preservation of Indian ‘roots’ – with South African Indians maintaining a semblance of Indian culture within their small communities.

It is not possible to define one “South African Indian Experience” (Rastogi, 2008: 11) because there are various factors such as history, language, religion and class that affect the Indian experience. Initially, Indians were distinguished as either indentured Indians or passenger Indians. The history of the manner in which a particular South African Indian’s ancestors arrived in South Africa would offer insight into their religion, caste, language and class. On the one hand, indentured Indians were mostly from the South of India, and have a large presence in Durban townships. Passenger Indians, on the other hand, were mostly from the Gujarat region of India and established themselves as part of the trading community throughout all major cities and towns in South Africa. According to statistics provided by the Department of Education and Culture (High Commission of India in South Africa, 2013), “the linguistic break-up of the Indian community is as follows: Tamil 51%, Hindi 30%, Gujarati 7%, Telugu 6%, Urdu 5% and others 1%”. However, most Indians in South Africa consider English as their first language.

The Indian community in South Africa is not just diverse in terms of the languages spoken but also in terms of religion. The two main religions of Indians in South Africa are Hinduism and Islam, with a large number of indentured Hindu Indians converting to Christianity during Apartheid. According to a report produced by the High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora (2000: 85), 39% of the South African Indian population are Hindu, 20% are Muslim (including the Cape Malay Muslims) and around 13% are Christian. It is important to note here that both Muslim and Hindu communities still recognize some form of caste systems within their communities but inter-caste relationships and marriages are common. However, “inter-communal” marriages across the religious communities are less common (2000: 85). This links to class differences within the group, which often are differentiated along the lines of indentured and passenger Indians, geographic location and religion. According to Rastogi (2008:20):

Descendants of indentured and passenger Indians differently articulate shared concerns such as egalitarian citizenship, memory, hidden histories, relationships to the British Empire, the Indian contribution to South African life, their oppression preceding apartheid, affiliation with black Africans, and the emergence of Afrindian identities.

The reluctance to encourage the mingling of different linguistic and religious groups is rooted in both the memory of an Indian caste system, as well as class intonations of indentured labourers versus those arriving as passengers. Cape Malay Muslims are also recognized as Indians, many of whom are descendents of early Indian settlers in the Cape who married “slaves from East Asia, other parts of Africa, or from indigenous Khoikhoi and San inhabitants” (Rastogi, 2008: 75). This study will consider Malay communities as part of the Indian community, even though they are sometimes recognized as part of the Coloured community. It becomes apparent then, that “South African Indian identities are always configured by multiple determinants such as indenture, migration for commercial purposes, language, religion, gender and class” (Rastogi, 2008: 11).

Tracing Performances from Apartheid and Beyond

The performance of culture is one of the many ways in which communities express their identities. In using the term performance, I refer to the expression of identity to an audience. In Apartheid South Africa, performance became a vital means to express concerns of the

times within the various segregated communities. This section traces how performance has been used, during and after Apartheid, as a means of expressing, unifying and solidifying identities. I consider how South African Indians have used performance to express their identities through time.

The Apartheid era was fraught with “contestation(s) between the state and its radical oppositions” (Peterson, 1990: 229). Communities, in an attempt to negotiate these contestations from within their segregated spaces, turned to social and cultural acts of performance. As Peterson (1990: 229) elaborates:

Cultural practices have featured prominently in these resultant conflicts because of their potential to give meaning to individuals' experiences of social processes and transformations.

Here, Peterson is particularly referring to the emergence of Black theatre performances in South Africa as sites of opposition towards the Apartheid government. Performances from within Black communities (here, I refer to Black as encompassing all non-white persons who were segregated under Apartheid policies) often occurred within the borders of the various segregated communities and took on different themes and forms.

While themes and concerns of black communities in Apartheid South Africa centred around reclamation of narratives around their histories, rights and “hopes”, basically “a negation of the state’s myths” (Peterson, 1990: 229), within the South African Indian communities, the concerns were slightly different. Initially, performance productions within Indian communities tended towards theatrical performances that were concerned with the preservation of ‘Indian’ culture. As mentioned before, the South African Indian community is divided across various linguistic, geographic and religious lines – this meant that performances were often delineated along the lines of vernacular groups. Furthermore (Naidoo, 1997: 32):

The segregation laws which prohibited the formation of mixed production or performance companies as well as mixed audiences also influenced the development of vernacular theatre.

Early productions of performance were often arranged through vernacular schools and performed in school halls and community venues such as community halls and temples. Therefore, early Indian theatre in South Africa was confined to “relatively conventional theatre in relatively inflexible venues” (Naidoo, 1997: 32).

The claim that South African Indians played a pivotal role in the fight against Apartheid is not clearly reflected in the cultural productions of the community. In contrast (Naidoo, 1997: 33)

The vernacular drama, in my opinion, was easy prey for assimilation into an apartheid culture. The local determination to preserve Indian traditions and culture tended, unwittingly or not, to support the apartheid ideology of distinct, unchanging, and timeless cultures. As a result, other forms and cultural practices that expressed the complexity of South African social, economic, and political reality were for a long time regarded as inauthentic.

The South African Indian community remained largely insulated during Apartheid and the performances of the time reflected an obsession with preserving Indian culture rather than assimilating to South African culture. Productions like these were encouraged in vernacular schools, as were productions of dance and music, all in an attempt to ensure the preservation of the mythical home culture. The embargo placed on South Africa, by the Indian government as a stand against Apartheid meant there was a lack of entertainment and informative content from India. Thus, theatre productions would perform re-enactments of “indian mythologies and history and included plays about great heroes” (Naidoo, 1997: 31) from Indian mythology. These were scripted and enacted from memory and often performed in vernacular languages, not in theatres but in community schools, halls and stadiums. These continue to occur in post-Apartheid South Africa in the form of dance troupes, shows fashioned around Bollywood music, classic and contemporary dance and eisteddfods. These shows are often a reflection of the preservation of aspects of culture that were deemed exotic and “acceptable to the dominant group” (Naidoo, 1997: 31).

Post-Apartheid South Africa brought with many changes in the South African Indian community. First, democracy brought with it the ability for people to relocate to areas outside of the segregated neighbourhoods they had been occupying. While many remained in these areas (and still continue to at the time of writing), there are also many who have relocated, causing previously insulated communities to become increasingly fragmented. This has also created a need for media that caters for those who no longer reside in the old townships. In contemporary South Africa, the media has been pivotal in the articulation of all Black identities. The media is known to offer various platforms on which representations of identity can be displayed and negotiated. In Post Apartheid South Africa, mainstream media began to offer some forms through which South African Indians can negotiate their identities. This includes a radio station dedicated to Indian culture, Lotus FM, and a few Indian lifestyle TV programs such as Eastern Mosaic. One of the leading South African news inserts, *The Sunday Times Extra*, used to be well-read by the Indian community, but was discontinued in December 2014. *The Post* newspaper, with a wide circulation in the KwaZulu-Natal region, offers a tabloid style medium to its majority Indian readers.

However, as with many mainstream media formats, some issues of identity and exploring ways of negotiating a post-Apartheid South Africa are sometimes missed in an attempt to reach a wide audience and enjoy commercial success. In an attempt to achieve commercial success, these media use formulaic, stereotypical themes to attract the attention of the “umbrella” South African Indian, ignoring the linguistic, historical, geographic, class and caste differences within the community. While online spaces do exist, with a variety of lifestyle websites (Indianspice, Proudly Indian, IndianDelights) and many social media pages dedicated to providing lifestyle information, these are mostly limited to providing information. With these issues in mind, some South African Indians, as with most marginalized communities (such as the youth and women), have taken to alternative, popular media formats to express their experiences of being South African and Indian at the same time.

The performance of comedy is not a phenomenon that occurred suddenly in a post Apartheid South Africa. Elements of comedy had been used in productions by Black communities during Apartheid and in the South African Indian community from as early as the 1960s. At this time, more original plays were being made and the formation of the Shah Theatre Academy brought

with it the introduction of comedy and skits to South African Indian theatre (Naidoo, 1997). However, these skits were limited and not produced within all vernacular communities. I suggest that comedy and humour became more popular in the radio skits played on Lotus FM with the introduction of the popular “Harry Mama” character, played by Vikash Mathura. The popularity of this character, as well as subsequent characters that emerged on Lotus FM catalysed the decision to take these characters off the radiowaves and bring them to public gatherings such as festivals and shows.

Although it was not well received initially (during Apartheid), comedy continues to be a common choice of expression, most likely chosen for its ability to speak of taboo, and often serious topics and stereotypes in a light-hearted manner. Interestingly, though many efforts have been made in other spheres such as music, dance and theatre, South African Indians are most visible in the comedy space. It is through comedy that the nuances of class, religious, linguistic and geographic delineations within the community are articulated most clearly and universally. Sierlis (2011: 514) argues that comedy is useful because it “extends beyond the specifics of geographical, historical, linguistic or prosopographic references”. Comedy offers an approach to exploring the anxieties of belonging and identity through this ability to be culturally specific in addition to its ability to speak of taboo topics. The ability of comedy to perform these functions has meant that, in post-Apartheid South Africa, where many of the South African Indian community have moved out of their townships and are becoming increasingly fragmented, listening to comedy skits and visiting comedy shows offer a way to reconnect to their origins. Furthermore, audiences can use opportunities of watching these shows to revisit their townships through identifying common stereotypes, language and themes. What comedy also allows these audiences to do is “point to what, where and who have been left behind or left over in the new dispensation of a democratic South Africa” (Sierlis, 2011: 514) and use this as a benchmark for how far they have come from the townships.

The comedy shows presented in this thesis have been selected from 2012 to 2017, what can be seen as the beginning of the explosion of comedy from within the South African Indian

community. As mentioned, the figure of Harry Mama and others from Lotus FM were then brought to live shows and this led to others being inspired to join in the comedy scene. In 1997, the characters of Peru and Bala were introduced to Lotus FM, played by popular radio personalities Ray Maharaj and Vikash Mathura. They achieved a huge commercial success from within the community, and they grew from radio to live shows, a comic strip in local newspapers and the three shows that appear in this thesis were national tours that were sold out at all venues. Peru and Bala are two of the most well recognised figures in South African Indian comedy. The figure of Karou Charou is the second comedian I consider in the thesis. Karou Charou is also a character created by Madhevan Moodley, who shot to fame with his shows “Don’t Dally with the Masala” and “Kama Sutra”. He is known for his flamboyant costumes and brash, forthcoming style.

Apart from skits, I also consider stand-up comedy a form of humour in the thesis. Riaad Moosa is a comedian that has achieved commercial success, not just from within but also from outside of the South African Indian audiences. He grew a big fan following with his stand up career, and was catapulted into fame with the success of his movie “Material” (2012). His stand-up comedy show “Doctors Orders” is also included as part of the data set in this thesis. Moosa is known for his family-friendly humour, his universal appeal and his comedy considers the anxieties of being a Muslim in a post-9/11 age. His work particularly considers familial conflicts between different generations and the tension between tradition and modernity. In deciding to include the Material movie, I also decided to include the movie “Keeping up with the Kandasamys” (2017) as part of the data set, also due to its commercial success. The movie is set in the township of Chatsworth and is a comedic take on motherhood, friendship and how they play out in a South African Indian township.

The above are a few of the more commercially successful comedy shows, skits and movies that have been chosen because of their commercial success as well as their accessibility. Apart from these shows, many comedy shows still occur on an informal basis – in community halls and stadiums, and recordings of these shows are inaccessible and difficult to come by. The time frame is interesting, as it spans a five year period, 18 years into the post-Apartheid

period. I argue that the burgeoning of comedy at this time reflects a pertinent time in the post-Apartheid period for various reasons. First, the initial years of democracy were marked by more pertinent issues that required urgent attention. The Truth and Reconciliation commission hearings, the tentativeness of the new democracy and, from within the South African Indian communities, the anxiety of belonging and where South African Indians fit in the new “Rainbow Nation”. That being said, theatre shows, comedy, dance and music still continued in their informal spaces, and started moving out of these spaces once people also started moving out of the townships into different areas – requiring performers to find more accessible venues to cater to their increasingly geographically diverse audiences. Third, while performances of dance and other traditional items still exist, the comedy shows attract the largest audiences because of their universal appeal. As an extension this reflects a “desire to extend oneself beyond the “Indian” community” (Naidoo, 1997: 30). Dance shows, for example, may be produced to demonstrate dance troupe skills of a particular dance style, or may incorporate Bollywood dances only – these are not to everyone’s taste and may not appeal to wider audiences. More recently, social media has become a popular means to create comedic characters and skits to relate and explore experiences. At the time of writing, popular comedians in the South African Indian comedy scene are still Peru and Bala, Riaad Moosa, Karou Charou, Simmi Arreff, Krijay Govender and Jailoshini Naidoo. In the online sphere, the personas of ‘Aunty Shiela’, ‘Have a Bash with Tash’ and ‘Adventures of 9 boy’ have become increasingly popular.

The adoption of comedy as a common performance choice, over theatre and other forms also reveals an interesting facet of South African Indian culture. It reveals that

... we have been subjected to a dominant ideology of white supremacy and Western cultural superiority, and like other groups have had to adopt customs and behaviors of the dominant culture and have developed an ambivalence toward our origins. What some of us have preserved of our original traditions are those elements that are acceptable to the dominant group. These elements are generally superficial and are regarded as exotic and therefore non-threatening.

Comedy, as a form that allows for the adoption of stereotypes to be used as the source of humour, also has the powerful ability to interrogate and subvert these same stereotypes. At the same time, it reveals a deep-seated need, from within the community, to emulate

Western ideals and practices. This is certainly not a claim that humour and comedy are Western concepts, but that these shows happen in English as opposed to vernacular languages is an indicator that there is a need, from within the community, to appeal to Western sensibilities. This is clearly contradictory to the attempts, during Apartheid past, to preserve Indian culture. That comedy is mostly produced by the younger generations of the South African Indian community reflects their desire to assimilate to wider South African culture. This creates a tension between the traditional old and the modern young generations.

The thematic concerns of the comedy reveal these interesting tensions between the preservation of tradition and culture – through the memory of an imagined home – and the assimilation to a ‘new’ South Africa through adopting modern ideals. In addition to the struggle between tradition and modernity, South African Indian comedy also thrives on the various stereotypes of Indian culture that, when considered through the lens of consumption and excess, reveal interesting connections between restrictions in Apartheid and freedoms of post Apartheid South Africa. Some of these tropes include: the figure of the ‘Charou’ as a mascot for conspicuous consumption, the obsession with cars, speed, and sound, the image of the greedy, enterprising, Indian businessman and Indian food. Another interesting facet of the comedy is the dominance of masculinity and patriarchal norms that inform the comedic themes. This is reflective of the wider state of comedy, which is a male-dominated space, in South Africa and across the world. The patriarchal norms adopted from traditional Indian culture as well as a repressive, Apartheid state, meant that South African Indians were subjected to a ‘double-dose’ of patriarchy and these ideals are still reflected in the comedy.

Through this navigation of the history of South African Indians, it becomes apparent that there are various defining moments in the history of this community that inform their sense of belonging in South Africa. The cultural products of this community are an essential route for members to negotiate and articulate their understanding and anxieties of belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. Comedy and humour are vital in this regard, as they offer a mode that is able to explore these anxieties by ‘making light’ of situations. The proliferation of comedy

in post-Apartheid South Africa, and a lack of academic study in this field, indicates that there is gap in the research that can be explored.

Research Problem

Current mediated spaces in South Africa cater for the vast majority of the country, but only limited coverage is given to issues pertaining to the South African Indian community. While these spaces do exist, they fail to deal with the issues of identity that South African Indians are seeking to negotiate. Indians in Post-Apartheid South Africa have been visible in very particular ways. It is not a universal visibility – Indians have been imagined around a very specific kind of culture. In mainstream media, both locally and worldwide, Indians are imagined to prescribe to very specific kinds of representations. In an attempt to achieve commercially viable success, much of the content of current SA media is limited to what is considered appealing to a vast majority. Themes covered in these spheres are usually limited to Bollywood, food, fashion and religion, which point to stereotypical representations of the wider community and ignore local specificities of location, caste, class, religion, vernacular and gender.

At the same time, there has been a growth of comedic performances in the South African Indian community in post-apartheid South Africa. Comedy, as a genre, has been increasing in popularity worldwide. This proliferation means that one of the ways in which Indians, along with other groups, try to negotiate their place in Post-Apartheid South Africa (or a postcolonial world) is through the genre of humour. Thus, alternative spaces such as comedy events and shows, offer opportunities for South African Indians to voice their concerns, opinions and issues pertaining to their experiences as a marginalized group. Currently, studies on Indian's in South Africa have been focused largely on very few tropes. The history of the settlement of Indians in South Africa has been investigated, and some work on literary productions have also been undertaken.

There is, however, limited academic undertaking that considers other cultural productions outside of literature. The cultural production of comedy offers a vital insight into identity formation within Indian communities in South Africa, and the way in which humour functions

as a tool for navigating belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. The function of comedy, as a powerful social tool that acts as a vehicle to explore identity and belonging in marginal communities, has not been explored in great detail – this study aims to explore this territory of research. The identity and anxieties of belonging experienced by a small diasporic community within post-Apartheid South Africa can be explored effectively through their production of comedy, as it allows the freedom to express these anxieties through light-hearted means. Assertions of identity also serve to cement belonging and concretize the performer's belonging to the wider community. Comedy is a social act, and performers call on stereotypes and identifying markers in order to stay relevant and funny to their audience. In doing so, they express their identity and cement their belonging to the wider community. The manner in which comedy is used in the South African Indian community, to explore the post-Apartheid anxieties of identity and belonging, is where this project seeks to contribute.

Research Questions

The research questions proposed are pertinent in uncovering the manner in which South African Indians experience and negotiate issues of identity in post-Apartheid South Africa. The main research question asks: In what ways do performances of comedy allow the articulation of identity, and the exploration of the anxieties of belonging in the South African Indian community in post-Apartheid South Africa? In order to answer this question, I aim to explore which South African Indians are involved in producing comedy performances, what themes these performances of comedy cover and, finally, what the themes in the comedy reveal about the South African Indian community.

The overarching research question, thus, aims to explore how Indians in South Africa in a postcolonial age, have appropriated comedic performances in order to construct and validate their identities and explore anxieties of belonging to a unique South African Indian identity, with no attempt to reconnect with India. In order to begin answering this question, the consideration of a contextual understanding of the community is required. In order to understand the context within which the comedians operate, I will consider which members of the South African Indian community use comedy to validate identity, with the aim to

understand the people involved in the production of these performances. The Indian community in South Africa is scattered amongst various regions of the country. The bulk of Indians reside in Durban and outlining townships and suburbs of Tongaat, Chatsworth and Verelum. In Johannesburg and Pretoria, many Indians reside in the Lenasia and Laudium areas and the rest of the Indian population is scattered around other regions. The reason for a concentration of Indians in specific areas is due to racial segregation of different racial groups during the Apartheid era. The Indian community largely consists of second and third generation Indians as well as some new settlers who arrive in South Africa for job prospects and trading. Apart from geographic divisions, the other factors that further divide the Indian community, such as gender, vernacular, income and religion, will also be considered. The study will attempt to identify which members of these groups are performing comedy performances and how they use them as a cultural tool to negotiate their sense of identity. In order to understand the cultural specificity of the performances, it is vital to understand the context that comedians themselves come from.

The second aspect that needs to be considered is the study of the various themes that these South African Indians address in their performance, with specific reference to aspects related to South African Indian diasporic matters. Here it becomes pertinent to attempt to address the various themes that South African Indians are interested in discussing in these alternative spaces of comedy performances. The study will identify the different themes that are discussed that are specific to the South African Indian community. I consider what themes the comedy uncovers, through a close reading of the texts. While much of the mainstream media focus on religious, culinary, cultural and fashion themes, this study aims to investigate what other themes and topics, if any, are of interest in the South African Indian community. This will be the springboard for the final section of the research.

Finally, having uncovered who produces comedy and what themes the comedy considers, the study will examine pertinent questions of the ways in which performances of comedy have opened up alternative spaces that enable South African Indians to negotiate and validate their unique identity. This leads to the sub-questions of the research. The first sub-question that

the research considers is: To what extent do performances of comedy by South African Indians explore the memory of 'home' in an attempt to articulate identity and cement belonging? Here, the utilisation of markers of cultural memory in the construction of identity, the creation of a sense of nationhood and links, if any, to the homeland are considered.

The second sub-question considers: To what extent do traditional gendered notions of identity impact on the performances of identity and validate belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa? Here, the highly gendered nature of the performances, and strictly delineated traditional views on gender and sexuality are considered. The anxiety of belonging is a gendered experience, with gender informing a large part of an individual's identity. The aim is to explore exactly how the comedy addresses gender, and whether notions of tradition impact on these performances.

The third and final sub-question is: To what extent have global, neoliberal and capitalist notions impacted on local performances of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa? The transition to the 'new' South Africa brought with it neoliberal sentiments that were informed by a global shift towards capitalism. This question explores whether this shift has impacted on the preoccupations of the South African Indian community and, if it has, to what extent it has done so.

Issues of memory and home, tradition and gender, neo-liberalism and globalisation, and their impact on identity are the main concerns of this project. The manner in which the abovementioned themes explore how the South African Indian community negotiates its belonging to a post-Apartheid era is also considered. These questions will aim to answer the main research question: In what ways do performances of comedy allow the articulation of identity, and the exploration of the anxieties of belonging in the South African Indian community in post-Apartheid South Africa? The study, thus, will ultimately aim to prove that comedy shows have opened up various new ways in which South African Indians are able to construct, negotiate and validate their identities and sense of belonging. It proves to offer a

potentially significant contribution to the study of South African designated groups and their use of popular media to articulate identity.

[Chapter Breakdown](#)

The remainder of this research project contains seven chapters. Chapter two considers the literature that contributes to the wider field in which this study is situated. The literature review offers an overview of literature under a range of topics including, the global Indian diaspora; the South African Indian diaspora, with an emphasis on the post-Apartheid era; the genre of comedy; and the genre of comedy in the global Indian diaspora, and within South Africa. The third chapter attempts to offer a theoretical framework, which is rooted in cultural studies and considers theories of diaspora in relation to cultural studies. Chapter four offers the methodological approach to the study and outlines the need for a qualitative approach in a cultural studies-based study of identity. The method of critical discourse analysis, based on themes found within the data, is explicated.

Chapter five offers the first of the analytical chapters. This chapter, titled 'Memory, Identity and Belonging' explores the impact of the memory of the alleged homeland (India), the migration and the assimilation of memory to inform belonging. The discussions on these matters reveal a strong affiliation to the memory of links to an ancient culture, but also the struggle to assimilate into a post-colonial, post-Apartheid South Africa. The concepts of individual, collective and cultural memory are all considered. This is followed by a more in-depth discussion of cultural memory as informing the hybridity of using cultural markers that are vestiges of memory work. Cultural markers such as religion, food, dress, song and dance are all considered vestiges of memory work.

Chapter six is titled 'Tradition and Gender', and considers the impact of tradition inherited from an ancient culture, largely built on the tenets of patriarchy, on the gendered nature of the performances within the South African Indian community. The system and notions of patriarchy, made even more stringent by Apartheid laws which served to make communities even more isolated and insulated than they were before, continue to exist within the

community. The Indian community preferred this isolation, as it made the maintenance of tradition easier to control. This chapter explores the most prevalent trope in comedy, that of a patriarchal notion of gender and sexuality. The chapter first explores the concept of patriarchy as tradition and how it informs South African Indian culture; followed by an exploration of the ways in which comedy serves to maintain (or undermine) patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality.

Chapter seven considers the impact of adopting a neo-liberal, consumer-driven approach in the socio-political milieu of post-Apartheid South Africa. Titled 'Comedy and Excess', the chapter examines the stereotype of the enterprising, money-hungry Indian as a springboard to discuss excessive consumption within the community. The characterisation of a "Charou" identity is considered first. The 'Charou' is a recurrent feature in South African Indian comedy and refers to a lower class of South African Indians that mostly reside in the townships of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The associations of "Charoudom" with excess, greed and aspiration are considered. First, the actual performances and consumption of the comedy, which, true to the nature of comedy, are excessively visible. This includes how the comedians style themselves, where they perform or showcase their work, language they use, and comments about the audiences, which are all markers for what comedy can tell us about the South African Indian community. Second, what the comedians say about the stereotypes around consumption patterns of South African Indians reveal a good deal about their collective aspirations and fears. What are the recurrent themes in the comedy that reveal the nature of the South African Indian identity in a neoliberal, postcolonial world?

The final chapter offers a conclusion to the research, specifically answering the research questions outlined in the chapter above. The conclusion will attempt to offer insight into the various ways in which South African Indians use comedy to articulate a unique South African Indian identity.

To conclude, this research project attempts to offer insight into the identities of South African Indians in post- Apartheid South Africa. It promises to contribute to a small, but growing field of research on the South African Indian community. The choice of the medium of comedy, based on its popularity, offers a rich data set from which inferences can be made about the factors influencing identity in this community. The influence of memory, neo-liberalism and patriarchy, as contributing factors to the construction of identity, will offer interesting insights into which segments of this community are affected by these factors, whether they ascribe to these factors or overturn them, and in what ways these affect their identity.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The research questions consider the construction of identity through the popular medium of comedy. Comedians from the South African Indian community draw on various understandings of “Indianness” for their material. Constructions of Indianness have been studied both worldwide and locally; and this literature review aims to consider the various academic works that have addressed the way Indianness is constructed. The literature review first considers studies around identity and diaspora in the Indian community globally and in Africa, and then explores work on Indians in Post-Apartheid South Africa. As comedy is the mode of construction, the genre of humour is then explored as a part of popular culture. Though the focus of the project is on the discourses within the comedy, and not the function of comedy itself, the study of humour will still be briefly considered, with an emphasis on the use of humour and comedic acts by marginalised groups as a means of negotiating issues of marginality. Work pertaining to comedy and humour in South Africa concludes the literature review.

The Global Indian

The Indian diaspora is the largest diaspora worldwide, with approximately 17 million Indians living outside of India, according to the United Nations International Migration report (UN, 2017). The experience of being a part of the Indian diaspora inspired the theoretical work of Homi Bhabha (1994). Studies about the global Indian diaspora have been vast and range across various disciplines, including literature (Mishra, 1996; 2007), economics (Parekh, Singh and Vertovec, 2003), as well as popular culture, with many studies focusing on the consumption of Bollywood in particular (Bhattacharya 2004; 2009). While these studies have been vital to an understanding of the global Indian diaspora, what is of interest to this study specifically is work that has been considered in terms of Indian identity and popular culture in the diaspora.

The studies of Indian identity in diaspora are most often discussed in relation to migrations from India to countries in the global North (Bhatia 2007, 2009; Shankar 2008). As Rastogi (2008: 20) argues, there is a “preoccupation with narrating the act of migration that had

characterized all South Asian diasporas”. This is seen in both works of fiction and in global popular culture itself, with many artists using the migration theme in their artistic material. Many of these studies consider the complexities of assimilation and adapting to Western societies, and the impact this has on identities (as with Bhabha’s (1994) concepts of hybridity and liminality). Rastogi (2008: 19-20) argues:

Yet the South African version of hybridity that emerges from centuries of covert racial fertilization is characterized by neurosis and anxiety and is radically different from the intercultural fusion celebrated by diaspora theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Salman Rushdie.

In the conclusion of her book, Rastogi (2008) notes the disjuncture between the celebration of South African identity in South African Indian literature and the narratives of Indianess she encountered in her research, which revealed the insularity and self-isolation of the community. She argues that “indianness in South Africa is polymorphous, full of gaps, fissures, and holes” (Rastogi, 2008: 167). As opposed to the global Indian diaspora, in South Africa “there is no one, unified Indian voice and (that) disparate discourses influence Indian identity” (Rastogi, 2008: 167). This has been a direct result of “the structural determinacy of the apartheid past—political oppression, racial hermeneutics, national identity, and longing for belonging” and these politics of identity still “prevail in the postapartheid period” (Rastogi, 2008: 167). While these studies have offered some valuable ideas on diaspora, few of these studies have considered the impact of a South-South migration and even fewer the impact of Apartheid on the diaspora. The South African Indian experience is significantly complicated by the presence of Apartheid, the resultant embargo against South Africa that distanced Indians from their home country for a period of 40 years, and the subsequent fall of Apartheid. This vastly different terrain from the ‘usual’ migration experience, complicates the anxieties experienced by South African Indians, and this study aims to explore how these anxieties are articulated through the use of comedy. In this way, the attempt is to contribute to the limited body of work that considers such complexities.

Within Africa, a large body of work under the umbrella of Indian Ocean studies has contributed to an understanding of how Indians assimilated in their host countries. Much of this work was conducted in the East African region, a region where Indians settled for trade

in Kenya and Uganda specifically. Ojwang (2012) considers the impact of migration on culture in East African Indian literature. His research explores how Indianness is portrayed in literature by both African and Indian African authors in the region. It offers valuable insights into the experiences of Indians in terms of memory, otherness and identity, and has particularly interesting insights on food and the centrality of Indian food in literature. The insights in this book and other works by Ojwang (2011) have been applied in this study in relation to the South African context.

Other works in East African Indian studies (see Gupta, Hofmeyer & Pearson, 2010) offer perspectives on the relationship between India, Africa and the Indian Ocean region through a multidisciplinary lens. Many other writings (Aiyar 2015; Morris 1956; Hawley 2008) consider the historical roots and routes that led to Indian settlement in South Africa, with particular focus on the socio-economic and socio-political impact this had on communities that Indians inhabit. There is little work that considers Indian identity in the post-colonial African context. This research attempts to explore this gap in the research.

[The Indian Community in South Africa – Identity and Diaspora in a Post-Apartheid Age](#)
The most comprehensive studies on the South African Indian community have been conducted by Rastogi (2008), Hansen (2001), Ebr.-Vally (2001), and Desai (2002). These studies have focused on the South African Indian community in various ways. This section traces these studies, along with others, that explore the arrival and growth of the Indian community in South Africa. The literature review then considers arguments around the Indian identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Finally, this section considers writings about the cultural contribution of Indian's in South Africa.

As noted, there is a significant lack of research on the South African Indian community. Rastogi (2008: 3) outlines this:

The reasons for the paucity of scholarship on Indians in South Africa have much to do with Indians occupying a middle place in a dichotomous racial model that had no room for shades of gray, both in its oppressive and oppositional modes.

The phrase, 'not black enough nor white enough' has often been used within the community to account for the lack of attention to this segment of the population in social, political and economic spheres. While attempts have been made to explore this segment of the population, studies are often reduced to smaller groups within the population, Baderoon's (2014) work on Muslims, and Hansen's (2012) study of the Chatsworth community are examples. This can be attributed to the time and space constraints that usually accompany research undertakings, but also lack of access to data that would allow for more comprehensive studies of the entire segment. Rastogi (2008) and Frenkel (2011), for example, consider literary explorations of Indian identity through their readings of books that, very specifically, address issues of small Indian communities in South Africa. Desai's book (2002), *We Are the Poors*, explores township life in the predominantly Indian townships of Chatsworth and Phoenix, as does Hansen's (2012) *Melancholia of Freedom*. They focus their work on the struggles of township life, living on the fringes of society and Hansen's (2012) work has offered valuable insights into 'Charou' identity, which finds its roots in the townships. It becomes apparent that these studies consider sections of the community based on religious beliefs or geographical location. All these works have been valuable resources to piece together a holistic view of the South African Indian community.

Some readings on the South African Indian community in South Africa trace historical aspects of this group (Ramakrishnan 2012; Desai 2013; Vahed and Desai 2010; Ebr.-Vally 2001). They map out the arrival of Indians in South Africa and continue to explicate how the Indian community in South Africa has become a "microcosm of India" (Ramakrishnan 2012: 88). The first wave of Indian settlers came to South Africa in 1860 and were brought to work as indentured labourers in the sugar cane fields of what is now known as KwaZulu-Natal. The first ships to arrive in South Africa have been traced to 16 November 1860, when two ships arrived carrying 342 Indians (Ramakrishnan, 2012: 84). Ramakrishnan (2012: 85) further traces the growth of the Indian community:

Over the next 50 years, as many as 152,000 persons were shipped to South Africa from India. They hailed from the poorer parts of South India. They were mostly Hindus, but some were Muslims and a few were Christians. They spoke a variety of languages – Tamil, Telegu, Kannada and Urdu.

As time passed, this community grew to include traders, who travelled on passenger ships from Gujarat and began to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities available in the region.

The early settlers, some of whom moved on from the sugar cane fields to other forms of labour and started their own businesses, inspired the settlement of more Gujarati's in South Africa. The Indian community, exploiting their unique position as an intermediary between the Black and White communities, eventually grew to be a nuisance to the then British government, who began restrictive measures to prevent free movement and trade opportunities afforded to Indians. This trend continued through to the rise of the Apartheid government, where Indians bore much the same discrimination as their African counterparts. Nevertheless, the Indian community remained steadfast citizens of South Africa and survived the struggle for freedom through to the Post-Apartheid era. The articles and books that trace these movements (Ramakrishnan 2012; Desai 2013; Ebr.-Vally 2001) take a sociological and anthropological approach to the Indian diaspora. Much of the work offers chronological events that led up to Indians currently making up approximately 1.5 million of the South African population. However, this endeavour, whilst very important for contextualisation, fails to consider cultural and intellectual products that are produced for and by this community. They also fail to address issues of Identity and how Indians see themselves in Post-Apartheid South Africa.

The South African Indian is in a very challenging situation in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Often, one will hear of Indians in South Africa bemoaning about not being 'black enough nor white enough'. It is a sentiment that many Indians hold. The Post-Apartheid Indian is considered through the lens of the "stereotype of the exploitive trader" (Vahed & Desai 2010: 3) and, as Rastogi (2008: 13) elaborates:

Indians may have been dispossessed by the apartheid regime, but a certain group of business-minded Indians managed to acquire vast amounts of wealth during the segregation years. These rich traders and merchants exemplified the stereotype of the rapacious Indian that then became the stereotype for Indians in general.

This stereotype was brought to the forefront even more during the very public Gupta family scandals between 2013 and 2018. On the other hand, and in the view of the South African government, Indians are encouraged to be South Africans who may “recreate themselves within particular cultural, racial, and ethnic milieus, and to be brought together as equals in celebration of unity through diversity in a non-racial state” (Vahed and Desai, 2010: 2).

The South African Indian in South Africa today is very different from the indentured labourer of the colonial era, as emphasised by Desai and Vahed (2010: 4):

Well over 90 percent regard English as their first language, tens of thousands have converted to Christianity, caste has eroded as a signifier for marriage, and cuisine, dress and other markers of Indianness have mutated. While their everyday lives are increasingly distant from India, they remain ‘Indian’ in the eyes of fellow South Africans and to themselves.

Desai and Vahed (2010: 4) also suggest many South African Indians “have roots that are four to five generations deep in South Africa” and, thus, would not consider leaving South Africa to make India home.

While Indians in South Africa are evolving, the yearning to connect with the homeland is becoming less important, but still exists at some level. The writers discuss this yearning by South African Indians to connect with the “homeland and to trace their roots in India” (Vahed & Desai 2010: 4). They explore the possibility that, with the advent of communications technologies, this has become more easily carried out and the South African Indians are able to “recreate their own fantasy structures of homeland” (Vahed & Desai 2010: 4). Yet, as Brown (in Vahed & Desai, 2010: 6) argues, “Diaspora as transnationalism remains in tension with place bound nationalism but South Africa remains the place Indians call home”.

The tracing of roots links to “pride in being linked to an ancient culture but no inclination to settle there” (Vahed & Desai, 2010: 5). Furthermore, Rastogi (2008: 2) terms this an Afrindian identity, which:

... suggests an Africanisation of Indian selfhood and Indianization of South Africa. The former is achieved by an affiliation with the indigenous population and an attachment to the African land, while the latter is demonstrated through tracing the changes wrought in South Africa by the Indian presence.

This discussion of identity is crucial in understanding the allure of emphasising cultural markers of Indian identity (Bollywood, cuisine, fashion) within South Africa. Particularly when in stark contrast with the strong inclination to all things South African, as well as a consideration of the influence of globalisation and neoliberalism on Indian communities in South Africa. However, this work fails to consider the output of cultural products by Indian South Africans, and looks instead at the consumption of satellite television and support at Cricket matches. This study provides some vital insights into the psychological and sociological implications of being a member of the diaspora, but fails to consider what methods the diaspora undertakes to create a visible identity for themselves. However, my project seeks to explore this missing aspect of Indian identity in the diaspora.

