

Self-Representations of Cultural Identity in South African Indian Filmmaking, 2004 – 2017

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has neither been submitted before to any other degree or examination at any other University, nor prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body or organisation or person outside the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Temara Vekash Prem', written over a vertical line.

Abstract

In a post-apartheid context, the filmmaking practices of South African Indian diasporic communities serves as a fertile ground for examining complexities of cinematic representation of identity negotiations and cultural expression. This research interrogates the extent to which cinematic self-representation in three South African Indian films—*Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017)—enables a visibility of complex heterogenous representations of cultural identity. Employing a combination of contextual and textual analysis, the study conducts a detailed critical analysis inspecting how these films navigate between cultural homogenisation and heterogeneous identity constructions and representations. The research finds that cultural specificity is exhibited in the films to limited degrees while more monolithic representations do serve to unify South African Indian experiences while also extending accessibility to external audiences. The extent to which these films manage to create visibility of the complex identities is intricately tied to varying modes of production and distribution, revealing both the opportunities and constraints in the ongoing project of cinematic self-representation for South African Indian communities. This study contributes to the underexamined field of South African Indian film scholarship, as well as broader discourses of postcolonial filmmaking by re-interpreting Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1994) as complicated by the specificities of 'place'. Emerging from the findings, an analytic framework of 'Prismatic Analysis' is conceptualised and proposed as a focused framework within postcolonial film studies that captures the complex and hybrid nature of postcolonial diasporic communities.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the seminal scholarship of Tomaselli (1989), the apartheid regime in South Africa, characterised by its rigid racial segregation and oppressive policies, significantly curtailed opportunities for representation in the arts for non-white ethnic groups. Film content was controlled and censored by the apartheid government, limiting the portrayal of various social realities and ideologies. The stringent regulations and the profound impact of these restrictions were evident, as state control over the media and the arts served as a means to maintain social and political hegemony (Tomaselli, 1989).

Following this period, the transition to democracy marked a significant shift in South Africa's arts industries, with the subsequent call for 'unity in diversity' aiming to reflect the country's diversity through various forms of cultural expression. The newfound government encouraged an inclusive national discourse (Moodley, 2015). In this context, the arts, particularly cinema, continue to function as a significant medium in the exploration of the nation's multicultural landscapes (Saks, 2010).

The thematic diversity and aesthetic experimentation characterised by post-apartheid South African cinema are highlighted by scholars such as Botha (2012), Shepperson and Tomaselli (2000), and Ebrahim (2018). Emerging film content included anti-apartheid narratives as well as a wider range of themes, such as the complexity of identity, social dynamics, and cultural nuances (Botha, 2012). Remarking upon the variety of filmmaking practices in South Africa, Ebrahim (2018) highlights the need for a polycentric approach to understanding South African cinema, moving beyond a nationalistic focus. This perspective acknowledges the multifaceted nature of filmmaking practices in South Africa, where narratives are increasingly contributing to the diversity of cultural expression.

Amidst this diverse representation, filmmaking practices from South African Indian communities represent a unique facet of cultural expression. These cinematic contributions provide an essential perspective on the nation's complex identity while also presenting critical insights into the experiences of South African Indian communities. However, despite its importance, South African Indian filmmaking remains an underrepresented subject in academic scholarship. The need for a more comprehensive exploration of these filmmaking practices is therefore foregrounded to enrich our understanding of the country's film industries and to provide insight into the cultural and social dynamics of its distinct communities.

Additionally, the ethnic group referred to as 'South African Indians' is, in itself, constituted of communities that are heterogeneous in religion, culture, and ethno-linguistic heritages. This heterogeneity is often overshadowed by the broad ethnic categorisation historically perpetuated by colonial and apartheid governments. Such categorisations, while offering a form of identity, oversimplify the complexities of identities within South African Indian communities. These oversimplifications often manifest as stereotypes characterising South African Indians through external representations in media (Kumar, 2015).

This reality underscores the significance of scholarship focused on the self-representation of minority communities, particularly South African Indians, in media and the arts. Such research is key in challenging prevailing stereotypes and enabling a nuanced understanding of the communities' narratives and experiences. With a focus on heterogeneity within the self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking, this study contributes to this area of scholarship. The scope, rationale, and background of the study are therefore outlined in the following sections of the introductory chapter.

Scope of Research and Rationale

This research analyses the cinematic self-representations of cultural identity encoded in three South African Indian film narratives produced in KwaZulu-Natal from the period of 2004 to 2017, with the aim of determining whether self-representation in South

African Indian filmmaking is enabling visibility of complex, heterogeneous representations of cultural identities typically designated as 'Indian'.

In the context of this research, 'heterogeneous representations' refers to the multifaceted portrayals of South African Indian identities in film productions. Rather than adhering to a singular, monolithic understanding of what it means to be South African Indian, heterogeneous representations engage with the complexities defining these communities. They move beyond reductive stereotypes or familiar tropes to incorporate elements that reflect the unique cultural, historical, and social realities of South African Indians. This includes, but is not limited to, the incorporation of diverse religious practices, alternative family structures, and localised cultural references. Such heterogeneity serves to challenge and disrupt any singular narrative about the community, thus allowing for a more nuanced understanding of South African Indian identities. This research also refers to the subject demographic group of South Africans of South Asian descent as South African 'Indians', as the term is commonly used in today's democratic Republic of South Africa.

In achieving this overall aim, the following research questions and/or objectives are addressed within the organised chapters of the study:

- a) determining and comparing the visibility of these cinematic self-representations to localised and external audiences through an examination of the modes of production and distribution of each film.
- a) what notions of identity are held by the characters and family units presented in the three films in order to determine the breadth of heterogeneity of this representation, by looking at the depicted social and family dynamics?
- b) Lastly, identifying and analysing the depicted aesthetic socio-cultural markers in each film (focusing on costume and styling, art direction and character performance in scenes within the home or depicting cultural rituals).

The three sample films produced by South African Indian directors, featuring South African Indian narratives from 2004 to 2017 for the comparative analysis, are *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better for Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*

(2017). The chosen sample of films for analysis share a locale of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, the primary region where South Asian populations were contracted for indenture by the British colonial powers and where subsequent generations developed within the 'Indian' townships established under the 1950 Group Areas Act during apartheid. In the aims of addressing self-representation within South African Indian filmmaking, utilising films set and produced within the same locale, and therefore with shared historical contexts, allows a focus on the analysis of the heterogeneity of the cultural identities depicted within the region, also acknowledging the historical climates that may have influenced change. This study looks at feature-length fiction film productions, and therefore short films, series, and documentaries are excluded.

After the first democratic elections in 1994 saw an end to apartheid policies, a search for a new national identity through the ideology of 'unity in diversity' was promoted by the state. Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared South Africa a "Rainbow Nation" of cultural and ethnic diversity (Moodley, 2015: 123), and arts and culture were promoted by the government as an idealistic means of cultural expression and recuperation of the diverse previously disadvantaged ethnic groups (Saks, 2010).

Now is our time to sing, to dance, to paint and to create. This is our right as citizens of South Africa. There is so much to look forward to, and so much work to be done. I trust we can do this as a united community with a common goal in mind (Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, 1996).

Legislation and proclamations from the state, echoing the above excerpt from the 'White Paper on Arts' (Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, 1996), promised a cultural renaissance for South Africa – albeit idealistically, and with insufficient existing infrastructure (Saks, 2010). Furthermore, the government's recognition of diversity within the 'Rainbow Nation' included 'Indians' as an accepted racial category, despite the homogenising qualities of the term, thereby subsuming distinct cultural, religious, and linguistic identities inherent within South African Indian communities. This categorisation, while offering a form of visibility and political

recognition, simultaneously oversimplifies the diverse individual and collective experiences of these communities.

Representations in media and journalism often depict Indians as a general and stereotyped identity which “sometimes takes the form of accents, dress, cars, foodways, or traditional family values, as recently evidenced in the soap opera *Isidingo*” (Kumar, 2015: 124). Topics such as racial categorisation, homogenisation, and societal stereotypes, among others, layer the discourses and notions of South African Indian identity. A particularly poignant contribution by Pillay (2015) included an interview with a youth discussing his perceptions of identity versus the identity the state has prescribed to him. He says, “I am what you say I am” (Pillay, 2015: 120), inferring that this category and all its associations are tied to his existence in South Africa, whether or not he personally identifies with it or feels represented by it. Focusing on cinema as a platform of representation, this research aims to centralise South African Indian filmmaking regarding its potential to depict heterogeneity in its communities’ cultural identities, rather than exploring self-representation as a response, or as a comparison, to established depictions and representation by others.

Hall (1989) identifies cinema as an ideal means for the exploration of cultural identity. Cheung and Fleming (2010: 3) present the perspective of cinema as a cultural product through which the filmmakers’ ideologies are encoded and projected, and through which “the world communicates itself to itself”. Given the fairly recent transition from apartheid to democracy and the subsequent emergence of film representations, South African Indian filmmaking can be said to be emerging into this dialogue in which the “world communicates itself to itself”.

As discussed within the context of postcolonial communities, self-representation is a means by which marginalised voices can achieve visibility, whether to localised or external audiences. Hall (1989), citing Fanon’s (1963) discussion on the nature of recovering identity, as well as Derrida’s concept of *différance* and deferred meaning, refers to cultural identity as something not fixed, but rather constantly evolving. Here, filmmaking is presented as a mode of representation “able to constitute us as new kinds

of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are” (Hall, 1989: 80). Hall posits that filmmaking goes beyond mere depiction; it actively constitutes identities. This suggests that cinema has the power to influence how individuals and communities perceive themselves, thereby enabling self-discovery and the articulation of identity.

Cinema, as a recording-based medium, inherently captures and preserves expressions and narratives, thereby fixing representations in time. Paradoxically, while cinema archives these snapshots of time, it also may serve a role in the dynamic construction of identities. As Hall (1989) suggests, cinema is not merely a reflective medium but an active participant in the constitution of new subjectivities. It becomes a canvas upon which identities are represented but also explored, questioned, and reimagined. In this context, cinema transcends its role in fixing representations in time; it becomes a catalyst for ongoing identity formation, continuously shaping narratives while reflecting the ever-evolving nature of human self-understanding and cultural expression.

Instances of South African Indian film production emerged only in 2004, ten years into South Africa being a democratic republic, initially as low-budget straight-to-DVD films shot on video cameras for specific local communities (Lotter, 2010). Since its emergence, the release of South African Indian-centred narratives has increased on various platforms, including short films such as *Cane/Cain* (2011) directed by Jordache Ellapen, and feature films such as *Deep End* (2018) directed by Eubulus Timothy, *Kings of Mulberry Street* (2019) directed by Judy Naidoo, and *3 Days to Go* (2019) from director Bianca Isaac. Film productions have screened in national theatres, national and international film festivals, and have further been accessed through different technologies such as subscription-based online streaming platforms (the relevance of the latter becomes increasingly pertinent as the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures globally reshape audiences’ parameters of access to media and entertainment).

Despite the growing presence of cinematic self-representations centred around this ethnic group, South African Indian film production remains an underrepresented subcategory of scholarship. More represented is scholarship on the effects of Bollywood and Indian cinema on South African Indian notions of cultural identity and South

African consumption of such cinemas, which have been discussed in the investigations of scholars such as Hansen (2005), Ebrahim (2008), Lotter (2010), and Boshoff (2011). This research addresses this by offering a unique focus on the underexamined area of South African Indian filmmaking practices, thereby also enriching existing debates on cinematic representations of identity formation and postcolonial filmmaking, and creating new pathways for future scholarly investigation.

Topics of identity and representation, as well as their relationships to cinema, remain complicated and evolving as discourses speaking to different facets of cinema enter the conversation – now not only in commercial cinemas but also that of localised cinemas, the peripheries, and marginalised voices. The work of filmmakers from the South African Indian communities presents a potentially intriguing reflection of culture and identity, particularly as postcolonial demographic groups exploring cinema after the apartheid era.

This research addresses a critical gap in existing scholarly discussions by focusing on South African Indian filmmaking as a vehicle for complex self-representation. It navigates the intricate terrain between homogenised and heterogeneous representations, providing new insights into the complexities of analysing South African Indian film narratives as cultural expressions of a postcolonial diaspora.

In addressing this gap, the concept of 'Prismatic Analysis' is introduced to metaphorically represent not only the diversity and complexity of identities within the cinematic representations but also the multifaceted nature of the filmmaking itself—including modes of production, distribution, and reception. Like white light passing through a prism to reveal a spectrum of colours, Prismatic Analysis elucidates various socio-cultural, historical, and economic elements that influence postcolonial cinematic expression. This analogy highlights how singular narratives in film can reveal complex interplays of elements when examined closely, thereby illustrating the multidimensional analysis required to understand these narratives fully.

Developed into an analytical framework in Chapter Six, the components of Prismatic Analysis emerge from the analytical chapters. Enabled through the methodology comprising a multi-criteria matrix (detailed further in Chapter Two), this approach facilitates an in-depth analysis of different depicted facets of South African Indian filmmaking, including family dynamics, social roles, cultural rituals, and the systematic uncovering of complex narratives of identity negotiation. These representations are shaped by both external influences and local specificities and are informed by the diverse modes of production and distribution that characterise the filmmaking. The methodology's suitability for breaking down complex topics into their constituent parts highlights the multidimensionality of analysis required, and its synthesis with Prismatic Analysis proves valuable in dissecting and understanding the diverse and intricate layers within the narratives of South African Indian cinematic self-representations.

By first examining the historical context from which these narratives emerge, a comprehensive understanding of these communities' self-representations can be gained, as canvassed in the next section.

Historical Trajectory of South African Indians

Indian-descended communities in South Africa have undergone many significant changes with regards to social, cultural, and religious identities (Hansen, 2000) since the onset of colonialism under Dutch and British hegemonic authority in 1652, transitioning into the era of apartheid in 1948 until 1994, and further into newfound liberties in the post-apartheid era.

Although evidence of forced migration of Indians to South Africa exists from two centuries before the arrival of indentured labourers (Rama, 2015), the South African government and local cultural organisations commemorated the one-hundred-and-fifty-year anniversary of the first arrival of indentured labourers from the Indian subcontinent, destined to toil on sugarcane plantations in the Natal colony for the duration of their indentured service under British rule. Religious diversity amongst the immigrants, as well as language barriers (Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Hindi, Bhojपुरi, and

other dialects spoken), presented obstacles such as alienation, lack of support or comfort, and even the need to adapt cultural or religious practices to what was possible in the new colony (Khan, 2012). Despite the harsh circumstances through years of service in the plantations and small enterprises, many of these ancestors chose not to return to their homeland and settled instead in Natal (Dharampal, 1992).

From the 1870s, South Africa saw a second influx of immigrants in the form of Muslim and Hindu merchants from the region of Gujarat in India, labelled as ‘passenger Indians’. This minority of tradesmen were free to establish shops and businesses and did not consider themselves part of the working class like their ‘Coolie’ indentured predecessors. In addition, they experienced more freedoms than the labourers, retaining stronger ties to ancestral cultural values and family structures as they were not forced to assimilate to the harsh conditions of indenture (Khan, 2012).

As the working-class Indians began settling into communities, and the stream of traders operated successful businesses, the Indians in South Africa soon came to be labelled as a hindrance to the ruling British government as their population began to exceed that of the English. Subsequently, various measures were put in place to force the indentured immigrants to repatriate. An example is the Colonial Act of 1891, which repealed grants of land offered to the Indians once their indenture was complete (Dharampal, 1992). Jan Smuts, twice the prime minister of the Union of South Africa, defined the situation of the Indian immigrants as “South Africa’s historical mistake” (Huntington, 1958: 43-44).

By 1949, deep inequalities in the treatment of African and Indian-descended South Africans by the ruling government ensured Indo-African tensions were high, and acts of violence within these communities were used as justification for the drastic action taken in the establishment of the Group Areas Act in 1950 (Maharaj, 1992). The Act led to numerous non-white communities being forcibly removed from their land and redistributed to segregated spaces designated for specific ethnic groups. Family units were dispersed, and many communities were deposited into ‘Indian’ areas, forced to live together even though they were diverse in religion, language, and cultural practices (Pillay, 2015). Many of these townships developed into communities which still remain

intact as socio-cultural centres and bustling communities for numerous South African Indian families.

Not included in this study are the more recent streams of migrants from the Indian subcontinent. After apartheid, South Asian migrants settled in South Africa steadily since the mid-1990s, with the largest immigration numbers being seen from 2005 to 2009 (Park and Rugunanan, 2009). As well as Indians, as of 2009, more than seventy-five thousand Pakistanis and fifty-five thousand Bangladeshis have settled in South Africa, many seeking better economic opportunities (Park and Rugunanan, 2009). These communities from the Indian subcontinent have cultural identities and established relationships to their 'motherlands' separate from South African history and politics. It is also more common for these groups to maintain strong bonds with family and friends from their countries of origin. South Africa, as a destination for economic pursuits, is considered safe because of its religious tolerance and already established diaspora. However, seeking opportunities in a country with an already high unemployment rate puts migrants at many disadvantages, including little government support, risks of poverty, violence, as well as xenophobia (Seedat-Khan and Johnson, 2018). South African Indians play a significant role in the employment of South Asian migrants; however, they are often exploited as cheap labour, contributing little evidence of support or kinship in their shared ancestry (Seedat-Khan and Johnson, 2018). While these more recently formed communities grapple with their own unique challenges and modes of cultural assimilation, the post-apartheid era ushered in significant shifts in the country's socio-political atmosphere.

Through South Africa's transition into democracy, the government foregrounded arts and culture, encouraging arts practitioners to utilise their liberties and space to explore their cultural and national identities. As the country entered the post-apartheid period, the 'rainbow nation' concept was promoted through the performance of cultural events and activities, such as the revival of Indian classical dance, and even pageants, such as the Miss India-South Africa-Miss India Worldwide pageant, which celebrates Indian culture (Radhakrishnan, 2005). Radhakrishnan describes the group's experience at the end of apartheid as a navigation of belonging between the historical authority of the

white minority and the new governance of the Black African majority. She states, “South African Indians face the political task of gaining recognition from the newly formed multicultural state as a key minority group” (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 263).

The goal of recognition and self-representation is evident through the progression of the South African Indian presence in South Africa’s creative economies, and in particular, film production. Ten years into democracy, the first recorded South African Indian-centred narrative, *Broken Promises* (2004), produced by South African Indian filmmaker Kumaran Naidu, was distributed on DVD for local audiences (Ebrahim, 2018). Then, more South African Indian film narratives were developed for community viewing and mainstream cinemas across the country. The nationally popular comedy film *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), directed by Jayan Moodley, for example, became the highest grossing South African film in the 2017 box office, superseding every other film produced in the country (National Film and Video Foundation, 2010). Since 2004, the number of cinematic self-representations emerging out of South African Indian communities, in localised modes of exhibition as well as national and mainstream platforms, has been increasing. The products of such groups are rich texts that, when decoded, may speak to these diverse and collective evolving identities, as well as contribute perspectives to the broader questions of identity and cinema. The three films, *Broken Promises*, *For Better for Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, are chosen based on their synthesis in locale and genre as the sample for the analysis of this study.

Broken Promises (2004), directed by Kumaran Naidu, is the first film set within an Indian township featuring a story centred around two South African Indian characters. The film, offering family entertainment, is set in Durban and follows the narrative of a newly married couple navigating family drama through many humorous moments and dramatic scenes. The film was made with equipment and resources secured through convenience and availability, focusing not on production quality but on narrative delivery (Ebrahim, 2018). The film was produced with no financial investment apart from that of the filmmaker himself. The primary market for the film was South African Indian family audiences who identified with the depicted townships and characters.

These audiences could access the film by purchasing the DVD, a method of distribution which eventually successfully recouped Naidu's investment. Naidu sold sixty thousand copies of *Broken Promises* (Lotter, 2010). The film forms part of this research as it marks the beginning of South African Indian self-representations in filmmaking practices within KwaZulu-Natal and in South Africa as a whole.

For Better For Worse (2010), directed by Naresh Veeran, is a romantic comedy film set in Durban. The well-known media personality Raeesa Mohamed wrote the screenplay and starred in the lead role. The film's narrative centres around a young career-driven woman who feels pressured by her mother and family to find a husband and 'settle down'. The film premiered at the 2009 Durban International Film Festival and was soon picked up for distribution by Videovision Entertainment, a prominent South African Indian-owned company in the film industry (elaborated upon in chapter five's discussions of modes of distribution). The film screened nationally in cinemas in 2010. *For Better For Worse*, like *Broken Promises*, engages with similarly relevant themes such as family, marriage, and cultural issues, adopting a light-hearted approach. The film forms part of this study due to its locale of Durban, as well as its mode of production and distribution, which differs from *Broken Promises*. Headed by a husband-wife team (Veeran as director and Mohamed as writer and lead actress), the film offers enriched perspectives on notions of family and cultural identity that would benefit the comparative analysis of this research.

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys (2017) was described as an anomaly in an information session hosted by the KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission during their breakdown of box-office statistics and returns on invested products. This was attributed to the film's commercial success in national cinemas, as local films do not often yield returns on investments, let alone make an impressive profit. The film remained in national circuits for thirteen weeks and made R19.2 million in box-office earnings (National Film and Video Foundation, 2019). Directed by Jayan Moodley, the film presents a Romeo-and-Juliet narrative set in Chatsworth, a well-known Indian township, centred around two feuding neighbours whose children fall in love. Visually, the film showcases commercial industry-standard technical support, art direction, and overall

production quality, including notable marketing presence. These are indicators of comprehensive financial investment, especially considering the KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission was only established two years before the film's release. *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* serves as an appropriate comparative sample for study due to its consistencies in location, themes, and content with the previous two samples, and its various achievements are anticipated to offer relevant insights in a comparative study of South African Indian filmmaking practices.

The sample of selected films shares locales of Chatsworth or the greater Durban area within KwaZulu-Natal and either falls under the drama-comedy genre or contains elements of it. When considering the genre in relation to South African Indian history, family drama and comedy played a significant role in the tradition of protest theatre movements and local productions emerging from South African Indian communities. In theatre, comedy was often used as a device through which serious issues were made relatable and accessible to the understanding of its audiences (Sana, 2020). Although genre is not a primary focus in achieving the aims of this research, it informs and shapes the delivery of the various film narratives and is, therefore, important to understand and contextualise when analysing the samples. It is worth noting that the modes of production, distribution, and exhibition for each film also play a significant role in shaping the choice of genre and themes, thereby influencing the cinematic self-representations in these works.

With this understanding of the scope, background, and selection of films for analysis, the following section provides a chapter outline of this research, canvassing the approach in which the chapters are organised in addressing the overall aims and research questions of the study.

Chapter Outline

This research is organised into six chapters, with chapters three, four, and five forming the body of the analysis aimed at addressing each research question. This analysis is contextualised with the literature review and theoretical frameworks in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six forms the conclusionary chapter, addressing the overall outcomes of the aims of the research:

Chapter One, already reviewed, provides an introduction to the study, an overview of the historical trajectory of South African Indians, as well as the background of the subject matter, and the rationale behind the topic of research and its contributions.

Chapter Two, to follow, comprises the discussion of theoretical frameworks and literature review, organised thematically in four sections: theories of identity formation and cinematic representation, postcolonial theory, diversity and notions of identity in South African Indian communities, and South African cinemas and Indian filmmaking practices.

Chapter Three investigates the modes of production and distribution of the sample films in relation to their intended audiences. To address the first research question in understanding the levels of visibility reached by the case studies, the various degrees of financial support, technical and human resources, production value, as well as the modes of distribution (DVD, commercial cinema, or other) are compared.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of notions of identity held by the characters and family units within the three selected case studies, pertaining to answering the second research question. It investigates the degree to which individual characters and families are exhibiting cultural specificity as South African Indians by examining their social and family dynamics.

Chapter Five attends to the third research question through inspecting the aesthetic cultural markers in scenes within the home or cultural rituals within the three case studies. Aesthetic choices within the households (specifically within costume and styling, location, set dressing, key props, colour choices) and the depicted rituals are examined. These elements will also be discussed comparatively to examine the breadth of cultural heterogeneity expressed in comparing the case studies.

Lastly, Chapter Six serves as the concluding chapter, comprising the discussion of the findings, the theoretical implications and contributions, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future scholarly research.

As delineated, the next chapter, Chapter Two, delves into the theoretical frameworks, literature review, and methodology. This chapter will lay the foundational theories and previous research that underpin this study, providing a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and approaches used in the analysis. It will also detail the methodology employed in examining the selected films, ensuring a clear and systematic approach to addressing the research questions. This exploration of theoretical perspectives and methodologies sets the stage for the in-depth analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS, LITERATURE REVIEW & METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Frameworks & Literature Review

To achieve the aim of analysing self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking practices regarding the visibility of complex and heterogeneous representations of cultural identity, the literature review and theoretical frameworks are organised into four sections. The sections commence with an exploration of broader theoretical discourses on the formation of identity, followed by discussions on theories of postcolonial identity and cinema. This leads to reviews of literature delineating the development of the South African film industry from the transition to democracy through to the post-apartheid period. Lastly, the examination turns to South African Indian community development. The review of literature and theoretical frameworks begins by exploring theoretical discourses on the formation of identity and its representation in cinema. Seminal scholarly literature by Hall (1989), Castells (1997), and Naficy (2012) is discussed, aiming to aid the analysis of expressions of cultural identity in the sample of South African Indian filmmaking.

This understanding of identity formation is then supported through the examination of key theories on postcolonial identity and cinema. This section intersects with discourses on postcolonial theories, with a focus on their application in cinema. Consequently, the formative scholarship of theorists such as Bhabha (1994), Said (1978), and Spivak (1985) are reviewed, aiming to deepen understanding of the intersection between cinema and postcolonial identity.

Following the theoretical frameworks, the landscape of South African cinema is overviewed. This section touches briefly on its development during apartheid but focuses primarily on filmmaking practices after 1994. The impact of apartheid on the film industry and the emergence of different cinemas in the post-apartheid period are

explored, along with the opportunities and limitations faced by filmmakers during this era.

Lastly, the existing literature on the history and cultural diversity of South African Indians is canvassed. The experiences of South African Indians during colonialism, segregation, and apartheid are discussed, as well as the ways in which these diasporic communities have evolved and adapted due to external influences. The immigrants' religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity and their descended family structures are included, forming a holistic illustration of the heterogeneous representation of cultural identities within South African Indian communities.

Theories of Identity Formation and Cinematic Representation

With established scholarship exploring the social and historical experiences of South African Indian communities, the representation of these experiences in the arts, particularly in cinema, remains underexplored. Studying a culture's cinema provides a unique lens for understanding its experiences and identities, as it combines narrative, visual, and auditory elements to construct and present stories of self-representation. The cinematic medium, with its multifaceted means of enriching a film with meaning, holds the potential to create a space for the performance and negotiation of complex and evolving notions of identity. This enables various degrees of visibility and resonance with its intended audience. Films, in both their narrative content and stylistic elements, can illuminate the specific socio-cultural realities of a community. Simultaneously, the viewing and interpretation of these films by the community itself involve a process of decoding the film's contents and reflecting on its representations in relation to their own notions of identity.

Chow and Bowman's (2010) chapter 'Film and Cultural Identity' explores the intricate relationship between cultural identity and cinema, extending its analysis to include spectators who engage with the cinematic spectacle. Employing psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship, they use the term 'sutured' to articulate how viewers become psychically enmeshed in the filmic experience, identifying themselves within the

narrative and character portrayals on screen. This concept of suture illustrates how films serve as apparatuses for identity formation and validation. Furthermore, the chapter interrogates the manner in which dominant ideologies are deliberately encoded within the cinematic text, aimed at influencing the viewer through strategic filmic design.

Film techniques such as montage, close-ups, panoramic shots, long shots, jump cuts, slow motion, flashback, and so forth, which result in processes of introjection, projection, or rejection that take place between the images and narratives shown on the screen, on the one hand, and audiences' sense of self, place, history, and pleasure, on the other, confirm the predominance of such modes of relativity and relations. With film, people's identification of who they are can no longer be regarded as a mere ontological or phenomenological event. Such identification is now profoundly enmeshed with technological intervention, which ensures that even (or especially) when the camera seems the least intrusive, the permeation of the film spectacle by the apparatus is complete and unquestionable (Chow and Bowman, 2010: 86).

The agency of the technical process of filming is emphasised, highlighting how the audience's experience and resonance with the narrative intertwine with the mechanics of filmmaking and the choices made by the filmmaker. Chow and Bowman particularly reference mainstream, profitable movies that likely cater to western perceptions of society. In their concept of the 'suture', they suggest that the postcolonial audience member may experience a deficit in self, wherein the film offers an affinity to the dominant culture, encouraging the audience to assimilate to the ideologies presented in the film, potentially at the expense of their own identity.

Chow and Bowman describe the technical nature of filmmaking as mechanical, and in a sense, inhuman. The camera lens replaces the human eye, casting a gaze over human interaction, with editing, lensing, shot design, and other choices framing the subject in a

particular light for consumption by the audience. Furthermore, the film's ability to reproduce images for widespread viewing positions cinemas as sites of cultural transmission, impacting both the dominant culture and the postcolonial individual. Notably, film audiences do not require filmmaking literacy or education to access the medium. Chow and Bowman argue that the development of film signifies a transition from word-based cultures to image-dominated ones, suggesting that modernity for postcolonial communities often involves rethinking ethnic cultural traditions in favour of practices accepted by the West. They posit that the powers of film and cinema should be considered cautiously useful, as they are capable of complex depictions and representations of identities through their narrative and technical properties. In the construction of identity on screen, individuals and communities from diverse cultural contexts become part of the viewing audience.

Chow and Bowman's emphasis on the mechanical and ideological properties of cinema underscores the importance of assessing and analysing the filmmakers' conscious decisions, which contribute significantly to the formation of identities on screen. The mechanical nature of film, infused with human intent, places the filmmaker in a powerful position in the dynamic between them and the audience. The audience, in turn, receives and interprets the ideologies packaged through the filmmakers' creative and technical choices. Within the context of this research, which includes an analysis of cinematic content focusing on notions of identity and cultural expression, a critical inspection of the filmmakers' choices is vital, especially to understand the audiences reached by the film productions.

Identity is a complex issue, as articulated by Cheung and Fleming (2010) in 'Cinemas, Identities and Beyond'. They argue that discourses on identity and its representation in cinema would benefit from a variety of contexts, perspectives, and case studies. Althusser (2001) describes identity as a fixed destiny, shaped by surrounding ideologies. These beliefs are indoctrinated into individuals, who then perpetuate them. Comolli and Narboni (1999) similarly view cinema as a means of replicating these beliefs, stating, "what the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology" (Comolli and Narboni, 1999: 755).

Williams (1986) also refers to cinema as a mechanism to represent prevailing ideologies, suggesting that identities in cinema are perceived as fixed or pre-existing before the camera is even turned on. This idea is further explored by theorists like Mulvey (1975) and MacCabe (1974), who view film as a medium that depicts a fixed variety of characters and identities within an "already established matrix of meaning" (Cheung and Fleming, 2010: 6).

Having been categorised into demographic groups and designated areas of living based solely on ethnicity, theories of fixed identity somewhat align with the experiences of South African Indian cultures. This is in the sense that the development of these communities was influenced by dominant ideologies and representations, reinforcing stereotyping and preconceptions. However, South African Indian identities may also resist these fixed notions by embracing their complexities and offering alternative narratives of lived experiences. The unique developmental history of postcolonial communities cannot be fully understood through static representations; instead, they are more accurately characterised by fluidity, as explored by Hall (1989).

‘Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation’ (Hall, 1989) has been referenced in numerous studies discussing the representation of identity in postcolonial communities, with Hall’s own research specifically addressing Caribbean identity and representation in cinema. Drawing on Derrida’s concept of ‘différance’, where meaning is perpetually deferred and therefore never fully concluded, Hall similarly describes identity using the term ‘positioning’. He discusses it as a continuous process of becoming that is never fixed, rather than something solidified and inflexible. This perspective allows for the consideration of identity as a site of ongoing negotiation, acknowledging the complexities that may influence the construction of identity. Hall’s approach invites an exploration of how historical contexts and cultural practices shape identity, thereby challenging the notion of a fixed identity that may homogenise experiences and perspectives. While theories of fixed identity might imply a degree of determinism, the concept of ‘positioning’ (Hall, 1989) suggests agency and the potential for resistance, enabling the examination of how marginalised or minority communities assert notions

of identity against dominant narratives. The concept of 'positioning' is particularly valuable in understanding the formation of diasporic or postcolonial cultural identity that may embody both continuity and disruption, as is the case with South African Indian communities. Furthermore, Hall's theory accounts for intra-group variations and internal dynamics often overlooked in discussions of identities within communities as monolithic or singular.

Castells (1997) also adopts pluralistic perspectives on identity formation, which have been considered in discussions of South African Indian literary contributions (Govinden, 2000) in relation to projections of identity. Castells suggests that the dynamic of power relations constitutes the conditions under which identities are developed, offering three types of identity projections: 'legitimising identity', which is advanced by authoritative powers in society; 'resistance identity', which emerges in response to oppressive hegemony; and 'project identity', where individuals consciously strive to assert their distinctiveness, aiming to reshape societal perspectives based on their convictions. His model's specific categories provide a framework for a detailed examination of how identities are formed, maintained, or transformed within distinct power structures. The concept of 'project identity' opens up possibilities for critical analysis where identities might be reimagined or reformed, aligning, to an extent, with Hall's model (1989).

The context of South African Indian identity can be analysed through the lens of Castells' concepts of power relations, which are constitutive of the conditions in which identities develop. His framework provides a means to understand the multiple forces and factors in the historical trajectory of the demographic group. Its affinity towards notions of multiplicity in identity formation is relevant in dissecting the dynamic and shifting nature of these identities in relation to historical events. Briefly, the concept of 'legitimising identity' refers to an identity propagated by the authoritative powers in society. In South Africa, the apartheid government attempted to establish legitimising identities for Indians based on racial categories, justifying segregationist policies and the inequitable treatment of non-white groups. Culturally diverse communities with South Asian heritage were grouped as 'Indians', regardless of markers of religious,

linguistic or ethnic diversity, and were assigned housing and land based on this designated group, often displacing them from their established homes. However, this imposed identity was resisted by individuals and communities unwilling to conform to the regime's expectations and limitations. Castells defines 'resistance identity' as the identity that forms in retaliation to oppressive hegemony. In South Africa, resistance identities would have emerged in response to discrimination and marginalisation experienced by communities living under apartheid. This form of identity may have also resulted from a sense of community, pride, and cultural preservation in the face of discriminatory policies. Resistance does not necessarily equate to political mobilisation but also applies to cultural expression and preservation against homogenising forces or westernisation. Lastly, 'project identity' refers to an identity developed when individuals consciously strive to assert their specificity, aiming to reshape cultural, social, and political identities in the post-apartheid period. This is characterised by the desire to transcend the limiting frameworks of the past and embrace a more pluralistic, inclusive vision of society. The project identity of individuals and communities would be influenced by increased access to global trends, multiculturalism, transnational influences, and technology.

The three projections of identity proposed by Castells are insightful in understanding how South African Indian notions of identity have been shaped by power dynamics, but they have limited applicability in specifically analysing the domestic film narratives in this research. While power dynamics are important, they are not the sole determinants of identity formation in the domestic narratives of the sample. Furthermore, the model risks simplifying the complexities of cinematic representations into predefined categories, which contrasts with the fluid and multi-influenced identities crafted in the film narratives by the filmmakers.

In discussing the recuperation or reconciliation of one's identities, Fanon refers to the process of individuals recuperating their identity as “passionate research” (Fanon, 1963: 170), a journey of self-discovery. He also uses the term ‘rehabilitation’ to describe the impacts and distortions of colonisation on the histories of colonial subjects. Within the context of this study, considering the homogenisation and distortions imposed by

hegemonic authorities, either consciously or subconsciously, the extent to which South African Indian communities might be using cinema as a form of 'passionate research' is contemplated. Addressing representation in cinema more specifically, Hall describes it as a means "to see and recognise the different parts and histories of ourselves, to construct those points of identification, those positionalities we call a 'cultural identity'" (Hall, 1989: 80-81). Here, cinema is presented as a space where the heterogeneity and myriad influences and histories that form the facets of cultural identity can be reflected and discerned.

Naficy (2012) explores these concepts of cultural identity and expression in cinema through his proposition of 'accented cinema', used to describe films that depict similarities in style or theme of displacement or exile, are multilingual or transnational, and address both homelands and host countries, among other defining characteristics. Discussions of cinema representation, as well as diasporic consciousness, often refer to first or second-generation migrants and displaced communities, such as exiles and refugees, with connections to a homeland and host country. While Naficy discusses diasporic filmmakers within the realm of accented cinema, he notes that they may not always create 'accented' cinema and might enter commercial spaces. He further elaborates on the representation of identity in diasporic filmmaking, where individuals "maintain a long-term sense of ethnic consciousness and distinctiveness, consolidated by periodic hostility from either their original home or host societies" (Naficy, 2012: 114). Additionally, postcolonial ethnic filmmakers often focus on expressing their identity experiences within their new country. Naficy also points out that these modes of filmmaking are not fixed positions; they are flexible, continuous, and responsive to the conditions being experienced.

Given that the South African Indian community in this study does not comprise first-generation immigrants maintaining complex relationships with a homeland of origin, Naficy's concepts more closely align with the study of South African Indian culture and filmmaking in its postcolonial context. South African Indian communities have evolved multi-generationally into identities distinct from those of first-generation migrants. Furthermore, South African Indian films emerged in a period emphasising the value of

cultural diversity expressions, as promoted by the state. Other diasporic communities may not share the same experiences of living in a multicultural society.

While accented and diasporic cinema theories can be insightful in understanding the films of other diasporic communities, this research will focus more specifically on the postcolonial and post-apartheid experiences of South African Indian communities, as will be reviewed in the next section.

Postcolonial Theory

The colonial experience in South Africa, marked by racial segregation and discrimination, resulted in a unique narrative of Indian identity reflecting the influences of both Indian and South African cultural and political systems. Generations of South African Indians experienced a flux of challenges in preserving cultural customs while adjusting to the dominant culture.

Postcolonial discourse illuminates how systems such as colonialism have imposed tensions on the cultures and social structures of communities, and how these communities have negotiated and resisted the dominant cultures. This informs the methodology of this research, facilitating the understanding of how the hegemonic forces of colonialism and the apartheid government affected the development of South African Indian communities, their perceptions of cultural identity, and the formal and informal structures of film production, distribution, and exhibition in South Africa. The contributions of seminal postcolonial theorists, including Said (1978), Spivak (1985), and Bhabha (1994), are explored.

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism (1978) has been a fiercely debated topic in postcolonial studies in the 20th and 21st centuries. It discusses the ways in which the West constructs a version of the 'Orient' (focusing on the East, Africa, and the Middle East) for western consumption. According to Ashcroft and Ahluwalia (2009), Said's theory of Orientalism is based on the premise that western cultures have created an 'imagined geography' of the Orient. This notion of the Orient as a mysterious and exotic

‘other’ has been used to create a hierarchy of power between East and West and has shaped the identities of postcolonial cultures within the East. By constructing a negative or mysterious image of the East through the use of Orientalism, their postcolonial identity is shaped by this image imposed by the dominant cultures.

The phenomenon of Orientalism does not directly address the Orient but rather the West's concepts about the Orient, irrespective of the accuracy or truth of these representations. The West creates and forms this identity through the representation of its cultures, thereby defining its own identity in contrast to the Orient. It is this power dynamic that has significantly influenced postcolonial identity formation. The power imbalance caused by the West's ability to define the identity of the Orient influences the colonial subject's construction of identity and place in society (Childs and Williams, 2016). According to Said, western media and discourses have created and maintained a false binary of 'us' and 'them' by consistently positioning the Orient as the other.

‘Othering’ creates a perceived dichotomy between the ‘normative’ or dominant group and those deemed different or outside the norm, leading to various forms of social exclusion and discrimination (Romero-Rodriguez et al., 2021). Said argues that postcolonial identity formation has been heavily influenced by this separation and can be seen as a device for reconfiguring the identity of the colonised to fit the imposed values of western culture (Said, 1978). Said proposes that knowledge of the East (or the ‘Orient’) was constructed by western scholars promoting a European worldview that permeates the cultural imagination, thus making it difficult to imagine alternatives to the dominant ideology. Portrayed as exotic, sensual, and strange, among other depictions, cultures represented by western powers are unable to speak over the dominant discourse and are left to reconcile with their constructed identities (Said, 1978).

While South Africa is not geographically situated in the East, Said's theory of western powers defining the colonial subject to instigate power dynamics is applicable to the experiences of South African Indians. Firstly, prejudices and stereotypes from the ancestral origins of South African Indians may persist in contemporary communities. Moreover, the concept of western powers defining the colonial subject is evident in the

process of racial categorisation and segregation by the hegemonic forces of the colonial authorities and the apartheid government. Like other postcolonial groups, South African Indians were subject to discriminatory policies that served to reinforce their differences. The images and stereotypes perpetuated through colonial discourse continue to shape how these groups are perceived and treated, even within the communities (Pillay, 2015). Viewing the trajectory of South African Indian communities through the lens of Orientalism also highlights the homogenising identity prescribed to South African Indians, who do not comprise a singular religion, language, or culture. Instead, the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of these communities challenge the notion of a single, fixed 'other' as constructed by colonial powers.

Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1985) interrogates the significance of postcolonial identity formation in the modern era, navigating theories such as Said's 'Orientalism' (1978) and Fanon's 'Black Skin, White Masks' (1967), to explore how the identities of colonised people were both shaped and silenced by imperialism. Spivak's essay offers a nuanced, critical exploration of the impact of colonialism on the formation of subaltern identities and their ability to express themselves. She reframes postcolonial identity formation by challenging the notion that the subaltern lacks a voice in the discourse shaping their experience, positing that the subaltern is marginalised by dominant discourse and not afforded the opportunity to self-represent. This absence of representation and agency significantly impacts identity construction, which Spivak contends is shaped by the discourse of the dominant group. The essay argues that the subaltern struggles to construct a self-identity distinct from the colonial discourse that has shaped their experience, and it emphasises the need for the subaltern to be given a voice in the discourse shaping their experience. This would enable them to begin formulating an identity separate from colonial discourse, allowing them to gain a sense of autonomy and agency (Spivak, 1985).

The term 'subaltern', borrowed from Gramsci's 'Prison Notebooks' (1992), denotes individuals who are socially, politically, and economically marginalised and often lack the means to represent themselves in the dominant discourse (Robinson and Tormey, 2010). Spivak's theory aims to create a space for these marginalised voices to be heard,

framing postcolonial identity formation as a process of reclamation, where the subaltern reclaims their right to define themselves and their experiences. Through this process, the subaltern can move beyond the restrictive definitions of identity imposed upon them by the dominant discourse (Spivak, 1985). Gairola (2002) considers Spivak's concept of the subaltern foundational in postcolonial theory. He discusses the significant impact of Spivak's work on discourses of postcolonial identity formation, suggesting that her text has been instrumental in challenging existing power structures within dominant discourse.

Spivak explores the inherent challenge in enabling the subaltern to genuinely speak in discourse. She posits that there are layers to representation; scholarly literature sympathetic to the subaltern's predicaments merely represents them, and every representation is essentially a misrepresentation until the subaltern can self-represent. This perspective underscores the complexity of identity formation in postcolonialism, where misrepresentation or suppression of voices can occur in communities not empowered or resourced to self-represent. Spivak believes this issue necessitates further exploration to authentically represent the experiences of society's most vulnerable members.

The question of whether South African Indians can be considered subaltern necessitates a consideration of the group's historical marginalisation, having been subjected to colonialism, segregation, and discrimination, and their struggles for rights and recognition. On the other hand, Spivak defines the 'subaltern' as members of society who are utterly unable to speak for themselves. Historically a minority, the South African Indian demographic has achieved various levels of representation, as well as comparatively more privileged treatment over other demographic groups such as Black South Africans (Dharampal, 1992). The first instance of self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking occurred a decade after the country's transition to democracy, indicative of the gradual but increasing access to resources and training available to the community's filmmakers in the post-apartheid era.

With the production of *Broken Promises* (2004), a form of ‘voice’ through filmmaking was enabled for South African Indian communities, previously unattainable. This development offered an opportunity for South African Indian identities to be represented beyond the limited, often stereotypical and homogenised representation within the landscape of South African cinema. The government's implementation of legislature and funding resources began to bear fruit, fulfilling the mandate for diverse representations of a rainbow nation, initially manifesting as opportunistic filmmaking and later transitioning into commercial spaces. South African Indian filmmaking evidences the community's emerging voices of self-representation. Thus, while the historical disenfranchisement of South African Indians is crucial in understanding the trajectory of the community's expressions of identity and representation, their growing capacity for self-representation in filmmaking does not align with Spivak's definition of the subaltern as those unable to represent themselves.

In addition to the discussion of Spivak's essay on the subaltern in relation to South African Indian identity, it is vital to explore Bhabha's foundational theory of hybridity (1994). Bhabha examines the formation and expression of postcolonial identity, introducing the idea that postcolonial identity is not merely a response or reaction to colonial subjugation. Instead, it is formed through a melding of the cultural values, ideas, practices, and traditions of both the coloniser and the colonial subject, and is continually evolving (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha argues that postcolonial identity is not merely a combination of the coloniser and colonised but represents a ‘third space’ where both coexist. This space facilitates interaction and negotiation between the two, leading to the creation of new unique identities that are not fully representative of either the dominating or the oppressed culture. Bhabha posits that colonialism does not obliterate pre-existing cultural identities; rather, it necessitates a space for hybridity through processes of mimicry and ambivalence. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, influenced by Fanon's ‘Black Skins, White Masks’ (1967), describes the phenomenon occurring when a culture dominated by a hegemonic force mimics the culture of the colonisers and is encouraged to do so. However, within the dominant culture, this mimicry is expected to be imperfect,

maintaining clear distinctions between the colonised and coloniser and ensuring the unchallenged superiority of the latter. Nonetheless, Bhabha views mimicry as a potential form of resistance against the dominant culture. When western language and culture are seamlessly integrated into the behaviour of the colonial subject, the adopted culture becomes akin to a performance (Bhabha, 1994).

In Bhabha's interpretation of mimicry, he asserts that the colonised subject mimics the coloniser not to become an exact replica, but to disrupt the authority of the dominant culture by exposing its constructed and performative nature. Essentially, the colonised subjects adopt the language, customs, and behaviours of the colonisers, infusing them with their own meanings or subtle distortions, turning the mimicked behaviour into subversive acts. The term 'performance' implies that adopting western language and culture is not assimilation into a fixed, unchanging identity but a dynamic, context-dependent, and strategic act. Bhabha argues that this performance highlights the constructed nature of the mimicked markers of identity, thereby destabilising the dominant culture's assumptions about its superiority. Thus, by performing the culture, the colonised subject reveals that what the dominant culture deems authentic is, in fact, a set of learned behaviours and ideologies, susceptible to change and reinterpretation (Bhabha, 1994).

Furthermore, in discussing the formation of complex hybrid identities, Bhabha identifies an 'ambivalence' present in both the minds of the coloniser and the colonised. For instance, to exert control over a community, the coloniser might strictly impose westernisation of practices, or alternatively adapt them to indigenous or ethnic beliefs for easier assimilation. The coloniser must reconcile their ideologies with indigenous knowledge, navigating this ambivalence to achieve their objectives. Similarly, an ambivalence exists within the oppressed culture. They might willingly integrate western practices into their culture, or conversely, view imposed doctrines with mistrust. Hybridity emerges within these ambivalent spaces, manifested in the simultaneous presence of multiple cultural markers from both the coloniser and the colonised. Bhabha posits that hybridity is a process whereby cultural forms from the colonising power are negotiated and reimagined by individuals in the colonised society. This notion of

hybridity facilitates the emergence of a new postcolonial identity, which is neither entirely western nor entirely non-western, but rather a unique blend of both. However, Bhabha's concept of hybridity, while prominent in postcolonial studies, has attracted criticism from some scholars for purportedly downplaying the violence of colonialism and the discriminatory effects of hegemonic authority (Childs and Williams, 2016).

Moreover, as Hall (1989) suggests, the identities negotiated by South African Indians are not monolithic. They have been intricately shaped by both the broader contexts of displacement to another continent and subjugation under hegemonic forces, as well as localised experiences within the confines of segregated communities and townships. The layered heritages of South African Indians give rise to complexities in the communities' self-perceptions and modes of cultural expression. In these contexts, notions of identity are neither uniformly Indian nor exclusively African, but exist in a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) of hybridity.

The intricate dynamics of cultural identity within South African Indian communities necessitate a nuanced theoretical approach for effective exploration. Bhabha's concept of hybridity (1994) offers a compelling lens through which the multifaceted aspects of identity, as portrayed in South African Indian cinema, can be examined. Building on Chow and Bowman's (2010) perspectives on the power of cinema's technical nature as a site of cultural expression, this context underscores cinema's potential to capture and articulate the ambivalence, hybridity, and third spaces of identity negotiation as conveyed through filmmakers' choices on screen. Following this theoretical discourse, the ensuing review of literature examines the trajectory of diversity and notions of identity within South African Indian communities, providing a comprehensive lens for analysing the selected films.

Diversity and Notions of Identity in South African Indian Communities

The narratives of postcolonial diasporas and their descendant communities are marked by experiences of migration, hardship, adaptation, and assimilation into the host state. South African Indians, in particular, comprised a blend of cultural, religious, and

linguistic diversity originating from the Indian subcontinent, laying the foundations for multicultural descendant communities. As outlined in this chapter's scholarship, these communities navigated numerous historical transitions, resulting in a constant negotiation and renegotiation of identity and community, from the point of migration to contemporary discourses of what it means to be South African Indian.