The “intellectual production” (and cultural production) of the Indian community have been largely ignored in “South African cultural and literary studies” (Frenkel, 2011: 1) and these sentiments have been echoed by many scholars, including Rastogi (2008). Frenkel’s work looks at a few South African Indian novels and attempts to explore “discourses of race and identity formations that redefine contemporary understandings of postcolonial South Africa” (Frenkel, 2011: 2). She considers transnationalism as a contributing factor to these works and is aware of what seems to be a “blurring of boundaries” (Frenkel, 2011: 2). Frenkel’s work explores various literary texts and suggests that “the specificity of the critical perspectives offered by non-normative narratives of South African Indian fiction are important indicators of where discourses of power reside” (Frenkel 2011: 15). Rastogi (2008: 9) offers a similar perspective and suggests that “there is a direct and determinate relationship between politics and identity in South African Indian writing”. Furthermore, Rastogi (2008: 10) argues:

The proclamation of a South African national identity, as well as the articulation of a permanent bond with an everyday South Africa rather than with an imagined India, dominates the thematic concerns of South African Indian fiction.

Here, “changing oneself as well as being an agent of change in order to claim a South African national identity is the central dialectic underpinning Indian fiction in South Africa” (Rastogi, 2008: 2). These works offer a context for understanding the cultural productions of the South African Indian community in a broader, transnational, cosmopolitan world, and in a post-Apartheid era. However, the work is limited to the cultural production of literature and does not adequately consider the issues that an in-depth study of popular media production from the Indian community may uncover.

Jyoti Mistry (2004), in her article for the *Mail and Guardian*, argues that “there is a problem in maintaining the interest of the youth in a community dominated by Western values and trends”. Her article suggests that considering the formulaic themes of Bollywood, food and fashion is off the mark and that South African Indians yearn for much more than the “uninspired local content” (Mistry, 2004). Her suggestion is that a more active engagement in “arts, culture and the media” is required. This study aims to broaden the spectrum of what has been considered in cultural production from the South African Indian community and includes more current, often overlooked, themes that are pertinent to South African Indians in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Comedy may then be the ‘inspired’ local content that speaks to the South African Indian community, and, based on the large success of comedy shows, is definitely a successful medium.

[The Genre of Humour](#)

This section will consider a workable definition of what constitutes humour. This will be followed by a discussion on the importance of the genre of humour in studying culture. Key issues around humour and comedy, and the way they work as cultural products, are also discussed, with particular mention of what makes humour work and the function of humour in society. Humour and comedy as popular culture are considered.

The genre of humour may encompass a variety of comedic performances that may be considered. While most definitions of comedy are limited to the comic performance under scrutiny, they fail to consider the actual umbrella definition of all things considered to be comedy or humour. Comedy and humour require performers who “present a pastiche of observations and characters, both real and imagined” (Gilbert, 1997: 317). While much has been said about situation comedies, the growth in comedic performances by South African Indian performers would constitute mostly a stand-up comedy genre. However, there are other performances that include humour and interaction with audiences, which may not be considered stand-up comedy. Thus, a workable definition of comedy and humour is required for the purposes of this study.

Stand-up comedy is not just about a single performer standing up in front of an audience without any props, costume, lighting, etc. (Mintz, 1985: 71). Mintz (1985: 71) offers an all-encompassing definition, noting:

We must therefore broaden our scope at least to include seated storytellers, comic characterizations that employ costume and prop, team acts (particularly the staple, two-person comedy teams) manifestations of stand-up comedy routines and motifs within dramatic vehicles such as skits, improvisational situations and films (...), and television sitcoms (...).

This definition seems most fitting for the project at hand, as varying types of humorous performances have been selected for interpretation. The definition considers both comedy and humour “as the much broader phenomena of talk or behaviour in everyday life which is the source of, or catalyst for, amusement, laughter and the joking relationship itself” (Lockyer & Pickering 2008: 808).

Comedy and humour have often been seen as trivial and not worthy of analysis and scrutiny. However, “comedy makes a defining contribution to contemporary culture, providing a valuable locus for the affective and reflective interplay of public culture and private intimacy” (MacRury, 2012: 185). Lockyer and Pickering (2008: 808) argue that it is “integral to social relationships and social interaction”. Another dispute surrounding the study of comedy

suggests that by taking comedy seriously, one is being “anti-humour”. Lockyer and Pickering (2008: 808) argue against this:

It is not intended to stop people laughing. It is to say instead that in its various communicative acts humour forms a distinct modality of human interaction, universal in occurrence yet highly particular in how it operates and how it is sanctioned within different societies different historical periods.

This universality suggests that humour is important and that humour performs very specific social functions in different social situations. The study of humour is vital in understanding “how existing social relations are reaffirmed and how normative social boundaries are maintained” (Lockyer & Pickering, 2008: 809).

It has been established that humour and comedy are a powerful social tool. However, humour is only effective if the audience is laughing. According to Gilbert (1997: 324):

In order for a joke to “work”, the audience must “get it”. And in order to “get it”, identification or dis-identification (i.e. identifying and immediately dismissing the identification) must occur – the audience must see itself in order to construct its identity as either subject or object.

Audiences need to identify with the performance to relate to the joke. Thus, audiences would have to have some sort of shared understandings, values, opinions and cultures to relate to the content being provided. Humour is “bounded by a culture code” (Boskin, 1997: 19). It must “relate to the customs, symbols and experience of people” (Boskin, 1997: 19). What one group may find funny may not work for another group as humour calls for cultural specificity.

Humour can be seen as “social critique” (Gilbert, 1997: 321) or as a “judgement which produces a comic contrast” (Freud, 1905: 26). Thus, jokes and humour are a human response to social happenings. Humour is a way to negotiate and understand society and power relations within a society. Comedians have a unique position in that they are able to make social commentary about serious issues all under the mask of humour. A comedian’s “social critique is potent and, because it is offered in comedic context, safe from retribution as well” (Gilbert, 1997: 317). A comic is able to ridicule “the society that creates ideals for appearance

and behaviour as well as individuals who subscribe to these standards” (Gilbert, 1997: 319). The comic has license to ridicule, and his/her role is to act as “our comic, spokesperson, as a mediator, an ‘articulator’ of our culture, and as our contemporary anthropologist” (Mintz, 1985: 75). The comic is our commentator on society.

Comedic performances and humour can be seen as a form of popular culture. Comedians see comedy as an alternative media which represents “those without a voice in mainstream media” and facilitates “a form of intercultural exchange” (Motaopanyane, 2011: 97). Stand-up comedy, in particular, has been a growing trend in popular culture, burgeoning in recent years. Furthermore:

Stand-up continues to develop contemporary cultural-commercial formats, thriving in distributed spaces and intersects of global late modernity, on- and offline, and emulates the forms and formats of the major culture industries in scope and scale. (Chortle in MacRury, 2012: 186).

This growth explains its popularity and appeal, and suggests that there is something worth examining within comedy in different communities.

[Not just for laughs: The use of Comedy by Marginalised Groups](#)

This section will explore the use of humour by marginalised groups. The section, first, explicates why comedy is a vital tool in exploring issues of marginality. The section then goes on to explore the various methods that comics adopt in marginal performances of humour.

Within marginalised communities, comedy is a popular tool to explore issues of power and being the ‘other’. Comedians “perform their marginality in an act simultaneously oppressive (by using demeaning stereotypes) and transgressive (by interrogating those very stereotypes through humorous discourse)” (Gilbert 1997: 318). The marginalised group will “rhetorically construct and perform their marginality on stage” (Gilbert, 1997: 317). Most comedians are marginalised in some way, be it by race, gender, physical or mental disability. According to Mintz (1985: 74):

This marginality, however, also allows for a fascinating ambiguity and ambivalence. In his role as negative exemplar, we laugh at him.

In any study of marginalised populations, power, “where it resides and how it is negotiated”, is vital (Gilbert, 1997: 318). Gilbert (1997: 317) suggests that the nature of marginal humour requires comics to become the victim. Hirji (2009: 570) suggests that ethnic (marginal) humour “is cathartic, a release of possible aggression or a permissible social transgression”. In this view, humour has become mightier than the sword.

Marginal humour functions in a very specific way. Gilbert (1997) outlines an axis of three main features of marginal humour. The first is that of “Humour and Objectification” (Gilbert, 1997: 322). Comics rely on “stereotypes” and “believe that using the type in order to explode the type may be considered a subversive act” (Gilbert, 1997: 323). They constantly ascribe stereotypes to themselves and others in order to claim and reclaim subjectivity. Gilbert (1997: 323) elaborates that “subjectivity is central to marginality”. The basic tenet of Gilbert’s argument is that comics appropriate stereotypes of a certain group, deny those stereotypes any subjectivity and then make that objectified target the butt of the joke (1997: 324). If this is the case then, even if the jokes are demeaning, in the very act of subverting and poking fun at stereotypes, the comic elevates themselves and actually “affirm(s) ethnic pride” (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985 : 82).

The second feature of marginal humour that Gilbert (1997: 325) outlines is that of “Self-deprecation and Subversion”. She suggests that:

...when self-deprecation is strategic, its subversive effect may be to send a subtle double message, at times becoming a type of supplication, an embodiment of the power of powerlessness (Gilbert, 1997: 326).

This sentiment is echoed by Weaver (2010: 31) who labels this process “reverse discourses” and further discusses the use of the word “Nigga” in African-American comedy and the subversive effect of using this derogatory term in popular culture and comedy.

The third feature that Gilbert (1997: 327) highlights is that of “Victims and Butts”. Here, the comedian would set up jokes aimed at a specific topic and set up a victim and butt of the joke. She suggests that “marginal humour depends entirely upon audience identification and interpretation” (Gilbert, 1997: 327). Again, the butt of the joke would have to prescribe to a specific stereotype that the audience identifies with and the audience decides who is victim and who is the butt of the joke. However, this is not always as simple as it may seem. Gilbert (1997: 327) argues that even “overtly hostile marginal humour does not necessarily construct victim and butt as one and the same”. In these jokes, the social critique is usually “implicit rather than explicit” (Gilbert, 1997: 328).

In Bhabha’s *Location of Culture* (1994), he explores notions of stereotype and mimicry. Bhabha suggests that stereotypes were a method adopted by colonisers to dehumanise and place the other as inferior in their representations. Huddart (2006: 35) suggests that stereotypes “seem to be a stable if false foundation upon which colonialism bases its power”. At the same time, these stereotypes reveal anxieties underlying their creation. Huddart (2006: 35) elaborates that stereotypes are “a form of anxious colonial knowledge” and by acknowledging stereotypes in this way, “Bhabha’s writings on this anxiety revise traditional studies of colonialism”. Huddard (2006: 35) explains:

The colonial discourse wants stereotypes to be fixed, and in turn traditional analyses of colonial stereotypes assume them to be fixed. However, this fixed quality coexists with disorder, something unconsciously apparent to the apparatuses of colonial power, but not apparent to those who study colonialism until Bhabha. Analyses of colonial discourse that proceed to subject colonial stereotypes to normalizing judgements are proceeding according to the same assumptions as colonial discourse itself.

Bhabha suggests that in order to analyse discourses of colonial power, the analyses of stereotypes should rather focus on “modes of differentiation, realised as multiple, cross-cutting determinations, polymorphous and perverse, always demanding a specific calculation of their effects” (1994: 67). Each stereotypical representation, while seemingly the same (and informed by colonial racism) has a different history, context and is produced, disseminated and reproduced in different circumstances. By looking at stereotypes in this way (as though

they are informed by the contexts in which they occur), we are removing the colonial power of the stereotype and reclaiming the power of the discourse.

The work around comedy and marginalised groups is imperative in understanding the content of South African Indian comedy. The studies offered in the literature review all have concise descriptions and arguments around what constitutes marginal humour and how it is constructed to serve particular ends. However, these studies main focus is on African-American, Jewish and female humour. There is also a strong focus on how the humour functions in terms of the setting up of jokes. However, there is little discussion of the themes that the humour focuses on, which would offer more insight into the identities of the comedians than an analysis of the construction of jokes and what different comic approaches make up humour. Not much work has considered an African perspective on humour and there is very little work that considers the Indian diaspora and comedy. This study aims to fill these gaps in the research.

[Comedy in Post-Apartheid South Africa](#)

There has been a growth in the field of comedy in post-Apartheid South Africa and this section will consider how comedy has made its mark in a post-Apartheid South Africa. This section aims to 'map the field' of South African comedy and consider where the South African Indian fits in.

The South African comedy scene has experienced enormous growth since 1997. Seirlis (2011: 513) suggests that, at last count, there were well over a hundred established comedians in South Africa. Her work considers comedy in a pre- and post-apartheid era, with particular interest in the political implications for comedians when making jokes. She offers a good observation of the target market of comedy shows in South Africa (Seirlis, 2011: 517):

Comedy is very much part of a new trendy young urban identity, particularly for middle and higher income groups across the races.

Audiences are 'new generation' South Africans and from wealthier backgrounds. This points to "new boundaries, based, since 1994, on class more than race" (Seirlis, 2011: 518).

Themes covered in comedy shows in South Africa are fairly consistent with the changes that the country has experienced post-apartheid. Comedy in South Africa often lampoons the marked "boundary between the old puritanical apartheid regime and the present democratic dispensation" (Seirlis, 2011: 521). Furthermore,

The young comedians still address the broadest issues confronting South Africa, exposing the risks involved in and the compromised quality of everyday life. They still mark out the limits of what the ANC government has managed to achieve in the new democracy. They address the huge socio-economic divisions, pointing to the very gap between rich and poor, to the huge differences in access to social amenities and infrastructure... (Seirlis, 2011: 521).

The role of comedy is vital in a country with such a troubled past. It has the ability to talk of taboo topics openly and call into question issues of national identity that encompass all nations that make up the so-called "rainbow nation".

While the growth in comedy in South Africa is not unnoticed, there is a surprising lack of academic work that considers comedy in post-Apartheid South Africa. This lack has been acknowledged by Crigler (2018) and Parker (2002). Crigler (2018: 157) says that "there is not much literature that contextualizes laughter in South Africa, and the few articles that do exist shed little light on long term processes of change". Crigler considers how the concept of '*South Africanness*' is constructed in the humour work of Leon Schuster. While this work is essential to understanding humour in post-Apartheid South Africa on a black/white binary, it fails to consider how humour is used in other marginal communities.

Parker (2002) grounds her work in the consideration of women in stand-up comedy in South Africa. Her article considers the comedy field as one dominated by white male individuals, where female representation is limited. Parker (2011: 10) interviews Gilda Blacher, who suggests:

South Africa does not have a strong comedic culture. We come from a tradition of oppression and censorship and we therefore find it difficult to laugh at ourselves. Comedy in South Africa is culturally and economically specific. We may live in a multi-cultural society, but unlike America we do not have a national identity and so there cannot be comedy for everyone, there is no audience for it. Our comedy is years behind and it's going to take us a long time to catch up. (Personal Interview)

The assertion that South Africa does not have a strong comedic culture may be a bit outdated (this article was published in 2002), and comedy in South Africa has since seen significant growth. However, the country is still in the process of creating its own national identity, given the violent and divisive history of the country. Apart from the global commercial success of comedian Trevor Noah, the South African comedy scene is very culturally specific.

One such culturally specific community is the South African Indian community. Parallel to the growth spurt in comedy across other race groups in South Africa, there has been a growth in performances of comedy within the small population of the Indian diaspora in South Africa. Hansen (2005: 298) conducted a study of the small town of Chatsworth, in KwaZulu-Natal, and performances of comedy within that community. Hansen's work particularly focuses on community theatre and suggests that:

Satire had been central to political critiques of Apartheid, as well as a powerful medium of celebration and reflection on the inner life of what apartheid compressed and institutionalized into a single 'Indian community' in South Africa. (Hansen, 2005: 298)

Hansen further adopts a Freudian stance on humour and suggests that "humour provides a way to reflect, indirectly, on a lost object that cannot be yearned for in any direct and public sense: Indian community life during apartheid" (2005: 298).

Hansen's work, however, is lacking as it only considers a small community of Indians and does not look at the broader, more prominent and popular comedy performances. The work also fails to identify the multicultural dynamics of the Indian community in South Africa. His work considers community theatre and only focuses on the self-deprecating nature of jokes. This project seeks to explore a wider range of texts and considers factors such as the growing

Indian middle class in South Africa and the effects of globalisation on themes covered in comic media in South Africa.

This literature review has attempted to provide a brief overview of the South African Indian community and the context in which the proposed topic will be investigated. An investigation into studies around the Indian community in South Africa found that studies revolved around 3 major themes:

- 1) The history of the settlement of Indians in South Africa;
- 2) Issues of Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa; and
- 3) Literature produced by South African Indians.

These are vital studies and serve to create a broader understanding of the Indian community in South Africa. However, they fail to consider contributions by the Indian community to popular media productions of comedy, and the reasons and implications thereof. This study aims to contribute to this gap.

In addition, the literature review considered studies of comedy and marginality. The review found that much work has been undertaken on comedy of marginalised groups such as women, African Americans and the Jewish. However, not much work has considered the Indian diaspora in South Africa and elsewhere. This study should offer some promising information on identities in diasporic communities. The characteristics of marginal humour, as outlined by Gilbert (1997), offer a solid structure upon which this study may build its argument. However, as Gilbert's study fails to consider issues of diaspora and multiculturalism, this study will need to include these concepts. It also fails to offer insight into the role memory plays in the performance of comedy. Finally, it has been established that very little work has been conducted in the field of media production and audiences in the South African Indian community and this study promises to offer vital insights about this small diasporic community in South Africa.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

The study of the production of comedy in the South African Indian community is essentially a study of the representation of a minority diasporic community in post-Apartheid South Africa. The performance of comedy is an act of culture. The thematic concerns of any cultural performance reveal a great deal about that specific culture at large. In order to understand the various tropes that the comedy reveals, an understanding of the cultural milieu within which they operate is vital. In the case of the South African Indian community, with their experience of being a diasporic community, complicated by the Apartheid system, and even further complicated in post-Apartheid South Africa, there are various factors that influence the performances of cultural identity from within the community. Adopting a cultural studies approach allows for the consideration of the tropes in the comedy as reflective of the complex system of cultural signs that South African Indians are in the process of negotiating in an attempt to find their sense of belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa.

This section considers cultural studies as the overarching theory which informs the project. Here, a consideration of representation is vital in understanding how comedy and stereotypes work in reproducing culture. The section first provides a discussion of the relevance of cultural studies in the consideration of diasporic identities and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. Second, the theoretical framework considers how memory works in reproducing culture. Traditional notions of gender in the production of cultural identities are also considered. Finally, theories that explore excess are considered in relation to what tropes of excess reveal about identities and belonging in culture.

Cultural Studies, Identity and Diaspora

The theoretical underpinnings that inform this section of study centre around three main topics. The first is that of cultural studies and representation. Here, the importance of cultural studies and the study of culture is discussed. The study of comedy as a cultural product is also considered. Second, the section considers the theory of diaspora in a post-colonial situation. Here the work considers ideas around the experience of diasporic communities. The aim is to explore whether the South African Indian community can be seen as a diasporic community when there are assertions of strong South African nationalism from within the community.

Finally, an attempt is made to amalgamate the concepts of cultural studies, representation, identity and diaspora, to explore how these theories can be used to view the South African Indian community.

The study of comedy is essentially a study of culture. Comedic products are a form of expressing culture. Culture has been defined by Hall (1997b: 2) as a “‘way of life’ of a people, community, nation or social group”. It is a concept which considers “the arts and artistic activity”, “the learned, primarily symbolic features of a particular way of life” and “a process of development” (Baldwin, Longhurst, McCracken, Ogborn & Smith, 2004: 4). Culture broadly encompasses anything about “shared meanings” (Hall, 1997b: 1). Culture is a “learned” (Baldwin et al., 2004: 7) phenomenon. People come to absorb aspects of culture through processes of socialisation and interactions with meaning-making systems. The media is one such key meaning-making system and is where many ideas about culture are circulated and perpetuated. Comedy, as a media form, is also a meaning-making system that explores culture. The comedy produced by the South African Indian community is thus a cultural product of the community, and reflects the overarching culture of the community.

Cultural studies is centrally concerned with “culture as a key concepts for understanding features of our contemporary historical situation” (Dahlgren, 1997: 53). Garnham (1995: 69) further defines cultural studies by noting:

Cultural studies believes that culture matters and that it cannot be simply treated (or dismissed) as the transparent, at least to the critic, public face of dominative and manipulative capitalists. Cultural studies emphasises the complexity and contradictions, not only within culture, but in the relations between people, culture and power.

Cultural studies, therefore, sees cultural products as powerful tools of meaning-making and examines them for their relations with people and with structures of power. The cultural studies approach allows for the study of “how discourse and imagery are organized in complex and shifting patterns of meaning”; and also looks at how cultural products create meanings and “how these meanings are reproduced, negotiated, and struggled over in the flow and flux of everyday life” (Murdock, 1995: 94). A cultural studies approach is key in

understanding the power structures that inform discourses around diaspora, identity and belonging. Linking to this is the exploration of stereotypes, and how the reclamation of stereotypes, as Bhabha (1994) conceptualises it, can have shifting meanings and speak back to colonial discourses around Indian culture.

A key concept in cultural studies is that of representation. Representation is a re-presentation of reality. In this vein, as mentioned when discussing the justification of this study, it can be said that the media is a tool through which reality is re-presented. Chandler (2002: 1) defines representation as:

the construction in any medium (especially the mass media) of aspects of 'reality' such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as still or moving pictures.

The performance of comedy is a representation of the lived or imagined reality of the comedian. The comedian selects key themes and ideas that he or she feels are relevant, important and funny, and shapes the performance through his or her cultural underpinning. The ideas that are circulated in a comedic performance are thus the result of a process whereby the cultural ideas, prejudices and ideals of the performers are impressed into the acts.

Hall (1997a: 17) describes representation as "the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language". His definition of language is broadly defined as "any system which deploys signs or any signifying system" (1997a: 19). He assumes that objects and people do not have established, exact denotations, but to a certain extent that meanings are shaped by human beings, who are members of a culture, and who have the authority to make things signify something (1997a: 19-20). Clearly, for Hall, representation involves perceiving how language and systems of knowledge production work together to produce and circulate meanings. Representation becomes the process, channel or medium through which these meanings are both created and reified. The primary method of analysis for this study, which I expand on in the next chapter, is that of discourse analysis. This method is closely linked to

cultural studies as it considers how language is used to create meaning – and speak back to power.

Hall in particular talks of theories that explain representation, particularly that of Saussure's semiotics and also that of discursive discourse analysis. Semiotics and discourse, some vital ideas that have an important influence on the study of representation, offer key characteristics in the study of representations. Through the use of signs, and visual and aural codes representations are given life. Once representations are repeated for long enough, through the use of the abovementioned codes, representations become 'normalized' and feel "unmediated" (Chandler, 2008: 1). These are manifested as discourses. Chandler (2008: 1) also suggests that representations are "selective, foregrounding some things and backgrounding others". The most common media representations are of gender, age, class, race or ethnicity, and physical disability (Chandler, 2008: 1). In performances of comedy, the normalised discourses and stereotypes are used as a tool for laughter. Comedy relies on shared understandings and shared discourses to create laughter. Thus, a study of comedy through a cultural studies lens would offer much insight into the study of "Indianness" in post-apartheid South Africa.

This section now moves on to consider the various characteristics of a diasporic community and interrogates the validity of considering the Indian population in South Africa as a diasporic community. Drawing on Robin Cohen's typology as a starting point (2008), the South African Indian population will be considered in terms of this typology. Furthermore, this section considers the experience of the diasporic community in terms of Homi Bhabha's arguments around the contrasts of migrancy. These discussions aim to explore how the South African Indian community situate themselves in post-Apartheid South Africa, and how anxieties of belonging are articulated within the community.

The term diaspora widely refers to a group of people who have moved from a homeland and settled in a different land, for many different reasons. Cohen (2008: 15-16) argues:

Not everyone is a diaspora because they say they are. Social structures, historical experiences, prior conceptual understandings, and the opinions of other social actors (among other factors) also influence whether we can legitimately label a particular group a diaspora.

A further argument by Cohen (2008: 16) is that a “strong or renewed tie to the past” must exist for a group to be considered a diaspora. In South Africa, however, the Indian community is not always labelled as a diasporic community and many South African Indians do not identify as a diasporic community as they have been part of South Africa for many generations and have assimilated to South African culture. However, some elements of South African Indian culture do negate this view and it would be worthwhile to consider a typology to determine whether the group is considered a diasporic group or not.

Cohen (2008) offers a typology which could be used to describe a diasporic group. The first feature that Cohen describes is that of “dispersal from homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions” (2008: 17). The Indian community had been dispersed in colonial times to work as slaves in many regions, with a large number being sent to South Africa. In South Africa, the initial dispersal from the homeland was a traumatic event, with the first wave of Indians being brought to South Africa as slaves. In other areas of the world, Indians often travelled to major cities in the West in pursuit of a ‘better life’ and opportunities. Currently, Indians reside in most of the major cities of the world and have settled in many foreign countries. Secondly, Cohen suggests that “alternatively, or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions” (2008: 17). This is a major defining factor for the South African Indian community, many of whom settled due to colonialism and for trade reasons.

Third, the community has a “collective memory and myth about the homeland, including in location, history, suffering and achievements” (2008: 17). This is especially true of the Indian community worldwide, many of whom continue to celebrate India’s achievements, have strong ties to history by, for example, celebrating Indian Independence day, and many still consider their links to their villages in India. In South Africa, though, this feature is complicated, most likely due to the complications that Apartheid rendered. Isolation from the

home country, along with the isolation from other groups within South Africa, allowed for a hybridization of sorts to occur within the Indian community. Apartheid policies allowed for communities to maintain Indian traditions, but the embargo against Apartheid South Africa meant an isolation from homeland politics, social life and achievements. The fall of Apartheid, along with globalisation, brought with it renewed links to the homeland and a renewed interest in the above.

The fourth feature that Cohen (2008: 17) suggests is that the diasporic community has an “idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation”. In small segments of the Indian South African community, there is a strong sense of idealising the Indian homeland, with much interest being taken in the successes and failures of the Indian state. It is worth noting that this is most prevalent in the passenger Indian community from Gujrat and less noticeable amongst the indentured labour communities. Examples of this would be the huge outpour of relief aid during the aftermath of an earthquake that hit Gujrat in 2001 and the fervent support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014.

During Apartheid, many South African Indians of indentured roots were completely isolated from the homeland. However, passenger Indians still had the advantage of strong finances and could afford to travel to and from the homeland if need be. The fifth feature that Cohen (2008: 17) mentions is:

The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland.

Post-Apartheid, there is a common trend amongst South African Indians, with many who can afford it making trips to visit temples, their ‘home’ villages, and shopping for weddings and festivals. Passenger Indians seem to have stronger links, with some still owning family property and having some family in the villages of their family origins. Indentured Indians, however, mostly visit for pleasure, many of whom are unable to trace the origin of their

villages due to the traumatic nature of their ancestors' passage and the lack of any official documentation or information that may assist.

The sixth feature is that of "a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate" (Cohen, 2008: 17). This is evident with the many religious and cultural groups that have been borne out of the Indian community with the aim of maintaining Indian heritage and culture. Interestingly, these groups were stronger during Apartheid, with the limits on movement and socialisation allowing for communities to maintain these groups. However, in post-Apartheid South Africa, the ability to move between geographical locations outside of one's community has meant that some of these groups and practises have become smaller and, in some cases, obsolete. Furthermore, it cannot be forgotten that, along with strong links to Indian 'heritage', South African Indians are also fiercely protective and supportive of their South Africanness.

There is an apprehensive sense of dislocation amongst South African Indians, who identify both as South African and as Indian, a sense of not belonging. As mentioned, members of the Indian community suffered similar atrocities as Black South Africans during Apartheid and some even fought alongside Black South Africans in the struggle for freedom. However, post-Apartheid, there is a sense of not belonging and not being black enough nor white enough. The seventh feature in Cohen's typology is reflective of this "troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group" (2008: 17). More recently, the spate of xenophobic attacks, as well as an anti-Indian sentiment across the country, fuelled by the Guptagate scandals, has left many South African Indians feeling uncomfortable about their belonging in South Africa. This, however, is not a prevalent feeling and many Indians do not have a 'troubled relationship' with South Africa because they see themselves as South African first.

The eighth feature of the typology is that of a “sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial” (Cohen, 2008: 17). Indians worldwide have often banded together for causes, both within India and outside of India. In South Africa, however, this feature is not as strongly adhered to as in the United States of America or the United Kingdom. The final feature in Cohen’s typology is that of “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (2008: 17). Many of the Indians who stayed in South Africa when offered an opportunity to return to India during colonial times saw opportunities of staying, and many South Africans post-Apartheid have embraced this possibility. The last feature is most reflective of the South African Indian community, where many prefer to remain faithful first to their South African roots and their Indian roots as an afterthought – relegated to certain situations, celebrations and times.

From what has been discussed on Cohen’s features of diaspora, it can then be deduced that the South African Indian population can be defined as a diasporic community, in as much as Meer denies it. It is important to note some of the experiences of members of the diaspora, and what Homi Bhabha discusses in his article (2000) about the importance of having a “transnational-migrant knowledge of the world” (2000: 214). In his article, Bhabha calls for a more global analysis of culture that considers other knowledge, not just culture of the powerful North. Bhabha talks about the borderline figures who experiences liminality and suggests that the migrant experience is both translational and transitional (2000: 227). According to Bhabha (2000: 228), “translation is the performative nature of cultural communication”. He further argues that the translation desacralizes cultural supremacy and demands contextual specificity. The question of the diasporic individual’s need to create a collective agency when in a situation of displacement still stands. Bhabha suggests that it is in this minority position that the oppressed individual becomes compelled to transform their agency to a positive collective one (2000: 230). Bhabha’s work suggests that the diasporic community works hard to substantialise cultural difference instead of cultural conformity. He suggests that the communities of the diaspora create a cultural domain marked by the distinctions of the material and the spiritual.

Stuart Hall's Cultural Identity and Diaspora

Theories of cultural studies, representation, identity and diaspora are all helpful lenses through which the South African Indian community can be studied. Hall (2014) offers insight into the amalgamation of all these factors in his article titled 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'. While Hall's article considers Caribbean cinema, it offers an interesting insight into the way South African Indian comedy can be viewed from a cultural studies perspective. Hall suggests that in post-colonial times, there is a movement of film that centres black subjects in the Caribbean diaspora (2014: 222). In the same vein, South African Indian comedy is a media that centres the South African Indian. If these movements centre on the non-Western diasporic, subject, then it can be assumed that the cultural identities of these subjects will be put into question (Hall, 2014: 222).

The central concern for all is to consider identity as "a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall, 2014: 222). If we consider identity as shaped by context: one's history, geographical location, language, etc., then we make the assumption that shared experiences equate a shared cultural identity. Hall (2014: 223) suggests that this is one way of considering cultural identity, as:

... reflect(ing) the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continues frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.

Thus, as 'Indians' of the Indian diaspora, there is a shared identity, a shared "essence", as Hall describes it, of *Indianness*. Hall suggests this definition of cultural identity is "a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples" (2014: 223), and describes this conception as being at the heart of movements such as Pan-Africanism.

This conception of cultural identity offers a valuable advantage – it allows for the reclamation of erasures of culture through the colonial project. By reclaiming histories and attempting to unearth the “essence” of what it means to belong to a group displaced by colonialism, we are able to reconstruct the identity of people displaced by colonialism (Hall, 2004: 224). Hall’s analysis of Caribbean visual art notes the centrality of Africa as the nexus of cultural identity of the Afro-Caribbean people. Similarly, some representations of *Indianness* in post-Apartheid South Africa are centred around the same concept of India as the motherland. It is through practices of proudly reclaiming the culture which was so brutally lost, that they resist the “fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West” (Hall, 2014: 225). Therefore, these cultural products aim to reclaim narratives about Indian (or Afro-Caribbean) culture that have long been represented through the refracted lens of Western conceptions. Said’s (1978) conceptualisation of orientalism comes to mind.

A fundamental shortcoming of viewing cultural identity as a reclamation of shared history and culture is that it fails to consider identity as fluid. If we look at cultural identity through this first conceptualisation, it essentially means that current experiences of culture in a diaspora are negated and overlooked. Hall (2014: 225) defines this second conceptualisation:

Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.

This conception allows for the cultural identity of Indians in South Africa to be expressed, not only in terms of similarities of shared histories and identities, but also in terms of difference. That the colonial experience of slavery and the barbarism of Apartheid belittled the cultural identity of South African Indians must not be ignored, thus, the reclamation of histories is important. However, it is also essential to consider “what we have become” (Hall, 2014: 225) and are in the process of becoming.

If we begin from the supposition that cultural identity is “not an essence but a positioning” (Hall, 2014: 226) and not a linear phenomenon from a “fixed origin”, the question of how to understand the formation of cultural identity then needs to be considered. Hall (2014: 226) elaborates:

We might think of black Caribbean identities as ‘framed’ by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture. Caribbean identities always have to be thought of in terms of the dialogic relationship between these two axes. The one gives us some grounding in the past. The second reminds us that what we share is precisely the experience of a profound discontinuity: the peoples dragged into slavery, transportation, colonisation, migration, came predominantly from Africa – and when that supply ended, it was temporarily refreshed by indentured labour from the Asian subcontinent.

Hall goes on to describe that, though there are core differences of country, religion, language, amongst others, the common experience of slavery is what unifies the Caribbean experience. South African Indians, similarly, experience identities framed within the very same axes. This includes the similarity within the community of being linked to the same ‘homeland’ and ancient culture, alongside the differences in their arrival to South Africa as either indentured labour or passenger Indians, as well as of differing geographical locations, different religious backgrounds, linguistic divides, and differing experiences of Apartheid.

Conceptualising cultural identity along these two axes allows for the exploration of South African Indian identities in a more rigorous manner and avoids the mistake of looking at South African Indian identities as fixed. We thus avoid looking at identity through a reified, Western lens and appropriating the identity of the ‘other’. This will then allow for an examination of the community as “both the same and different” (Hall, 2014: 227). Therefore, through an acceptance of the fluid identity of South African Indian, alongside the acknowledgement of differences within the community, we are allowed the freedom of exploring identities through the unity as well as the variances shared by the community. It is also important to note that the complexity of this cultural difference “exceeds (the) binary structure(s) of representation” (Hall, 2014: 228) that represent diasporic communities as simply us/them, black/white, past/present, and so on. They are, as Hall (2014: 228) argues, “differential points on a sliding scale”. In relation to representation, it is also important to note that “without

relations of difference, there can be no representation” (Hall, 2014: 229). Representation can only occur when signs have meaning and those meanings are continuously evolving. Representation then, like the signs that it is made up of, is fluid.

It has been established that representation is not fixed, and the same has been established for identities. What happens when the two are put together as representations of cultural identity? Hall (2014: 230) suggests that one needs “to rethink the positionings and repositionings of (Caribbean) cultural identities”. He does this by exploring at least three metaphoric “presences” outlined by Césaire and Senghor. The first is that of *Presence Africaine*, the “site of the repressed” (Hall, 2014: 230). Furthermore Hall argues (2014: 230):

Apparently silenced beyond memory by the power of the experience of slavery, Africa was, in fact present everywhere: in the everyday life and customs of the slave quarters, in the languages and patois of the plantations, in names and words, often disconnected from their taxonomies, in the secret syntactical structures through which other languages were spoken, in the stories and tales told to children, in religious practices and beliefs, in the spiritual life, the arts, crafts, musics and rhythms of slave and post-emancipation society. Africa, the signified which could not be represented directly in slavery, remained and remains the unspoken, unspeakable 'presence' in Caribbean culture.

The *Presence Africaine* of South African Indian community is the presence of India as the signified presence in South African Indian culture. India is present within this community through the very practices described above. Though unspoken, India is pervasive in the practices of most South African Indians and, as Hall (2014: 231) explains, everyone in this diaspora “must sooner or later come to terms with this (Indian) presence”. Though India is the core, or “origin” of the South African Indian identity, the passage of time has meant that it too has undergone change. That means that, while South African Indians must not fall into the trap of viewing India through a Western lens, they must also reconcile with the fact that it “cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered” (Hall, 2014: 231). India will always remain the “imagined community” that Benedict Anderson conceptualises and South African Indians can ‘return’ through “another route” (Hall, 2014: 232) and “re-tell it through politics, memory and desire”.

The second presence that Hall identifies is the European presence. He recognises Europe as the antithesis of the African presence. The European presence is pervasive, spoken about and is “endlessly speaking *us*” (Hall, 2014: 232). Hall (2014: 232) elaborates:

The European presence interrupts the innocence of the whole discourse of 'difference' in the Caribbean by introducing the question of power. 'Europe' belongs irrevocably to the play of power, to the lines of force and consent, to the role of the dominant, in Caribbean culture.

The European presence is about “exclusion, imposition and expropriation” (Hall, 2014: 233) and shaped the discourses of non-white, non-European subjects which used its “dominant regimes of representation”. The aftershocks of the impact of the European presence still reverberate worldwide, and “has become a constitutive element in (our own) identities” (Hall, 2014: 233). It has shaped how South African Indians see themselves and represent themselves. The dilemma, for post-colonial society, lies in the reconciliation of the barbaric, irreversible damage caused by the European presence, with the emerging recognition of said damage. There also needs to be a resistance of the “imperialising eye” (Hall, 2014: 234). In South Africa, the European presence is doubly pervasive, with the European presence being succeeded by an Apartheid presence, which, in much the same way, if not more violently, affected the psyche of the nation.

Finally, Hall (2014: 234) recognises the presence of the “New World”. This world is (Hall, 2014: 234):

... the signifier of migration itself- of travelling, voyaging and return as fate, as destiny; of the Antillean as the prototype of the modern or postmodern New World nomad, continually moving between centre and periphery.

Hall elaborates on this using Caribbean cinema’s preoccupation with the trope of movement and migration. In the same way, movement between spaces, from the discussions of migration to the movement between geographic spaces within South Africa, is something that South African Indians are also preoccupied with, along with concepts “of diaspora, of hybridity and difference” (Hall, 2014: 235). Hall argues that the view of diaspora in the postcolony cannot be described any longer as “those scattered tribes whose identity can only

be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return” (Hall, 2014: 235). He clarifies (2014: 235):

This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of his backward-looking conception of diaspora – and the complicity of the West with it. The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

Hebdige (in Hall 2014: 236) suggests that this is the way in which cultural identity, through hybridisation, still manages to “appropriate(s) elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and ‘creolises’ them, disarticulating given signs and re-articulating their symbolic meaning”. The imagined homeland cannot be returned to, but gives rise to the “beginning of the symbolic, of representation, the infinitely renewable source of desire, memory, myth, search, discovery” (Hall, 2014: 236). South African Indians have done just this, tapping into this “reservoir of narratives” and creolising their representations to express the experience of being (or not being) a diaspora of India in post- Apartheid South Africa.

Cultural studies and memory

Adopting a cultural studies approach to the consideration of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid offers a unique perspective on how memory and history can be considered. Cultural studies scholars within the field have realised that “because the past is thought of as other and vanishing, efforts to preserve it become more and more strenuous” (During, 2005: 54). Usually, cultural studies is associated with a tendency to consider contemporary culture (During, 2005: 54), but the scholarly work in cultural studies allows for a consideration of history and cultural memory in shaping contemporary culture.

The comedy analysed reveals a struggle between contemporary culture and the cultural memory of a long history inherited from India and brought to South Africa. That the comedy relies a great deal on cultural symbols reveals that remnants of history still trickling down into contemporary South African Indian culture. As During (2005: 52) elaborates:

Every action carries a trace of the past – an unconscious memory of it even. A great deal of contemporary theory analyses the way that the past is carried forward unknowingly into the present. With individuals, one word we use to talk about the unreflective determination of the present by the past is 'habit', and there exist embedded social habits as well.

Social habits such as food, clothing, and religious beliefs and practices all form part of the unconscious memory of an Indian past. Memories of cultural symbols impact contemporary culture, thus, allowing inferences to be made about the influence of memory and history in shaping contemporary identities and affirmations of belonging.

History and memory are the basis upon which identity is built and belonging is cemented through social acts of shared cultural memory. In communities, "historical narratives continue to form a basis of identity for ethnicities and nations" (During, 2005: 57). In many cases, this occurs in "the form of a straightforward identification of certain events (generally traumatic ones)" (During, 2005: 57). In the case of South African Indians, the traumatic event of slave migration, coupled with the experience of Apartheid, has shaped and defined "current ways of life and structures of feeling" (During, 2005: 57). Consequently, these shape the narratives of comedy that are borne out of the South African Indian community.

The connections South African Indians have to South Africa are slightly different to those they hold for India. During (2005: 57) suggests:

Identity through history can also take a weaker form, through the deployment of nostalgia, as in nostalgia for imperial and traditional class-based society so apparent in middle-class Britain today, which, for many, seems to represent an essential tradition which defines Britishness.

In the same vein, identity in South African Indian communities can also be seen to be shaped by nostalgia for the Apartheid era and the isolation it allowed, which made the preservation of "Indian" culture easier due to the relative isolation of communities. This nostalgia is evident in the vehement manner in which older generations strive to preserve culture.

The manner in which cultural memory is preserved differs within communities and circumstances. During (2005: 59) suggests that the "heritage industry", with an obsession for

preserving history through archives, documentaries and museums, can be a way in which histories are preserved. However, (During. 2005: 59):

Another set of public-cultural memories able to resist the heritage industry are those firmly based in the local, and especially in communities with a strong sense of unity and roots. Such memories can become historicised through oral histories, memoirs, hobbyist 'local history' research and writing. Upon occasion cultural studies academics have helped to historicise and preserve cultural memories of beleaguered communities.

In my view, the South African Indian community is sitting astride these two conditions. First, the South African Indian community, up until the end of Apartheid, relied on public-cultural memory to preserve and disseminate culture. This was a reaction to the times – the lack of official archives and preservation facilities, and the displacement of many Indians from their homes to 'Indian' townships – which meant that there was no infrastructure upon which to base a heritage industry in this community. With the fall of Apartheid grew the trend to attempt to formally preserve South African Indian culture.

There is value to be found in the formal archiving of history. First, "it provides a resource for the children and the children's children of community members, those who feel attached to the community for familial reasons but who may no longer retain any lived connection to it" (During, 2005: 59). With the freedom of movement allowed to individuals in post-Apartheid South Africa, the Indian community became increasingly scattered. Historical archives allow community members to reconnect to the histories of the community. It also "confers a certain visibility, status and solidity on a community" (During, 2005: 59), which is especially important for displaced or previously displaced communities in their efforts to establish belonging. Having official historical archives "becomes, in sum, a ground of identity" (During, 2005: 59). Furthermore, "organised cultural memories may help resist and correct the false representations of outsiders, and in communities of the poor and marginalised, the formalisation of cultural memory may have political resonances" (During, 2005: 59). The South African Indian community could use history archives to establish belonging in a time where their belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa is being questioned. However, while there is a movement to formalise elements of South African Indian history, there is still

significant reliance on public-cultural memory to exhibit culture. Comedy, while unconventional and contemporary, does serve the purpose of highlighting cultural memory.

There is value to a cultural studies approach, which allows the analysis of comedy in the present to be interpreted through an understanding of contextual histories that shape the words, actions and themes that the comedians explore. Comedy, as a contemporary cultural product, is being used by the South African Indian community to establish common identity and community belonging through the dissemination of historical cultural symbols. An understanding of how history intercepts current themes is an inherently cultural studies project.

Gender and Cultural Studies

The performance of culture is almost always a gendered performance. Cultural codes shape how gender and gender roles, and sex and sexuality are viewed in society. Comedic performances in the South African Indian community are highly gendered in their content, production practices and dissemination. If we consider that gender is a social construct, it helps us understand that the culturally prescribed gender roles that comedy uncovers are shaped by the socio-economic and socio-political spheres in which they operate. Thus, we shift away from the biological, binary views of sex/gender and femininity/masculinity. The consideration of gender as fluid is important. In the ever-changing world of gender studies, traditional views of gender have become complicated. The comedy reveals a strong affiliation to traditional notions and the maintenance of patriarchy, which I will argue, is the ultimate goal of the cultural project of this community.

The mere fact that performances of comedy, at first glance, occur along gendered lines, suggests that the wider experience of South African Indians is a very gendered experience. As During (2005: 171) suggests, “gender is now a core category for social and cultural analysis in a way it never was previously”. This shift to gender studies was prompted by the rise and fall of first wave feminism and the more recent shift to gender studies as a field of research. The common notion that “traditional, pre-industrial societies are routinely thought of as ‘patriarchal’, that is as dominated by men” (During, 2005: 173) is one of, or even the biggest, driving force behind the feminist movement. However, “it seems that modernising capitalism,

if anything, has intensified women's subordination" (During, 2005: 173). This is especially true among middle class women. During elaborates that "outside capitalism, aristocratic women could acquire considerable independence and power, and even under industrialisation working-class women often worked outside the family" (2005: 173). Those who did not fall into these categories were found to have been oppressed in other ways (During, 2005: 173). Thus, the first wave of feminism was critiqued for various reasons, as During (2005: 177) suggests:

Across cultures, ethnicities and classes, solidarity between women, which is the foundation of a feminist politics, has something of a strained and abstract character unless it has a firm footing in a set of shared restrictions, unless it has an actually existing patriarchy firmly in its sights. Partly for this reason, and partly because popular culture has proved quite immune to feminist reform, cultural studies has by and large lost its focus on women's liberation.

Feminism in this form does not consider the cultural specificities, but instead ignores other gender identifications and promotes a white, female empowerment. The inability to apply feminist principles across cultures is largely attributed to the loss of interest in this field.

The gender studies movement, with its acknowledgement of the shortcomings of feminism, has "moved through a number of positions very rapidly, positions which recapitulate the debates and flows of the women's movement in the outside world" (During, 2005: 177). There were many pivotal points in the movement that shaped gender studies, one of which is the "critical analysis of patriarchal ideology as an overarching symbolic structure through which identities are granted" (During, 2005: 177). These identities are granted to men and women and subsequently, "social norms are organised in the interest of maintaining male domination" (During, 2005: 177). Gender studies insists on a distinction between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' – where sex is the biological concept and gender the social concept. This distinction is important in terms of identity and belonging in the South African Indian community – where alternative performances of gender and sexuality are considered against tradition.

By considering gender as a social construct, the cultural studies approach allows the analysis of comedy to be considered a gendered performance aimed at maintaining patriarchal norms.

The overarching cultural studies project could draw ideas from gender studies in understanding why notions of femininity, masculinity and alternative sexualities are so predominant in comedy and, in turn, in shaping (or stifling) identities in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Cultural studies, Consumption and Excess

The post-Apartheid era brought along with it access to a global world. The adoption of neo-liberal policies by the post-Apartheid dispensation also meant that a capitalist economy would soon emerge. This, coupled with anxieties of a troubled past, allowed for a culture of consumerism to flourish. It is helpful then, in the study of South African Indian culture, to explore how representations of consumption from within this community reveals anxieties of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa.

There is no escaping the act of consumption. Every human being consumes – whether it is air, water, food or clothing, news, entertainment, etc. Many of the items we consume come with a price tag, and while “these types of everyday consumption seem unexciting”, they are “experienced by most of the global population in some form” (Paterson, 2017: 8). Paterson (2017: 8) elaborates:

Insofar as it relates to consumption, comparable admixtures of conscious and nonconscious processes take place, such as noticing labels, passing the gaze over advertisements and signs, breathing in smells that involuntarily remind us of home or holidays. If we stand back and take notice, these actions and processes reveal complex personal and interpersonal negotiations to do with identity, status, aspirations, cultural capital, and position within a social group.

Every act of consumption can reveal a set of complex social moments that lead up to the decision to consume. More importantly, they (unconsciously) tell a story about the consumer’s social status by giving an indication of their level of wealth, culture, preference, etc. The practice of consumption essentially tells us a story about the identity of the individual and where he/she/they belong. Furthermore, “consumer behaviours and decision making can be interpreted only in terms of a certain level of irrationality, of daydreaming, or wanting and wishing” to belong to a specific group (Paterson, 2017: 7). Paterson suggests that at the same moment of consumption, we are also producers and that “we buy to express our

individuality, but we get our cues from social groups and social media. (Paterson, 2017: 11). Through an analysis of the comedy, and recognising key moments of consumption (and production), inferences can be made about identity and belonging in the South African Indian community.

Consumption has often been seen as linked to excess. Excess, as linked to the word extra, can be defined as “an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Excess also infers a lack of moderation, decorum or limitation. Narratives around consumption often occur around the paradoxes that arise from the line between ‘just enough’ and ‘excessive’ consumption. Paterson (2017) explores these paradoxes. The first paradox he suggests, is the way in which consumerism is seen as both “*creation and destruction*”, whereby the Latin etymology of consume (*consumere*) means “to destroy”. At the same time, another, similar etymology (*consummare*) means to “bring to completion” (as in used in consummate). Paterson (2017: 12) suggests that “consumption is therefore simultaneously destroying (using up), as in the disposability of goods, and a completion (bringing to fulfilment)”. Here the paradox between enough and excess is clear.

The second paradox is that of “*freedom and control*” (Paterson, 2017:12). Here the “effects on the individual consumer are not about individual acts of gratification” but rather on the various “psycho-social factors beyond the individual, heavily influencing the character of everyday life” (Paterson, 2017: 12). The freedom to consume is enough but becomes excessive when we are influenced to consume what we do not need. The third paradox, “*utopia and dystopia*”, sees consumerism as both enabling progress and modernism but also destroying it. On the one hand, “consumer capitalism allows us great freedoms and the ability to express complex notions of self-identity and social identity, our identity within a group” (Paterson, 2017:12). On the other hand, “to partake, we must literally buy into these values, requiring a not inconsiderable measure of disposable wealth, and also the knowledge that our tastes, desires and aspirations are almost inescapably engineered by the mass media to some extent” (Paterson, 2017: 12). That consumables matching our identity are available is countered by the need to buy the products to express ourselves.

The fourth paradox, as suggested by Paterson (2017: 13), is that consumerism allows for a paradox between “homogenization and heterogenization”. Here, there “is a tension about the commodification and therefore the flattening of difference versus the celebration, and even fetishization, of difference in terms of consumer choice” (Paterson, 2017: 13). Consumption to express individuality is squashed by mass production. Another paradox outlined by Paterson (2017: 13) is “the inefficiency of efficiency”. It is evident that the aim to accumulate wealth as efficiently as possible, “but whose inherent contradictions would inevitably lead to periodic economic crises” (Paterson, 2017: 13) suggests that greed in the accumulation of wealth would inevitably lead to losses in some spheres. Finally, Paterson (2017: 13) suggests that consumerism also has the paradox of “irrationality of rationality”. Here, the highly rationalised thinking behind mass production can have “absurd outcomes” (Paterson, 2017: 13) such as long queues to access mass produced goods or the “unsustainable use of farmland, water, and grain to feed cattle in South American countries so that enough cheap hamburgers can be sold to North Americans” (Paterson, 2017: 14).

From the above, it is apparent that a study of culture, in a global, neo-liberal world would be lacking if it did not consider consumption as an influence on identity creation; whereby the practices of consumption (and production), in all their excesses, reveal a great deal about the anxieties of belonging in post-Apartheid communities. The comedy, which offers themes of consumption, allows us to see how these anxieties play out in the narratives of humour.

Conclusion to Theoretical Framework

The Indian community in South Africa can be seen to have attributes of a diasporic community as defined by Cohen, as well as experience the tensions that Bhabha explores. The cultural products out of the Indian community, in this case comedy, suggest this experience of liminality and performance of translation is evident. There is an evident urge to preserve culture and at the same time to try keep up with modern times, adjusting to post-apartheid South Africa. The performance of comedy within the Indian community is a good example of cultural products that project the diasporic experience. However, looking at the elements of representation and diaspora independently does not offer a thorough lens through which one can adequately explore identity. Hall offers insight into how one can explore identities in a postcolonial world, with a specific emphasis on the fluidity of identity, representation and

culture. Using this theoretical basis, inferences can be made about the South African Indian community as existing in a similar quandary as the Afro-Caribbean communities. This theoretical framing offers a workable theory through which South African Indian identities and anxieties of belonging are expressed in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Three main themes, that of memory and history, gender and tradition, and consumption and excess frame the above exploration of identity in post-Apartheid South Africa. First, a cultural studies approach can help us understand the complexities of history and cultural memory, and how these impact on current cultures. Second, the highly gendered nature of comedy reveals a tension between understanding traditional, gendered notions of identity and the impact this has on alternative notions of gender and sexuality. Finally, acts of consumption reveal anxieties of belonging and assertions of identity in cultural spaces – the fact that these acts are portrayed excessively reveals various paradoxes of consumerism. Together, these three themes provide meaningful lenses through which inferences can be made about South African Indians and their sense of belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Adopting a cultural studies approach to the study of comedy requires methods that aim to not only gather information but also interpret the discourses that this information offers insight to. An understanding of culture requires an understanding of the various discourses that circulate within that culture – that is, what is being said and what is not being said/being unsaid. As mentioned, comedy has been selected for its ability to interrogate taboo topics (sometimes) without fear of reprimand or reprehension because what is being said is meant to be ‘in jest’. This offers rich text through which ‘hidden’ discourses can be examined.

The history of South African Indians is inextricably linked to issues of migration, colonial and Apartheid rule, the freedom that followed democracy in 1994, and the effects of a neoliberal world. Thus, South African Indian histories, as with all cultures, are inextricably linked to issues of *power*. A thematic critical discourse analysis of the comedy is a valuable tool to explore the themes covered and how these relate to issues of power in society. This chapter explores, first, the value that a critical discourse analysis approach to studying comedy offered. Second, the research aims of the project required that I gather enough data in order to substantiate the claims that I am making. The methods and challenges to the data collection process will be discussed. Third, I will offer a brief summary of each of the texts used in the study. Finally, the various themes that were uncovered are discussed briefly and the methods used to interpret the data will be explored.

Research Design: The Value of Critical Discourse Analysis

Preceding a discussion of the method of discourse, it is essential to provide a workable definition of the term ‘discourse’. In order to glean the significant role comedy plays in the expression of South African Indian identity, it becomes imperative that the method through which one approaches the study of comedy is able to uncover the underlying factors that influence the performances of comedy. It becomes apparent that discourse, with its strong links to power relations, refers to “spoken or written language use” (Fairclough, 1995: 54) as well as other forms of “semiotic activity” (Fairclough, 1995: 54). Discourses can, therefore, be any form of meaning making using language, symbols, non-verbal or visual signs. It is vital to

distinguish between the study of semiotics and the study of discourse (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005: 167):

Unlike semioticians, who are concerned with language as an abstract system of rules (what de Saussure called *langue*), Foucault is concerned with language in action (what de Saussure called *parole*), which he called 'discourse'.

Discourses are "ways of representing aspects of the world" (Fairclough, 2003: 9) through verbal and non-verbal signs. This is an important distinction to consider in a study of performance.

If discourses can be seen as "ways of representing" (Fairclough, 2003: 9), then it can be deduced that the different ways in which comedians represent the world are shaped by their different discourses on the world. Therefore, a study of comedy would be useful in understanding the discourses that circulate in South African Indian communities. Fairclough (2003: 124) suggests:

Particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, so we are generally in the position of having to consider the relationship between different discourses. Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people.

The relationships between people, whether complementary or contentious, may be seen to be relational to the discourses they share or disagree upon. In the comedic space, the humour lies in the shared discourses between performer and audiences.

Discourses create the world; through the power of representation, discourses have the power to "define an event or phenomenon as significant" (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005: 167). The mass media is often the impetus behind many mainstream discourses, particularly because of its reach and power. Though popular media, like comedy, may serve to undermine dominant discourses, in the act of rejecting dominant discourses, popular media must still recognise those very discourses. The performance of comedy relies on dominant discourses to create humour and undermine these discourses. The mainstream media is an institution and

discourses in media texts can be seen as an “institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power” (in Jäger & Maier, 2009: 35). However, through the comedic undermining of these discourses, the power is somewhat dissipated. Thus, discourse is not “only mere expressions of social practice, but also serve particular ends, namely the exercise of power” (Jäger & Maier, 2009: 35).

If we consider discourses as expressions of power, then a more critical analysis of discourse is required. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a valuable tool to analyse comedy in a manner that will reveal how systems of power have impacted the collective identity of South African Indians. Van Dijk (2001:352) defines critical discourse analysis:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.

The very nature of comedy is to make light of discourses that the audience recognises. However, in a society dominated by systemic relations of power – politically, socially and economically – the discourse often follow conventions circulating in that society. In this vein, the analysis of comedy using a CDA approach would help root the project in the socio-historical milieu of post-Apartheid South Africa. The approach would also allow the research to expose various systems of power that still constrain the South African Indian community.

As a researcher in the humanities and the social sciences, I identify that the value and importance of context cannot be divorced from research. As Van Dijk (2001: 352) suggests:

Crucial for critical discourse analysts is the explicit awareness of their role in society. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a “value-free” science, they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction.

The role of a researcher in the social sciences is to explore social occurrences in detail, but research would be very superficial if it were conducted in isolation of social structures and failed

to understand that social interaction, even in the form of comedy, is influenced by structures of power.

Van Dijk (2001: 353) outlines Fairclough and Wodak's (1997: 271–80) main tenets of CDA. The first characteristic they identify is that "CDA addresses social problems" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271). A discourse analysis approach is most viable in the case of studying comedy as it allows the researcher to work with the various themes that make up the comedy performances and make inferences on the cultural experiences of the Indian community in South Africa and the main issues, or social problems, that are experienced within the community. Second, "power relations are discursive" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271). Undertaking a discourse analysis allows for the underlying power relations that inform identities in the South African Indian community to be revealed. Discourse also "constitutes both society and culture" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271) and, thus, it can be argued that cultures and societies are shaped by the discourses that circulate within them – comedy reflects the dominant discourses that circulate within the communities they represent.

That "discourse does ideological work" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271) is natural – if discourses shape the society and culture in which they circulate, then, in the long term, these discourses become the ideologies that define these societies. In the South African Indian community, discourses circulated through everyday talk and cultural productions become normalised and ingrained in the ideological memory of the community. If we view media texts as historical relics that function/ed in their social, economic and political environments, then the discourses that inform these texts are also informed themselves by their historical context. Comedy, as an historical relic, circulates in its context and is only relevant and funny if the audience is a part of the same context. The performance of comedy to an audience within a context is an act of mediation, the analysis of which would require an explanatory and interpretative exploration of the text (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271). Finally, "discourse is a form of social action" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: 271) – discourses are shaped by interactions with language and other semiotic systems. These actions are, in turn, also informed by the discourses. The performance of comedy is laden with discourses that have

been shaped by action and vice versa. If we consider discourses as the above, and analyse them as such, they offer a rich analysis that considers not just discourses at a surface level, but also their relationship to systems of power.

That critical discourse analysis will be useful in a study of comedy has been sufficiently established. A useful methodological approach would assist in uncovering discourses underlying the comedy. Fairclough (2012: 12) suggests a “trans-disciplinary research methodology” that requires “bringing disciplines and theories together to address research issues” and considers that the relation between disciplines is a “source for the theoretical and methodological development” of the disciplines involved. Comedy does not act in a vacuum – rather it is influenced by various external factors that shape the societies within which this genre operates. A trans-disciplinary research methodology allows the researcher to explore comedy, using frameworks of research that may originate in other disciplines outside of the study of comedy.

Fairclough (2012: 13) suggests a four step approach (adapted from Bhashkar, 1986 and Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) to this suggested methodological approach. The first step is that one should “focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects” (Fairclough, 2012: 13). Once a social wrong has been identified, one should “identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong” (Fairclough, 2012: 13). Next to be considered is “whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong” in order to maintain itself (Fairclough, 2012: 13). Finally, one should attempt to “identify possible ways past the obstacles” (Fairclough, 2012: 13). While these steps act as a guideline for how to approach a research project, they are merely that – a guideline, not a stringent rule to be followed in order to conduct critical discourse analysis. As Fairclough (2012: 12) suggests:

... these are essential parts of the methodology (a matter of its ‘theoretical order’), and, while it does make partial sense to proceed from one to the next (a matter of the ‘procedural order’), the relationship between them in doing research is not simply that of sequential order.

These steps do not necessarily have to be undertaken in the order stated above. Step one, for example, requires the researcher to pre-identify a social wrong. In the case of the research I am undertaking, while it is clear that the 'social wrong' of Apartheid informs the identities of those who lived under it, the social wrongs within the community in post-Apartheid are not clear. As Fairclough (2012: 12) explains:

'Social wrongs' can be understood in broad terms as aspects of social systems, forms or orders that are detrimental to human well-being and could in principle be ameliorated if not eliminated, though perhaps only through major changes in these systems, forms or orders. Examples might be poverty, forms of inequality, lack of freedom or racism.

Fairclough (2012: 12) suggests that this can be done in two steps: by first selecting a topic that directly refers to a social wrong that could be solved in a trans-disciplinary way; and then by theorising the identified objects of research in a trans-disciplinary way. The issue of identities can be approached in a trans-disciplinary way as there are various external factors that could inform identities. The themes that occur in the comedy will thus offer insight into the social wrongs that could be affecting the identities of South African Indians.

At this point, I realised that identifying these themes and finding discourse strands that would allow me to explore the construction of identities in post-Apartheid South Africa would require a methodical, organised manner of reading transcripts of the comedic performances. Thus, I decided to include, to a small extent, a thematic content analysis to see what patterns emerge in terms of themes. It was then possible to explore these themes using the discourse strands I identify from the thematic content analysis. Undertaking this exercise would allow for a quantitative indication of what the predominant themes in the comedy are and to make inferences based on those.

The second step in Fairclough's (2012) methodology is to identify obstacles to address the social wrong. Once the themes and discourse strands pertaining to the social wrongs are identified – an in-depth analysis of the discourses that occur in the comedy will allow me to see what the words of the comedians tell us whether and how these social wrongs are informing the identities of Indians in Post-Apartheid South Africa. The third and fourth steps

would require a discussion of identified social wrongs and whether the discourses are subverting or enabling the advancement of these social wrongs, and offer possible solutions to rectify these. In this way the research on the performance of comedy will be designed to conform to the ideas of a critical discourse analysis.

Methods of Data Collection – Challenges and Insights

This section will explore the decisions made in the data collection process in order to allow for a rich data set that would offer a broad overview of the field of study. I will first explore the decisions made in the data gathering process in terms of medium, comedians selected and time frame. The rationale and challenges behind the selection of data will be explicated. Second, I consider the method used to gather the discourse of the data set.

Initial interest in this research was prompted by the increasing popularity of comedy within the Indian community in South Africa. As explored in the introductory section of this study, comedy has played a significant part in negotiating identities across all race and cultural groups during the transition to post-Apartheid South Africa. Within the South African Indian community, this was particularly visible. The South African Indian comedy industry, while a burgeoning field, is an informally organised form of popular culture. The data collection process was the most challenging aspect of the research. Though the field is rapidly growing, the largely transient nature of these events pose a challenge to the collection of data. The major challenge to the collection of data was access to recordings of comedy. In the initial stages of the study, I attempted to access video clips from online sources such as Facebook and YouTube. However, I quickly realised that the videos were not uploaded regularly, they were too short to allow for a rich range of data and often not uploaded by credible sources (the comedians themselves) but rather by audiences who recorded live shows on their personal devices. While this data set was not used towards the project, it offered some valuable initial insights into the field of study. Through this exercise, I was able to glean who were the most popular comedians at the time in the South African Indian community and used this as a basis upon which to build my data set.

As a second step, I contacted some of the comedians themselves and explained my challenges regarding access to material that I needed to build my data set. It became apparent that the dearth of recordings online was due to the hesitation on the part of comedians to share their intellectual property because of the high possibility of plagiarism in the field. One comedian explicated, in an informal conversation, that he did not like to upload videos because audiences would then stop attending the live shows, where the bulk of the income is generated. The comedian further explicated that DVD's of the shows were also not widely available because of the fear that comedians have of widespread piracy in South Africa. Thus, many comedians prefer to isolate their talent to the live shows and, those that do record their shows, offer DVD's of previous shows on sale at venues where the live shows are happening.

Having established that I would not easily get uploads of videos online, I decided to change my approach by including only DVD recordings of live shows. The opportunity to attend live shows was obtainable, and would offer insight to audience demographics and responses, but recording the shows were restricted and this would have compromised the ethical considerations of the study. I was also more interested in the comedians' discourses as media producers than the audiences. I then also decided to include two comedic movies created by South African Indian comedians, because they offered much the same value as stand-up comedy and skits. The choice to not limit the study to one 'type' of comedy resulted in a wider data set and was further justified because the study is more interested in discourses of comedy rather than an analysis of how the genre of comedy works. I thus collected seven DVDs in total. The DVDs collected were performances of the most popular South African Indian comedians. They included, Peru and Bala, Riaad Moosa, Karou Charou and Jailoshini Naidoo.

The time frame of my study was determined by what I could collect and spanned 5 years, between 2012 and 2017. It seems that comedy from within the South African Indian community began to burgeon after 2010. While the timeframe for this study is coincidental based on the availability and accessibility of what could be analysed, it also revealed that it took around 16 years into the new democracy for the comedy scene to begin to flourish in

South Africa. The preoccupation, in early democracy, with healing the wounds of the Apartheid past through TRC hearings and other serious issues that needed urgent addressing were likely to influence the timing of cultural acts of a popular nature. I am not claiming that there was a complete lack of popular culture products in the public sphere, but the rise of comedic acts at this point in democratic South Africa suggests that there were more ‘serious’ preoccupations that required urgent attention. This five year span allowed for a vast range of DVD’s to be accessed. This offered a valuable advantage, as I could then see whether there were any changes in the discourse over time. The list of DVD’s collected appears below in chronological order.

Table 1: List of DVD’s collected

<u>Year</u>	<u>Title of DVD</u>
2012	Material
2013	Peru and Bala Featuring Karou Charou National Tour 2013
2014	Doctor’s Orders
2014	Don’t Dalla With the Masala
2015	Harry and the Uncles
2017	Keeping up with the Kandasamy’s

The first DVD collected was the movie, *Material* (2012). The movie is a semi-autobiographical project based loosely on Riaad Moosa’s life, and considers the struggles of a young South African Indian man named Cassim who wants to be a stand-up comedian, though his father disapproves. The movie traces Cassim’s journey through the stand-up comedy scene and the implications this has on his life, his relationships with his father and family, and on his culture. While the movie is touted under the genre of drama, there is a strong comedic element and various scenes where comedy is foregrounded.

The second DVD is *Peru and Bala Featuring Karou Charou National Tour* (2013). This was a recording of a live national tour which spanned 29 shows in five provinces, many of which were sold out. It was a big commercial success for the creators, Vikash Mathura and Ray Maharaj as well as Karou Charou (Mathura, 2018: 18). The show was immensely popular, and

was conceptualised as a spin-off from the popular Peru and Bala radio skit on Lotus FM. In this particular show, Karou Charou makes a special appearance as the master of ceremonies and introduces various skits by Vikash Mathura and Ray Maharaj, who play the roles of Harry, Bala, Professor Pyarelal and Peru. These characters interact with each other on stage, where the simple setting of a few chairs, a small table laden with a bottle of alcohol and some glasses, and some banners display the sponsors for the shows. The skits discuss various scenarios that these men experience.

In 2014, Riaad Moosa released the DVD of his live stand-up comedy show, *Doctor's Orders*. The DVD was released after the successful 2013 tour of the show and he discusses various topics, including his success with the movie *Material*, politics and religion. The fourth DVD chosen is that of Karou Charou's nationwide show, *Don't Dalla with the Masala* (2014). The term loosely translates to 'don't mess with an Indian' or 'respect Indians'. The persona of Karou Charou was created by Madhevan Moodley and he uses this persona to explore the various intricacies of what it means to be South African Indian, particularly being an individual from a Durban township and the everyday happenings in the life of a 'Charou'.

In 2015, Vikash Mathura and Ray Maharaj made a comeback to the comedy scene with their show, *Harry and the Uncles*. The content was centred on the topics of everyday conversation between men over a drink of alcohol. The show also explores what the three characters have been doing in the time since their retirement. The last DVD was that of *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's* (2017). This is the first, and only, female-centred comedy that I was able to source, which reflects a broader lack of gender diversity in the field of South African Indian comedy. The movie explores the rapport between two neighbours (Shanti and Jennifer), formally best friends, who have an acrimonious relationship from a fight in the past. They discover that their children (Jodi and Prishen) are in a relationship and come together to sabotage the relationship. The scenarios that follow provide a comedic lens through which they re-discover their friendship.

Once the DVDs were sourced and collected, I watched all of them to get a sense of the overall themes that the comedy covered. I then began the transcription process. The process was lengthy and time-consuming. Conventional transcription programs would prove to be tedious, time-consuming, and inaccurate as they are designed to identify globally common accents and inflections, and the South African Indian accent is unique to the small community it is borne out of. Thus, the only option was to transcribe manually, which enabled more accurate transcriptions. I had enlisted the assistance of a research assistant to transcribe the DVD's for me, and I then also re-watched the DVD's along with the transcripts to ensure accuracy. We found that the movies (*Material* and *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*) were easier to transcribe, while the DVD's of stand-up comedy and skits were harder to decipher because of poor audio-visual quality and the use of slang that was harder to decipher. We also found that, particularly with Peru and Bala and Karou Charou, some of the content was repeated across shows. Though these challenges existed, the final data set was made up of transcriptions of the six DVD's.

[Methods of Data Analysis](#)

Once the transcriptions were completed, I made a list of common themes that ran through most of the DVD's. I then began reading transcriptions and highlighting them according to the themes. The themes were listed and then tabulated according to the number of times they occur.

Table 2: Content Analysis of Themes

<u>Theme</u>	<i>Material (2012)</i>	<i>Peru and Bala (2013)</i>	<i>Doctor's Orders (2014)</i>	<i>Don't Dalla with the Masala (2014)</i>	<i>Harry and the Uncles (2015)</i>	<i>Keeping Up with the Kandasamy's (2017)</i>	<i>Total</i>
Food	6	6	3	5	4	12	36
Sexuality	1	10	2	5	9	6	33
Money	1	12	3	7	9	1	33
Religion	12	3	5	1	4	3	28
Marriage/ Weddings	4	10	0	1	10	2	27
Clothing or Dress	3	4	3	5	4	3	22

Gender Roles	3	6	0	1	8	4	22
Intergenerational Angst	9	0	6	2	0	3	20
Alcohol	2	6	0	0	5	2	15
Homosexuality	0	2	1	2	5	2	12
Bollywood	3	1	0	0	3	3	10
Youth	2	0	3	0	0	2	7
Cars and Sound	1	2	0	0	0	3	6
Drugs	1	0	0	0	1	0	2

These thematic discussions almost always relate to the South African Indian experience and there is very little direct reference to India as home. The question of belonging in post Apartheid South Africa is also not directly referred to, but merely hinted at through the negotiations of difference and similarities between race groups. The theme of food is most popularly mentioned in all the comedies, followed closely by sex/sexuality and money. Through a closer examination of the themes, it was found that themes of food, religion, weddings, Bollywood and clothing were all discussed in relation to some form of memory of Indian culture, indenture and South Africa. These were most popular in the comedy of Riaad Moosa. Money, alcohol, cars and sound, and clothing reflected an interaction with a neoliberal market economy in post- Apartheid South Africa. These were predominant in the Peru and Bala and Karou Charou videos. Gender roles and homosexuality were interesting, unanticipated themes that reflected a patriarchal system within the community. This extended across all the DVD's, though the manner in which gender was addressed differed. These were the three major discourse strands that appeared across all the comedic acts. These discourse strands allowed me to make inferences on the common themes that the comedic acts follow, and the implications of this on the identity creation and belonging of South African Indians. The analysis of the comedy then took place in these three distinct categories.

In order to allow for validity of a subjective topic based in the cultural studies tradition, it is necessary to have a methodical, clear research design and methodology. Cultural studies allows the texts and discourse analysis, as well as the content analysis, to open conversations about how history and memory, gender and tradition, and consumerism and excess impact the identities and anxieties of belonging of individuals in the South African Indian community. The above research design, methods of data collection and interpretation have allowed for a thorough, rigorous examination of the data, through which well-planned research was undertaken.

Chapter Five: Memory, Identity and belonging

The performance of comedy in post-Apartheid South Africa is riddled with references to cultural memory. The way in which symbols of cultural memory are invoked in comedy promise to offer insights into the preoccupations of the comedians and larger South African Indian community. Comedy, with its ability to cover a variety of thematic concerns, offers a vehicle through which South African Indian comedians can project the cultural memories that are most valuable to them. In the one and half centuries since Indian settlement in South Africa, the “fundamental organising principals and accepted social behaviours” brought by Indian ancestors have, with time, been adapted and “re-enacted in South Africa to help ‘Indians’ construct an identity that was different from both the rest of the South African population and from the people back in India” (Ebr. Valley, 2001: 178). As mentioned before, South African Indians struggle to assimilate to post-Apartheid South Africa because of their experience of isolation before, during and after Apartheid. Symbols of the ‘home’ country have been preserved in the collective memory of the South African Indian consciousness and are used in comedy to elicit collective laughter by identifying with common symbols. This chapter explores these symbols as vestiges of memory and how they serve to assimilate or isolate South African Indians from each other, from other Indian diaspora’s and from other South Africans.

Comedy and humour rely on stereotypes. Stereotypes – as blanket groupings of individuals into groups based on fixed, often simplified, identifying characteristics – are often used in humour and comedy. When stereotypes of particular groups are used by members of that group in the performance of comedy, the purpose of affirming an “ethnic pride” (Boskin & Dorinson, 1985: 82) is usually the driving force behind the joke. By reclaiming these stereotypes and subverting and poking fun at the same stereotypes, the comic is able to do two things. First, the formation of ethnic pride, which allows the comic to do the second important thing: establish a sense of belonging to said ethnic group. Stereotypes rely on memory of symbols and this chapter explores which symbols are vestiges of the collective consciousness of South African Indians, and how comedy uses these symbols to establish identity and belonging. Religion, and other cultural symbols such as dress, music and dance,

as well as food, customs and language are all symbols through which belonging and identity are established in comedy.