Dharampal (1992), critical of the generalisation that associates the genesis of Indian settlement in Africa predominantly with indenture, claims that by 1892, over thirty thousand Indians were in Natal, and their population quickly exceeded that of the English colonial settlers. Dharampal's scholarship also highlights earlier instances of Indian migration and journeying at free will, including voyages as early as 1498. In contrast, the book 'Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story, 1860-1914' by Desai and Vahed (2010) centralises indenture in their narrative, focusing on chronicling the trajectory and experiences of indentured immigrants over that period. According to Desai and Vahed (2010), the indentured Indians were diverse in origins, linguistic backgrounds, and cultures. They were predominantly of Hindu faith, along with Muslims, and a smaller percentage being Christians. Embarking from the ports of Madras and Calcutta, many hailed from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Bihar, and the provinces of Agra and Oudh. They spoke various regional languages including "Bhojpuri, Magahi, Awadhi and Kanauji, while those who came via Madras mainly spoke Tamil (71 per cent) and Telugu (25 per cent)" (Desai and Vahed, 2010: 180).

Desai and Vahed also note the diversity of caste, region, and profession among those aboard the ships transporting the indentured Indians to Natal:

The *Truro* included Christians, Malabars (from western India), Gentoos (Telegu Hindus), Rajputs (landowners), Pariahs (untouchables), Marathas (from West Central India), Muslims and even an African. The list from the *Belvedere* is even more varied. *Dosadh* (village watchman), *Koormee* (agriculturalist), *Koiree* (weaver), *Hajjam* (barber), Brahmin (priest), *Gowala* (herdsman), *Musulman* (Muslim), *Tantee* (lower caste from Orissa), *Chamar*

(leatherworker), *Dhobi* (washerman), *Noniya* (agriculturalist) and *Kahar* (personal servant) are some of the labels the indentured attached to themselves (Desai and Vahed, 2010: 176)

Indentured immigrants were compelled to alter or abandon their traditional ways of life established in their homelands to assimilate into the new environment of the Natal colony. Traditions that had been passed down generationally were altered, simplified, and sometimes reimagined. Caste, for instance, identifiable by social standing in India and geographically based, became difficult to enforce amid new power dynamics and community structures in the colony. While caste no longer incurred strict regulations on the socialisation and interaction of society members, its various characteristics were adapted, for example, in the form of marriage and socialisation prejudices (Desai and Vahed, 2010).

Desai and Vahed (2010) also discuss the second stream of ‘passenger’ Indians - merchants who funded their travel to establish businesses in Natal from the 1880s, further expanding the diversity of Indian immigrants and their communities in Natal. The scholarship of Desai and Vahed is crucial in achieving the aim of this study by providing contextual information on the diverse origins, social, cultural, and religious practices pertinent to the identities of the immigrants and their descendants. This informs the analysis of the sample films in this research, identifying instances where ancestral cultural practices, traditions, and languages, or their adaptation, are evident.

The depiction of the heterogeneity of Indian immigrants by Desai and Vahed is supported by Khan's writings (2012). Khan discusses the second stream of Indian traders, dissecting the regional and linguistic diversity of both the first and second streams of Indian immigrants, as well as the challenges this diversity presented. According to Khan (2012), the variety of dialects limited communication and interaction within groups, and heightened experiences of detachment and alienation from the familiarity and community values of the motherland. Khan particularly notes the rigid traditional family values held by the free ‘passenger’ Indians, citing that they maintained ancestral traditions because they were not forced to assimilate into the harsh conditions like their indentured predecessors.

Through the scholarship of Desai and Vahed (2010) as well as Khan (2012), the diversity within communities of immigrants is explored, reinforcing a narrative of changing and evolving identity and cultural practices due to circumstances in the Natal colony. Distinct identities and cultural practices were transplanted to South Africa and forced to adapt; fluidity in notions of self and community becomes evident as practices of caste are modified or discarded, social structures change, and cultural practices that were rigid in the ancestral homeland become more flexible in response to the conditions faced by the indentured immigrants. A further distinction is drawn between the first wave of immigrants and the second 'passenger' wave, who maintained stricter adherence to their ancestral traditions, indicating intra-community divergences or even a diversification in which the first wave of immigrants with their adapted practices may be seen as a separate community entirely.

More specifically addressing the forced adaptation faced by the immigrants and their descended communities, Khan and Sooklal (1991) present similar perspectives on the Group Areas Act imposed by the government in 1950 as being seminal in changing family structures within Indian communities. A joint family structure, where male siblings or relatives and their families lived on shared land with a patriarchal 'head' of the family unit, was typical in these communities. In this unit, women ran domestic duties, raised children, upheld religious traditions, and even worked in various industries such as domestic services, markets, or factories. The joint family is a communal, family-centred way of living, as described by Khan, "...in the early evolution of family life, the extended family served as an economic, psychological and social safety net upon which strong family values were established" (Khan, 2012: 139).

Khan (2012) describes the decline of the traditional joint family structure in Indian families as symptomatic or situational in relation to the political landscape and growing western influences. Sooklal (1991), on the other hand, interprets the matter as a hegemonic directive to essentially strip these communities of their cultural identities, citing the segregating policies established as targeting joint family structures, as well as the ideology of Christian National Education which Sooklal believes was

‘Christianising’ Hindu youths in schools. Sooklal’s central argument is that it is within the joint family that culture, traditions, and religion are incubated and generationally passed down. A joint family would be multi-generational, and values would be taught to the children through formal and informal education, teaching by example, and oral tradition. With apartheid laws breaking down communities and displacing the joint families into smaller, more scattered ‘nuclear’ family units, children are more likely to lose their connections to their religion and culture (Sooklal, 1991). Both Khan's (2012) and Sooklal's writings are relevant in the context of this research, highlighting the relationship between religion and family community in Indian societies, as well as the context in which their practices have evolved.

The evolution of family structures among South African Indian communities can be articulated through the lens of Hall's concept of positioning (1989) as a process of ongoing adaptation to changing social and political contexts. Various factors contributing to the decline of joint families, including apartheid policies, the effects of westernisation, and class inequalities, can be perceived as external pressures shaping how South African Indian communities position themselves in relation to their culture and heritage. These factors have led to the fragmentation of traditional family structures and the erosion of cultural practices, affecting how individuals and families negotiate their identities. The instances of 'Christianisation' of the migrants and subsequent generations of South African Indians, mentioned in the literature, also serve as examples of fluid identity. Education systems propagated Christian beliefs and values to Indian youth, and as articulated by Sooklal, this agenda can be interpreted as an attempt to break down traditional cultural practices and create identities that aligned with western values and authority. Furthermore, resistance to Christianisation, along with the preservation of cultural practices, may exemplify the notion of positioning. To varying degrees, generations of South African Indian communities have accepted, resisted, and adapted western values, as well as characteristics of their cultural heritage, positioning themselves as a distinct group that is not fully reminiscent of India or the West. This negotiation of identity would have provided a sense of agency and self-determination, highlighting how identity is constantly evolving and adapting to changing contexts.

Further scholarship by Vahed and Desai (2010) comments on representations of culture within the community, specifically how South African Indian identity has often been assembled, disassembled, and reconstituted since the indentured immigrants first set foot in Natal. Hall is quoted in arguing that cultural identity and belongingness are “not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture” (Hall, 1994: 395), but are instead fluid and subject to the interplay of their contexts. Pillay (2015) expresses similar sentiments to Vahed and Desai; however, she approaches the subject matter of culture, identity, and belongingness through the concept of the ‘other’.

Pillay (2015) discusses the effect of apartheid racial categories on post-apartheid concepts of cultural identity and race, as well as the generational effects of this categorisation on "born free" younger generation South Africans. Pillay's study found that the homogenous racial classifications of apartheid had lasting effects, even through the new democratic way of living. She further discusses the limitations of post-apartheid identities, where one would theoretically be able to choose one's own identity and choose to be South African. However, through interviews, Pillay found that younger participants in her study feel as if they have to learn and perform their designated ethnic category to be accepted by their own community members. Pillay's research is an important facet of the narrative of the changing notions of cultural identity in South African Indian history, as it discusses not only the younger ‘born free’ generation's perceptions but also the expected expressions of identity found in ‘Indian areas’ into which individuals feel they must assimilate (Pillay, 2015). Radhakrishnan (2005) further articulates how political identities play a significant role in South Africa, citing that Indians are required to identify with their ‘black’ classification to receive employment, places in universities, and government benefits. Radhakrishnan also found, however, that many South African Indians believe they cannot forgo their ‘Indianness’, which is their contribution to the ‘rainbow nation’ ideal of democratic and multicultural South Africa.

The various facets of identity that South African Indians navigate within the changing political landscapes of South Africa's history highlight the complexities in the development of notions of self. These identities are constructed for, or may even

conflict with, prescribed identities by dominant power structures. This is reminiscent of Said's (1978) rhetoric, which posits that western discourses have created and maintained a false binary of 'us' and 'them', consistently positioning the 'other'. Said's theory suggests that this can be seen as a device in reconfiguring the identity of the colonised to fit the imposed values of western culture. Specifically discussing South African Indian communities, Pillay (2015) concurs with Said's concepts, arguing that the stereotypes perpetuated through colonial discourse continue to shape the way these groups are perceived and treated, even from within the communities.

This experience can also be interpreted through Castells' model of identity projections (1997). Castells' concept of 'legitimising identity' refers to identity propagated by authoritative powers in society. In South Africa, the apartheid government attempted to establish legitimising identities for Indians based on racial categories, justifying segregationist policies and the inequitable treatment of non-white groups. Culturally diverse communities with South Asian heritage were grouped as 'Indians', regardless of religious, linguistic, or ethnic diversity, and were allocated housing and land based on their assigned group, displacing them from their established homes. These newly formed townships and communities were forced to endure the deconstruction of their established ways of life and adapt to new notions of community, once more evidencing fluidity in the formations of identity, as defined by Hall (1989).

Hansen's 'Melancholia of Freedom' (2012) addresses notions of identity within working-class communities of the Chatsworth township in KwaZulu-Natal. Hansen's chapters speak to the shifting 'gaze' under which South African Indian communities have had to adapt their existence. From the gaze of a hegemonic authority needing to control the Indian population, to that of the new democracy and its ideals, such as former President Thabo Mbeki's African renaissance. Mbeki insisted on Indians identifying themselves as African Indians – Africans first, Indians second, in acknowledgment of their ancestry. The gaze shifts in the new political landscape, and South African Indian communities are tasked with reconciling their experiences and identities from the periphery, self-identifying their designated space in the tapestry of

the rainbow nation, and defining what it now means to be 'Indian'. Hansen (2012) notes the following from observation:

One became an Indian because one lived an Indian life—went to Indian schools, shopped in Indian shops, went to Indian cinema halls and Indian beaches, and visited family in other parts of the country who also lived in enclaves designated for Indians. The *charou* culture was, and remains, interior to this everyday form of life, a social and linguistic code one could switch back to and a mode of being and speaking that was a part of the everyday experiences of most Indians, however morally ambiguous or even shameful it was in the eyes of those striving for respectability (Hansen, 2012: 80).

Hansen suggests that locale plays a significant role in defining 'Indianness', implying that the segregating policies of the Apartheid government forged a new definition of Indianness, rooted in broad racial categories and designated areas rather than inherited cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. He also mentions a 'charou culture', where the working class's vernacular speech and colloquial behaviour within Indian communities self-identify as *charou*. The township *charou* could be considered a product of apartheid and the Group Areas Act, representing an example of Indianness specific to South Africa.

Hansen (2012) further posits that association with the term *charou* is deemed shameful to Indians striving for respectability, raising questions about the source of this desired respectability. This could refer to Indians seeking to distance themselves from their designated spaces and communities, aspiring to assimilate into areas previously dominated by white residents and businesses. It might also allude to seeking respect within the Indian communities themselves, as community values and acceptance play a significant role in shaping assimilative behaviour. According to Hansen, Indians distancing themselves from the *charou* identity are colloquially called *lahnee* (meaning 'boss' or 'wealthy', a term formerly used for white people), indicative of class differences. A *lahnee* typically has a large house, possibly a nice car, and might speak

more western-aligned English, yet retains knowledge of both the *charou* culture and the environments from which they both emerged.

While Hansen's observations offer detailed insights into the socio-cultural practices of (mostly working-class) South African Indian communities, interpreting colloquial terms requires considering the perspective of the community being represented, especially in instances of their self-representations. Sana (2020) explored how South African Indian comedy acts define the word *charou*, finding it used to depict a socio-economic group of South African Indians, predominantly located in KwaZulu-Natal's townships. Sana argues that portrayals by South African Indian comedians create a space for cultural expression, reflecting the sentiments of the represented communities. He notes that comedy, through its embodiment, language use, and choice of locale, is a suitable platform for understanding communities, their collective beliefs, and characteristics. According to Sana, the *charou* is often associated with traits of overindulgence, ambition, and conspicuous consumption – the need to display wealth through luxury items. The *charou* is also linked with a fascination for fast cars and sound systems, and as businessmen, they are portrayed as opportunistic and greedy (Sana, 2020).

Sana examines the term through the self-representations of the community, whereas Hansen's approach might be problematised in its engagement with the *charou* as an essentialising identity. This focus may disproportionately emphasise the aspiration for 'respectability' equated with western ideals, such as the desire to move to historically white areas or to adopt more western-aligned English. In this context, Hansen's approach risks overlooking other forms of social capital or cultural expression within the community. Additionally, while Hansen acknowledges the historical conditions underpinning the emergence of 'Indianness' and the *charou*, he posits that apartheid policies conceived a new definition of Indianness through broad racial categories and designated areas rather than inherited cultures. This perspective risks emphasising prescribed identities over the authentic voices and complexities of the represented community's identity negotiations.

Notably, the discourses of Hansen and Sana resonate with the concept of fluid identity. The perceived connotations associated with the terms *charou* and *lahnee* illustrate how South African Indians navigate and define their identities in response to changing social and cultural landscapes. Their association with one term or lifestyle over the other indicates a shift not just in social status, but in self-identification as well. This reflects an ongoing process of negotiation influenced by both external perspectives and internal aspirations, aligning with Hall's (1989) concept that identity is not fixed or a mere cultural artifact, but an ongoing product of change and agency.

From the waves of immigration to the contemporary classifications of *charou* and *lahnee*, identities have been constantly shaped, negotiated, and reimagined under various socio-political and historical influences. Scholars such as Desai and Vahed (2010) as well as Khan (2012) underscore the multifaceted origins and evolutions of these communities, noting distinctions along linguistic, regional, and religious lines. Additional scholarship, including the works of Sooklal (1991) and Pillay (2015), investigates the construction and perception of specific identities within the South African context. However, these scholarly contributions also highlight the need for more nuanced, intersectional, and participatory approaches in studying identity within these communities.

Transitioning from the discussion of the complex layers of identity formation in South African Indian communities, the next section delves into the specific avenue of cinema through which these identities are expressed, shaped, and represented.

South African Cinemas and Indian Filmmaking Practices

Various facets of South African cinema offer enriching subjects for scholarly attention, yet discourses on the contributions and roles of South African Indians in the film industry remain limited. Given the complexity of identity formation, negotiation, and its representation in cinema for communities such as South African Indians, it is pertinent to review literature discussing their established filmmaking practices. Initially, the

landscape of the South African film industry is outlined to situate South African Indian filmmaking within its broader context.

This literature review canvasses the development of the South African film industry, acknowledging key theorists such as Tomaselli (1990), Gutsche (1972), and Botha (2013) as prominent figures in the discussion of South African cinema. Botha (2011) states that documentary film production in South Africa began around 1896 with the Anglo-Boer War. Feature films started development in the country in 1910, while “hundreds of short fiction and non-fiction films have been made in South Africa since 1980” (Botha, 2011: 225). The majority of these films depicted narratives relating to the anti-apartheid movement, with a smaller number focusing on gay and lesbian rights. Botha comments on the promising changes in 1994 as South Africa entered democracy, and subsequent actions leading to the establishment of the government-aided statutory body, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), towards the end of the decade. By 2000, the foundation was allocated millions of Rands to fund various film formats and local filmmakers (Botha, 2011).

It is notable that South African Indian filmmakers did not access this funding for self-representative films until a decade after its availability, suggesting barriers that initially prevented this demographic group from fully participating in the film industry. This delay could be attributed to various factors, including economic, social, and cultural obstacles. Botha associates post-apartheid filmmaking with the emergence of new filmmakers exploring diverse subject matters, noting “many films explore the realities of South Africa from various ethnic perspectives” (Botha, 2011: 235). While he does not explicitly mention South African Indian filmmaking, the early instances of independent South African Indian filmmaking support his observation. It first emerged in the post-apartheid period, creating content for localized audiences without state support.

Similar to Botha, Shepperson and Tomaselli (2000) provide insight into the development of South African cinema, focusing on exhibition during apartheid, as well as the effects of apartheid strategies on minority enterprises such as the Avalon Theatres Group. The Avalon Theatres Group, opened in 1939 by South African Indian owners,

suffered greatly after apartheid policies were implemented in 1948, favouring white-owned companies in white-designated areas. Later in the 1980s, sanctions and protests affected many international relations as less profitable film productions were produced, while independent productions continued. Towards the 1990s, affirmative action schemes sought to remedy the white monopoly on the industry. The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid saw government-implemented changes intent on creating equity reach successes at different levels (Shepperson and Tomaselli, 2000).

Shepperson and Tomaselli also provide relevant contextual information on the genesis of South Africa's relationship with cinema exhibition, as well as the state of the industry during apartheid and the transition into new post-apartheid policies. This transition allowed for a division to emerge in South African cinema, between 'high' film culture and 'low' culture, where profitable films, such as subsidised international co-productions, were supported by major companies, and smaller, alternative means of production and exhibition were utilised by other post-apartheid filmmakers. As an example, the Odeon theatre complex built in Chatsworth in 1969 was purchased by a local family after 1994 who then made it available to community members for performances. Through resourcing and collaboration with community volunteers, the cinema amenity was refurbished and reopened in 1997 to screen Indian commercial films. Remarking on the transition and growth of filmmaking practices and audiences into the post-apartheid period, Shepperson and Tomaselli (2000) argue that progress in supporting a growing democratic cinema would be more quickly achieved if the state facilitated citizens' access to resources and skills development rather than curating it. This statement implies that there are insufficient state structures for facilitating the upskilling of previously disadvantaged members of the public.

Linking back to the discussion of access to state funding, a possible explanation for why South African Indian films faced barriers in sourcing opportunities for financial support could be a lack of access to formal training programmes or necessary resources to produce high-quality productions that meet the standards of funding organisations or the wider film industry. Filmmakers such as Kumaran Naidu emerged during this post-apartheid period, with Naidu creating a culturally specific domestic narrative through

limited funds and opportunistic means. If supplied with formal training opportunities and facilities, as proposed by Shepperson and Tomaselli (2000), the trajectory of South African Indian filmmaking might have been quicker in its development.

In 'Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation' (2010), Saks elaborates on the institutional changes during the transition from apartheid to a democratic state, focusing on the turnover of policies, legislature, and formal organisations surrounding the arts and culture industries, with a particular emphasis on film production. Saks' scholarship contrasts the infrastructure inherited by artists with the new policies and "utopian" ideals of post-apartheid South Africa. This includes examining the actions and aspirations of the state during the period when South African Indian filmmaking first emerged and was developing. This period saw the establishment of state-owned organisations such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), which supports South African filmmakers as creatives broadening the cultural representation and diversity of the country in alignment with post-apartheid ideology. Additionally, the Industrial Development Corporation's media and motion picture division focuses on the viability and marketability of locally produced films in international markets. Despite these platforms becoming accessible, Saks notes that training in film production to upskill previously disadvantaged and emerging filmmakers was not as readily available. While Saks does not directly address the more opportunistic and informal filmmaking practices that emerged over this period, such as Naidu's *Broken Promises* (2004), there is acknowledgment of the diversity of cinematic stories that emerged in this period of newfound freedom of expression:

If the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa did not produce a cinema capable of critiquing the state or responding to the hatred, violence, and rage in the country, it did produce a genuinely post-apartheid tapestry of voices. In its own way, this has been a contribution to the democratisation of the public sphere (Saks, 2012: 10).

Shepperson and Tomaselli (2000) argue for the development of a democratic cinema through state support in upskilling emerging voices in the film industry. Saks

acknowledges the underperforming infrastructure provided by the state while suggesting that democratisation has been genuinely pursued, given the diversity presented during this period. Saks offers insight into the resources available to filmmakers at the time, both state-supplied and independent, as well as the limitations of the post-1994 era. However, Saks' focus is less on themes of racial diversity and community cinemas, leaning more towards mainstream representation. This gap is partially filled by Ebrahim (2020), who discusses the recent state of informal South African filmmaking and its appeal to localised audiences beyond mainstream cinemas.

In 'Cinematic Sidestreams: A Political Economy of Small Cinemas in South Africa' (2020), Ebrahim outlines the smaller economies of film production that have developed in democratic South Africa. These productions are situated within several ethno-linguistic communities and on the fringes of mainstream cinema, including “Tshivenda-language films (Vendawood), the comedies of Sello ‘Chicco’ Twala (Twalawood), Kumaran Naidu's films targeting Indian South African audiences (Vollywood), and isiZulu-language horror films produced in the townships around Durban in KwaZulu-Natal (Inandawood)” (Ebrahim, 2020: 27). Ebrahim notes that these 'small cinemas' play an active role within their societies but remain relatively unknown in other areas. They share similarities in production modes, such as small scale, varying degrees of informality, amateur casts, and a need for ethno-linguistic cultural expression and representation. Ebrahim's discussion broadens the understanding of the post-apartheid South African filmmaking landscape and the consumption patterns of South African Indian communities within the industry. The study also examines the scope of state-funded bodies established in this period to develop the film industry.

They include the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), which formulates state cultural policy and legal mandates, the policies and practices of the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) through its funding agency, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). Provincial or metropolitan state entities include the Gauteng Film Commission and the Durban Film Office (2017), mandated to promote the development

of their province or city as hubs of revenue-generating filmmaking activities (Ebrahim, 2020: 25).

Other institutions, including the SABC, private broadcasters such as eTV and Multichoice, support and exhibit low-budget productions, in addition to film festivals and educational organisations that provide both practical and theoretical training (Ebrahim, 2020). Ebrahim further examines how the state has incentivised film production training through several programmes focusing on aspiring black filmmakers. However, it is suggested that neoliberal funding models and an aspiration towards international production quality may hinder the progress of these programmes. For instance, the DTI participates in such programmes, emphasising the importance of “quality productions” (Ebrahim, 2020: 26). Ebrahim argues that the standards defining 'quality' should be scrutinised, as the criteria might not align with local viewership preferences. These criteria often emphasise standards defined outside local contexts, thus potentially neglecting the entertainment value for local audiences. Aspiring filmmakers, including South African Indians, may have increased access to broadcasters, film festivals, and training programmes, yet they may still face challenges in meeting the quality standards set by these initiatives. Additionally, the funding models may not adequately represent the circumstances and needs of these previously disadvantaged filmmakers, who may require more tailored support and resources to benefit from the programmes.

The discussion of South Africa’s diverse filmmaking facets and industries, encompassing various production and distribution modes, highlights more attainable standards of production that cater to local audiences. Ebrahim contends that these “small cinemas are significant sites of cultural expression that often signal larger socio-cultural shifts before they permeate mainstream discourses” (Ebrahim, 2020: 22). This cultural expression is exemplified in Naidu’s low-budget, straight-to-DVD ‘Vollywood’ productions of the 2000s, featuring narratives relatable to South African Indian families. These domestic themes later become more prevalent in commercial cinemas for national audiences, as seen in films like *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), *Deep End* (2018) directed by Eubulus Timothy, *3 Days to Go* (2019) directed by Bianca Isaac, and

other productions benefiting from South African Indian stories with the resources for mainstream release.

In 'Traversing the Cinemascope of Contemporary South Africa: A Peripatetic Journey' (2018), Ebrahim refers to the landscape of South Africa's film economy as a 'cinemascope', encouraging a perception of it as a multidimensional space rather than merely through the lens of national cinema. Ebrahim argues that the framework of national cinema is unproductive in the South African context due to the diverse manifestations of cinema in the country, along with the complexity of identity in a post-apartheid South Africa. Ebrahim's conception of South African filmmaking as a cinemascope situates South African Indian filmmaking within the broader South African film industry, encompassing straight-to-DVD, low-budget films, Afrikaans-language films, as well as state-subsidised filmmaking. The contemporary funding models of the NFVF and criticisms thereof are elaborated upon in Ebrahim's work (2018).

Supporting the inclusion of South African Indian filmmaking, Lotter (2010) pioneered scholarship in this area, presenting a comparison with Bollywood and Indian cinema. Lotter notes the use of transgressional characters in South African Indian filmmaking as a deviation from Bollywood or commercial Indian film traditions. Kumaran Naidu, who produced *Broken Promises* among other narratives under his production company, is referenced by both Lotter and Ebrahim as a self-taught filmmaker who utilises available resources for his early productions. Ebrahim (2018) describes Naidu's practice as oscillating between formal and informal filmmaking, and also briefly mentions Bollywood influences on other instances of South African Indian filmmaking, such as Pinky Mothie's work, which, according to Lotter (2010), features a unique selling point of Bollywood prestige.

Directly relating to the samples of this study, Moodley and Govender (2021) offer a critical analysis of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* and its sequel *Kandasamys: The Wedding* (2019), focusing on audience reception and box office success in South African commercial cinemas. They suggest that *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* evoked nostalgia for home or hometown community among South African Indian

audiences from Chatsworth or the greater KwaZulu-Natal, including "audiences in Gauteng who are no longer residing in Chatsworth but who continue to use Chatsworth as a frame of reference as home" (Moodley and Govender, 2021: 234). Their article provides a historical overview of the history of South African Indian communities, particularly Chatsworth, arguing that the films' successes are attributable to their popularity with South African Indian audiences.

According to Moodley and Govender (2021), the film script of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* was submitted in response to a callout by the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) for government-funded feature film incubation. Although initially projecting earnings of R1.8 million, the completed film grossed R16.3 million in South African box office revenue, and its popularity led to the production of a sequel. The director, Jayan Moodley, attributes the success of the films to the support from the South African Indian communities, noting her goal was to create stories with which local viewers could identify. Moodley and Govender also highlight the concept of location identity in their central argument, proposing that the inclusion of well-known landmarks within the community, such as the Hare Krishna temple, Gandhi Park, and Bangladesh market, resonated with the audience. This speaks to how identity may be perceived and tied to a locale. Through focusing on the community of Chatsworth and invoking nostalgia for the locale, the director's intentions for the audience to develop a sense of pride in being South African Indian becomes evident (Moodley and Govender, 2021).

Other South African Indian filmmakers, such as Naresh Veeran, Raeesa Mohamed, Masood Boomgard, and Maganthrie Pillay, are mentioned in the discussions of Lotter (2010) and Ebrahim (2018). Maganthrie Pillay, who became the first 'black' female director in South Africa with the release of her film *34 South* (2005), a road-trip narrative that took eight years to complete, describes herself as a black woman, "Not Indian, I'm South African," (Lotter, 2010: 134). This reveals her perception of her political identity, aiding in the interpretation of self-representation reflected in her filmmaking narratives. Lotter (2010) speculates that future South African Indian filmmaking will more frequently represent characters as "black South Africans with a

distant Indian heritage” (Lotter, 2010: 134-135), meaning that such filmmaking practices will reference links to India and Bollywood less and will represent more of an African, or specifically South African, perception of identity. This theme is explored further in the analysis of the samples within the body of this research, albeit to a limited extent as the focus remains on heterogeneity in expressions of cultural identity rather than on a national identity.

As demonstrated by Maganthrie Pillay, Pinky Mothie, and other South African Indian filmmakers, complex and differing perceptions of identity and influences are projected within the filmmakers’ self-proclaimed identities and film narratives. Each filmmaker, with their distinct life experiences, interpretive lenses, and creative aspirations, reflects the heterogeneous landscape of South African Indian notions of identity. There is a notable gap in scholarship dedicated to the South African Indian identity as represented in film. Such scholarship would not only enrich our understanding of South African Indian communities but also contribute to the larger discourse on how cinema serves as a medium and platform for cultural expression for postcolonial diasporic communities.

Methodology

The investigation of identity, culture, and representation in South African Indian filmmaking necessitates a dynamic methodological framework for scholarly enquiry. This section elucidates the multifaceted methodology employed to address the research questions leading the focused analysis of three distinct films. The sample selected for this study includes *Broken Promises* (2004) directed by Kumaran Naidu, *For Better for Worse* (2010) directed by Naresh Veeran, and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017) directed by Jayan Moodley.

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative, utilising archival information, existing interviews, and news reports, as well as comparative analysis. Research on the subjects of study, namely South African Indians, as well as the communities’ origins, political and socio-economic status, and participation in the South African film industry, draws upon secondary sources from existing scholarship, archival data, and resources

such as the annual reports of the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), alongside interviews and news reports. This information informs the analyses of the selected films within the socio-political landscapes of their production and release. Thus, the methodology presents a combination of textual and contextual analysis of each film, focusing on its notions of identity, cultural specificity, and modes of production, combined with a novel use of analysis conducted through the adaptation of a structural framework identified as EVAM (Entertainment Value Assessment Matrix) (Passchier, 2007).

EVAM, developed by Passchier (2012), has been implemented by the South African Broadcasting Service (SABC) as a method of evaluating the proposals of entertainment products submitted for broadcast. It involves a structured approach to analysing a film product. The framework also currently forms the foundation of the curriculum design and examination structure of AFDA, a South African higher education institution specialising in film/television studies and creative economies (Passchier, 2012).

EVAM evaluates a potential film's constitution in the early phase of pre-production before it is even produced (Basson, Dullaart, and Tomaselli, 2013), and proposes that entertainment value can be derived from five components that constitute a film production: Narrative, Performance, Medium, Aesthetics, and Control. Each of these five components encompasses various 'disciplines' of filmmaking within them. Broadly, 'Narrative' refers to the film product's engagement with story progression, narrative structure, themes, conflict, subtext, and context. 'Performance' pertains to the actors' performance on screen, and the characters' ability to evoke emotional investment in an audience through the use of dialogue, body language, blocking, and movement. 'Medium' refers to the technical components used to frame and deliver the narrative and performance, including cinematography, audio design, and editing patterns. 'Aesthetics' is the stylistic treatment of a film's visual elements encoded to enrich the narrative and encompasses lighting, colour grading, costume styling and makeup, as well as art direction and set dressing. Lastly, 'Control' focuses on the "economic viability and sustainability in the product market" through researching the target market, as well as marketing and distribution methods (Basson, Dullaart, and Tomaselli, 2013: 72). The

genre of a film or entertainment product contextually informs all five components of the EVAM framework, in which AFDA scholars would explore the above-mentioned components of filmmaking within the research parameters of assigned genres. This is included in the analysis of this research - genre manifested in the narrative, performance, medium or technical choices, aesthetic choices, and even in relation to the target market in Control.

Applied to the evaluative systems of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the physical examination structure of AFDA, EVAM and its five categories provide a systematic and practical approach to analysing film productions through the collaborative sub-disciplines of filmmaking that constitute them. This study effectively adapts Passchier's EVAM into a methodological framework of analysis for already established film productions based on the five components. Whereas formal textual analysis would focus on select elements of a film production, such as mise-en-scène and dialogue, for example, an adapted EVAM allows for the organic organisation and deconstruction of the film production for a fine-tuned examination: the various different elements that constitute mise-en-scène can be deconstructed into disciplines that fall under 'Aesthetics' and 'Medium', and dialogue would be categorised under 'Performance'.

The use of this matrix, designed for the evaluation of proposed entertainment productions, is beneficial for achieving the aims of this research for several reasons. Firstly, this methodology provides a modular approach to textual analysis, wherein the relevant elements of film productions can be inspected according to the specific needs of the research questions. The categorical nature of EVAM offers a framework in which all the various working facets of a production can be individually examined for the value they add to the overall production. This approach is well-suited to the goals of analysing existing film productions, and the analyses can be organised and structured into three parts to address the three research questions, as demonstrated below.

The second research question of the study examines notions of cultural identity held by the characters and family units presented in the three films, looking at the depicted

narrative events, social and family dynamics, as well as language. Therefore, the components of Narrative (analysing themes, story progression, conflict/obstacles, subtext, and context) and Performance (focusing on human interaction, cultural/societal cues, emotional development, character psychology, dialogue, body language, and movement), in the context of the genre, are categorically analysed in Chapter Four. The third research question involves identifying and juxtaposing the depicted aesthetic cultural markers in each film, focusing on costume and styling, art direction, and character performance in scenes within the home or depicting cultural rituals. Therefore, the disciplines within Aesthetics (colour, space and composition, visual representation and designs, wardrobe and styling, location, set dressing and props) and Performance, where applicable, are presented for scene analysis in Chapter Five.

Chapter Three examines the modes of production and distribution in relation to the target audience, with the components presented for analysis being Medium (cinematography, sound design, editing) and Control (target market, distribution, marketing). It should be noted that although each research question (and therefore chapter) is assigned relevant components of EVAM, where necessary, elements of the narrative, performance and aesthetics of various scenes important in the analysis and answering of research questions will be highlighted and included.

Regarding the approach to the first research question and the nature of EVAM, the novel contribution of this research's analytical framework to film scholarship is highlighted. By using an adaptation of EVAM as a framework for analysis, the target market and modes of production and exhibition are included in the constitution of the film production, thereby becoming categories for evaluation (Control). Consequently, the intended audience and modes of distribution are inherent in the consideration and evaluation of a film or entertainment production. Instead of merely decoding the films as texts and then employing different methodologies to examine the modes of production and distribution in relation to the target audience, this research's methodology presents a combination of textual and contextual analysis, which may prove to be a beneficial analytical framework for future film production scholars. The modes of production and distribution of the case studies present both variety and

similarity in terms of access to resources, financial support, and breadth of visibility, which needs to be reflected in the comparative analyses. EVAM's components of evaluation cater to a formal comparative analysis inclusive of this variety through its sub-headings. For example, under Control, juxtapositions and comparisons in the analyses can be organised into various applicable subcategories such as 'target market', 'distribution methods', and 'marketing methods'.

The Entertainment Value Assessment Matrix (EVAM), originally conceived as a tool for evaluating the potential success of films at the pre-production stage, is adaptively re-purposed in this research for the analysis of existing films. This adaptation significantly broadens the utility of EVAM, transforming it from a primarily predictive tool into one capable of detailed, retrospective analysis. By deconstructing each film into its constituent elements - ranging from Narrative and Performance to Medium, Aesthetics, and Control - the adapted EVAM facilitates a modular and systematic inquiry. This shift in EVAM's application enhances analytical rigour and provides a structured mechanism for comparing different films.

Moreover, this methodological innovation offers a focused yet comprehensive lens, well-suited to addressing multifaceted research questions. By including an analysis of production and distribution within the 'Control' component of EVAM, this approach offers a dual framework for understanding the films as both cultural products and market commodities. This holistic approach acknowledges the commercial realities films must navigate, including dynamics of target audiences, market viability, and distribution strategies.

Building upon the methodology discussed, as mentioned in Chapter One, this research introduces 'Prismatic Analysis' emerging from the findings of the analytical chapters. Prismatic Analysis integrates with the adapted EVAM, enhancing its utility in the exploration of the complex and multifaceted components influencing the sample of films.

Prismatic Analysis is particularly effective in conjunction with EVAM as it extends the scope of traditional film analysis by focusing not just on the constituent elements of a film but also on how these elements interact within the broader socio-cultural and historical contexts of the narratives. This approach is detailed further in Chapter Six, where it is demonstrated how various themes such as family dynamics, community reputation, and cultural practices are not only represented in film but are also shaped by the specific locales and historical trajectories of the communities depicted. This methodological pairing, therefore, presents a focused framework in uncovering insights in the cinematic self-representations of South African Indians.

Transitioning into the analytical chapters of the research, the next section will utilise the adapted EVAM model to explore the modes of production and degrees of visibility of each film in the sample.

CHAPTER THREE: PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION & AUDIENCE REACH

This chapter explores the conditions of production and distribution that shape the form and content of *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017). Providing essential context for analysing the film texts in subsequent chapters, it addresses the political economy of filmmaking within the South African Indian context by examining the financial, institutional, and regulatory frameworks that influence production and distribution.

Following the methodology of categorical analysis of EVAM, this chapter focuses primarily on the 'Control' components—target market, distribution, and marketing—as they are critical in understanding how films reach and impact their audiences. Additionally, aspects of the 'Medium' category, such as cinematography, audio design, and editing, are discussed where relevant to the research question. Utilising the metaphor of white light dispersing into an array of colours, this approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of how multiple elements converge to shape the cinematic texts under study, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the analysis. This 'prismatic' analysis reveals the spectrum of influences that shape the final film, highlighting the complex interplay of factors that contribute to cinematic production.

Understanding the mode of production and distribution is crucial as they not only determine the feasibility and visibility of film projects but also influence filmmakers' creative decisions. This analysis sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the films as cultural products shaped by their creative dynamics and external production conditions. This backdrop is vital for the next two chapters, which delve into how these production and distribution factors contribute to the textual expressions of cultural identities in South African Indian cinema. By scrutinising these films' production and distribution strategies, we can discern the structural factors that might amplify or constrain their visibility and therefore their impact on shaping perceptions of 'South African Indianness' within and outside the South African Indian community. The modalities of

production and distribution are not mere background information; they are integral to the interpretative framework that evaluates the degrees to which the films exhibit nuanced self-representation to various audiences.

In addition, assessing the modes of production and distribution of the sample films is essential in comprehending the practical challenges and opportunities faced by the South African Indian filmmakers in the post-apartheid period. This encompasses an array of factors including access to funding, resources for production, and distribution channels. The realities of South African Indian filmmaking within this cultural milieu are therefore highlighted in this chapter, including the practices' alignment with the post-1994 state objectives to promote diversity in arts and culture.

In the post-apartheid period, the South African democratic government acknowledged the importance of cinema as a medium for cultural expression and economic development. Consequently, state-owned organisations such as the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) were established to support filmmakers. Ebrahim (2020) critically examines the NFVF's focus on 'high-end' filmmakers and projects, arguing that it often neglects the smaller-scale filmmaking practices. Similarly, Saks (2012) acknowledges the establishment of the NFVF and the Industrial Development Corporation's media and motion picture division, which focused on the marketability of locally produced films in international markets. Furthermore, both Saks and Ebrahim note that state-funded support was not without its challenges. Ebrahim (2020) argues that the criteria for accessing funds from entities like the NFVF were often stringent, making it difficult for small-scale filmmakers to benefit from the support. Saks echoes this sentiment, pointing out that training in film production to upskill previously disadvantaged and emerging filmmakers was not as readily available (Saks, 2012).

In response to the limitations of government support, independent filmmakers sought alternative avenues for film production, distribution, and consumption. Ebrahim (2020) highlights the emergence of small cinemas as vibrant but less-visible cinematic practices, characterised by micro-entrepreneurial film production. According to Ebrahim (2020), these small cinemas operate in a fluid space between formality and informality,

often bypassing traditional mainstream distribution and exhibition channels. Saks (2012) discusses the diversity of the cinematic narratives that emerged in these conditions, suggesting that despite the underperforming infrastructure provided by the state, democratisation has been attended to in some form because of the diversity presented in the smaller-scale practices. Furthermore, the small cinemas fulfilled a role of providing a platform for marginalised communities to express their cultural identities (Ebrahim, 2020). This is particularly relevant in a country transitioning from apartheid, where representation and cultural expression could be highly politicised.

The modes of production and distribution for the three films in the sample— *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017)—are inspected in the forthcoming sections. By scrutinising these operational frameworks, the way the films navigate the terrain between formal and informal cinematic practices is assessed, as well as the degrees of visibility achieved by the cinematic practices of the filmmakers.

Broken Promises: Informal Production Modes and Straight-to-DVD Success

Broken Promises (2004), directed by Kumaran Naidu, serves as an example of the artisanal approach to filmmaking in a smaller-scale, localised film production that serves to represent the cultural identity of its represented community. It is the first film produced within South African Indian communities focusing on South African Indian characters. The target market for the film was South African Indians themselves (Ebrahim, 2018).

The film was made with a low budget, shot on digital video as Naidu believes it enables the “capturing of the reality of a particular contextual moment of ethnic identity in South Africa” (Moodley, 2005: 54). After being loaned money and emptying his bank account to purchase the editing and camera equipment (Moodley, 2015), the film was shot informally over twenty-one days in 2003, reflecting the resourcefulness and adaptability of South African filmmakers operating on smaller budgets. The filmmaker’s localised approach to filmmaking is reflective of Ebrahim’s (2020) description of small

cinemas, as well as the cinema's function as a site of cultural expression. The filmmaker's experience of relying on loans and personal savings to produce the film is indicative of the financial challenges faced by small-scale filmmakers, reflecting the limited availability of funding and support and therefore exemplifying the perspectives of Ebrahim (2010) and Saks (2012).

In assessing the production value of *Broken Promises*, it is important to note that Naidu is credited as the director, director of photography, as well as the editor of the film, thereby exhibiting artisanal modes of production. The film was produced informally and with a low budget; practical uses of lighting were employed with simplistic cinematography and shot design in the aim of capturing the action in the scene. The coverage of shots is pieced together with a simple and effective drama edit pattern: an initial wide shot establishes the context and characters' spatial relation to each other, followed by closer character shots (close-up or medium-close-up shots of characters engaging) to increase tension, lastly ending the scene by pushing back to the wider frame to diffuse tension. While the cinematography and edit pattern would have aesthetically benefitted from more variety and style, the narrative is presented cohesively and unburdened by large technical issues.

After completing the film, Naidu aspired to screen it in cinemas. As he was a new local filmmaker, the film was not accepted by mainstream cinemas. In addition, representatives of mainstream cinemas cited the film being of poor quality (Appasamy, 2020). The production quality may have affected the possibility of cinema screening but it did not inhibit the popularity or the reception of the film from its target audience. Naidu decided to sell the film straight to DVD, and he ended up successfully selling around fifty thousand copies, and even recuperating his original investment. The film became so popular that due to DVD piracy, "illegal sales of his film topped half a million in South Africa, and two million in Pakistan, where it was a hit" (Le Cordeur, 2008). In an interview, Naidu stated that he acknowledges the role of piracy in the distribution of his film - he did not make any money from it, however, he was building a reputation because of it (Le Cordeur, 2008).

The popularity and subsequent rampant piracy of *Broken Promises* could be attributed to a multitude of factors. The film's focus on South African Indian characters and communities provided an opportunity for specific cultural representation in a media landscape where such representation has been sparse. Given its target market of South African Indians, the film offered a portrayal that deeply resonated with its audience, providing a window into a lived experience that mainstream representations might not adequately capture. Moreover, the artisanal and localised approach to production may appear closer to the lived experiences of the community it represented. As Ebrahim (2020) argues, small cinemas often act as outlets for cultural expression and can even contribute to democratic representation. By focusing on local issues, dialects, and cultural markers, the film fostered a sense of cultural pride and collective identity that resonated with audiences.

The film's mode of distribution—initially directly to DVD—also made it more accessible to its target audience. DVDs would have been easy to share, lend, or even duplicate illegally. In a landscape of piracy, the film's quality or technical prowess becomes less important than its cultural relevance and narrative appeal, highlighting the notion that a sense of cultural pride, relatability, or authenticity sparked the film's popularity. Additionally, the proliferation of pirated copies can often indicate not just a film's popularity but also its unavailability through legal channels. This would particularly be the case in Pakistan, where the film found an unexpected audience. In such situations, piracy can fill the gap left by formal distribution networks.

The film being popular in Pakistan suggests that its appeal crossed national boundaries, resonating with global South Asian diasporic communities. It underscores the malleability and complexity of 'South Asian identity', which appears to traverse geographic, national, and even cultural boundaries. From a postcolonial perspective, the representations of the diaspora often foster common narratives around themes such as displacement, hybrid identities, and the struggle to maintain cultural heritage (Naficy, 2012). The portrayal of South African Indian life in *Broken Promises* may have resonated with Pakistani viewers by capturing universal aspects of the South Asian diasporic experience.

The film further exemplifies Ebrahim's (2020) discussion of ethnolinguistic interpellation in small cinemas through its community engagement and audience reception. From a linguistic standpoint, *Broken Promises* employ dialects and cultural expressions that are relatable specifically to a South African Indian audience. Linguistic choices can serve as a direct form of 'hailing' subjects who recognise their cultural and ethnic idiosyncrasies in the dialogues and language used. The thematic choices in the film—such as family dynamics, cultural rituals, and perhaps even the unique socio-political circumstances of South African Indians—can also act as points of interpellation. These themes speak to the lived experiences of the community, thereby creating spaces for audience members to recognise themselves as the intended addressees of these representations.

Naidu's artisanal approach to filmmaking, including the localised method of production, adds another layer to this interpellation. By adopting a smaller-scale, community-focused production model, the filmmaker reinforces the idea that the film is by, for, and about South African Indians. This approach signals to the audience that this film is explicitly engaging with their specific cultural narratives and experiences. In addition, the film's distribution method—initially straight to DVD and its subsequent wide circulation, including through piracy—further amplified its reach within the community, essentially broadening the scope of individuals being 'hailed' by the film. The evident volume of sales, both formal and pirated, demonstrates that the film resonated with its ethnically delineated primary audience, who discerned elements within the narrative that merited their engagement, thus accepting the interpellation.

Although gaining traction within the industry was difficult, the film met the South African Indian target audience's desire for representation in film, and paved the way for *Broken Promises 2* (2007) to premiere in a mainstream cinema (Appasamy, 2020). Through his filmmaking, not only did South African Indians feel represented, as Naidu mentioned, "I had non-Indians say the family situation portrayed in the film was very similar to theirs" (Le Cordeur, 2008). Because of the popularity and success of *Broken Promises*, its sequel saw more ease in its creation, as Vollywood Productions was

conceptualised, comprising Naidu's Garuda Motion Pictures and Magashan Reddy's AfriCommunications (Le Cordeur, 2008).

The film sparked a franchise of four productions, featuring its popular archetypal characters within Amsugi's South African Indian family (Appasamy, 2020). Since then, Naidu has produced several films firmly set in South African Indian contexts and locales, utilising formal and informal business practices (Ebrahim, 2018). In his succeeding films, Naidu aims to avoid generalising an Indian identity, expressing that he foregrounds the South African identity and inherited Indian culture is secondary. He focuses on depicting cultural specificity, as articulated through his characters—for example, Amsugi and Natasha's friction in Tamil and Hindi cultural customs and ethnolinguistic backgrounds. A critique on Naidu's films considers the lack of depiction of South African Indian communities in relation to South African society as a whole. In debating this, Naidu refers to the lack of South African Indian presence in filmmaking, and his mandate is to provide a platform within the community (Moodley, 2015).

Naidu perceives his mission to provide a focused platform for South African Indian communities as a counter-narrative to mainstream cinema, which often marginalises these specific cultural narratives. His work seeks to fill this void by bringing visibility to the experiences, intricacies, and idiosyncrasies of South African Indian communities. However, the critique raises an important issue - by focusing almost exclusively on South African Indian communities, Naidu may inadvertently be contributing to a form of cultural myopia that isolates these communities from their broader African context. This isolation can run counter to the discourse of a pluralistic and post-apartheid South African identity, in which inclusivity and diversity are promoted. Naidu's rationale regarding a deficit of South African Indian presence in filmmaking is evidently valid; however, it raises the question of whether this absence justifies a form of cinematic ethnocentrism or whether it could serve as motivation for a more nuanced depiction that situates South African Indians within a larger social fabric.

Naidu's filmmaking practices can be viewed as both consonant with and divergent from the state's post-1994 goals for ethnic diversity and cultural expression in arts and

culture. His commitment to representing South African Indian communities aligns with the broader ideological framework that sought to include previously marginalised ethnic groups in the national cultural narrative (Saks, 2010). In this sense, Naidu is responding to the call for 'unity in diversity', enriching the perception of South Africa's 'Rainbow Nation' through nuanced portrayals of South African Indian identities. However, limitations exist in the degree to which his films engage with other communities or reflect the broader post-apartheid quest for an integrated national identity. Naidu's films, while valuable in giving voice to a minority community, can be critiqued for not extending far enough in fostering a more inclusive notion of South African identity.

It is also important to discuss how Naidu's artisanal, smaller-scale mode of filmmaking interacts with the ambitions of the South African government for a 'cultural renaissance'. While the Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology (1996) projected grand visions of unity and cultural expression, Naidu's obstacles in securing funding and distribution channels reflect insufficient infrastructure to support these goals. Naidu's films, therefore, stand as both products and critiques of the state's idealism of transformation in arts and culture in the post-apartheid era. They fulfil the desire for increased representation and cultural expression, yet they also underscore the limitations and challenges still present in South Africa's evolving landscape of arts and culture.

Moodley (2015) discusses the prevalence of stereotypical or one-dimensional characters that often reflect external representations of South African Indians in arts and media. In contrast, Naidu's characters, such as Amsugi and Natasha, transcend this simplistic portrayal, resonating with members of the target audience who either share similar experiences or can readily identify such nuanced characteristics—a fact corroborated by the feedback Naidu received. The juxtaposition between these characters and the ensuing conflicts that arise from their interactions are intentional narrative strategies employed by Naidu in his depiction of South African Indian communities. Through a methodology centred on self-representation, Naidu encodes narratives, characters, and their inter-relationships with a depth that emanates from the filmmaker's intimate understanding of the community and culture he represents. The complexity of these

tensions and character developments finds resonance with the target audience, thereby successfully engaging the represented communities of South African Indians.

Broken Promises serves as a distinct case study in understanding the employment of culturally specific characters within cinematic self-representation and its reception by the represented localised communities. Naidu's approach to filmmaking, characterised by an artisanal mode of engaging with formal and informal production processes, emerged as a response to the challenges of inaccessibility to resources such as funding, skills development, and mentorship. Leveraging alternative means of distribution, such as DVD sales and even piracy, Naidu's innovative approach not only afforded him success with his means of distribution and audience engagement, but also helped him build a reputation within South African Indian communities that paved the way for future projects.

The trajectory of *Broken Promises* and Naidu's subsequent modes of production and distribution underscores the value of self-representation, community engagement, and innovation in production and distribution, particularly for filmmakers working within underrepresented communities and with limited resources and support.

For Better For Worse: Visibility via the Film Festival Platform

Produced six years after *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), written by Raeesa Mohamed and directed by Naresh Veeran, utilised different means of production and distribution, with evidence of a larger focus on formal filmmaking practices. The film was developed independently through the production company Bright Side Pictures. Principal photography of the film included an eighteen-day shoot with a substantial crew of twenty, in over twenty-five locations (Smart, 2009). Though not much information is publicly available about the film, it is evident through the credit roll that many service providers functioned as partners or sponsors in the production, thereby indicating that partnerships and community engagement served as a key factor in meeting production quality expectations and keeping budgets low.

The strategy of utilising sponsors and partnerships in the production of the film suggests a degree of understanding of the state of the South African filmmaking industry as well as an informed approach to resource management. It also suggests that the filmmakers were proactive in seeking out support from independent and non-state sources, rather than being limited to what is readily available. The focus on maintaining mainstream cinema expectations of production quality indicates that the filmmakers' aspirations were for the film to stand alongside productions on mainstream platforms such as national cinemas. The collaboration with sponsors would, therefore, have provided the resources and support necessary to achieve the intended scale of production.

Although it is lesser known than its counterparts in the sample within localised communities, the film premiered at the 30th Durban International Film Festival and was later acquired for distribution on mainstream cinema platforms by Videovision Entertainment. This highlights the importance of the role of festivals in the visibility of independent and artisanal filmmaking practices. More broadly, in recent decades, film festivals, primarily from Europe or North America, have extended support to postcolonial states by providing opportunities for project funding (Falicov, 2016). The support may not just be financial, but also in the form of training or development, which is critical for the success of informally trained filmmakers. Critiques of this dynamic include the notion of western countries serving as gatekeepers or cultural mediators, as well as the power balance between these gatekeepers and the assisted filmmakers, particularly in regard to the selection process of the films and the allocation of funds (Falicov, 2016).

Dovey and Sendra (2023) further remark on the selective and often prejudiced characteristics of many film festivals, in which established power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South determine the accessibility to platforms of exhibition and networking. They argue that a decolonisation of the film festival space needs to actively occur in the context of each of the festival's locales, as well as how the festivals engage with each other. Dovey and Sendra call for "decolonised film festival worlds - a shift away from the competitive, capitalist 'world of the powerful' (in this

context, a hierarchical, white film festival world that seeks to maintain its privilege)” (Dovey and Sendra, 2023: 276).

In the context of African film festivals, Anthony (2005) acknowledges the role they play as valuable platforms for emerging African artists, documentary makers, and performers across various genres. However, he argues that they still operate within a structure that is largely influenced by western markets, reliant on foreign financial support, and controlled by western distribution channels. While these festivals serve as crucial venues for showcasing the diversity and richness of African cinema and other cultural productions, they are not entirely emancipated from the neo-colonial structures that govern international arts and culture. The dependency on western markets and foreign financial support underlines a financial and ideological imbalance that risks shaping the content and form of the films showcased.

Such conditions invoke questions about curatorial independence and the freedom for these platforms to genuinely serve as sites for cultural expression that is not heavily influenced by external, particularly western, considerations. The reliance on the Global North and their distribution channels may also inadvertently lead to the exoticisation or simplification of African narratives to fit prescribed expectations or market demands, thereby diluting the complex social and cultural realities these films aim to portray. Solutions forward might involve a concerted effort to decentralise funding and distribution control, making room for local and regional players to have a more significant influence. This, in turn, could allow for a more authentic representation of African cultures and narratives, fulfilling the festivals' original mandate as platforms for genuine cultural expression (Dovey and Sendra, 2023).

In the discussion of access to exhibition, Dovey (2020) argues that the emergence of African film festivals plays a crucial role in connecting African filmmakers with their intended audiences, and that the festivals have begun to serve as a space for African filmmakers to engage with their target markets, receive feedback, and participate in discussions about their work. Dovey believes this to be influential to the filmmakers' future work and the development of the direction of their careers. Additionally, these

festivals provide an opportunity for these filmmakers to politicise their audiences, addressing socio-political issues relevant to their audiences, fostering a sense of connection and shared experience. African film festivals are not just venues for screening films; they are sites of cultural production where filmmakers and audiences interact in ways that shape the meaning and impact of African cinema (Dovey, 2020).

This can be exemplified in South Africa, where festivals play a pivotal role in the industry, serving as a platform to stimulate interest, generate demand, and expand the market for South African films (to intended audiences, as well as for international reach). The NFVF acknowledges the function of film festivals in enhancing the accessibility of South African films, thereby providing funding to national film festivals. This is particularly beneficial in a context where historically many potential South African audiences lack access to cinemas. In addition to showcasing films, festivals such as the Durban International Film Festival serve as a networking platform for industry players, thereby fostering collaborations and exchanges (National Film and Video Foundation, no date). As demonstrated through *For Better For Worse*, they provide opportunities for filmmakers to increase their distribution channels.

The film's premiere at the 30th Durban International Film Festival enabled the opportunity in which the well-known enterprise Videovision eventually acquired its distribution rights. Videovision is a company with operations in film and television production and distribution and has been involved in numerous South African film productions and the broader African continent. In a film congress held in Durban in 2002, producer and CEO of Videovision, Anant Singh's ambitions to build the South African film industry included expanding infrastructure and attracting foreign investment (Lelièvre, 2002). In the 2016 KZN Top Business Portfolio, as a 2016 Top Business Awards finalist, Videovision is cited as having produced in excess of eighty feature films across South Africa and internationally, with the total value of production costs surpassing R1 billion. Larger mainstream film productions in the company's history include *Sarafina!* (1992) and *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013). Furthermore, Videovision's relationship with the popular South African filmmaker Leon

Schuster resulted in three of the all-time top five South African box office successes (KZN Top Business Portfolio, 2016).

Singh's interest in the industry began in the apartheid era, where stringent censorship policies permeated many facets of media, including cinema. He became the first South African Indian and person of colour to operate a film rental business during this time - an endeavour that led to his arrest. Subsequently, he established Videovision Enterprises, which has become a significant player in the South African film industry (Singh, 2021). Regarding the distribution deal with Videovision for *For Better For Worse*, Videovision Head of Acquisition, Sanjeev Singh, commented on the cultural context and appeal of the film:

We are delighted to have acquired *For Better For Worse* for distribution in South Africa. The film is a humorous take on the pressures placed on eligible men and women to find marriage partners. The setting of an Indian household and context gives the film a touch of authenticity. We will release the film at cinemas later this year (Videovision, 2009).

In total, the film made R 263,737 in the mainstream cinema box office (National Film and Video Foundation, 2010). The target market of *For Better For Worse* is not explicitly stated; however, it can be assumed that the film is geared towards target audiences of romantic comedies, considering the romantic comedy genre of the film, with the potential for viewers to experience 'a touch of authenticity' (Videovision, 2009) due to it being set in an Indian home, as per Singh's comment, revealing a similar sentiment to the reception of *Broken Promises*. The cast includes personalities well-known to South African Indian communities for their work in radio, theatre, film, as well as television, including Mohamed herself, Mariam Bassa, Vivian Moodley, Juanita Ramlochan, and Eubulus Tracey (Smart, 2009). This would have contributed to the marketability of the film. The overall low earnings in the box office may speak to the scale of marketing of the production, South African audiences' level of investment in local film productions, or other factors.

Minor criticism of *For Better For Worse* pertained to technical issues and sound imbalances (Smart, 2010), with Mohamed herself mentioning the technical difficulties the crew faced during principal photography (Pillay, 2010). A particular anonymous online review of the film questions its possible Bollywood aspirations because of the 'melodrama' as well as the seemingly unnecessary dance sequence at the end. The theme of marriage is also mentioned; the author states that it is one of the biggest stereotypes faced by the Indian community (the obsession of parents getting their children married) and the film contributes to that perception (IOL, 2010).

Think of all the worst stereotypes of Durban Indians anyone ever jokes about, and they play on them without actually making a joke.

While the issue of successfully marrying off the children is important to the Indian community it is not the be-all and end-all of life and this film paints the community in a bad light (IOL, 2010: no pagination)

The disapproving singular online review cited from the website IOL (2010) invokes several considerations. Firstly, the inclusion of Bollywood influences may serve ambitions to enhance the film's entertainment value and perpetuate the filmmaker's perceptions of South African Indian identity and its influences; however, audiences or represented community members may not hold the same notions of identity and may feel misrepresented. Bollywood's appeal among South Asian diasporic communities may serve as a cultural touchstone, offering a sense of familiarity and affinity. The filmmaker may have incorporated these elements to connect with broader, transnational South Asian sensibilities, yet this raises the question of the degree to which such elements genuinely resonate with the specific experiences of South African Indians. The strategy could be perceived as simplifying complex identities and experiences into potentially reductive cinematic tropes.

As an example, criticism of the film's focus on the topic of marriage highlights a sentiment of discomfort around cultural traditions such as marriage being reinforced with South African Indian identity. While marriage is indeed a significant aspect of South African Indian cultures, the critique suggests that an overemphasis on this theme can contribute to stereotyping and limiting the range of stories told about the

community. It could also reflect a desire among audiences for more diverse representations of South African Indian life, beyond domestic themes and narratives.

The reviewer's comments indicate a discord between the filmmaker's representational choices and the way these choices are received by at least a segment of the audience or community. This discord underlines the complexities and responsibilities filmmakers face when dealing with the representation of ethnic and cultural identities. The criticism thus serves as a reminder that while filmmakers may have their interpretations and visions of what a particular community or identity should look like on screen, such decisions are inherently dialogic, involving often unpredictable interplay of interpretations and reactions from the audience and the community being portrayed.

In an interview, Mohamed states that the concept for the film arose from the need to create more representation of South African Indians, citing *For Better For Worse* as the first South African Indian film in commercial cinemas, and punting the universal themes of the film that are relatable to anyone. In speaking on her inspiration for the narrative, she questions a void in the industry of meaningful roles for Indian women and suggests that it was something she decided to remedy herself:

I've always wanted to do a movie but there were no scripts that appealed to me. I felt it was time someone did a movie on Indian South Africans. There have been so many films on Indians in the diaspora (*Bend it like Beckham*, *Bride and Prejudice* and *Bollywood Hollywood*), and we have one of the largest Indian populations outside of India and we haven't done something similar here. I also wanted to do a comedy because they are popular, but not one where we stereotype Indians or mock accents or have vulgarity. There was no script like that out there so I wrote one (Pillay, 2010).

Mohamed's intentions elucidate the complex interplay between representation, cultural specificity, and audience reception. Like filmmaker Naidu, Mohamed is aware of the potential pitfalls of stereotyping South African Indian characters. Her focus on 'universal themes' and the absence of 'mock accents or vulgarity' suggests a

conscientious approach towards the portrayal of her community. Mohamed perceives the film as a response to a lack of representation in the landscape of commercial cinema, especially concerning roles for Indian women, and more specifically, Muslim women. While Mohamed encoded her film with specific messages and themes intended to challenge stereotypes and offer nuanced representation, the decoding process, or how the film is interpreted by audiences, is not entirely within her control. The criticisms thus act as a mirror reflecting both the filmmaker's intentions and the complexities of cultural representation. They underline the challenges of negotiating the multiple layers of identity, community, and audience expectations, particularly in a post-apartheid South Africa seeking to promote diversity and cultural expression.

Contrasting perspectives to the aforementioned critique are also evident. A review on the IMDb page of the film by a South African Muslim audience member expresses enjoyment of the themes of the film: "I also loved that, as a South African Indian, I could totally relate to it as it was such a real portrayal of our experience. Yes, it had stereotypes because a) that's what happens and b) it was sending them up" (Malek, 2020: no pagination). This review highlights the divergence in interpretation and reception that different audience members bring to the same cinematic text, contrasting the earlier criticism that the film perpetuates stereotypes and paints the community in a negative light. In this case, the reviewer found the film's stereotypes not as limiting or derogatory but as reflective of 'real' experiences and even as a form of satirical commentary.

The response by the viewer offers an alternative reading that aligns more closely with filmmaker Mohamed's stated intentions. This underscores the complexity of representation and the dialectic relationship between filmmakers and audiences. It becomes evident that for some audience members, in this case a South African Indian Muslim viewer engaging with a film centred around a South African Indian Muslim family, Mohamed's film is able to positively engage its ethnic subjects, thereby accepting the interpellation, as described by Ebrahim (2020).

Overall, the film's low box-office return in cinema suggests that there is still work to be done in building audiences for local productions and fostering a culture of cinema-going in South Africa, as well as resources and financial support for independent film productions for the purpose of marketing and visibility to potential audiences. While the film may not have met with larger-scale acclaim or box-office success, it nonetheless contributes to a growing body of work that explores the contours of South African Indian life in the post-apartheid era.

In sum, the varying receptions of Mohamed's film underscore the multiplicity and complexity of South African Indian identity, as well as the challenges and possibilities inherent in cinematic self-representation. This reflects not just the divergent expectations of its audience but also the multifaceted nature of the community it aims to represent. As such, it serves as both a cultural artefact and a point of departure for ongoing discussions about the evolving role of cinema in shaping and reflecting South African Indian identities in a multicultural, post-apartheid landscape.

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys: From State Funding and Mentorship to Commercial Cinemas

The final film in the sample developed with aims of representing a specific South African Indian community, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), presents a third alternative mode of production and funding in comparison to the methods of *Broken Promises* (2002) and *For Better For Worse* (2010). Directed by Jayan Moodley, the film was developed as part of an initiative by the South African government entity, the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF). A call was released for an incubation programme in which a slate of feature films would be developed, produced, funded, and exhibited on mainstream cinema platforms through mentorship from veteran filmmakers Junaid Ahmed and Helena Spring (Govender and Moodley, 2021). R3,900,000 in total was awarded for the production of three feature films, including *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* as well as *Happiness is a Four Letter Word* (2016) directed by Thabang Moleya (National Film and Video Foundation, no date).

Earning a significant R16.3 million in the box office and becoming nationally popular, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* is also the first feature film set and shot within the predominantly South African Indian township of Chatsworth in KwaZulu-Natal. Up until this point, the South African Indian demographic as a profitable target market for cinema exhibitions of local productions was uncertain. Govender and Moodley suggest that the success of the film can be attributed to its popularity amongst South African Indian audiences:

There was overwhelming support from the Chatsworth community and Indian South Africans all over the country, evident through their [the production team] observation and engagement with the community and audiences, during production and distribution processes (Govender and Moodley, 2021: 230).

The release of the trailer of the film in 2016 reached five hundred thousand viewers in one week (Khan, 2019). Open casting calls for extras that were shared on social media received over three hundred applicants from Chatsworth, and a free screening of the film in Chatsworth received three thousand viewers (Govender and Moodley, 2021). Govender and Moodley (2021) note that although the film reached financial success and popularity amongst audiences, it was not acknowledged at the South African Film and Television Awards (the SAFTAs), the space in which South African films are acknowledged and lauded for their critical reception. This indicates that critics and audiences do not always align in their perceived value of a product.

Not all audience reception was positive, however. Similar to the criticism faced by *For Better For Worse*, a minority of negative reviews speak to the content of the film and the stereotypes it presents. For example, a review on IMDb refers to the film as “not at all relatable to South African Indians. We don't have coordinated dances in our lives and functions” (IMDb, 2021: no pagination). A longer online review speaks to the cultural specificity of the film:

Keeping up with the Kandasamys is definitely not a film for all viewers. Few movies cater to such a niche audience as much as this film does. Whether you will enjoy this film is largely dependent on

whether you fit its narrow demographic or not. Either way, it's refreshing to see a movie that does cater to this often forgotten part of the South African viewing audience that is not a foreign Bollywood movie. Hopefully, it is a sign of things to come and we will get to not just see more of these films being made, but see an improvement in production and acting quality too. If you are familiar with its demographic *Keeping up with the Kandasamys* is a must-see. For everyone else, there are several other DVDs out this month to watch instead (Risi, 2017: no pagination).

The review mentions that the film caters to a niche audience due to its cultural specificity and therefore is not for everyone. As gleaned from the analyses in the previous chapters, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* narratively expresses cultural specificity in a few ways. This includes linguistic interactions, mostly comedically with Aya or Shanti, religious or cultural scenes such as the *satsang* or wedding event, and other smaller moments such as the scene in the Bangladesh market. The comment also implies that this specificity may limit the film's appeal to a broader audience. Viewers who do not identify with the cultural context of the film may find it less engaging, thereby inferring that while cultural specificity can enhance a film's appeal to a particular demographic group, it can also potentially narrow its overall audience. Interestingly, the reviewer also acknowledges an 'often forgotten part of the South African viewing experience', suggesting a recognition of a need for greater diversity in South African cinema, and an appreciation for films that represent different cultural experiences.

The comment contrasts other reviews, such as the previously mentioned example in which the reviewer feels that the film presented an inauthentic representation of South African Indians. The discourse around the representations of South African Indians in the film, similarly to *For Better For Worse*, highlights the diverse notions of identity that exist within the communities being represented and the fact that one production will not successfully and homogeneously represent the sentiments of all South African Indians. Amidst the discourse around the film, it nonetheless gained traction in proving

that a mainstream cinema-going target audience exists, and three sequels have been subsequently directed by Moodley.

The film is also the only one in the sample that has been directed by a female filmmaker. A 2018 study found that Indian women constitute 2.13% of female filmmakers in the country (National Film and Video Foundation and Swift, 2018). This reflects the weight of Raeesa Mohamed's discussion around platforms and meaningful roles for South African Indian women and the mantle she, as a female filmmaker, took to create the platform. Both Moodley and Mohamed acknowledge the deficit of this type of representation and actioned the aim of creating meaningful roles.

These characters in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* represent (sometimes nuanced, sometimes stereotypical) facets of the South African Indian community of Chatsworth, reflecting different generations, social classes, and attitudes towards modernity and tradition. The filmmakers' choice of represented roles enables different faces of South African Indian communities to see versions of themselves represented on screen. For these audiences, the characters may resonate on a personal level, reflecting their own struggles, nostalgias, and aspirations. For external audiences, the characters may provide a window into South African Indian communities, offering insights into its culture, history, and social dynamics. The intention behind the characters in the film appears to be the creation of unapologetically culturally specific and relatable characters that can be laughed at as well as empathised with. By focusing on a universal Romeo-and-Juliet narrative, the film can appeal to a broad audience while its uniqueness enhances its authenticity and relevance for South African Indian viewers.

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys earned R16.3 million in the box office, the highest of all South African feature films between the periods of 2017 to 2019, earning four times more than the second-highest film production (Govender and Moodley, 2021). The success of the film in returning on financial investment as well as making a significant profit in the South African box office demonstrates the existence of a mainstream commercial cinema audience for local productions, provided they meet certain degrees of production quality and marketing campaigns. The success of the film is also

indicative of a significant transformation in the South African film industry over the previous two decades, with evidence of the state increasingly recognising the importance of supporting local filmmakers. The film benefitted from layers of mentorship, funding, and support in order to achieve its lifespan in cinema exhibition as well as video-on-demand (VOD) platforms.

The financial accomplishment of the film serves as an empirical counterpoint to preconceptions held by reviewers or the industry at large that films catering to a 'niche' or culturally specific audience are not commercially viable. It challenges a viewpoint that films addressing specific communities are inherently limiting in their scope and, therefore, their potential profitability. This perception, if held by the financing and support entities, the state, or distributors, would serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, limiting the resources, mentorship, and marketing budgets allocated to such productions, which in turn limits their reach and financial return. However, the success of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* in the South African box office demonstrates that a commercial cinema audience for films of local provenance exists, given sufficient production quality and a robust marketing campaign.

Furthermore, the film's financial accomplishment can be contextualized within the broader landscape of state support for the arts. Its success could serve as a validating factor for increased state-sponsored support, thereby furthering the South African government's agendas for cultural expression and unity through the Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology. The film's lifespan in cinemas and its availability on VOD platforms are indicative of how state support can effectively bridge the gap between cultural cinematic storytelling and commercial success.

The film's profitable run adds another layer to the ongoing discourse surrounding the South African film industry's transformation over the past two decades. In a post-apartheid South Africa, where efforts are being made to reconcile with a history of cultural segregation and misrepresentation, the film's box-office performance is not just a commercial win; it's a socio-cultural milestone. It informs the industry that authentic stories about South African communities, even if perceived as 'niche,' have both a

market and a substantial audience, and that these stories can play a pivotal role in the nation's broader socio-cultural and economic ecosystem.

In conclusion, the trajectory of resources for filmmakers and state support in South Africa marks a departure from the early 2000s, a period when filmmakers such as Naidu relied on informal and opportunistic methods of completing his production, without secure resources, support, or training from the state. Naidu's artisanal approach can be viewed as both a reaction to and a product of the limitations imposed by the early 2000s environment for South African filmmakers. Lacking structured funding mechanisms, Naidu relied on informal networks, personal finances, and community contributions. This mode of production is intrinsically adaptive but precarious, often requiring the filmmaker to wear multiple hats, from scriptwriting to distribution (Ebrahim, 2020). While such an approach can imbue the project with a raw authenticity, it also hinders scalability and broader distribution opportunities, limiting the film to local or community-based channels.

Later along the timeline, Veeran and Mohamed's production of *For Better For Worse* was marked by a shift toward independent filmmaking that benefited somewhat from the evolving landscape of the South African film industry. Though Veeran and Mohamed also engaged in funding methods like sponsorships, the climate they operated in was considerably more favourable. With a film festival premiere, the filmmakers gained access to a platform that not only elevated the film's credibility but also expanded its potential audience beyond local communities. The opportunity for festival inclusion suggests a degree of institutional support, likely from entities like the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), which could offer filmmakers visibility and validation that were unavailable to Naidu. However, despite these advantages, *For Better For Worse* faced its own set of challenges, evidenced by its low box-office returns. This indicates that although the landscape may have evolved, there are still significant gaps in the state and institutional support needed to ensure not just the creation, but the successful distribution and reception of films from marginalised communities.

In summary, Naidu's artisanal mode was a byproduct of necessity, shaped by an industry in its infancy concerning state support and resources for diverse storytelling. In contrast, Veeran and Mohamed's independent mode was more a choice facilitated by a slowly maturing industry. These differences in production modes have direct implications for how these films are distributed and exhibited, with Naidu's film likely being confined to community or grassroots-level channels, while Veeran and Mohamed's film, thanks to modest institutional support, having a somewhat broader reach. Yet both demonstrate the persistent need for more comprehensive structural support to fully leverage the creative practices emerging from South Africa's diverse communities.

Released in theatres in 2017, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, directed by Moodley, represents a milestone in the trajectory of South African film production. It demonstrates the cohesion of government programmes offering guidance and opportunities for financial reinforcement for production and marketing, and the unique community engagement and partnerships employed by the filmmakers to generate interest and engagement with the appropriate target audience. This stands in contrast to the artisanal approach of *Broken Promises*, where such support was inaccessible, and the independently produced production, *For Better For Worse*, which saw a modicum of aid mainly in the form of film festival inclusion. The level of support for *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* likely contributed to the film's technical polish and broader distribution capabilities, allowing it to meet a standard of quality that could compete with international releases. Lastly, the film had the advantage of a more comprehensive marketing strategy, backed by adequate funding, to which neither of the previous films had access.

Now a mentor in the NFVF incubation slate that she was once a participant in, Moodley is advising emerging filmmakers through their own production processes. Moreover, the film represents a solidly-constituted answer to the state's call for representations of diversity in arts and culture, with clear evidence of better (and improved access to) opportunities and programmes for support to reinforce the mandate.

The journey from Naidu's *Broken Promises* to Moodley's *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* encapsulates the evolving landscape of South African cinema and the increasing presence of South African Indian filmmaking practices, marked by a slow yet significant shift from artisanal to more diverse and formal modes of film production. This progression reflects not just the progression of individual filmmakers, but a broader systemic evolution towards greater institutional support and inclusivity.

CHAPTER FOUR: DEPICTED NOTIONS OF IDENTITY IN CHARACTERS AND FAMILY UNITS

In this chapter, the sample is comparatively analysed, specifically examining the notions of identity held by the characters and family units presented in the three films. This analysis aims to determine the breadth of heterogeneity in the representations of culture, achieved by examining narrative events, social and family dynamics, as well as language within relevant scenes. Before delving into the analysis, the story trajectory of each film is outlined to contextualise the various scenes discussed.

Broken Promises (2004), set in Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal, begins with the lead character, Natasha, in distress, speaking to a therapist about her relationship. The story unfolds through flashbacks, starting with Natasha being dumped by her boyfriend in a restaurant. Ruben, a young man overhearing the conversation, approaches Natasha to cheer her up. They leave together for a night out dancing, where Ruben proposes, believing Natasha to be 'the one'. Natasha accepts, and Ruben informs his parents of the engagement the next day. Ruben's family is of Tamil linguistic heritage, while Natasha is of Hindi-speaking heritage; both are of Indian descent and Hindu faith. Ruben's mother, Amsugi, opposes the cultural mixing, while Ruben stands firm in his decision. Ruben's father, Tony, an easy-going alcoholic, is happy for his son. The film also introduces Ruben's neighbours, Saras and her mother-in-law Kamla, highlighting Saras's dominant role.

Natasha's first meeting with Ruben's parents is tense, with Amsugi dictating her expectations for the wedding and Natasha's role as a daughter-in-law. A cultural clash arises over wedding customs, with Natasha preferring *sindoor* (a red pigment used by married Hindu women) over a *thali* (a necklace worn by married Tamil women). Despite initially siding with Natasha, Ruben eventually concedes to his mother's wishes.

Natasha, orphaned, lives with her sister and brother-in-law, who plan to move to Australia post her marriage. After marrying Ruben, the couple honeymoon in Cape

Town and Durban. However, marital discord surfaces when Ruben lies about going to work to meet friends, leading to Natasha feeling neglected and Amsugi criticising her for not appreciating Ruben's career. Natasha tries to adapt to her new role but feels overwhelmed and isolated, especially after a confrontation with Amsugi, who accuses Natasha of changing Ruben.

Tensions escalate over dinner preparations, with both Natasha and Amsugi believing they know Ruben's preferences better, resulting in a culinary disaster. That night, a heated argument between Natasha and Ruben culminates in Natasha feeling reduced to a mere maid in the house, underscoring the deepening rift in their relationship.

Back in real time in therapy, Natasha discusses how she was employed but recently retrenched. When the therapist asks her what her real problem with Ruben is, she states that he keeps breaking his promises to her, and he lets his mother take advantage of her. She also believes that he doesn't pay attention to simple things that she says, and he does things to please his mother but not her. In one instance when she needed to plan a party, he bought all the wrong items from the store. Natasha was sitting by the swimming pool as he tried to apologise, but she ended up pushing him in the pool and telling him that he deserved it.

The therapist finally asked what triggered the call for the appointment. We cut to Natasha dancing to music in the kitchen while cleaning. She accidentally pours washing powder in her mother-in-law's tea, and sugar into the sink with the dishes. We see Natasha's father-in-law drinking the tea, and later Amsugi begins shouting at Natasha, accusing her of trying to kill her, and of poisoning her son's mind. Amsugi calls Natasha a *moodevi*, essentially referring to her as back luck or misfortune.

Shots of Natasha crying in bed are intercut with Amsugi complaining to Ruben about her. Amsugi asks Ruben to 'sort her out' otherwise she is going to develop heart problems like their neighbour with the problematic daughter-in-law Saras did. Ruben leaves to speak to Natasha, and Tony, his father, confronts Amsugi. Tony warns Amsugi

that she needs to give Natasha a break, and the argument escalates. Tony laments that Amsugi turned him into a drunkard, and that he's been this way for thirty years.

At the same time, Natasha is explaining how she feels to Ruben. She mentions that she made a sacrifice when marrying Ruben and living with his family. She feels unappreciated and does not deserve the way she is being treated. She then suggested they see a marriage counsellor, and this is how she ended up at the therapist. The therapist tries swindling Natasha for many more sessions, but something he says plants the idea of divorce in her head.

Back at home, Ruben is fiddling with a guitar as Natasha comes home from the therapist. He asks her if she 'sorted herself out' while not really paying attention to her. He requests for her to make him a sandwich, and she then promptly tells him that she is leaving. Ruben doesn't take the threat seriously until he sees her leave the house with her suitcase. Ruben ponders for a while with his guitar, and starts playing a sombre song while reminiscing about his relationship with Natasha, eventually falling asleep.

Amsugi wakes Ruben up, complaining about drama with the neighbours. Ruben has had enough, and emotionally warns Amsugi that she needs to stop putting her nose in other peoples' business and problems, and that her attitude needs to change. Amsugi believes she has done no wrong, even mentioning Natasha as a problem that she has solved. In response Ruben admits that his own affection for his mother led to him taking his wife for granted. As Ruben defends Natasha to his mother, Natasha walks into the house hearing everything. She and Ruben embrace, and she lets him know that she does not want to fight.

Next door, Saras has had enough of Amsugi's meddling in her affairs and takes her husband's gun, marching over to Amsugi's house. She finds Amsugi, Natasha and Ruben in the lounge, and points the gun at Amsugi. In the panic of the moment, Saras accidentally shoots Natasha, and Natasha falls to the floor. We see a montage of Natasha and Ruben's time together, and then cut to Ruben worrying over Natasha in the hospital. We learn that the bullet deflected off Natasha's *thali*, and it saved her life.

One year later, the family is at a *braai*, a South African barbecue, with Saras and her mother-in-law. Natasha is pregnant, and Amsugi muses over the baby's name. Ruben reveals the baby's name as Mandoza, much to the surprise of Amsugi, who was expecting a traditionally Tamil-sounding name. Mandoza is the name of a popular Black South African musician. The film ends with Mandoza's locally famous song *Nkalakatha* (2000) (with lyrics in the Zulu language) playing over visuals of Amsugi and Kamla's surprised faces.

For Better For Worse (2010) is set in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The film opens with a family function in a large house, where women dressed in formal and colourful *kurtis* and *salwar kameez* discuss their families and recent weddings. It is quickly established through dialogue that marriage is a priority for these families, and the lead character, Anisa, is being pressured to settle down. At Anisa's home, we see her family sitting around the table. Her mother, Ayesha, adamantly urges Anisa to find a husband due to her age, while her father, Yusuf, complains about his wife pressuring Anisa. Through dialogue, we learn that Ayesha has tried to set up Anisa with several men with high-paying careers and does not see value in Anisa's job as a lawyer. Yusuf treats his daughter gently but berates his son Farhaan for not working or joining the family business. Ayesha coddles Farhaan, revealing her soft spot for her son.

At the office, Anisa remembers discovering her fiancé cheating. Meanwhile, at home, Ayesha and her friend bake and plan Anisa's marriage. Anisa meets with her friends at a coffee shop, where they discuss her mother's pressure. Zak, who takes their order, finds himself on the receiving end of Anisa's complaints about the unprofessional menu. Zak retorts by delivering Anisa's order with a book on punctuation and spelling, establishing distaste between them. Anisa's friend Merv heads home and finds his parents and a woman from the temple waiting for him. The woman begins 'exorcising' evil spirits from him, likely due to his homosexuality which his parents do not approve of.

Farhaan meets with an Urdu-speaking friend or business partner from Pakistan. Farhaan becomes involved in the man's affairs, pretending to be his translator with a government official. At Anisa's work, we see the serious matters she handles. At home, she has a

close relationship with her younger sister, Tasneem, helping her convince their father to allow Tasneem to take a date to her matric dance. Their plan works, and Anisa later gets a call from Merv, setting her up on a date. At home, Ayesha and her friend Saras sit in the kitchen gossiping. They discuss a new doctor at the local hospital who could suit Anisa and devise a plan to meet him under the guise of patients.

Anisa endures a blind date with an obnoxious businessman. Zak observes the disastrous date and hands Anisa a book titled "Bling Is Not the Thing", leading to a verbal exchange between them. Anisa and Ayesha drive to the hospital, where they 'accidentally' meet the doctor.

On a golf course, Zak and his father discuss their multiple investments, and Zak's father expresses his desire to venture into the business of boutique hotels with his son. Concurrently, Anisa visits her recently married friend Manisha and her husband, who have returned from their honeymoon. Anisa discovers that the couple have been arguing because Manisha had to assume the majority of household duties such as cooking and cleaning. Anisa objects to this, but Manisha cautions her that such high standards might prevent her from getting married. Manisha then informs Anisa that she has also arranged a date for her. Anisa meets the man at a coffee shop and is disturbed to find that he has invited his mother along. Anisa is quite put off by the mother and son's close relationship. Zak, observing the date, hands Anisa a book about Freud as a jab.

Outside the mosque, Yusuf discovers his son Farhaan's dealings with the Urdu-speaking man and is very unhappy. He tells the man to leave his son alone and takes Farhaan off to pray. That evening at the dinner table, Yusuf complains about Farhaan, while Ayesha continues to treat him like a child. Ayesha mentions to Anisa that she should expect a call from the doctor, arranging a meeting between them. Anisa eventually meets the doctor at the coffee shop. The date seems to be going well, causing Zak to become agitated. He gives Anisa a book titled "Too Good to Be True". Anisa has to leave suddenly to meet a client, and the doctor offers to drop her off at work. Zak decides to follow them, and in doing so, accidentally rear-ends the doctor's car. The boot pops

open, revealing a body inside. Anisa and the doctor are taken in for questioning by the police. Zak intervenes, using his connections to secure Anisa's release.

Back at home, Anisa recounts everything to her parents, who are shocked. Ayesha agrees to stop trying to find her a husband. Later, at the coffee shop, Anisa thanks Zak for his help. He finally asks her out on a date, which she hesitantly accepts. We see a montage of Anisa and Zak engaging in various activities, establishing a happy and romantic tone. Upon returning home from a date, Ayesha receives a call from a family friend who saw Anisa out with a waiter. Yusuf and Ayesha confront Anisa, explaining that her relationship with Zak cannot continue. Anisa becomes upset and storms off.

The next day, Anisa meets Zak at a restaurant, where he finally informs her of his ownership of several businesses, including the coffee shop. He explains that he kept his wealth a secret to see if she would date him as just a waiter. Angry about the deception, Anisa leaves. In the following scenes, Anisa discovers that Zak is involved in a complicated situation that includes a woman and a child. Misunderstanding the situation, Anisa confronts Zak at the beach and slaps him. Later, she visits Manisha's house to talk through her feelings. Anisa's father, Yusuf, confronts her about Zak, and Anisa reveals that Zak hurt her. Her parents express their upset and comfort her, reassuring her that they will always be there to take care of her.

Subsequently, Anisa pieces together that Zak married a woman who fell pregnant to protect her from shame. Determined, Anisa travels to a hotel in Kenya where Zak is conducting business. Upon seeing her, Zak and Anisa embrace and reconcile. The film concludes with a Punjabi-culture *garba* dance sequence centred around Anisa, dressed more ornately than those around her. The credits roll alongside pictures of Anisa and Zak's wedding.

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys (2017) begins with a voice-over by an elderly woman, speaking in a South African Indian accent, about the 'real' Durban. She explains how the Indian people of Durban were all placed together in an area called Chatsworth. Visually, we are introduced to a juxtaposition of two nuclear families living as

neighbours – the Naidoo and the Kandasamys. The Naidoo family is portrayed as a loving and vibrant middle-class family, whereas the Kandasamys are depicted with an air of prestige, leaving their more modern house (in comparison) and driving off to a wedding in their BMW. At the wedding, it becomes evident that the two mothers, Shanti Naidoo and Jennifer Kandasamy, harbour a rivalry. Jennifer discovers her daughter, Jodi, kissing Shanti's son, Prishen, at the back of the wedding hall.

In the Kandasamys' home, we meet Jennifer's husband, Elvis, and her comedic, playful mother-in-law, Aya. In a conversation with Elvis, Jennifer expresses her wish that Aya did not live with them and disapproves of her neighbour's son driving Jodi to the university. At the university, Jodi and Prishen are shown to have a comfortable relationship where they poke fun at their mothers. Disturbed by their relationship, Jennifer drives to Shanti's workplace to insist that Prishen leave Jodi alone.

One day, Jodi returns home from school, and Aya, thinking they are sweets, discovers condoms in her backpack. She offers one to Jennifer, causing Jennifer to panic. Around the same time, while cleaning Prishen's room, Shanti finds a box hidden away. It contains men's underwear with the letter 'J' on the front. Having seen enough, Shanti and Jennifer secretly meet to discuss their need to break up their children's relationship. Jennifer confides in Shanti about her desire to move out of Chatsworth, hindered by her mother-in-law's wish to stay in the township and Elvis's efforts to ensure his mother's comfort.

Jodi and Prishen carry on with their clandestine relationship. It is revealed that Prishen turned down an opportunity in Cape Town to stay with Jodi in Durban. Jennifer's husband and Shanti's husband, Peggie, also secretly maintain a friendship, often playing golf together while concealing this from their wives. Jennifer and Shanti continue their scheme to separate Jodi and Prishen: Jennifer invites Jodi's ex-boyfriend to a religious service at her home, while Shanti invites a friend and her single daughter over for dinner. Their plan seems to be working as Prishen, having witnessed Jodi hugging her ex-boyfriend, becomes troubled. Shanti keeps inviting the girl from the dinner over, hoping Prishen will develop an interest in her and forget about Jodi. During

a meeting at the Bangladesh Market to discuss the success of their plan, Jennifer and Shanti encounter Aya. Jennifer, to remain incognito, quickly dons a full Islamic *burqa*. Unrecognised by Aya under the disguise, Jennifer hears Aya candidly express her strained relationship with her daughter-in-law.

The mothers' plan seems to be effective, causing Jodi and Prishen to drift apart. Jennifer manipulates Jodi into singing with her ex-boyfriend during a service and records the performance. Prishen, seeing the performance online, becomes further upset. This prompts Jennifer and Shanti to devise a final move to definitively end their children's relationship. Inadvertently, as they continue their scheme, they grow closer. They employ a drama student to approach Jodi and falsely imply a sexual relationship with Prishen, which leads to a heated confrontation between Jodi and Prishen. Both become withdrawn and distant, even from their families. Feeling guilty, Shanti begins to regret their actions, but Jennifer remains determined. However, Jennifer's plans unravel when Jodi, having learned the truth from her ex-boyfriend, confronts her mother in front of the entire family, leading to a heated argument. At the Naidoo household, Prishen announces his decision to move to Cape Town, making Shanti realise the consequences of her actions. Overcome with guilt, she breaks down in tears and confesses everything to her husband.

Both families gather at the dinner table, where Jennifer and Shanti explain everything. Jodi and Prishen leave in anger, and the husbands start quarrelling with their wives. While the arguments escalate, Aya feels ill, but Jennifer dismisses her concerns. Jennifer and Shanti then begin arguing among themselves, revealing their close relationship as youths and their subsequent fallout in high school. The conflict reaches a climax with everyone raising their voices, leading to Elvis punching Peggie in defence of his wife. Amidst the chaos, Aya collapses.

At the hospital, Shanti and Peggie reconcile, showcasing the strength and warmth in their relationship. Meanwhile, Elvis and Jennifer's relationship remains strained, as Elvis continues to be unhappy with Jennifer's stubborn attitude. He expresses his desire for her to be happy. The next day, Prishen and Jodi drive separately to school. Elvis and

Preggie meet for golf, reaffirming their friendship. At her lowest point, Jennifer emotionally connects with her daughter. She shares her own story of marital struggle with Elvis and her in-laws' disapproval, realising that she was causing her daughter similar pain. Jodi responds with a hug. In a gesture of humility, Jennifer visits the Bangladesh market, sees her mother-in-law in the hospital, and finally approaches Shanti's house, where they reconcile with an embrace.

The film culminates with the Kandasamys preparing for Aya's eightieth birthday celebration. Jennifer and Shanti, now wearing matching colours, deliver a joint speech about love. Aya's heartfelt speech about happiness and second chances moves everyone, including their children. The film concludes with all attendees joyfully dancing together. Jodi and Prishen dance to their favourite song, initially with some hesitation, but soon they find harmony and embrace. A choreographed dance sequence ensues, with Jodi and Prishen at the centre, evoking the essence of a Bollywood romance. Their parents watch them dance, filled with joy. As the party continues, Aya's closing voice-over speaks about the culture of family that makes Chatsworth special.

Broken Promises: "Such a big fuss over this Hindi and Tamil"

In discussing the notions of identity held by characters and family units, the depicted narrative events, social and family dynamics, and language will be analysed through the adaptation of EVAM as a framework for analysis. The component of Narrative involves analysing themes, story progression, conflict/obstacles, subtext, and context.

Performance will encompass human interaction, cultural/societal cues, emotional development, character psychology, dialogue, body language, and movement. The sample films will be discussed chronologically and comparatively, using these categories as organisational tools for analysis.

Broken Promises (2004) is a family drama narrative centred around the domestic lives of newly-married Ruben and Natasha. The film begins with a distressed Natasha speaking to a therapist, immediately informing the audience that her relationship with Ruben is troubled. Through her dialogue with the therapist, Natasha recounts the events

leading up to her appointment and narrates her story with Ruben, starting from their meeting. The prevalent themes in the film include marriage and love, power dynamics, and abuse. The marriage and the changes Natasha has made to accommodate her husband are recurring topics.

Initially, we meet Natasha amid a break-up with her fiancé. She is outspoken about her desires and clarifies her unwillingness to be in a relationship with an absent partner. In their dialogue, Natasha's fiancé attributes his unhappiness to her clubbing habits and labels her "bad news". After he leaves, Natasha decides to follow Ruben, leaving her engagement ring at the restaurant. This early scene establishes her independence and social life, which are not further elaborated upon. When she first meets Ruben's family, she does so alone, revealing that her parents are deceased.

Meeting without more representation from within her family would be considered irregular in the South African Indian context for several reasons. Firstly, Amsugi has a clear expectation of traditional gender roles to be adhered to, in which there would be a patriarchal or matriarchal head of the family that would lead discussions and negotiations since they are meeting formally for the first time. The absence of Natasha's parents or a representative elder signifies her independence; however, in Natasha mentioning that she is an orphan, Amsugi may perceive this as vulnerability and an opportunity for matriarchal guidance. Amsugi also believes in maintaining boundaries, as is discussed later, between Tamil and Hindu ethnolinguistic cultures. This is transgressed through this interaction, resulting in her feeling discomfort or unease. By arriving alone without traditional familial support, Natasha is at once presenting a challenge to traditional values and asserting her autonomy, while also signifying a duality in identity that she is alone and vulnerable, and desiring a family unit to assimilate into. This is indicated as Amsugi uncompromisingly lists her expectations of a daughter-in-law before Natasha is even married. Natasha does express her own desires, but she concedes to the wants of her future husband and mother-in-law dutifully. Eventually married, Natasha moves in with Ruben's family and becomes a homemaker in her new environment, living under Amsugi's rules.

With the film set in the early 2000s, Natasha's character moving in with her in-laws and becoming a housewife is not a point of conflict or discourse in the narrative. It is depicted as a natural manoeuvre in marriage, also demonstrated through their neighbour, Saras, living with her mother-in-law. Natasha's initial willing transition into a homemaker role indicates that she identifies with traditional values and its associated gender roles within the Durban Indian community, highlighting this value as important to the filmmakers. In the domestic space, Natasha's character is not afforded much autonomy by her mother-in-law figure, Amsugi, who has strict routines to be adhered to. Natasha, however, does appear to be content as Ruben's wife, indicating no further ambition. Natasha's conflict, therefore, stems from the friction and hostile environment created by Amsugi, who herself is grappling with the new dynamic in the family and her identity as the matriarch and only woman in Ruben's life.

The theme of marriage and family is closely entangled with the power dynamics within Natasha's relationships with her new family, eventually leading to instances of verbal abuse. As she becomes more desperate and less passive as the narrative progresses, Natasha eventually engages in conflict with Ruben. She outright states that she feels like a servant in the house, and through this, it is evident that her notion of self and identity has warped over time. A shift in notions of self is also evident in the character arc of Amsugi. While Natasha enters the home empowered by her new husband, his affection, and her intimate knowledge of him, Amsugi's strong foundation as matriarch of the small family becomes unsteady, allowing Natasha's newness and her own fears to bring out the worst in herself. Without her primary role as her son's carer, Amsugi has to face redefining her role in the family.

The approach to the theme of marriage and family in the film provides insight into the sociocultural dynamics of South African Indian communities in Durban in the early 2000s, particularly the expectations that were placed on women during this time. The importance placed on the preservation of social order and stability within families and the community is represented through Natasha and Amsugi's adherence to what they consider traditional values and gender roles. These values and roles were most likely passed down generationally within the community and form the standard of behaviour

that these women are expected to conform to. Natasha is also not given much freedom of expression by Amsugi, exemplifying pervasive power dynamics that shape South African Indian women's agency and capacity to pursue personal goals. The disagreements between the two characters also indicate the difficulty faced in navigating social structures and cultural expectations. The challenges Natasha faces in claiming her identity and position in the family are presented as a critique of the expectations that women in South African Indian communities are required to meet. Furthermore, Amsugi's resistance to change and her own struggle to preserve her position as the matriarch indicates a generational challenge faced by women as they attempt to balance their cultural identities within changing social contexts.

Amsugi's initial perceptions and expectations (representative of the older generation in South African Indian families through the perspective of the filmmaker) around cultural identity are revealed in the scene when Ruben first tells his parents that he is going to marry a woman with a Hindi surname. Amsugi reacts very negatively to the idea. She repeatedly rejects the notion, telling the men that she doesn't want problems in her house. Amsugi argues that there's no such thing as putting a Hindi person and a Tamil person together. Firmly believing that something like this is not done, Amsugi represents a generation that was most likely brought up with rigid cultural divides between the Tamil and Hindi-speaking communities. Her character sees herself as the custodian of culture and custom in her household, and probably her community, however, her main fear is losing her son.

Ruben, although exasperated at his mother's behaviour, speaks to her more respectfully than she did to him and Tony. He is sure of himself and is firm with his tone, inferring that he will not stand for behaviour such as hers again, suggesting some authority that his character holds as the breadwinner son in the family. At the peak of Amsugi's outburst, he tries to rationalise with her.

Ruben

Listen Ma, I am not Tamil, and she is not Hindi. I speak English, she also speaks English. We are the same religion. She is Indian, I am Indian. What is the problem? Ma, why are you making such a big fuss

over this Hindi and Tamil? They are just languages; they are a means of communication. It does not mean if one person speaks Tamil they are more superior, or if a person speaks Hindi, they are more superior. People who believe that are stupid. Hindi and Tamil are not a means of gaining into Heaven, okay? The person that thinks they are more superior by speaking either language is silly. When you are walking down the street and you see a dead body lying there, do you say ‘ah shame, look at the poor dead Tamil body’? No, you do not do things like that. Please, once and for all, get this out of your head. Now is everyone clear about this? (*Broken Promises*, 2004, 17:41- 18:34)

In Ruben's speech, we gain a clear understanding of the perception put forward by the filmmakers regarding cultural differences within Indian communities, believing the divide between Hindi and Tamil to be insignificant in the grander scheme of life and love. In Ruben's monologue, his character essentially declares that he and Natasha will not be upholding the rigid borders of culture and perceived superiority as the generations before him have.

As discussed in the literature, heterogeneous streams of Indians emigrated to South Africa, with those of indentured ancestry having now laid roots in the country for over a century. Amsugi's outright resistance to a Tamil and Hindi union (she states that there is “no such thing”) indicates a rigidity in customs that are passed down generationally until Ruben forced a break in its practice. Amsugi's outburst, characterised by her expressive body language and reaction, indicates the extent to which she values the preservation of her inherited customs. Contrasting Amsugi, Ruben's monologue calls into question pre-existing distinctions between ethno-linguistic communities and promotes a more open-minded view of cultural identity. Ruben rejects the idea that language alone should define one's identity or sense of superiority within their community by highlighting their shared faith, ancestry, and experiences. His argument emphasises the limitations of using ethno-linguistic characteristics as boundaries for the purpose of preserving cultural identity, which he believes is an arbitrary and

counterproductive practice. Ruben's monologue calls for South African Indians to reevaluate their perceptions of rigidity regarding cultural identities and family structures, which is particularly relevant for the evolving social contexts in South Africa. This monologue is representative of a generational shift in perspective, set in the post-apartheid period where social cohesion and mending past divides is crucially promoted.

Ruben and Amsugi's interaction explores generational differences in ideas of cultural identity within the context of South African Indian communities. Their contrasting priorities and viewpoints on the topic (of choosing a life partner) reflect broad changes in attitudes and values between these generations. Amsugi, an 'elder', is a character who would have experienced apartheid and the effects of racial segregation in her backstory, which may have emphasised the value of maintaining one's cultural and linguistic identity as a means of fortitude, survival, or even resistance. Her character strongly practices her principles, such as condemning the mixing of Hindi and Tamil ethnolinguistic backgrounds, as she feels a need to protect her cultural heritage in the face of impending social and political change. Her emphasis on maintaining her boundaries can be interpreted as an expression or need for consistency and continuity amidst the uncertainties of the new social and political era. Ruben's character, in comparison, was written to have grown up in a more diverse and accepting climate where exposure to various cultures and viewpoints encouraged a more flexible and open-minded approach to understanding identity. Fully aware of her cultural background, Ruben insisted on marrying Natasha, indicating a willingness to embrace a common South African Indian identity, rather than foregrounding the ethnolinguistic backgrounds of the characters that highlight their differences. Ruben and Amsugi's disagreement present an intergenerational conflict of cultural perspectives and highlights the challenging process of negotiating and renegotiating cultural identity in a changing society.