The chapter begins with a brief exploration of the concept of memory and the way memory informs cultural products. This chapter explores the ways in which memory of migration South Africa and the subsequent settlement in South Africa, before, during and after Apartheid, is evoked using comedy. The stereotypes of religion, and cultural symbols such as dress and Bollywood and food are explored in terms of how collective memory has been used to create markers for identity within the South African Indian community. The question of belonging will also be explored. That is, how do comedians construct the idea of belonging, through their re-enactments of memory in post-Apartheid SA?

It is important to establish an understanding of memory as “sedimentation of relics, traces and personal memories on the one hand, and as social construction on the other” (Assmann, 2013: 36); and how memory thus plays an important role in the cultural production of communities in post-apartheid South Africa. In the humanities, memory research has focused largely on an “engagement with varied instances of contemporary and historical violence” (Wertsch & Roedinger, 2008: 32). This is particularly pertinent in the case of South Africa, with its violent past informing much of the present condition. Memory research also has “close ties with questions of identity- and, relatedly, with identity politics- and its bridging of the domains of the personal and the public, the individual and the social” (Wertsch & Roedinger, 2008: 32). In an attempt to establish belonging, the individual calls on memory in order to establish a link to the public and, in turn, to establish a sense of identity through belonging to a public. It is to this body of work that this chapter seeks to contribute.

Memory is vital, it is necessary and it informs all human interaction and cultural production. This chapter is particularly interested in the production of post-Apartheid texts and uses Halbwach’s premise that “the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present” (Coser, 1992: 25). The obsession of coming to terms with the

traumatic past, is the presiding theme of cultural products in present, post-Apartheid South Africa – and rightfully so, with a population that still lives with the spatial and temporal remnants of an Apartheid state. The way cultural products, like comedy, make sense of the past, has “strategic, political and ethical consequences” (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003: 1) on the present.

Memory can be divided into three distinct experiences. When an individual experiences the “inner time” of ones’ physical self, which can be called an individual memory (Assmann, 2013: 36). Halbwachs (1992: 39) makes the point that one is only truly experiencing individual memory when in complete isolation of others. He considers dreams as a space where one experiences the “state in which [the individual] would live if he were in contact with no society” (Halbwachs, 1992: 39). In dreams, one is “no longer capable - or has need – of relying on frameworks of collective memory” (Halbwachs, 1992: 39). While individual memory may inform a sliver of cultural production – cultural products rely on a shared understanding of symbols in the meaning-making process. In the case of comedy, the comedian needs to perform her/his comedy using symbols that the audience recognises and identifies with based on shared memory.

In this vein, the comedian needs to establish themselves as belonging to or affiliating with the audience. Memory informs the way in which humans establish their belonging. By calling upon the past, one finds their “connective structure” to others, which is a uniquely human phenomenon “based on the exclusively human faculties of symbolization and communication” (Assmann, 2013: 36). As Halbwachs (1992: 38) observes, most of the time, remembering is through the help of others, who spur him/her on and “their memory comes to the aid of [his] and [his] relies on theirs”. Our memories are, thus, mostly recalled through interactions with others. The self is created through an interaction with the other, and vice versa, and the memory that is shared between both. This experience of memory in a collective, is “social or collective” memory (Assmann, 2013: 36). Ahmed (1999: 330) extends on this:

The very failure of individual memory is compensated for by collective memory, and the writing of the history of a nation, in which the subject can allow herself to fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten past.

The content that a comedian creates relies on their collective and cultural memory in order to keep the comedian interesting and relevant to the audience and to 'fit in'. In terms of collective memory, the comedian will make use of shared social memory which is "embedded in the constellations of social communication but still embodied in the brains of the participants" (Assmann, 2013: 37). This is where a person's knowledge of recent shared history spanning a "limited time depth" of approximately 80 years (Assmann, 2013: 37) becomes paramount. For comedians it is vital, as an audience will relate to an experience, or rather, memory of familiar interactions and communication cues they share.

The link between collective memory and belonging thus becomes glaringly obvious. Halbwachs (in Coser, 1992: 22) suggests that "the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people". Shared memories help people create an individual sense of belonging within and without groups. Assmann (2013: 36) further reiterates:

Human memory brings about a synthesis of time and identity, both on the collective and on the personal level which may be called a diachronic identity. It is this identity which allows human beings both personally and collectively to orient themselves in time.

The importance of memory in being able to orient oneself in both spatial and temporal terrains is an important aspect of belonging.

The last form of memory is more complex, encompassing a "historical memory" that could originate from generations before and be passed on through social contact (Assmann, 2013: 36). This form, also known as cultural memory, relies less on communication and interaction and more on symbols. According to Assmann (2013:37):

...cultural memory is neatly disembodied, exteriorized, objectified and embedded in cultural institutions such as rituals, feasts, texts, archives, all kinds of symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures are stable and

situation transcendent, able to be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another.

Memory, in this case, is contained in symbols and is more stable because of its longevity. These symbolic forms are preserved with even more zest in the case of migrant communities, in which symbolic forms become a means of preserving the 'culture' of the home country.

While the field of memory studies is enormous, and varied across disciplines, conceptions of collective and cultural memory have been used as very practicable in a study of culture and cultural products. Specifically because cultures are maintained through the communication of history and symbols. The performance of comedy draws on all three forms of memory. But what happens when performances rely on various histories and memories? What happens in the case of migrants and diasporas who have histories from other homes, histories of homelessness and violent displacement, of movement, of newness, of belonging and un-belonging, and of settlement? How do these people create communities of shared memory, and how do they negotiate these histories?

[On memory, migration and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa](#)

The post-Apartheid condition in South Africa has been captivated by a fascination with the past – how to address it, how to overcome the traumas of the past and how to preserve the memory of the past. According to McEwan (2003: 740):

Coming to terms with the past has emerged as the grand narrative of the late twentieth and early 21st centuries. Individuals and nations are seeking to overcome their traumatic legacies through the establishment of historical truth and the creation of collective memory.

In South Africa, this narrative is particularly strong. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the years following the transition to democracy in 1994, is the most visible manifestation of the desire to reconcile the tragedies of the past. As Zegeye and Harris (2003: 3) state:

The country is currently enmeshed in an historic struggle to break free of its oppressive and, racist and violent past and create a new multi-racial and

multicultural social order based on reconciliation, social equity and political democracy.

South Africa is still a fairly young democracy, 25 years at the time of writing, and these are still pertinent, everyday struggles in all spheres of life, from the social and political to the economic.

In any post-colonial study, it is vital to understand the impact of history on the present. In the South African Indian context this becomes even more pertinent because of the element of migration and cross-cultural elements. In Post-Apartheid South Africa, the physical and social delineations imposed by the Apartheid government have now been removed and Govinden (2011: 71) suggests:

South Africans are imbricated and entangled in one another's histories; indeed, it is difficult to separate these histories into various discrete tracks, as happened during apartheid, where relational understandings were deemphasized.

Indians in the 'new' South Africa are now in a position where negotiating between the cultural rigidity of the past and the cross-cultural notion of where they fit in the 'rainbow nation' becomes an important focus of their existence. It is helpful, then, to draw from Homi Bhabha's theories of culture in the postcolony. Bhabha shows how "histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding that we transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations" (Huddart, 2006 1).

In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha suggests:

Where, once, the transmission of national traditions was the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees - these border and frontier conditions - may be the terrains of world literature. (Bhabha, 1994: 12).

In the case of South African Indians, their experience is closely intertwined in the national narrative of South Africa. Huddart (2006: 101) interprets Bhabha's claim that each nation has its own narrative but "very often, a dominant or official narrative overpowers all other stories, including those of minority groups". The dominant narrative in South Africa has always been

Apartheid and, more recently, post-Apartheid healing. It is the work of marginalised groups, who “have privileged perspectives on the rethinking of national identities” that help make nations “more inclusive and realistic” (Huddard, 2006: 102). It is through the lens of minority groups that the true realities of a nation are revealed.

If minority groups play such a vital role in the establishment of nation-ness, the question of how they can do this arises. The notion of difference becomes vital here (Bhabha, 1994: 2):

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moment of historical transformation.

Difference is performed. It is through cultural engagement of this difference that it becomes apparent that difference is not the same. That is to say, all minorities have different experiences, affiliations and traits. This gives them culturally hybrid identities. In an interview, Bhabha (2017) describes how cultures are “not a seamless whole” and this has led to “the most interesting and most important ethical and political problems”. In cultures, there “are discordant elements; there are divisive elements; there are divergent elements” (Bhabha, 2017). This link between cultural hybridities, the transformation of the ethical and the political, as well as the historical is pertinent. It is through the uncomfortable experiences of migration, colonialism, apartheid, and post-Apartheid democracy that South African Indians have created their unique hybrid cultures that are different from Indians worldwide, Indians in India and even different from within South Africa.

The post-Apartheid condition is an interesting space in which identities rely a lot on memory, as well as on the present and future. As Bhabha (1994: 2) succinctly puts it:

We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.

This is an important time globally – and it demands that we negotiate our violent histories, migrations, homelessness, belonging, hybridity, and the like. Bhabha (1994: 7) suggests that:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes a part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living.

This in-between space that Bhabha proposes, is an important part of culture. While we live in the present, we are not entirely isolated from the past - the past informs our performance of the present. South African Indians who identify as South African cannot wholly disregard their Indian heritage because it still informs their present; even in the smallest ways, like ticking a box for ethnicity on an official form. On the other hand, there are those for whom links to India are vital. However, the “impression one gets from cursory discussions with those searching for roots is pride in being linked to ancient culture but no inclination to settle there” (Vahed & Desai, 2010: 5). As Bhabha says, we “need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1994: 1).

According to Gqola (2010: 8), “memory resists erasure and is important for the symbols through which each community invents itself”. The memory work that continues in post-apartheid South Africa is palpable. McEwan (2003: 740) argues:

Since the ending of apartheid, the state, political parties, civil society and ordinary people in South Africa have attempted to deal with the traumatic legacies of the past, to provide some therapeutic release and to engender a common sense of nationhood, people and community.

In the case of the South African Indian, it becomes apparent that repetitive tropes in comedic acts point to particular markers or symbols that distinguish the South African Indian community from without and within. These markers are vestiges of memory work that has been ongoing for the last century and a half. It is important to note that, in most cases, these vestiges do not appear as an active recollection of memory, it is more ingrained and subtle.

The symbols I refer to are things that link the comedians to being members of the South African Indian community. Some of the symbols that feature in Indian South African comedy include, amongst others, religion and cultural symbols such as dress, music and dance, as well as food.

In the case studies explored below, I base my analysis on Assmann and Czaplicka's (1995: 130) conception of cultural memory as central to identity in the following way:

Cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ("We are this") or in a negative ("That's our opposite") sense.

In the South African Indian community, through my analysis of the comedy, it becomes apparent that identity is strongly linked around three major themes: religion, cultural symbols such as dress and Bollywood, and food. The identity of individuals within this community is often, stereotypically, based on these three themes. I explore below how belonging in the community is constructed around these themes and how they become markers for self-identifying as a part of a community. The preservation of religion and religious practises, the assertion of identity through dress and participation in Bollywood related activities, and the centrality of food in the assertion of belonging and identity are explored below.

Religion

We should see religion as a "chain of memory" as Hervieu-Leger conceptualises it (Urbaniak, 2015: 2). In this vein, religion can be imagined to span generations and be embedded in cultural memory. In a postcolonial diasporic setting, the urge to preserve their 'culture' is a key driver in many religious communities. Thus, "a religious community accepts tradition and draws from it in the name of the necessary continuity between the past and the present" (Urbaniak, 2015: 2). There is a sort of manic preservation of religion in some cases, with the emphasis on religious traditions as a means of preserving culture.

In South Africa the category of "Indians" is uniquely divided into three main religious groups: Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Thus, associations with Indians as linked to only Hinduism or

Islam can be refuted, with a growing number of South African Indians converting to Christianity. Singh (2008: 6) argues that the South African Indian community habitually base their identities “upon the retention of sociocultural and religious practices originating in India and adapting to the conditions that South Africa offers them as an ethnic minority”. While these groups identify as being part of an Indian diaspora, interestingly (Hansen, 2012: 222):

...the category “Indian” appears evermore obsolete in South Africa. Muslims increasingly see themselves as linked to the Middle East; some South African Tamils see themselves as linked to a global Tamil diaspora whose central point of reference is Jaffna in Sri Lanka; and many South African Hindus convert to Pentecostal churches, making Jerusalem, Kentucky, and Tennessee more meaningful references than the subcontinent.

While this is true for some of the Indian community, the bulk of South African Indians are still increasingly connecting to the idea of mythical India as a homeland, through performances of religion. It is through globalisation and access to information about the roots of their religions that Indian communities now attempt to make sense of and strengthen their affiliation to their religion.

The performance of comedy by South African Indians often refers to religion. This includes the performance of the memory of religion and religious practices and traditions, and how it is linked to their identity. Through an interpretation of religious references in comedy, the way in which religion is used as a means of maintaining Indian culture can be deduced. Religion in these comedic acts have three specific, distinct functions – the first is to enunciate an affiliation or understanding of religion through use of religious terms thus enhancing the comedian’s relevance to their Indian audiences. The second is through the context of religious purity and what it means to be a true devotee of a specific religion – this often means critiquing those who seem “pious”. Lastly, religion is juxtaposed with modernity, where comedians make light of religious traditions by placing them in the modern context.

As mentioned before, in order for comedians to be relevant, they need to connect with their audiences. In their attempts to enact what it means to be Indian, and to appeal to their largely

Indian audiences, comedians need to invoke an understanding of religion – this very important aspect of South African Indian culture. According to Ebr. Valley (2001: 179):

Religious faith has influenced the way in which the land of the ancestors is remembered. The memory of India is expressed in terms of religious orthodoxy. The distance or proximity to India expressed by many 'Indians' demonstrates their religiosity.

By expressing an understanding of, and usage of, religious phrases, symbols and ideals, comedians emphasise the relevance of religion in their lives, as well as their affiliation with a particular religion.

In a Facebook Live video addressing fans about an upcoming show in the town of Witbank, Riaad Moosa accidentally sneezes. What transpires before and after the sneeze:

So, I'd just like to say Jumah Mubarak to everyone in Witbank. (Sneezes) (Smirk)
That was live, Okay. Uh, Sorry, maaf. You're supposed to say ah Alhamdulillah, then you're supposed to say "Ya hamuk Allah" and I'm supposed to say "ya dikum Allah" this goes on about five minutes.

Moosa starts by greeting his fan base using the words "Jumah Mubarak" which, translated literally, means "Happy Friday". The religious connotations of this phrase are deeper. On days other than Friday, the general Muslim greeting of "Asalam Walaikum" is used without any other reference to the day of the week, so the emphasis on adding this phrase points to the deep significance of Friday in the Muslim religion. Fridays are considered deeply significant in Islam because of the weekly Namaaz (prayer) that is offered on a Friday afternoon. Akin to the Sabbath in Christianity, Fridays are a day of prayer in Islam. After this, Moosa goes on to explain Islamic etiquette when one sneezes – the joke referring to the back and forth exchange of religious idioms taking about five minutes after one sneezes. Moosa's comedy is littered with such religious references. He starts all of his performances with the traditional greeting of 'Asalam Walaikum'. Moosa's comedy references his commitment to his religion often, and by owning his Muslim identity he becomes a part of the 'in-group'. At the same time, he also establishes himself as beyond condemnation for making jokes about Islam because he is a Muslim himself and can claim authenticity from his lived experience.

In his stand-up comedy show *Doctor's Orders* (2017), Moosa makes reference to moments in the mosque during prayer time. In one particular instance, he makes light of people being in embarrassing situations and pretending they did not occur. He refers to the age old predicament of flatulence in public spaces. Moosa (2017):

Like, like in *Taraweeh* right sometimes you know cause like the people like (*imitates sound of flatulence*). They fart during *Taraweeh*. (*Imitates sound of flatulence, then pretending as if nothing happened*). Could be worse, you could be in *ruku* like (*bends over and makes the sound again*) and the guys behind you's mouth is open. (*Imitates tasting something strange*). (*Imitates Muslim man*) 'We didn't have lagan for *iftar* (*inaudible*)?'

Here, Moosa makes light of the happenings inside the sacred space of the mosque, and references specific terminology that points to his understanding of religious practices. *Taraweeh* (or *Tarawih*) refers to prayers performed during the evening prayers in the month of Ramadan (the holy month of fasting for Muslims). *Ruku* refers to a postulation during prayer where one bends forward. In mosques where men pray in rows, at the time of *ruku*, there is the likelihood of a person bending forward in front of you. The joke then refers to the flatulence caused by post-fast indulgence and the 'bad taste' it can leave in one's mouth.

Moosa, in the above skit, demonstrates his proximity to his religion through explicating his joke with reference to very specific religious practices. The identification of the practises and terms of *Taraweeh* and *ruku* as memorised symbols of Muslim prayer, enable him to belong to the religious group of Islam. At the same time, he makes a joke that is seemingly out of the bounds of propriety – relating a bodily function, the discussion of which is often distasteful, to the function of prayer. Here, Moosa is pushing the boundaries of what is considered offensive to his 'in-group' and what is deemed acceptable. His identity as a Muslim is solidified, but he is still able to make light of Islam in a way that allows him to explore the notion that serious affairs or matters in Islam can offer some humour.

The notion of Islam as a religion that is very serious and as a religion in which there is no space for humour leads to an interesting trope in Moosa's comedy – that of the *halaal/haraam*

spectrum. The concepts of halaal and haram are outlined by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC) (2019):

What Almighty Allah has made lawful and permissible (*halal*) in His Book, it is *halal*; and what He has forbidden/impermissible (*haram*) in His Book, is *haram*.

Contrary to the common links of halal to food consumption practices, Halal is expressed by Muslim's as a way of life, of attempting to live a pious life by following the tenets outlined by the Holy Quran. Haram, consequently, refers to the disobedience of these tenets and/or the indulgence in activities that are not permitted in Islam.

Riaad Moosa's comedy often grapples with what it means to be halal and haram, and what practices are permitted or denied. This 'grey' area of religion in an increasingly modern world is something that many religions have had to adapt to. Urabniak (2015: 5) argues that "faith draws from the reservoir of memory in a selective way, thus creating a kind of a religious bricolage" and that these reconstructions of religion "takes place in an entirely fragmentary and arbitrary way". If this is true of religion, and constant religious debates have proven this, then there is ongoing tension based on the interpretation of religion.

In the movie *Material* (2012), Cassim's (played by Riaad Moosa) passion for performing stand-up comedy comes in direct conflict with his father's (Ebrahim) traditional views on the halal/haram spectrum. Ebrahim's initial response to finding out that his son is a comedian is of vehement displeasure. He says: "What kind of a hobby is that? You know what these people are like. F this and F that and the blasphemy!" (Material, 2012). Ebrahim's displeasure is not entirely misplaced – he draws on his knowledge of the stand-up comedy scene as being associated with vulgarity performed in haram spaces. He visits a bar where his son is performing later in the movie and later that evening he says to Cassim:

Your mother tells me I don't know this thing, this comedy. So I think, maybe she's right. Maybe I don't. So, tonight I went to look at that place. Full of drinking and smoking and swearing and everything *haram*.

The fact that his son is present in a space where haram activities are happening around him dissatisfies him deeply, despite the fact that his son is not actively engaging in any of those activities. The father's view of haram is linked to his interpretation of the basic principles for halal/haram, and two specific principles stand out here – first the tenet that “permitting the *haram* is similar to committing *shirk*” and second that “when it is forbidden to perform an act, it is also forbidden to request its performance” (MJC, 2019). Shirk refers to idol worship and polytheism, which is a grave sin in Islam, a religion which believes that there is only one God and that is Allah. Ebrahim sees Cassim's stand-up comedy as active involvement in permitting haram activities.

Alternatively, Cassim attempts to navigate his own interpretation of the halal/haram spectrum. In an interaction with a talent scout at the bar where he is performing, the scout offers him a beer and he turns it down. This demonstrates his commitment to following the tenet that “the prohibition of things are due to their impurity and harmfulness” (MJC, 2019). In a later scene, Cassim attempts to work through his father's displeasure of stand-up comedy through his comedy. Here the comedy is used as a cathartic project, to make sense of the tension between father and son, old and young. In the scene, Cassim is performing his set, juxtaposed with what is going on in his personal life outside of the comedy. It plays out like this (Material, 2012):

Cassim: You know being a Muslim and doing stand-up comedy is very difficult. Like, like some people say that too much laughter, too much laughter is *haraam*. And, and I don't know what that means. Too much laughter is *haraam*. Now, I don't know if you know *haraam* means prohibited. Now the opposite of *haraam* is *halaal* which means allowed. And then in between there you've got *makrooh* which means not recommended. So now when they say too much laughter is *haraam* what does that mean?

Scene changes back and forth between Cassim packing and in the bar. Aisha comes to his room. Cuts back to bar.

Cassim: Is it like, like haha, that's *halaal* that's fine. And hahaha that's *makrooh*, not recommended. And hahahaha, *haraam*, no that's not allowed.

Scene changes back to Cassim's room.

Aisha: I'm so sorry Cas. Dad asked where I got the phone and I didn't wanna tell him.

Cassim: It's okay.

Aisha: I didn't wanna tell him. I'm so sorry.

Cassim: It's not your fault.

Aisha: I'm so sorry.

They hug. He consoles her.

Switch back to the bar.

Cassim: That's too many 'ha's, that's one too many 'ha's. You fine with a hahaha, but then ha, it's too much. *Haraam*. I don't understand it huh.

His confusion about what is halal and what is haram is clear. It becomes clearer that here the memory of religion is "an interlacing of shattered memories that have been worked upon, invented and constantly reshaped in response to the present, itself being subject to the pressures of change" (Urabaniak, 2012: 5).

Earlier in the movie, Ebrahim expresses the above tension and says that "too much laughter is haram" (Material, 2012). According to Marzolph (2011: 175):

While laughter is thus permitted in principle, the 'rule of intensity' refers to a precept of moderation that has also been known to Arabic authors by way of the translation of the Aristotelian ethics. In theological discussions, the 'rule of intensity' is often sided by an explicit warning according to which the Prophet is quoted as having said: 'Frequent (or: intense) laughter kills the heart'.

Traditional notions of Islam view excessive, intense laughter as haram. While a constant theme here is the tension between tradition and modernity, this is further complicated by the complexity of the notion of purity and piety in religion. These tensions are further complicated by the yearning to belong and assimilate to post-Apartheid South Africa. Cassim yearns to explore his talent through fitting in with like-minded individuals, though these individuals are not of his religion, nor his race group. Ebrahim does not relate to this yearning as he is comfortable in his life of isolation, as it has been for the bulk of his life.

In the above scenes, the tension between traditional notions of the preservation of Islam, Islamic culture and piety, and the modern post-Apartheid amalgamation of cultures in an attempt to create a new notion of South-Africanness through the assimilation into the comedy scene is visible. Ebrahim's notions of Islam are linked to his memory of Islam practised at a time when communities were isolated and traditional practises of Islam were preserved without any outside influence. Cassim, however, is of a generation where the post-Apartheid landscape allowed for influences from other religions, cultures and global modernity to inform his understandings of Islam. The religion remains the same, as do the practises, but the manner in which these two generations interpret what is permissible in Islam are vastly different.

There is no doubt that religion has had to adapt to the demands of a global, commercial industry. As Urbaniak (2015: 2) argues:

Religious community is capable of incorporating into its own tradition the innovations and reinterpretations demanded by the present (Hervieu-Leger 2000:87), but it always attempts to link this new data to the ancient data and thus to place it within the body of its own doctrine.

In an interview with a senior *pujari* (priest) at the Umgeni Road Temple, Hansen (2012: 223) discusses a moment where the interview is interrupted by a couple who had come to request that he perform a blessing ceremony for their new car. The priest proceeds to explain that, while people (he refers to young South African Hindus) still have faith in the Hindu religion, they also appreciate their modern amenities like cars, houses and the like. Here, it is demonstrated that religion has been adapted to fit into modern life and that modern Hinduism, modern Christianity and modern Islam are all adaptations of cultural memory that are reinterpreted to the present.

Moosa's comedy also attempts to place the practices of an old religion in conversation with modern activities and current events. In one stand-up skit, he discusses teenager's obsession

with Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series of books and the subsequent movies, which became popular from 2008.

But young girls will like what they like. They like what they like. They into Twilight... stuff like that. You know what, some of the uncles got confused. 'What twilight? *Magrieb* is over long time ago. What you talking about?'

Here, Moosa refers to the *magrieb* prayer, which occurs just after sunset. His joke alludes to the lack of understanding on the part of 'uncles' who are not familiar with popular culture. This insertion of religion into popular culture is a subtle attempt to demonstrate how the two intertwine, particularly with younger generations.

Moosa, in *Doctor's Orders* also creates a joke about the traditional practice of *Istinja*, which refers to the practice of cleaning oneself with water after urinating or defecating. This is in accordance with Islamic ideas around cleanliness and purity.

And I feel sorry for the non-Muslims that have to stay in a hotel rooms after the Muslim people. Cause, you guys don't know what we use those little glasses in the bathroom for hey. Do you know what I'm talking about Lizzie? (*Imitates white woman*) 'Cheryl, what's the glass doing next to the toilet, I don't understand. Must be children playing around or something.' (*Filling imaginary glass and drinking from it*). Lizzie you don't know what's going on hey? Let me explain it to you, you know, cause this show's educational as well. Right basically what happens is Muslim folks right when we go to the loo right we have to be pristine back there, at all times you know. Right so we don't just use toilet paper we use water so we can be (*does odd hand movement behind his back almost making the sound of a slashing sword*) you and we have this ritual ablution called *istinja* right and there's a specific bottle devoted to this purpose called the *istinja* bottle or *istinja* jug at home, right. Okay sometimes also in upper class Muslim homes they got like a hosepipe, like. That's very confusing to non-Muslims. Especially if there's a pot plant over there. Like (*imitating white woman*) 'Mohammed really cares about his plants hey.' But basically there's a *istinja* bottle or jug right so basically that's at home right, so when you go to hotels, there's no *istinja* bottle so, you tend to use like what's closest to you. (*Imitating sitting on a toilet and reaching for something*) It's that little glass. (*Imitating filling the glass with water while squatting*). Have you ever heard this from your family? (*Imitating Indian accent*) 'The glass is too small, bring the kettle!'

Here, Moosa considers what happens to traditional practices when one is 'out in the world', away from the home where tradition can be practiced freely. This juxtaposition also highlights

what it means to follow tradition in a modern context. Here tensions of belonging are also brought to light. It becomes harder to separate traditional notions of religion and social life in a world that is increasingly global, modern and allows for freedom of movement. Moosa highlights this tension with the notions of Istinja, which, when practised at home or within one's community, is easier due to the accessibility of the physical infrastructure required to wash. These amenities are not available in most Western toilets, hence the need to improvise. This joke, however, makes a serious statement about Muslims ability to navigate and belong in a world that does not consider the traditional needs of this community. A sense of displacement is experienced through something as small as the lack of a jug in a bathroom, and how this is navigated becomes the point of the joke funny.

While the constant theme in Moosa's comedy is that of tradition versus modernity, Moosa also acknowledges his pride for his religion:

They, they ridicule our culture cause they don't understand the wisdom behind it. Like, like take swine flu for instance. All of a sudden you had Europeans scared of pigs. We've been saying that for years. Europeans so paranoid about swine flu they were walking around airports wearing masks. Take a look at our women. We've been saying that for years.

Through the discussion of the swine flu epidemic, Moosa defends Muslim restrictions against consuming pork or any pig-derived products, as they are considered impure. Here, Moosa flips the narrative of Islam on its head. Eating pork is considered a sin in Islam and this is well known across the world. The face veils that some Muslim women wear has been a stereotypical symbol of Islam in mainstream culture for decades. The suggestion is that these notions, which Western societies often dismissed as oppressive and/or a source of ridicule against Muslim culture are now being adopted by Europeans in an attempt to prevent contracting swine flu. Moosa embraces tradition and humanises the Muslim experience by highlighting the clear prejudices which inform these stereotypes. By doing this, he asserts his belonging to Islam and suggests that the 'out-group' adopt some Islamic practises for they are informed by practical considerations.

Moosa also self-identifies as a comedian who is interested in what it means to be a Muslim in a post-9/11 era. In *Material*, when Cassim is performing one of his stand-up skits (2012), he discusses what it is like to be a Muslim travelling in a post-9/11 era:

Don't be alarmed people, they searched me at the door. Everything is fine. You know it's difficult for my people when we fly, you know. You know, cause a Muslim with a plane ticket it's a little bit, a little bit suspicious. I did a normal thing. I, I recited a prayer for good luck to protect me and my family on our journey. It's a normal thing. I was like... (*Recites prayer for good luck in Arabic*). And within a minute everyone else was praying as well.

While Cassim makes light of this, the September 11 attack on the Twin Towers in the USA was an issue that affected Muslims globally. The policing of Muslims during air travel is what Moosa takes a jab at. From this, it can be deduced that there is a grappling to negotiate the fine line between expressions of faith in post-9/11 Muslim society and the global persecution of the Muslim faith, informed by the global North.

That Islam and practicing Muslims' struggle to assimilate to an increasingly global world, with clear prejudices against the religion, is a clear tension highlighted by Moosa's comedy. He skilfully navigates this by appropriating the stereotypes about the religion and, through the process of reclaiming these symbols (and thus reclaiming his ethnic pride), he is able to explore the anxieties of creating an identity that amalgamates both his understanding of religion based on the collective memory of his group and his experiences in a post-Apartheid world.

Cultural Symbols

Cultural symbols such as dress, music and dance are some of the ways in which memory of home are invoked. In a post-colonial, 'modern' context, it became more imperative that these symbols remained. In South Africa, particularly within the Apartheid system, the Indian communities were able to retain these symbols easily while living amongst each other, because of the physical boundaries of the Group Areas Act (Ebr. Valley, 2001). However, these "guaranteed strict measures of mutual control amongst the 'Indians', [have] disappeared" (Ebr. Vally, 2001: 178) in a post-Apartheid era. Yet, Indian's still find ways in which they can

incorporate vestiges of Indian culture, particularly during special events like weddings and parties.

Dress is one of the most visible vestiges of the cultural memory of India in South Africa. If we consider the notion of dress as “culturally laden, personally mediated signs and symbols” (Weber and Mitchell, 2004: 5), then the possibility of viewing dress as a marker for identity and belonging opens up. The saree/sari, a six metre length of (usually patterned and decorated) material, draped in different styles over a petticoat and blouse, is the national dress of India. Like other forms of dress, the “sari can be seen as a template for multiple and often competing ideological meanings” (Amin & Govinden, 2012: 334). Amin and Govinden (2012: 334) elaborate:

The sari, as with dress in general, may signify the dialectics of identity and act as a means of narrating identity. From our perspective, the sari straddles the divide between tradition and modernity. There are different types of saris that are appropriate for different occasions, on a broad continuum from informal to formal, workday to ceremonial. There are also different codes of dress for Indian women and the sari, rather than jeans, is often seen to be appropriate wear for weddings and funerals. Generally, wearing a sari is seen to be representing tradition and its use is extolled as a good indication of adherence to ‘Indian culture’.

The sari represents tradition and South African Indian women who wish their identity to include Indian cultural symbols and who wish to belong in this ‘in-group’ adhere to this dress code when attending ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and prayer ceremonies.

In an attempt to create a unique South African Indian identity, women from the South African Indian community “experience an inside/outside or the same/ difference dialectic” (Amin & Govinden, 2012: 331). This tension is highlighted in a situation described by Amin and Govinden, where a group of South African Indian women visiting India chose to wear traditional African dress when interacting with their hosts. They were immediately seen as non-Indian, and Amin and Govinden (2012:331) explain:

Though their cultural heritage makes them Indian insiders, their status as African nationals relegates them to the outside. The wearing of Afro skirts, beads and

headgear contradicts and erases their Indian ancestry and positions them strongly as outsiders. To show that they are Indian they have to wear saris. The discourse around Indian women is shaped by associating ideas of authenticity, nationality and dress as a compounded conception for women of the diaspora. There is no opportunity within an African-expressed sense of dress to claim Indian identity. Being Indian can only be achieved in the presence of a sari.

Within South Africa, South African Indian women mainly wear Western attire in the workplace and in their everyday lives. This is an attempt to assimilate to broader South African culture and establish belonging as South African. In events that the sari is worn, it is usually a predominantly Indian space, with mostly members of the same community attending. Heritage Day celebrations also provide an opportunity for South African Indians to express their Indian identity.

In the opening scene of the movie, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamy's*, the two neighbouring families are preparing to leave their homes to attend a wedding. The two female leads, Shanti and Jennifer, walk out of their homes and see each other – they are both wearing the same sari. Both women are visibly upset that they have the same sari.

Shanti: My sari. She's wearing my sari.

Preggie: Eh, come on get in the car man this.

Shanti: The lady said it was a designer sari. She said it was a designer sari. Now that one is wearing it.

(Shanti and Jennifer glare at each other from the two cars. Their husbands smile and wave to each other).

Jennifer: She's wearing my sari. Actually, think she can pull it off?

Later, at the wedding, the ladies are seated at a round table with their families and both women look clearly unhappy. They have still not come to terms with the fact that they are wearing the same sari and this leads to a back and forth about who looks better in the sari. Because traditional Indian dress has been relegated to special occasions, it becomes a space where they are able to demonstrate their status, with women vying to ensure they have 'exclusive' garments. There is a common understanding that shopkeepers selling Indian garments market these as 'one-of-a-kind' or 'designer' pieces, even though they may have many in stock, misleading women into believing they have a unique outfit. Here, belonging

and the anxieties of identity are implied – both women wear a sari to affirm their traditional values, but at the same time try to assert their individuality by hoping to wear a unique sari.

As mentioned earlier, dress is an important marker to demonstrate how committed to culture an individual is. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Jennifer's mother-in-law runs into Shanti and Jennifer (who is disguised in a purdah):

Aya: Oh, there's your friend. (Jennifer walks out in full burka).

Shanti: Aya, uh, this is my friend, uhm, Aisha bibi. Uh, we old school friends.

Aya: *Salaam Alaikum* (with accent. Jennifer just nods) Why, what happened? She can't talk or what?

Shanti: No, uhm, oh she had her wisdoms removed (Jennifer holds her cheek and shakes her head as if in pain).

Aya: Oh shame. If you'll were friends together at school then you must be knowing my daughter-in-law, Jennifer. I keep telling Shanti, she would've been the perfect daughter-in-law for me.

Shanti: Oho Aya. Jennifer's not that bad. She may be cooked in the head but when has she ever let you down?

Aya: That's true eh. Why must talk lies. But you know she smokes? And her dressing? Ooh what short short things she wear. She should dress like your friend.

In this exchange, two interesting things happen. First, the Aya greets Shanti's 'friend' with the traditional 'Asalam Walaikum'. By doing this she is identifying that the woman is Muslim because of the way she is dressed and acknowledging her accordingly. She also shows her respect by greeting her with the traditional Islamic greeting, this is meant to demonstrate that Hindu and Muslim communities live together in townships like Chatsworth in harmony. Second, Aya goes on to complain about her daughter-in-law, who, unbeknownst to her, is hidden behind the purdah. Interestingly, Jennifer is styled in the movie as a modern woman with a very Western style of dress. Shanti, on the other hand, is more 'traditional' and, though she wears western clothing, she is more demure in her dress style. Aya does not approve of her daughter-in-law's dress style and goes as far as saying that she would've preferred a daughter-in-law like Shanti. Unsurprisingly, the politics of dress are relegated to female Indians, and men have adopted Western clothing styles with no critique. This is covered in more detail in the chapter on gender and tradition.

In *Material* (2012), Cassim attends a wedding where he is meant to meet a girl for a potential arranged marriage. He remembers the girl as stocky, with glasses and not very attractive. He ends up seeing an attractive girl at the dessert table and attempts to strike up a conversation by saying: “That’s a very nice dress you’re wearing”. The girl is wearing a traditional sari in orange. Weddings, as mentioned, are the spaces where women are dressed usually in traditional dress. Cassim’s mother and sister, as well as other women at the wedding, dressed in traditional wear. This is interesting, as in this sphere, Muslim-ness is not separated from Indian-ness but there has been a movement by some within the Muslim community to detach and purge themselves from Indian traditions and adopt those from Islamic countries. As Hansen (2013: 23) argues, Muslim’s have attempted to “re-imagine their own genealogies as somehow ‘Arab’ and thus not South Asian”.

On the other hand, Arabic Muslim dress is portrayed in a very different manner in the comedy. For example, Riaad Moosa says:

Normally people wear the pardah and the scarf, but these French guys (imitating a French accent and gesturing) - I don’t like this, look at this... Muslim women with this thing over here (hurling sound) I don’t know whether to make love to you or post a letter, I don’t know. Disgusting.

Moosa’s quip is a subtle response to the French government ban on the *niqab* (Face covering). While this joke is a comment on the struggles of Muslims post-911, which, as mentioned previously, is one of the themes he grapples with, it demonstrates the importance of dress in maintaining Muslim identity.

In this section on dress it has been established that dress is an important marker for cultural identity and provides a cultural symbol for expressing one’s links to Indian culture and/or to one’s Muslim heritage (which, while not excluded from Indian culture, may have broader influences from Arabic countries). Comedy provides a platform where the politics of belonging are explored through the representation of culture through dress. Women who wear sari are deemed to be part of Indian culture and use opportunities to wear the sari as platforms for the expression of their “Indianness”. Alternatively, women also wear non-traditional clothing in everyday life – but the style of clothing should also link to aspects of

modesty (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), emphasising one's commitment to culture. Anxieties of identity and belonging are performed through dress.

Another stereotypical marker of Indian culture is that of the assimilation of Bollywood culture into South African Indian spaces. The "intense interest in Bollywood films, their songs, stars and aesthetics" (Hansen, 2013: 23) has translated into the performance of Indian culture. In the two movies, *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's* and *Material*, popular Bollywood songs are used to remind the viewer that this is, in fact, an "Indian" movie. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Bollywood is evoked at the end of the movie, where Jodi and Prishen perform a pre-choreographed dance at Aya's birthday. In *Material*, music is used in a scene when Cassim sees Zulfa and attempts to woo her with some mishaps. The song in the background is a light-hearted song, with a silly beat to emphasise the hilarity of the situation. The influence of Bollywood is clear and these movies' use of Bollywood songs extend the idea that "hindi films, as a dominant storytelling institution in post-independence India, have come to possess tremendous cultural and emotional value" (Punathambekar, 2005: 155). Overall, while music and dance are a large part of South African Indian culture, they are enjoyed at celebrations, parties and weddings; spaces where the performance of "Indianness" are required. Here, belonging is established through the consumption of Bollywood, allowing South African Indians to "remain, at least culturally, residents of India" (Punathambekar, 2005: 156).

Food

The globally recognised image of India and the Indian diaspora often related this exoticized land with spices and food. While South African Indian comedians play on this stereotype, food is really one of the symbols that South African Indians use to invoke memories of home. According to Govinden (2008: 107), "[c]uisine was an important way of preserving cultural identity in a strange land". The success of the *Indian Delights* cookbook (1961) demonstrated that food was intrinsically linked to "the challenges faced by Indian indentured labourers in South Africa" (Baderoon, 2014: 59). Food, in all cultural production, is a dominant theme in the South African Indian community. Therefore, in order to understand this diasporic culture better, it is vital to "account for the centrality of food as material reality and symbol" (Ojwang, 2011: 68). As Ojwang (2011: 69) states: "...indeed to recall in a new time or place a taste one once savored in another time and place—is to demonstrate cultural memory and to "write"

oneself into history". In the act of demonstrating cultural memory through food, members of the community assert their identities as South African Indians and cement their belonging too.

The use of food, and the narration of this mundane part of everyday life, is utilised to articulate the "powerful links with places left behind" (Ojwang, 2011: 70) and also offers "the grammar for rendering the experience of loss and longing". Furthermore (Ojwang, 2011: 70):

The burden placed on women to reproduce the immigrant community socially through the preparation of "traditional" food is turned into a resource by the women who take control of kitchens. Such women personify what Brinda Mehta calls "a paradox of positionality" in that they "[display] complete autonomy in the kitchen on one hand, while being enlisted to ensure cultural permanence as a means of safeguarding the interests of the group".

Here, women are given a 'voice' in their kitchen's through which they can ensure that the 'group' is taken care of. Interestingly, while the kitchen is their terrain, the activity in the kitchen is geared towards ensuring the sustenance of their families and their men in particular. In a culture that is predominantly based on patriarchal notions (which I elaborate on in the next chapter), one of the few spaces where women can assert their identities and truly belong, is around the axis of food.

In the movie, *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, the preparation of food and their command of the kitchen as symbols of women's domesticity, and thus desirability, is prevalent. The shots of their children's' lunchboxes immediately invoke the spirit of Jennifer and Shanti's personalities. Jennifer, as the health-conscious, "modern" woman, who is seen as 'useless' by her mother-in-law, packs her daughter a bland lunch. Shanti's son, however, has a hearty lunch. This serves to set Shanti as the 'domestic goddess' who provides good meals for her family and is, therefore, considered 'good daughter-in-law material'. The image of a good Indian woman is often associated with her ability to manage food. Images and narrations of women in comedy also often revolve around food. In *Material*, Cassim's mother is often seen in the kitchen space, as is Shanti in *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*.

The kitchen can be seen as a base of power and control through which women manage and maintain their family structures. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, when Shanti first finds out about Prishen's relationship with Jodi, she attempts to get him to open up to her by cooking all his favourite meals. While this doesn't work, leaving her feeling dejected, Shanti continues her attempt to sabotage her son's relationship with Jodi from the base of her kitchen, by introducing him to Devani. The first time Devani is introduced is at a home-cooked dinner and she is complimented on her good culinary skills.

Prishen: Ma this ... is awesome. New recipe?

Shanti: I didn't make it. Complements to the chef.

Devani: Aunt Shanti, I just whipped it up in five minutes.

Shanti: Ja, but you know what they say. If a lady can't cook then there's no hope for her.

Prisci: True that Shanti. It's what makes or breaks a marriage. That's what I always say.

The suitability of a woman as a wife, and maintainer of marriage and family is a primary theme in most texts from South African Indian comedians. If a woman is not able to do this, she is considered unsuitable, a failure and not well-liked by her in-laws. Jennifer is represented as the antithesis of Shanti and her mother-in-law expresses her displeasure of her daughter-in-law on a few occasions. In a scene where Shanti and Jennifer argue, Shanti's retaliation to Jennifer's insult is "You can't even cook", which to Shanti is seen as the ultimate failure as a mother and wife. Here, Jennifer is ousted and made to feel as if she is not 'good enough' because of her inability to cook. She is often depicted as the outlier in the movie for the mere reason that she does not make the kitchen her priority, and her identity is not intrinsically linked to feeding of her family.

When things fall apart in the movie, Shanti's food, again becomes the space through which she measures her success as a mother. When Prishen and Jodi break up, she begins to regret her decision to sabotage their relationship and she tells Jennifer that her "child is not eating" and then asks if she is a bad mother for putting him in this situation. Her state of mind is also reflected in the management of her kitchen.

Preggie: Hey babes, what happened? No chows?

Shanti: Just one day. Just one day I don't cook and you having a heart attack.

Preggie: No no no no I'm just asking.

Shanti: Every day I cook. Every day I do everything. I wash the clothes. I clean this house. I just don't do everything for you. I do everything for this entire neighbourhood. What more you expect from me?

Shanti struggles with what she has done and her internal dejection makes her unable to cook that day. Her statement that she does "everything for this entire neighbourhood" is significant. She is the matriarch of her family but she is also well-known in the community for her culinary skills, this is her contribution to the community. Her belonging in the family, and in her community, is built on the basis of her culinary ability; it is a vital part of her identity.

In the comedy skit, *Harry and the Uncles*, Peru and Bala have the following exchange:

Peru: What wake up? The missus, the dragon, will never wake up because she knows you drunk. She'll never ever, she'll never warm food for you. (Inaudible) Now you hungry, you only had bites there. The vades too extra salt (inaudible). But you eat it because otherwise (inaudible). Now you come by the house, you hungry. The missus make the food but she will never warm it for you. You know the women's (inaudible) is like that heh. Dirt in their mind (inaudible) the heart. And they married the man, the father of her children. They make the, they make the husband starve. But how you know (inaudible).

Bala: I have to ask. See that last part. That wasn't in the script. You taking too very personally.

Peru: (inaudible) How you know you paralytic drunk? You take the food out. You dish it out. Then you realise that thing got the gold mark around you can't put in the microwave. Then you (inaudible) change the plate now. Put another plate. Then you put in the microwave. Then you close the microwave door. Then you look at the microwave.

Bala: How you know you drunk?

Peru: You know you drunk if you put your ATM pin number on that thing. And you wonder why that thing is sizzling away there. Forty- five minutes later you passed out and the food is going in the microwave there.

Peru's retelling of coming home drunk and being 'punished' by his wife for not coming home on time and sober, is telling of the power that food wields. After a night out, having eaten 'bites' and "vades" (an Indian fried snack) that were too salty, Peru looks forward to a good, home-cooked meal. He demonstrates disdain at having to come home and warm his food himself, and at having to be careful which plate he puts in the microwave. His wife, however, has demonstrated her power to retain her 'wifely duties' of warming his food, thus punishing him for his drinking. This demonstrates the kitchen and food as women's domain and the

ineptitude of men in trying to manage them. The skit conveys the notion that men do not 'belong' in the kitchen, their identity is not built around the preparation and serving of food.

Spice is also a big part of South African Indian culture. Riaad Moosa commented on Indian's and their relation to spice:

Also, we're very fussy about food, taught to be fussy about food from a very young age. I think if Indian babies could talk, they would complain about the mother's milk. (Laughter) Be like... (Gestures as if suckling, then turns away in disgust) (Laughter follows) Why you didn't put more elachi???

This recognition of the importance of food in Moosa's skit is taken a step further at the end when uses the word "elachi", thus alluding to the importance of spice in Indian food. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Shanti and Jennifer meet at the local market in Chatsworth. Here, Shanti is purchasing items to prepare dinner for her guests that evening. Shanti later haggles with the shopkeeper about the price of chillies and, after having a taste of one, argues that "this thing taste like cardboard". Spice, and the ability to consume spice, is an identifying marker for Indianness. It becomes a part of the South African Indian's identity, and a person is not "Indian" if he/she cannot tolerate spicy food.

The physical space of the market is reminiscent of an Indian market and contains fresh fruits, vegetables and spices. This "not only refers to the assertive ways in which the diaspora occupies urban space, but also of their ability to turn home" (Ojwang, 2011: 81). In creating physical spaces that resemble spaces 'back home', the sense of belonging is solidified – the physical space becomes a metaphor for a mental longing to preserve 'home'.

As Ojwang argues (2011: 77), "the foods associated with different social groups are a significant source of hostility between such communities within the Indian Ugandan diaspora". In the South Africa, there is a similar experience, particularly with the Muslim community, for whom following a halal diet is mandatory. Moosa makes light of this:

The rest of the world we buggered, we victims of war right but you know in South Africa Lizzie you can even find a *halaal* logo on a hot cross bun. Have you seen this

at Woolies? A *halaal* hot cross bun. That's hectic. That's like seeing a *fez* on Father Christmas or something. Be like ho ho ho *Eid Mubarak*. Maybe like seeing a long beard on the Easter bunny. (*Imitating bunny hopping on stage with Indian accent*) *Salaam-Alaikum*. We are well catered for. But sometimes this goes too far right, like even though we hate pigs, right, my people hate pigs, there's even a Muslim version of bacon. They call it macon. This is too much. I mean what's next? We gonna be eating mork. Drinking a six pack of meer. Especially Cape Muslims hey, we'll do all sorts of strange stuff but none of us will touch pork. You friend be like, uh, you want a ham sandwich? (*Imitating Coloured accent*) 'Wat? Ug. Ek's a slum, sy mal? Galieb gee die dagga pyp my broer. (*Imitating smoking*). Dis magga, dis magga. Dagga is not allowed but magga is fine. Magga.'

Here Moosa quips about the drive towards ensuring a variety of foods cater for Muslim shoppers. The insistence of adhering to a halal diet is an "indicator(s) of moral difference" (Ojwang, 2011: 77). Consequently, food plays an important role in the "delineation of the symbolic and moral boundaries that divide communities, thus lending them with their distinctiveness" (Ojwang, 2011: 77). The differences between Tamil, Hindi, Hindu Gujarati and Muslim communities is often discerned by food. Tamil speaking Hindus, for example, are commonly known as "Porridge Ou's" and Hindi speaking Hindus are known as "Roti Ou's" based on the former's use of porridge for the annual Mariamman prayer held for the welfare of the family and the latter's penchant of enjoying Roti's at all meals. Identification of a specific linguistic or religious group within the community is even based on the foods they consume and their practises around food consumption.

The bunny-chow is also an important part of South African Indian culture. Made from a hollowed out chunk of a loaf of bread (either a quarter or half of the loaf) filled with a curry, the bunny chow is fabled to have humble roots going back to the time of indenture, where workers would take curry to the fields using the loaves of bread as vessels to hold the curry and make a meal of substance. The image of the bunny chow has since changed.

Cuisines that would otherwise be discarded for their peasant or working-class associations are recuperated precisely because the scenes of peasant and working-class life have been left behind—and because any such recuperation serves to provide foundational myths that hold the immigrants together in their present (dis)location. (Ojwang, 2011: 74)

While the upwardly mobile South African Indian community still hold the humble beginnings of the bunny chow in high regard, the bunny chow has now become the ultimate comfort food for many South African Indians. Most Indians (outside of Durban) declare that a trip to Durban is incomplete without having a bunny chow.

Along with bunny chow, Biryani is also considered the ultimate comfort food, and features on the menu at almost all Muslim, Hindi and Tamil weddings, with the exception of Gujarati weddings. As Ojwang (2011: 76) argues:

This kind of extravagant display of comfort is especially pronounced in the late colonial and early postindependence period (1950–1972), a time during which many in the community measure each other's class status on the basis of "the amount of ghee floating on top of curries—[of which] less than two inches made you low class"

The taste of the biryani, as well as meat to rice ratio, spiciness and accompaniments such as sojee and salads, is often the first thing that is complimented/criticised at a wedding. In the scene following the wedding scene in *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Shanti is seen engaging in a conversation with one of her clients, who also attended the wedding, the following exchange occurs:

Vassie (client): Pity about the food though, ey Shanti.
Shanti: Ooh, tasteless. You know I didn't even get one potato in my biryani.
Luckily, Marlin did such a top job with the wedding.

These kinds of conversations about food at Indian weddings circulate widely in popular culture and highlight the importance of the traditional meal as symbolic of links to India. Regardless of how modern and beautiful the wedding may be, the food must be traditional and tasty.

Conclusion

The chapter has attempted to explore the ways in which the cultural memory of religion, cultural symbols of clothing and Bollywood, and food have permeated South African Indian performances of identity. These symbols have become markers of belonging, whereby members of the South African Indian community assert their identity through the

performance and consumption of these symbols. Interestingly, various different religious and linguistic groups within the community itself, are preoccupied with the cultural memory of different symbols and at different levels of intensity from each other. Belonging to the wider South African Indian community is asserted, but at the same time, belonging and difference within the community is explored through various different cultural memories.

It becomes apparent that the Muslim community, in particular, is vested in the maintenance and preservation of Islam, with predominant themes in comedy being the halal/haram debate and the tradition/modernity tension. Moosa's comedy is littered with reference to this. Belonging to the Muslim community is largely based on the collective, cultural memory of the practises and preservation of Islam. Moosa's comedy explores the tension between the preservation of cultural memory and the ever-changing modern, post-Apartheid world. The manner in which practises of Islam are performed in the post-Apartheid context – with the added possibilities of inter-cultural mixing – feature strongly in *Material*. This tension of the centrality of Islam to Muslim culture and attempting to assimilate to post-Apartheid 'rainbow nation' culture is the source of humour in Moosa's comedy.

Interestingly, while dress, song and dance appear as displays of affiliation to the home country, this affiliation occurs on a less pervasive manner than food and religion. Here, I argue that dress and Bollywood are expressions of identity relegated to special occasions where one the predominant crowd is that of the same cultural group. Western dress is appropriated in the post-Apartheid landscape in order to assimilate and belong to wider South African culture. However, the politics of belonging are further complicated in terms of dress when the manner in which one dresses is based on a scale of purity: one's dedication to religion and tradition is marked by how modestly one dresses. Western dress is 'allowed' – as long as it prescribes to guidelines of modesty according to the cultural memory of the community. The use of Bollywood songs and dance reveal an attempt to find links to the 'home' country – with Bollywood being the largest and most accessible cultural product of India. Attempts to assert belonging through these symbols are reserved for special occasions, whereas 'everyday' life is navigated through assertions of a South African identity. Food also features significantly in

the comedy, with women being expected to sustain their cultures and families through their kitchens. The importance of spice and foods that offer comfort and memory of a long lost home are rekindled in the comedy. Food operates in the community as a measure of suitability to belong in the community based on one's ability to produce and consume Indian food.

These symbols are evidence of the vestiges of India in South African culture. While there is no direct yearning to return to India, there is a yearning to maintain the ancient culture that distinguishes this community from other South Africans, as well as from each other. Through the preservation of religion, the maintenance of cultural symbols, and the production and consumption of food, the South African Indian community navigates anxieties of belonging and identity in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Six: Gender and Tradition

The arrival of Indians in South Africa meant that association with their 'home' culture, largely built on the tenets of patriarchy, came with them. The system and notions of patriarchy still continued to exist within the community. These were made even more stringent by Apartheid laws, which served to make communities even more isolated and insulated than they were before. The Indian community preferred this isolation, as it made the maintenance of tradition easier to control. This chapter explores one of the most prevalent tropes in the comedy, that of a patriarchal notion of gender and sexuality. First, I explore how notions of gender and sexuality inform the performance of identity and belonging. Second, the chapter then explores the concept of patriarchy as tradition and how it informs South African Indian culture. Finally, this is followed by an exploration of the ways in which the comedy serves to maintain (or undermine) patriarchal notions of gender and sexuality, and the inferences that can be made from comedy about identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Performances of humour and comedy, as with any performance, cannot be seen in isolation of gender politics. By considering how gender influences comedic performances, this section is "also expanding our "sense" of humor as a primary site for both realizing and resisting gender identities" (Ryan, 2000: 76). This is an important activity, as identities have been considered on gendered notions for as long as notions about sex and gender have existed. Gender, in itself, is an act of performance, as Butler (2004) conceptualizes it. Thus, both humour and gender are central aspects of identity, and require the same consideration as other discourses that the comedy reveals.

In post-Apartheid South Africa the notions of patriarchy that were characteristic of the Apartheid regime continue to exist in many communities. In the South African Indian community notions of patriarchy have been pervasive, exasperated by the existence of the very same notions brought along from the homeland and passed on for generations. However, the cultural products produced by the community, often project "an alternative universe that rectifies the community's problematic ideologies" (Rastogi, 2008: 167). Here, comedy is useful, as notions of censorship, tact and image are of little concern to the nature

of comedy. Humour and comedy promise to reveal a great deal about these ideologies through the manner in which they address gender issues. The fact that very few South African Indian comedians are female is reflective of an imbalance within the community around whose voices shape narratives about the community. The views on gender roles, whether performed by male or female comedians, also promise to offer insight into how identity and belonging are constructed along gendered lines in this community. Comedy, with its ability to exist in a space beyond reprehension, allows for these lines to be seen more clearly, where other forms of cultural products may be more censored in their representations. Comedy also allows for the proliferation of sex-talk, where issues of sexuality and morality can be aired in communities where these matters are not often spoken about.

It is vital to make the distinction between sex and gender at the outset. Sex refers to the physical, biological differences between male and female bodies, while gender refers to “the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation” (Butler, 1986: 35). Furthermore Butler (2004: 42) argues:

Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place along with the interstitial forms of hormonal, chromosomal, psychic, and performative that gender assumes.

Gender is not as simple as masculine or feminine, there exist varying factors that influence how individuals see themselves in the scale between male/female, masculine/feminine. However, traditional notions of gender have always been articulated along the stringent binary of male/female, masculine/feminine.

Gender makes up a large part of an individual's identity and, consequently, their sense of belonging. Butler (1986: 36) suggests that “(G)ender must be understood as a modality of taking on or realizing possibilities, a process of interpreting the body, giving it cultural form”. Gender is performed as the individual's perception of themselves of where they belong on the gender scale. Importantly, “(G)ender is not only a cultural construction imposed upon identity, but in some sense gender is a process of constructing ourselves” (Butler, 1986: 36). Here, the importance of gender to identity is solidified, and the process of performing gender

is as much a social and cultural process as a personal one. The existence of stringent laws and cultural norms that govern gender have impacted greatly on the 'normalisation' of masculinity/femininity or male/female as the two 'genders' and the '*otherisation*' of any alternative gender identifications on the scale. Constructions of identity and belonging have traditionally centred on this scale, with alternatives being labelled as deviant, other and dangerous to the 'natural' function of society.

Tradition in the South African Indian community is seen as interchangeable with patriarchy. While this may seem a sweeping observation, the notion of patriarchy as a social system are clear when one considers the social, economic and political decisions in society are dictated by heterosexual men (white men, particularly) and the needs of men of power are placed before the needs of everyone else. South African Indian communities can be seen as ascribing to notions of patriarchy under the guise of traditional gender identities and roles brought to South Africa on the slave and passenger ships. Post-Apartheid, as the community strives to find its footing in a 'new' South Africa, it is important to note "the gendered ways in which culture comes to articulate a racialized politics of minority recognition for South African Indians in the building of the post-apartheid multicultural nation-state" (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 264). The manner in which "(A)rticulations of cultural difference" occur, are often along gendered lines and "in a distinctly gendered vocabulary" (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 268). This phenomenon is a growing field and "literature on gender and nationalism has established the crucial ways in which nationalist projects are gendered" (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 268).

If patriarchy is seen as a social system of heterosexual male domination, then it is a given that any other sexualities and genders would fall prey to the machinations of patriarchy. Apartheid, as a system of white, male domination, is seen as a patriarchal system. Along with this, the religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam, brought to South Africa by Indians, were also deeply patriarchal. In order to understand and approach an analysis of South African Indian identity, it is important to understand the "peculiar, locationally specific, patriarchal nationalism that is constituted through the material and cultural legacies of colonialism and then apartheid" (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 269). As Radhakrishnan (2005: 269) elaborates:

Here, the vastly different contexts of anticolonial nationalisms in India and a contemporary South African Indian nationalism share common scripts of a gendered nation. Centering the experience of gendered subjects to understand the essentializing moves of nationalist discourses focuses on the space “between woman and nation,” which draws attention to the discursive formations that naturalize the relationship between the two (Kaplan, Alarcon, and Moallem 1999).

Women are seen as the keepers of the nation, as the ones responsible for the maintenance of the values and beliefs that inform the nation. Ironically, women are also seen as the ones who are responsible for the maintenance of patriarchy (which can be synonymous with the concept of nation).

If Indian and South African notions of nationhood were built on patriarchal values, it can thus be argued that women, and people of alternative sexualities, were subjected to a *double dose* of patriarchy. According to Carrim and Nkomo (2016: 15):

The passive role of women was inculcated from a very early age as families strongly adhered to cultural values brought from India and the gender roles of males and females were rigidly demarcated within families.

While Carrim and Nkomo specifically look at the role of women as passive, people of alternative sexualities would also have to succumb to the rigidities of gender norms and patriarchal values. South African Indian men also bore the brunt of the Apartheid system that served to dehumanise and emasculate men of colour. Thus, it can be said that their notions of masculinity, informed through cultural tradition, were challenged and stifled under the Apartheid system. These notions, while stifled in public spaces, would be heightened in private spaces, where Indian men could exercise their displaced power.

Jokes have, for as long as they have existed, relied on the binaries between sexes as a source of humour. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of the humour. In comedy, they are viewed “not only as objects of the ‘male gaze’ but of the male laugh” (Parker, 2002: 13). Most tropes about women are “portrayed in terms of stereotypes and as objects of male derision” (Parker, 2002: 13). There are few examples in South African Indian comedy where women are portrayed as going against the grain and, if they are, they are subjected to ridicule and

embarrassment as a sort of *punishment* for not ascribing to gender norms. According to Shade (2010: 73)

Following Said, my argument is that, like the Orient, definitions of women have been established by others (perhaps men in particular) making statements about them and describing them. Jokes contribute to the totality of statements and descriptions used to establish a set of rules about... women. It is that which makes women the subject of cultural hegemony and, since comedy is an aspect of culture, it follows that comedy practice will demonstrate features of 'cultural imperialism', as defined by Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (Said 1993), in the comedic forms and styles that have been privileged. Where Said refers to 'narratives', we can understand these to include jokes: 'the power to narrate or to block other narratives [...] is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them' (Said 1993: xiii). Hence, we can perceive jokes made about women and ways of describing women through jokes as aspects of that discourse of culture and imperialism.

South African Indian women are treated to double dose of this cultural imperialism. With very few women in comedy worldwide, and in South Africa, it is inevitable that comedy would be dominated by male discourse. During Apartheid, "women were denied any form of discursive power in social situations" (Parker, 2002: 13). This trend has continued post-Apartheid, with much fewer women comedians on the circuit than men.

The remainder of this chapter explores how traditional values informed by patriarchy are expressed in the comedy, and how they inform views on masculinity and femininity in the realms of work and family. Belonging is central to the argument, exploring how do men and women in the South African Indian community, in post-Apartheid South Africa, view gender roles and ascribe to specific gender roles in order to belong to the group? Second, the chapter considers how themes of sex and sexuality appear in the comedy. The anxieties of identity and belonging are complicated when alternative views of sex and sexuality impose on traditional views of gender. It is important to explore the very gendered nature of gender roles, sex and sexuality within this community, as it reveals a struggle with traditional notions of gender in a post-Apartheid setting.

Gender Roles at Work

It is a predominant myth that women 'belong' in the home and men at work. This notion is still widely held, Even though women are becoming increasingly active in the workplace, the maintenance of the home is still believed to be a woman's responsibility. Men on the other hand, are expected to go out and work, and be the financial backbone of the family. Apartheid South Africa, as mentioned before, was a deeply patriarchal system. The policies of the Apartheid government only served to deepen patriarchal divisions within communities. Women were not often allowed to work. Black women, with restrictions to their movement, were often relegated to the homelands and kept away from urban settings. Interestingly, before Apartheid, the system of indentured labour allowed Indian women to join in the work on the plantations. Maharaj (in Carrim & Nkomo, 2016: 9) suggests:

While indentured men and women worked on the sugarcane plantations, wives and daughters of passenger Indians did not work outside of the home as their husbands and fathers were merchants.

Work amongst South African Indian women during Apartheid was largely based on class and necessity. Women who had husbands and fathers as merchants would often be seen at home not working, or offering basic support to the family business. Few women were allowed to pursue education post-secondary level and those who were, were only allowed to enrol for teaching and nursing diplomas. Women in the townships, however, were more often seen working in factories or as domestic workers.

Though women worked, they still operated under the patriarchal gaze. As Desai (2002: 65) argues:

For women it was a source of liberation as they broke the taboo on working outside the home and confronted the tradition that assigned them the role of housewife. But it was a double-edged sword. At work they had to labor under the brutal gaze of the male supervisor who acted much like the father-in-law they thought they had escaped. And at home they still had to do the cooking and other household chores. As the cost of living soared, being in the factory became an economic necessity rather than a political act. As the clothing and textile industries started to shed labor it was the men who went first. Many men became reliant on their wife's wages. Newspaper columnist Gita Father, who grew up in Westcliff, tells of men waiting for their wives at the bus stop on Friday and forcefully taking hold of their pay packets.

Thus, women were still under the control of men at work, in the home and, of course, by their government. Indian women rarely dabbled in politics. One exception perhaps was when the Satyagraha movement called for them to join in the fight against the invalidation of Indian marriages (Rajab, 2017). This was regarded as a necessary fight for Indian women, whose job it is seen as to maintain family values. However, while a few Indian women continued to serve a small part in politics, most largely stayed out of the political struggle in order to continue to maintain their households.

Post-Apartheid South Africa, while experiencing a huge shift in policies regarding women's rights and empowerment, has seen much the same maintenance of patriarchal values in communities. While many Indian women have moved out of the kitchens and entered the workplace, there is little said in the comedy about women operating in these spaces. A study conducted by Carrim and Nkomo (2016) found that South African Indian women still found themselves informed by the patriarchal and traditional notions of femininity when entering the workplace. Thus, work and home are still inextricably linked for women.

In the movie, *Material*, Cassim and Ebrahim are seen in the first scene as waking at the break of dawn and going to work at their family business. Cassim is reminded often throughout the movie, that he will inherit the shop after his father's retirement and that it will be his privilege to continue his father's legacy. Throughout the movie, Cassim's mother, sister and grandmother are seen in domestic and social spaces of the home and family events. If Cassim's mother is seen at the shop, she is in the back of the shop, not serving customers. When the shop is not doing well, she intervenes, along with Cassim, to plead with Ebrahim to try new ways of revitalising the shop – he quickly dismisses her. This is a demonstration of how "fathers and brothers handled conflict situations outside the home." (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016: 17). Cassim's declaration that his son will take over the shop is also telling of the patriarchal notion of work as his daughter does not feature in his inheritance. This is in accordance with traditional Muslim custom where "women do not have any claim on their father's patrimony" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 279). Furthermore, a women's only bequest from her father is a dowry and that "(does) not qualify as a form of premortem inheritance since (it is)

transferred directly to the bridegroom's kin and (does) not take the form of productive property, such as land" (Kandiyoti, 1988: 279). While the system of dowry has largely been shifted to a system of 'gift giving' and legally abolished in India, the concept of inheritance to the male heir is still widely held.

In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, the relationship between economic need and work becomes clearer. Shanti and Peggie are not as economically wealthy as Jennifer and Elvis. Shanti works as a hairdresser and Jennifer, though qualified, stays home because her husband can afford for her to be in the house. Interestingly, it is Shanti that is the more domesticated of the two, spending her time outside of work taking care of her domestic duties. It is because her domestic duties trump her job that in every scene where she is at work, some mishap occurs with her clients. Giving the impression that she is careless at her job and a much better homemaker. Thus, a woman can never have both, she has to fail at one aspect in order to excel at the other.

Work has traditionally been seen as performed by men. The comedy reinforces this stereotype, particularly in two ways. First, the relative absence of talking about women in workspaces; it is not explicitly mentioned in any of the comedy. Second, if women do work, they are still more often seen in domestic spaces than work spaces, and domestic work is not seen as being shared by her male counterpart. Inheritance of business and property is also seen to be only for the male heir, reinforcing patriarchal values as being passed on from generation to generation. These spatial constructions of belonging are vital in a post-Apartheid landscape – the South African Indian community still has widely held beliefs that women belong in domestic spaces and men in the workplace. If a woman (or man) is seen to demonstrate a lack in their space, they are seen as "other" and their identity as a 'good' man/woman is called into question.

[Gender Roles: Home and Family](#)

Discourses around the home are most telling of the patriarchy that still exists in the South African Indian community. The domestic setting is where patriarchy thrives in South African

Indian comedy, with an emphasis on family values. This is particularly evident in the practices of marriage. In the following scene, taken from *Material*, this notion is explored:

Scene changes to Cassim in the kitchen at home with his mother, sister and grandmother.

Fatima: Rolling roti. You must remember her Cas. You and her used to play together all the time.

Cassim: *Eating* No, no, Ma.

Fatima: Such a sweet child.

Aisha: Wasn't she quite fat?

Fatima: No...

Dadi: And she wore those thick black glasses.

Aisha: And that squeaky voice.

Cassim: Oh ja, now I remember. Zulfa four-eye.

Aisha: That's the one.

Cassim: Remember when she used to make salaam like a mosquito. In high pitched voice: *Salaam-Alaikum*.

Fatima: Anyway (Cassim repeating *Salaam-Alaikum* in the background), she's going to be at the wedding.

Dadi: Roll it little thinner Fatima.

Aisha: Wasn't she overseas or something?

Fatima: Yes, she was studying in London.

Dadi: London? Oh terrible. Very cheap girls from there like that lady uhhh...

Fatima: Di?

Dadi: No no. The one that wore the meat. Uh, Lady Gogo.

Aisha: Lady Gaga, Dadima, and she's American.

Dadi: And the meat wasn't even halaal.

Fatima: She's a very nice girl from a very nice family. And she's educated.

Aisha: I see another problem Mummy.

Fatima: What's that?

Aisha: Isn't Zulfa's father on dad's blacklist.

Fatima: Aisha!

Aisha: Like just about everybody else in Fordsburg.

Dadi: You know I think she's got a boy there Fatima. Thinner Fatima. Yes, I don't think Ebrahim will approve of this marriage.

Cassim: Marriage? What marriage? Whose marriage?

Aisha: So besides the fact that she's a bit maashaallah (holding her hands out implying she is wide).

Dadi: Huge.

Aisha: And she wears those weird glasses and has that terrible voice.

Dadi: Very bad.

Aisha: She's also the daughter of one of dad's enemies.

Dadi: And a bit on the dark side.

Cassim: And when did I say I wanted to get married?

Fatima: Just stop it all of you. You giving me a headache.

Cassim: Ma, what did I do?

Chuckles. Aisha holds her hands around her eyes like glasses, making fun of Zulfa, and Cassim repeats '*Salaam-Alaikum*' in a high-pitched voice. Aisha replies 'Wa 'alaykum salaam' in a high-pitched voice. Cassim (high-pitched): 'Kem Chho, haru chhe.' Fatima giggles. Cassim: 'Salaam-Alaikum, I can't see nothing.'

This scene demonstrates how family values are passed on through the tradition of arranged marriage. I use this scene as an introduction to the remainder of the section on gender roles in the home and family. In the scene, Cassim's mother discusses the prospect of an alliance between Cassim and Zulfa. Her mother-in-law, known as Dadi, disapproves as the girl is said to have studied in London. That Cassim's father holds a grudge against Zulfa's father is also discussed, as well as Zulfa's physical appearance. Here, three particular roles stand out: Cassim's father as the patriarch who will have the final say on whether this alliance will happen, Cassim's mother in her role as mother and wife (and Zulfa's as a suitable wife), and last, Cassim's grandmother as the figure of the 'mother-in-law/older woman'. These three figures are often brought up in the comedy. Below I examine these three roles in further detail.

The Father/Husband as Head of the Household

The father or husband is most often represented as the head of the household and the purveyor of control and discipline. Ebrahim's character in *Material* can be seen as the typical patriarchal character, entrenched in his views on tradition and how things should be done to the point that he is almost caricatured as a dictator. In his household, nothing can be done without his permission, and Cassim's venture into stand-up comedy remains hidden to Ismail as he is afraid of his father's response. In the above scene, where Ebrahim does not even feature physically, it is made clear that the alliance will not happen as Zulfa's dad is on Ebrahim's 'blacklist'. The fear of his ominous reaction is palpable – though made light-hearted, and they soon end the conversation. Later in the movie, when Cassim tells his father that he has feelings for Zulfa, he flat out refuses to entertain a conversation and says: "End of story. You don't marry the person. You marry the family". This is a common phrase amongst South African Indians, where familial legacy, tradition and lineage are all considered of paramount importance when choosing a life partner.

There are many other examples of Ebrahim's patriarchal role in the movie. One such example is when he refuses to give his daughter a cellular phone as he says that the *Imam* at the mosque had warned them about the dangers of "Mxit" and "Tooter" and "Facebrick". His stern attitude is lightened with humour as he gets these terms wrong – portraying him as old-fashioned and not willing to adapt. He takes his advice from the *Imam* at the mosque, a man with a patriarchal role, whose advice is valued as he is a man of power within his religion.

Patriarchal roles of men are very closely linked to masculinity and control of one's family and household. Ebrahim is seen as the archetypal patriarch. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, while Preggie and Elvis play peripheral roles in a movie that focuses more on the female protagonists, a scene occurs where the two female protagonists are having an argument and the men decide to step in.

Jennifer: Well at least I saved my daughter from having a fat embarrassing mother-in-law like you.

Preggie: Jennifer if you don't shut your mouth I'll...

Elvis (grabs him): You gonna do what?

Preggie: Control your wife!

Elvis: What you gonna do?

(Both start shouting and Preggie punches Elvis)

Here, Preggie instructs Elvis to control his wife – thereby reminding him that it is his 'duty' as a patriarch to have control over his wife's actions. Elvis retaliates and they eventually end up in a physical scuffle, demonstrating their masculinity and ability to defend their wives' honour.

In these above scenes, men consider their roles as husbands and fathers in close relation to their masculinity. Being a 'good' father or husband requires a performance of masculinity that aims to maintain the status quo in the family. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest the term "hegemonic masculinity". A definition of this term is offered by Carrington, Connell and Lee (in Donaldson, 1993: 655):

Hegemonic masculinity is "a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance".

In the case studies above, hegemonic masculinity is seen to operate in the second sense where the men attempt to legitimate their power through the control of their families. In the case of Peggie telling Elvis to control his wife, the implication that Elvis is not masculine enough offers Peggie a position of power and a sense of control in the situation. Here, masculinity is inextricably linked with control over femininity and the females in their lives. In the case of *Material*, Ebrahim's insistence on controlling his kids' choices, from marriage prospects to allowing a cellular phone, demonstrate that masculine hegemony is applicable to other men in their attempt to maintain power. A man's identity is linked to his ability to control and wield power over his family and partner, otherwise he does not belong.

The Wife/Daughter-in-Law

The kitchen scene in *Material* reminds us of the very spaces in which women need to be seen. Women in the South African Indian community are stereotypically seen as inextricably linked to family values, 'respectability' and maintaining the family. As Carrim and Nkomo (2016: 17) recognise of the women in their study:

The women were raised in collectivist hierarchical communities where independent decisions and conflict were not valued and group interdependence was encouraged. Female engagement with conflict was viewed as particularly negative by the community. Family honor was embodied in the respectability displayed by females.