Hall's theory (1989) that cultural identity is a dynamic process of becoming is exemplified by Ruben and Amsugi's exchange in this scene. According to Hall, cultural identity is a dynamic process involving historical, cultural, and individual influences.

This fluidity is reflected in Ruben's viewpoint on ethnolinguistic identities. His character believes that cultural barriers between Hindi and Tamil-speaking communities should not be maintained, and that this difference in language is a tool of expression and communication rather than a fixed marker of identity. Ruben actively chooses to inspect, modify, or forgo traditional values that do not align with his notion of cultural identity, thereby representing Hall's fluid identity in motion by deviating from traditional expectations and reformulating his own values. Additionally, the scene manifests Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1994) where cultural hybridity is confronted and negotiated. Traditional binaries and hierarchies are challenged in the scene, allowing for the emergence of a new, more complex cultural identity.

Further, the depiction of diverse and complex cultural identities established in *Broken Promises* addresses the issue of representations of heterogeneity. Revealing instances of the diversity within South African Indian communities, Ruben and Amsugi's interaction displays opposing viewpoints on this diversity. The perspective of Ruben embodies a more flexible understanding of identity, where he views himself and Natasha as fellow Indians who speak English and practice Hinduism, again focusing on their similarities more than their differences. His viewpoint demonstrates potential for embracing heterogeneity within the community through acknowledging a variety of ethnolinguistic backgrounds but also the commonalities within the community. Ruben is not ignoring Natasha's background but is rather inclusive of it. Contrastingly, Amsugi represents more rigid approaches to ethnolinguistic diversity. Her reluctance to accept Natasha's Hindi-speaking background reflects a cultural divide within the community. Amsugi still acknowledges the diversity within the community; however, she feels as if they should not intermingle. The scene highlights how various perspectives on cultural identity coexist within South African Indian communities and provides external audiences insight into the intricate dynamics of cultures that are homogenised as 'South African Indians'.

As discussed in the literature, an integral component in the formation of cultural identity is the constitution of the family unit, particularly within the context of South African Indians. The characters of Ruben and his parents form a small nuclear family unit, with

Natasha being the outsider needing to acclimatise to this new environment. In the scene where Natasha meets Ruben's parents for the first time, she is not warmly introduced to the family; however, there is no resistance from Amsugi to the idea of her marrying Ruben. Natasha speaks plainly about her wishes, which all go against Amsugi's notion of traditional and cultural expectations. Amsugi rejects Natasha's ideas about the wedding, insisting that her son has the final word on how the wedding will proceed. In this scene, Amsugi presents as an obstacle to the couple, firmly and authoritatively to Natasha and then more aggressively towards her son as she realises that he does not agree with her straight away. Natasha, remaining outspoken but respectful, engages in the discourse with Amsugi but uses Ruben as a shield to champion her in the conflict. In this scene, Amsugi represents the figure of tradition, continuity, and uncompromising authority. Natasha's character embodies a more youthful, pragmatic, and compromising perspective.

In the scene, as Amsugi's character realises her son agrees with Natasha, her demeanour changes abruptly—from authoritative towards Natasha to aggressive towards her son—showing how desperate she is to maintain control in the face of change and opposition. As touched on earlier, Amsugi's character is that of an older South African Indian woman, shaped by historical experiences that moulded her understanding of cultural boundaries and the importance of preserving traditions. She perceives Natasha and Ruben's support for change as a threat to the standards and values that she cherishes and holds as part of her identity, which drives her to assert her authority more forcefully as guardian of Tamil culture in the family. Additionally, Ruben and Natasha are representatives of a younger generation with a more hybrid cultural identity that is willing to negotiate cultural norms and subvert established traditions. Amsugi's hostility towards her son can be felt as a betrayal, as her authority is questioned in front of Ruben's bride-to-be, shattering her image of matriarchal and cultural power. It was established that Amsugi's ulterior goal is for her daughter-in-law to understand the hierarchy of the home and to perceive her in a certain way, which is why she initially only engages with Natasha once the men have left the room. This is demonstrated by the following excerpt of dialogue when Natasha expresses that she would like just a small

reception to celebrate her marriage with Ruben (*Broken Promises*, 2004, 00:24:35 - 00:25:00):

Amsugi

No, I don't believe in reception. We have to have a traditional wedding. How else we gonno tell the people that y'all are married?

Natasha

I'll be wearing his ring.

Amsugi

That ring means nothing. I don't have a ring. In my days we have to tie a *thali* to show the people that we are married. If you don't want a big wedding, we can take you to the temple and Ruben can tie the *thali* there.

In the initial interaction between the two characters, the tone is calm, yet Amsugi projects her words with strength, while Natasha speaks more demurely. At this point, Natasha is still testing the waters with her future mother-in-law's allowances and submissively allows Amsugi to lead the conversation. Amsugi discusses the fact that 'we' must have a traditional wedding, thereby implying that the wedding is not just about Ruben and Natasha. It also reinforces the fact that Natasha is joining her family. What is also made clear is Amsugi's need for the marriage to be announced to her community in what she considers a 'proper' way. She requires the cultural event of tying a *thali* (a necklace the groom ties around the neck of the bride) to present the marriage to the community free of judgement.

Amsugi's behaviour and decision-making process reflect the collective nature present in South African Indian cultures, where family and community may play a significant role in personal affairs. Her character's insistence on tying the *thali* demonstrates a significance placed on the maintenance of customs and traditions as well as a pressure to fulfil community obligations and its social norms to uphold her social standing. The importance that South African Indian cultures place on kinship and community can be seen in the representation of Amsugi's relationship with her community. She cares about

maintaining the family's reputation and abiding by community standards of living, which is evident in her desire to present the marriage to the community in a 'proper' manner. This indicates that Amsugi is a representation of South African Indian community members that make decisions based on how they will affect their family and their position in the community.

Amsugi also explicitly informs Natasha how she feels about non-traditional ways of thinking, for example, simply stating that the wedding ring signifies nothing. She doesn't give Natasha a choice regarding wearing the *thali* and considers taking her to the temple to do it there as a compromise. Amsugi presumably feels as though she needs to train or guide Natasha into her way of operating, and that is her responsibility too. Conversely, Natasha is left feeling pulled in one direction in the design of her own wedding, which she still tries to approach in a respectful and tactful manner, as illustrated in the below excerpt (*Broken Promises*, 2004, 00:25:19 - 00:25:50).

Natasha

Aunty, I would like to wear the *sindoor*.

Amsugi

You can wear what you want.

Natasha

So I don't have to wear the *thali*?

Amsugi

Why don't you want to tie *thali*? Don't you know how important it is?

Natasha

To be quite honest, I don't.

Amsugi

Anyway, the boy's word is final. You'll have to listen to him. If your mother and father were here, they will tell you the same.

Natasha

Okay, let's ask Ruben what he thinks.

Amsugi

Ask him.

In the scene, Natasha looks Amsugi in the eye when speaking to her and tries to respond thoughtfully to everything she says. Natasha's character understands the position of a daughter-in-law in a South African Indian family and is becoming aware of the power dynamics in this family. She addresses Amsugi as 'Aunty'—which is considered respectful in South African Indian cultures—in telling her that she would like to wear *sindoor* (red pigment worn on the forehead of married Hindu women) instead of the *thali*. Natasha suggests the *sindoor* as a compromise to wearing the *thali*, as both are recognised cultural markers of marriage in their community. Natasha offers this compromise because *thalis* are more commonly associated with Tamil culture, and her character is of a Hindi-speaking background. This is reinforced by the moment Amsugi asks Natasha if she knows how important the *thali* is, to which Natasha replies that she honestly does not.

This interaction between the two characters is significant, as it serves as an example of how cinematic self-representation can effectively convey the heterogeneity within an ethnic group that may be perceived as homogenous to outsiders. Through the dialogue, the audience learns about subtle variations in cultural practices, values, and traditions that exist within South African Indian communities. The discussion of *sindoor* and the *thali* as symbols of marriage brings to light the differing cultural practices of the Tamil and Hindi ethnolinguistic backgrounds—the *sindoor*, which holds meaning to Natasha, and the *thali*, which holds meaning to Amsugi. Their conversation challenges the assumption of uniformity within the South African Indian ethnic grouping and highlights the possibility of diversity within such homogenising groupings. The scene's emphasis on compromise and negotiation between various cultural perspectives also speaks to the dynamic nature of cultural identity, reminiscent of the rhetoric of Hall (1989).

Hall (1989) emphasises the development of identity as fluid and ongoing, subject to being constantly negotiated within the context of cultural and historical circumstances. As Amsugi and Natasha navigate their respective relationships and their positions in South African Indian cultures, this scene illustrates this negotiation and navigation in the form of dialogue between a mother-in-law (to be) and a daughter-in-law, positions that hold their own cultural values. The discussion of the *sindoor* versus the *thali* represents the discourse of two ethnicities and the way forward in marrying both. Even the mention of a wedding ring in the discussion acknowledges that both parties are negotiating new hybrid identities and practices acceptable to the household once the marriage occurs. This dialogue is representative of the larger South African Indian demographic communities and the formation of new blended identities due to the interactions and intersections of different needs for adaptation in a post-apartheid world. Amsugi, representative of past structures of society and ways of thinking, serves as an illustration of change that is more resistant to being altered or modified. Lastly, the discussion between the two characters can also be perceived as an interaction of Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1967). Although the interaction is not between coloniser and colonised, it is between representations of authority and subordinates where culture is in the process of negotiation and evolution, rather than remaining fixed. Amsugi and Natasha are in negotiation as they look to find a middle ground between their cultural practices, and this takes place in the 'third space' where cultural fusion and hybridity are not only feasible but essential for the way forward. This space is not devoid of power relations, however, as Amsugi's authority sways the discussion. Natasha's fortitude and need to please also affect the manoeuvring and outcomes of this third space negotiation.

It is also noted that the cultural negotiation is written to be performed by the two female characters. In the context of South African Indian communities, from practices established in India and emulated in descended generations of family units, Indian culture can be considered patriarchal (Khan, 2012; Radhakrishnan, 2005).

Radhakrishnan further states that "women perform various kinds of culture, which men oversee and organise. Here, not only do women transmit and signify culture; they also mark its boundaries," (2005: 272) when discussing Indian women in South Africa and

the political and cultural roles they play. Amsugi's character perceives herself as such – a cultural cornerstone in her community and in her household. She not only sees herself as the true north of religion and cultural practice at home, but also needs to align Natasha to the same standard. Like Radhakrishnan describes, Amsugi's character transmits and performs the culture, which she expects Ruben to moderate and approve. Her character's understanding is that the man should be the head of the household and final decision-maker, and quite confidently, she fully expects Ruben to overrule Natasha. This scene marks an instance in which the design of the characters in *Broken Promises* (and therefore the self-representations) illustrate the values and practices of South African Indian communities remarked upon in scholarly literature, such as the rhetoric of Radhakrishnan (2005).

In the interactions between the male and female characters, further revelations about the notions of family and identity held by the characters in the film are uncovered. Before the men leave the scene, Amsugi and Tony are seated on opposite sides of the frame, interacting minimally. Amsugi and Tony subvert the expectations of a patriarchal figure; Tony is portrayed as a drunk and non-serious character whom Amsugi neither respects nor consults in decision-making. From the two characters, it is Amsugi who is direct and strong-willed, taking up the mantle of leading her family to live up to the community's expectations, maintaining her family's cultural and religious values, and being the active parent in raising her son to be a man and the eventual head of the family. Radhakrishnan (2005) and Khan (2012) emphasise the patriarchal nature of Indian culture, historically placing men in positions of authority. Amsugi's lack of respect for her husband and passing over the power of authority to her son depict the changing cultural practices within South African Indian families, differing from the family and social structures originating from Indian tradition generations before emigration. This is also representative of a postcolonial and diasporic community in the wake of constantly shifting circumstances, as the narrative depicts the family's attempts to balance and navigate a heritage of cultural specificity while adopting practices relevant to new contexts. Amsugi's assumption of leadership highlights the transformative nature of diasporic experiences in reshaping traditional gender roles and cultural expectations, specifically in the context of South Africa.

As a result of the discussion, Ruben and Natasha eventually get married, with Natasha adorning the *thali* as per her mother-in-law's wishes. The conflict between Natasha and Amsugi escalates as the story progresses, culminating in a crisis moment where Amsugi accuses Natasha of wanting to kill her (Natasha accidentally puts washing powder in tea instead of sugar). At this moment, Amsugi flexes her authority and demands that Ruben 'deal with' his wife. Natasha eventually leaves, and Ruben turns his anger towards his mother. In the following scene, Ruben finds out that she is again involving herself in other people's issues (this time with their neighbour Saras and her mother-in-law Kamla), and he realises that she is an instigator of conflict, and that he should have known better the whole time (*Broken Promises*, 2004, 01:28:26-01:30:05).

Ruben

Why must you poke your nose in other people's business? Let them sort their own problems out. Why must you go there every day and try and give them advice?

Amsugi

They wanted my help!

Ruben

If they wanted your help, then why does Saras keep coming over here and threatening you?

Amsugi

She can't do me anything, I'll finish her.

Ruben

You see, there you go again, trying to be the boss of the road. The mafia godmother's gonna sort everybody out. We got our own problems that we can't sort out.

Amsugi

I sorted our problem out. She's gone! I got rid of her.

Ruben

Ma, listen, and listen carefully. I finally realised I was the fool. I was blinded by my affection for you that I took my own wife for granted. Now she's gone. It's too late.

Amsugi

Oh, so your own mother who brought you up... Do you know what a hard time I had when I was pregnant with you? Huh? And now you're doing this to me!

Ruben

How I'm doing you? All I want you to do is change a little for me, and you can't do that.

Amsugi

Nevermind, leave it, blame everything on me!

Ruben

See here, stop feeling sorry for yourself and do something about it.

Amsugi

It's that bloody girl, man. That bloody girl did this to you. She poisoned your mind. You never used to talk to me like this anyhow before! And I do so much in this house, I don't get appreciated.

Ruben

Ma, she did not poison my mind. For the first time I'm not thinking with my heart, I'm thinking with my head.

Amsugi

Oh, so you gone so clever now. You forgot that I'm the one that put you through university.

Ruben

I am not denying any of that. But when you are wrong, you are wrong. And you've been wrong plenty of times recently. I was just too stupid to admit it. I thought everything would work out nicely.

In the scene, Ruben looks his mother in the eyes as he speaks to her, and the height difference between the two characters becomes very apparent. Now that they are standing face-to-face, Amsugi appears much smaller in the frame, even though her behaviour is still confrontational. Through his posture and body language, Ruben is asserting his agency, and we see him as an authority figure for the first time. Both characters remain firmly in position during the dialogue, each holding their ground as if in a standoff.

The dialogue itself provides rich insight into the filmmaker's self-representations of South African Indian communities, encoded into the narrative through Amsugi's relationship with her family, neighbours, and her perceptions of herself. Ruben's comparison of his mother to the mafia of the road that "sorts everybody out" indicates that his mother is involved in the business of multiple neighbours, seeing herself as an authority figure or at least someone who believes they are empowered in the community. Amsugi sees herself as a moral compass, not just for her home, but as an elder in the community who they need for her wisdom. Amsugi's desire to maintain her position within the community further highlights the importance of social standing and reputation in South African Indian cultures. This sense of community value, a manifestation of diasporic consciousness, is depicted in her character's compulsion to maintain and follow cultural customs to stay connected to ancestral roots and a cultural identity not warped by historical circumstances and change.

Depicted in the film, the sense of community has apparently reached a generational break, as Ruben and his wife do not care about their reputation and standing in society and do not wish to interfere with their neighbours. This is yet another change Amsugi and her generation will have to adapt to – a post-apartheid influence of independence, cultural hybridity, and westernisation, rather than living by the codes of the immediate

community. In the dialogue, Ruben points out that Amsugi's behaviour is not appropriate in modern society, and that the neighbours do not need Amsugi's interference or moral alignment. Furthermore, Ruben mentions his family having their own private struggles at home to resolve. Amsugi likely does not want her neighbours to know of their own domestic conflicts and therefore uses her dominating personality to eclipse the issues in her own home. She is a prideful, self-appointed matriarch of her small nuclear family and would want to present the best version of herself to the community. This is supported by her previous dialogues with Natasha and Ruben, where she expects them to present the marriage to "the people" in a way she deems appropriate. Amsugi therefore places importance on her community identifying her as a successful mother and a resilient wife who keeps traditional values. She is the only character in the family that bases her decisions on what others may think of her, and this may be related to events in her history, as indicated in the dialogue when she mentions the struggles she had when she was pregnant, and then again reminding Ruben that she single-handedly put him through university.

These examples in Amsugi's dialogue infer a strained relationship in her backstory with her husband. In an earlier scene, Tony accuses Amsugi of causing him to become a drunkard, and reveals that for thirty years he has been tolerating her. Over time, Amsugi's character presumably manifested as the dominant force in the family out of necessity, due to Tony being non-contributing. She therefore resents her husband and some parts of her life. This is further supported through her dialogue, not only when she discusses her struggle in raising Ruben but also in moments where she invites him to "blame everything on me", inferring that she is taken for granted. In her struggles and unhappiness, her character's established rigid beliefs in her inherited cultural traditions would have rendered divorce or separation unthinkable, as well as the societal pressure of what "people" would think if she abandoned her marriage. Perceiving herself as a self-sacrificing mother and wife, Amsugi believes that the family operates off the sweat of her back. By exasperatedly inviting Ruben to just "blame everything on me," she indicates that this will merely be another burden that has been placed on her. Through the revelations in the dialogue, one may discover empathy for Amsugi's character, as we

understand that the strained evolution of her personality, values, and cultural identity is a result of various experiences in different contexts requiring adaptation.

As the narrative progresses into the third act, Amsugi and Natasha's relationship reaches a breaking point, and the event of Natasha almost dying shifts each character's perceptions of what is important and what can be forgiven. Interestingly, as Saras accidentally triggers the gun in her hands, the bullet hits Natasha, but not fatally as we learn that her *thali* deflected the bullet. The very culturally symbolic item Amsugi required Natasha to wear ended up saving her life. This inclusion in the narrative potentially represents a few concepts that the filmmaker would like to express to the viewing audience: that in relationships compromise can be a good thing, that one's elders in their wisdom are worth humouring, and that one's culture or religion is something that should be deemed important and could even save us in our darkest moments.

Although with struggle, Natasha's character embraced the cultural identity of her new family while maintaining her own, and this hybrid identity and 'third space' (Bhabha, 1967) of negotiating identity eventually saved her life. This idea is consistent with Hall's (1989) view of cultural identity as a lifelong process of becoming that entails constant negotiation of one's place within a shifting cultural landscape and is also reflective of how shifts in notions of cultural identity required by circumstance or authority can aid survival and continuation—an experience that is felt by postcolonial diasporas and communities on a much larger scale. It is also critical to acknowledge how Amsugi's actions contributed to the danger placed on the characters in the first place, as it is the moral of the story encoded by the filmmaker for the audience to glean from the narrative: there is harm in the rigid adherence to cultural norms, and a flexible approach to cultural identity and negotiation is the way forward in fostering understanding and harmony within the South African Indian communities.

This harmony can be seen in the final scene of the film, as the family is reconciled with each other and preoccupied in a neighbourly *braai*. Amsugi and Kamla, eating pleasantly and conversing, are positioned on the opposite side of the scene as Saras and

a pregnant Natasha are also eating and conversing. The tone of the scene is quite relaxed, and all characters interact with a new comfort and familiarity that indicates that all major conflict has been resolved. The scene's dialogue, in particular, provides an interesting perspective on Natasha and Ruben's perceptions of culture and identity, as they discuss Natasha's pregnancy (*Broken Promises*, 2004, 01:38:58 - 01:40:05):

Amsugi

Natasha looks very nice, huh?

Kamla

Oh ya, she's a very sweet girl. Tell me, y'all decided what name to keep for the baby?

Amsugi

I went and saw the priest and all. He said it must start with a "Ma", and I was really thinking about a nice name like "Manogren". I really like that name.

Kamla

But she is Hindi now, what happens if she wants to keep one Hindi name, say like, "Manoj".

Ruben

Ma, what y'all talking about?

Amsugi

Nothing, we just thought we must keep a nice Tamil name for the baby, because the father is Tamil.

Kamla

I'm just saying for a word, what if the mother wants to have a Hindi name for her son?

Saras

Thawa [there you go], they'll start talking nonsense now.

Ruben

Ma, Natasha and I've already decided on a name.

Amsugi

For really?

Ruben

For really. And guess what, it actually starts with "Ma".

Amsugi

You see, you see! I know my son will make me happy. What name? Like "Manogren"?

Ruben

Well Ma, it's actually not Manogren.

Amsugi

What name you keeping?

Ruben

Mandoza.

The dialogue in the scene highlights the differences within South African Indian ethno-linguistic groups that are initially perceived as homogenous to external viewers. We learn that these names are identifiable with specific cultural backgrounds, and that they are actually ordained as auspicious by Hindu priests before being bestowed upon a child. Amsugi mentions that she has visited a priest who has advised on the baby's name according to religious astrology, an action seen as normal by everybody present at the *braai*. This once more reinforces the importance of tradition, religion, and culture within South African Indian communities, and the act of consulting a priest indicates how those who practice the Hindu religion in South Africa believe the wellbeing and future of a child can be affected by astrological principles. Once more, Amsugi is the driving force behind the preservation of cultural tradition, meanwhile Natasha and

Ruben are much more relaxed around the topic. Amsugi is therefore delighted to hear that Natasha and Ruben's chosen name follows the rules.

By choosing a baby name beginning with the letters 'Ma', Natasha and Ruben show respect for family and cultural values by retaining the naming tradition, also showing flexibility and compromise even though they are a more progressive couple. Within a changed power dynamic where the couple now hold the power of decision-making and authority, they enter the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) and negotiate with Amsugi's traditional values. Of course, as the previously established religious and cultural cornerstone of the family, Amsugi believes that the baby's name should be Tamil as the baby's father's family is Tamil. She retains various traditional values even though she does not wield the power to assert them. In this instance, Ruben and Natasha meet her needs somewhat.

In an unexpected reveal (unexpected as indicated by both Amsugi and Kamla's shocked expressions), Ruben informs his mother that the baby's name will be Mandoza. As the name is revealed, the song *Nkalakatha* (Tshabalala, 2000) by South African kwaito artist Mandoza plays, closing the film. Ruben and Natasha have subverted all expectations and have chosen to name their child after a black South African musician, choosing neither a Tamil nor a Hindi-sounding name while still maintaining Amsugi's requirements. The choice of name satisfies traditional demands and honours Amsugi's values while still expressing autonomy.

In the narrative, the desire of Natasha and Ruben's characters to push cultural boundaries established by their South African Indian community reflects the broader dynamics of South Africa after apartheid, where different ethnic groups are encouraged to harmonise and present a tapestry of diversity. This scripted decision by the filmmaker not only ends the film in a comedic tone by subverting expectations but also indicates a positivity in the concept of embracing other cultural influences. The South African post-apartheid era was characterised by a process of reclaiming and redefining identities beyond the strict racial categorisations of the past. Mandoza's name, which blends various cultural influences, creates a distinctive hybrid identity that Natasha and

Ruben's characters have chosen for the child. As discussed in the literature, the drive for greater inclusivity, tolerance, and celebration of diversity is one of the objectives of post-apartheid South Africa. The characters therefore present their willingness to engage with South Africa's multicultural landscape and at the same time contest the idea that culture must be unchanging and fixed.

In analysing the notions of identity held by the characters and family units within the narrative of *Broken Promises*, the complexity of the character dynamics provides insight into the filmmaker Naidu's cinematic self-representations and perspectives on navigating a multicultural society. The conflict between tradition and modernity, the gendered roles within South African Indian family units, and the navigation of cultural identity in a changing context are key topics explored in the film. The characters of Amsugi, Ruben, and Natasha, each represent various perspectives in navigating these topics, and each character serves as an example of the process of negotiating identity as they aim to co-exist in an altered family hierarchy and cultural confrontation, leading to the need for opening space for negotiation and communication.

Engaging in themes relevant to postcoloniality and cinematic representation, Naidu's film directly investigates cultural identity formation and negotiation. In acknowledging the ways that colonialism and apartheid have shaped the experiences and identities of South African Indians, an example depicted through the character of Amsugi, *Broken Promises* also confronts pre-existing narratives and power structures by highlighting the difficulties of constructing and adapting identities in a post-apartheid, postcolonial setting. *For Better For Worse* (2010), the second film text in the sample, expands on the diversity of post-apartheid representations of cultural identity by featuring a young Muslim female lead, navigating the complexities of family obligations and her career. The comparative analysis of these films builds a clearer understanding of notions of identity and the cinematic choices made by the filmmakers in the aims of cinematic self-representation.

***For Better For Worse*: "Those traditional roles don't work anymore"**

Released six years after *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010) is a story about Anisa Khan, a young South African Indian woman of Islamic faith who gets set up on multiple blind dates in order to find the man she will eventually settle down with. The film is also set in Durban and deals with the themes of love and marriage.

Anisa is quickly established as a woman with a promising career trajectory. She represents the complexities of a South African Indian Muslim woman navigating the intersection of their cultural, religious, and social identities in a post-apartheid South Africa. Her success as a lawyer is indicative of the opportunities that are available to South African youth of various backgrounds. She is also representative of an empowered 'black' woman in South African society and a field of work that is historically dominated by men. As Radhakrishnan (2005) notes, South African Indians are required to identify with their 'black' classification to access opportunities such as employment, university opportunities, and government benefits. This concurs with Hansen's (2012) understanding of President Mbeki's call for an 'African Renaissance', including wishing South African Indians to embrace their African identity first and their Indian identity second, in the aims of social cohesion and economic prosperity in the post-apartheid pluralistic society of South Africa. Anisa's accomplishments as a lawyer demonstrate her capacity to meet this requirement, and at home in the domestic space, she retains her cultural and religious identity, embodying the 'rainbow nation' ideal. Anisa serves as a representation of embracing different facets of one's identities to succeed in a multicultural society. Her success and freedom are also attributed to the leniencies of her parents, as Anisa still maintains the tradition of forming part of the family unit under the guidance of her father, the patriarch of the family, until she is married. The intricacies of the family dynamics are further discussed in this chapter as dialogue is revealed, however, the clear liberties afforded to Anisa by her family already indicate a shift in cultural identity in the gendered expectations of women in the family.

According to Patel (2013), Muslim communities form a vital part of the nation's diverse cultural and religious landscape, however, discussions surrounding gender within the Muslim communities, especially concerning 'girlhood', often remain separate from the wider discourse of gender roles in a South African context. In a study conducted

towards understanding South African Muslim girls' notions of identities, it was found that the girls responded positively to educational prospects, however, they also already maintained preconceived notions about their futures, citing becoming mothers and nurturers for their futures. Implying a conservative history, Patel notes that Muslim communities are progressively and assertively navigating the newer democratic spaces, in which gender-related matters are becoming increasingly included in broader discourses, rather than remaining intra-Muslim discussions. In analysing gendered dynamics within Islamic knowledge, Bux (2004) specifically examines Islamic religious teachings, positing that the faith promotes equality in terms of access to education and knowledge, however, creates distinctions in the duties of the sexes. Bux cites various rules of socialisation from Islamic teachings (Bux, 2005: 28):

- (1) The family is a vital mechanism for the sane structure of society. It must be based on legitimate marriage.
- (2) It is the law of creation that in every grouping there must be order. In animals in general and in man in particular, there must always be a leader, for every herd, for every flock and for every social or political formation.
- (3) There are moral and legal rights and obligations that come into force when marriage takes place. Unless both are accepted with conviction and contentment, no happy family relationship can result. The main moral values of an Islamic marriage are unity and sharing, always keeping the main purpose of marriage in view. When these moral values are adopted, the question of "equality" becomes invalid because it does not arise. Man and women are created equally by their creator and are subject to the same transactional and behavioural views expressed in the Qur'an.
- (4) Because of their different physiological structures and biological functions, each sex is assigned a role to play in the family. This role is compatible with and emanates from their respective biological formations.

The teachings followed by Muslim communities promote gendered duties, such as positioning men in leadership roles and encouraging women to maintain roles associated with their biology, such as being a mother and homemaker. This is reflected in the responses of Patel's (2013) study, as well as in the characters of Yusuf and Ayesha as they perform their cultural and religious roles in the family unit. Ayesha's character is proud of her role as a housewife and takes pleasure in looking after her family's needs. Yusuf assumes his role as the leader of the flock, making decisions for the family and providing for them. In this sense, Anisa's family is likely influenced by the conservative history and traditional gender roles discussed by Patel (2013). This also allows for the understanding that Yusuf and Ayesha believe it is their cultural and religious responsibility to guide their children down paths that align with their shared inherited values. However, Anisa's autonomy and career also represent the endeavours of Muslim communities navigating new democratic spaces. The freedom she is allotted by her father reflects changing perspectives in changing contexts, indicating that the Khans maintain traditional community and religious values but are also navigating developments of notions of identity in the evolving broader democratic South African context.

Lastly, speaking on Anisa's character as a successful lawyer and Muslim woman in South Africa, her projections of identity align with the concepts of legitimising and project identities as discussed by Castells (1997): the legitimising identity prescribed by the authoritative powers in society, and the project identity in which identity is developed when people consciously strive to become subjects who assert their specificity, wishing to change societal perspectives based on their convictions. As a legitimising identity, Anisa's professional success is indicative of her embracing opportunities provided by the post-apartheid state in the aims of developing a multicultural society and equitable economy, where previously disadvantaged ethnic groups are encouraged to lean into their 'black' classification and reap the benefits of affirmative action initiatives. Her character maintains seriousness in her professional capacity and is driven by her passion for her work while representing a variety of clients of different ethnic backgrounds. She exemplifies the state's ideal youth as an individual

that prioritises their 'South Africanness', is actively flourishing in a post-apartheid workforce and economy, and is working hard to improve the quality of life of South Africans by contributing to the justice system. On the other hand, Anisa's character also represents a project identity. She challenged cultural gendered expectations by pursuing a career in law, and through a romantic relationship that is not approved by her parents. Additionally, her insistence on marrying Zak, despite her parents' disapproval, reflects her need to assert autonomy and place her personal goals ahead of her need for family harmony. Anisa's character and project identity is one that seeks to redefine gender roles and opportunities for women in her community and with her background, promoting a narrative of creating a new path, or hybrid identity, that combines personal values and ambitions with cultural and religious inclinations.

In creating the character of Anisa, the filmmakers may aim to challenge their audience's ideas about gender and personal freedom within the context of a South African Indian family, advocating for a re-evaluation of what empowerment and independence could look like for women in this particular cultural milieu. Anisa's decisions around her career and attitude towards love reflect an agency that might prompt a viewing audience to consider the extents to which individual desires should be moderated by familial or societal expectations. Further, the layers of Anisa's character suggest that the filmmakers are invested in exploring and representing the intersectionality of various forms of identity - be it cultural, gendered, religious, or social. This multiplicity invites the audience into perceiving a version of South African Indian women that is multifaceted, dynamic, ambitious, and also navigating traditional and modern values.

Anisa's character expresses autonomy in social settings as well. She meets her close friends regularly and seems to care about the people in her circle, including her receptionist. She has a close and loving relationship with her parents and her two younger siblings. The deficit in Anisa's life is one of romance, as her mother, Ayesha, keeps reminding her. Early in the story, it is revealed that Anisa's previous serious relationship ended with her catching her fiancé cheating on her. Similar to Natasha in *Broken Promises* (2004), Anisa's relationship ended with her taking off her engagement ring and not looking back. Marrying Anisa off is very important to her mother, Ayesha,

who feels that socially Anisa is getting older and surpassing an appropriate age for women to be married. Ayesha's requirements for Anisa's future husband are that he must be wealthy or at least in a respectable profession - he needs to be able to take care of his future wife. The conflict that exists within the narrative is not manifested in a character, but rather in the expectations of marriage that weigh heavily on Anisa, as well as her dwindling hope that she can find exactly what she is looking for.

Set in the 2000s, *For Better For Worse* (2010) also diversifies the depiction of Durban's South African Indian communities through a narrative centred around a thirty-year-old Muslim woman who has an advanced career and is dealing with the universal themes of love and relationships. Whereas Natasha's character in *Broken Promises* brings to light the plight of a daughter-in-law in a new home, Anisa illuminates the domestic space of the dutiful daughter who would like to find love and settle down. Differing from Natasha's conflict with an antagonist in the form of her own mother-in-law, Anisa's parents (with their own faults) are cohesive and supportive, aiming to lessen her stresses in their own ways. Within the home of the Khans, it is clear that family, community approval, and respect are incredibly important. Amsugi's character would most likely approve of the sentiment.

The first scene of the film, showcasing Anisa joining her parents and two siblings for a breakfast gathering, serves as an informative tableau by the filmmakers to elucidate the family values underpinning the Khan household. Anisa, dressed for her professional role, greets her family with a *salaam*, to which they respond in unison. This choice suggests an adherence to and emphasis on cultural traditions and expressions of respect within the family. Yusuf, the father character, is portrayed as having a soft spot for his daughters, a trait contrasting with his stricter expectations for his son Farhan. Through this dynamic, the filmmakers illuminate the gendered expectations manifesting in South African Indian families, including how Ayesha, the character of the mother, is critical of Anisa's unmarried status but is tender towards Farhan. The characteristics of the parental figures amplify the underlying gender dynamics and expectations within the family structure.

The shared meal in this scene (and others) is not only depicted as a family ritual but also serves as a moment for narrative development. These gatherings act as platforms for dialogue and character interaction, allowing the audience to glean insights into the family's values and concerns. Ayesha's culinary efforts also display her character's maternal care and adherence to cultural domestic roles.

In terms of family hierarchy, Yusuf is clearly established as the patriarch and primary breadwinner of this nuclear family, aligning with cultural expectations that emphasise male authority in South African Indian households, as articulated by Khan (2012) in the literature review. Yusuf's character leads the family with tenderness and care, emphasising a model of masculinity that is both authoritative and nurturing. Ayesha, in her role as the homemaker, is proactive and outspoken, yet also defers to Yusuf's ultimate authority. This can be interpreted as a commentary by the filmmakers on the roles women are expected to play in South African Indian households, likely depicting Ayesha as content in her domestic role, reflecting common sentiments among women in similar situations who, like her character, may be part of a community of stay-at-home mothers.

The characters of Ayesha and Amsugi from *Broken Promises* can be considered to hold shared values, each embodying traditional practices prevalent within South African Indian communities. Ayesha's character is portrayed as a woman who considers herself infallible in most matters. She is deeply concerned with her family's reputation in their community and shares Amsugi's emphasis on socially acceptable marriages and gender roles. Particularly, her tenderness toward her son Farhan, regardless of his poor decisions, is a narrative choice intended to illustrate the mother-son dynamic in South African Indian cultural contexts. Ayesha's zealous pursuit to find Anisa a suitable husband highlights her conformist attitude and possibly serves multiple narrative functions: it signifies the social pressures concerning marriageable age, reflects Ayesha's personal desire to progress to the next phase of her life as a mother-in-law, and shows her concern for her daughter's financial and emotional wellbeing. Ayesha's focus on affluent, professional men as ideal suitors for Anisa is another telling element

inserted by the filmmakers to spotlight issues of social status and wealth within these communities.

On the other hand, Anisa, unlike Natasha in *Broken Promises*, is a character that reflects more independence in prioritising her career and personal autonomy. The narrative shows her as unwilling to compromise on an imperfect relationship, a stance that sharply contrasts with Natasha's readiness to adjust her lifestyle to conform to her husband's family's expectations. Through Anisa's demonstrated active social life, including her interactions with friends, dates, and colleagues, her character seeks a partner who aligns with her lifestyle and believes in shared domestic responsibilities. This characterisation serves as a counterpoint to the other more culturally conservative roles depicted in the two films, highlighting evolving gender roles as a focus of the narrative in *For Better For Worse*.

As mentioned, the filmmakers use meal-sharing scenes to reflect the familial dynamics and individual aspirations of the characters. With these interactions in the scenes, the contrasting views of characters such as Anisa or her siblings in comparison to that of her parents are laid bare. Through dialogue presented in scenes such as the following excerpt, understanding of the characters, notions of identity, and cultural values deepen (*For Better For Worse*, 2010, 00:06:07- 00:07:21):

Farhan

You don't have to worry about Anisa,
she's too old.

Ayesha

Chup [keep quiet], what's wrong with you?
As it is, I'm trying to find a husband for
her. How many nice boys I found for you?

Anisa

Doctors, lawyers...

Ayesha

Rich businessmen. But you're not
interested, too fussy.

Anisa

Why should I be interested just because they're rich or professional, Ma? They could be closet psychopaths or something. Why don't you be like Papa? He doesn't pressurise me.

Ayesha

If your father had his way, you girls would never get married. He's not interested in finding a husband for you. I have to do all the work. And now, he'll act like he didn't hear anything. Yusuf, say something, hmm?

Yusuf

I'm waiting for you to stop, it's rude to interrupt.

Ayesha

You not worried your daughter is getting so old and she's still sitting at home?

Yusuf

She's not old and she doesn't have to get married. For what? Not like we can't support her or anything.

Anisa

And I'm not sitting at home, Mum. I do actually have a job.

Ayesha

And that helped you to get a husband, didn't it? Farhan, *beta* [son], why don't you eat. I cooked so much for who?

Yusuf

A re [exasperation] man, how much more you want him to eat? As it is, he's looking like a *ladoo* [round sweetmeat]. Rather tell him to get a job.

[to Farhan]

Your sister is a lawyer. And you? You haven't even finished your studying yet.

Farhan

Papa, please, Papa.

Yusuf

How many days in your life have you worked? Every time you start something, you leave it. I told you to join the business, you couldn't even do that. You left suddenly. I started from scratch and I worked very hard. And you troubled youngsters, you have it all too easy. You know, in my days, I had to catch three buses to get to work. If the buses didn't come, I had to walk twenty miles.

In this contextualising dialogue, which occurs at the beginning of the film, it is revealed that Ayesha has already been very active in trying to find a man for Anisa. It is also clear that Yusuf's character is not at all interested in trying to get his daughter married, instead defending Anisa from her mother. What is also highlighted is Yusuf and Ayesha's difference in their treatment of Farhan. In general, the way the Khan parents respond to their children is insightful into the notions of culture and identity held by the characters and the family unit. As the son in the household, Farhan certainly holds an interesting position within the family unit, as his mother dotes on him, while his father expects him to step up as a breadwinner and either join the family business or make a name for himself in a career. Ayesha raises her children in accordance with her established cultural norms and expectations. Her adoration of Farhan also confirms the inherited generational tradition of treating sons as the future breadwinners of the family, even though Anisa is already in an established career.

The attitude Yusuf displays towards Anisa's independence and professional goals, on the other hand, is more progressive. He expresses admiration for her professional accomplishments, indicating respect for her achievements. Compared to Ayesha, Yusuf appears more willing to question gender norms when it comes to the happiness of his daughter. However, when it comes to Farhan, Yusuf follows his own cultural

conventions and expectations by encouraging his son to pursue a career and establish himself as financially secure. Yusuf imposes gendered duties upon his son, while at the same time providing his daughter the comforts of being supported by him until she eventually is ready to leave the house with a husband (even though she has a career and can leave independently). The difference in Yusuf's approach to parenting his son and daughter suggests that his stance on cultural identity is perhaps more fluid and dynamic than Ayesha's. Lastly, the generational gaps between the parents and the children have significant impacts on how the characters perceive their own cultural identities. Anisa, more a product of post-apartheid environments than her parents, is focused on her career, challenging cultural gender expectations, and searching for companionship and love in a partner. Farhan also expresses freedom without cultural obligation as he navigates changing careers, unemployment, and the comfort of his father's financial support.

The filmmakers' design of the characters and their interactions is a commentary on the evolving dynamics of South African Indian families, particularly in the post-apartheid era. The characters of Ayesha and Yusuf serve as vehicles through which the filmmakers explore the navigations of inherited cultural values and emerging sensibilities from broader contexts of the different generations in South African Indian families, and what this may look like in a domestic setting. Ayesha's character embodies the weight of tradition and the socially acceptable status quo, especially with respect to marital and gender roles. This includes conceding to Yusuf's wishes, even if they deviate from tradition, as he is the patriarch. Her character's relentless pursuit of the ideal partner for Anisa exemplifies the filmmakers' illustrations of the pressures placed on women in South African Indian families regarding orchestrating the wellbeing of their children and maintaining notions of class status.

In designing Yusuf's character to exhibit progressive attitudes towards his daughter Anisa, the filmmakers make a strategic choice in exhibiting a commentary on the evolving nature of family dynamics within South African Indian families. Rather than performing a completely autocratic and conservative representation of a South African Indian father figure, Yusuf's character challenges the patriarchal stereotype,

underscoring the diversity of attitudes that may exist in a family unit. The filmmakers suggest that the roles of 'patriarch' and 'progressive parent' are not mutually exclusive, hinting at the adaptability of cultural norms and the capacity for individuals within a traditional structure to entertain change.

In the dialogue of the scene, what is also notable is the interjection of Urdu words as the parents speak to each other and the children. The characters of Yusuf and Ayesha casually and naturally include Urdu phrases in their dialogue, however, the children do not. This indicates that Yusuf and Ayesha's backstory includes being taught this manner of speaking by the previous generations and that they understand the language, representing a transitional generation that speaks both a South Africanised Indian language and English. Including this in the dialogue is a key point of self-representation through the filmmakers' choices, representative of South African Indian communities which maintain various degrees of linguistic connections with their ancestry.

During the apartheid era, racial segregation enforced by state policies severely limited cross-cultural exchanges, contributing to the preservation of ancestral languages within South African Indian communities. Historically, people from these communities learned English as a medium of instruction for civil participation but may have also maintained their mother tongue, like Urdu, within familial and communal settings. Ayesha and Yusuf are representative of this transition, as they are fluent in both English and their ancestral language. In the post-apartheid 'rainbow nation' era, younger generations, represented by Anisa and Farhan, have increased access to racial and cultural integration from a younger age. Their linguistic experience would be a confluence of diverse experiences; however, this may come at the expense of a deeper connection to their ancestral languages. The influence of the westernisation of culture also plays a role in this shift (Sooklal, 1991). The absence of Urdu in the dialogue of Anisa and her siblings can be seen as a cinematic cue by the filmmakers in exemplifying the decline of connections to ancestral languages in South African Indian communities.

Through the design of the characters and interactions through dialogue, the filmmakers comment on the evolving cultural identities of South African Indians across generations.

In a broader sense, the cinematic treatment of the characters also addresses the complexities of language as a marker of cultural identity. Here, language serves as a metaphor for cultural retention and transformation, and the disparity between the generations in their use of Urdu in comparison to English - with it being accepted by the parental figures - invokes the notion that linguistic proficiency is not a priority to transmit to the succeeding generations, and that this interaction of connection to ancestry is not foregrounded in the characters' notions of self.

Lastly, on the discussion of language in the scene, to be mentioned is Anisa's Arabic greeting of "*as-salamu alaykum*" (peace be upon you), a habit she and her siblings would have been taught through the practice of her Islamic faith. The conversation held over breakfast by the Khan family is conducted in three languages, Arabic, Urdu, and English, linked to the characters' religious identities, ancestral heritage, and nationality. This diversity highlights the layered identities of the characters, indicating a richness of contexts in the formation of these identities.

The use of these languages in the scene is also an instance of cinematic self-representations of cultural heterogeneity. The inclusion of the Urdu language, indicative of cultural ancestry, as well as Arabic, highlighting the importance of religious teachings to the family, creates a nuanced representation of cultural identity that would be identifiable to South African Indian audiences but may seem homogenous to outside perspectives. The use of the languages would resonate with South African Muslim audiences as well as South African Indians familiar with Urdu. English, the first language of the characters, is representative of their contemporary South African nationality. For external audiences not privy to the resonances and historical contexts of the languages, the scene might appear as an amalgam of 'Indian' dialect, contributing to a monolithic perception of South African Indian identity. Without the relevant cultural knowledge, the subtleties of the characters' multilingual interactions are lost, leading to a simplified, and arguably homogenised, interpretation.

In both *Broken Promises* and *For Better For Worse*, the filmmakers employ linguistic choices to signify generational divergences within South African Indian families. In

Broken Promises, the character of Amsugi employs Tamil vernacular, particularly in emotionally charged moments, as exemplified when she refers to Natasha as a *moodevi*, essentially calling her a bad omen. This use of Tamil serves as a form of cultural signification that demarcates her as part of a generation maintaining connections to her ancestral heritage through language. By contrast, characters such as Natasha and Ruben, akin to the younger Khan siblings in *For Better For Worse*, predominantly utilise English in their interactions. This departure can be read as indicative of a form of Westernisation, revealing a generational shift towards greater integration into the broader social milieu of South Africa. Furthermore, it underscores the potential decline, or even erasure, of ancestral linguistic and cultural legacies in the notions of identity of younger South African Indians.

Such generational discrepancies in language, as illustrated by the filmmakers' choices, reflect the broader socio-cultural transformations and underlying shifts in influence on South African Indian notions of identity. This includes a gradual assimilation into the larger South African society, which could consequently threaten the continuation of ancestral linguistic and cultural frameworks. In this regard, the films operate as cultural commentaries, highlighting the dynamics of language as both an emblem and a mechanism of evolving identity constructs.

Although there is a generational difference in the use of language, the hierarchy of the family's interaction reflects a traditional patriarchal family unit. The tone of the scene's conversation changes as Yusuf feels agitation over Farhan's lack of a job. He becomes confrontational, pointing his finger in Farhan's direction and making unflinching eye contact. Farhan looks away submissively, pleading with his father not to continue saying more. The characters remain static at the table until Farhan decides to leave, with his mother trailing behind. Yusuf remains planted at the head of the table. As the 'man of the house' and the breadwinner, he is seated at the head of the table with his family to his left and right. Only Anisa sits at the end of the table opposite her father, representing her independence as an adult in her own right. This choice of placement of the characters emphasises the extent of the patriarchal structure within Yusuf and his family, indicated through the space of the table and the arrangement of characters that is focused around

him. This is further evidenced by his ability to speak his mind to his family and the tone of the room and conversation changing as his mood does. However, as mentioned, Yusuf's progressive tendencies are reflected in the treatment and respect given to his eldest daughter, Anisa.

Yusuf's position of power and his dominating expression of expectations to his son are consistent with Khan's (2012) observation of patriarchal culture in South African Indian communities. Khan also notes the domestic responsibilities of women in these family units, exemplified by Ayesha's need to cater to her family and her efforts at mediation and easing tension in the family to create a peaceful environment. Sooklal (1991), who discusses the decline of the joint family structure and the traditions and values passed within them, attributes the change in value systems to increasing western influences on younger generations, as well as historical circumstances forcing families to break tradition and adapt into smaller nuclear units. Elements of the joint family still remain, such as the patriarchal head, however, cultural traditions and gender roles learned generationally would not have been passed down the same as before. As family dynamics change in response to historical and circumstantial forces like apartheid and Westernisation, this scene provides a snapshot of the dynamic nature of South African Indian cultures in the post-apartheid period. Anisa's character represents the generational change in cultural identity in response to a changing South African landscape, and a compromise in notions of cultural identity also exists in her parents as they allow her expressions of autonomy, interests in a career, and the freedom to be dating men with the goal of finding a husband. With much more expectations placed on Farhan, Yusuf and Ayesha's characters still also allow him the breadth to explore his interests in the hope that he settles into a career that interests him.

Later in the narrative, we see Farhan meet up with Iqbal, a Pakistani man with whom he has been dabbling in unsuccessful entrepreneurial pursuits. The scene is set in Durban's central business district, locally called 'town', and more specifically the scene occurs outside of a mosque which is about to call men and women to prayer. Unfortunately for Farhan, on the way to prayer Yusuf discovers him and Iqbal, becoming angry. Farhan has no suitable answers for his father's questions, and Iqbal's presence makes Yusuf

more incensed. He believes his anger towards his son is justified and would have been spurred for several reasons; in this context, Yusuf is stressed that community members will see his son engaging in unsavoury business while loitering around the mosque. If people see this, they might question the values of the Khans, and Yusuf as the father. It is clear that his character cares about his family's reputation, as he is a devout Muslim and well-respected member of the community. Yusuf's expectations of his son play a big part in his rage. His character anticipates that Farhan will follow in his footsteps as a family patriarch and will achieve this by working for the family business or pursuing a respectable career. The fact that Farhan is involved with Iqbal displays a failing in Yusuf's plans for his son's future.

The incorporation of this particular scene, notably outside a mosque, can be perceived as direct commentary by the filmmakers on the interplay between religion, community, and family reputation, as well as the importance placed on it, in South African Indian communities. The mosque serves as a potent symbol of collective identity and social cohesion, rendering Yusuf's apprehension about potential judgement from the community members palpable. This accentuates Yusuf's multiple roles, including being a devout Muslim and a respected community figure, both of which contribute to his escalating frustrations towards his son, Farhan.

The scene also serves as a poignant narrative device to highlight the generational differences in values held by the characters. Reminiscent of Ruben and Amsugi's dynamic in *Broken Promises*, where the figure of the son does not prioritise how they present themselves to 'the people' and are rather focusing on individual ambitions, Farhan conducts his business dealings outside of a place of worship that his father would expect him to respect. This act encapsulates his character's attitude towards family obligations, ethics, and community reputation. Farhan, as a son, maintains values that are far removed from his father's, thereby also revealing a dearth of understanding between the characters, with this unfamiliarity resulting in anger and mistrust from Yusuf's character. This can be interpreted as a further commentary by the filmmakers in that the changing social contexts and the negotiations of identity that happen in these spaces can lead to estrangement, with the different generations not understanding the

motivations and actions of the other, leading to breakdowns of communication and relationships.

Yusuf's response to Iqbal reveals facets of his character and his perceptions of class and social relations. As a South African Indian man, Yusuf may hold preconceived ideas about social stratification and the importance of upholding a particular social standing in his surrounding community. He may view Iqbal's presence as an impediment to his family's reputation due to potential prejudices or stereotypes that exist in the community regarding Pakistani nationals. Farhan, on the other hand, shares none of his father's concern about his family's image in engaging with Iqbal. Through analysing the dialogue of the scene in which Yusuf catches Farhan parked outside the mosque with Iqbal, the tensions between the two Khan men are clarified without the mediating presence of women (*For Better For Worse*, 2010, 00:46:35- 00:47:59):

Yusuf

So this is how you spend your day. Your bad luck, you got caught today, boy. What do you think you are doing, making all this commotion like a *gunda* [goon]? Right outside the mosque, what if somebody from the family saw you? Instead of reading *namaaz* [prayers] you're playing music!

[to Iqbal]

And you, come out.

Farhan

Papa, we're going to *namaaz* now, we're going to be late.

Yusuf

You're trying to make me a fool, now you go read *namaaz*?

[to Iqbal]

And you, you must be the *mashhoor* [famous] Iqbal?

Iqbal

Yes.

Yusuf

Finally, I'm honoured to meet you. I heard you're working for the Receiver of Revenue?

Iqbal

Jee [yes]?

Yusuf

Jee haan [yes], you are the receiver of all my revenue. All my bloody profit is going into your pockets via this useless son of mine.

Farhan

Shit.

Yusuf

You watch your mouth.

[to Iqbal]

What have you got my son involved in now?

Iqbal

Ji, kuch nahin, kuch nahin [Uncle, nothing, nothing]!

Yusuf

What are all these bottles of water doing in the car? Farhan?

Farhan

It's seawater, Papa.

Yusuf

Seawater, for what?

Iqbal

Uncle, you know in Joburg they like the sea, right? But they don't have it there. So,

we are going to bottle the seawater and sell it to them. My idea.

Yusuf

Of all the bloody stupid ideas!

Iqbal

Uncle, *gaali mat de, masjid kehna* [don't swear, we're outside the mosque].

Yusuf

Are you trying to tell me what is right and wrong? You wait, I'll make you take the next plane to Karachi!

In another instance, as demonstrated earlier in the film during meal-sharing, Yusuf and Farhan's contrasting values and priorities make it difficult for the two characters to engage effectively, leading to interactions where Farhan is essentially spoken at by his father, further isolating each other in their relationship. Additionally, Yusuf's interaction with Iqbal provides the filmmakers' perspective and understanding of the treatment of foreign nationals by South African Indian community members. His character's treatment of Iqbal is dismissive, lacking in manners, respect, or polite engagement. He also specifically acknowledges Iqbal's foreign nationality, responding to his Urdu communications and even threatening to send him back to Karachi.

There are several potential factors influencing Yusuf's treatment of Iqbal. For instance, broader historical contexts such as the tumultuous history of Indian and Pakistani relations and associated prejudices could play a role. Considering the history of immigration to South Africa, Yusuf's ancestry is most likely Indian, and he would have been exposed to prejudices associated with his family's background. However, within the rest of the film, Yusuf does not express any strong attachments to his ancestral country or a diasporic national identity that would affect his perceptions of Iqbal. A more plausible rationale might stem from Yusuf's community values and standards regarding class and socioeconomic backgrounds, which he himself upholds. Although of Muslim faith like Yusuf, Iqbal is first perceived as a disreputable and unsuccessful entrepreneur and foreign national, associated by Yusuf with belonging to a lower social

class. Iqbal's economic dependency and exploitation of Farhan's ignorance reinforce Yusuf's negative perception of him, likely associating such behaviour with those from lower social classes due to the etiquette and moral standards he believes his community upholds. Yusuf's strong dismissal of Iqbal's business ideas further suggests preconceived notions about Iqbal's moral character, work ethic, and intelligence.

The scene can be examined through the concept of 'othering', which Yusuf's dialogue represents to a degree. Yusuf identifies Iqbal as an outsider and constructs notions of his identity based on his preexisting prejudices and Iqbal's differences in language and notions of respectable behaviour (Said, 1978). Yusuf sarcastically says, "Finally, I am honoured to meet you", upon learning that Iqbal is Farhan's Pakistani friend. He sees Iqbal as an influence of foreign values on his son, further emphasised when he threatens to return Iqbal to Karachi. Yusuf's behaviour towards Iqbal (meant for comedic relief to the audience) represents a view of Iqbal as the 'other', highlighting differences in their religious values and nationalities. Although the interaction does not involve distinct power dynamics of the West and the East, it illustrates how the concept of 'othering' manifests in smaller interactions, shaping relationships and perceptions based on differences. The scene also highlights an understanding of heterogeneity in these cultural identities, depicting that while South Asians and South African Indians share commonalities in cultural and religious practices, they do not necessarily foster feelings of kinship or share the same identities.

Gauging by Yusuf's character's age, similar to Amsugi in *Broken Promises*, his backstory would have included growing up and working during the apartheid period. Also akin to Amsugi, in a previous scene, he mentions the struggles of his younger days and his belief that today's youth live easier lives. The narrative's treatment of Yusuf's character suggests that the filmmakers intend to portray him as someone proud of having worked hard to overcome past disadvantages, with his success being a source of confidence. Yusuf is guided by his inherited cultural and religious beliefs, adhering to the generational model of supporting his children and his wife, who is a homemaker, attending prayers, and maintaining a good community standing. However, he does not impose the same standards of living on his children, indicating a hybridity or

amalgamation of inherited and adopted values in his notions of self. Yusuf allows his children the freedom to explore their identities without barriers of hardship, which, while beneficial, sometimes leads to conflicts with his personal values, as exemplified in this scene with Farhan.

As the story progresses, the divide between Farhan and Yusuf widens until Farhan, inspired by a new romantic interest, decides to become more serious about his life. This development pleases Yusuf, easing the tension between them. Meanwhile, Anisa starts dating Zak from the bookstore coffee shop. The narrative reveals that a neighbour from the community reported seeing Anisa with Zak, known as a waiter, leading to her parents' distress upon hearing she is considering marrying someone they perceive as having limited prospects. The characters of Anisa, Yusuf, and Ayesha each have different priorities, which become apparent in their confrontation, as highlighted in the following dialogue (*For Better For Worse*, 2010, 01:08:40- 01:12:00):

Ayesha

Anisa, you know Auntie Hajra from down the road? She was on the phone. She said she saw you in town with a waiter. What a horrible thing to say. How ridiculous...
Anisa? Anisa?

Anisa

Yes, Ma?

Ayesha

Anisa, tell me this is not true!

Anisa

I can't do that, Ma. I am going out with a very nice person who just happens to be a waiter.

Ayesha

Allah paak! [Dear God!] What have I done to deserve this! What *gunah* [sin] am I paying for? How am I going to face the people?

Yusuf

Ayesha, calm down this minute. You're overreacting. It's making the situation worse. Let me handle this.

[to Anisa]

Anisa, sit down. What is this boy's name?

Anisa

Zak. Zakaria Ali. And he's not a boy, he's thirty years old.

Yusuf

And what does he do again?

Anisa

He's a waiter.

[Ayesha sobs]

Yusuf

Ayesha, shush. I was hoping I heard wrong the first time.

Anisa

What does it matter if he's a waiter?

Yusuf

Are you serious about him? Are you going to marry him?

Anisa

Yes, we are serious. We plan on getting married.

Yusuf

How can you marry a waiter? I don't believe that I have to explain this to you. How is he going to support you?

Anisa

Papa, those traditional roles don't work anymore. I earn well, and besides, he writes articles and he does well with that. He's writing a book.

Yusuf

He's writing a book? What's wrong with you girls, man? One daughter brings home a DJ, and the other one is going out with a writer who is also a waiter. Don't you girls want to go out with guys with real jobs? Anisa, you studied so hard, and you want to marry a waiter?

Anisa

He studied too. He's got a BCom.

Yusuf

He's got a BCom! What's wrong with him, man? Why is he a waiter? Why doesn't he get a better job? You know if he was in his twenties, it's understandable, but he's thirty! He's bluffing man, did you see certificate?

Anisa

No, Papa, he writes. That's what he's interested in.

Yusuf

Tell him to be interested in making some money.

Anisa

Money, money, money.

Yusuf

You need money in order to live. And I don't want my daughter supporting her husband!

Anisa

How can you judge him? You know nothing about him. You haven't even met him! He's wonderful. Ma, Papa, you've been wanting me to get married for so long, and now that I've found someone who makes me happy, whom I want to marry, you're making such a fuss.

Ayesha

We want you to be happy, but how can you be happy with a waiter!

Anisa

Ma, why are you so concerned about image and status and what people will say?

Ayesha

Because we live with the people. We do not live on a desert island.

Anisa

You know what, Zak makes me happy. And I want to marry him.

Yusuf

No, you will not marry him. In fact, you don't have to marry anybody. Understand?

Anisa

No, I will marry him, and you can't stop me!

In the interaction between the characters, the space between them symbolises their lack of agreement. Yusuf remains rigid throughout the scene, addressing Anisa with the same authoritative body language he presented to Farhan—a strong stillness punctuated with hand gestures and direct eye contact. Yusuf only moves when he needs to comfort his emotional wife, speaking to Anisa with authority but in a kinder, more negotiatory tone than he used with Farhan. Ayesha gestures broadly, looks up as if seeking divine guidance, and dabs her tears with a tissue. Yusuf appears more logical in his approach,

while Ayesha expresses her thoughts emotively. Anisa, largely static in demeanour, mirrors her father's body language more than her mother's.

Their dialogue again highlights generational differences in values. Yusuf appeals to Anisa's hardworking nature, holding her in high regard but also firmly believing she needs a partner who can provide for her. Yusuf values career and responsibility as benchmarks for respecting men, and perceives Zak as falling short due to his job as a waiter and apparent lack of ambition. Yusuf believes love is important but views Anisa as deserving more than a partner who might depend on her financial success.

The scene comments on the challenges faced by South African Indian parents raising children in an era of new democratic freedoms and the changes they must navigate. Yusuf represents parents caught between inherited values of familial and societal obligations and the broader influences shaping their children's experiences. He respects Anisa's independence, which he helped foster, yet assesses Zak based on traditional benchmarks of success.

By juxtaposing Yusuf's internal conflict, the filmmakers highlight the crises of cultural tradition, identity, and family faced by his generation of parents. This includes issues of hybridity, where individuals strive to maintain authentic notions of self while adapting their identity and values to connect with their children beyond conflict. Yusuf's character embodies the sentiment of elders feeling their traditional teachings invalidated by the succeeding generation and the internal conflict this creates. The scene offers a nuanced portrayal of how parents, especially from minority communities in a postcolonial setting like South African Indians, navigate the challenges of imparting inherited values in a changing socio-cultural environment. The filmmakers suggest that while traditional norms provide a moral compass, they may not always align with the realities and desires of the younger generation, or even fully with their own.

As the dialogue escalates, both Yusuf and Anisa become increasingly agitated until Anisa can no longer tolerate the conversation and storms off. Given the established relationship between Anisa and her parents, this escalation of conflict is clearly unusual.

Culturally, in conflicts between a child (even an adult) and their parents (or any elder) within this context, the younger person is expected to concede submissively, similar to Farhan's response when confronted by his father. Especially within a hierarchical culture and a family adhering to traditional South African Indian values, an act such as Anisa standing up to her parents will be formative in their relationship going forward and is equivalent to insubordination, which her parents would perceive as disrespectful. For Anisa's character to reach this point of emotion indicates how much she is willing to concede to maintain peace and, conversely, what she is willing to sacrifice by choosing her happiness over fulfilling her parents' expectations.

Bhabha's (1994) conceptual frameworks of mimicry and ambivalence are instrumental in contextualising how each character navigates their cultural and generational positioning within the narrative. Yusuf's character displays ambivalence in a postcolonial context, oscillating between his ingrained cultural values and the modern principles he and his family have adopted to varying extents. While appreciating the post-apartheid freedoms enabling his daughter to develop an independent and industrious disposition, he remains anchored—and thus conflicted—by his traditional values. This duality in Yusuf's perspective resonates with Bhabha's concept of ambivalence, characteristic of postcolonial subjects obliged to negotiate between dominant cultural norms and their own traditional practices (Bhabha, 1994). Yusuf's ambivalence symbolises the broader struggles faced by communities navigating a rapidly evolving social and political landscape.

Yusuf, as a liminal figure in the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994), renegotiates his hybrid identity. He does not completely abandon his cultural values for peace with his daughter, nor does he fully embrace new scenarios she presents. Instead, he configures a notion in between both, employing his patriarchal authority as a last resort, acknowledging the potential damage to their relationship but prioritising his goals as a father for her future. Yusuf's attitudes towards Zak, seen as part of a lower socio-economic class, reflect heritage and community views that often place importance on socio-economic indicators as measures of a person's worth. His need to negotiate these tensions points to the inescapable ambivalence in his character.

Anisa's ambivalence arises in balancing between filial submission and personal autonomy, influenced by different aspects of her hybrid identity. Her transition from a careful, respectful individual to directly defying parental expectations for love exemplifies her grappling with values and renegotiating hybridity in identity. Anisa's act of defying cultural expectations and asserting her intentions, choosing potential damage to her relationship with her parents, showcases her as exemplary of the younger generation's desire for autonomy. The filmmakers present the younger generation of South African Indians as exploring their hybridised identities while weighing repercussions from within the household and immediate community.

In the scene, the character of the mother, Ayesha, reveals that she is less concerned with Anisa's partner's financial ability to support her and is completely focused on how this will look to the community. Anisa outright asks her mother why she is so focused on image, to which she replies that they live within a community and not on a desert island. She insinuates that all actions are observed and judged by their neighbours, and reflect on their family's name and reputation. Ayesha delivers her dialogue with intense emotion and centralises herself in the situation. Showing similarity to the mindset of Amsugi in *Broken Promises*, and being of the same generation, Ayesha's security comes from others not disapproving or judging the actions of her family and perceiving her and Yusuf as failed parents who are unable to instil community values in their children.

Ayesha's fears, much like Amsugi in *Broken Promises*, place emphasis on the importance of community judgment and its role in moderating behaviour within South African Indian households. Amsugi's character holds a similar attitude as Ayesha in being concerned about how their children's decisions, especially to do with romantic partners, will be perceived and accepted by their surrounding community. Between the two films in the sample, differences in the family dynamics are displayed more in the attitude towards relationships and socioeconomic status. In *For Better For Worse*, Yusuf's character is depicted as having great concern for his daughter's comfort and future, questioning her choice of partner based on his financial prospects and unrespectable career choice of being a waiter. Yusuf further indicates prejudice towards

individuals of lower socioeconomic status in his interactions with Iqbal, completely dismissing Iqbal's attempts at polite conversation and speaking to him bluntly. Presentations of financial wealth and more privileged class standards of living and engagement are important to both of Anisa's parents in different contexts.

In *Broken Promises*, Amsugi's concerns around Ruben and Natasha's relationship initially stemmed from cultural variations due to ethnolinguistic differences between her family and her new daughter-in-law, because it would reflect on her as the matriarch responsible for upholding family traditions and values. These differences, in her perception, not only have the potential to disrupt the familial equilibrium but could also affect the community's perception of her family's commitment to cultural continuity. Therefore, Amsugi's apprehensions can be seen as an attempt to maintain the cultural integrity of her family within the context of her surrounding community.

Both films do emphasise family conflicts in the form of generational differences. Anisa's character challenges her mother's obsession with image and status, arguing that these points should not influence her decision regarding a life partner. Similar tones of discussion occur between the characters in *Broken Promises*, as members of the younger generation question and challenge the boundaries of societal and cultural standards. Quite early in the film, Ruben's character performs a monologue speaking to his beliefs on the absurdity of the Tamil and Hindi cultural divides that his mother endorses. In the end, Ruben and Natasha stay together because of love as the primary factor. This suggests a shift towards a more westernised value system that prioritises personal choice and emotional connection over traditional, culturally defined social structures. In *For Better For Worse*, Anisa marries Zak for the same reasons.

The conflict between traditional, inherited values and contemporary sensibilities in both narratives serves as a representation of the social and cultural changes taking place in the post-apartheid period. These films signal the challenges faced by their respective communities as they navigate a shifting landscape. The younger generations in both films undergo significant character evolution, questioning established norms and expectations while grappling with the complexities of cultural identity in evolving

contexts. This is underscored by a generational gap in values and beliefs that becomes apparent throughout both narratives. Several factors contribute to this gap. First, the younger generation has come of age in a post-apartheid society, which offers new democratic freedoms and access to global influences, thereby cultivating a more liberal mindset. Second, exposure to western values, which prioritise individualism and romantic love, often challenges more traditional cultural norms. Lastly, the socio-political shifts occurring in South Africa, including greater intercultural contact and the re-evaluation of entrenched hierarchies, have prompted the younger generation to scrutinise and redefine their cultural identities in ways that diverge from the perspectives held by their elders.

By showcasing characters with various values, cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic backgrounds, *For Better For Worse* and *Broken Promises* certainly illustrate degrees of heterogeneity within South African Indian communities, including influences of westernisation affecting generational gaps, and the younger generations' growing connection and assimilation to the larger South African context. Consistent with narrative themes, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), produced thirteen years after *Broken Promises*, features a narrative surrounding two mother figures interfering in the romantic relationship of their children. The film is analysed with regards to the complexities of its characters, family dynamics and notions of identity in the next section.

***Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*: “We all became like one family”**

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys (2017) is a family comedy that touches on the themes of friendship, love, and community. The film centres around two matriarchs of nuclear families who are also neighbours. Their children, Jodi Kandasamy and Prishen Naidoo, are engaged in a secret relationship, knowing their mothers would not approve. This Romeo and Juliet narrative of forbidden romance can be considered a universally known trope; however, the cultural context of the film creates a unique rendition. Jodi and Prishen are neighbours within a South African township named Chatsworth in KwaZulu-Natal. Designated by the apartheid government, Chatsworth became occupied

by Indian families and remains largely dominated by this ethnic group. It is a sentimental representation of home to many South African Indians who subsequently relocated throughout South Africa.

The film refers to the locale of Chatsworth in the context of the narrative. This is more specific than in the instances of *Broken Promises* (2004) and *For Better For Worse* (2010), both of which are understood to be set in greater Durban as revealed from various scene locations. As mentioned, Chatsworth maintains particular historical value because of its establishment during apartheid in relation to the Group Areas Act of 1950. Khan (2012) refers to the effects of the Group Areas Act as “social trauma” (Khan, 2012: 139), as communities, families, and settlements were upheaved, leading to around 140,000 Indians in Durban being uprooted and forcibly relocated to areas such as Springfield, Chatsworth, and Phoenix. Most joint families were not able to board together in the public housing provided because of the designated smaller domiciles, more suited to western notions of family structures, leading to the dislocation and separation of bigger families, and the rise of smaller nuclear family units.

This situation, in the main, had devastating effects on the elderly and resulted in the breakdown of the traditional way of life which was reconstructed in the early years of indenture, forcing families into a nuclear family system by virtue of the public housing design. A 1978 survey by Butler- Adam and Venter (1987) suggests that 80 percent of Indian families were living in nuclear family units (Khan, 2012: 140).

As discussed in the historical trajectory of South African Indians, the apartheid system in South Africa engendered a complex form of cultural heterogeneity through its policies of forced removals and the establishment of segregated townships. The systematic relocation of various ethnic and racial groups into specific, isolated geographical areas not only fractured communities but also inadvertently created spaces for new forms of cultural interaction and synthesis. As nuclear families in the townships developed into the new normal and apartheid eventually gave way to democracy, areas such as Chatsworth developed and operated as functional cultural communities, with re-established social bonds, neighbour relationships, and support structures. Radhakrishnan

(2005) notes that Chatsworth also served as a home for political activity among Indians, from which prominent activists have emerged. Further, as the economy developed, class divisions became evident due to the financial and economic changes of different families, with Indians moving out of Chatsworth and into previously ‘white’ areas, or remaining in the community and modernising their domiciles (Khan, 2012), as seen with the Kandasamy family.

The theme of class is also prevalent in the film. Although the Kandasamys and the Naidoos share the same heritage, religion, and Tamil linguistic background, the Kandasamys exude an air of wealth and westernisation. Jennifer looks down on the Naidoo family for their older cars and their habits. Conversely, Shanti perceives the Kandasamys as harbouring a false sense of superiority, while she and her family adhere to wholesome traditional values that have ingrained them more deeply into the Chatsworth community. Jennifer harbours aspirations to leave Chatsworth but is unable to do so due to her mother-in-law, Aya, who lives with the family and considers Chatsworth her home—much like Shanti does. The husbands of both Shanti and Jennifer are less rigid in their beliefs, largely following the directions of their wives, who place great importance on representing their families in distinct ways.

In regards to the notions of class, the family units of the Naidoos and the Kandasamys designed by the filmmakers rather reflect the observations of Hansen’s (2012) discussion of *charou* and *lahnee* culture. According to Hansen, the *charou* culture can be associated with South African Indian communities such as Chatsworth, which developed under the effects of apartheid and the Group Areas Act resulting in enclaves of distinctive South African Indianness. The Naidoo family, including Shanti, embraces *charou* culture as a vital component of their identity. Shanti is presented as proud of her community ties and traditional family values which connect her to the community. *Charou* culture is also evident in Shanti’s dialogue, discussed later in this chapter. She embodies the normative experience and linguistic engagements associated with the culture.

The term *lahnee*, as defined by Hansen, is represented by Jennifer and the Kandasamy family. Jennifer's aspirations include a higher social status and a need for separation from her neighbours and the *charou* way of life. She emphasises her family's modern (and more westernised) lifestyle to set herself apart from the neighbourhood's residents, many of whom are working class. Despite her efforts, however, Jennifer and her family still possess knowledge of *charou* culture and therefore remain connected to the locale and community from which they have emerged. Jennifer's distaste for Chatsworth, her neighbours, and the surrounding culture reveals a conflicted notion of identity. She desires to redefine herself in terms of social status, class, and cultural identity. Despite her efforts to distance herself from *charou* culture, Jennifer cannot completely escape her South African Indian heritage and its influences that have shaped her life in various ways. Her behaviour reflects a struggle to balance her aspirations for a higher social status and more westernised lifestyle with her cultural heritage and the reality of her upbringing in Chatsworth.

Jennifer attributes her family staying in Chatsworth to Aya, the character of her mother-in-law, who does not want to move out of the area. Aya's backstory at seventy-nine years old would have included being only thirteen years old during the time of forced relocation, most likely having experienced life in the extended family as a child, the trauma of being uprooted, and the formation of the new way of life in her Chatsworth community which is now her home. This context gives Aya an appreciation of the community which she witnessed develop and heal as she grew up and got older. Jennifer, who sees living in Chatsworth as a negative attribute, does not see value in living in the township when they can afford to live somewhere else that is more suited to her notions of class. The film begins with a voice-over of Aya speaking about her community, which captures the filmmakers' perspective on the value of Chatsworth (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 00:00:22- 00:01:36):

Aya (V.O.)

[over images of Durban]

Durban, beautiful, isn't it? Like one
paradise this place is, man. But you think
this place is the real Durban- oh, no no no.
Let me take you to the real deal.

[over images of Chatsworth]

See, many years ago, the government took us, all the Indian people, and put us in one place. They named it Chatsworth. After some place in England. Hmm, but the bloody cheek! But nevermind they did like that, we struggled and struggled and stayed. Only one thing, the houses are so close to each other. The neighbours are so nosy, they become like our extended family.

[intercut Shanti and Jennifer]

Why must lie, man? Not all of them. You see these two here, they used to be best friends. But now, oh!

Through the voice-over that introduces the tone of the film, the filmmakers provide the audience with context about the community, its history, and its unique cultural characteristics. Aya's character wishes for the audience to appreciate the charm and distinctiveness of Chatsworth before delving into the lives of Shanti and Jennifer, who grew up there. Her voice-over also resonates with the nostalgia and understanding of residents and ex-residents of Chatsworth, almost as if the film is a tribute to its people. This sentiment is reinforced by the concluding bookend voice-over, where Aya continues her monologue from the beginning of the film (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 01:26:24- 01:26:57):

Aya (V.O.)

Yes, we live in this place called Chatsworth. You know, at any time you walk here, people are always greeting each another. And always making friends. Ya, the government took us and put us here, but we made it our home. The houses are so close. Why I must lie? You can smell what our neighbour is cooking. But eventually, we all become like one family. That's Chatsworth for you.

Regarding Aya's 'Chatsworth' accent and manner of speaking, Moodley and Govender (2021) note the response of various audience members to *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, who believe that the film's employment of the accent does not mock the characters and their way of speaking, but rather comes across as unapologetic and

appropriately emulated. Aya's manner of speaking also provides insight into her character and the community. She speaks a dialect of English that is not formally Western in delivery or syntax, alluding to the notion that "the population speaks English in language shift, incorporating the cadence, syntax, and idioms of their ancestral mother tongues" (Moodley and Govender, 2021: 241). Aya speaks a dialect of English, but the cadence and rhythm in which she communicates are reminiscent of the group's Indian ancestry and her own ethnolinguistic background.

Aya's manner of speaking differs from that of her daughter-in-law, Jennifer, who subscribes to classroom-taught English devoid of any Chatsworth intonation. The difference in linguistic presentation between Aya and Jennifer serves as another lens through which generational differences can be observed, particularly within the South African Indian community. Aya, having experienced the dislocation and communal restructuring brought about by apartheid's forced relocations, manifests her deep-rooted connections to her community through her language. The accent serves as a form of linguistic resistance and continuity for her generation, linking them to a complex past. Jennifer, on the other hand, epitomises the influence of westernised education. Her 'classroom-taught' English, devoid of Chatsworth intonation, symbolises her detachment from the community Aya holds dear. Unlike Aya, Jennifer views her context not as a resilient community to be proud of, but as a lower-status environment from which she aspires to escape. This form of English aligns with her aspirations for a different class status and reflects her internalisation of broader societal hierarchies that devalue her own community's way of speaking.

The difference between Aya and Jennifer, emphasised in the narrative by the filmmakers, further reflects the generational distinctions in South African Indian communities, with the characters' use of language exacerbated by different exposures to education, economic opportunities, and systemic structures. Whereas *Broken Promises* and *For Better For Worse* depicted conflict between the generation of parents and their children developing and integrating into the post-apartheid period, the character of Aya represents the sentiment of an older generation of South African Indians with different lived histories, including experiencing the effects of displacement from the Group Areas

Act. South African Indians of similar age to Aya's character engaged with limited opportunities, forming closely-knit communities, described by Aya as 'one family,' as a form of socio-cultural survival. In contrast, South Africans of Jennifer's generation, afforded more educational and professional opportunities, face the task of assimilation into a westernised climate, while balancing responsibilities such as community ties and cultural continuity. Thus, the difference in their manner of speaking serves not just as a linguistic variation but as a deeper commentary on diverging generational experiences and values within the South African Indian communities.

A scene that provides insight into Jennifer and Aya's relationship occurs early in the film, where the daily life of the family is still being introduced. In the scene, Jennifer blends a smoothie for herself while making her husband a coffee. Aya attempts to speak to her friend Saras on the phone; however, Jennifer's obnoxious use of the blender prevents her from speaking. The scene serves the purpose of contextualising life in Chatsworth from Jennifer's perspective, as well as establishing her dominating personality and feelings of superiority. Jennifer brews coffee for Elvis instead of the tea he wanted, and purposefully inconveniences her mother-in-law with the loud blender. These small acts are representative of Jennifer's need to be in control of everybody, as encapsulated in the excerpt of dialogue (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 00:10:35- 00:11:30):

Jennifer

Here's your coffee.

Elvis

But I asked for tea.

Jennifer

You know you really need to sort your mother out.

Elvis

She's old, love. Just give her a break.

Aya

[on the phone]

Ya, Saras, I'm seventy-nine years old.
Anytime I'm going to go. Sometimes I
even see a white light. Plus too, with the
cataracts and all.

Jennifer

See what a drama queen she is. You know,
normally I can put up with her nonsense.

Aya

[looking at Jennifer]

But my ears are still fine.

[back to the phone]

Your pressure not coming down? I must
give you Sushi's pressure tablets.

Elvis

Ma, I told you not to use other people's
medication.

Jennifer

[looking out the window]

That boy's car is literally falling apart. So
cheap and embarrassing. I can't believe we
actually allow our daughter to drive in that.
It's not safe.

Elvis

You don't remember, doll? You used to
drive in your father's old rusty Valiant
then. Besides, he's giving her a ride.

Jennifer

Oh, he's giving her a ride alright.

Jennifer's character interacts with her husband in a very matter-of-fact manner, responding to his displays of affection with indifference. She notably disregards Aya, speaking about her to Elvis in her presence, which can be perceived as disrespectful within their cultural context. Jennifer sees herself as the matriarch of the family, a role that goes unchallenged, with Elvis catering to her desires in his efforts to please her. In

her dialogue, Jennifer conveys that she has endured living with her mother-in-law for some time, despite her evident aversion to the arrangement. This dynamic is in stark contrast to the relationship between Amsugi and Natasha in *Broken Promises*, where Jennifer, as the daughter-in-law and a modern woman, desires a nuclear family setup, free from the presence of her mother-in-law. The reversal of roles here contrasts sharply with *Broken Promises*, where Amsugi held the dominant position over her daughter-in-law, Natasha.

Jennifer's focus on image and status echoes Ayesha's character in *For Better For Worse*. Jennifer's disdain for the neighbour's old car, which she describes as embarrassing and cheap, highlights her preoccupation with maintaining a facade of financial success and improved social class. Elvis's reference to Jennifer's past, specifically her father's old, rusty car, suggests that she once lived in a manner akin to those she currently looks down upon. Throughout their conversation, Jennifer's body language is rigid and closed off, with crossed arms and a frown, positioning herself away from Elvis and Aya and gazing out of the window. Even when engaging in dialogue, she does not turn to face Elvis, who is directly addressing her.

As the narrative unfolds, Jennifer undergoes significant change, becoming aware of the negative impact of her actions. Her transformation is encapsulated in a monologue that follows a dramatic fallout caused by her and Shanti's interference. This humbling experience leads Jennifer to reconcile with her daughter Jodi (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 01:13:44- 01:15:11):

Jennifer

You know, when Dad first took me to meet his parents, I was so excited. But I realised so quickly that I was never going to be good enough for their family. I tried, I tried so hard. They didn't make it any easier for me. But your dad and I... Your dad and I, we knew we were soulmates. We knew we belonged together. He had to fight so hard for me. Those were the toughest years for me. For us. I didn't realise I was doing the same thing to you. I thought I was so right

about everything, but I was completely wrong.

As a matriarch in a South African Indian family, it is unusual for the elder to seek forgiveness from a subordinate, let alone their child. Jennifer's character has put her pride aside as her new priority is to repair the relationships she once took for granted. Self-reflective, Jennifer divulges information about her past. The rejection from her in-laws was formative in her transformation from a woman who was comfortable riding in her father's rusty car into a woman who wishes to be perceived as wealthy, successful, and superior. In *Broken Promises*, Natasha is presented as a character who also faces challenges in her relationship with her mother-in-law. As the matriarch in the narrative, Amsugi made her reservations about Ruben and Natasha's pairing clear and subsequently used her power to discomfort Natasha as she saw fit. Like Natasha and Amsugi, Jennifer would have had to navigate complex intergenerational relationships and the expectations placed upon her. In her case, her struggle for acceptance had a significant impact on her actions and decisions throughout the film, revealing the rationale behind her need to transcend the traditional values of her Chatsworth community and redefine her cultural identity.

In the revelation to her daughter, evidence of Jennifer's fluidity of notions of identity is highlighted. Hall (1989) argues that identity is not a fixed entity but rather a process that is never complete. The character of Jennifer depicts an evolution through different stages of her life, influenced by her socio-cultural and familial circumstances, and her positioning in those contexts. As a young woman, Jennifer was apparently comfortable in her class identity, as disclosed in Elvis's dialogue. This notion changed drastically when engaging with her in-laws, who made her feel inferior. Her need for approval and acceptance from her in-laws pushed her to adopt a superficial veneer of wealth and success. Her identity expressed fluidity, moulding itself to meet the expectations of her superiors. In her dialogue with her daughter, her character presents a further shift in notions of self and values. She becomes cognisant of her actions and the cyclicity of these actions, stepping out of the boundaries of the established matriarchal authority to apologise to her daughter. This action signifies a repositioning of her identity within the family dynamics.

Depicting another matriarch of a family, Shanti holds different values to Jennifer in the running of her household. In a much more relaxed home, Shanti and her husband share a warm and affectionate relationship, and she also prioritises her relationships with her sons over the general status and presentation of her family. Shanti blissfully believes that she and Prishen have a perfect mother-and-son relationship and that he tells her everything. This is established in a scene in which Jennifer approaches Shanti in order to inform her of their children's secret relationship. At first, Shanti does not believe Jennifer, but a seed of doubt is planted in her mind from that moment. In the dynamic of their relationship up until this point, Shanti has no reason to believe that Prishen would be keeping secrets from her. However, she cannot help but be suspicious since it is uncharacteristic of Jennifer to make up rumours about her own daughter.

A scene that captures Shanti's character and values is also presented early in the film, after hearing Jennifer's rumours about their children. In the scene, that moment plays in her mind as Prishen greets her and heads off to the gym, leaving his phone vulnerable to be searched. Shanti's interaction with her son is casual and loving, and it is clear that she holds deep affection for him. When he finds her in the kitchen, she is aggressively chopping up food, clearly thinking about what Jennifer has said (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 00:15:33- 00:17:10).

Prishen

What happened, Ma? Who's head you're chopping off?

Shanti

So you going to gym?

Prishen

Yeah.

Shanti

I'm cooking all your favourites.

Prishen

All my favourites?

Shanti

Ya. You know someday I'll have to teach
your wife all of this.

Prishen

Plenty of time for that.

[They kiss on the cheek and Prishen heads
out]

Shanti

Prishen!

Prishen

Hmm?

Shanti

...Love you.

Prishen

Love you too, Ma.

Shanti

[tempted to look through Prishen's phone]
Come, Shanti. Love, light, peace. Love,
light, peace.

[grabbing the phone]

Where's the buttons on this phone?

Siri

[robotic voice from the phone]
Sorry, I do not understand 'where are the
buttons on this phone'.

Shanti

Hello?

Siri

Hello, sexy Prishen

Shanti

Who you?

Siri

I am Siri, how may I help you?

Shanti

Oh, okay. Please can I see all the messages that this Jodi girl from next door is sending my son?

Siri

Thank you, I can definitely assist. Are you looking for a) a message, b) a phone log, or c) both options

Shanti

Why you asking so much questions? Ey, fat lot of help you are.

Siri

I do not understand, 'fat lot of help you are'. I am Siri, how may I help you?

Shanti

You know what, Sivvie, Selvie, or whatever your name is, why you don't shut your mouth. And stay away from my son, you wild thing!

Siri

I do not understand, 'stay away from my son you wild thing'.

The mother-son relationship is a recurring theme in all three films, with each mother figure using food to express her love and care for her son. In the dialogue, Shanti informs Prishen that she is preparing his favourite meals. Ayesha expresses a similar line of dialogue in *For Better For Worse*. In *Broken Promises*, Amsugi insists that she knows how her son prefers his curry prepared. By using food as a means of connecting

with and showing affection to their sons, the mother figures represent the role of the devoted maternal caregiver that aligns with all of their traditional and community values. Shanti accepts her role as a devoted mother at home, while also working at a hair salon. She actively participates in both the domestic sphere and the workforce, displaying her willingness to juggle her obligations at home and at work. In contrast, Ayesha and Amsugi are portrayed as housewives who do not support their families financially. The dual role that Shanti plays in the Naidoo home is accepted as normal, despite the demands of running a household and working like her husband does. She mentions that she will need to teach Prishen's wife how to prepare his favourite dishes, thereby not only accepting her culturally imposed duties but also aspiring to perpetuate them to the next generation. The idea of Prishen cooking his own meals is not a consideration for her.

The filmmaker's portrayal of Shanti as a character balancing multiple roles also illustrates the complexity of her notions of identity, as well as the demographic of South African Indian mothers she represents. As discussed with the characters in *Broken Promises* and Anisa's character in *For Better For Worse*, hybrid identities may be developed in the negotiation of traditional and cultural values with new and diverse influences in the dynamics of a shifting society. Shanti's character exemplifies her capacity to navigate these changes while still feeling deeply rooted in her cultural heritage. She accepts the inherited traditional facets of her identity as a South African Indian woman while also adjusting to more contemporary standards, such as working outside of the home. Shanti is the first female character in the parental generation of the three films that is depicted working and socialising in a workspace. This inclusion by the filmmakers may allude to the family's financial circumstances, however, it more strongly serves the purpose of affirming Shanti's position as an integrated community member that is part of the daily operations of Chatsworth.

Shanti's dialogue with Siri and inability to communicate with the app emphasises the fact that she speaks the dialect of English shared by Aya. Ingrained in her community and culture, as Aya is, Shanti's character does not make conscious efforts to assimilate to a 'whiter' way of speaking English. It highlights the difference between her character

and Jennifer. As friends from school, their backstories would have included growing up similarly and closely, however, Jennifer's character now assimilates to what she considers a more sophisticated way of speaking, thereby losing the syntax stemming from their mother tongue that has been present for generations.

Shanti's character and ways of speaking can be understood through the lens of Castells' resistance identity (1997), which emerges in opposition to dominant culture, often embraced by marginalised groups seeking to preserve their cultural heritage. In the context of South Africa's history, Shanti's retention of her dialect of English and strong connection to her local community can be seen as an expression of resistance identity. As a South African Indian woman, she may have felt encouraged to assimilate to the dominant culture and adopt more 'superior' westernised ways of speaking and behaving, as Jennifer did. Shanti, however, maintains her inherited linguistic and cultural practices. Her resistance identity is not only expressed through her manner of speaking but also her behaviour as a character. Her pride and integration into the Chatsworth community, as well as her commitment to traditional values and gender roles, further emphasises her rejection of external practices. She therefore maintains a sense of self and belonging in a local community that shares the same sentiments and values her distinct identity.

Shanti's ease and comfort in these spaces is highlighted by the filmmakers in her interactions with community members and her family. When engaging with Prishen in the above scene dialogue, her character maintains a relaxed and open posture, facing her son directly and maintaining eye contact. Prishen mirrors the same, leaning against the wall as they smile at each other when speaking. Quite a contrast to the Kandasamy home, the characters of Shanti and Prishen share a frame and close space, do not isolate themselves, and engage in small-talk with each other. It is also clearly natural for Prishen's character to kiss his mother before he leaves the home, indicating comfort in the relationship.

Shanti's family is the foundation of her character's happiness. This is confirmed through her change in demeanour as the narrative progresses and her actions with Jennifer cause

Prishen to become extremely unhappy. Included in the inspection of Shanti's character development is a scene in which Peggie finds her sitting at the dinner table looking miserable (Keeping Up with the Kandasamys, 2017, 00:58:11- 00:58:43).

Peggie

Hey babes, what happened? No *chows*
[food]?

Shanti

Just one day, just one day I don't cook and
you're having a heart attack.

Peggie

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 don't just do everything for you. I
do everything for this entire
neighbourhood. What more you expect
from me?

As already discussed, Shanti as a character is confident and busy with her duties as a homemaker, but in this instance, she is displayed as defeated and tired. Her character derives her happiness from being a good mother and wife, and she is now undergoing a crisis of identity in questioning all the effort she puts into her life, family, and community. She bemoans to Peggie that she does everything for their whole neighbourhood - like Ayesha and Amsugi, part of her identity is rooted in community involvement and integration. However, what once constituted Shanti's sense of self and belongingness is now feeling like a burden. Like the experience of Jennifer, she, too, grapples with the pressure of the implications of her actions in her family's life.

Depicted as a direct commentary by the filmmakers on the relationships of South African Indian mothers with their children, Shanti realises that her attempt to maintain the role of nurturer and caregiver to her son (who is growing up and developing his own relationships) needs to shift to allow him the space to reflect his own autonomy, and her act of holding onto the role becomes less fulfilling and inspiring than it once was. As

her bond with her son deteriorates, Shanti's character begins to doubt the importance of her commitment to her family and community. Her deeply ingrained cultural expectations, as well as her individual needs, are at odds, leading to a crisis of identity and fluid transformation. Presenting empathy to mother figures in South African Indian communities, the filmmakers' inclusion of this scene also demonstrates the emotional toll that their roles in the community and family have on them. Shanti feels overburdened and underappreciated as she realises how difficult it is to consistently meet the needs of everyone without getting support. As the narrative concludes, she eventually reassesses her priorities and positioning in the lives of her family and neighbours. Repairing her relationship with her son, husband, and with Jennifer becomes Shanti's new priority, as she now values peace and harmony in her home and community above all else.

In all three films in the sample, the parental figures aimed to use their power to influence or end the romantic relationships of their children. This leads to different degrees of transformation between both generations in navigating this conflict. Shanti and Jennifer's eventual atonement and willingness to adapt their values stand in contrast to Yusuf's character in the moment of crisis in *For Better For Worse*. Yusuf eventually exercises a rigid, patriarchal stance in exercising authority over Anisa's marital choices. This difference may be indicative of the nuances within familial power dynamics, wherein matriarchs, despite wielding influence, may be more willing to negotiate or adapt their positions based on emotional bonds with their children. On the other hand, Yusuf, operating within a patriarchal framework, embodies his role as one of a decision-maker whose judgments ought not to be questioned after the tactic of reasoning with Anisa. Here, a key difference lies in how fluidity of identity and adaptability to changing circumstances are perceived and enacted across gender roles in a traditional family structure. Additionally, Yusuf's treatment of Anisa reflects a patriarchal system where male authority can unilaterally overrule a woman's autonomy, even in matters as deeply personal as marital choice. This system is based on notions of inherited cultural gender roles that become propagated by community members that hold these traditional beliefs in their value systems, including perpetuation by women themselves, as demonstrated through the characters of Amsugi in *Broken Promises* and Ayesha in *For*

Better For Worse. Contrasting the act of absolute authority by Yusuf, in revoking their matriarchal authority and conceding to the desires of their children, the characters of Shanti and Jennifer subvert the outcome of strained relationships with their families by conceding to the desires of autonomy presented by their children instead of rigidly maintaining their personal values.

The characters and family units in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* negotiate various evolutions of identity in the context of a post-apartheid township in South African society. The Kandasamys and the Naidoo are depicted as navigating the complexities of their Indian heritage, class differences, and shifting roles in their families and community. Jennifer, who considers herself the matriarch of the Kandasamys, initially wishes to transcend the perceived lower social strata of *charou* culture associated with Chatsworth. Her character's notions of self are shaped by a history of desiring respect and status, motivating her to adopt a more western lifestyle. Her character exhibits Hall's fluidity of identity (1989) in the revelation of her backstory and the development of her personal conflicts and actions throughout the narrative. Shanti's character is presented as valuing her heritage and culture. Her manner of speaking and engaging reflects a strong sense of identity and belonging in her community. As a working mother, she balances her multiple responsibilities as best as she can, despite occasionally feeling overburdened. Shanti consistently finds fulfilment in her family and community involvement, and after reconciling with herself and her values, the articulation of this affection for her family adapts to the needs of her changing environment. Like Anisa and Natasha's generation, Jodi and Prishen represent the hybrid identities created by a fusion of traditional values and exposure to broader South African cultures and westernised influences.

The narrative of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* does not directly address issues of cultural differences, or focus on the depiction of cultural heterogeneity, as done in *Broken Promises* or *For Better For Worse*. It offers an engaging and complex portrayal of the South African Indian community in Chatsworth and can therefore be perceived as a relevant example of cinematic self-representation of South African Indian cultures. The residents' relationship to its locale is insightful in understanding the historical

circumstances faced by South African Indians, and the forced adaptation faced by the families that were displaced due to the Group Areas Act. Through the locale, mannerisms, and lifestyle of the characters, the self-representations of the community are presented as prideful and thriving. This is articulated through the voice-over of Aya, who begins and ends the film discussing her locale and what makes it unique. *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* exemplifies self-representation creating culturally inclusive representation in the South African cinematic landscape and is analysed further with the sample in regards to their aesthetic treatment and cultural markers, as well as audience engagement, in the chapters to follow.

Conclusion

Various scenes were examined in this chapter with the intention of engaging in a discussion on the notions of identity held by the characters and family units presented in each narrative. The characters that were included as part of the analysis are as follows: Natasha and Amsugi (daughter-in-law and mother-in-law) in *Broken Promises* (2004), Anisa, Ayesha, and Yusuf (daughter, mother, and father) in *For Better For Worse* (2010), and Aya, Jennifer, and Shanti (mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and neighbour) in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017).

Throughout the analysis of the various scenes, narrative consistencies are found to be present in all three films: navigation of family hierarchy, the negotiation of hybrid identities, the importance of community, and issues of intergenerational conflict. These themes are interlinked, as it is evidenced that family, community, faith, and culture overlap in the construction of South African Indian notions of identity. With regards to the navigation of the family hierarchy, family relationships are a major factor in determining the identities and values of the various characters. A recurrent theme is the hierarchical arrangement of roles and responsibilities in the representations of these South African Indian families, as well as the role of the mother figure in interfering with the unfolding of their children's lives.

Although they may initially appear homogenous in their representation, each film ultimately depicts a unique transformation in family structure over the course of its narrative. In *Broken Promises*, the power struggle between the characters of Natasha and Amsugi serves as the central point of conflict. Natasha ultimately asserts her independence and chooses to compromise with Amsugi, although the balance of power remains delicately punctuated by moments of resistance, as exemplified by the choice of a stage name of a black kwaito musician for their unborn son. In *For Better For Worse*, the character of Anisa deviates from traditional family hierarchies by overruling her parents in decisions about her own life, fully aware of the sense of family and belonging she stands to lose—even though everything eventually works out. Jennifer and Shanti's feud in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* puts their respective families in discomfort. Although their plan to end their children's relationship succeeds, Jodi and Prishen resign themselves to the ensuing events, deeply unhappy. However, Jennifer and Shanti offer the first instance in which the rigid traditional values and desires of the older generation are reassessed and reevaluated, not through forced change, but through a genuine willingness to make amends.

The family hierarchies in these narratives are interwoven with traditional values associated with gender roles. These gendered roles are frequently questioned as characters negotiate the expectations imposed upon them by their families and communities. Remarkably, all key female characters in these narratives adhere to varying degrees of gendered duties except for Anisa in *For Better For Worse*. Her deviation is especially notable given that she emerges from a more conservative culture in which gendered duties are also informed by religious teachings. Anisa is the only character across the three films who asserts any form of career ambition or personal goals. In contrast, a character like Jennifer aspires to a more westernised lifestyle for her nuclear family. The consistent establishment of traditional family hierarchy in each film, coupled with the nuanced unfolding of family dynamics, underscores the significance of family structure in shaping South African Indian cultural identities.

As previously mentioned, factors affecting the development of the characters' cultural identities must also consider various historical influences. The three films present an

array of hybrid identities that the characters traverse within their social, cultural, and personal realms, set against the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa. In *Broken Promises*, the filmmakers depict Natasha as a young South African Indian woman who grapples with reconciling her modern perspectives on marriage and family with the traditional Indian views held by her husband's family. Her journey, during which she both adopts and rejects different viewpoints presented by her mother-in-law, exemplifies Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity as a process of 'becoming' (Hall, 1989). The narrative further delves into Natasha's journey of establishing her cultural identity at the juncture of her Hindi ethnolinguistic heritage and her mother-in-law Amsugi's insistence on Tamil practices. Representative of two different generations, both characters Natasha and Amsugi inhabit Bhabha's 'third space' (Bhabha, 1967), negotiating Natasha's role as a new daughter-in-law and Amsugi's evolving status as matriarch within specific familial power dynamics and hierarchies.

In *For Better For Worse*, Anisa is portrayed as a complex character who is a South African Indian Muslim woman navigating the intersections of her cultural, religious, and social identities in post-apartheid South Africa. She maintains her cultural and religious identity within her domestic sphere, symbolising the amalgamation of different facets of one's identities to thrive in a multicultural setting. Anisa's character enjoys a degree of freedom granted by her parents, especially her father, who serves as the family patriarch until her marriage. This freedom, as depicted by the filmmaker, is reflective of shifting perspectives in dynamic contexts; it suggests that the Khan family, while upholding traditional community and religious values, is also adapting to evolving notions of identity within the broader democratic landscape of South Africa.

Anisa's multifaceted identity aligns with the concepts of 'legitimising' and 'project identities' as discussed by Castells (1997). In her legitimising identity, she reflects the state's ideal youth as an individual who prioritises their 'South Africanness', is actively flourishing in a post-apartheid workforce and economy, and is working hard to improve the quality of life of South Africans by contributing to the justice system. On the other hand, Anisa's character also represents a 'project identity'. She challenges cultural gendered expectations by pursuing a career in law, and through a romantic relationship

that is not approved by her parents. Anisa's character and project identity seek to redefine gender roles and opportunities for women in her community and with her background, promoting a narrative of creating a new path, or hybrid identity, that combines personal values and ambitions with cultural and religious inclinations.

The characters of Shanti and Jennifer in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* also navigate their conceptions of self as they experience shifts in their relationships with their families. For example, motivated by her initial rejection by her in-laws, Jennifer opts to adopt a more westernised lifestyle to distance herself from the customs and practices of her immediate community. This decision marks a fluidity in her identity, as she engages in a renegotiation of her self-conception, resulting in a hybrid identity that incorporates western standards of living while still retaining aspects of her traditional Indian and religious values. Shanti, by contrast, harmonises her multiple roles as a working mother and homemaker, aiming to uphold the traditional Indian values and gender-specific responsibilities that she believes befit an Indian mother and wife.