As Carrim and Nkomo notice, women in the community often hail from extended families, where it is not uncommon to have grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins live in the same household as the nuclear family. In both *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's* and *Material*, a grandmother features as a character, not only to add humour, but also to demonstrate the Indian norm of communal living. The role of the women, then, is seen as integral in maintaining this way of life. Thus, in *Material*, Dadi is unsure about having a 'cheap' girl from London marrying her grandson. Here 'cheap' refers to a girl who may be promiscuous and in Dadi's context, any previous relationship would contribute to the 'cheapness' of Zulfa. Dadi's real concern is that a woman with 'modern' values would not be a good fit in a traditional household, which she masks by discussing Zulfa's possible love-life. Her interest is in maintain the respectability of her household by ensuring that the right fit is found for her family. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Jennifer is seen as the 'bad' daughter-in-law who smokes,

doesn't cook as well as Shanti and who doesn't care for her mother-in-law as she wishes. Shanti, and her domesticity, is admired and Jennifer's mother-in-law, known as Aya, expresses her wish that Shanti would've been the perfect daughter-in-law for her. In Aya's view, Jennifer does not maintain the respectability of her household and Jennifer's 'modern' personality is not to her liking. Here, it is clear that 'traditional' equates with domesticity, family values and maintaining patriarchal norms, and 'modern' equates with bad and not being family-orientated.

The relationship of men and their wives is also a common theme in the comedy. Double (in Parker, 2005: 13) suggests:

Joke wives were bossy, nagging and talk all the time because real wives were supposed to respect their husbands, bowing to their authority. Joke wives were terrible cooks, because real wives were supposed to have adequate culinary skills to provide meals for their families. Joke wives were fat and ugly, because real wives were supposed to be slim and beautiful to serve their husbands sexually.

The 'joke wife' trope is interesting, particularly in the case of Peru and Bala's comedy. As mentioned, the Peru and Bala 'franchise' started as a radio show skit on Saturday mornings. The show was a spin-off of another show conducted by two female radio personalities, Devi-Sankree-Govender and Krijay Pilly. Their show featured two old ladies, Padma and Savitri, who complained about their husbands, Peru and Bala. It was then that Vikash and Ray decided to bring Peru and Bala 'to life' as a joke to their female colleagues and they introduced them on their radio show. The Peru and Bala show became an instant success and soon Padma and Savitri receded into the background, with their 'husbands'' interaction being preferred over theirs. The very story about the start of this franchise is a metaphor for where wives are seen to belong, usually operating in the periphery.

When Peru and Bala refer to their wives, it is often in relation to one of the tropes outlined by Double above. The trope of the bossy, nagging wife is common. As can be seen in the two quips below:

Harry: This goat, this goat Uncle, had the two biggest horns you can ever imagine your whole life. Big massive horns. Ey, Nitya reckon Harry you check that goat. I reckon ja. He reckon bra, that goat, it reminds me of my vrou.

Peru: The goat reminds him of his missus?

Harry: I reckon Nitya how something so (inaudible)? (Inaudible) Nitya was there for two years now. He got no (inaudible) from his vrou so long right. He reckon that goat with the two big horns remind him of his vrou. I say what you mean? He reckon bra, my vrou is the same. She also got long beard. She also eats everything in sight. And whole day she makes nothing, no other noise except baa-baa-baa-baa. I reckon ey Nitya you know what, come to think of it now, I'm checking that goat out, that two horns. I reckon I'm looking at that goat, ey but that thing don't remind me of my vrou eh. He reckon why Harry? I say check, my vrou she's never horny.

Here, Nitya thinks of his wife as a goat – someone who eats all day and he likens her talking to the bleating of a goat. Karou Charou also discusses his wife and he sees fighting with her as a blessing:

What about BBM? You'll got BBM? My wife got 158 contacts. Where she got them from I don't know? I only got eight, and she likes to BBM all the time. Darling if you're sleeping send me your dreams. If you are happy send me your smiles. If you are sad send me your tears. I love you. I BBM back; darling I'm on the toilet, what should I send you? And you'll lucky nowadays when your fight (inaudible). All the happily married men put your hands up. Happily married men put your hands up. If you are happily married. What you call them? Professor (inaudible). I'm married for 10 years. It's the single biggest mistake of my life and I got the guts you know why you know why? My vrou is by the *posie*. I said I got guts I didn't say I'm stupid. Big difference. Why I'm saying that is because remember when your wife fight with you when your wife fight she pull a face like a (inaudible). Right she pulled her face she won't talk to, not one single word for five days. Not one single word and strangely she thinks she's punishing you. Best five days of your life (inaudible). You all are lucky when she fight (inaudible) not talking, can SMS BBM. Am I right? Husband wife across the table not talking. Husband BBM the wife pass me the salad. She BBMs back you got two hands to get yourself. And while I'm, let me tell you a story; before BBM 10 years ago when we didn't talk she pulled a face we had those yellow Post-it notes remember those notes we used to leave yellow all over the house stick notes. I left a note for her I need to get to work early in the morning wake me up at 6 o'clock. When I wake up it half past six she is gone. Then I saw her note wake up it's 6 o'clock.

These two quips posit the 'joke' wives as constantly talking and nagging, and that wives like that are a misfortune. According to the patriarchal norm, the wife should be subservient, soft-spoken and not linked to any discord or disagreements. The humour here is derived from the notion that women like these are the antithesis of the feminine Indian norm.

Wives and attractiveness are also lampooned in Peru and Bala's comedy. Peru and Bala both constantly discuss their wives' lack of attractiveness. In this skit, Bala discusses his relationship with his wife:

Bala: (inaudible) Saras is putting on weight now.

Peru: Your missus getting fat?

Bala: It happens as we get older because as you get older you can't go exercise and all. You know body can't do that. Saras putting on so much weight now man. Nowadays when she goes into a heroplane, the moment she steps inside the aeroplane the aeroplane start movings. But at least I'm lucky Peru. Saras is very outgoing eh.

Peru: Your missus is always sociable type.

Bala: Stomach, backside, varicose veins, everything coming out. Everything coming out. And check Saras backside getting so big she's taller when she's sitting down. Not nice to laugh by other people's problems. Now when we go shopping centre Christmas time, Saras is so big, Christmas father comes sits on her lap. You know I'm not saying that Saras. I'm not saying that Saras eats too much Peru. I'm not saying she eats all the time. Ey but I had to put one energy, I had to install one brand new energy saving bulb.

Peru: Where ma?

Bala: In the fridge. I told you'll, fifty years ago when I met Saras she was like a man-eater.

Peru: And now?

Bala: Now she's just like a eater.

Here Bala discusses his wife's weight and that age has taken its toll on her attractiveness. He says that Savitri (Saras) was like a 'man-eater' when she was young, referring to the fact that she caught the attention of many men with her attractiveness, but now she is just an 'eater'. A woman who indulges is seen as unattractive. That she has aged is also a bone of contention for Bala as he would prefer a much younger, more attractive wife.

In this section, patriarchal notions of femininity were discussed through an analysis of how wives and daughters-in-law are presented in the comedic texts. It is clear that the notion of the 'perfect' Indian wife and daughter-in-law relates to physical beauty, family connections, subservience and a quiet nature. Women in the jokes do not conform to this and are thus made fun of and caricatured as a cautionary tale. Women are reminded, through these

comedic texts, that should they begin to conduct themselves like a 'joke-wife', they too will be the object of ridicule.

The Mother-in-Law/Older woman

As mentioned previously, the mother-in-law often features in South African Indian comedy. However, this trope is not only limited to comedy out of this community, as anecdotes about "mothers-in-law and older women have a long provenance" and jokes about these women tend to portray them as "essentially unattractive, troublesome and inconsequential" (Shade, 2010: 72). Shade (2010: 73) elaborates:

Almost all jokes about older women relate to one of three subjects – their controlling relationships with immediate family; their trivial interests (mostly gossiping, curtain-twitching or shopping); and, above all, a variety of negative manifestations of the menopause, including fluctuating moods and ill-temper, deteriorating physical appearance and diminishing sexual allure, and either a lack of interest in sex or an insatiable desire for it.

The older woman/mother-in-law trope is often repeated in Peru and Bala, and Karou Charou comedies. All of the above are mentioned in some way throughout the comedies. Peru and Bala both talk about their wives aging and their lack of sexual appeal. In *Harry and the Uncles*, when Peru returns from India he reports this:

Heh, and the mother-in-law will come even before the flight arrives, sitting there by the house. Heh, before the other, your brothers and sisters can open the bag, she's checking what you got there. But lucky, Padma, by my house, Amma by my house, people don't like to come my house.

Here, the mother-in-law is posited as the greedy old hag, whose trivial interest is the collection of gifts. In addition to that, Peru counts his blessings, saying that people would not come to visit as his mother-in-law and wife are there; this has saved him from having guests.

The grandmother's in both *Material* and *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's* movies are positioned as an extension to the family but not central to the plot. In the *Material* kitchen scene, Dadi's contributions to the conversation about Zulfa can be seen as trivial but also very frank and, at times, impolite. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Aya is stereotyped as the

bad-tempered, rude mother-in-law, who doesn't like her daughter-in-law. She is constantly gossiping with her friend on the phone and is particularly vocal about her dislike for Jennifer. In a scene in the market, Aya is unaware that her daughter-in-law is disguised in a veil and talks about her to Shanti:

Aya: Oh shame. If you'll were friends together at school then you must be knowing my daughter-in-law, Jennifer. I keep telling Shanti, she would've been the perfect daughter-in-law for me.

Shanti: Oho Aya. Jennifer's not that bad. She may be cooked in the head but when has she ever let you down?

Aya: That's true eh. Why must talk lies. But you know she smokes? And her dressing? Ooh what short short things she wear. She should dress like your friend.

Shanti: Aya I saw madumbees there why you don't buy some for Jennifer. I know she liked it from school days.

Aya: Ey, why you talking like that? Since when you like her?

Shanti: No, uh, uh I don't like her but I'm, I'm just saying, you know, I know you got a good heart and I know you got place in that heart for Jennifer.

Aya: Ey, she must make space for me. You know I had to come here by taxi. Where's she gonna bring me and come here? But just now, I can go anywhere where I want to. You know why? Elvis gonna buy Jodi new car. (Jennifer looks on in surprise).

Aya's declaration that Jennifer needs to make space for Aya in her heart, confirms the belief that the daughter-in-law must work for the mother-in-law's affection, and that it is the responsibility of the daughter-in-law to serve the mother-in-law.

The mother-in-law in South African Indian comedy, has come from the very same patriarchal system that she continues to perpetuate. Why, then does she feel the need to enforce this on to her own daughter-in-law? According to Kandiyoti (1988: 279):

Woman's life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves.

Thus, the mother-in-law is akin to a caged bird, set free when her daughter-in-law arrives to be bound in the patriarchal expectations that she herself had to endure all the years of her young life. This internalised patriarchy explains the yearning for the mother-in-law to have

control over who her son marries. Just as Shanti says to her son about her cooking: “You know someday I’ll have to teach your wife all of this” – her ideal daughter-in-law would be someone she could easily teach. Here her dislike of Jodi as an “unteachable” girl, and her preference of Devani (who demonstrates a knack in the kitchen) as a partner for her son becomes apparent.

Sex and Sexuality

Before 1994, the “draconian policing of sexuality was fundamental to the apartheid project” (Posel, 2005: 128). This “stringent censorship and a regime of moral prohibition were seen as critical weapons in efforts to expurgate the threat of white dissidence and preserve the rigours of a ‘civilized’ way of life” (Posel, 2005: 129). To maintain the ‘civilised’ way of life meant a repression of sex-related content, and the sexual and reproductive rights of people of colour were policed through rigorous laws preventing the mixing of races. The post-Apartheid milieu has seen a rise in what Posel (2005) calls sex-talk. As Posel (2005: 130) argues:

It is not simply the newfound visibility of sex and sexuality which marks the post-apartheid landscape. The proliferation of public images, representations and modes of sex-talk has been patterned, producing a series of discrete discursive nodes, each nested in and shaped in particular ways by recent global economic positionings, national processes of class and status formation (particularly the emergence of new black elites), the acceleration of the AIDS epidemic, as well as the strategies and powers of new social movements.

Thus, the manner in which sex and sexuality have been discursively framed in post-Apartheid South Africa are influenced by various outside factors. I will argue here that sex-talk in South African Indian comedy is framed by patriarchal notions of gender.

The pervasiveness of sex-talk in South African Indian comedy is connected to the opening of the floodgates, so to say. There is now an abundance of sexual imagery, tropes and discourses that pervade South African society and these “multiple public sites, activated by intersecting pressures and interests” now allow “for more open, explicit and graphic ‘sex talk’ and sexual display” (Posel, 2005: 130). In some sites, these are productive images of sex aimed at building awareness about sex and sexuality, and curbing sexual assault and HIV/Aids. In others, sex is used as entertainment and for marketing products. Thus, Posel (2005: 130) argues:

And the ways in which sexuality is discursively constituted varies between these sites, producing different and often discordant - yet interconnected - grammars of speech and silence.

These grammars of speech and silence are important because what is said and what is left out greatly influence how sex is viewed in communities.

Sex has quickly become associated with freedom in post-Apartheid South Africa. As Posel (2005: 130-131) suggests:

In the aftermath of political liberation, and in the midst of the widespread demobilization of political movements, sex has become a sphere - perhaps even pre-eminently the sphere – within which newfound freedoms are vigorously asserted.

This is evident if one just switches on a television in South Africa. There is an abundance of sexualised imagery and various shows that have some manner of sex-talk. It is unavoidable that “(I)n this milieu, sexuality is boldly and openly on display” (Posel, 2005: 131). Interestingly, sex-talk in the South African Indian community is still seen as particularly taboo in some circles but seems to proliferate in others. In *Material*, for example, there is no appearance of any sex-talk whatsoever. However, in the Peru and Bala shows and Karou Charou shows, sex-talk is a predominant theme. The sex-talk that appears in these comedies revolves around one of three main themes. The first is that of sex and masculinity – where overt sexuality is seen as a badge of masculinity. Second, sex and morality, where we critique the line between what is allowed and what is not allowed, and to whom these limits apply. Lastly, sexuality and a prevailing sense of homophobia is explored.

Masculinity and Sex

If the post-Apartheid milieu is saturated with discourses of sex-talk and sexuality, then it can be said that most of these discourses are catering for heterosexual men and serving patriarchy. As a result, masculinity and the post-Apartheid man became associated with the “hedonistic pursuit of visceral pleasures” (Jordon, 1995: 138). This hedonism, as suggested earlier, can be argued to be a consequence of freedom.

The increase in sex-talk, combined with the drive towards a consumerist, neo-liberal economy has resulted in sex and consumption as inextricably linked. As Posel (2005: 130) argues:

Sex is also the object of consumption, in a genre of popular culture which eroticizes possession and accumulation as icons of sexual prowess and libido. For young men with aspirations to macho status, an expensive car and flashy, designer clothing have become signifiers of their sexual bravado as men 'in control', with the power to command multiple sexual partners.

Karou Charou's shows often include interactions with audiences, as do many stand-up comedians. In his *Don't Dalla with the Masala* show he points to a man with a receding hairline in the audience. This is what he says:

Ey, that guy over there, are you married? That's your wife? The guy with the less hair on his forehead. You know I always say in a show, whenever I see a, you must be a lucky woman darling I'm telling you, because whenever I see a guy, there's another guy there, two women, whenever I see a guy with less hair on his forehead, I for a fact I know, you hitting (inaudible) full time. Am I right? (Inaudible) Good for you darling. I'm happy for you. You're the envy of a lot of women here.

Here, the stereotype that men with a receding hairline make a lot of money and work hard is combined with a man's suitability. He points out another man in the audience who has "two women". He goes on to say that the woman seated with the man with the receding hairline is the envy of a lot of women there. Here, capitalism is merged with desirability and the double entendre with the man with two women refers to that man's sexual prowess – multiple partners equals more points on the masculinity scale. While not overtly sexual, Karou Charou's joke is clear: the more money your partner has, the more desirable he will be and the luckier you will be. This also contributes to patriarchal notions of masculinity, which require men to be able to 'look after' their women in order to be considered a desirable partner.

This leads to women and their role in the sexual milieu. If women in post-Apartheid South Africa were allowed freedoms that would increase their standing and, theoretically, allow them to be equal to men, this would threaten the patriarchal system. As the *Sunday Times* (in

Posel, 2005: 137) reported: “masculinity in South Africa was being challenged by women who were fast achieving equal social status in society”. As Posel (2005: 137-138) elaborates:

Certainly, the issue of masculinity - as an issue of sexual identity as much as gender - along with anxieties about overly powerful and assertive (emasculating) women, seem to be up for discussion much more visibly and uncomfortably than before.

Jokes are the most uncomfortable of spaces in which men explore this new territory, where women are increasingly having more say, both inside and outside the bedroom. The comedy done by men often explores their emasculation through the withholding of sex on the part of their female partner.

Peru and Bala discuss how they strategise the withholding of sex by their partners. Below, a scene from *Harry and the Uncles*:

Peru: But you have the missus ma. You have the missus.

Bala: (inaudible).

Peru: You do jobs.

Bala: I do odd jobs. Odd jobs is what she don't do. You know what I mean right (to audience)? Uncle. Right. You know. Your vrou sitting next to you? Which side? You got two aunties sitting next to you. Which side? You're the man! Don't worry about triple seven. Jackpot came your way already. Now me I'm doing odd jobs by the posie. Why? Because husbands do odd jobs only for one reason.

Peru: Uh?

Bala: Never mind. We want to score brownie points with the wife, right?

Peru: Brownie points?

Bala: Brownie points.

Peru: And if you have brownie points, what happens?

Bala: Then you must vye cash it in.

Peru: You cash it in with the missus?

Bala: Oyo! Only problem Peru, I vye to cash my brownie points in.

Peru: With the missus?

Bala: Ja.

Peru: What she say?

Bala: Bank is closed. Bank is closed.

Peru: So what you did then?

Bala: No now, now, whenever she chune me the bank's closed, I do internet banking. You know what internet banking is? Ey you'll. Some of you'll from Sandton you can check.

Here we see Bala explaining that he does odd jobs at home in an attempt to gain favour with his wife so that he can 'cash in' his 'brownie points' for sex. The joke occurs when he goes to

his wife for the 'cashing in' and she replies that the "Bank is closed" – meaning that she is not available (rather, not interested) for sex. He then goes on to say he does 'Internet Banking', referring to him consuming pornography online. Here it becomes clear that the inability to receive sexual gratification can easily be resolved with 'just a click of a button'.

Jordan (1995) conducted a study on the sex-jokes of Spanish films in the 1970's and 1980's, just as Spain found freedom from the Francoist dictatorship. Interestingly, the tropes of the comedy are very similar to that of the tropes that emerge from post-Apartheid comedy. As Jordan (1995: 130) argues:

...though heavily caricatured, most of the main characters in the sex comedy are presented as average, (stereo) typical, Spanish males with whom audiences can readily identify and in whom they can see reflected their own desires, lacks and frustrations. They are nearly always drawn from a place of moral/sexual enclosure and repression.

The figures of Peru and Bala, and Karou Charou are the average, stereotypical Indian males. Hansen (2012: 89) observes that their shows are popular with men and younger people, who all identify with them. The withholding of sex by a female partner, for example, is not an unfamiliar situation for men in relationships, nor is the idea of the consumption of pornography and masturbation.

Karou Charou does an interesting experiment at his *Don't Dally with the Masala* show. He conducts a quick survey of the audience to see who is attending one of his shows for the first time. He then points out a female in the audience and says this:

That would make you a Karou Charou virgin. Because it's your first time, am I right, it's your first time? First time makes you, it's virgin territory. Feeling a bit moist darling? Your palms, your palms, you know when you (inaudible). You bring any lubrication? For your throat darling, in case it get dry.

This overtly sexual double entendre is clearly made to set the tone for his show. That he does it with a strong sexual connotation and by establishing his masculinity through an almost condescending belittling of a female audience member, suggests that one strategy of establishing masculine sexual dominance is through the uncomfortable exchange. By 'pushing

the boundaries' and talking down to the woman, he has established his dominance and implied sexual dominance too.

Masculinity is seen as inextricably linked with sex in post-Apartheid South Africa. In the Charou comedy, this is a strong theme that resonates throughout the performances of Peru and Bala and Karou Charou. The trope of the hyper-sexed male versus the 'cold' female is often played out in different scenarios; and reinforces the traditional patriarchal views of masculinity as associated with sex and femininity with demureness/purity. The constant retelling of sex-stories is meant to set up the comedians as masculine.

Sex and Morality

The concept of morality has been a subject of social discussion and debate for as long as time itself. The very basis of religion, governments and social systems are based on ideals of morality and what is considered right versus what is considered wrong. Scales of good/bad, right/wrong are often used to maintain the order of the system. In a patriarchal system then, morality is used a strong force of control, particularly along gendered lines. When combined with sexuality, the code of morality is enforced with even more force. This section explores how South African Indian comedy reveals deep rooted gendered notions of sexuality and morality within the community.

In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Shanti – the epitome of a 'good' wife/daughter-in-law/woman - confronts Jennifer about Shanti's son Prishen's sexual relationship with Jennifer's daughter, Jodi.

Jennifer: Hm, you think that's bad, I found these in Jodi's bag (shows her the condoms). It means they having sex Shanti.

Shanti: (passes the condoms back to Jennifer) Don't put that thing by me. Oh my God my poor son.

Jennifer: Your poor son? Your poor son is a scoundrel that's what he is.

Shanti: Hello. I see how your daughter dresses. She looks like a damn tramp. Buying all these fancy underwear, carrying condoms in her bag. And, look at this, look at this, look at where the J is, look, see it's right by the (inaudible word). Hmm, sis man (throws the panties at Jennifer). Your daughter's a witch.

Jennifer: You're a crazy woman, you know that. You absolutely lost your mind. You going loony, that's what it is. I don't know what she sees in your son.

Shanti: My son is the picture of innocence.

Jennifer: Innocence my foot. Instead of sitting here blabbing your mouth have you thought about the fact that she could fall pregnant, hm?

Shanti: Oh my God. Imagine if that baby comes out like you. Gosh, oh my gosh.

Jennifer: Or it could turn out like you. Baby's first words would be 'weh, I'm hungry'.

The mothers have discovered the fact that their children may be engaging in a sexual relationship. The discussion around where the 'fault' lies because of this alleged sexual relationship reveals some highly gendered notions on the responsibility of maintaining sexual morality, and who should maintain it.

Shanti's reaction to the condoms and underwear is telling. She finds discussions of sex-related topics taboo, uncomfortable and strange. The mere thought of discussing sex makes her uncomfortable. As Shanti is positioned as the ideal woman in a patriarchal system, her voice dominates this conversation. Her strong description of Jodi as a 'tramp' and a 'witch' reveals deep-seated notions of morality based on a female's ability to abstain. That Jodi is walking around with condoms in her bag makes her call Jodi's morality into question and her 'poor son' is the unfortunate recipient of Jodi's 'witchcraft'. A female who takes charge of sexual responsibility and sexuality is immediately set up as promiscuous, 'bad' and immoral. It is later revealed that Prishen and Jodi don't, in fact, have a sexual relationship and that the condoms were kept in Jodi's bag as she was on the college SRC and responsible for filling up condom containers in the campus bathrooms. It is important for the filmmakers to restore Jodi's image, making it easier for the audience (and Shanti) to accept Jodi. Interestingly, it is later revealed that Shanti's marriage was prompted by her pre-marital pregnancy – a source of shame for her - which may explain the ferocity with which she attempts to maintain a 'perfect' image. Still, she holds views of Jodi as the tramp who has her son under a spell, because her morality has been put into question by the very fact that she has condoms in her bag, dresses as she wishes and wears nice underwear.

Sexual morality is also measured on the scale of the number of sexual partners one has had. Virginity is considered a marker of 'purity', making promiscuity 'impure' on the morality scale. Peru and Bala discuss the sexuality of a woman in the community, named *Kanta*.

Peru: We told (inaudible name of Kanta's husband) don't get married to Kanta.
Bala: Oyo how I told him that night before...
Peru: Terrible reputation she had.
Bala: I told him go do what Aishwarya Rai did, go marry one dog.
Peru: In the district used to call her common denominator. Sachi ma, they used to call Kanta, before she got married, common denominator.
Bala: What a long nickname that. Why they called her common denominator Peru?
Peru: Because everything went into her. Sachi ma. Sachi ma.
Bala: I believe you Peru. (Inaudible)
Peru: Kanta got married right. Three months after that she had a baby.
Bala: Heh?
Peru: Ja. Kanta get married to (inaudible). Three months after that she had a baby.
Bala: What a thing eh Peru?
Peru: Ja before she can say I do, she did.

Peru says that Kanta's husband was warned that she was not good for him based on the fact that she was perceived to be promiscuous. Using the double entendre of the term 'common denominator' he implies that many men have been 'in' her – suggesting that Kanta was promiscuous. The fact that she was pregnant before her marriage is also seen as immoral and Peru says: "before she can say I do she did". Here, the responsibility of maintaining morality is left to Kanta, her husband does not feature in the conversation as part of the moral responsibility of avoiding sex before marriage. As governed by the patriarchal system, the responsibility of morality is always placed on the woman.

If the woman is meant to be the holder of sexual morality, then that leaves the man free of the shackles of responsibility and able to explore his masculine right to be promiscuous. Bala is introduced to the audience as "*Savitri's husband and Rosie's neighbour and boyfriend*". Bala's character is known to be having an affair with his neighbour, Rosie. Here he talks to Peru about almost getting caught:

Peru: Rosie told you.
Bala: Rosie said she saw you trying to hide the gifts. I think some people they can't see. Eh Peru, vye bring that decoration this side. I nearly got caught last night.
Peru: For what ma?

Bala: Oyo Saru (inaudible) check Rosie and I together last night.
 Peru: Saru nearly caught you and Rosie?
 Bala: Whole night interrogation by my house.
 Peru: (inaudible)
 Bala: Oyo questions questions questions.
 Peru: About Rosie?
 Bala: About Rosie. Ey me.
 Peru: What you said?
 Bala: I denied everything Peru. I denied everything you know. Let me tell you fellas something right, they always say, what is the necessity for innovation? Invention. Necessity is the mother of invention. That's what they say right. Necessity is the mother of invention. Let me tell you all that is rubbish. Rubbish. Getting caught. That's when you start inventing things.
 Peru: Getting caught is the mother of invention?

Interestingly, that Bala's relationship outside of his marriage is paraded so openly reflects an acceptance of extramarital affairs, if conducted by the husband, as something 'normal'. That men's masculinity is linked to their virility and sexual prowess, makes male promiscuity equivalent to masculinity. Here, Saras interrogation of Bala when he almost gets caught reflects her responsibility for his morality – she needs to keep her husband 'in check' and maintain the familial structure.

If sexual morality is informed by patriarchal structures, it means the responsibility of maintaining morality is left to the female as the upholder of morality. This responsibility binds the woman into a contract where her sexuality is meant to be repressed and kept 'pure' in order for her to be able to maintain morality and decorum for the males in her life (father, husband). The man, then, becomes free of moral responsibility and can explore his sexuality without any judgement.

Homophobia

Another theme that emerges from the comedy is the reference to gayness and alternative sexualities. The South African Constitution, in its transformation post-Apartheid, ensured that the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community were to be upheld from the perspective of the law. This, however, did not necessarily mean that it translated to a social acceptance of alternative sexualities. The Apartheid era was defined by strong laws that aimed to curb sexuality and

“criminalized homosexuality”, and resulted in a “deep-seated and widespread homophobia deterred the open expression or assertion of any sexualities deemed transgressive” (Posel, 2005: 128). This homophobia has been hard to overcome.

With deeply rooted homophobic tendencies, it is similarly unsurprising that homophobic violence is on the rise, including sexual assault and rape. Recent research reveals that 'hate crimes committed in Johannesburg [against gays and lesbians] are exceptionally violent' (Reid and Dirsuweit 2002). In comparison to international figures, the incidence of homophobic rape post-1994 is judged to be high, a tendency which the authors attribute to violent reassertions of an embattled and threatened sense of 'masculine dominance'. (Posel, 2005: 137)

The South African LGBTQIA+ community still suffers discrimination in the form of hate speech, hate crimes and corrective assault and rape. While, “(l)ssues of sexuality have an extraordinary prominence” this does not necessarily translate to a “widespread comfort or acceptance of their profile or substance” (Posel, 2005: 129). Within the South African Indian community, alternative sexualities are even more repressed based on the relatively insulated nature of the community and the repression of sex-talk.

Two specific sexualities are made fun of in the comedy – gay and transgendered identities. Other alternative sexualities are largely ignored and not discussed. The comedy content is largely homophobic. Peru and Harry discuss his time in jail:

Peru: And tell me Harry, six months heh, and uh no womens, how you managed?

Harry: I told you. In jail very hard hey. You get rough business in jail right. You get very rough business in jail. The problem is all those *bras* come to the prison, the first thing they do, they change their Facebook status.

Peru: What they change it to ma?

Harry: They change the relationship status to say ‘It’s Complicated’. Waarheid because me, I check (inaudible) of what you ous come to jail for the first time, they come as strong rough men, they leave there one year later as somebody else’s *stekkie*.

The widespread belief that going to jail means that one will be exposed to ‘turning’ gay and/or rape is used here to lampoon the gay community. The fact that gayness is associated with jail also adds to the discourse of homosexuality as deviant. Harry also suggests that ‘big strong men’ go into jail and come out as someone’s *stekkie* – the joke being that their masculinity gets overturned when they become gay.

Karou Charou has often been criticised for his homophobic jokes. This brash, masculine persona often makes jokes about the gay community without reproach or fear. Here he discusses a suggested song to represent the Gay Pride Parade.

Also Cape Town is famous for gay people. Alright. Moffies. Any moffies in the house today? (Inaudible) moffies, I want to tell you I am one hundred percent behind you guys. A friend of mine, and this guy has got a motorcycle, (inaudible) real butch guy. His son first day at college. Came home from school and said, 'dad, I had my first sexual experience today.' His father was so excited he said, 'son, sit down and tell me all about it.' Said, 'not right now, my arse is sore.' I know it's a family show (inaudible) but I'm going to do this anyway. I reckon Cape Town they have a gay parade right. So I thought I'll pen a song for them. You know for the gay parade (inaudible) nice and exciting song. I was thinking about it and I came up with this song. How many of you remember, in primary school we had sports? You'll remember the days of school sports and (inaudible) was exciting. And then early in the morning you'll line up. And they'll give you a mineral. White people, that means cold drink. That's how you get the punchline. They give us small mineral, they give you apple, and they give you a donut, the long donut. And you remember the good old days with that cream in the centre of the donut? You remember those days? Those days. And then, we had the banner, and we had the mascot. And we walk around the school and we used to sing that song. Who remembers that song? Who are who are who are we? We are we are can't you see? What's your colour? Red and white. How you take it? Easy. How you put it? Boom bang. Jubla he, he. Jubla he, he. Anybody know what jubla he means? No idea. But we sang it like we meant and we (Inaudible).

So I thought, at the gay parade, use the same song, change the words slightly. Go something like this. Who are who are who are we? (In soft feminine voice) We are moffies can't you see? What's your colour? (In same voice again) Pink and white. How you put it? (In same voice, thrusting hips forward) Easy. How you like it? In my...

The term 'moffies' is a derogatory Afrikaans term for gay people, a vestige from the Apartheid past that seems hard to shake post-Apartheid. Karou Charou uses the term unashamedly and often in his comedy. He starts with a joke about a strong, butch motorcyclist whose son comes home from school and tells him that he has had his first sexual encounter. The joke comes in when the son says "my arse is sore" – indicating that the intercourse he experienced was gay intercourse. He ends there, leaving the audience to make the inference that this would not sit well with the butch dad. He then continues to his song. The use of a soft, feminine voice when imitating the responses to the lines in his Gay Pride song, serves to further emasculate gay males. Finally, he ends with highly suggestive sexual thrusting of his hips and his

unfinished ending leaves the audience to assume he would end by saying “In my bum/arse/butt””. This clear obsession with the mechanics of sex when one is gay further undermines the gay community through highlighting their ‘difference’ in the manner in which they choose to perform sexual acts. This enables patriarchy to retain control through shaming alternative sexualities.

Transgendered sexualities are also explored in the comedy. Here Vikash Mathura and Ray Maharaj are presenting a spoof news broadcast in *Harry and the Uncles*:

Ray: Life’s not fair. When Bruce Jenner wears a cocktail dress, the magazines ask him for a photoshoot. But when Vikash Mathura cross-dresses, the police ask him for a breathalyser test. But the person to really feel sorry for is Kanye West, the poor fellow who is married to Kim Kardashian now has two mothers-in-law. And the biggest problem for the Kardashians is when do they buy a present for Bruce Jenner? Should it be on Father’s Day or Mother’s Day?

While not as overtly homophobic in its content, this spoof attempts to undermine the complexities of transgender identity. The joke refers to the highly public ‘coming out’ of Bruce Jenner as transgender. Here their suggestion that Kanye now has to suffer the fate of two mothers-in-law and their questioning of when to buy a gift for Bruce Jenner, attempts to make light of the complexity of this sexuality. This also implies a challenge to the patriarchal familial dynamic and is, therefore, deemed ‘abnormal’ or weird.

When Jennifer and Shanti attempt to break-up Prishen and Jodi, they approach a prostitute to pretend to have some sort of relationship with Prishen.

(Scene changes to Durban city. They approach a skimpily dressed woman on the road)

Woman: Can I help you’ll with something?

Jennifer: You the only one here?

Woman: Ja, day shift.

Jennifer: Probably do half better at night.

Shanti: Jennifer you terrible man.

Jennifer: Shhh.

Woman: So, two ladies huh. Well, I guess there’s a first time for everything.

Jennifer: Don’t be an idiot. We just here because we looking for someone to do some acting.

Woman: Oh yes, I can do that. In fact, I'm acting right now.
Jennifer: What do you mean?
Woman: My real name's actually (switches to male voice) Marvin.
Shanti: Oyo Jennifer, she's a man. Drive man drive.
(Scene changes to golf club, both laughing)
Shanti: And you thought Jodi becoming a nun was a bad idea. But I wouldn't have allowed that boy, I mean that prostitute anywhere near my son.

When they first approach the prostitute, Jennifer quips that she would do better at night – a dig at her attractiveness as well as the fact that approaching a prostitute is associated to be a night activity. The prostitute turns out to be a male and Shanti yells for her to drive away. Her fear is palpable, but that turns to humour when they return to the country club and she quips that she would never let that prostitute near her son. This fear of the transgender prostitute is reflective of a fear of difference and alternative sexualities within the community.

This section has explored various ways in which comedy addresses the predominant view on the LGBTIQ+ community. While gayness and transgender identities are mostly discussed, other identities are largely ignored. This phenomenon has a simple reason: gayness and transgender (man to woman transformations) issues are *men's* issues. In a patriarchal society, the sexuality of men trumps that of women and is also directly related to their masculinity, and women's femininity is devoid of sexual intonations. Thus, men's sexuality is most often talked about. Even so, these identities are made fun of in an attempt to transgress their narratives through the embarrassing dissection of the mechanics of their sexuality, the impact it will have on patriarchal family values and the othering of alternative sexualities as deviant and something to be feared.

[Conclusion to the Chapter](#)

This chapter has explored the ways in which patriarchy has informed various identities and roles of individuals in the South African Indian community. The patriarchal system of Apartheid, combined with an insulated community governed by the memory of an ancient, patriarchal culture from India, served to lay the foundation for deep-seated ideals on gender roles and sexuality. The comedy clearly reflects a society that holds heteronormative roles in stead and is struggling to adapt to the changing milieu of the post-Apartheid condition.

As reflective of a patriarchal society, the themes of the comedy reflect highly gendered notions of roles regarding work and the household, as well as notions of sexuality. The chapter has found that patriarchal notions of women still exist and, though women are increasingly stepping outside of the realm of the household, the patriarchal norms that they have been ascribed still hold them hostage. Women who are viewed as challenging these norms are considered to be deviant and are stigmatised. The patriarchal notions of women as nurturers, flag bearers for family values and as the moral compasses for the men in their lives, are still strongly suggested, by both men and women in the comedy. Men are portrayed in the comedy as the providers, the patriarchs and their masculinity is often portrayed in their ability to 'control' their women and families, their sexual prowess and their ambivalence towards women.

These highly gendered notions of men and women's roles become far more complicated in a post-Apartheid, neoliberal society, where women are increasingly stepping out of their homes and turning into providers; where masculinities are being challenged by men who help out in the home; and where alternative sexualities are free to be explored. The comedy demonstrates a struggle to adapt to these changes due to the rootedness of patriarchy within the South African Indian communities. Gender identities in this community are viewed as conforming to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and belonging is inextricably linked to normative performances of gender and sexuality. Any deviance from traditional notions of gender and sexual identity are considered unnatural, and those individuals are *othered* in the comedy and in the community.

Chapter Seven: Comedy, Consumption and Excess

Performing excess is a trope of comedy that dates back to the earliest times – with jokers and clowns being the most popular example of how comedy allows individuals to abandon restrictions of decorum and social graces. In an age where increasing democratic freedom allows for expressions of identity to be performed more openly, it is interesting to note how excess has been linked to the consumption of material goods, wealth and the caricatured performance of culture. Comedy, true to its nature, allows for these expressions of excessive consumption to appear even more pronounced than they do in other cultural products. In the South African Indian community, excess is used in an attempt emphasize belonging in a market-driven capitalist economy, and is also used to lampoon stereotypes of the rapacious Indian.

In 2015, McDonalds South Africa released a controversial advertisement campaign to promote their 'McFeast Spicy' burger. The two advertisements depicted three friends (played by comedians Karou Charou, Jai'prakash Sewram and Simmi Areff) consuming the McFeast Spicy Burger in two scenarios. These both relied heavily on exaggerated accents and oriental sounding background music, along with costuming, which all served to use stereotypical depictions of South African Indians to sell the product. The responses in conversations from within the community were varied – with some finding the advertisement funny and grateful that it put the South African Indian comedy 'on the map', while others found the advertisements deeply offensive. Those who critiqued the advertisements rejected the use of essentialist stereotypes and exaggeration in order to sell products.

The McFeast Spicy burger case reveals two issues that are closely related to the comedy. First, the South African Indian community has been associated with the stereotype of greed and rapaciousness, and the comedians (most prominently Karou Charou) were criticised for allowing the use of stereotypical tropes in order capitalise on the lampooning of the South African Indian community. Second, the exaggerated stereotypes reflect the state of comedy in post-Apartheid South Africa, with a heavy reliance on stereotypes and excessive displays of conspicuous consumption. The comedy in post-Apartheid South Africa, particularly from

minority communities, has often been 'low brow', with an emphasis on excess, exaggeration of stereotypes and self-deprecatory humour. This excessiveness is prevalent in some South African Indian comedy, which rely heavily on stereotypes to provoke humour. This chapter explores excess as an expression of consumption: how is consumption linked to comedy and how does this reflect the identity of South African Indians?

Consumption

Post-Apartheid South Africa has seen significant changes towards a culture of consumption, originating with a political, economic and social shift to a neoliberal society. This has meant that freedom from Apartheid has largely been expressed through excess and the act of consumption, being able to consume, and performing consumption simply because one can. This section explores the complexities of consumption in post-Apartheid South Africa. In addition, there will be an examination of the way the Indian community in South Africa have taken to practices of consumption, with a particular focus on stereotypical practices of conspicuous consumption. These aspects will be explored through the comedy and the way performances of comedy explore these stereotypes.

Having already mentioned that South Africa functions in a neoliberal system and in a global society, studying the consumption of South Africans is important as "the country serves as a microcosm for global patterns of income, inequality, race-based economic oppression, and hopes for the material betterment of life" (Iqani & Kelly, 2015: 97). There is no denying that consumption shapes our lives in every way possible and is an important facet of global society. Locally, consumption "helps to forge global connections through migration, reframes claims to modernity and autonomy (as opposed to simply operating as a form of mimesis), and becomes embedded in local cultures and practices in unique ways" (Newell in Iqani, 2012: 12). "Consumption is a social process" wherever one is in the world, but is, at the same time, unique to its social contexts (Iqani, 2012: 12). The consumption context in post-Apartheid South Africa will now be discussed.

The examination of practices of consumption can be enlightening in that they reveal the contextual and symbolic processes that inform them. By consumption, I am referring not only to the consumption of physical goods, but also the implications of choices informed by a neoliberal system, an economy of consumption and the so-called freedom associated with such consumption. During Apartheid, the regulation of consumption practices served to control race groups (Iqani & Kenny, 2015: 96). Post-Apartheid South Africa allowed the freedom of movement, choice and the ability to consume as one wishes. Iqani (2012: 8) elaborates:

The ability to practice consumption in a more democratized manner was certainly high on the agenda of many South Africans who bore the brunt of systematic exclusion and institutionalized, grinding poverty. For these reasons, it is impossible to consider citizenship apart from the possibilities and limitations of consumption in the South African context. This is arguably true for many post-colonial and post-authoritarian societies.

Being able to consume is a defining trait of the post-Apartheid landscape. Practices of consumption have impacted on performances of identity and anxieties of belonging in turn. In post-Apartheid South Africa, “consumption has become one of the modes for social analysts to anticipate and read change, citing the entry of the black consumer into new spaces and new socialities as markers of transformation” (Mupotsa, 2015: 185). Thus, the study of consumption in post-Apartheid South Africa is vital as “... the practices and politics of consumption are... crucial for the circulation of meanings about race, order and discipline” (Iqani & Kenny, 2015: 96). A study of consumption “can never be set apart from questions of power” (Iqani, 2012: 9) and belonging. Analysing comedy through this lens promises to reveal a great deal about the manner in which South African Indians demonstrate their understandings of how they fit into post-Apartheid South Africa through acts of consumption.

Studies on consumption practices in post-Apartheid South Africa have often been framed around the implications of freedom on consumption. Furthermore, practices of consumption cannot be considered without a consideration of the agency of individuals. This is especially true “in the context of societies in which consumption was actively used as a form of racist regulation and exclusion” (Iqani, 2012: 8). Iqani (2012: 9) considers the theorisation of consumption along the lines of “two broad strokes”. First, she suggests consumption can be

seen “as evidence of manipulation by the imperialist/capitalist system and is rooted in Marxist critique” (Iqani, 2012: 9). The theorisation of the culture industries is one example, where “Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) framed mass consumption as evidence of strategic manipulation” along with more recent studies that “frame consumption as a form of labour that helps to drive capital” (Lee, 1993; Perotta, 2001). The second approach, which is the approach adopted by this section, “often rooted in anthropology or cultural studies, considers consumption as a practice through which individuals exercise agency through the construction of class identities (Bourdieu, 1984) or even communicate love and care to one’s family (Miller, 1998)” (Iqani, 2012: 19). To summarise (Iqani, 2012:9):

The “Marxist” (to summarize it crudely) approach emphasizes political-economic structures, the power of capital and industrial and post-industrial commodity production, and the limited choices available to individuals within this system. The “anthropological” approach emphasizes the pleasures inherent in consumption, and takes note of how consumption is a crucial zone in which individuals exercise agency, choice and self-expression.

Both approaches offer useful frameworks through which consumption can be explored in the comedy. However, it is the anthropological approach that considers consumption as a means of expression, agency and choice that allows us to consider how the production of comedy, and themes of consumption within the comedy, is essentially an expression of identity.

If we view consumption as linked to expressions of identity, then it can be argued that “consumption is a form of public action and participation, and a process of making visible – both of which are inherently political” (Iqani, 2012:12). Through practices of consuming, be it food, clothing or entertainment, we are making visible statements about our identities and social inclinations. Furthermore, consumption is “a site of cognitive value; [...] good for thinking and acting in a meaningful way that renews social life” (Canclini in Iqani, 2012: 12). Furthermore Iqani and Kenny (2015: 96) argue:

...consumption is an area of fascination which, in its visibility, in its excess and extravagance, in its (contrary) basic economic necessity, in its expressive freedom and in its ability to call up anxieties and moral orders, returns us to the limits of society and value/s.

The visibility and excess of consumption is of particular importance in this study, for two reasons. First, the actual performances and consumption of the comedy, which, true to the nature of comedy, are excessively visible. This includes the way the comedians' style themselves, where they perform or showcase their work, what language they use, and comments they make about the audiences. These are all markers for what comedy can tell us about the South African Indian community. Second, what the comedians say about the stereotypes around consumption patterns of South African Indians could reveal a good deal about their collective aspirations and fears. Thus, what are the recurrent themes in the comedy that reveal the nature of the South African Indian identity in a neoliberal, postcolonial world?

[The production of comedy and The 'Charou': A mascot for conspicuous consumption](#)

In 2012, Neville Pillay, a popular DJ on Lotus FM, a public radio station catering to the South African Indian population, created a parody song of the popular 'Gangnum Style'. He called his version "Charou Style". The song became immensely popular amongst South African Indians, prompting an interest in the politics of an excessive display of consumption in order to articulate an identity. The lyrics of the song suggest that 'Charous' are stereotypically known for their love of spicy food, 'desi' music, cars and sound, drinking alcohol, watching soccer, weddings and their geographical location, amongst other things. This kind of spectacle made by typically overemphasising these stereotypes and the context of this style of comedy is what this section is interested in exploring.

The 'Charou' is a recurrent feature in South African Indian comedy. Karou Charou, as a self-styled 'Charou' comedian, attempts to epitomise what it means to be a Charou. Hansen (2012: 79) notes:

When people in Chatsworth describe someone as a "real Charou" they are referring to certain way of speaking, joking, eating (and drinking), and comportment that is characteristic of working-class life. Wealthy, and upwardly mobile Indians are, in other words, decidedly not charou. They seek to purge everything charou- cheap liquor, traces of colloquial South African Indian English, eating of meat, cracking (coarse) jokes, and enjoyment of low-grade Bollywood film songs.

Thus, the Charou has been historically linked with a display of excess: excessive drinking, eating, joking, dress styles and the like. The Charou is seen to be linked with the lower, working classes, while those that have 'made it' and moved out of the townships become upwardly mobile, continue to be called "lahnee" as either a term of pride or, in some cases, as referring to those Indians who have 'forgotten their roots' and aspire to be 'white' (the term 'lahnee' is used often interchangeably to refer to fancy/white/employer). The figure of the Charou reflects the "first kind of trajectory that emerges from a study of accounts of conspicuous consumption post-apartheid" as a "linear one, indicating the direction 'up from' and 'out of' the racially based discrimination and oppression structuring sumptuary regulations" (Kistner, 2015: 242). The Charou is thus a mascot for aspiration. While the remainder of the section explores Charou comedy as indicative of stereotypes of conspicuous consumption and excess in the South African Indian community, this does not mean that the comedy coming out of 'upwardly mobile' or higher class Indians does not include these stereotypes. In fact, they do but in a subtler and sometimes differing way. This will be explored later.

The Charou represents Indians at their lowest social order, still living in the township, aspiring for the day they too become a *lahnee*. For Hansen (2012: 80) the Charou represents the "zero-point from where cultural capital and respectability can be built and developed". This reflects a national sentiment of township life, where there is a "peculiar entwinement of the rhetoric of national transformation with fictional narratives of consumption" (Kruger, 2012: 78). In order to become a *lahnee*, you no longer need to be a "politically active agent, but rather an upwardly mobile consumer whose consumption confirms national growth as well as individual success" (Kruger, 2010: 78).

The Charou is seen as the epitome of township Indian life. The stereotypes around township life in South Africa are very similar across the three racial categories of black, coloured and Indian. They speak of township culture as aspirational spaces, where the pursuit of wealth, conspicuous consumption and merriment are juxtaposed with violence, misogyny and the harsh realities of living in spaces that still bear the marks of an unequal past. It is also a culture

influenced by global capitalist trends and global culture. The Charou is seen in the stereotypical township role, as “something simple, crude, or even quaint, yet honest and unpretentious” (Hansen, 2012: 81). There is still an appreciation of the Charou as representative of a ‘simpler’ time when Indian communities lived together and performed their marginality in much the same way. Thus, as Socrates (in Bevis, 2013: 63) argues, “we enjoy the spectacle of others doing the ridiculous things we’d secretly like to do ourselves”. Comedy is the mode of choice based on its ability to “... knowingly playing dumb as a way of playing around with the limits of knowledge” (Bevis, 2013: 63) and its association with “various kinds of lowness” (Bevis, 2013: 64). By making consumption a spectacle, through its conspicuousness, the aspiration of the Charou is being solidified and there is a “celebration of individual consumption as the sign of national prosperity” (Kruger, 2010: 76). At the same time, this celebration of consumption “sets in sharp relief the rhetoric of success that encourages the have-not majority to identify with fictions of aspiration towards the bounty of the new elite and the wealth gap that makes this aspiration impossible” (Kruger, 2010: 76).

Style of comedians

Through the analysis of the comedy, there is a stark distinction between the comedy of Peru and Bala and Karou Charou, and that of the Riaad Moosa and the mainstream films analysed. It becomes clear through the analysis, that Peru and Bala and Karou Charou are representatives of ‘Charou’ comedy. Karou Charou, with his flamboyant style, is the epitome of *Charoudom*. The way Karou Charou styles himself is indicative of his excessive, brash, colourful style of comedy. He is most often seen on stage in brightly coloured ‘Indian’ styled outfits, an array of headwraps and turbans, with dark sunglasses, and an excessive amount of jewellery. His flamboyant style is a reinterpretation of an Indian, Bollywood look. Here, the celebration of a flamboyant Bollywood style, in an almost ‘kitsch’ manner is an indicator of the excessive. The excessive is acknowledged as ‘inferior’ in the overt caricature-like styling but celebrated at the same time. As Chan (2008: 265) suggests:

... kitsch has also come to signify excess: an overabundance of emotion, a “surplus of signs,” and a repetition of endless copies. Traditionally, this excess was associated with the masses and mass culture. With Bollywood, however, the excess also encompasses cultural differences that reside outside the logic of mainstream American popular culture.

Certainly, Karou Charou is a figure that displays excess as the ‘overabundance’ of a brash, excitable, no-holds barred persona, combined with over the top dress and jewelry. This bombardment of signs, excess of colour and shine reflects an urge to ‘stand-out’ and express cultural difference. The kitsch, in this case, is an articulation of difference.

On the other hand, the absurdity of Karou Charou’s dress and style also serves the purpose of creating a persona that allows for an escape from reality. As Corrigan (2015: 147) notices:

What would the ultimate consumerist fashion fantasy entail? Possession of a garment that could transform the wearer’s identity would certainly be a fundamental aspect.

Here the emphasis is on the masquerade as allowing a freedom that donning a costume enables. Karou Charou styles himself in an elaborate costume, in silks, with the bling and turbans; in a style that is reminiscent of an Indian ‘*Maharajah*’ (king). Here, “the conspicuous, the elaborate, the excessive – are framed as a hyperreal dream space in which economically deprived subjects lose themselves as a form of escape from the suffering of everyday life” (Iqani & Kenny, 2015: 98). Thus, the caricatured persona is, in all its excess, meant to make Karou Charou relatable to a South African Indian audience, as he represents “a sign of both freedom (to consume) and its lack”.



Figure 1: Karou Charou

Karou Charou is proud of his flamboyant look. In his show *Don't Dalla with the Masala*, he addresses the audience about his outfit:

Right now I'm saying can you please show some love for my outfit. I'm all dressed up for you guys, can you please. Personally designed hot couture from my auntie, uh, uh Amla in unit three Chatsworth (inaudible). You like my bling? My rings? You like? All the way from China. Bought them on the China mall. You like my shoes? Official footwear of India. Now you know clearly why India doesn't have a national football team. And this is genuine leather, you know how I say, you know how you go genuine leather is by the smell.

Charou puts a lot of effort into his style – the humour of the joke comes when he reveals that his specially designed 'hot couture', or haute couture, is actually made by an aunt in the township of Chatsworth. His 'bling' is from the China Mall – notorious for selling cheap, counterfeit items. Finally, he talks about his shoes, the only 'genuine' thing from India – leather *jutti's* – a slipper type shoe that is often paired with traditional ethnic clothing. Here, Karou Charou's outfit represents "a symbolic economy where the inscription and marking of characteristics onto certain bodies condenses a whole complex cultural history" (Skeggs, 2004: 1). Through his costume, a form of masquerade, he is appropriating characteristics of Indian culture in an attempt to create a symbolic self that 'belongs' in the South African Indian community. In this way, Charou's masquerade "can thus be revelatory – it reveals moments of reflexivity 'about the otherness within and beyond ourselves' (Kaiser, 2001 p.xiv) and, through its excessive caricaturing, provides a measure of pleasure, and a vehicle for a 'politics of desire'" (Khan, 2015: 31).

The figures of Peru and Bala, in contrast to Karou Charou, are that of two old men dressed humbly in Western shirts and pants, often donning hats. Their style is simple – they represent a generation that lived the bulk of their lives during Apartheid and still maintain much the same lifestyle post-Apartheid. They are truly representative of the old township men who have stayed behind in the "predominant Tamil (as were the majority of indentured labourers), provincial and backward" (Hansen, 2005: 310) township of Verelum. They have a "country bumpkin" attitude and are styled as such. They have a frugal style – the excess of clothing is something they do not aspire to – perhaps due to their age or due to the long held stereotype that some Indian's are frugal with certain things while in the pursuit of accumulating

wealth. Peru proves this when he discusses his trip to India with Uncle Harry in *Harry and the Uncles*:

So I went to Hindia. I went to about 20 30 temples there. Not to pray for Padma. Some rubbish stole my slippers by the first temple I can't find my slippers there heh.

Here, Peru discusses his trip to India. He was told to go to India to pray for his wife's (Padma's) wellbeing as she was battling an illness. He goes to pray at a temple (his intention being only to visit the one temple) but ends up visiting twenty or thirty temples because his slippers disappeared at the first temple. Removing slippers before entering a temple is a religious rule and Peru is assuming another devotee has taken his shoes. He decides to visit the other temples in the hope of finding the slippers, not to pray for his wife. Here the frugality of Indians is lampooned. Though their style is simple, Peru and Bala guard their material possessions intensely. While they're clearly very different from Karou Charou in that they're older, more modestly dressed and represent a different generation that is where the differences end. The content of both Karou Charou and Peru and Bala's comedies are very similar as will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

Location of Charou Shows

Of particular interest to the link between comedy and consumption is the location of these shows. The shows are often held in community halls – in predominantly Indian communities – but, more interestingly, many shows happen in theatres housed in casino complexes. Firstly, that the shows occur in community halls is interesting. Here, the “social settings of laughter” are created where “moments of momentary freedom where one can be “Indian” without apologies” (Hansen, 2013: 92). This is frowned upon by many educated Indians and seen as a form of “ethnic closure” (Hansen, 2013: 92). But the shows continue to flourish at these venues and the settings serve to reaffirm a “we”, as Hansen suggests.

The link between Charou aspiration and gambling has always been there. A survey conducted by the National Gambling Board (2004: 29) found that Indian students were the highest

percentage (26.8%) of respondents to spend R200 or more on gambling. According to the report (2004: 29):

In all but one of the predominantly Indian schools surveyed, a disproportionate number of respondents claimed to have spent over R200 gambling. In a lower class community with very high rates of unemployment in the Durban area, this amounted to as many as 6.5% of all respondents (the same number as those involved in the most exclusive private school included in the survey). In a middle class Indian school, this rose to an astonishing 10.7% of respondents. (For reasons of confidentiality, the report is not able to provide the names of the schools involved.) This is an interesting trend. R200 is a lot for anyone to spend in a gambling session. When repeated, this translates into a potential debt which no pupil, least of all learners from under privileged communities, could ever be expected to absorb comfortably. This is an indication of potentially problematic gambling behaviour, especially in the Indian community.

The fact that these shows take place in casinos – where a lot of the target market spends their time – speaks to an overall culture of gambling within a significant proportion the South African Indian community. These shows are often sold out and the comedians themselves will use humour to reinforce that they perform in casinos and that they know the audience enjoy gambling.

Language

Charou language is unique. The accents, inflections, connotations and slang are understood only by members of the community and an outsider would find it very taxing to decipher much of what is said if they were to be put into a social setting where Charou language is being used. The language used to market and perform these shows is decidedly Charou, ensuring that the audience know what show they're attending. There is no doubt that the show is attended by a majority of Indians. It is made clear that there is no cultural space for other races in these shows. Not in an overtly exclusionary manner, but in a subtler way as anyone outside the community will not 'get' the humour and attending the shows would be a wasted cost and effort. As Hansen (2013: 91) suggests:

In Chatsworth, the effect of sharing comic performances clearly produces a form of "ethnic closure". By this, I mean two things: first, closure as in *closing ranks*. The knowledge of the follies of the charou world and the comical effects of exaggerated accents and well-known stock characters presuppose a sharing of the spaces of cultural intimacy where these accents and their connotations exist.

Second, I mean closure in the *ordinary therapeutic sense*, as reconciling oneself with a certain traumatic event or process. The key here is what Freud, in many places in his early work on jokes and the unconscious calls “economy in psychical expenditure” that is, the exchange of energy between inhibitions (consuming energy) and their release in the laugh or the comical pleasure.

Charou shows are focused on the retelling of day-to-day troubles of the South African Indian. They use these shows as a way of “closing ranks” and capturing their target market into said “economy of psychical expenditure”. The aim is to sell tickets by making their audience laugh – and their audience responds well to exaggerated versions of accents and mimicry of stereotypical characters.

Karou Charou and Peru and Bala use the form of orality to create humour, with an emphasis on accent, slang and phrases only identifiable to their target market. In his show, *Don't Dalla with the Masala*, Karou Charou talks about his real name:

Okay for those of you haven't seen me before, let me now introduce myself officially. My name is the Karou Charou. Don't be a doos. My mother never call me that name. She didn't make that name for me when I was born. It's not my real name. I have the green ID book, which I bought for fifty bucks. In that ID book it says clearly my full name is Madhevan, Manbud, Kartrain, Moodley. Madhevan, Manbud, Kartrain, Moodley. Let me tell you those who saw my show before you will know I have a nickname which is? Madhir! That's right. There you go. That's my nickname. I'm, I, everybody's it is hard to believe that my father gave me the nickname because when I was only two years old, running out of the house he called me, 'your madhir! Come here. Go put your brief on.' Nothing wrong. That's a nickname. In fact, madhir, if you Google it, it means freakin' amazing. All Indians! Aren't we glad our Indian names have meanings? Am I right boss? Am I right? Indian names like madhir means amazing, Google it, you'll see. And even like, Hindi people, Hindi people, their meanings, their names have meanings. Like a Hindi guy, his name, Sakdeep. Self-explanatory name. Muslim people, you'll don't laugh because you'll names, you'll have meanings too, Essack and Ismail. Self-explanatory once again. White people, I don't know, I'm educating you cause our Indian people, we, we choose names that have meanings. White people got a, I got a guy name's John. What does John mean? To me John means toilet. Like if I ask you Charles where you vying. 'No I'm vying to the John, take a piss.' You say that? Am I right? You say that. Just John, am I right, you see.

Interestingly, Karou Charou starts this show by checking how many white and black people are in his audience. By doing this, he makes it quite clear that the few non-Indian people that are there will stick out like sore thumbs. Throughout the show, slang and language are used

to further alienate these audience members. In the scene above – he talks about his nickname “*madhir*”. To the larger audience, this is a humorous nickname as this contraction of his name translates loosely to two meanings. The first translation, as he explains is ‘awesome/great’. Second, *madhir* can be translated to a vulgar curse word, as the prefix to ‘*madhir chod*’ which literally translates to ‘*mother f***er*’. This alienates any white audiences who, if they are not familiar with the term, will not get the humour and feel out of place amidst the laughing crowd. Thus, the crowd has ‘closed ranks’, through the shared sense of pride and connection to the mystic homeland that gave them names with meanings. The lampooning of white people’s names also serves as therapeutic escape from the everyday realities of Indian people having to adopt white nicknames in order to placate white people who could not pronounce their names. Through this example, it becomes clear that the shows are designed to be exclusionary of audiences outside their target markets through the use language more specifically, but also to allow for the ethnic consumption of comedy through the use of language.

[Charou shows as sites of conspicuous consumption](#)

From the above section, it is clear that the symbolic styling of the Charou, a township figure with aspirations of economic and social mobility, is created in the shows of Karou Charou and Peru and Bala, in an attempt to create identifying markers of belonging to the Charou community at large. Belonging is created through the style of the comedians, the language they use in the shows and even the locations where the shows are performed. These choices represent a wider culture of consumption and excess that imply the upward social mobility of the comedians (and the audiences) is inextricably linked with excessive displays of ‘Indianness’.

[Themes that explore conspicuous consumption in the Comedy](#)

As mentioned previously, the stereotypical notions of the rapacious Indian has been widely circulated in narratives of South African Indians from both within and outside of the community. These notions are long-standing – dating back to slavery and Apartheid – where Indians were perceived as earning better and being allowed better economic advantages than Black South Africans. Political scandals involving Indian South Africans have also served to

cement this view. The conspicuous consumption of goods such as cars and alcohol, from within the Charou community, as forms of aspiration and freedom are some of the themes that arise from the comedy. This section begins with an analysis of the perceived relentless pursuit of wealth by South African Indians and how this is portrayed in the comedy. Themes of speed and sound, and drinking, drugs and gangsterism are also explored.

Themes: The Relentless Pursuit of Wealth

In 2002, Mbongeni Ngema produced a controversial song titled “AmaNdiya” (Indians). The song, which offered a scathing view on the South African Indian community as even more racist than the white community, and as an adversary and obstruction to the advancement of Blacks in South Africa, was met with harsh criticism and subsequently banned for attempting to foster hate speech. Some lyrics of the song are loosely translated as (News24, 2002): “The reason we are faced with hardship and poverty in Durban is because everything was taken by the Indians. But they turn around and exploit us”. The sentiment, while scathing, was not new. South African Indians have been associated with the relentless pursuit of greed, wealth, exploitation and corruption in post-Apartheid South Africa. The very public scandals which included Schabir Shaik and the controversial Gupta family only served to add to this view.

The manner in which South African Indians are portrayed in the comedy with regards to the pursuit of economic gains is aimed at getting audiences to identify with the stereotype but at the same time does something completely different. Kistner (2015: 250) suggests:

Status-seeking through the valorisation and acquisition of commodities instrumental in marking distinction, is subject to commercial commodity culture which in turn levels distinction.

Thus, the pursuit of wealth, and the luxury lifestyles and commodities that accompany wealth, is also a pursuit of belonging. The Charou wants to belong to lahnee culture – a culture associated with a different level of distinction and class.

The Peru and Bala and Karou Charou shows often begin with some inference to the financial practicality of performing the shows. Karou Charou's *Don't Dalla with the Masala* show is particularly interesting. He begins his skit with these words:

Listen, before I start officially, I would like to uh thank my sponsor. I'd like to suck ass to the people who give me money, and to be honest, this is the first time the institution, it's an institution, not even a business, has sponsored anybody, or any (inaudible) really, and I'm so glad they've chosen me. Please give a round of applause for the South African Revenue Service, SARS, (inaudible) give round of applause. I cannot believe they chose me. But apparently they chose me because they feel I can get through to you, Indian people. Message they want me to give you is that they are well aware that most Indians are declaring only one income per household. They say, to let you know, that they know your wife, she's making samosas and selling as a sideline business, and you got a daughter doing hair and beauty, she got a wendy house at the back cutting hair. You are breaking the law. You need to declare all income because the government needs your money. They want me to show you this video (screen changes to image with SARS logo saying, 'without you, their dreams can't come true', and with images of Julius Malema, Jacob Zuma, Kgalema Motlanthe, and Gwede Mantashe from left to right), to get the message across. So please, do the right thing, now I'm saying, I'm saying it, I'm paid to do this right. But in all honesty, they aren't my sponsor. My sponsor are these guys over here to be honest with you (screen changes to Thava logo) and uh please give a round of applause for Thava Indian Restaurant. They've got a branch in Norwood and in Midrand, and I've been there and I'm gonna tell you'll this much, they have something called, on a Saturday, uh it's called the Taste of Thava where they, for every second Saturday in a month, they showcase one province or area in India, and all their dishes and all their food from there is showcased.

Here, Karou Charou begins by talking about how he needs to "suck ass" to the people who have given him money, his sponsors. However, before revealing the true sponsor, he jokes that the sponsors are the South African Revenue Services. The inference to Indians and tax evasion is made clear – he urges the audience to declare all their income. The link is made between informal businesses and the enterprising ways in which Indians pursue an income like selling samoosas and cutting hair. This reflects the stereotype of Indians pursuing enterprises. This quip reveals a greater issue of anxiety and belonging in this community, where most members of the community do not, in fact, evade tax or blatantly pursue wealth, but are stereotypically depicted in this light. By appropriating this joke, the comic is subverting this stereotype, and by laughing at the joke, the audience recognises the anxiety that many South African Indians feel about this view of their community.

In *Harry and the Uncles*, Peru begins the show by discussing why they haven't yet retired. The response is as follows:

You know people say, you'll say you'll retiring, why you never retire? Why you'll never go out fishing. Three reasons why we came back. Fish don't clap. Fish don't laugh. And fish don't pay big big bucks to come see a show here. Because economically how hard it is here you know.

The economic viability of performing is vital to Peru. We are reminded, through both scenes, that these shows are being performed for the sole reason that they are economically viable. The very reason for these shows is capitalist gain and this reflects the alignment of the Indian community to neoliberal and capitalist policies.

The stereotype of South African Indians being linked to greed and corruption has been fuelled by the very public cases of businessman Schabir Shaik's corrupt relationship with then deputy president Jacob Zuma. He was found guilty of fraud and corruption and sentenced to jail time – he was consequently released on medical parole. During his parole, he was seen playing golf at a prominent golf club, seemingly in good health. This, as well as the Gupta Saga, which came much later, became a topic of interest for many comedians, not just the Indian community. Within the South African Indian community (Vahed & Desai, 2010: 3):

Support for the ANC is mainly from higher income Indians, who may benefit from affirmative action and BEE. Working-class Indians, on the other hand, feeling threatened and marginalized, have tended to support minority parties.

This demonstrates an ambivalence within the community towards the ruling party, made deeper by the scandals that served to entrench divisions between South African Indians and Black South Africans (AmaNdiya was ringing true for many). It also sustained the stereotype of the wealthy Indian and their involvement in corruption; which did not reflect the larger South African Indian population dwelling in townships.

In *Harry and the Uncles*, Harry discusses his return from prison with Peru. Peru observes that Harry served time in the same prison as Schabir Shaik and asks if he met him. Harry responds:

Harry: Ha! (Inaudible). Two words I've got for Schabir's jail sentence. Thewa here (thrusts hips forward). Check Schabir was there right, but Schabir was not in the (inaudible). He was there but not there. He was like invisible. He was like always in the hospital in the same prison, and he shoot them one two times like every third week to come meet the prison wardens. So, they go together Durban Country Club and they play golf. But I'm *chuning* you right remember the doctors reckon Schabir was on his deathbed. I'm telling you, golf is not good for his health.

Peru: Why golf is not good ma?

Harry: Uncle, you check every time in the newspapers, Schabir play golf.

Peru: Ja.

Harry: His blood pressure shoots up. He starts fighting with the people in the golf course. He starts *moering* the caddies. I'm telling you, golf is not good for that man's health.

Peru: That's true heh.

Harry: Not good for his health.

His discussion of Schabir Shaik is scathing. There is a clear allusion to the fact that money can afford Shaik freedoms that other prisoners did not have and discussions of his time at the Durban Country Club also explore this further. But, in another discussion about his prison stay, the discussion evolves as follows:

Peru: And how was bribery and corruption there? I hear that it's very bad in South Africa...

Harry: (inaudible) one fellow there in the prison, he bribed two security guards for his one brother to escape. He bribed two ous for his bru to escape. I reckon to him, bra, how you managed that? He said I learnt from you. I reckon how. What you mean your learnt from me? He reckon larney, you the ou that introduced "Buy Two Get One Free". You know I always say, find a show me a man who's not corrupt, and I'll show you a man who hasn't been offered enough money yet. (Inaudible)

Here the joke refers to a popular discount strategy of "Buy Two Get One Free" and infers that the concept was introduced by Harry to the other prisoner, who subsequently 'bought' (bribed) two prison guards to help his one brother escape. Harry goes further to infer that there isn't a person who cannot be bribed. So, while there is resentment of sorts towards the rich Indian, there is still a veneration of the 'enterprising Indian' and a willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve some sort of financial gain.

The enterprising Indian stereotype is not an unfamiliar theme to popular culture. Globally, Indians have been linked to business acumen and entrepreneurial expertise. The concept of

the 'enterprising Indian' is not only limited to South African Indians. Riaad Moosa explores this in more detail. In a skit about his son breaking his new iPhone, he talks about going to a cellular shop in a mall and being quoted R5000 to get a new phone as the broken one cannot be fixed. In true Indian fashion, he looks to save some money and decides to go another route. He says:

I just walked out, I was like (imitates child crying intermittently as he described earlier). You not my service provider anymore (while crying). And I thought screw this. Screw this. I'm gonna go to the top. I'm gonna go to the technological leaders in cell phone repair techniques. Went to the Pakistanis. There at the Oriental Plaza and these brothers they have a different concept of time and money hey. Like ask them can you fix the phone. He's like (imitates Pakistani accent) '(whistles), of course I can fix it.' I'm like how much it's gonna cost. 'No too expensive sir, too expensive. Too expensive. I do it for three hundred rand.' I'm like what! How long's it gonna take? 'Too long sir, too long. Too long. It's a very technical very complicated process. I have to send it to (inaudible name) Bhai who's got seventeen jobs like this just today alone. You can only get the phone in one hour.'

The 'Pakistani' has become a term loosely related to first generation Indians (or Pakistani's) who migrated to South Africa for business opportunities. The 'Pakistani' here may very well be Indian – as it is known that the Oriental Plaza is a space where many Indian immigrants also establish businesses. The inference is that by going to the Oriental Plaza one can achieve the 'impossible' and that the enterprising Indians (or Pakistanis) can make it happen. Note that the joke also makes light of the fact that Moosa himself has decided to take the option of visiting an informal business in order to save money – alluding to the 'miser' stereotype. The enterprising Indian is also made fun of by Bala who talks about someone he knows who "sold building cover" and "household cover" to three homeless people. He talks about the man in a more condescending manner, as if he disapproves of the man's actions. Interestingly, the comedy explores corruption and enterprise as intertwining concepts, and that the 'grey area' between legal and illegal is where Indians achieve their success.

While making money is a constant theme explored, preserving wealth comes across just as much in the comedy. The figure of the 'miser' is often associated with South African Indians. Interestingly, within the community, the figure of the miser is seen as associated with certain communities namely, Hindi and Gujarati speaking Indians. As mentioned before, Hindi

speaking Indians are often referred to as 'bread ous' or 'Roti Ous'. Peru and Bala makes light of their 'miserly' nature:

Researchers have finally released their report on why Roti Ous are hesitant to go to strip clubs. No, it's not because of moral or religious issues. The main reason apparently that Roti Ous don't like to go to strip clubs is that they find difficulty putting coins into G-strings.

The inference is that Hindi speaking Indians are reluctant to spend money and that coins (being currency of a lesser value) are as far as they would go to tip a stripper. But the stereotype goes beyond just the Hindi and Gujarati speaking communities. We are reminded of when Peru hunted for his missing slippers, and how Shanti bargains with the grocery vendor at the market.

Greed of money and consumption of goods without paying is also an excess that is explored in the comedy. Peru talks about his trip to India:

Ey, you know I'm a grant person. I can't afford big money. We went to one restaurant and now I went with my brother, Sagar (pronounced *sahgaah*), you'll know my brother Sagar. I went with my brother Sagar. He looked at the price on that thing he said let's go Dutch. I said oyo I came to India, let's eat Indian stuff here. He said no man, let's go Dutch. I said what you mean by let's go Dutch. He said no you pay half, I pay half. I said no let's go Greek. He said what's going Greek. I said no we eat and we run away without paying.

Later, Peru also reiterates how Indians will take tinned fish to a holiday and make a meal of it in their hotel rooms instead of eating at a restaurant to save money. He talks about how expensive food is in India and discusses the various ways he tries to save money in India but still have a good time. When he returns from India, he discusses a gripe he has with the Indian community:

You know I just came back here, the, two days ago from hindia. And what's the worse thing that happens to charous when come back from Hindia? What's the worse thing? Not jet lags and all of that. Worst thing is every connection will come by the house and they didn't even come for your mother's funeral, heh, they didn't come for your mother's funeral ceremony, heh, but they'll come there when you come back from hindia. Just in case you brought one present and came. Just in case.

The inference that Indians are greedy and only come to visit when they stand to gain something is clear. Peru infers that greed is the driving force behind the social ties in the Charou community.

The stereotypes of the frugal, miserly, greedy, corrupt Indian come across very strongly in the Charou comedy. Interestingly, this is a trope that has been prevalent in popular culture and that had defined even the passage to South Africa. Thus, this stereotype possibly goes back to the very beginning, when Tamil speaking Indians were lured into slavery on the promise of economic opportunity. Gujarati and Hindi speaking Indians arrived in South Africa as traders and not via slave trade as Tamil speaking Indians did. The reason Indians arrived in South Africa was economic – which is possibly why a large part of their identity revolves around the money. This is more so in a neoliberal post-Apartheid setting, where identity is largely based on class and wealth. Yet a tension still exists within the South African Indian community, particularly the Hindi and Tamil communities and it is largely based on class, wealth and consumption. The comedy explores these tensions by making light of situations of spending and saving. The identity of South African Indians is inextricably linked with global stereotypes of rapacious, enterprising Indians, complicated by the capitalist, post-Apartheid culture, and anxieties of consumption and aspiration. The Charou comedy explores the tension that is widely felt in the community, especially by those South African Indians who still live in townships and aspire to move up and out of their poverty.