Shanti's character can also be examined through the lens of Castells' concept of 'resistance identity' (Castells, 1997), which typically emerges in opposition to the dominant culture and is often embraced by marginalised groups seeking to preserve their cultural heritage. While Jennifer's character is depicted as choosing to assimilate into a more 'superior' westernised lifestyle, Shanti consciously retains her distinct linguistic and cultural practices, which serve as markers of her identity. This resistance identity is expressed not merely through her manner of speaking but also through her behavioural choices as a character. Her pride in and integration into the Chatsworth community, coupled with her steadfast commitment to traditional values and gender roles, further underscore her rejection of external influence. In doing so, she maintains a coherent sense of self and belonging within a local community that reciprocates these sentiments and values her distinct identity.

Community involvement is not only a priority for Shanti but is a consistent theme within the three films. One's social standing and maintaining a good reputation in the community are presented as priorities for the parents' generation in the films. As one

example, Ayesha's outburst in the climactic scene of *For Better For Worse* is sparked by the revelation that her daughter is dating a waiter. She is so acutely aware of what her neighbourhood will think of her family that she sheds tears in the confrontation with Anisa, thinking of her daughter's actions as a betrayal. A large facet of Ayesha's identity is her sense of belonging within her community. Anisa is jeopardising this connection by not adhering to the established values of her parents. As mentioned with the character of Shanti, like Ayesha, her community involvement and reputation are significant factors in her notions of identity.

The figures of the mother character, or the parents' preoccupation with maintaining good standing in their community circles, are manifested through their actions, choices, and dialogues within the narratives. Representative of South African Indians who are perceived as bound by intricate social codes and norms that have evolved over generations, these characters bear the responsibility of upholding 'respectable' family values and community reputation. The emphasis on maintaining good standing is not merely a nod to conventional attitudes but rather a critical life strategy in a society where community connections often serve as social and economic safety nets, reminiscent of the joint family values in which social hierarchy, cultural tradition, and religious values are maintained and transmitted to succeeding generations (Khan, 2012). Given Amsugi and Ayesha's intense reactions to potential judgement, a breach in these cultural codes could mean not only personal shame but also social ramifications for the family as a whole.

An essential backdrop to understanding these characters' preoccupation with social standing is the socio-political environment that the generations of South African Indians they are representing have navigated—specifically, living conditions under apartheid and adherence to rigid social, economic, and spatial restrictions. A generation of South African Indians, like the parental figures in these films, would have internalised a guarded sense of community preservation that often manifested as an obsession with social reputation. The parental figures' heightened concern for community standing also sets up an intriguing platform for intergenerational dialogue. Often, the younger

characters in these films challenge the orthodoxies of their parents, seeking to forge identities that honour their individual preferences and more hybrid cultural landscapes.

Intergenerational conflict is a significant driver of each narrative that is articulated in different ways. In *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, the younger characters require freedom from the interference of their mothers, while the mothers are determined to control their life choices, resulting in intergenerational conflict. This type of conflict also exists in the intergenerational relationship of Jennifer and Aya, as we learn that Aya did not approve of Jennifer as a daughter-in-law, and now, with the power dynamics reversed as they are older, Jennifer is forced to tolerate living with Aya. This is similar to the rivalry that is depicted in *Broken Promises* as Natasha clashes with the needs and expectations of her unhappy mother-in-law. The intergenerational conflict and discomfort of young South African Indian women are highlighted through Natasha's experience, representing a larger conversation regarding traditional values and expectations and personal autonomy.

In *For Better For Worse*, intergenerational conflict is illustrated early on in the narrative as the character of Yusuf repeatedly engages with his son regarding his seriousness about his future. Yusuf is relentless in his criticisms of Farhan and his belief in Farhan's responsibility to perform his gendered duties. Anisa, who maintains a pleasant relationship with her parents, also engages in intergenerational conflict when she chooses to reject her parents' wishes and marry a man that they do not approve of. Yusuf and Ayesha, as well as the parental figures in all the films, maintain a belief that they have power over their children's lives and values and reserve the right to make decisions for them in keeping with their own beliefs. The younger characters are placed in a position of having to navigate the pressure of these expectations, their own desires, as well as their own developing identities in the greater context of a multicultural post-apartheid South Africa.

Intergenerational conflict is not just a dramatic device in these films; it serves as a lens through which the intricacies of navigating culture, tradition, and personal autonomy are refracted. The struggles of the younger generation of characters embody a larger

narrative about the reconfiguration of family dynamics in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape. The tension between Jennifer and Aya, where power dynamics have shifted due to age and circumstance, encapsulates how traditional roles and expectations can become fluid and subject to reinterpretation, especially in an evolving post-apartheid society. In *Broken Promises*, Natasha's own strife with her mother-in-law underlines the cultural dissonance between elders who perpetuated traditional roles without question and a younger generation demanding greater autonomy and personal freedom. In a broader sense, her plight symbolises the societal shift towards individual agency and the questioning of established norms and hierarchies, even at the expense of creating intergenerational tension.

In the narratives, the parental figures—be it Yusuf, Ayesha, or others—represent a generation of South African Indians with similar experiences who do not just exercise authority due to a sense of entitlement, but also as a manifestation of their anxieties. Their need to control comes from a deeply ingrained belief that conformity and community reputation are crucial survival mechanisms. On the other side, the younger characters of the children in the narratives, growing up in the more open and multicultural atmosphere of post-apartheid South Africa, challenge these rigid norms. Their conflict with their parents is also their struggle to reconcile their emerging identities, crafted in a far more pluralistic milieu, manoeuvring the expectations and traditions that their parents see as non-negotiable. Thus, the intergenerational conflicts in these films are not isolated events; they are microcosms of the broader cultural and social transformations taking place in post-apartheid South Africa.

The films illustrate the complex and nuanced aspects of South African Indian experiences while presenting an emergence of recurring trends in the portrayal of the characters and their relationships. This includes the navigation of family hierarchies, the negotiation and formation of hybrid identities, issues of community representation and involvement, and intergenerational conflict. Further, characters in the films frequently struggle to balance their personal goals and values with expectations placed upon them by elders, a task made more difficult by the need for integration in the workforce and social spaces of a post-apartheid South Africa. As characters struggle with cultural

values and contemporary aspirations and multicultural influences, formation of cultural identities is presented as complex, and a fluid process of ‘becoming’, as described by Hall (1989), negotiated within Bhabha’s ‘third space’ (1994).

Heterogeneity in depictions of characters and their backgrounds are depicted to various degrees, illuminating insightful perspectives into the pluralistic and constantly reforming identities of South African Indians. The above findings are discussed further in regard to the overall aims of this research—of determining whether self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking is enabling visibility of complex heterogeneous representations—in Chapter Six along with the discussion of aesthetic cultural markers and modes of production and distribution for audience reach.

Before delving into the analysis of cultural markers in Chapter Five, it is necessary to comment on the theoretical considerations of the current chapter. The research gravitates towards the conceptual frameworks of theorists such as Bhabha (1994), Hall (1989), and, to a lesser extent, Castells (1997). Hall’s concepts provide a rich vocabulary for discussing the fluidity and construction of identity, while Bhabha’s theory provokes the nuances of hybridity within the characters’ constructions of identity. The absence of Naficy’s concepts (2012) from the theoretical discussion is also notable, indicating that the postcolonial film scholarship’s emphasis on displacement and migrant experiences is not immediately applicable to the unique aspects of cinematic representations of South African Indian communities in the context of their history and identity. This is particularly relevant in a postcolonial context that has given rise to complex, multi-generational diasporic communities that have exhibited numerous instances of change and hybridisation.

This chapter, although successful in critically examining the film productions, has accentuated the limitations of analytical frameworks in addressing the unique attributes of postcolonial cinematic representations, especially within the South African Indian context. As revealed in the analysis, characters consistently synthesise their notions of identity through navigating their specific historical experiences, inherited cultures and values, and newer influences. Bhabha’s concept of the ‘third space’ (1994), in which

various characters negotiated and reformed their hybrid identities, presents a valuable lens for understanding the formations of identity in postcolonial spaces. However, its application within the context of South African Indian representation underscores the need for a nuanced approach that accounts for the historical and experiential realities of these communities and the specificity of their locales.

Revisiting the concept of a 'prismatic analysis' helps to further elucidate this complexity. Like white light passing through a prism and emerging as a spectrum of colours, the identities depicted in these films are formed through a process where an array of various cultural, historical, and social influences converge and diverge to create individual identities. Each colour of the spectrum can be equated to a distinct facet of identity, influenced by unique factors yet collectively forming a coherent whole. This effect of cultural influences underscores the importance of considering the multiplicity of factors that shape the characters' identities as they navigate the 'third space'. The history and experiences of South African Indians, marked by unique trajectories of colonialism, displacement, apartheid, and systematic ethnic segregation, further complicate and inform the negotiations of identity that occur.

The question of emphasising the impact of geographical setting in the navigations of the 'third space' emerges, as does an acknowledgement of the specificity of a character's context as fundamental in decoding their represented identity. This is explored further in the theoretical considerations of Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FIVE: AESTHETIC CULTURAL MARKERS, SOCIAL & CULTURAL GATHERINGS OR RITUALS

This chapter is dedicated to identifying and analysing aesthetic cultural markers depicted in select scenes of each film, particularly those that occur within domestic settings or portray cultural rituals. The analytical framework is bifurcated into two primary categories: Aesthetics and Performance. The 'Aesthetics' category incorporates elements such as lighting and colour, spatial arrangement and composition, visual representations, wardrobe and styling, as well as location, set dressing, and props. The 'Performance' category, on the other hand, addresses facets such as human interaction, cultural and societal cues, emotional development, character psychology, dialogue, body language, and movement. In each film, scenes are scrutinised according to these elements to the extent that they contribute to the portrayal of cultural markers and reflect the characters' notions of identity.

The films—*Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017)—will be examined scene-by-scene rather than categorically. Given the systematic nature of EVAM, this methodological choice facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the cultural markers within the specific contexts of the scenes, thereby enriching our comprehension of the filmmakers' intentions and the meanings embedded in their portrayals. To augment this analysis, the chapter makes use of appendices featuring stills from each film as visual references.

In the analysis of the scenes, jargon used to describe the characteristics of lighting are employed, as an important purpose of lighting is for the creation of atmosphere, mood and emotional effect, and over time, standardised lighting styles became prominent and associated with respective film genres (Poland, 2015). Lighting is often used as a compositional tool in bringing attention to relevant artefacts or characters on screen. Together with colour, the mood of a scene is dependent on the key and contrast of the light. 'Key' refers to the amount of light and darkness in a shot. High-key shots are well exposed, most often providing an upbeat or light-hearted feeling. Low-key lighting

refers to light set-ups where dark tones dominate the shots. This does not necessarily mean the frame is under-exposed. This lighting is common in films with darker or more mature themes (Ferncase, 2013). ‘Contrast’ can be described as the transition from white to black in an image, and how subtle or stark that transition is. Low-contrast lighting setups are where we see soft, diffused light on the background and the subjects. In comparison, high-contrast lighting is bolder, more dramatic, with dark, saturated shadows and peaked, sharp highlights (Keba, 2015).

Lastly, to note in the category of art direction, a prop (short for property) is a physical object that functions as part of the set or as a tool used by the actors. Props gain significance as they are used throughout the film and they can often be used to express a character’s thoughts or feelings. Props are used very symbolically in filmmaking and become iconic in their employment in a film, such as the animal taxidermy in *Psycho* (1960) which not only serves as atmospheric, moody props, but also as signifiers and perhaps even a premonition of the events that follow in the narrative (Benyahia, Gaffney & White, 2006). ‘Instrumental props’ are props used according to their assigned function—for example, a knife being used to cut food. ‘Metaphorical props’ are props that are used for an unexpected function—for example, a knife being used to kill a person. ‘Cultural props’ could be a model of car, or a piece of furniture that has an association with a specific culture or society. Finally, ‘contextualised props’ are props that achieve their meaning through their changing place in the narrative (Corrigan and White, 2004). The way the characters interact with the props tells us more about their personalities, as well as the significance of the props to them. It is the relationship between the props and the performance that creates deeper meaning (Benyahia, Gaffney & White, 2006).

Broken Promises: Negotiating Cultural Symbols and Hybrid Identities

In *Broken Promises* (2004), we see Natasha and Ruben interacting for the first time in a restaurant Natasha refers to as ‘Bollywood Café’. The scene begins with Natasha in an argument with her soon-to-be ex-boyfriend while Ruben is watching from across the room. He soon joins her at her table and tries to cheer her up (figure 1a).

The visual representations within the scene provide a deeper understanding of culture and identity reflected by the characters within the context of their environment. The scene is filmed in an existing restaurant named ‘Banana Leaf’, which Natasha refers to as ‘Bollywood Café’ in the world of the story. In the location, the walls feature a collage of well-known Bollywood actors. The enlarged face of famous Bollywood actor Aamir Khan is identifiable behind Ruben as he joins Natasha’s table. The fictional name and theme of the restaurant confirm a familiarity of South African Indian communities with India’s Bollywood, to the extent that the famous actors from India are identifiable to South African Indians. Ebrahim (2008) discusses South African (and South African Indian-descended) relationships to Bollywood, where we see Bollywood transition into mainstream platforms of consumption in the early 2000s, including major cinemas and then national television. South Africans of diverse demographics engaged with the content, with South African Indian viewership demonstrating a clear target market for Bollywood content (Ebrahim, 2008). Further, the experience of viewing Bollywood films in cinemas was also treated as an event or outing, with South African Indian women dressing finely to watch the films, “aimed at linking themselves with an Indian past of royal dynasties, and Mughal extravagance” (Jagarnath, 2004: 215). The influence of Bollywood on South African Indian arts and culture is evident in the local entertainment and performances, and even in the aesthetic of commercialised spaces aimed at appealing to specific communities, for example, the location of this scene.

The influence of Bollywood does not, however, extend to the costume and styling of the characters in the scene. There is a visual uniformity in the dressing of the characters as the men (Natasha’s ex-fiance and Ruben) are both dressed in dark blue or navy-coloured formal buttoned shirts. Natasha is dressed in a black sleeveless cocktail dress and simple jewellery (figure 1a). From her styling choices, we can tell that Natasha adorns a westernised aesthetic in her daily wardrobe. In general, Ruben and Natasha’s styling do not indicate any Indian cultural inclination but suggest that both characters are middle class. Overall, the scene’s acknowledgement of Bollywood and Bollywood actors presents a clear awareness of India’s cultural influence; however, the engagement with this influence is selective and nuanced, connecting to only part of the characters’ hybrid

identities. Its reception and integration are influenced by a South African context. Natasha's cocktail dress contrasts with the Indian attire and jewellery worn by the actress on the wall poster behind her. The characters' westernised attire represents the hybrid nature of South African Indian cultures, resulting from a mediated maintenance of ancestral culture (represented by Bollywood) and the assimilation into a more westernised culture. The contrast of the characters' attire in the Bollywood-themed space reflects the multiple cultural influences that form South African Indian notions of identity.

The scene offers an intriguing juxtaposition of western and transnational Indian (Bollywood) influences in the constitution of South African Indian identity. While the restaurant setting heavily leans on Bollywood iconography, the characters' wardrobes reveal an unequivocal western influence. This duality suggests a complex and hybrid form of cultural representation, aligning with notions of globalisation and cultural fluidity. Yet, noticeably absent from this cultural tableau is any manifest influence of African identity or aesthetics. This omission may reflect a form of cultural hierarchy where global (western) and transnational (Indian) influences are foregrounded at the expense of local African elements. It could also indicate a more complex interplay of forces, perhaps shaped by historical factors such as ongoing debates about what constitutes 'Africanness' in a post-apartheid South Africa. The absence raises questions about the multiplicity and limits of hybrid identity, particularly within the South African Indian community. While this requires further inquiry in a study of itself, it also reveals the priorities of the filmmaker in his choices of representation. The foregrounding of Bollywood can be seen as a strategic choice by the filmmaker to appeal to both domestic and international audiences familiar with the Indian film industry, therefore the primary audience being South African Indians.

A significant choice of props in the scene refers to the engagement ring that Natasha chooses to take off and leave on the table as she exits the scene with Ruben. Functioning as a cultural and contextual prop, the ring indicates Natasha's alignment with western symbols of status, and towards the end of the scene, as she takes it off, the ring symbolises the end of a failed relationship. As discussed in the previous chapter,

another symbol of marriage that emerges in the film is the *thali*, which is of cultural significance to Natasha's mother-in-law. Natasha's experiences with the differing cultural symbols of marriage in the form of the *thali* and the engagement ring highlight the hybridity within her notions of identity.

Cultural identity in diasporic contexts is a complex, fluid construct that enables a unique kind of hybridity, allowing individuals to navigate between multiple cultural spaces simultaneously. Bhabha (1994) suggests that in postcolonial settings, cultures intermingle and produce new meanings and identities that cannot be easily categorised within traditional frameworks. This hybridity enables a fluidity of identity, allowing individuals to adopt, adapt, or reject cultural elements as they see fit, often leading to a blend of traditions and norms. In the case of Natasha from *Broken Promises*, her engagement ring and the *thali* serve as distinct cultural symbols, each bearing its own set of expectations and historical backgrounds. Natasha's interaction with both these symbols demonstrates her ongoing negotiation between different cultural logics and expectations. Further, as Hall (1989) posits, identity is a production that is ongoing, the symbolism of the ring and the *thali* can be perceived as artefacts that represent an ongoing process of becoming for Natasha's character.

In figure 1b, Natasha meets Ruben's parents for the first time (this scene is also discussed in Chapter 3). As we are introduced to the scene, we see that the family is seated in an open lounge area. The arrangement of the characters creates a symmetrical composition of the elements in the space, as both Ruben and Natasha form the compositional centre of the frame, and are balanced by Amsugi and Tony who are separated on either side of them.

The blocking of the characters within the composition can be interpreted as a conscious choice by the filmmaker to underscore the couple's centrality to the unfolding events and relationships, thereby reflecting their significance within the familial and narrative context. The separation of Amsugi and Tony on either side of Ruben and Natasha could serve to signify underlying emotional or ideological distance between them, possibly also reflecting generational gaps or differing viewpoints. Furthermore, the negative

space between the characters emphasises the discomfort of the meeting. Such use of negative space serves to heighten the tension, turning the physical distance into an emotional obstacle that the characters must navigate. In this case, the spatial arrangement acts as a form of visual rhetoric, relaying information that supplements the spoken dialogue and other forms of non-verbal communication. This layout could serve to foreshadow the relational dynamics and conflicts that may unfold later in the narrative, offering a nuanced understanding of the family structure.

Both Natasha and Amsugi choose to don Indian cultural attire for the meeting, signalling the formality and significance they attach to this occasion. Amsugi, wearing a brown patterned *saree*, occupies the role of the family matriarch and sets the cultural standard that Natasha is expected to adhere to upon joining the family. Presenting herself as the future daughter-in-law, Natasha's character wears silver eastern jewellery to accent her outfit, as well as a *bindi* on her forehead. She is dressed in a light blue *salwar kameez*, also referred to as a *punjabi* in some South African Indian communities. This attire is often worn by younger or unmarried Indian women. By choosing this outfit, Natasha acknowledges and shows respect for the cultural and religious preferences of her future in-laws. Her choice of attire also marks her as someone belonging to the same cultural milieu, signifying her willingness to assimilate into the role of a daughter-in-law within this household.

The colour palette in Natasha's attire offers a visible contrast to the neutral tones worn by the other characters, serving as another device used by the filmmaker to indicate her isolation and outsider status within the family setting. This contrast not only highlights Natasha's earnest desire for acceptance and assimilation but also underscores her separateness from her future family, amplifying the complexities of her position as she strives to negotiate her identity within this new familial structure. So far in the narrative, Natasha presents herself in a multifaceted manner representing a younger generation of South African Indian women; as demonstrated, her character wears western clothing with ease, is also influenced by Bollywood aesthetics as she now emulates the look of the actress on the wall of Bollywood Café, and is also aware of how and when to appear traditionally respectful in a South African Indian household.

In the scene, Amsugi's character discusses the wedding with Natasha, with her own *thali* around her neck. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the women debate about whether Natasha will have to wear the *thali* or not, with Amsugi adamant on Natasha adorning the symbol of womanhood and marriage. In the formation of notions of femininity in relation to Indian culture and roots, Radhakrishnan considers how the "deeply gendered construction of the Indian nation-state provides a historical backdrop for some of the symbolic meanings of Indian womanhood that South African Indians draw on in constructing a contemporary gendered identity" (Radhakrishnan, 2005: 269). Amsugi's need for Natasha to follow tradition stems from her own experience as a woman becoming married within a specific cultural context. Whether this comes from expectations of the performance of gender in India, this generational moulding of behaviour has become important in South African Indian communities with the goal that virtues of culture may be retained, and the communities are never completely removed from their ancestral cultural heritages. Chatterjee (1990), supporting the rhetoric of Radhakrishnan, denotes a cultivation of cultural purity and preservation within Indian communities originating from the time of India's colonisation by the British, elaborating on the gendered position of Indian women who were expected to retain the foundations of their culture and resist becoming westernised. Chatterjee further states that this ideal persists within the Indian diaspora, with the woman's body and behaviour burdened with preserving culture.

Both Tony and Ruben are dressed in formal western clothing, although differences in wardrobe indicate preferences for different eras of fashion. Ruben wears a linen striped shirt with sleeves down to his elbows, and Tony wears a long-sleeved satin shirt intentionally unbuttoned to his waist and neatly tucked into his slacks, as if he has walked off the set of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). The men do not, however, wear cultural or religious clothing, revealing a freedom from these expectations and reinforcing the opinion of South African Indian women being the torchbearers of the preservation of culture and religion (Radhakrishnan, 2005).

A key instrument to consider in the discussion of cultural preservation in a South African context is the effects of colonialism and apartheid. The geographical separation of ethnic groups by the apartheid government directly impacted the formation as well as the evolution of culture within South African Indian communities. South African Indians developed and maintained various community values, inadvertently leading to degrees of cultural preservation and the strengthening of some inherited traditions and practices as social interactions primarily involved interaction with one's own community or neighbourhood. A close-knit lifestyle facilitated the transmission of cultural practices, languages, and values, thereby creating a resilience in the face of hegemonic circumstances. Additionally, as discussed, colonialism and apartheid also fostered the forced evolution of identities due to the oppressive and segregating power presiding over multiple cultures. While the preservation of Indian culture was central to South African Indian identity, the surrounding influences from other South African cultures, colonial power, and the impact of westernisation and globalisation shaped many identities into a synthesis of varied influences. The enforced segregation of the Group Areas Act thus served as a double-edged sword. While undeniably a tool of oppression, it fostered strong notions of community and cultural identity amongst South African Indians, as exemplified by the characters in *Broken Promises*.

The location of Amsugi's entertainment and dining area is where the family meets Natasha. The characters are seated on leather couches with white doilies placed by the head-rest area, as typically found in the homes of middle-class South African Indian communities. The design of the location and setting does not appear to be intentionally crafted or altered by the filmmakers with production design or set dressing. Rather, the space appears to be a found location that is suitable to deliver the narrative within. This could have been influenced by various factors, most likely due to the budget constraints of micro-budget and informal filmmaking. Designing and creating a set, including production design and set dressing, is more costly than the use of practical existing locations that offer value and degrees of authenticity to the scene. The 'authenticity' of the found location may invoke nostalgia in South African Indians who have moved out of their family homes. The familiarity of the home's aesthetic and its function as a real,

lived-in space may connect with the intended audience of the film, thereby enhancing their experience and the emotional resonance of the film.

The only functional props used in the scene are the snack platters of biscuits and juice laid out on the table in front of all the characters. Their presence reflects the traditional customs of hospitality and the bonding during meal-sharing that hold significance in these communities. Even though Amsugi's demeanour toward Natasha is not particularly warm, the act of offering snacks is a culturally conditioned response to having a guest or a family member in one's home. Discussed further into the chapter in regards to meal-sharing scenes, it is a ritualistic act that is less about personal sentiments and more about adhering to established norms of cultural values, wherein the act of offering food or drink to an individual is considered a sign of respect and care. The use of functional props like these can be seen as another layer of storytelling, revealing underlying social norms and cultural practices that frame the characters' interactions. While the characters themselves are negotiating complex layers of identity, tradition, and modernity, these 'mundane' objects serve to ground the narrative in a specific cultural context. They operate not just as props within a filmic setting, but as authentic cultural markers that South African Indian audiences can identify with. On the one hand, they function within the internal logic of the scene to signify cultural norms around hospitality; on the other, they reach out to the audience, providing a tether to lived experiences and cultural traditions that many South African Indians would find familiar and evocative. In this way, the functional props contribute to the broader depiction of South African Indianness in the film, subtly weaving cultural nuance into the fabric of the narrative.

As the conflict further escalates, the relationships between the characters evolve. In one instance, Natasha is tasked with cooking dinner. She cooks a curry to what she believes is Ruben's preference, until Amsugi plants doubt in her mind about the spiciness of the curry. This shorter scene reinforces the emphasis placed on the mother-son relationship as discussed in all three films, highlighting the deference given to the male members of the family, particularly sons. Amsugi's interjection about the spice level of the curry reveals her perceived knowledge about Ruben's tastes and preferences, thereby subtly

asserting her belief that she is the primary female figure in Ruben's life. Her character leverages her experience and seniority to assert her influence over the younger generation. Her commentary on the curry's spiciness is a veiled power move to reaffirm her primacy in the family hierarchy, especially in relation to her son, Ruben.

The scene also reaffirms the gender roles of South African Indian families that both Amsugi and Natasha subscribe to. Sooklal (1991) notes that, stemming from precolonial traditions of joint family units, women would run domestic duties including cooking. Natasha's attempt at cooking a curry Ruben would like demonstrates her attempt to fit into this role and please her husband, reflecting the expectations and pressures still placed on women within this more modern cultural context. Both Amsugi and Natasha embody different generational understandings of what it means to be a woman in this particular cultural setting, which becomes evident through the act of cooking and the ensuing tensions surrounding the meal. The cultural expectation for the women to be skilled homemakers is most clearly embodied by Amsugi, who seems to see this skill as a determinant of a woman's worth and position within the family. Her authority rests partly on her perceived expertise in domains traditionally relegated to women—like cooking—and she uses this to subtly challenge and undermine Natasha.

On the other hand, Natasha's character navigates a complex interplay between westernised values and traditional South African Indian customs. While she strives to assimilate into her new family by cooking a curry—thereby fulfilling the traditional role expected of her as a woman—her actions also suggest a tension. Despite her character's established exposure to more liberal perspectives, she evidently feels the weight of enduring traditional expectations. The scene included by the filmmaker reflects the complex reality for women in such families, who often find themselves at the intersection of modernity and tradition. Natasha's initial attempt to tailor the curry to Ruben's preferences underscores her willingness to adapt and accommodate the desires of her future family, particularly her husband-to-be. Yet Amsugi's interference alters the dynamic, placing Natasha in an uncomfortable position and inadvertently casting her as a disruptive force during the family meal.

Natasha's predicament in the narrative serves as an illuminating example of broader socio-cultural issues. While her character endeavours to navigate the nuanced terrain of family and tradition, her actions potentially expose internalised gender norms that are often unwittingly perpetuated even by those who may have access to more progressive ideas. Amsugi's meddling not only creates immediate tension but also symbolises the latent power struggles that can manifest in the simple act of preparing a meal. This scenario poignantly encapsulates the complicated, often contradictory, expectations imposed upon women in South African Indian families. Because of her interference, the curry ends up being unmanageably spicy, and all three characters suffer through the meal in silence (figure 1c).

The comedic scene takes place in the dining area of the home and only features Natasha, Ruben, and Amsugi. There is no explanation as to why Tony is not eating with the family. In the scene, the overall warm tone serves as an example of lighting being used to create an intentional, familiar, intimate, and comforting atmosphere, reaffirming the value of shared meals in South African Indian households as not only for the consumption of food but also for family bonding.

All three characters are styled casually for dinner. Amsugi is dressed with her *thali* visibly around her neck, indicating that it is an item that is part of her daily wardrobe. By adorning Amsugi in the *thali* consistently, the filmmaker highlights her status as a married Tamil woman, as well as a presentation of pride in her character's adherence to her cultural traditions. The daily use of the *thali* also represents Amsugi's commitment to maintaining generational customs and cultural identity rooted in her heritage. She also sets a behavioural model for younger women in the family, such as Natasha, and most likely desires to pass on these customs to the next generation. Lastly, the *thali* is also representative of the Hindu faith, thereby holding religious significance. By wearing it all the time, Amsugi is asserting the importance of her religion in her life.

In the scene, Amsugi is dressed in dark colours, whereas Natasha and Ruben both wear white. This aesthetic choice reflects the changing family dynamics in the narrative, and the discontent Amsugi feels towards the young couple—that Natasha is causing change,

and supposedly turning Ruben against his mother, and that she is now becoming the outsider in the new relationship. Through the styling choices, it is emphasised that the roles are reversing, and Natasha, who once stood out as the outsider, is feeling more secure in the family, and Amsugi, who was secure in her son's affection, is now feeling more isolated.

The space in which the characters sit once again presents as a sourced location that is appropriate to the world of the story. The set dressing reinforces the family's middle-class status; characters sit around a large dinner table, and in the background is a large dark brown wooden cabinet filled with ornaments, porcelain dinnerware, and picture frames. The functional food props in the form of the array of curry, rice, salad, and dhal on the dinner table disclose that the family cooks and eats Indian cuisine and/or Indian-descended versions of it. The food is also arranged to share, with big bowls placed in the centre of the table for the characters to dish out as they see fit. Sliced white bread is also presented as an option to accompany the curry. A metallic water jug gives the characters relief from the spicy food as they continue pouring and drinking.

In discussing the complexity of food culture in India, Sutton (2001) suggests that food serves as a potent social tool, bridging the gap between ritual and everyday life while internalising social relations and allegiances. He posits that the multi-sensory experience of food, particularly taste and smell, generates a feedback loop between social contexts and the food itself, acting both to unify and separate communities. It's possible to see how the cooking and sharing of ancestral food hold particular significance for diasporic communities, such as South African Indians. The ritualistic aspects of ancestral cooking, for instance, become integral parts of the everyday, offering both comfort and a sense of belonging. This blend of ritual and the quotidian also adds layers of meaning to social interactions, making them "both deeply intimate and also obligatory" (Osella, 2008: 174). In the scene, the incorporation of the cultural food into the intimate dining space, and the ease with which the characters interact with the food in the scene suggests a familiarity and comfort with the cuisine. Both characters of Amsugi and Natasha consider it their responsibility to maintain the cultural knowledge of cooking traditional curries, therefore indicating that it is a staple

part of South African Indian households as well as a link emulating one of the practices from the ancestral homeland.

Osella (2001) further discusses the concept of synaesthesia and food memory, which activates multiple senses—smell, vision, taste, touch, and even hearing—creating a rich, multi-sensory experience that is deeply evocative. In this context, the act of cooking and sharing Indian food can evoke a sensorial tapestry of the ancestral homeland that goes beyond the act of merely eating. In their research on South Asian immigrant women in Canada, Dyck and Dossa (2007) observe that these women utilised their cuisine and meal-sharing spaces to create comfortable environments for their families. Their culinary skills from the homeland translated into the new space provide a connection to the familiar. However, although part of the diaspora, South African Indians in the context of this study are not first or second-generation migrants that may wish to emulate the comforts of a homeland. Rather, the act of cooking and meal-sharing, as well as the generational transmission of culinary practices, becomes a form of embodied knowledge that asserts and negotiates identity within both the local South African context and the broader narrative of Indian diasporic history. Thus, culinary practices become both a connection to an ancestral past and a dynamic form of cultural expression in the present.

In the scene (figure 1c), the characters casually eat the food with their hands and only struggle with the level of spiciness—this struggle provides some comedy as they are clearly uncomfortable, sticking their tongues out due to the heat. Amsugi and Natasha's conflict has materialised for the first time, physically affecting Ruben, and the placement of the characters emphasises this. Although Natasha is dressed in the same colour as Ruben, she is also placed across the frame from Amsugi, with Ruben placed in the middle. The binary of the women is again highlighted, and so is their conflict, with Ruben caught in the middle of it. Ruben is positioned between his wife and mother, symbolising his struggle with loyalty to both without hurting the other.

Although the filmmaker's blocking of characters in the scene is symbolic, it also holds cultural meaning. Ruben's seated position is at the head of the table, with the women to

his left and right. As the breadwinner, Ruben is allocated the seat at the head of the table, and the caregiver characters (the wife and the mother) are at his side. This visual representation of the hierarchy of the family depicts the women's submissiveness to the patriarchal figure, and although Amsugi pulls the strings in the home, in her mind, she does it for the sake of serving her son. Amsugi retains her power (in doing so she almost made the meal unbearable) but willingly concedes the appearance of leadership to her son.

This scene serves as another example in exemplifying Radhakrishnan's (2005) argument of women having to perform culture, and men supervising and curating this behaviour to adopt the appearance of maintained tradition. From the period of Indian migrants settling on jointly-owned land and their eventual descendants living in extended family units (siblings and their families housed together in one property under a usually elder patriarchal figure), men generally served as the breadwinners, with the women performing household duties, cooking, and taking care of children. Women were also tasked with teaching religious and cultural values to the next generation. According to Khan (2012), these roles filtered down into generational behaviour that eventually became tradition even in modern-day family units: "...in the early evolution of family life, the extended family served as an economic, psychological, and social safety net upon which strong family values were established. It served as the foundation for the emergence of the later nuclear family form" (Khan, 2012:139). These inherited values would have formed the foundation of Amsugi's upbringing and justifications for her way of thinking—a big emphasis on community living, as she asks about what people may think, and as she interferes with the affairs of her neighbours. Her emphasis on Natasha behaving as per her rules stems from her understanding of women's primary roles being that of housekeepers and carers. Amsugi's strong affection for her son in raising him, putting him through university for him to become breadwinner is a point of pride which she credits herself in accomplishing, and for Ruben to meet a woman and start siding with her over his mother is something that would naturally cause emotional distress.

In the closing scene of the film, Amsugi, a pregnant Natasha, and Ruben are hosting a *braai* (South African barbecue) with their neighbours, Saras and her mother-in-law, Kamla. The daughters-in-law eat together, while the mothers-in-law sit separately engaged in conversation about potential baby names. Ruben's character attends the grill, cooking for the women. This reversal of gendered roles contradicts the overall established norms of the family, where the women are expected to cook and the male figure is perceived as the provider. Placing Ruben in the role of the cook may be an acknowledgement of the changing dynamic of gender roles in South African Indian communities; however, it most likely points towards the influence of wider post-apartheid South African cultural influence where men are often responsible for *braai-ing* over an open flame. Ruben's assumption of this role indicates an amalgamation of South African Indian and broader South African practices, depicting cultural hybridity as a hallmark of post-apartheid identity formation. This notion of hybridised identities and the acknowledgement of 'South-Africanness' is further emphasised by Natasha and Ruben's choice of baby name, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The act of gathering for a *braai* in the closing scene underscores a 'South Africanness', embedding the narrative within a specific social and cultural context. The *braai* is not merely a South African version of a barbecue; it is a socio-cultural institution that holds symbolic value. As in many cultures, food rituals in South Africa are laden with social meaning, and the *braai* is no exception. It is a communal practice that cuts across various ethnic, racial, and social lines, offering a lens through which to view the unity and diversity of the South African experience (Cohen and Avieli, 2004). In this particular scene, the *braai* serves as a powerful vehicle for illustrating cultural hybridity and the interplay of different sets of expectations and norms. As mentioned, Ruben's role in cooking the food breaks away from the traditional gender roles observed earlier in the film, particularly within the South African Indian community. It hints at a changing dynamic within this specific cultural milieu but also points to how South African Indian identities are influenced by, and in dialogue with, wider South African cultural norms.

The inclusion of the *braai* in the final scene could be the filmmaker's way of encapsulating the complexities of post-apartheid identity formation in South Africa. It serves as a reflection of the evolving cultural landscape, showing how traditional roles and expectations are being questioned, adjusted, or upheld. This is further emphasised by the chosen baby's name, pointing to a nuanced blend of both traditional South African Indian and broader South African identities. Therefore, the *braai* acts as a symbolic nexus, tying together multiple strands of cultural, social, and gender-related themes, to present a holistic view of life in post-apartheid South Africa.

In the scene, the younger generation is dressed in western-styled clothing while the mothers-in-law are dressed in sarees. Ruben wears a casual tank top and sunglasses, and Natasha as well as Saras wear printed informal blouses. Both women have *bindis* on their foreheads, as do their mothers-in-law. Amsugi and Saras are styled more formally, however, with draped *sarees*, gold earrings, and their *thalis* on display. From their styling of all the characters in the scene, a generational narrative of westernisation or assimilation to broader South African aesthetic markers is depicted. Amsugi and Saras's characters represent a position of cultural tradition and preservation, Natasha and Saras depict the hybridisation and negotiation of cultural identity in the wake of changing contexts, and Ruben is depicted as immersed in the wider South African cultural landscape, at ease in westernised clothing.

Degrees of homogeneity are represented in this scene and in the overall aesthetic treatment of *Broken Promises*, such as in the use of *bindis* and *thalis* by both generations, and by Saras and Kamla's family reflecting the notions of identity as Amsugi and Natasha's family. The assigned gender roles also demonstrate a commonality in tradition and notions of identity and hierarchy in the household, which would appear to external audiences as homogenous 'South African Indian culture'. Evidence of heterogeneity in depictions of cultural identity is also evident in the scene and the greater narrative, reflected in the wardrobe choices as Natasha and Saras lean towards western-styled clothing indicating influences of broader cultures and trends in contrast with the older generation. This heterogeneity signifies the dynamic nature of South African Indian cultural identity, which is represented as not fixed or unchanging,

but rather evolving over time, in alignment with Hall's (1989) concepts of fluidity in postcolonial identities.

Other depictions of cultural expression, such as Natasha wearing a *punjabi* and Amsugi donning a *saree* in earlier scenes, reflect a variety of Indian cultural markers. These markers might appear more nuanced to South African Indian audiences while representing a more general South African Indian identity to external viewers. This complexity of representation extends to the culinary choices in the film. In one scene, the family partakes of a curry together, while in the concluding scene, they enjoy a *braai* in each other's company. External audiences may associate the curry with a broad notion of South African Indian culture, but they are likely to perceive the *braai* as an acknowledgement of a broader South African identity.

The aesthetic treatment in *Broken Promises* serves as a symbolic representation of the identities, cultural negotiations, and hybridity of the characters, thereby illuminating the intricate navigations of self-representations of cultural identity within South African Indian communities. The characters' nuanced use of both Indian and western attire across different generations signals a transition from traditional ancestral norms towards adaptation within a broader, multicultural landscape. Furthermore, the setting of the Bollywood Café provides additional context, emphasising the clear transnational diasporic influence of Indian culture on South African Indians. For instance, Natasha emulates the style of a Bollywood actress, albeit in a more modest fashion.

Through its nuanced negotiation of various cultural markers, the film showcases a fluidity of cultural identity, thereby subtly challenging any monolithic notion of South African Indian identity. This fluidity gains added significance in a post-apartheid context, where the social landscape is in flux and communities are actively negotiating their place within it. By incorporating a diverse range of cultural markers and stylistic choices, the film is representational of broader identity negotiations taking place in South African Indian communities. Therefore, *Broken Promises* serves not merely as a cinematic artefact but also as a critical lens through which the complexities of cultural identity formation in contemporary South Africa can be examined.

For Better For Worse: Navigating Cultural, Social and Religious Identities

In examining *For Better For Worse* (2010), it is pertinent to first discuss a notable scene around the dinner table, as depicted in Figure 2a. As elaborated in the preceding chapter, dinner holds a significant role within the Khan family, serving as a communal moment for sharing news and fostering familial bonds. Yusuf, Ayesha, and Anisa are seated at the table partaking in the meal. Farhan, who enters later, opts not to join them. Likewise, the youngest daughter, Tasneem, is conspicuously absent, being at odds with her family at this time.

The absence of the younger siblings during this family bonding ritual can be interpreted as their non-verbal expression of discontent towards their parents. Anisa, who appears to be the most amenable among the children, engages in conversation with her parents just as Farhan walks in. The deliberate choice to include this moment of tension in the film highlights the theme of generational conflict, capturing the subtleties of non-verbal communication that can both enforce and disrupt family dynamics.

Looking at the styling choices of the characters in the scene, Yusuf is attired in a business-appropriate blue collared shirt, while Ayesha is dressed in a purple tunic, or *kurti*, which serves as a more casual expression of Indian cultural attire. Anisa's character has returned from a blind date, clad in a peach *punjabi*. This choice of clothing for the date signifies her character's inclination to don cultural eastern-wear for formal occasions, much like Natasha in *Broken Promises* (2004). Although the characters of Anisa and Natasha hail from different religious backgrounds, both representations of Durban-South African Indian women seem to conform to a consistent South African Indian cultural aesthetic.

While Anisa's character reserves her traditional clothing for formal instances, her mother, Ayesha, integrates it into her daily sartorial choices. Both characters implicitly acknowledge their ethnicity through their attire, yet Ayesha makes it a more continual aspect of her self-presentation. Given her character's status as a member of a close-knit

community in the narrative, one can deduce through the filmmakers' representations that women of her generation within various South African Indian communities likely share similar sensibilities. This nuanced difference between mother and daughter characters—Ayesha's consistent incorporation and Anisa's reserved use of traditional attire—reveals generational variations in cultural representation. It also raises questions about how South African Indian women negotiate their identities through clothing, depending on the social context and the community's implicit norms.

Through the filmmakers' choices in styling Anisa's character, they represent the complexities of a younger generation navigating a pluralistic social landscape. She exemplifies a duality of identity: comfortable in both western and traditional attire, selecting each according to the context and occasion. This flexibility signals a form of cultural fluency, where identity is not fixed but can adapt and shift. It suggests that for the generation of South African Indians that Anisa represents, cultural identity is not an immutable legacy to be protected at all costs but rather a dynamic aspect of self that is perpetually negotiated and redefined. Her sartorial choices become a form of identity play, allowing her the freedom to engage with multiple cultural scripts without being confined to a single narrative. Consequently, Anisa's adaptability offers a contrasting yet complementary form of cultural preservation, one that values fluidity and choice as much as it does tradition.

The aesthetic treatment of Ayesha's character can be analysed through the framework of Castells' (1997) concept of 'resistance identity', particularly considering the generational context from which characters like Ayesha emerge. As previously noted, Amsugi and Ayesha's more steadfast adherence to cultural attire, in contrast to their children, can be read as an act of cultural preservation against imposed changes, thus signifying a form of resistance. However, it is also worth noting that the transformative experiences under apartheid and the shifting sociopolitical landscapes in post-apartheid South Africa may have catalysed the formation of 'project identities' among this generation of South African Indians (Castells, 1997). These project identities afford them the agency to define and embody what it means to be South African Indian on their own terms, which also may account for the filmmakers' styling choices of Ayesha.

On another front, the characters of Amsugi and Ayesha can also be seen as exemplars of a different approach to navigating the hybridisation of cultural identity, as conceptualised by Bhabha (1994). In the narratives and implied backstories, the characters' responses to change and adaptation can be interpreted as reflecting a more fraught journey than the flexibility exhibited by their children's generation.

In the scene, there is harmony in the dressing of the characters in accordance with their surrounding space. The room itself is spacious with curated set dressing in the form of a lamp, a vase, and flowers dotting the background. Functional props of plates and crockery are all presented in a uniform white. The imagery creates a distinct impression of the Khan family being very comfortably middle class. In *Broken Promises* (2004) the dinner scene created similar features in terms of the location, however the set dressing reads more as a collection of sentimental items and curios rather than an intentional curation to create a sense of class, like it does in the Khan home. However, similar to *Broken Promises*, the food and crockery is placed in the centre of the characters, meant for sharing and communal eating. Lastly, as a cultural prop or set dressing, a tapestry illustrating the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia is hung on the wall of the dining room.

The filmmakers' inclusion of the Islamic tapestry depicting the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca serves multiple narrative and symbolic functions within the framework of the film. It acts as a visual marker of the Khan family's Islamic faith, indicating that their religion is a significant aspect of their identity. The tapestry's placement within the dining room—a space for family gathering and communication—suggests that their faith is central to their family dynamics, acting as an ever-present backdrop to their daily interactions. Furthermore, the tapestry serves as an intertextual link to global Islamic culture and, specifically, the pilgrimage rites. The location depicted, Masjid al-Haram, is the most sacred site in Islam, and its inclusion speaks to the depth of the family's commitment to their faith. Its presence might be seen as a nod to the transnational aspects of their identity, connecting them to a wider community of believers beyond South Africa's borders.

The tapestry in the scene therefore adds another layer to the already complex notions of identity embodied by the Khan family. While they are unmistakably part of the South African Indian diaspora, they also exist as part of a wider Islamic diaspora. This multiplicity enriches our understanding of their identities as it introduces a dimension that exists in tandem with, and sometimes intersects, their ethno-cultural background. The tapestry serves as a potent symbol of their faith, reminding viewers that the Khans' religious faith places them in a global community of Islamic believers. Lastly, from a production design perspective, the tapestry acts as an aesthetic complement to the broader mise-en-scène of the dining room, contributing to the overall impression of a harmonious and culturally rich environment.

The scene itself begins with Yusuf recounting his day and talking about his interaction with Farhan outside of the mosque. The tone changes as Farhan enters the scene, and once more the difference in the interaction of the parents with their children is noticeable. They speak to Anisa as if she is a counterpart in the affairs of the home, and yet refer to Farhan as if he is a child, as can be assessed from the dialogue (For Better For Worse, 2010, 00:50:38-00:51:16):

Ayesha

Hare, beta, come! Where have you been for so long? Come and eat.

Yusuf

Wa 'alaykumu s-salam.

Ayesha

Come and eat.

Farhan

No, I ate, Ma.

Ayesha

I cooked all your favourites- chicken tikka, soji, naan- I cooked so much.

Yusuf

Eat, eat. *Soji* with *ghee*. Chicken tikka.
Naan.

[to Ayesha]

You too Ayesha, eat.

[singing]

*Arre jiski biwi moti uska bhi bada naam
hai* [the one whose wife is fat is a fortunate
one].

[Farhan exits]

Ayesha

These people, you'll only appreciate me
when I'm dead and gone.

Yusuf

Only when I'm dead and gone, you'll
know. They way you've spoiled that boy,
just now he'll be sitting on top of your
head.

In a different note to the dialogue that has been delivered by Yusuf previously, he pokes fun at the relationship Ayesha has with her son. This is reminiscent of Amsugi's dialogue and sentiment in *Broken Promises* - women's labour in support of their families is rarely acknowledged. Yusuf and his son do not thank Ayesha for the meal, as it is an expected duty of hers as a housewife, and one that she proudly and culturally performs. As primary caregivers and caretakers of the homes, Amsugi and Ayesha are a representation of many South African Indian women who shoulder a significant portion of the emotional and physical labour required to keep their families functional and well-cared for. Yet, they also find their efforts often taken for granted, leaving them feeling undervalued. Despite the essential nature of this labour, it may go unnoticed or uncompensated. Ayesha shows care for her family in the means she has control over - wholesome meals and family bonding. Her children's disregard of her effort and Yusuf's light mocking of her character is compounded by the cultural and societal expectations of her needing to shoulder the homemaker role, most likely leading to feelings of being undervalued or dismissed.

The dialogue in the scene is included in the analysis as it reveals the array of food that Ayesha has made for her family, all of which is South Asian cuisine. The incorporation of this variety into Ayesha's culinary repertoire presents a heterogeneity within South African Indian cuisine, in addition to the curry the family eats in *Broken Promises*. As seen in both films, the act of cooking and meal sharing is a means of cultural preservation shared by the family units and can be considered self-representative of South African Indian notions of cultural values. Through the act of cooking and eating, Ayesha's character and her family perform their inherited culture. They comfortably eat the food with their hands, as the character of Amsugi and her family does, and it is Anisa who expresses her appreciation for her mother's cooking. While eating and talking, the characters hold relaxed body language, eating with one dominant hand and expressing with the other. Yusuf is seated at the head of the table again, with Anisa directly across from him, exactly as they were seated at breakfast.

Another scene of cultural significance, as well as significance in the narrative, occurs after Anisa finds out that Zak was not being truthful about who he is. It is the moment in which Anisa and her parents reconcile after having their argument. Figure 2b depicts Anisa's character praying in her bedroom before Ayesha and Yusuf enter to speak with her. As Anisa prays, she is dressed in a black *hijab*, a head covering worn by Muslim women. This is the first time we see her or any character partaking in religious practices. She performs it in the intimate space of her bedroom, wearing a *hijab*, thereby revealing a different facet to her identity than we have seen of her character so far. Anisa is depicted as a practitioner and believer in her family's faith, and does not practice it as a matter of pretence or having to be told to partake by her parents, like Farhan. Anisa's character prays privately, her *hijab* revealing her choice in when she prefers to wear the religious attire as well as how modest in clothing she chooses to be.

The filmmakers' decision to depict Anisa in a *hijab* while privately engaging in prayer suggests a conscious effort to present her as a nuanced, modern Muslim woman. The setting—her own bedroom—provides an intimate backdrop, emphasizing that her religious practices are a matter of personal choice rather than societal compulsion. In doing so, the filmmakers challenge enduring stereotypes that often pigeonhole Muslim

women as being solely under the influence of tradition or family expectation. The *hijab*, worn in the privacy of her own space, serves as both a religious and cultural marker, adding layers to her character that extend beyond the curated Indian cultural aesthetic presented in formal moments, or the western-oriented identity she may otherwise project in her social and professional spaces as a lawyer. This complex portrayal seeks to subvert a monolithic representation of Muslim women, presenting instead a more multifaceted view.