Themes: Speed and Sound

South African Indians, young men in particular, are often associated with an obsession with cars and sound. This stems from the deep rooted political system in South African where “modes of transport were historically organised as an expression of racialized personhood” (Hansen, 2012: 178). Owning a car is seen as a signifier of wealth, upward mobility and privilege, and the “distinction between those in cars and those who are walking is one of class and entitlement” (Hansen, 2012: 178). Kistner (2015: 247) explores this in more detail:

This sequence traces a trajectory of decodings redrawing the lines of social distinction, each punctuated by particular objects of consumption signifying

specific lifestyle orientations and decisions: luxury – i.e., decidedly non-essential – food and drink items (the Uncle-Tomistic American translation of Fanon, ‘sho good eatin’, comes to mind; see Gilroy 2010: 12); and vehicles signifying freedom of movement, and movement individually initiated and embarked upon, bypassing segregated transport, transport boycotts and violence along transport routes, and giving meaning to ‘auto-mobility’ (the role of the private car, with its dizzying freedoms, in the American civil rights struggle comes to mind; see Gilroy 2010: 12). Vehicle sales, in turn, were rarefied later, once cars had conquered mass markets, by luxury trimmings and niche markets.

Here Kistner explores the consumption of cars in post-Apartheid townships as a signifier of movement and, though non-essential, cars are seen as signifiers of having ‘made it’ out of poverty. Clearly, this was not solely the case in the South African Indian communities, but in other townships too (see Jones, 2013). Sound then can also be interpreted as a means of demonstrating freedom of sound – to be able to be heard when you are moving through spaces in the car.

Within the South African Indian community there is often mention of what car a person owns or drives as this is can be a marker of one’s status. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy’s*, Jennifer does not take to Jodi travelling to campus with Prishen and expresses her concern that they allow their daughter to travel in a car that is “cheap and embarrassing”. She eventually purchases a new BMW for her daughter in an attempt to undermine Prishen and, in doing so, asserts her family’s superiority and social ranking above that of Prishen’s. Here, Prishen is outed as unworthy for his lack of ability to purchase a nice car, and he is seen by Jennifer as unsuitable. He does not ‘belong’ to her class. The BMW, along with Mercedes Benz and Golf GTI’s, are seen as the cars that South African Indians prefer and aspire to.

In the township, owning a car means one has achieved something and the car becomes an extension of the self. Thus, as Hansen (2012: 178) argues:

The free-roaming or even reckless driver is not merely a figure of defiant freedom or insubordination but can well represent an expression and affirmation of social hierarchy.

The car is also seen as a “surface(s) for creative self-expression” (Hansen, 2012: 178). The car is not only a means of getting from one place to another but also “... a highly structured form of seeing and being seen that is more akin to racialized metacommunication” (Hansen, 2012: 179).

If the car can symbolise so much, then it is natural that this nurtured a “genuine car culture” that naturally, “developed among working class men in the Indian townships” (Hansen, 2012: 180). This was one of the few freedoms allowed to Indian men in South African townships and offered them a way to express their consumption of this commodity in various ways. Sometimes this was dangerous, as Hansen (2012: 180-181) argues:

Illegal car races over the weekends on little used strips of road and parking lots became a part of an illicit and transgressive youth culture that was fuelled by dramatic injuries, drugs and alcohol, and sometimes death.

Car culture quickly became associated with the youth and sometimes also associated with illegality. However, the culture grew and soon (Hansen 2012: 181):

Working class youths began to spend large sums of money on extensively decorating vehicles and souping up engines; a fleet of spectacular-looking and spectacular sounding vehicles, which were easily recognisable as distinctly charou, cruised the township and the city over the weekends. It continues to this day, that “... young Indian men have embraced, if not fetishized, automobility as a medium of self-expression” (Hansen, 2012: 181).

When one has moved out of the township, even if one does not actively participate in the culture of “souped up” engines and painted cars, there is still a yearning to own a fast car, be seen in a, more often than not, German car and consume car-related media.

In the movie *Material*, Cassim performs a skit where he talks about car culture and Indians. He starts by discussing the establishment of a space program in India:

Cassim: But I think Indians are doing pretty well in the world. Uh, started our own space programme, which is awesome. Obviously with international Indians you know, I can't imagine a local Indian the captain of his own spaceship. Chilling there (imitates Indian) 'Space, the final frontier. (Ebrahim and Fatima shown laughing)

These are the voyages of the starship enterprise three point six litre GTI. (Aisha and Zulfa shown laughing in the audience). Mr Spock. Howzit cuzzie. Mr Spock set a course for the galaxy lambda echo nebula. Also known as Lenz. (Yusuf and Zulfa shown laughing). Seventy-five million lightyears away. What is the estimated time of travel? About fifteen minutes boss. Fifteen minutes. Just around the corner'. (Ebrahim and Fatima shown laughing). Applause of the whole theatre. Cassim bows.

Here the mention of GTI immediately associates one with an Indian trend – owning GTI's – known for their speed and agility. The joke emerges as he likens a GTI with a spaceship and then continues as he names the destination as Lenz (Lenasia). Lenasia is known as an Indian town, located in the South of Johannesburg. The stereotype of Lenasia males driving GTI's is called upon here. The joke is taken one step further, when Moosa explains that seventy-five million lightyears away would take fifteen minutes – alluding to the fact that they would drive at an immense speed.

The manner in which cars and speed are spoken about in South African Indian culture is interesting. The obsession with attaining a car links closely to a yearning for freedom and mobility, both literally and as a metaphor for social mobility and financial gain. The embellishment of the car speaks to a need for visibility and being heard (with car sound being so important). The car is seen as a way out of Charoudom but also an expression of Charoudom. It literally offers a means to travel out of the township and into spaces that otherwise would not be accessed. However, through the styling of the car, the Charou makes it known that this is a Charou's car. Identity is clearly linked with mobility in South African Indian culture, with the car being an aspirational symbol of class status.

Themes: Drinking, Drugs and Gangsterism

During Apartheid, alcoholism, drugs and gangsterism were allowed to flourish in townships in South Africa. The government was, after all, more concerned with political control than managing the abuse of substances in townships. Post-Apartheid cannot be seen as the end of suffering for those in townships. On the contrary, these problems stemming from inequality remain social issues that the government is still attempting to address 25 years post-independence. The South African Indian community, in townships in particular, is no different.

The hedonistic consumption of alcohol and drugs is something that is pervasive in Charou culture and often comes up in comedy skits.

The geopolitics of Apartheid South Africa meant that communities were largely isolated from each other. Townships had limited access to spaces of leisure and entertainment. In the early days of the formation of Chatsworth, the social implications of the establishment of these townships were already starting to show. Desai (2000: 31), for example, notes:

In the absence of social and cultural venues and the broader networks of their previous abodes, alcohol abuse increased. Suicide and divorce rates spiralled upwards. In a detailed report on 31 families carried out in 1976, the University of Durban-Westville's Department of Social Work found that alcoholism existed in 10 families, 18 experienced severe marital discord while 11 instances of child neglect were recorded.

The lack of leisure venues left residents alienated and seeking leisure from the everyday silencing of dissenting voices, the consistent de-masculinisation of male bodies during Apartheid, the despair of unemployment, inequality, and the hard labour that they endured daily. This depression led to the abuse of alcohol, drugs and other social excesses that became synonymous with township life in South Africa. These challenges still exist in the townships, with the new dispensation's market-related policies leaving the poor even more alienated than before.

According to Desai (2002: 32), the mid 1970's saw the rise of gangsterism in Chatsworth. It "coincided with the arrival of Mandrax on the illicit drug market. Bag ladies brought in the drugs from India" (Desai, 2002: 32). He further argues:

"Buttons," the street name for Mandrax, came to replace dagga as the drug of choice. With it came a more lucrative market and violent territorial battles ensued. Gruesome murders became commonplace. In the early 1980s, schoolchildren at Crossmoor Secondary came across human flesh in the school tennis court. It turned out to be the body of Tokaieye Farouk, a local gangster who had been murdered. His body had been chopped into small pieces. Then there was the call box murder. A woman was violently assaulted and stuffed in a call box. The killer was "an addict" from the area. Chatsworth was getting used to

blood. The weapons were limited to knives and bush-knives though (Desai, 2002: 32).

This violent past informed the landscape of Chatsworth and many townships in South Africa, with gangsterism and crime escalating as a response to the demand for excess in the townships. These excesses were an escape from the harsh realities and entrapments of the Apartheid government. Post-Apartheid, these realities still exist for many and the same entrapments hold townships to ransom and have allowed such violence to continue.

Harry's retelling of his experience in prison is reflective of the culture of drinking that exists within Charou culture. His conversation with Peru below:

Harry: You brought one two (alcohols?) for me?

Peru: (inaudible) You know I don't (inaudible), I spent big big bucks for this. But Harry, didn't you promise that your lips will never touch one liquor for the rest of your life? That's what you promised your missus or not? That's what you promised? Your lips, this is an expensive Johannesburg and Bloemfontein.

Harry: That big don and those muffatiyahs will be happy, this is the only thing smaller than my tie (takes the small bottle from Peru).

Peru: And you said your lips will never touch a drink ma.

Harry: Ja, I said that.

Peru: Heh.

Harry: I didn't lie.

Peru: Heh.

Harry: That's why these days, I move with my straw. (Inaudible) I'm a man of my word. You know all the bras here who are married, you'll gotta learn. Woman's Day this weekend right? Your vrou taking advantage isn't it? (Inaudible) a beer and come here isn't it? This is just an excuse to make your wife gamble. Now I'm a man of my word, meaning, I'll give my vrou a word that my lips won't touch liquor again, I don't go back on my word.

Peru: And here's a being in prison, six months you was in jail, right? Has it changed your dopping habits at all?

Harry: Being in jail?

Peru: Ja. Has it changed your drinking habits?

Harry: What you think Uncle? Think me I've cut my dopping down by half now.

Peru: You cut your drinking by half?

Harry: Ja, sachi ma, sachis, now I don't dop dash.

This conversations of the analysed comedy reveals the excess of alcohol consumption within the Charou community. Harry starts by asking Peru if he brought any alcohol back from India for him. Peru then goes on to produce a small bottle of alcohol, and explains that it was very expensive. He then reminds Harry that he had promised his wife that his "lips would not touch

alcohol” – meaning he will no longer drink alcohol. Harry insists that he has kept his word – he drinks from a straw so that his lips literally don’t have to touch alcohol. Harry then goes on to talk about his time in prison, where he learnt to cut down his drinking in half – he no longer drinks ‘dash’, an informal name for mixers – he now just drinks the alcohol neat.

First, drinking in the Charou community is seen as part of the socialised rituals of male bonding, catching up, celebrating and even mourning. It is not uncommon to see ‘boot parties’ at weddings, parties and events – where men gather around the trunk of a car and drink alcohol out of a makeshift bar created to provide alcohol at events where alcohol wouldn’t typically be served. It is also not uncommon to see men drinking separately from women. It is uncommon to see women drinking socially at events and women drinking alcohol openly is still a new phenomenon in the community. Here, Peru and Harry are enjoying a catch-up session with alcohol brought back by Peru. What is worth noting is that, in most of the Peru and Bala shows, there is always a bottle of alcohol that features as prop on the table placed between them. The recurrent scene is reflective of Peru and Bala’s shows conceptualised around the idea of two old Charou men, meeting to catch up on the happenings in their lives. This happens over a shared drink or two, or even more. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy’s*, Jennifer and Shanti’s husbands ‘escape’ the awkward situation in the wedding scene by meeting up at one such boot party. They discuss their wives feud and declare that they will not get involved in their wives politics. That this declaration is made over a shared drink enhances the trope of male bonding as only occurring over a shared drink.

Second, the price of liquor is also an important trope in Charou popular culture. Peru makes sure that Harry knows that the little bottle of alcohol he has bought for him was very expensive. Cane is the most popular choice of spirits in the Charou community. This is a spirit produced from sugarcane, which was the most accessible based on the abundance of sugar cane in the region and the very fact that many of the Charou’s ancestors worked the sugar cane fields when they arrived in Durban as labourers. Other cheap spirits such as rum and vodka are also preferred, while drinks such as whiskey and cognac are reserved for special

occasions. The price, type and brand of liquor one consumes is immediately telling of one's social standing.

Third, Peru and Harry discuss the promise Harry made to his wife. This reflects a dislike, on the part of Harry's wife, of his drinking habits and points to the fact that he may be an excessive drinker. That he manages to find a loophole around the promise is interesting. He has found a way to continue consuming alcohol without breaking his promise which demonstrates an almost desperate attempt to always be able to drink. Again, it is the wife who disapproves of the husband's drinking, just as Peru's wife had punished his drinking by not preparing a hot meal for him and leaving him to his own devices. The woman is seen as the disapproving pillar of morality, who will punish the man if he drinks. As mentioned earlier, the woman is not often seen drinking. In *Keeping up with the Kandasamy's*, Shanti and Jennifer meet at a country club to discuss plans to sabotage their kid's relationship. When Jennifer orders alcoholic drinks, Shanti initially looks on with disapproval, but consumes the alcohol when she gets stressed.

Harry later suggests that the Russian economy collapsed after he stopped drinking Vodka – one of Russia's biggest exports – indicating that he drinks copious amounts of vodka. He says that he was caught four days after being released from prison for driving under the influence, citing a confusion about the laws of limits of drinking and driving and those of customs:

Harry: One thousand prisoner's uncle. Only thing you get is milk. Whole morning, every morning after 10 'o clock, we spend twenty minutes rubbing and burping each other. And, in fact, I think that two muffatiyahs used to smaaak that part the best. Because why to speak a word of lie right, you know me for six months in jail, I stopped drinking (cane). I never have choice. I stopped drinking vodka. Oh, vodka. You saw that happened the Russian economy after I stopped drinking vodka for six months. The whole Russian economy collapsed.

Peru: I heard you got four (fines) for driving yesterday? Drinking and driving.

Harry: What a story Uncle. What a story. You thought that *carrols* was corrupt? Must check that, the metro police. (Inaudible) yesterday for drinking and driving. I'm only out for four days now. They don't even take leniency right. I chuned the ou look here not my fault. (Inaudible) I'm confused. Can't remember one litre of

liquor, is that the amount you allowed legally for drinking and driving? Or is that the amount you allowed to get duty free from customs? I couldn't remember.

The level of conspicuous consumption of alcohol is clear. Harry, as a representative of the Charou community, credits the collapse of the Russian economy to him being unable to consume vodka for six months. This retelling of conspicuous consumption also explores the politics of freedom and consumption. The consumption of liquor is allowed outside of prison, he is a free man, and so he will consume excessively because he can and he is free to do so. This metaphor is important. It speaks to a broader trend of conspicuous consumption in post-Apartheid South Africa as being associated with freedom: the freedom of people becomes inextricably linked to the freedom to consume.

Conclusion to the Chapter

This chapter has attempted to discuss various ways in which the production and discourses of comedy can be viewed through the lens of consumption. This lens offers solid grounding from which to explore comedy because, as Dodson (2000: 412) explains:

...as leisure and culture become ever more drawn into the economic realm of consumption, the boundaries between work and leisure, economic and cultural, public and private, if not entirely removed, are at least destabilized. This is true not just conceptually and functionally but also spatially as the distinctions between the workplace and home, public and private space, local and foreign, become blurred.

This is true of every aspect of post-Apartheid South Africa, where neoliberal and market forces shape social, economic and even personal lives. This is seen in the comedy where entertainment and leisure are seen as commodities to be consumed. This is a normal trope in post-colonial discourse and it "appropriates the cultural surplus, whether as language, genre, form, style or theory itself, and redistributes it as excess" (Ashcroft, 1994: 35).

Up until 1994, South Africa was isolated from developments in leisure and consumption, both "materially and intellectually" and "high levels of unemployment and poverty might make a focus on leisure and consumption seem an irrelevant indulgence" (Dodson, 2000: 413). But, consumption is very relevant to South Africa in a neoliberal post-Apartheid context. It offers

a lens through which we can see how identities are performed through consumption. As Ritzer (in Dodson, 2000: 413) notes of Baudrillard:

Baudrillard seeks to extend consumption from goods not only to services, but to virtually everything else. In his view, 'anything can become a consumer object'. As a result, 'consumption is laying hold of the whole of life'. What this communicates is that consumption has been extended to all culture; we are witnessing the commodification of culture.

The image of the Charou can be seen as a perfect example of this. Not only is Charou culture largely defined by a culture of consumption of liquor and drugs, cars and sound, a certain type of clothing and 'bling', and consumptions of entertainment like low grade Bollywood, Chutney music and, of course, comedy but Charou culture is itself becoming a commodity for consumption (Dodson, 2000: 413).

Charous can be seen as "non-consumers", as "those whom the consumption-driven economy excludes, marginalises or displaces" (Dodson, 2000: 414). This chapter attempted to explore that section of the population who, while largely marginalised due their small number, managed to create a culture which melds the consumption of products from the mystical east with consumption in a postcolonial, post-Apartheid township, and results in a culture unique to South Africa and apart from the rest of the world.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

My initial interest in this project was sparked by the rampant rise of comedic acts in the South African Indian community. At the time of writing, the industry continues to grow, with many new comedians and acts not included in this project beginning their careers. This rise means that there is *something* transpiring in the South African Indian community that requires members of the community to express their identities through this form. This concluding chapter begins with a discussion of how the findings discussed in the chapters preceding relate to the theory and methodologies I have outlined. Second, I consider how these findings relate to gaps identified in the literature review and how this work contributes towards filling those gaps. I will explore what this means for existing research and how this work will fit into a growing body of work in cultural studies. To conclude, I directly address and answer the research questions, followed by a discussion on the significance and implications of my findings. I continue to discuss the contribution this research project has made, ending with a critique of this work, and possibilities for further research that could stem from this.

The use of comedy, as discussed in my literature review, is common amongst marginalised groups, who use the form as a means of exploring the marginal experience. The speaking back to power often occurs in the form of a joke, as jokes are a medium whereby one can freely express identity without fear of retribution, because whatever is said, is said 'in jest'. This project has considered humour as the tool through which South African Indians express their identity. Much like Hall (2014) discusses Afro-Caribbean cinema, a form of popular culture, as a form of expression of creolised identities in the postcolony, so too this project considered the cultural identity of South African Indians in post-Apartheid South Africa. The medium of comedy, while important, is not as central to the project as the thematic discourses of the comedy. The humour is certainly there and it speaks volumes about the cultural life of South African Indians, who are attempting to negotiate what it means to be Indian and South African. It is the themes that these comedians are preoccupied with and use to articulate their unique South African Indian identities that are interesting to this project.

The themes outlined in the methodology all speak volumes about a community that is yearning to connect with an ancient homeland through the expression of cultural symbols that reflect *Indianness*. This happens in contrast with the assertions made by many South African Indians that they are not a diaspora of India and have fully assimilated to South African culture. However, it becomes apparent that there certainly is a yearning to express a unique identity by appropriating and amalgamating elements of Indian culture to the South African context. This amalgamation happens to varying degrees.

Inserting the term “Not all Coolies are the same” into the title of the project served to reiterate the idea that not all Indians in post-Apartheid South Africa are the same. They have varied experiences and histories of migration, religion, language, class, and even experienced Apartheid in different ways. The different ways in which the comedians deal with Indianness is revealing of this difference. Much of this difference is based on the history of the migration to South Africa. The descendants of indentured labourers experience South African Indianness in a very different way than those of passenger Indians. Here, class and religion play a large role in how Indian culture was preserved and disseminated, and how it continues to be experienced in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Riaad Moosa’s comedy, for example, has strong traditional undertones and the trope of memory and preservation of Muslim culture is strong. The tension between tradition and modernity, and the importance of religion in his life and the lives of many Muslims in South Africa, is reflective of a past that held strong beliefs about the maintenance of culture. This seems to be a common trope, especially amongst passenger Indians of a ‘higher’ class, for whom the continued maintenance and success of ‘home’ country traditions is paramount. The presence of India (like Hall’s *presence Africaine*) is omnipresent and the yearning to ‘return’ to home, albeit in the metaphorical sense, is strong. Within this segment of the population, the links to India were never ‘cut’ completely and passenger Indians, who acquired wealth and success, would have access to routes and roots within India.

In stark contrast, the comedy from the townships, where indentured labourers set their roots, is more interested in the excessive, the vulgar, and the continued pursuit of material wealth. Here, the comedy reflects the *presence European*. Where the identity of Indians was stripped (sometimes literally) through the passage to South Africa, essentialised and, like Said's orientalism, exoticized and belittled. This, combined with the freedoms of democracy, the neo-liberal market economy and the struggles of township living, has created unique senses of self that are portrayed in the comedy.

It is clear from the comedy, that there is a stark difference in the way in which communities of passenger Indian descent and communities of indentured Indian descent present themselves. Communities of passenger Indian descent are obsessively concerned with the maintenance and preservation of culture and the discourses of religion, food and other cultural characteristics which are used as markers of identity. Communities of indentured Indian descent are more concerned with upward mobility, finding a 'way out' of township life, styling themselves as exotic, and playing into stereotypes of the rapacious Indian. The distance of the homeland is further in this community than the other.

For all their differences, the two communities have one thing in common: the deep-rooted entrenchment of patriarchal values that is revealed in the comedy from both communities. The fact that there are so few female South African Indian comedians is reflective of the lack of diversity in this regard. Interestingly, while patterns of patriarchy are evident in comedy from both passenger and indentured descendent communities, they occur in different ways. In comedy from passenger Indians, patriarchy is rendered in more subtle ways, with the foregrounding of men, the absence of women in spaces such as business, the passing on of gendered roles through tradition, and the subtle shaming of women. Here, tradition is central to the patriarchal notions of women as upholders of family values and of morality, with women who do not ascribe to the notions of what it means to be an Indian woman being shamed. Patriarchal notions in indentured descendant comedy are less subtle, with misogynistic jokes foregrounding much of the comedy. Sex and sexuality are often crassly used to demonstrate masculinity and demean women. Heteronormativity is lauded and

homosexuality is lampooned in the most homophobic manner. In this comedy, heterosexual men rule, a reflection of the communities they represent; their wives are 'dragons' and their mistresses sweet, they demand respect, and are entitled to flaunt their sexual prowess. The reactions to homosexuality in this comedy demonstrate a strong homophobic sentiment among this group.

Having examined the comedic texts and explored discourses in the texts, it becomes apparent that South African Indians are not a homogenous group yearning for their homeland. Rather, they are groups that experienced migration in very different ways to the global Indian diaspora, whom experience being part of a diaspora through an East/West, South/North dichotomy as opposed to the 'South/South' migration of Indians. Within South Africa, the ravages of Apartheid isolated this group from other South Africans, making them feel a sense of distance and marginality to other groups. They are also a group divided internally by the very basic incident of *how* they arrived in South Africa, and the difference between passenger and indentured Indians is mainly that of class.

I have discussed the major differences and similarities I found within the comedy from the community. Adopting a thematic content analysis and using a critical discourse analysis approach to analyse the findings allowed for a thorough understanding of what the major themes were and how they related to history, excess and gender. Through reading the transcripts, the major discourse strands were evident and guided the rest of the project. The stark differences between the manners in which the different comedians presented their comedy hinted at differences in class and interests between passenger and indentured Indian descendants.

The literature reviewed shows significant gaps in the understanding of identity in post-Apartheid South Africa. The major gap identified in current writings was the lack of research done on the complexities of identity within the South African Indian community. The research that does exist fails to explore that within the community, there are communities of

difference based on linguistic, class, geographical location and other boundaries. The major drawback of much of the current South African Indian research, is the grouping of these identities under the umbrella term “Indian” and assuming that all South African Indians experience post-Apartheid South Africa in the same way. This project has attempted to problematise this by exploring identities within the different groups, and identifying the two distinct groups which are differentiated through their ancestor’s passage to South Africa as a starting point.

Second, the selection of comedy as medium was stumbled upon by happenstance. In the early conceptualisation of the project, the initial interest was in exploring how South African Indians perform their identity through media in South Africa. As mentioned, it became apparent that the most popular choice for South African Indians was the genre of comedy. An examination of the literature revealed a glaring gap in the research as there was little research conducted on popular media from this small community. This research fills that gap and contributes to a growing field of research in comedy.

The findings discussed in the three analytical chapters offer various insights into the field of cultural studies and media. First, the project offers insight into how cultures in a south/south diaspora can be read. Here, the common mistake of essentialising cultures and assuming their homogeneity can be avoided. Second, the work offers insight into post-Apartheid culture and comedy as tools for negotiating identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa. The power of patriarchy and the way it influences the representation of women, masculinity, femininity and homosexuality in light of a patriarchal tradition are also discussed. This study has proven that patriarchal values span generations and are exacerbated further by living within the parameters of a patriarchal state. Interestingly, class and status contribute to the ways in which patriarchy is expressed and portrayed, with indentured descendent comedy being more openly misogynistic and passenger descendent comedy subtler in the ways in which they portray women and sexuality.

There are various ways in which comedy is used to articulate a uniquely South African Indian identity. The use of stereotypes in the comedy are a given, as comedy relies on stereotypes to ensure relevance. However, it is the manner in which these stereotypes are portrayed that is relevant and reveals differences within the communities. That South African Indians see themselves as different from other Indians in the diaspora, that they see themselves as different from other South Africans and that they acknowledge differences amongst themselves has been established. The comedy proves that this difference is articulated in the manner in which South African Indians engage with these stereotypes: through engaging with the memory of an ancient culture; grappling with the challenges of neoliberalism and democracy; and also through maintaining traditional patriarchal norms that were taught by both Indian and South African value systems.

It is interesting to note that the majority of comedy comes out of the descendants of indentured labour. The association of comedy with 'low' culture may have something to do with this trend – with 'higher' class Indians considering comedy low brow. This sentiment is expressed in the *Material* movie. That Riaad Moosa has been able to achieve such popularity proves contrary to the belief that comedy is not a viable form of culture, and that even Indians of a higher class enjoy humour. Still, it is uncommon for passenger Indian descendants to involve themselves with comedy.

A second interesting tendency worth noting is the lack of female comedians in the industry. At the time of writing, many South African Indian women had ventured into the industry, but not many have achieved the same commercial success as men in the field. The comedy also reveals glaring misogyny in the content, and women comedians contribute to this through an internalised misogyny masked by 'tradition'. Patriarchal systems spanning generations and passed down through both Indian and South African culture, are the reason for the paucity of female South African Indian comedians and the lack of regard to women in comedy.

The themes in the comedy reveal a great deal about the ways in which South African Indians imagine themselves in post-Apartheid South Africa. While the common sentiment is that South African Indians see themselves as South African first and in the truest sense of the word, the themes in the comedy reflect a yearning to connect with an ancient culture that comes from the “homeland”. This yearning reveals that South African Indians do, in fact, feel a sense of displacement and discord with their ‘host’ country, which was further exacerbated by the Apartheid regime. Post-Apartheid, South African Indians are finding themselves struggling to assimilate to the newness of integration and seem to negotiate this by holding on to cultural markers adopted from their home country. The themes of food, style, weddings and religion are most telling of this trend.

In order to answer the main research questions, I first consider who from within the South African Indian community, is involved in the production of the comedy. The comedy is performed mainly by men of various communities, but prevalently of indentured labour descent. That one scarcely finds females comedians, not only in the South African Indian comedy scene, but the South African comedy scene itself, speaks to issues of patriarchy that still exist in a country with one of the most comprehensive constitutions in the world. The informal nature of the industry often means that access to material from other comedians are scarce and hard to come by, thus allowing for only a small amount of comedy that has managed to achieve commercial success to be accessed for interpretation. The lack of diversity in the comedy scene thus means that only a few narratives of the South African Indian experience are being portrayed and this feeds into the stereotyping and essentialising of South African Indian identities.

I also considered the themes that the comedy covered. It became apparent, through the reading of the transcripts, that the most common themes in the comedy were food, weddings, Bollywood, cars and sound, clothing and dress, religion, gender (specifically, marriage and wives), money and homosexuality. Along with these themes, it became apparent that the three common discourse strands that stood out were that of memory and remembering culture, excess in the form of conspicuous consumption, and the highly

gendered nature of the comedy. The themes seemed to be negotiating identity in any one of these three ways. Food, religion and dress were specifically fashioned around the concept of memory. Money, dress, cars and sound, and weddings were spoken of in terms of their excessiveness. Gender and homosexuality were often portrayed through the lens of patriarchy and tradition. These themes are not limited to the three distinct categories and could apply to two or more categories. The project also does not claim that these are the only three discourses through which South African Indians claim their identity. These are merely the most common themes.

In order to get a better understanding of the field at large, I considered what the themes identified reveal about the community. The first notable thing about the themes is that they do assert Indian identity as central to the South African Indian experience. Be it through the consumption of Bollywood and Indian clothing, or through the expression of religiosity and discussions of food as cultural memory; there is a strong link to the home country that still exists. However, isolation from the home country for some of the community, meant that these markers evolved and became markers of South African Indian identity that is different from the Indian diaspora identity. For example, while links to Indian roots in food are made in terms of spice and flavour, the types of food, like bunny-chow and some curries, are unique to South Africa. The way the comedians interact with the themes also reveal a lot about the differences within the community. The descendants of passenger Indians (who maintained contact with the home country throughout Apartheid) are more concerned with the history and memory of the homeland and the preservation of culture; whereas descendants of indentured labour are more distanced from 'home'. The most common theme between these two groups was that of patriarchy and the influence of patriarchy as 'tradition' on masculinity, femininity and sexuality.

I continue this discussion by briefly considering the main research question of this thesis – which aimed to consider how Indians in South Africa in a postcolonial age, have appropriated comedic performances in order to construct and validate their identities and explore anxieties of belonging to a unique South African Indian identity, with no attempt to reconnect with

India. The initial assumption of this study was that South African Indians do not have any inclination to reconnect with India as a 'motherland'. The assumption was made through the various common displays and assertions of 'South Africanness' and the perceived rejection of the label 'Indian'. However, the comedy revealed that there is a yearning for connection to the ancient culture, though there is no need to physically return home. The attempt to validate a unique Indian identity is glaring. This can be said to be a remnant of Apartheid culture, where communities were separated and isolated and this led to the maintenance of 'home' culture as opposed to the assimilation of host culture. Thus, adjusting to a 'new' South Africa has been difficult. There is a general sense of displacement, with South African Indians attempting to assert belonging in this sphere.

The construction of identity has been considered in the theoretical framework, and it has been reiterated that identities are complicated further within diasporic communities. Identity, in the case of South African Indians, is constructed around a series of cultural markers which assert 'Indianness'. This could be food, clothing, religion, language and cultural traditions. The collective memory of Indian culture deems these to be markers of allegiance to South African Indian culture and allow for South African Indians to negotiate their identities through the performance of these stereotypes. The stereotypes are used in different ways and to varying degrees by different comedians from different groups in the community. Religion, for example, is discussed with more reverence and fervour by Riaad Moosa, than other comedians. This reflects the centrality of religion in the Gujarati Indian community of passenger descent.

The first sub-question considered: To what extent do performances of comedy by South African Indians explore the memory of 'home' in an attempt to articulate identity and cement belonging? The memory of home is invoked most strongly through the trope of food in the community. Spice becomes a route for invoking memories of belonging to a place, time and community. The tension between traditional notions of religion (practised more easily during Apartheid) and the modern, post-Apartheid influence on religion suggest a deeper tension between generations; with older people nostalgically holding on to an Apartheid utopia under

the guise of maintaining religion. This tension signifies the feelings of displacement and 'not belonging' experienced by South African Indians. Clothing and Bollywood are symbols of asserting identity and belonging to Indian culture, but they circulate in very specific social and spatial situations, largely hidden from the wider South African community. The performances of comedy explore the memory of home through these tropes, and reveal a nostalgic yearning for belonging, which was felt more strongly during the isolation of communities during Apartheid, and a displacement of this belonging as South African Indians are becoming increasingly incorporated into wider South African culture.

For my second sub-question I considered: To what extent do traditional gendered notions of identity impact on the performances of identity and validate belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa? Notions of post-Apartheid nationhood have been largely considered along gendered lines. The inheritance of patriarchal culture from both India and Apartheid South Africa, placed women as the bearers of culture and tradition. Women who do not ascribe to patriarchal norms, along with people of alternative sexualities and genders, are othered and seen as not belonging to the community. Men are also expected to ascribe to patriarchal notions of masculinity and their identity as a 'man' revolves around controlling their women and households, achieving success in the workplace, and demonstrating sexual prowess and virility. Men who do not ascribe are also othered. The analysis also found that the comedians in the community still held deeply homophobic sentiments and alternative sexualities were often joked about in ways that demonstrated homophobia. In this analysis, identity and belonging are inextricably linked to the maintenance of patriarchal culture and traditional gender roles. The community, at large, has not adjusted to 'modern' notions of gender roles and sexuality.

The third research question I consider is: To what extent have global, neoliberal and capitalist notions of consumption impacted on local performances of identity and belonging in post-Apartheid South Africa? Consumption is considered in this question as a site for the projection of identity and, in turn, an affirmation of belonging. Here I considered how the comedy shows themselves were projected as sites for conspicuous consumption through the exaggerated

notions of Charou culture. I attempted to theorise the image of the Charou as a uniquely South African identity, centred on notions of conspicuous consumption, excess and aspiration. I also considered themes within the South African Indian comedy that portrayed South African Indians as mascots for conspicuous consumption through the stereotypes of the rapacious Indian, the love of cars and sound, and the consumption of alcohol and drugs in Indian townships. The stereotype of the money hungry Indian has proliferated in recent years, with prominent political scandals fuelling the fire. At the same time, a large portion of township dwelling Indians are revelling in the freedom of consumption offered in post-Apartheid South Africa. The ability to buy freedom of movement and voice/sound through purchasing cars, and the freedom of consuming whatever liquor one wants, etc. has created a culture of conspicuous consumption upon which South African Indians paint their identities. Through common sites of consumption, South African Indians strive to maintain belonging to their communities.

The above findings that I have outlined will have far reaching implications. First and most importantly, the project has proven that there is a need to move away from essentialising communities and cultures into 'boxes' and assuming that they all possess the same cultural traits. It is clear from an examination of the South African Indian community, that more attention needs to be paid to the differences within the community and that the linguistic, class, religious, geographical and gender differences reflect different experiences of being South African Indian. Second, there needs to be more focus on popular culture as a medium of cultural expression; where performances of 'low' culture reveal deep seated cultural ideals within the communities they represent. Third, looking at culture through a multi-disciplinary lens allows for one to explore the power relations that inform culture. Neo-liberalism, as an economic policy, has greatly influenced the manner in which township Indians portray themselves. Apartheid, as a political policy, influenced the maintenance and preservation (and loss) of traditional cultures from the homeland. Considering the context of post-Apartheid South Africa is important, and a critical discourse analysis is the ideal tool to use in the examination of cultures in a specific context.

This study contributes to the wider field of research on the Indian diaspora worldwide. It also, importantly, contributes to the small field of research on the South African Indian community. Works on post-Apartheid South Africa have often been conducted on the black/white scale and this work contributes to the field of research on the 'in-between' cultures and the impact of Apartheid on these communities. The application of consumption studies to the study of culture is also fairly novel in the field of diaspora studies, and studying consumption patterns of members of the diaspora promises to offer insightful information on how consumption reflects links to the imagined homeland. Memory has long been used in the consideration of diaspora and this project contributes in some way to growing research in this field. Finally, gender and patriarchy in diaspora studies have also been considered but there is little research that has been conducted on gender in the South African Indian community who, under the double dose of patriarchy, consider tradition as gendered.

No study is without limitations. The first major limitation of this study was the lack of access to comedic material from a wide range of comedians in the field. The major comedians were chosen due to the ease of access to their material, but there is still a large, growing field of new comedians performing in the field. The study also failed to consider politics as influencing the South African Indians, and this could be a possibility for further research. Further research may be extended to studies of live comedy shows (if permission is granted), and an extension on gender in comedy (through accessing more female comedians). At the time of writing, new films from the South African Indian community had been released, opening up many new research possibilities.

This project has considered the topic 'Not all coolies are the same: South African Indians and the performance of comedy in articulating identity in post- Apartheid South Africa'. The use of comedy as a form of cultural expression of South African Indian identity was considered. This small community in South Africa has been part of the country for many years, and lived through brutal regimes of colonisation and Apartheid. They consider South Africa as home and reject the assertion that they are a diaspora of India. Yet, for all the nationalism they hold for South Africa, there is still a strong assertion of Indian identity, hinting at a yearning for

connection to the homeland. Within the community, the various divisions based on how Indians arrived to South Africa (passenger versus indentured labourer), location, language, religion etc. are unseen from the outside, and South African Indians try hard to assert these differences and maintain a united “Indian” identity at the same time. Bonding over stereotypes is the common solution, but the manner in which comedians interact with these stereotypes reveals these differences. The notions of cultural memory, consumption and patriarchy contribute effective conceptualisations through which this community can be explored. This research serves to contribute to a small, but growing, field of research on South African Indian identity in post-Apartheid South Africa.

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