In numerous Muslim-majority countries, regulations or societal norms dictate the appropriate dress code for women, often requiring the use of Islamic attire. However, in diverse cultural contexts such as South Africa, Muslim women display greater flexibility in sartorial choices, often incorporating contemporary styles alongside traditional dress (Shirazi, 2000). According to Muthal (2010), South African Muslim women adhere to an array of dressing styles, ranging from traditional Islamic attire to less modest western clothing. The multicultural milieu of post-apartheid South Africa has a formative influence on women like Anisa in their self-presentation, guiding the negotiation of which facets of their identity are to be displayed, and in what contexts. For example, Boulanouar (2006) notes that Islamic guidelines discourage women from wearing transparent or form-fitting clothes. Anisa chooses to comply with these guidelines in her everyday attire while still donning western clothing for work and social events.

Anisa's character, as portrayed through the filmmakers' choices, serves as a potent exemplar of cultural hybridity and fluidity in the South African context. Her character is not just a mere amalgamation of different cultural elements but a dynamic entity that adapts and responds to her immediate socio-cultural environment. Her fluidity in toggling between these different modes of cultural expression speaks volumes about the multiplicity of her identity, thereby challenging rigid cultural or religious categorisations. The filmmakers' choices in the portrayal of Anisa create a dialogic space for the audience to engage with these complexities, thereby contributing to a nuanced discourse on cultural hybridity and fluidity within the post-apartheid South African landscape.

Underneath her head covering, Anisa wears white satin pyjamas (figure 2c), reinforcing the class status of the family, as well as the comforts they employ. As her parents come in to speak to her, we see Ayesha dressed in a black cotton *kurti* and blue jeans. As established, she incorporates the aesthetic of her inherited culture into her day-to-day dressing, paired with blue jeans. She wears the opposite tonal value to Anisa – black contrasting with the white – with Ayesha representing a feminine strength in Anisa’s moment of fragility. Yusuf is dressed in a formal western beige collared shirt as if he has just ended a workday, reflecting that Yusuf does not feel the need to represent his Indian heritage or his faith in his work environment. Yusuf, like Anisa, presents the religious facet of his identity in prayer, although he does it with his community of men in the mosque. Like with Tony and Ruben in *Broken Promises*, there also appears to be no expectation of Yusuf’s character to bear or perpetuate his cultural heritage in his dressing choices, as there is with his wife.

The design of Anisa’s bedroom is spacious and consistent with the already established comfortable aesthetic of the home, but it does not reveal much information about the nature of her character. Like the dining room, the space is perceivably curated with set dressing. Referring back to figure 2b as Anisa’s character prays at the beginning of the scene, it is the functional cultural prop of the prayer mat which contributes to our understanding of the character. The prayer mat provides a hint of colour in the warm toned neutral space and represents Anisa’s connection to her faith. Although this is a moment of emotional lows for Anisa in the narrative, it also sparks the progression of her and Ayesha’s character arcs as they connect and realign their values and priorities as a family.

In the Khan household, the act of practising cultural traditions serves as a conduit for communication and expression. For instance, Anisa's absence from the family dinner serves as an indicator of her emotional state, prompting her parents to check on her well-being. This example illuminates how, within the family, cultural rituals facilitate a nuanced form of interpersonal communication, thus revealing more intricate aspects of the characters' identities. Furthermore, the depicted use of cultural traditions as a form

of communication and expression may reflect broader patterns within South African Indian families, particularly in terms of the crucial role that traditions play in maintaining familial bonds and cultural heritage. In post-apartheid South Africa, many Indian families find themselves navigating a complex landscape of multicultural influences, ethnic diversity, and a history of racial discrimination. In this setting, traditional practices such as communal meals can serve as an anchor, providing a sense of continuity and stability, while also acting as a space for intergenerational transmission of values and identity.

A scene included in the analysis of cultural rituals occurs in the home of Anisa's friend Merv. The scene is not relevant to the main storyline of the film; however, it presents a distinctive instance of religious and cultural diversity. It depicts Merv coming home to his Hindu parents and a spiritual woman with the aim of exorcising bad spirits from him - the bad spirits being his homosexuality (figure 2d). According to Dave (2011), in discussing Indian society (and South African Indian society), in many communities homosexuality is considered inappropriate, partly because of the importance Hinduism places on the act of marriage and forming families as a part of fulfilling religious obligations. Further, South African Indian conservatism and the communities' needs to preserve traditional values perpetuate the social taboo and lack of open discussion of homosexuality in Indian communities (Vahed and Jeppe, 2004). It therefore remains difficult for individuals to 'come out' or reconcile their homosexuality as part of their identity.

In the context of South Africa's constitution, however, the rights of gay individuals are safeguarded. Mahomed and Trangoš (2016) argue that despite this protection, South African homosexual men still face prejudice. Merv's character experiences this prejudice through his parents disregarding his autonomy and attempting to force a ritual upon him in order to dismiss his homosexuality - a part of him that they do not accept or see as normal. The scene is presented in a comedic tone, a potential reflection of the sentiments of many South African Indian communities and audiences in accepting Merv's gayness as a spectacle. In this scene, what is often perceived as a 'western affliction' of gayness to many non-white South African ethnicities (Dave, 2011) is met

with the religious and superstitious remedy of a South African Hindu temple. Merv's parents are depicted as employing their traditional cultural and religious knowledge to combat their issue, thereby highlighting their desperation and belief in their faith. The scene reveals the conservatism of South African Indian communities, as well as their retention of inherited Indian practices in the wake of modernisation and the changing South African socio-political climate.

Referred to as *trance aunties*, *temple aunties* or *jaaro* (blessing) *aunties* by community members, women such as the one in the scene earn income by relieving superstitious individuals of their various ailments, including bad luck and 'the evil eye' (Naidoo, 2019). In this instance, Merv's parents have employed a temple aunty to banish his homosexuality, having linked it to evil spirits. During the scene, Merv's mother explains that even though the government has "gone crazy" (legalising gay marriage), they don't need to "go crazy too" (accepting homosexuality). The *temple aunty* commands the bad spirit to leave Merv alone, shaking her body stiffly and widening her eyes as if possessed by a higher power. Her character holds a broom and a belt as contextual props. She uses the items to lightly hit Merv as she chants at the bad entity to release him, with no apparent expertise or qualification besides a performance. Although women such as her may be described as taking advantage of people's fears for income (Naidoo, 2017), the alternative perception is that they are earning an income independently, as many of these women have been taken in by the temple and have found safety after leaving abusive marriages (Appasamy, 2018). Merv's father provides minimal emotional support but is mainly preoccupied with the cricket match on television, leaving the spiritual work to be conducted by the women.

The *temple aunty* is wearing a yellow and white coloured saree with her face painted in yellow turmeric, invoking a supernatural appearance, embellished with a large red bindi on her forehead (figure 2e). Her character is most likely representative of a devotee of the Hindu goddess Durga, worshipped for her triumph against evil and a demon king in a great battle. Durga is often depicted in yellow and associated with yellow during the holy period Navratri in which the nine Hindu goddesses are worshipped. The goddess Durga is also referred to as Haldi Mukhi (turmeric-faced) as physically represented by

the *temple aunty*'s application of turmeric to her own face in preparation for her encounter with Merv's 'demons'.

Hofmeyr (1982) discusses the decline of ritualistic Hinduism and its adaptation into neo-Hinduism movements in response to the changing South African socio-political landscape. This shift is also attributed to the decline of joint family structures, in which the act of passing on cultural knowledge and ritualistic behaviour was formative. The neo-Hindu agendas focused on redirecting Hinduism from what was considered "superstitious beliefs and archaic ritual practices" (Kumar, 2013: 77) that emerged with the indentured labourers and fostered in subsequent working-class communities, to refocusing on the philosophy and intellectual pillars of the religion.

The filmmakers' inclusion of the *temple aunty* in the scene is a representation bringing attention to the superstition-centred belief systems that still exist within South African Indian communities. This points to a sense of persistence of beliefs that have survived over generations, due to the active and intentional preservation of these practices by community members such as Merv's parents (and possibly characters such as Amsugi) as well as historical circumstances. The oppressive politics of apartheid isolated and segregated many communities, most likely inadvertently contributing to the preservation of certain cultural and religious practices, such as the need for a *temple aunty*. The presence of these superstitions in the narrative also reveals an exchange between old and new belief systems. Neo-Hindu philosophy would not be able to assist Merv's parents with their physical issue of their son's 'affliction', and so the practical ritualistic Hinduism holds value as it promises a method of directly removing the obstacle. Merv's parents' retention of older belief systems provided a benefit of validating their concerns and providing community support in resolving their issue.

In the discussion of representation of cultural identity in the film sample of this study, the scene with Merv's family and the *temple aunty* highlights the heterogeneity within the Hindu religion, illustrating the spectrum of belief systems within communities. This includes more orthodox and ritualistic practices, such as the engagement of the *temple aunty*, as well as the more philosophical neo-Hinduism posited by Ruben when

confronting his mother in *Broken Promises*. Amsugi, whose religious practices are closely entwined with her ethnolinguistic heritage, purports her beliefs of rigid boundaries between different ethnolinguistic backgrounds within the same faith. A heterogeneity within the Hindu practices of South African Indians is therefore presented by its different iterations in each film. An even broader heterogeneity of religious practices within the South African Indian community is presented with the consideration of *For Better For Worse*'s presentation and depiction of the South African Indian Muslim community and their practices of the Islamic faith, as illustrated by the Khan family.

A final scene in *For Better For Worse* comprises a choreographed dance sequence (figure 2f), as Anisa is the centrepiece of a coordinated dance to a song titled *Sajni ki Dwaar* (no date) by South African Indian musician Tansen Nepaul. The scene occurs in a built set featuring metallic-coloured pillars, multi-directional stage lighting, colourful drapes on the walls and a central space in the centre intended for dancing. The female dancers all wear colourful *lehenga cholis* (skirt and blouse) and the men are dressed in equally vibrant *kurtas* (tunics). Anisa is styled in a more elaborately embroidered *lehenga choli*, accessorised with metallic bangles, earrings, a necklace, and a *sirbandi* (headpiece). The scene presumably forms part of Anisa and Zak's wedding celebrations, serving as a light-hearted and energetic end to the film, reminiscent of Bollywood musical scenes.

For South African Indians, Bollywood can be considered a cultural reservoir that is replicated during events and cultural gatherings, including the act of performing coordinated dance routines from popular Bollywood films at weddings (Boshoff, 2005). According to Ebrahim (2008: 64), "the term 'Bollywood' connotes a characteristic set of stylistic conventions, the prominence of song-and-dance sequences, recognisable themes and genre categories, Indian cultural values, and an overall entertainment ethos". Although the scene features a choreographed dance to a (non-Bollywood) Hindi song and no evidence of singing, the overall celebratory tone, entertainment value and styling choices of the Indian cultural attire, as well as the ornate built set that deviates from the location-based realism of the overall film, reflect inspiration from Bollywood.

Bollywood's reception and cultural influence in South African Indian communities previously discussed in the context of *Broken Promises* emerged from an early scene location in the film. Bollywood Café immersed Ruben and Natasha into a space where iconic celebrities and collages featured on the walls, presenting a visibly direct influence on South African Indian locales and characters. Further discussed is the mediated manner in which the *Broken Promises* characters incorporate Bollywood influences into their hybridised notions of identity, with it forming one source of influence in their multifaceted identities. Expressed differently, but still similarly to *Broken Promises*, the presentation of Bollywood aesthetic inspiration in *For Better For Worse* is curated to a special event of the marriage of Anisa and Zak. Deviating from the location-based realism of the Khan home, the completely designed and dressed set with artificial stage lighting and coordinated dancers appears 'larger than life', thereby ending the film with an energetic and fantastical tone. The scene represents the bridal happiness of Anisa in the overcoming of obstacles in her love story and is a moment chosen by the filmmakers to incorporate and acknowledge Bollywood influences in their self-representations of cultural identity.

Although Anisa and her family are Muslim, the style of the coordinated dance with coloured sticks referred to as *dandiya* (or at least inspiration from *dandiya*) reflects a degree of homogeneity in expressions of cultural identity in the film. *Dandiya* is a form of religious and cultural community engagement, most often performed by Hindu men and women during the festive period of Navratri. The inclusion of the dance style in the film represents a form of cultural exchange, highlighting the shared experiences of South African Indian communities irrespective of their religious differences. More broadly, the blending of Hindu and Muslim cultural practices reflects the shared elements of cultural identity amongst South African Indians. While religion creates distinctions, cultural expressions may cross these boundaries, fostering a sense of shared identity and unity. The Bollywood-inspired dance sequence itself acts as a unifying influence across diverse South African Indian communities, and therefore the *dandiya* form of dance may also be culturally integrated and accepted as 'Indian' rather than Hindu to both South African Indian communities and external audiences.

In the context of a film analysis, this scene also reflects the manner in which cultural and religious practices may evolve over time and in response to different contexts. It demonstrates how cultural identity is not static but instead is dynamic and adapting to circumstances. This hybridisation of identity allows for the maintenance of religious beliefs while also acknowledging shared cultural practices, creating nuanced and multifaceted notions of cultural identity. However, to external audiences, the nuanced navigation of many elements such as Bollywood inspiration, Hindu *dandiya* dance styles and eastern cultural attire by a Muslim family will be received by external audiences and homogenised as ‘Indian’.

As a whole, *For Better For Worse* presents distinct representations of South African Indian cultures that are shaped by circumstances of South Africa’s history, as well as the broader influences of globalisation and westernisation. Characters such as Anisa and Ayesha represent different generational interpretations of cultural identity, signalled through their styling and lifestyle choices. Ayesha’s character embraces her inherited traditions of gender roles such as preparing Indian cultural meals for the family, while Anisa navigates westernisation, cultural expression and religious expression, demonstrating a fluid and flexible identity.

Further complex cultural dynamics within South African Indian communities are embodied in the characters of Merv and his family, whose family employs a woman from the temple to cure his homosexuality. The scene reflects the distinctions between superstition-centred religious belief systems and more philosophical views of religion in Hindu families, thereby presenting heterogeneity within the community. The film’s final dance sequence, which presents elements of Bollywood as well as Hindu culture, reflects the diversity of the communities that define ‘South African Indian’ while also presenting a homogeneity of shared identity transcending religious and cultural differences.

For Better For Worse contributes instances of cultural specificity as well as homogeneity shaped by the interplay of South Africa’s history that differ from the

scenarios provided in *Broken Promises*. The discussion and analysis of cultural markers and aesthetic treatment is further enriched by the analysis of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017).

Keeping Up with the Kandasamys: Expressions of Class, Community and Faith

The film opens with the Kandasamys and the Naidoo busily preparing for a wedding. Early in the narrative, viewers are introduced to the first significant cultural event: both families find themselves seated at the same table during a Hindu wedding of one of their family or community members.

Figure 3a portrays the onset of the wedding as the bride makes her entrance into the hall. The scene is illuminated with purposeful, purple-toned lights creating a high-contrast, low-key lighting effect. This lends the setting an air of indulgence and elegance, giving the impression that the event is taking place at night, despite it actually occurring in the morning. The wedding is aesthetically presented as a grand event, as illustrated through the stylistic mood-lighting and set dressing within the scene, including pillars, flowers, drapes, and centrepieces aimed at creating an experience transcending the realism of the characters' day-to-day lives. This indicates the family to be comfortably middle class and also reflects a resourcefulness or access to budget on the part of the filmmakers' ability to construct the scene - whereas *Broken Promises* (2004) and *For Better For Worse* (2010) circumvented the depiction of wedding scenes even though marriage was a key theme in both films.

The image of Shanti's son enthusiastically leading the bride and her family down the aisle is also a significant representation of community culture and the role of the extended or joint family in South African Indian communities. The integration of extended family in the ceremony proceedings signifies the value placed on the interconnectedness of the community and on broader family relationships. In addition to discussing weddings as 'indulgent' within Hindu communities, Naidoo (1985) observes the role of extended family in the affairs of Hindu family units:

The extended family traces its origin to a long-prevailing custom of kinship. Father's brothers are also fathers and are known as either big father or small father in relation to the age of the biological father. Mother's sisters are also mothers. Cousins are also brothers and sisters (Naidoo, 1985: 131).

Francis (1999) observes that in both South Africa and India, the life of a Hindu is generally characterised by the performance of various rites, known as *samskaras*. These rites mark significant phases in an individual's spiritual, emotional, and physical development. Among these pivotal milestones, marriage is often regarded as one of the most sacred, serving as a foundational element in a Hindu individual's spiritual journey, according to Hindu scholars (Francis, 1999). Singh (1989) posits that marriage is not merely a social contract, but also a crucial institution in the Hindu tradition. It serves as a pivotal platform for the enactment and experience of religious, cultural, and spiritual practices among Hindu individuals. This institution thus plays an indispensable role in the preservation and continuation of the religio-cultural and philosophical tenets of Hinduism.

The inclusion of a wedding scene immediately cues the viewer into the socio-cultural and religious milieu to which the characters belong, and by extension, it serves as an indicator of the community's values. Noting the importance placed on the marriage ceremony within the Hindu religion, the act of inviting the community to participate in the nuptials therefore signifies more than social courtesy; it serves as a way to sustain and fortify communal bonds within the diasporic environment. Given the histories of migration, displacement, and adaptation faced by South African Indians, the communal gathering at a wedding could be seen as a momentary reconstitution of a social and cultural space that reinvigorates collective identity. The wedding therefore represents a site where cultural continuity is actively maintained. The rituals, attire, and social dynamics at the wedding echo ancestral traditions, thereby acting as a repository of culture and a means of its transmission to successive generations. The communal approach to marriage and weddings is also suggested in *Broken Promises* through Amsugi's insistence on what she considers a culturally appropriate wedding ceremony for Ruben and Natasha to present themselves as a couple to her community, as well as

in *For Better For Worse*, which featured a choreographed dance scene with presumably family and community members partaking in the festivities.

In the scene, the bride is styled in a red bridal *saree* and gold blouse, wearing traditional Indian jewellery such as an ornate *nath* (nose ring), *maangtikka* (headpiece), *bindi*, and necklaces that present her as the focal point of the day, also indicating that she is Hindu. A practice originating from Hinduism in India, red is perceived as a bridal colour representing prosperity, and many Hindu brides wear red to their weddings in South Africa (Vladimirovna Kudrya-Marais, 2022). The groom is styled in a cream-coloured *sherwani* paired with a matching turban, also acknowledging his Indian cultural identity. Shanti's young son and the guests wear a variety of colours, perceivably a choice made by the filmmakers to highlight the vibrancy of South African Indian cultures. Both Shanti and Jennifer are dressed in a deep blue saree with gold trim, each styled differently (figure 3b). Jennifer's aesthetic aims to be minimalist and elegant. In contrast, Shanti is accessorised more ornately. Shanti also wears a *bindi*, with the yellow string of her *thali* also visible, indicating that the religious symbol of marriage is important for the character to display.

The characters' attire for the wedding scene offers insights into the Chatsworth Indian community's notions of identity. The bride and groom are representative of the community's strong ties to their Indian heritage, as well as their Hindu faith in this instance. Shanti and Jennifer, both wearing the same *saree* styled differently, reflect personal adaptations of cultural attire based on individual preferences and beliefs, while still both respecting a shared heritage. Jennifer's minimalist approach to style may reflect a more modern or westernised interpretation of the traditional Indian saree. In contrast, Shanti's complex layering of Indian accessories, including the visible yellow string of her *thali*, demonstrates a more conservative adherence to cultural traditions. Her use of the wedding as an opportunity to display these cultural markers suggests a sense of pride and a desire to visibly affirm her cultural identity.

Similar to the women characters in *Broken Promises* and *For Better For Worse*, the women in these films moderate their appearance for different social or cultural contexts.

They all choose to wear Indian cultural clothing for important social occasions, while foregrounding western-styled clothing in their day-to-day interactions. This fluidity in expressions of cultural identity of all the female characters in the sample films also partly reflects the gendered responsibilities of bearing and carrying their Indian culture in comparison to the flexibility afforded to men in South African Indian communities.

Figure 3c depicts Shanti and her family hosting friends in a casual dinner setting at their home. Shanti is again dressed with her *thali* around her neck, and a *bindi* on her forehead. We learn that like Natasha and Amsugi's characters in *Broken Promises*, Shanti's religious identity is incorporated into her daily styling, even though she is dressed in western clothing. Shanti, however, also wears a wedding ring - a symbol of marriage Natasha's character desires but cannot wear because of Amsugi's rejection of it as a western practice.

A choice made by the filmmakers, both symbols of marriage in the form of the wedding ring and *thali* are represented as valid, and Shanti's character does not maintain as stringent requirements of ethno-linguistic and cultural boundaries as Amsugi from *Broken Promises* does, even though both characters are of the same ethno-linguistic background and religion. Adding to the preceding analyses of hybrid identities navigated by the various characters in the films, more complexly by the women, Shanti's character demonstrates another iteration of balancing traditional Indian culture and a more globalised or western environment. Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity (1994) emphasises its transformative aspects, creating new cultural forms and identities. Shanti's use of cultural markers can be perceived as an example of this, exemplifying South African Indian women amalgamating western and inherited Indian influences in their expressions of cultural identity.

In the assimilation or adaptation of western culture and its cultural markers, the historical effects of dominant culture on the formation of cultural identity should also be considered. For example, as discussed in *Broken Promises*, Amsugi's complete rejection of the wedding ring as a symbol of marriage and strict adherence to her inherited culture's value systems can be perceived as a form of resistance to hegemonic authority

as per Castells' model of identity construction (Castells, 1997). The western dominant culture in the historical context of South Africa affected the deconstruction and reconstruction of many notions of identity, such as within South African Indian communities, family structures, religions, and lifestyles (Desai and Vahed, 2012). This involved the Christianisation of Hindus, which Sooklal (1991) argues was a direct agenda of the apartheid government to instigate a decline in ancestral cultural practices.

Said (1978) delves into the impact of the West's conceptualisation of the Orient—or 'the other'—and how this has profoundly shaped postcolonial identity construction. In the context of the film, Shanti's wedding ring serves as a compelling example of this dynamic. The ring symbolises her assimilation of certain aspects of western Christian culture, thereby revealing the power dynamics influencing her character's self-conception as a postcolonial subject. However, Shanti's decision to keep her *thali* alongside the ring signifies more than mere assimilation; it stands as an act of cultural preservation. By doing so, she asserts the importance of her own religious and cultural heritage in expressing her identity.

The design of the location of the scene reveals further cultural markers contextualising Shanti's notions of identity. Similar to Amsugi's home in *Broken Promises*, Shanti's dining room is decorated in a way that makes the organic history of the space seem as though items have been collected and added over the years, resulting in a kitsch yet comfortable and familiar image within the frame for South African Indian audiences. Behind the characters of Devani and Prishen in the scene, there is a poster of the Hindu gods Shiva and Hanuman - an inclusion of their faith into their home space, indicating the importance of Hinduism in the Naidoo family, similar to the way in which the Masjid al-Haram indicated the faith of the Khan family in *For Better For Worse* in the intimate dining space.

On the dinner table, functional props in the form of various crockery items serve an array of culturally specific food. As with Amsugi's family and Ayesha in *For Better For Worse*, we observe a variety of Indian dishes such as curries, roti, dhal, and side salads. As represented by the characters, the act of preparing, serving, and consuming these

dishes connects the characters to a wider cultural context and history, thereby invoking a sense of diasporic communal identity. Moreover, across the three films, moments of meal-sharing are ritualistically depicted as opportunities for familial bonding and interpersonal connection. The consistency in the filmmakers' depictions of meal-sharing can be seen as a form of cultural encoding where the ritual is imbued with specific meanings that are designed to resonate with both the characters within the narrative and the audience. By consistently placing such emphasis on the act of meal-sharing and the type of cuisine served, the filmmakers engage in a form of cultural narrative that speaks to the values, traditions, and collective identity that exists in South African Indian communities. However, even within this apparent homogeneity, there are subtle variations that reflect the diversity within these communities. For example, the Naidoo family presents a variation in this theme. Unlike the more rigid family hierarchies depicted in *Broken Promises* and *For Better For Worse*, the Naidoos display a more egalitarian arrangement, as evidenced by the absence of an apparent 'head' of the table. Family members are dispersed around the table, with guests seated at the far end, hinting at a more informal familial structure.

Occurring at the same time as Shanti's dinner in the world of the story, the character of Jennifer hosts a *satsang*, a devotional gathering of religious community members (Vedalankar and Somera, 1975) at her home (figure 3d). This entails individuals gathering to sing *bhajans*, "an Indian song of devotional love which is sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments, on traditional themes, and may be chanted in temples or in public gatherings" (Parrinder, 1971: 44), in worship of Hindu deities. These *bhajans* are sung in Hindi, even though English is the first language of the majority of South African Indians. This is consequential to the history of South African Indians adapting to life in South Africa. Although religious temples were constructed from the time of indenture, the legislature of British colonisation from the 1920s onwards made practices difficult (Meer, 1969), and missionaries were designated the task of converting Hindus to Christianity. Hinduism saw a decline in practice, and a need to preserve the religion manifested, resulting in the formation of organisations focused on the task (Naidoo, 2007).

By the 1950s, the Group Areas Act came into effect, forcing communities of Indians to relocate to housing that did not accommodate their extended families or religious organisations. The joint Hindu family was to be separated into nuclear units (Hofmeyr & Oosthuizen, 1981), and so the loss of linguistic and religious integrity was felt further as younger generations were not mentored by elders and were not equipped by the oral tradition of passing on religion and culture. Schooling also affected the decline of Hinduism - a western and Christian education system saw English as the sole means of communicating, teaching and learning, and did not support alternative religious needs (Naidoo, 2007). In order for following generations to partake in the workforce and education systems, English became the primary language of South African Indians, at the expense of their mother tongues which were only employed in their religious practices, such as the singing of *bhajans* (Meer, 1969). Through the punting of religious organisations that remained intact, reformations of Hinduism in South Africa adapted to the needs and stresses of life.

The reformed Hindu movements represented a basic change in the practice of Hinduism. As a consequence they are better equipped than traditional Hinduism to meet the stress of the South African situation. They have laid greater emphasis on the philosophical interpretation of the ritual rather than the act itself. The teachings of these movements also have a firm theological basis unlike traditional Hinduism, which in most cases, were devoid of theological exegesis (Sooklal. 1986: 56).

Priests educated in the vernacular languages and understandings of religious texts resided in temples as leaders of practices of the faith. *Satsang* groups performed instances of prayer which included chanting devotional songs, meditation, and reciting religious texts. Jennifer's family is depicted as partaking in these gatherings, indicating their devotion and interest in Hindu practices. Within the scene, the group sings in a vernacular language; however, outside of the religious practices, they would revert back to English as their spoken tongue. As depicted by the filmmakers, the Kandasamy family practises an adapted and reformed version of the faith that has evolved due to the circumstances of indenture, colonialism, and apartheid in South Africa.

All the characters at the *satsang* are dressed in traditional Indian cultural attire, with the men in white or cream cotton *kurtas* and the women in light-coloured *punjabis* and sarees. Once more, Jennifer's style is minimalist, and within the more casual space of her home, she employs less colour and cultural Indian jewellery, rather wearing the *punjabi* as appropriate clothing for a religious gathering. Although Jennifer and Shanti share the same religious beliefs, they express this in different ways. Jennifer does not wear a *thali* but rather opens up her home to *satsang* and prayer. This is generous considering the nature of Jennifer and allows us to view a different angle of her personality that is spiritual.

Similar to the Khan home in *For Better For Worse*, the Kandasamy home is designed towards a curated look that aligns with Jennifer's established lifestyle aspirations. This contrasts with the more sentimental and random set design of the Naidoo home. Functional cultural props are used in the scene in the form of the *dholak* (drum) and harmonium being played during the *bhajan*. *Dholaks* are Indian drum instruments that are also used in other instances of the Indian diaspora. The harmonium, although originally a western instrument, was introduced to India in the 19th century and has been used in the making of its music since (Rahaim, 2011). Both instruments are associated with the playing of *bhajans* in South Africa.

In the scene, the musicians perform with mics pointed towards their instruments. The characters involved close their eyes and worship through singing. All characters employ the same uniform behaviour, indicating that it is culturally appropriate to embrace a meditative stillness and add one's voice to the chorus of prayer. This is a moment of religious and cultural specificity that would be understood primarily by the target audience of the film - South African Indians, and more specifically, Hindu South African Indians. The moment of prayer worship is uncommon in the exhibition of Indian culture and Hinduism in mainstream South African cinemas, much like Anisa's Islamic practice of prayer within her home in *For Better For Worse*.

The scripted *satsang* scene in the film serves multiple functions, both narrative and thematic, and offers an iteration of culturally specific representation of religious practices within South African Indian communities. On the surface, the *satsang* functions as a form of character development, providing insights into Jennifer's religious and cultural commitment (even though she maintains personal goals for the outcome of the *satsang* in the scene). On a deeper level, however, its inclusion signifies a deliberate choice by the filmmakers to highlight the intricacies of religious practice within the South African Indian community, thereby serving as a vital cultural marker. Furthermore, to the filmmaker, the incorporation of culturally and religiously specific practices like a *satsang* serves to enrich the narrative's authenticity and self-representations, with an aim to present the film as deeply rooted in the specificities of South African Indian communities. This attention to self-representation is therefore most likely included to resonate with the immediate community and primary audience.

The final scene of the film features a choreographed dance sequence by Jodi and Prishen (figure 3e) with background dancers to the Hindi song *Mehndi Laga Ke Rakhna* (1995) from the famous Bollywood film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995). At Aya's birthday party, all the women characters are dressed in traditional Indian cultural attire. Jodi, in a colourful *lehenga choli*, dances with Prishen, dressed in a western formal shirt and pants. They form the focal point of the dance sequence, much like Anisa in the closing scene of *For Better For Worse*. In a space also designed like a set to celebrate and cater to the dancing, the dance sequence is reminiscent of Bollywood dance scenes, however, it is slightly more motivated and diegetically integrated into the narrative as reaction shots of the family are incorporated into the sequence, and the dance is announced before it happens; it is apparently one of Aya's favourite songs.

As mentioned, relationships to Bollywood were already established in South African Indian communities, as Bollywood films featured in major cinemas and then on national television, with South African Indian viewership demonstrating a clear target market (Ebrahim, 2008). The eventual inspiration and employment of Bollywood aesthetics and themes in South African Indian filmmaking practices present a further nuanced development in the relationship and cultural influence. For example, the use of a song

from a famous Bollywood film in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* serves as a direct link to its ongoing influence on South African Indian cultures. The inclusion of dance scenes in both *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* and *For Better For Worse* suggests a degree of cultural homogeneity, indicating shared South African Indian values and influence, regardless of any religious inclinations.

The way in which the song is introduced in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* is indicative of the familiarity and relationship South African Indians have with Bollywood. The song being one of Aya's favourites not only offers a glimpse into his personal preferences but also reflects the pervasive influence of Bollywood films and music in the daily lives of some South African Indians. This cultural element is so deeply embedded that it seamlessly integrates into their celebrations. In contrast, *For Better For Worse* utilises the Bollywood-inspired dance sequence more as a spectacle or grand finale, thereby emphasising the emotive and performative dimensions of Bollywood's influence. Collectively, both films underscore the role of Bollywood as a cultural bridge that connects South African Indian communities to various aspects of their Indian heritage, thus highlighting its significance in the process of identity formation.

In the discussion of the characters' identity formation, as well as the analysed cultural markers, there is a notable absence of distinctly African context or influence in the film, as well as the other films in the sample. This could be indicative of several factors. It might be reflective of the filmmakers' intention to focus on the nuances of the South African Indian community, thereby unintentionally sidelining the broader South African and African cultural landscape. This could stem from a desire to explore the internal dynamics of a community that itself exists at the crossroads of multiple identities—Indian, South African, Hindu, and so forth. From a historical perspective, the South African Indian community has often been positioned in a liminal space, facing unique challenges distinct from the African and white populations. This positionality could lead to an inward focus, thereby relegating the broader African context to the periphery of community consciousness.

Moreover, the absence of an African context or influence could also be read through the lens of Said's *Orientalism* (1978), where South African Indians, perhaps unconsciously, adopt a form of western gaze that focuses more on their ancestral Indian heritage and less on their African context. Such a focus could inadvertently prioritise Indian over African traditions, or centre western intervention in the communities' historical trajectory and influences, thereby echoing broader global hierarchies that often marginalise African cultural expressions. The absence of a palpable African context or influence in the film could be interpreted in multiple ways; however, this absence in itself can also be perceived as a form of commentary.

The absence of African influences in the film's narrative or cultural markers may reflect the historical trajectory of South African Indian communities which have been shaped by a long history of segregation and compartmentalisation. During the apartheid era, for instance, Indian communities were segregated from African communities, limiting social interactions and cultural exchanges. As a result, the space for amalgamating cultures was constrained, creating conditions conducive to the development of insular cultural practices. Westernisation, on the other hand, was imposed upon many communities in South Africa through colonialism and later, globalisation. This imposition would have diminished the importance of local African cultures in favour of a more Eurocentric worldview. Within this framework, both South African Indians and African communities were subject to a form of cultural hegemony that prioritised western norms and values. Thus, the absence of African culture in the narrative could be indicative of this hierarchical relationship, reflecting a complex interplay of cultural forces that South African Indians have had to navigate over time.

Acknowledging the deficit of an African context or influence within the film, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* nonetheless presents a tapestry of cultural identities that interplay between Indian and western cultural symbols in the context of post-apartheid Chatsworth. Religion is also portrayed as an integral part of South African Indian communities, informing daily practices and community relationships. In these representations, the film also underscores a heterogeneity within religious practices,

subtly demonstrating the different manners in which the faith is interpreted and worshipped within the community.

Concluding the analysis of the cultural markers within scenes of the home or depicting cultural rituals, the sample of three films—each with its unique narrative focus—unveils a constellation of shared cultural markers, social rituals, and religious expressions that typify South African Indian identity. However, these films do not merely present a homogenous account; they also reveal varying degrees of complexity and heterogeneity in the formation of identity, as manifest in their characters. This tension between unity and diversity in cultural representation provides a rich landscape for further investigation and discussion, themes which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent concluding sub-chapter.

Conclusion

In the concluding chapter analysing cultural markers, social gatherings, and rituals within the films *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), several distinct trends emerge concerning the portrayal of South African Indian cultural identities. These trends include: the mediation and negotiation of hybrid identities by the female characters, meal-sharing of home-cooked Indian cuisine, and direct as well as indirect references to the cultural influence of Bollywood on South African Indian notions of identity.

Interestingly, analyses of the films reveal a noticeable absence of African influence in the depiction of cultural markers and expressions of identity. Certain scenes, however, such as the *braai* in *Broken Promises*, do reflect a broader sense of 'South Africanness'. Moreover, the films are punctuated by scenes that illustrate cultural specificity, thereby showcasing a visible heterogeneity within the formation of South African Indian identities. For instance, *For Better For Worse* features scenes of Anisa in private Islamic prayer, as well as a ritual led by the Hindu *temple aunty*, both of which stand out for their cultural distinctiveness. Similarly, the *satsang* in Jennifer's home in *Keeping Up*

with the Kandasamys offers a unique portrayal of Hindu religious worship within South African Indian communities.

The leading characters, all women in the films, depict a consistent complex navigation of multiple influences on their expressions of cultural identity which they then mediate and present as different facets of themselves in different contexts. In *Broken Promises*, Natasha is first seen in a cocktail dress wearing an engagement ring as a symbol of promised marriage, indicating an alignment to western values and symbols in her daily life. The symbol of marriage becomes renegotiated in the context of Natasha's new husband's family's requirements, where Natasha then adapts to the religious and cultural symbol of a *thali* to represent her marital status. The interplay of symbols reflects the process of cultural adaptation in line with the shifting dynamics of a multicultural society, as described by Hall's theory of postcolonial identity formation (Hall, 1989). Natasha's awareness and navigation of differing cultural symbols and contexts also reflects the 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) of negotiation she constantly re-enters in the development of her evolving identity.

The character of Anisa in *For Better For Worse* maintains already discussed similarities to Natasha. Anisa presents the various faces of her multifaceted identity in relation to the social or cultural context. For example, as Anisa prays, she is dressed in a black hijab, a head covering worn by Muslim women. She performs it in the intimate space of her bedroom, thereby revealing a conscious choice of only revealing her religious affinity in private. At work, Anisa chooses to wear formal western clothing, also indicating the conscious decision of presenting a modernised or westernised aspect of her identity negotiation to her colleagues and social spheres. However, like Natasha, Anisa adorns Indian attire in cultural gatherings or important social moments.

The aesthetic treatment of Anisa's character in regards to cultural markers, social and cultural gatherings, and rituals further emphasises the complexities of a South African Indian Muslim woman navigating the intersection of their hybridisation in a post-apartheid South Africa. In addition to the exemplification of Bhabha's (1994) space of negotiation in creating a new hybridised identity, Anisa's projections of identity align

with the concepts of legitimising and project identities as discussed by Castells (1997). In her legitimising identity, she foregrounds her western cultural influences and her 'South Africanness'. On the other hand, Anisa's character also represents a project identity - a hybrid identity that interplays personal religious values, South African western influence in professional and social spheres, and respect and acknowledgement of one's Indian cultural heritages in moments of significance.

Additionally, the use of a *thali* as well as a wedding ring by Shanti in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* represents another materialisation of the negotiations of cultural identity that South African Indian women enter into, much like Natasha's dilemma in *Broken Promises*. Shanti's simultaneous use of both cultural markers demonstrates her acceptance of both her religious heritage and the broader westernised South African context. The adornment of both symbols reflects her recognition of both as valid, suggesting a more flexible approach to cultural boundaries.

The evident preference for the female characters to don Indian cultural attire for scenes with significant social events, while predominantly opting for western-style clothing in more casual settings, underscores the represented fluidity in their cultural identities. This duality not only reveals part of the hybrid nature of South African Indian identities but also reflects the gendered burden of cultural preservation largely shouldered by South African Indian women. In stark contrast, their male counterparts within these communities seem to experience a greater degree of flexibility in their negotiations of identity. Consequently, this denotes an intricate dynamic wherein women play a crucial role in upholding and transmitting cultural heritage while also being expected to assimilate to the broader dominant westernised culture.

The three films also pivot around the recurring motif of meal-sharing, specifically home-cooked Indian cuisine made by the mother figures in the family. This represents a central point of cultural expression within South African Indian communities. In *Broken Promises*, the comfort and familiarity exuded by the characters while interacting with the food signifies its entrenched role as a staple within South African Indian households. Both Natasha and Amsugi's culinary skills - handing down traditional curry recipes

generationally - highlights the continuity of cultural practices and the role of women in transmitting these traditions. The mutual respect accorded to the meal by the family, irrespective of its perceived taste, highlights the significance of communal dining and appreciation of homemade food in South African Indian cultural contexts.

Similarly, in *For Better For Worse*, family bonding occurs around the dining table, with an array of South Asian dishes manifesting cultural heterogeneity within South African Indian cuisine. Once again, the act of cooking and sharing these meals serves as a medium for preserving cultural values. In eating with their hands and partaking in conversation, the family performs their inherited culture, once again emphasising the significance of this ritual in their communal and cultural identities. *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* continues the trend of foregrounding Indian food and meal-sharing as key cultural markers and rituals. The casual seating arrangement of the family, in contrast to the rigid hierarchies observed in the previous films, suggests a shift in traditional power dynamics or from the power dynamics present at the dinner table. Despite this difference, the importance of connecting over home-cooked food for family bonding and cultural preservation remains a consistent theme.

The shared meals depicted in the films not only invoke a sense of community values and continuity but also are representative of an avenue for South African Indians to assert their cultural identities within the broader South African context. The prominence of women or maternal figures in these scenes, active in preserving and transmitting culinary traditions, further highlights their pivotal role in shaping and maintaining various notions of cultural identity in the face of changing societal contexts and circumstances. Overall, the films present homogeneity in the representation of culinary culture and family bonding in South African Indian communities.

A final trend evident in the aesthetic treatments of the films refers to the different expressions of the influence of Bollywood on South African Indian cultural identities. The Bollywood Café in *Broken Promises* establishes the palpable presence of Indian cinema in the everyday lives of South African Indians. The café is not only a dining venue but also a communal space in which the characters may indulge in popular

culture as well as a form of connection to their Indian heritage. This allows them to experience and reimagine their cultural traditions within their South African context, highlighting the diasporic engagement with cultural influences from an ancestral homeland.

Anisa's choreographed dance scene in *For Better For Worse* is a clear nod to the song and dance numbers characteristic of Bollywood films. The sequence can be interpreted as Anisa's assertion of a facet of her hybridised cultural identity, drawing upon the cultural markers made popular in Bollywood cinema. The nature of the scene - as it appears to transcend the realism of the film's entire narrative - serves as a celebratory and sensational ending to a love story, further reflecting Bollywood characteristics and its influence on South African Indian communities and audiences that would understand the transition. In a similar tone, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* utilises a popular Bollywood song for a dance sequence, thereby offering an explicit example of the cultural transmission of Bollywood influences on South African Indian cultures and its filmmaking. The choreographed dance, reminiscent of Bollywood dance numbers, indicates the characters' familiarity and knowledge of popular Bollywood culture. Through the selection of the well-known song, the film is effectively bridging geographical and cultural differences with the aim of reinforcing an affiliation with Indian culture.

The influence of Bollywood in the three films serves to illuminate the ways in which South African Indian communities negotiate their multi-layered identities. Bollywood cinema provides an easily accessible and exciting link to the ancestral homeland for South African Indians, with aesthetic markers and styles that can be emulated in South African Indian filmmaking practices to reinforce this influence and relationship. This cinematic intersection provides a rich space for South African Indian filmmakers to engage with, interpret, and assert their multifaceted self-representations of identities.

While the films examined in this study extensively portray various facets of South African Indian identity, there is a conspicuous absence of African influences in these depictions. This is particularly intriguing given the films' geographical and social

context, which is intrinsically tied to the broader African landscape. Several rationales could account for this absence. One possibility could be rooted in the historical development of South African Indian communities, which may have evolved in somewhat segregated settings, limiting cultural amalgamation with indigenous African communities. Furthermore, the lack of African elements could be reflective of an implicit bias, perhaps unconsciously adopting a form of Said's Orientalism (1978), which tends to centre Indian or even western transnational cultural elements over African influences.

A noteworthy scene depicting African influence and cultural specificity of 'South Africanness' is the *braai* hosted by Ruben in the closing scene of *Broken Promises*. 'Mandoza', the name chosen by Ruben and Natasha for their unborn son, is associated with the late Kwaito musician who was an icon in South Africa's pop culture. The use of this name incorporates an instance of black African influence into the film, also serving as a nod to a broader, inclusive identity that goes beyond the South African Indian community.

This naming choice serves multiple narrative and thematic functions. It acknowledges the cultural heterogeneity within South Africa, an acknowledgment evidenced to be lacking in narratives focusing on South African Indian communities. It also challenges the audience to consider the complexities of identity formation in a multicultural society, raising questions about how cultural specificity can coexist with broader forms of national identity. Lastly, it adds a layer of relatability to the story by incorporating a real-world cultural reference that would resonate with a South African audience. Overall, the name 'Mandoza' operates not just as a character identifier but as a complex symbol of cultural interaction.

Lastly, in discussing the scene, a *braai*, akin to a barbecue, is a distinctively South African tradition, and its inclusion in the film depicts the multiculturally influenced identities of South African Indians. The event reflects how South African Indian communities may engage in cultural practices not solely tied to their Indian heritage but is also illustrative of embracing a South African national identity. In this scene, the

braai demonstrates an acknowledgment and acceptance of broader South African culture, with the practice highlighting the dynamic nature of cultural identity in South African Indian communities, shaped by many influences including the South African cultural landscape.

Another scene depicting cultural specificity is Anisa's prayer in *For Better For Worse*. In this scene, Anisa adorns the *hijab* as she engages in Islamic prayer, presenting the actions as a deeply personal act of faith. This moment reflects her commitment to her religious practices, suggesting that these practices play a pivotal role in her identity as a South African Indian Muslim woman. The scene also subtly communicates the heterogeneity of religious beliefs within the South African Indian community. Anisa's individual expression of her religious identity is indicative of the variety of notions of identity held within South African Indian communities, with the diversity even further emphasised through the scene featuring Merv and the temple aunty. The scene also reflects internal cultural struggles within some South African Indian communities, specifically between traditional beliefs and contemporary notions. The inclusion of the *temple aunty* in the film presents an aspect of Hinduism and the larger South African Indian communities that may be identifiable to local self-represented audiences rather than external viewers, also thereby contributing to the variances of heterogeneity that characterise South African Indian cultures.

Lastly, Jennifer's *satsang* in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* offers a final depiction of cultural specificity in the three examined films. The act of hosting a *satsang*, a religious and devotional gathering where community members sing *bhajans*, embodies a significant facet of Hindu practices and demonstrates the ways in which these practices have been adapted and preserved within the South African context. Despite the prevalence of English as the first language amongst most South African Indians, the *bhajans* are sung in Hindi, reflecting a commitment to preserving the religious traditions. The maintenance of vernacular language in these practices and subsequent reversion to English in general communication reflects the complex dynamics of linguistic hybridity and adaptability within South African Indian communities. The scene, also performed in the home of the Kandasamys, is an example of how South

African Indians have reformed and adapted their faith traditions in response to their unique historical and social contexts.

From the observation of the attire worn by various characters in the films, to the religious symbols donned by characters navigating their cultural identities, negotiations of multiplicity in hybrid identities are revealed, most commonly by the female characters who bear the roles of cultural custodians and preservers of traditional practices amidst inevitable forces of change. Analysis of the depicted cultural markers, social and cultural gatherings, and rituals reveal shared homogenous values amongst South African Indian cultures.

At the same time, exhibited instances of cultural specificity exist, demonstrating heterogeneity within South African Indian communities as self-represented in the filmmaking of the three films in the sample. *Broken Promises*, *For Better For Worse*, and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* offer rich portrayals of South African Indian identities and their interplay between tradition and modernity, faith-based and transnational influences, as well as individual and collective identities in their cinematic aesthetic treatments.

Lastly, the complexity emerging in this chapter, through the analysis enabled by EVAM's multiple criteria, substantiates the concept of 'prismatic analysis' as discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter's focus illuminates how various cultural, historical, and social influences form unique representations of identity. The utility of this metaphor and its application within a framework are therefore further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The concluding chapter collates and reflects upon the core insights derived from the analytical chapters of this research. In the first section, the parameters of the research are revisited, followed by a cohesive discussion of the primary research findings, including the significant themes and patterns discerned from the analyses in Chapters Three, Four, and Five. In the section following the findings, the focus shifts to the theoretical implications arising from the results of the study. Here, the implications of the broader theoretical discourses and seminal theories within the scope of this research will be denoted, and the original contribution of this research is presented. The following sub-chapter comprises an objective reflection in canvassing the limitations of the research. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be provided, charting potential directions of inquiry and study that scholars might pursue in building upon the scholarly research established herein.

Findings and Discussion

Academic discourses on South African cinema, although expanding, offer limited detailed scrutiny of cinematic works generated by and intended for the South African Indian demographic group. This deficit not only does a disservice to the broader academic subjects of South African filmmaking and postcolonial diasporic filmmaking practices but also carries wider cultural ramifications by marginalising an essential voice constituting part of the post-apartheid South African milieu. The study sought to address this deficit, aiming to enrich both the academic and cultural understanding of South African cinema.

This research aimed to explore cinematic self-representations of cultural identity in three South African Indian films produced in the post-apartheid period. The problem statement that guided this research was to determine whether self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking enables visibility of complex, heterogeneous representations of cultural identities typically designated as "Indian" in South Africa. To navigate this complex terrain, the research was structured around three key objectives:

dissecting the notions of identity as portrayed by characters and family units in the selected films; identifying and scrutinising the aesthetic socio-cultural markers in scenes in each film; and evaluating the modes of production and distribution to gauge the films' visibility to target markets and audiences. The film productions selected were set and produced within the same locale, and therefore share historical contexts: *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010) and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017).

In conducting the literature review, the intricate dynamics of identity navigation within South African Indian communities were explored. Key works by Desai and Vahed (2012), as well as Pillay (2015), were drawn upon to examine the evolving nature of South African Indian identity. The literature review revealed that while there is a burgeoning body of work on South African cinema, the specific focus on films produced by and for the South African Indian community remains underrepresented. More represented in scholarship are the effects of Bollywood and Indian cinema on South African Indian notions of cultural identity and South African consumption of such cinemas. The present research, therefore, offers an original contribution by focusing on an underexplored area of South African cinema. It engages with key theories related to identity formation and cultural expression, thereby enriching existing discourses and offering new avenues for future research.

The methodology of the research employed a comprehensive approach to understanding self-representations in South African Indian filmmaking. The research was conducted in a qualitative manner, utilising a range of data sources, including archival information, existing interviews, and news reports. Secondary sources from existing scholarship, archival data, and resources such as the annual reports of the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) were also drawn upon. This ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the context in which these films were produced and received.

Distinguishing this study's approach to the methodology, integration of contextual analysis, including sociological contextualisation as well as the films' political economies, aided in understanding the broader influences that shaped the films'

representations and receptions by South African Indian viewing audiences. By including and examining factors such as community dynamics, historical influences, and economic conditions, the research more informedly examined how the films reflect and represent their immediate communities within the broader socio-political landscape of South Africa. This informed the textual analysis, thereby unveiling the meaning within representations encoded in the film productions. The combination of textual and contextual analysis not only considered the narrative and aesthetic treatments of the films but also situated the films within their broader cultural and historical contexts.

This approach was enabled through the novel adaptation of the Entertainment Value Assessment Matrix (EVAM), originally developed by Passchier (2012). This model proposes that entertainment value can be derived from five components comprising a film production: Narrative, Performance, Medium, Aesthetics, and Control. EVAM has been implemented by the South African Broadcasting Service (SABC) for evaluating entertainment products during the production process (Passchier, 2012). In this study, EVAM has been adapted to serve as a methodological framework for the analysis of established film productions, effectively facilitating a synthesis of textual and contextual analysis through its modular nature in addressing the research questions posed in the study. This research demonstrates how EVAM can be adapted to suit different research needs in film studies, providing a framework capable of capturing the complexity of film production.

Looking more specifically at the framework's applications in addressing the research questions of the study, firstly, the modes of production and distribution in relation to the target audience were analysed in Chapter Three, with the components presented for analysis being Control (target market, distribution, marketing) and Medium (cinematography, sound design, editing) where applicable. The second research question pertained to analysing notions of cultural identity held by the characters and family units presented in the three films. This involved examining the depicted narrative events, social and family dynamics, as well as language. Therefore, the components of Narrative (analysing themes, story progression, conflict/obstacles, subtext, and context) and Performance (focusing on human interaction, cultural/societal cues, emotional

development, character psychology, dialogue, body language, and movement), in the context of the genre, were categorically analysed in Chapter Four where applicable. The third research question involved identifying and juxtaposing the depicted aesthetic cultural markers in each film, focusing on costume and styling, art direction, and character performance in scenes within the home or depicting cultural rituals. To achieve this, the disciplines within Aesthetics (colour, space and composition, visual representation and designs, wardrobe and styling, location, set dressing and props) and Performance were utilised for scene analysis in Chapter Five.

The integration of contextual analysis with textual analysis through the adapted EVAM framework enabled the uncovering of meaning in various scenes encoded in the self-representations of South African Indian films. The approach recognises that the meaning within a film, and the intentions of the filmmaker, cannot be fully understood without considering the geographical, socio-cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. For example, a key point of analysis in answering the first research question included the dialect of certain characters. Understanding achieved through contextual analysis, in the inspection of the film scene through textual analysis, proved crucial in interpreting how dialogue functioned as representations of identity. Discussed in the analytical chapters, dialects in South African Indian communities signify not just ethnic origins but also convey nuances of class, community, and cultural affiliations. Through the analytical framework, the study was therefore able to examine characters' negotiations of identity and senses of belonging within the narratives.

In attending to the second research question, the analysis of rituals, cuisine, attire, and other markers laden with cultural value within the film scenes was enriched through the analytical approach utilised in this study. Furthermore, the ability of EVAM to intrinsically include a production's strategy for marketing, distribution, and exhibition in its constitution enabled an effective strategy in discussing the third research question. The modular approach to the analytical chapters allowed the various elements of film productions to be inspected according to the specific needs of the research questions. In summary, the methodology offered a dual framework for understanding the films as

both cultural products and market commodities, thereby enabling a focused examination of the film productions through the research questions.

Discovered through the application of the framework, a recognised limitation of the adapted version of EVAM lies in its structured headings and subheadings, which are designed to scrutinise the components of a scene in detail. While this makes EVAM an advantageous tool for an in-depth examination of complete scenes, its efficiency in the context of comparative analyses involving multiple projects becomes more complex. The framework's focus on specific elements within a scene can inadvertently constrain a broader comparative analysis, which may require a more flexible approach to effectively capture the nuances across different films or scenes.

It should be noted that in the previous analytical chapters, as well as in this concluding chapter, a disproportionate focus on female characters might be apparent. However, this is not the result of any analytical bias or an intentional focus on women characters in the film, but rather a reflection of the films themselves, in which each of the main characters happens to be women. These film productions are primarily narratives centred on the experiences, challenges, and agency of women figures within the depicted South African Indian communities. Consequently, they naturally occupy a significant portion of the analysis and the discussion of the findings.

In the findings of the analysis of the notions of identity held by the characters and family units presented in the sample of film productions, core themes consistent in all films emerged in the form of family unity and hierarchies, community centrality, intergenerational conflict, and the navigation of hybrid identities. Family unity and hierarchies were depicted as central elements in the social fabric of the characters. Intergenerational conflict was a further prevalent theme, often manifesting in the form of tension between values and agendas held by the parental generation and the younger generation.

Notably, characters in the films are often depicted as navigating complex, hybrid identities. This theme is interlinked with the other themes, as the negotiation of these

identities often occurs within the context of family dynamics, community expectations, and generational conflicts. The characters are shown to be self-aware of their specificity not just as South African Indians, but also as ethnic subgroups within that broader category. These core themes are not isolated but are interrelated, demonstrating the layered interplay of family, community, faith, and culture in shaping the identities of the characters.

Throughout the three films, the preservation of the integrity of the family structure constituted an important theme, in many instances emphasising the consequential role that family plays in individual identity construction. Particularly notable as a consistent theme is the recurrent depiction of maternal figures wielding considerable influence over their children's lives. In invoking consistent themes of family hierarchy, unity, and the prominent role of maternal figures in family dynamics, the films at the surface present a semblance of homogeneity, but upon deeper inspection, reveal more complex dynamics and negotiations of power.

In *Broken Promises*, the family structure is hierarchical, with Ruben, the breadwinning son, being placed at the head of the table by the character of his mother, Amsugi. She considers herself the matriarch of the family in the context of upholding her traditional family values and dominating her daughter-in-law. However, in the narrative, her power and influence extend to manipulating her son for her own agendas, and his character often overrules her in moments when he chooses to be authoritative. An example of this occurs early in the film, as Amsugi questions Ruben's choice of partner (a Hindi woman, of a different ethnolinguistic background to their Tamil family). In a monologue, Ruben invalidates his mother's beliefs, ending the conversation at the moment of his choosing. In fact, both women characters – Ruben's mother and his wife – are forced to appeal to his character to inflict any type of change in the household. Through this representation, the filmmaker Naidu portrays a nuanced family dynamic that at first appears matriarchal, but is ultimately patriarchal.

The film's exploration of these dynamics is rooted in the cultural contexts of South African Indian communities as a tension is reflected between traditional values and the

evolving modern context with shifting power dynamics, gender roles, and the impact of socio-cultural changes within South African Indian families. The perception of male authority is questioned through the character dynamics of an ineffectual father-figure and an assertive matriarchal figure. The initial illustrated subversion of patriarchal power depicts Tony, the elder male of the family, as an amusing and powerless drunkard. An appearance of authority is presented by Amsugi, who, in actuality, is only able to exert power on the most vulnerable member of the family – the new daughter-in-law. The filmmaker's depiction of the power dynamics between Amsugi, Natasha, and Ruben presents a commentary on the evolving interplay of gender roles, suggesting a state of transition where the traditional reverence for elders and predefined roles are in flux.

For Better For Worse depicts a more traditional notion of a patriarchal nuclear family. The family dynamics are more transparent, with the father figure, Yusuf, characterising the patriarch. The character of his wife is portrayed as a dutiful housewife, referring to Yusuf in important family matters and involving herself in the lives of her children. The children in the family are all afforded different degrees of autonomy, as depicted with the freedoms experienced by Yusuf's eldest daughter, Anisa. These freedoms, however, are granted by the father's character, as we see him attempt to revoke them when engaged in a heated disagreement with Anisa. This depicts another instance in which an appearance of power is held by a female character, but it ultimately exists by permission of the patriarch.

In contrast, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* presents two matriarchal families in which the mother figures run the households and make decisions for the family. In both the Kandasamy and Naidoo households, the husband characters may be the breadwinners, but they are depicted as unquestioningly following the lifestyle prescribed by their wives. In the film, the children are afforded freedom by their families; however, they are not free from interference in their lives by their mothers.

The films collectively highlight the complexity of family dynamics within the South African Indian community, challenging monolithic interpretations of power and agency.

They reveal that while women may occupy positions of apparent authority, these positions are often circumscribed by patriarchal norms and expectations. The films serve as a lens through which to examine the intricate ways in which power is negotiated within families, reflecting broader societal structures and cultural norms. They underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the roles and agency of women within this specific cultural context, contributing to broader discourses on the representations of gender, power, and identity within South African Indian communities.

Intertwined with the depiction of family dynamics, gender roles are interrogated in the narratives. In *Broken Promises*, Amsugi's self-appointed role as the matriarch of the family and primary caregiver to her son is challenged by the introduction of her daughter-in-law and the more mature characteristics that she invokes in him. Prior to her marriage, Natasha is portrayed as an independent character, but her entry into a new household necessitates a shift in her role. She transitions into performing a role laden with cultural and familial expectations. This transformation also signifies a deeper shift in her identity and agency. Along the narrative, when she decides to separate from Ruben, this act of leaving serves as a powerful assertion of her character's agency and a rejection of the assumed gender roles that confined her. It signifies her refusal to be subjugated within a patriarchal system that does not validate her experiences or concerns. Furthermore, characters such as Anisa in *For Better For Worse* break from the conventional expectations of a female member of a South African Indian Muslim family as established in the scholarly literature. Anisa's character exhibits career ambitions and the challenges of a romantic relationship that is irregular to the established cultural norms, especially considering that the character of her mother is a dutiful and proud homemaker. In *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, Shanti and Jennifer's characters orchestrate their households, while also performing the duties of housewives. This duality serves to question the simplistic categorisation of gender roles, revealing more nuance in the formations and negotiations of identity within the depicted characters and family structures.

By interrogating traditional gender roles, the films therefore also challenge cultural norms and expectations. These topics, incorporated by filmmakers, prompt the audience

to question the validity and rigidity of these positions, thereby opening up space for dialogue and potential change within the community. The films offer a nuanced understanding of agency within cultural contexts that often define its limits. Characters such as Natasha and Anisa navigate terrains of expectation and constraint, ultimately asserting their agency in ways that challenge the status quo. The questioning of traditional roles may also reflect broader societal shifts, capturing the tensions and transformations occurring within South African Indian communities in the post-apartheid period. As families become exposed to different cultural influences, the established traditions and roles are inevitably questioned and redefined. This is elaborated upon in the inspection of the cultural markers exhibited in the films.

Associated with both discussions of family structure and gendered roles, the depicted ritual of meal-sharing in the films serves as a platform where multiple dimensions of cultural identity, family hierarchy, and community values intersect. The act of preparing and sharing South Asian dishes operates as a vessel for the cultural transmission of inherited culinary traditions. The maternal figures often spearhead this ritual, underscoring their integral role in the preservation and dissemination of cultural knowledge. Through food, they impart specific tastes, smells, and textures that encode generations of familial history and collective memory, effectively bridging the gap between ancestral roots and contemporary lifestyles.

Across all three films in the sample, the dining table sets the stage for a nuanced display of family hierarchies, as observed in the varying seating arrangements and interactions among family members. This most often situates the patriarchal figure at the physical head of the table, with the exception of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, in which the women characters still perform cultural gendered duties. However, the dining environment is depicted as more casual and communal. A character's absence from this ritual is also symbolic. As illustrated in *For Better For Worse*, when characters are in conflict, their failure to attend these meal-sharing events serves as a non-verbal yet potent form of communicating unhappiness. The dialogue that accompanies these meals often delves into broader issues, from personal challenges to communal affairs, thus serving as a forum for the socialisation process that is central to the formation of

community bonds. Beyond the family unit, the filmmakers' depictions of the meal-sharing ritual scenes encapsulate their perception of South African Indian cultural identities. The act of communing and sharing food and discussion emphasises the family units' collective values over individual identity.

Community involvement and reputation is a recurring theme that permeates all three films. The priority of maintaining a favourable social standing and community reputation is especially evident among the characters representing the parental generation of South African Indians raising children in the post-apartheid period. In *Better For Worse*, Ayesha's emotional breakdown in a key moment of the film comes when she learns that her daughter Anisa is romantically involved with a waiter. Ayesha's strong emotional reaction reflects her intense concern about how her family is perceived in their community. For her, Anisa's choices feel like a personal betrayal that risks damaging the family's social reputation. Ayesha considers her community involvement and the esteem in which her family is held to be a vital part of her identity.

The characters portraying the roles of mothers or parental figures in these narratives exemplify South African Indians who are navigating a complex web of social and cultural norms that have been shaped over multiple generations. These figures bear the mantle of preserving the family's honour and standing in the community. To these characters, the task is more than a matter of holding traditional values; it is an essential survival strategy in a society where the connections within a community can act as a safety net both socially and economically. For characters such as Amsugi and Ayesha, the potential for public disrepute serves as a significant deterrent, as a violation of these deeply ingrained cultural codes could lead to not only personal disgrace but could have broader implications for the family's social standing.

In comprehending the focus placed on community reputation by these characters, it is crucial to consider the historical and socio-political background of the South African Indians they represent, specifically the generations that have experienced the rigid social, economic, and spatial restrictions of apartheid governance. This experience has led to the internalisation of a guarded sense of community preservation that often

manifests as an obsession with social reputation. This strong inclination toward maintaining community reputation also establishes an interesting dynamic of intergenerational conflict within the films. While the older parental characters are invested in sustaining traditional norms to different degrees, younger characters question or challenge these established norms more than their elders, opting instead to forge new identities that are more reflective of their individual desires. This recurrently leads to conflict between the younger characters and their parents in the narratives.

In the films, intergenerational conflict serves as a potent vehicle to examine broader societal shifts and questions of identity within the South African Indian community. This tension transcends mere familial discord, reflecting the filmmakers' perceptions of issues related to culture, tradition, and personal autonomy. The younger figures in the films are not just challenging their parents; they are challenging an entire system of beliefs that have been handed down through generations. Their struggles represent the growing pains of a society in transition, as new, more individualistic norms clash with traditional collective values. Characters such as Natasha and Anisa encapsulate the struggle for personal autonomy against a backdrop of culturally imposed gender roles and expectations. Their conflicts with their elders are symptomatic of broader societal tensions, pointing towards a future where individual desires and a more pluralistic understanding of identity might take precedence.

The interplays of intergenerational conflict and the filmmakers' choices in navigating it through the characters offer a microcosm of perceived broader transformational shifts occurring in South African society, especially within self-represented Indian communities. Both the parental figures and the younger characters represent different facets of change, from the entrenched caution shaped by historical racial and social divides to the burgeoning desire for individual expression in a more open and integrated world.

The conclusion of each narrative serves as a pivotal moment where the transformation of the family unit comes to light, highlighting the nuanced ways in which individuals and their relationships have evolved. The climactic scenes are not merely an endpoint

but a gateway to altered dynamics within the family. In the case of Jennifer and Shanti in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, the after-effects of conflict force a revaluation of their roles and power dynamics within the family. The end of their narrative reflects a shift in the families' internal politics. Both characters come to terms with the reality of their coexistence and the need to renegotiate their roles within their respective families to maintain peace and unity, thus exemplifying fluidity in their own values and familial relationships. *Broken Promises* offers a different kind of transformation—Natasha's struggle against her mother-in-law serves as a catalyst for both to reconsider their positions and roles within the family. The elder, Amsugi, comes to realise that the perpetuation of her rigid values serves neither her nor the younger generation. In fact, it placed her family's lives in danger, and therefore she relinquished decision-making power to her son and her daughter-in-law. In *For Better For Worse*, the characters of Yusuf and Ayesha reflect character growth as they develop newfound respect for their daughter's choices, even if they deviate from traditional paths. Anisa's marriage, once a source of conflict, becomes an accepted and celebrated part of the family's evolving dynamic, reflecting changing attitudes toward marital freedom and individual agency. By each narrative conclusion, prominent characters within the family units are depicted as stepping into reshaped identities, both as individuals and as parts of a continually evolving familial structure.

Before further discussing the reshaping of identities within the characters, it is important to acknowledge a notable influence on the filmmakers' narratives and therefore the depictions of the characters. This influence exists in the transnational Bollywood aesthetic markers that are evident in all three films. The incorporation of Bollywood elements into the films serves as another layer of cultural negotiation, becoming a narrative tool for the expression of the multifaceted identities of South African Indians in post-apartheid South Africa. Be it through choreographed dance sequences in both *For Better For Worse* and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, or a café dedicated to Bollywood culture in *Broken Promises*, the Mumbai film industry is intentionally and visibly manifested in the cinematic self-representations by the filmmakers, thereby highlighting its significance to the broader South African Indian communities.

The setting of Bollywood Café in *Broken Promises* exemplifies how the Indian film industry has permeated the social locales of South Africans, becoming a communal space for cultural engagement. The choices made by the filmmaker to include this stylised location emphasise the cultural fusion experienced by South African Indians, as well as the familiarity with which they engage with these influences. It presents a space where characters may engage with their Indian heritage in a manner that is both nostalgic and contemporary. Furthermore, it is not just a physical locale but a metaphorical one, where characters engage with Indian iconography while simultaneously situating it within their South African reality. This dual engagement highlights the diasporic negotiation with cultural influences from an ancestral homeland, enabling a reimagining of cultural traditions in a distinct South African context.

The presentation of the café scene, as well as the Bollywood-inspired dance sequences in *For Better For Worse* and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, not only enable a reimagining but also actively celebrate it. The sequences, drawing from Bollywood's iconic song and dance tradition, transcend the realism of the films' narratives. Beyond functioning as celebratory endings to love stories, they present intentionally vibrant assertions of a blended cultural identity that is both South African and Indian. The scenes serve as a visual representation of the hybridity navigated by South African Indians.

Utilised by the filmmakers in all three films, the Bollywood aesthetic markers speak to the cultural mediation properties of cinema, serving as both a cultural tether to an ancestral homeland and a lens through which South African Indians can view, reinterpret, and articulate the uniqueness of their cultural identities within the South African landscape. These aesthetic references to Bollywood constitute a form of cultural translation that allows the filmmakers, as part of the diasporic communities, to negotiate the complexities of their hybrid identities and multi-layered cultural influences. This transcultural influence also captures the evolving, adaptive nature of cultural identity in the face of globalisation and diasporic experiences. Bollywood references in these films

act as a shared homogenising cultural currency, unifying both South African Indian and other Indian diasporic audiences through a common visual and emotional language.

In canvassing the multiplicity within the characters' development and hybridised notions of identity, a further revelation is the lack of African influence or context in the depicted self-representations of the filmmakers, such as in the cuisine, settings and locations, casting, background extras, or other opportunities. The notable absence could reflect a few reasonings; the filmmakers intended to focus on the unique challenges faced by these communities, which often have been historically positioned in a liminal space, distinct from both African and white populations in South Africa. Alternatively, the lack of African cultural markers might be interpreted through the lens of Said's *Orientalism* (1978), suggesting a form of westernised gaze that prioritises Indian or western traditions over African cultural elements. Within this framework, both South African Indians and African communities were subject to a form of cultural hegemony that prioritised western norms and values (including attire, cultural symbols, dialect, family structure, notions of class and aspirations). This imposition diminished the importance of local African cultures in favour of a more Eurocentric worldview. This can echo broader global hierarchies that often marginalise African expressions, also reflecting the historical trajectory of community segregation and western cultural hegemony that shaped the landscape of South African Indian hybridised identities.

The depiction of hybridised identities in the films is notably consistent with Bhabha's (1994) frameworks in tandem with exemplifications of Hall's (1989) concepts of fluid identity. All main characters exhibit fluidity in their identities, albeit in different ways. For characters such as Anisa and Natasha, who represent a younger generation of South African Indians, this fluidity is adapted more willingly, a consequence of immersion in the multicultural environment of post-apartheid South Africa from a younger age. These characters reflect a form of voluntary hybridity. In contrast, various characters from the parents' generation, such as Ayesha and Amsugi, demonstrate a more tentative fluidity of identity, brought about by external change and conflict more than internal desires. While they too engage in a form of identity blending, it often emerges as a reactive adaptation to shifting circumstances rather than a proactive choice. This representation

further differs from the experience of characters such as Jennifer from *Keeping up with the Kandasamys* and the father figure, Yusuf, in *For Better For Worse*, who present more flexible hybridity in notions of identity and values which aids in serving their goals and needs.

The divergent ways in which the characters experience and express hybridity underscore the impact of socio-cultural contexts and historical backgrounds as effectors of the fluidity of identity. In *Broken Promises*, Natasha's character is situated in a South African Indian family that holds rigid inherited traditional notions of values and gender roles, and she feels pressured by the expectations placed upon her to assimilate into their lifestyle. Her struggle to reconcile her individual desires with collective family aspirations illustrates Bhabha's 'third space' (1994), a site of tension and negotiation where cultural elements interact and new meanings emerge. This is most evident when Natasha negotiates adorning either the *thali*, *sindoor*, or wedding ring—symbols of marriage that hold different degrees of validity to her mother-in-law. Her character's ability to question and engage with the traditional notions of Amsugi while maintaining and adapting her own beliefs reveals the fluidity of her identity, as theorised by Hall (1989).

Anisa's character in *For Better For Worse* is presented as a multifaceted woman who is simultaneously rooted in her inherited cultural and religious beliefs, while also displaying more westernised perspectives in her outlooks on personal agency, social interaction, and her career. Her sartorial choices are particularly revealing. Anisa's fluctuating wardrobe, modulating seamlessly from traditional Indian attire in formal settings to western clothing in professional contexts, signals a form of cultural fluency. This aligns with Hall's notion of fluid identities (Hall, 1989) that are not fixed but are in a constant state of becoming. Simultaneously, by making these choices, she enters Bhabha's third space (1994), consciously choosing elements from her South African heritage and global influences to construct her identity. Moreover, Anisa's choice to wear a *hijab* during private moments of prayer is a powerful statement on the multiplicity of her identity, breaking away from monolithic representations of Muslim

women. Anisa's choice symbolises her personal interpretation of faith, as opposed to mere conformity to cultural or familial expectations.

In their representations by the filmmakers, broader societal dynamics are reflected. Natasha and Anisa are representational figures in the context of post-apartheid South Africa—a society grappling with issues of cultural diversity and identity at both the collective and individual levels. The struggles and negotiations of identity, as well as cultural values engaged by characters such as Natasha and Anisa, are designed to resonate with the challenges faced by many South Africans who are caught at the crossroads of established cultural expectations and modern aspirations. By adapting and renegotiating their identities in response to their socio-cultural environment, both Natasha and Anisa exemplify the modulations of a younger generation of South African Indians who would have developed experiencing the multiple influences of evolving multicultural social contexts. The cinematic treatment of their characters underlines a perceived shift in societal attitudes towards individuality and a move away from collective cultural determinism towards a more nuanced understanding of personal agency in the formation of identity.

Presenting an alternate perspective, Amsugi's character in *Broken Promises* represents the challenges and vulnerabilities that come with aging in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. Through the lens of Hall's (1989) concept of cultural identity as an ever-evolving production, Amsugi aims to preserve her traditional values and practices as a counterweight against the introduction of further modern ideas and westernisation in her home, embodied by her new daughter-in-law. Her character does actively negotiate values within her notions of identity; however, initially, she leans heavily towards preserving her cultural heritage and community-established values. Projecting authority over her daughter-in-law, Amsugi and Natasha's engagement becomes complicated as power dynamics are contested, and eventually, Amsugi's capability for fluidity is uncovered.

In contrast, in *For Better For Worse*, Yusuf is presented as a character of the same generation as Amsugi who is more open to the idea of evolving and adopting notions of

hybridity in circumstances he deems acceptable. Yusuf, unlike Amsugi, holds more power over his process of 'becoming' (Hall, 1989). His character negotiates his identity through a prism that attempts to balance cultural tradition and religious values with modernity, often finding himself recalibrating his values in the 'third space' as described by Bhabha (1994). Until the end of the narrative, Yusuf actively adopts more progressive views than those of his immediate community, affording his children the space to follow their individualistic tendencies and independent pursuits, which may be accompanied by external influence.

Notably, in the climax of the narrative when Anisa's decision conflicts with the values Yusuf retains, his character reverts to a more patriarchal version of himself in order to exert power over his daughter. Yusuf's reversion illustrates how negotiations within one's hybrid identity are not a linear, irreversible process, and are further subject to the pressures and influences of context. In his case, the third space that initially served as a site of compromise becomes a battleground where entrenched beliefs may regain prominence. These fluctuations in agency have deeper implications, with the choices made in the 'third space' being deeply rooted in an individual's context, social milieu, and personal experiences, which are themselves subject to change. Yusuf's character reveals the fragility of the third space, which is particularly relevant in a post-apartheid South African context, where the broader society at large evolves through unique historical circumstances with changing modern and even globalised aspirations. Thus, in this instance, the characters' agency in what is accepted or rejected in their renegotiations of hybridised identity also reveals their anxieties.

Addressing the overarching aims of the research in determining whether the self-representations in the sample of films enable visibility of heterogeneous representations of cultural identities that are typically homogenised as 'Indian', the analytical chapters reveal that certain degrees of homogenisation are exhibited in the depiction of South African Indian identities. Consistent themes, including family structure and unity, the ritual of meal-sharing, and the cultural influence of Bollywood, recur in these narratives. These themes reflect more stereotypical portrayals of Indian culture, possibly in an attempt to offer relatable cultural markers for both broader South African and

external audiences, presenting a somewhat monolithic image of what it means to be South African Indian.

However, despite these instances of homogenising representations, the sample of films also reveals nuanced complexities in the cinematic treatments of the characters within the various narratives. In perpetuating family structure and hierarchies, characters such as Amsugi and Yusuf are still found to negotiate the rigid structures of cultural tradition, modernity, and multicultural influences to arrive at personalised notions of hybrid identity in the context of their circumstances. Furthermore, the adoption of Bollywood aesthetic markers serves as more than an acknowledgement of Indian cultural influence; rather, they are conscious choices that infer multiple layers of identity formation, signalling a connection to an ancestral homeland while situating the narratives firmly in a South African locale.

While certain consistencies illustrate some forms of cultural homogenisation, as examined in the analytical chapters, the films also delve into various instances of specific representations that reveal nuanced facets of South African Indian cultures. For example, the choice in naming a child after the popular black South African Kwaito star 'Mandoza' in *Broken Promises* offers a uniquely South African influence on the narrative, challenging the idea that Indian heritage is always foregrounded in the formations of South African Indian notions of identity. Similarly, the *braai* scene symbolises a broader South African cultural embrace as a scene that would resonate with South African audiences but not external or transnational viewers.

Instances of religious diversity, as seen through Anisa's prayer scene in *For Better For Worse* and Jennifer's *satsang* in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, underscore the notion that South African Indian communities are not religiously homogenous. They showcase different aspects of spirituality and practice, signifying that being 'Indian' in a South African context can mean a range of experiences and beliefs. From private Islamic prayer and communal gatherings for worship at a mosque to communal Hindu *satsangs*, the portrayal of different religious practices is an emphatic statement on the heterogeneity existing within South African Indian communities. Moreover, the subtle

elements such as attire, linguistic choices, and religious symbols enhance this depiction of cultural diversity and complexity, as elaborated upon in the analysis chapters.

Exemplified through the critical analysis of the three sample films, this research posits that self-representation in South African Indian filmmaking enables visibility of complex, heterogeneous cultural identities within the demographic group referred to as 'South African Indian' to different extents. Building on this overarching observation, the varying degrees of visibility each film achieves in their self-representations of South African Indian identity were also surveyed in this research.

The three films represented different approaches to modes of production and distribution in order to reach intended audiences, offering some insights into the state of South African film economies in the post-apartheid period until 2017. *Broken Promises* reflected the challenges and resourcefulness of low-budget artisanal filmmaking. Although unsuccessful with a commercial cinema release, the pivot to DVD sales as a distribution strategy proved fruitful. DVD piracy further enhanced the film's audience and increased the popularity of the filmmaker, Naidu. *For Better For Worse* leans towards formal filmmaking production in which partnerships and sponsorships play a pivotal role in achieving the filmmakers' desired production quality. Premiering at the 30th Durban International Film Festival and its subsequent acquisition for distribution by Videovision showcases the vital role festivals play in providing visibility to independent films. Lastly, *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* represents a model underpinned by state support and mentorship. The film benefitted from substantial funding and support, reaching financial box-office success in mainstream cinema platforms, thereby proving that a significant mainstream audience exists for such content. The production and distribution model of the film also symbolises a transformation in the South African film economies with the state increasingly playing an active role in the incubation of emerging filmmakers.

The analysis of production and distribution modes of the sample of films reveals a narrative of growing access to resources and support faced by South African Indian filmmakers, further demonstrated by the increasing presence of South African Indian

film narratives on various platforms of exhibition since the release of *Broken Promises* in 2004. In the period following the end of apartheid, the state endeavoured to foster an ideology of diversity, aiming for a cultural renaissance in the arts. While there was an active push towards celebrating diversity in arts and culture, the practical foundations of infrastructure and resources for artists emerged insufficiently (Saks, 2010). As exemplified by the varying approaches to filmmaking in the sample of films, the diversity of modes of production and distribution, inclusive of its alternative means and economies of 'small cinemas' (Ebrahim, 2020), is key in creating platforms for cultural expression and self-representation for local filmmakers with varying access to resources. The trajectory of the sample of films does, however, reflect growing evidence of state support, formal training opportunities, and increasing access to resources for filmmakers in the post-apartheid period.

The diverse means of reaching their audiences provided the filmmakers with different degrees of audience reception in understanding the notions of identity and cultural expression in each film. All three films reached different breadths of viewership, and each received criticism and commentary regarding the authenticity of their representations of South African Indians. The recurrent criticism received by the three films related to the stereotyping of South African Indians. This highlights the intricate balancing act in the cinematic portrayal of community, in which filmmakers may have to face ensuring relatability to a broader audience while maintaining authenticity to the very community they aim to represent. By drawing on familiar tropes and homogenising various characters and practices, films achieve broader appeal, facilitating the audience's ability to engage without an intimate understanding of the culture being represented. However, this can come across as reductive and inauthentic to the community audience and detract from their connection to the subject matter. This is demonstrated through noted criticisms of the sample films, including a discussed online comment on *For Better For Worse* questioning the Bollywood references and behaviour that is supposedly non-representative of South African Indians. In contrast, the cultural specificity depicted in various aspects of the films reveals degrees of intricate familiarity with the represented community or culture. Such representations resonate with the localised audience but may then also alienate broader or external audiences, as

exhibited in an example of the critical reception of *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* outright stating, “whether you will enjoy this film is largely dependent on whether you fit its narrow demographic or not” (Risi, 2017: no pagination). The critique underscores a fundamental tension in culturally specific storytelling; it is at once perceived as a source of authenticity as well as a potential exclusion. Such remarks are less often directed at franchises and productions from the Global North, largely because these works tend to operate within a context of dominant western culture and media influences, where their narratives, idioms, and values have been globalised and are often assumed to be universally understood or appreciated.

Through the various chapters of analysis and discussion in addressing the overarching research question, the evidence gleaned from the analysis of *Broken Promises*, *For Better For Worse*, and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* offers a nuanced perspective. On one hand, the films do engage in some level of cultural homogenisation, relying on familiar tropes such as family dynamics, Bollywood influences, and ritualistic meal-sharing that may perpetuate stereotypical perceptions of what it means to be South African Indian. These elements could be seen as both a nod to a broader cultural milieu and a pragmatic approach to achieving wider distribution and audience relatability, given the diverse nature of the South African cinematic landscape.

On the other hand, the films also contribute to the visibility of heterogeneous South African Indian identities through intricate, culturally specific narratives and characters. Elements such as representations of diverse religious practices, or depictions of diverse and complex hybrid identities, serve to disrupt the notion of a monolithic South African Indian identity. From the conception of South African Indian filmmaking moving further into the post-apartheid period, the sample of films represents significant strides towards enabling visibility of the complexities and multiplicities inherent in South African Indian communities.

The degrees of visibility reached by each of these films vary according to the modes of production and access to support structures available to the various filmmakers. Each approach reveals different facets of the post-apartheid South African film economies,

indicating that the visibility of these self-representations is conditioned not merely by their narrative content but also by their modes of production and distribution.

In sum, South African Indian filmmaking practices exist within a dynamic tension between homogeneous and heterogeneous self-representations. While criticisms related to stereotyping persist (suggesting the enduring challenges in achieving fully nuanced self-representations), the overall trajectory indicates increasing visibility of diverse, complex identities within South African Indian communities. This is, however, intricately tied to a rapidly evolving landscape of production and distribution, which itself represents both opportunity and limitations in achieving the potential of these self-representations.

Theoretical Implications and Contributions

In the context of broader academic discourses surrounding identity formation and postcolonial cinema, the analysed films in this study represent cultural products offering insights into the layered identities of specific postcolonial (and post-apartheid) diasporic communities from the perspectives of filmmakers intent on providing platforms for self-representation and cultural expression. Produced in a period marked by significant political and social changes in South Africa's history, the films most consistently reflect the processes of identity formation as defined and discussed by Hall (1989) and Bhabha (1994).

The findings of this research align with considerations of postcolonial theory which emphasise the multiplicity of identities that emerge during and in the aftermath of histories of colonialism. In several examples discussed in the analytical findings, characters and family units experience negotiations of values and identity, leading to transformations either willingly or due to their various circumstances. In the narrative choices as well as cultural markers in the aesthetic treatment of scenes, characters have repeatedly exhibited a multiplicity of influences informing the fluidity of their hybridised identities, whether it is generational traditions stemming from India, cultural and ethnolinguistic practices developed in the segregated South African Indian

communities during apartheid, westernised values from broader influences in the post-apartheid period, or various other factors.

In engaging with these discourses in the application of this research, limitations inevitably emerge where it can be argued that existing conceptual frameworks do not fully encapsulate the experiences of postcolonial communities with unique diasporic contexts in order to achieve the aims of the research. Primarily referring to Bhabha's seminal theories of hybridity and more specifically the 'third space' (1994) that characters enter in negotiating their identities, an opportunity to address and extend upon the concept's efficacies is presented.

Bhabha (1994) theorises that postcolonial identity is not a mere amalgamation of the coloniser and the colonised but is rather formed in a third space, in which unique notions of identity are formed, neither fully representative of the dominating culture nor of the oppressed subject.

The linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance is dramatised in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of a preposition (*énoncé*) and the subject of enunciation, which is not represented in the statement but which is the acknowledgement of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilised in the passage through a third space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious (Bhabha, 1994: 36).

Here, in discussing the use of language in cultural performances, Bhabha creates a distinction between the words that are spoken, and the context or background that informs the words. Bhabha believes that both these aspects should be considered in order to truly comprehend what is being communicated. This process involves

navigating the third space, which in the above instance is a combination of the rules of language with the nuances and intentions of the speaker.

The findings of this research indicate that the intersection of these elements in third space is inflected by the specificity of geographical contexts and surrounding environments. Characters such as Natasha, Anisa, Amsugi, and Yusuf embody the fluid nature of identity, as theorised by Hall (1989). The characters engage in complex renegotiations of hybridised identities within the third space, which is informed by the specificities of their 'place' – encompassing geographical, historical, cultural, and ecological aspects. For South African Indians in the studied sample of films, this place is KwaZulu-Natal, the initial landing site of Indians as indentured labourers, and where their communities later endured the constraints and injustices of apartheid.

The sample of films were selected for the study partially due to their shared locale of KwaZulu-Natal, with *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017) referring more specifically to the township of Chatsworth within this region. The opening monologue, examined in the analytical chapters, exemplifies the significance of 'place' in understanding characters' negotiations of identity (*Keeping Up with the Kandasamys*, 2017, 00:00:22- 00:01:36):

Aya (V.O.)

[over images of Durban]

Durban, beautiful, isn't it? Like one paradise this place is, man. But you think this place is the real Durban- oh, no no no. Let me take you to the real deal.

[over images of Chatsworth]

See, many years ago, the government took us, all the Indian people, and put us in one place. They named it Chatsworth. After some place in England. Hmm, but the bloody cheek! But nevermind they did like that, we struggled and struggled and stayed. Only one thing, the houses are so close to each other. The neighbours are so nosy, they become like our extended family.

Accompanied by visuals of Chatsworth's landmarks, the monologue immediately situates the story within contextual backstories intertwined specific to the region's geography and its history of segregation. As the narrative continues to progress, our understanding of the characters' hybridity is extended and therefore enriched through this specificity of place and its connotations. In this study's analysis, Jennifer's character grappling with her values in her rejection of *charou* culture (a culture associated with the locale), and her aspirations to transcend the lifestyle and class status associated with Chatsworth, is clarified through knowledge of her locale. The character of Shanti embracing *charou* culture, her community values, and location-specific dialect amongst other facets constituting her hybridised identity is also unfolded through the consideration of this knowledge.

For a character such as Natasha in *Broken Promises* (2004), a more particular place includes the physical boundaries of the home (and territory) of her mother-in-law, which implies various cultural expectations of conduct, behaviour as well as power dynamics. If the narrative were to play out in a different setting, such as in *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* where the mother-in-law is living in her daughter-in-law's house, the power relations and negotiations of values and identity would manifest differently. The distinct geographies and their associated histories have therefore shaped their experiences and continue to influence the evolving affirmations and vulnerabilities of South African Indian cultural identities as portrayed in these films.

This research therefore presents a contribution to postcolonial scholarship by re-examining Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1994), positing that the third space is complicated by 'place'. Consistently, the knowledge of these specificities of 'place' inherently informed the analysis of characters as they entered the third space, thereby uncovering meaning from what would otherwise be considered a more neutral arena. While the concept of the third space facilitates crucial negotiations of identity, it omits the integration of detailed geographical and spatial contexts that carry historical, cultural, and socio-political information that can enrich our understanding of identity formation processes in various settings.

Furthermore, this study posits that these represented communities in the KwaZulu-Natal South African Indian diaspora, shaped by the region's unique experiences of colonialism, history of apartheid and segregated development, presents a distinct form of the third space which differs markedly from that of other communities. A similar study of films set in a different South African locale with its own histories and implications may offer different findings. More broadly, the Indian diaspora in other countries would also present distinct iterations of the third space, as each diaspora is influenced by its own experiences and trajectories. This space is therefore not shapeless or figurative; rather, it is profoundly influenced by the unique characteristics of the locale that influences communities' experiences and identity formation.

Emerging from this study's findings that the efficacy of the third space is complicated by the specificity of place, the question arises of how this concept may be formally applicable in augmenting the analysis of characters within the space. The analytical chapters conducted through the application of EVAM and combination of contextual and textual analysis reveal consistent themes throughout the sample of film productions that inform the characters' various negotiations of hybridity. The findings suggest that a spectrum of themes such as family structure and gender roles, community reputation, generational differences, linguistic proficiency, notions of class, religion, rituals and cultural practices, and broader society influences, all informed by geographical specificity and historical knowledge, are identified as key elements for analysing characters' navigations of hybrid identities.

Presented as the concept of 'Prismatic Analysis', as visited in the analytical chapters, these themes developed into an analytical framework is proposed for addressing the unique socio-cultural, historical, and geographical contexts that influence identity formation and representation within film productions from postcolonial diasporic communities. The term 'Prismatic Analysis' metaphorically represents a multifaceted nature, akin to white light dispersing into a spectrum of colours through a prism. This concept acknowledges the singularity and multiplicity of influences reflecting the hybrid nature of postcolonial diasporic communities. It recognises that postcolonial cinematic self-representations are continuously formed and reformed in response to

varying influences such as modernisation, westernisation, linguistic proficiency, class consciousness, religious adherence, and cultural practices.

Building on its metaphorical utility, Prismatic Analysis evolves into a robust analytical framework. Within the context of this research, emerging from the analytical chapters, this framework is therefore applied in conjunction with EVAM, demonstrating its versatility and effectiveness in breaking down film texts into their constituent parts. Through this methodology, this study dissects films to uncover layers of meaning that contribute to a deeper understanding of cinematic self-representations. Each film is analysed not just as a narrative but as a complex arrangement of cultural signals, from family dynamics and social roles to visual and linguistic cues, each influenced by specific local contexts.

The integration of Prismatic Analysis with EVAM or similar methodologies enhances the ability to scrutinise various elements of film comprehensively. EVAM, traditionally used to evaluate the entertainment value through components such as narrative, aesthetics, and performance, when combined with Prismatic Analysis, extends its scope to include a nuanced exploration of how these components reflect and construct the cultural identities and representations depicted in films. This methodological synergy allows for a detailed examination of how films encode cultural, social, and historical contexts into their narratives, providing a richer, more textured understanding of the films' impact and significance.

As found in this study, Prismatic Analysis is effective in uncovering the specificities of place and identity that shape cinematic representations in postcolonial settings. It particularly highlights how the unique historical and cultural landscapes of KwaZulu-Natal shape the narratives and identities portrayed in South African Indian cinema. The framework's adaptability makes it a potent tool for exploring a variety of postcolonial and diasporic contexts, offering insights into how different environments influence portrayals in cinema.

Through the proposed concept of Prismatic Analysis, this research not only contributes to the broader discourse on postcolonial film studies but also validates the framework's utility in analysing and understanding the complex narratives and identities within South African Indian cinema. This dual approach of metaphor and methodology encapsulates the essence of postcolonial identity as both singular and plural, unified and diverse, offering a comprehensive lens through which to view and analyse cinematic texts. In application, Prismatic Analysis is proposed to comprise the following phases:

Phase One: Context

Geographical Setting & Historical Background: This phase explores the broader significant historical events that have affected characters' locales or communities. In exploring the intersection of history and geographical setting, including the effects of colonialism to more contemporary socio-political dynamics, an informed understanding of character motivations emerges. Next to be examined is the characters' more specific personal histories, experiences and cultural heritages. This is a key first phase in the analysis, as it further informs the following headings of analysis.

Phase Two: Specificity

Family Structure & Gender Roles: The cinematic treatment of family structure and gender roles in a film can reveal deeply ingrained cultural norms, social expectations, and individual agency. These elements offer insights into how the complexities of identity formation are approached in the films. These values may even shift as character arcs progress over the course of the narrative.

Community Reputation: This refers to the portrayal of a character's attitude towards community reputation, including their process of integration into their immediate community and the broader society. This can highlight the maintained value systems and interplay of influences navigated by the characters and should be contextualised by the character's backstory or history.

Generational Differences: Differences between the character of the parental figure and the child in the depictions of the characters' styling and design, dialogue and

communication, socialisation, and behaviour in moments of conflict reveal the different degrees of hybridity and fluidity in depicted representations.

Linguistic Proficiency: The character's dialogue – communication expressed in the mother tongue, colonial language, hybridised vernacular, or other languages spoken, in relation to their historical and geographical context – further reveals the complexity of the diasporic identity and notions of cultural identity represented by the filmmaker.

Notions of Class: How cinematic elements like dialogue, location and setting, styling, or narrative engagement with different cultural elements and practices illustrate the class standing and aspirations of the characters and family units. These choices should be considered in the context of the character's backstory and heritage, thereby further unveiling their notions of identity.

Religious Beliefs: The depiction of a character's religious beliefs provides insight into their personal identity and moral compass. The manner in which characters engage with their faith, partake in religious ceremonies, and their interactions with sacred spaces are integral in painting a picture of their notions of identity. These aspects can reveal the complexities involved in upholding religious faith amidst diverse and evolving societal landscapes.

Cultural Traditions and Rituals: Possibly linked to religious beliefs, these practices, steeped in cultural history and often passed through generations, are emblematic of the characters' heritage. The filmic representation of these traditions provides insights into the characters' connection to their cultural roots. How these rituals and cultural practices are adapted or maintained in the film narrative can speak to the characters' adaptation to different contexts.

Broader Society Influences: This refers to the characters' willing or unwilling adoption of westernised, globalised or transnational societal influences in the narrative, illustrated through narrative choices, character design or elements such as aesthetic cultural markers. The hybridised interplay of adopted external influences and retained inherited

cultural beliefs and practices reveals the fluidity of the characters' notions of identity. This interplay may also shift as character arcs progress over the course of the narrative.

With emphasis on the multifaceted nature of identity formation and the impact of place, Prismatic Analysis acknowledges the multiplicity and hybridity of identity within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts. The framework flexibly accounts for the notion of fluid hybrid identities that are reshaping in response to varying influences. The application of the framework may extend beyond the analysis of South African Indian filmmaking, offering a versatile tool for examining postcolonial diasporic films in other contexts. This framework is particularly relevant in settings where the interplay of global influences and local specificities is pronounced.

For instance, it may be applied in uncovering how geographical settings, historical backgrounds, family structures, community reputations, generational differences, linguistic choices, class perceptions, religious beliefs, and broader societal influences converge to shape characters' identities in diasporic films from other regions. This is particularly useful in contexts such as postcolonial diasporas where existing theories in film scholarship may not fully encapsulate the experience of various communities with differing relationships to place, as was found with the rhetoric of Naficy (2006) in the context of this study.

Naficy's theories describe films that depict themes of exile, displacement, and a complex relationship with both host locale and homeland. The discussions frequently refer to first or second-generation migrants and displaced communities. Therefore, the depictions of South African Indians or other diasporic communities, which have developed multi-generationally, do not exhibit the descriptors as defined in Naficy's concepts. As discussed in the analysis of the sample of films, characters experience a multiplicity of influences on identity, with evidence of both older and younger generations being perceived as adaptive to new or broader influences. Evidence of descending from the first generation of immigrants in the Indian diaspora is evident in the design of characters in inspecting their historical background, but in the form of

inherited cultural traditions, which present their own complexities in relation to the historical circumstances of South African Indian communities.

Prismatic Analysis, therefore, serves the need for a more contextually grounded and specific approach to understanding postcolonial identities in cinema. It acknowledges that the third space (Bhabha, 1994), while crucial, requires supplementation with a more detailed exploration of the characters' backgrounds and the socio-cultural milieu they inhabit. This approach allows for a richer and more comprehensive understanding of postcolonial diasporic identities as depicted in film.

In concluding the contributions offered by this research, the narrative and socio-cultural aesthetic choices embedded within the sample of films present a nuanced interrogation of the representations of the multifaceted nature of South African Indian identities. Moreover, this research situates these identities, expressed in the characters of the films, within the broader historical contexts that have shaped South African Indian communities and contributed to the current cinematic manifestations of South African Indian identities. This research therefore offers discourse on the inherent diversity within representations of South African Indian identities that are visible or invisible to film audiences to various degrees, paying particular attention to the multiplicity of voices that are typically homogenised.

This research also serves the South African film industries through a rigorous examination of one of its facets: South African Indian filmmaking. Situated within the post-apartheid context, insights are offered into diverse modes of production and distribution in relation to access to resources faced by previously disenfranchised filmmakers within this particular context. Challenges faced by these filmmakers in the post-apartheid period are illuminated, as well as the available state support and the degree to which it facilitated the visibility of diverse cultural narratives. In essence, this study serves as an examination that reflects broader trends within the South African film industries in the post-apartheid context, thereby enriching the discourse on South African cinema.

The examination of South African Indian film productions constitutes a contribution to the limited body of scholarly literature addressing South African Indian cultures, particularly within the context of the arts industries and the South African film industries. In its focus on cinematic self-representations of cultural identity, a contribution of culturally specific case studies to the broader discourses of postcolonial film studies and postcolonial theory is also offered.

More specifically, within the realm of postcolonial discourse, this research engages with Bhabha's seminal concept of the 'third space' (1994) in consideration of the specificity of communities' locales and historical contexts. Prismatic Analysis provides an emphasis on cultural, geographical and historical dimensions of cinematic representation, potentially creating opportunities for nuanced and contextually rich analysis for future scholarly endeavours.

Limitations

It is crucial to acknowledge that the parameters of this study constitute various limitations through numerous factors, including its specificity and design. These limitations range from the selection of films for analysis to the methodological approaches employed, as well as the broader socio-cultural and historical contexts that frame this research. Acknowledging these limitations not only adds a layer of reflexivity to the research but also provides scholars with insights into areas that require further exploration, thereby leading into the recommendations for future research.

The decision to focus exclusively on feature-length films in this research introduces a constraint in terms of the range of cinematic forms examined. The exclusion of other formats, such as short films or documentaries, may limit the diversity and enrichment of findings. For example, documentaries often provide a more direct form of representation, offering real-life perspectives into a community that fictional narratives may not capture. Different formats provide various degrees of depth to the subject matter being explored and may also provide a platform for a broader range of voices that may be homogenised in fiction films. However, the exclusion of various formats is

necessary to achieve the aims of this research, as it creates space for a structured and extensive comparative analysis of cinematic self-representations of narratives of identity formation, through the uniformity of format, locale, and themes in the sample of films. The research also requires specificity in the form of self-representation, and the availability of filmmaking products in various other formats is found to be scarce in the beginning stages of South African Indian filmmaking practices of self-representation.

The selection of films for analysis, *Broken Promises* (2004), *For Better For Worse* (2010), and *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017), serves as both beneficial and a limitation for the aims of the research. The film selection offers a concentrated lens through which to explore the intricate dynamics of identity formation, cultural expression, self-representation, and differing modes of production within South African Indian communities. However, limitations exist due to the narrowness of the lens. Firstly, the sample of only three films inherently restricts the breadth of experiences and perspectives that can be examined. While the films are significant in their own right, they cannot cinematically encapsulate the full range of South African Indian experiences, which are influenced by multiple factors. The sample size does not offer an exhaustive understanding of broader trends and themes within South African Indian filmmaking, potentially overlooking other examples that may challenge or enrich the findings of the study. The films were also produced within a specific timeframe, from 2004 to 2017, and are therefore reflective of the socio-cultural dynamics prevalent during this period. The study may not account for evolving or emerging trends in South African Indian filmmaking, particularly in response to more recent social, political, or technological changes.

The geographical focus of the study is also confined to films set in KwaZulu-Natal, particularly areas such as Chatsworth or greater Durban. While the region has significant South African Indian populations and serves as a key cultural hub, it is one of several provinces in South Africa that features its own unique socio-cultural landscape and historical trajectory. Chatsworth, for instance, was established as an Indian township under apartheid and has developed specific social, economic, and political factors that have shaped its community. The experiences and identities of South

African Indians residing in other regions or in now more racially integrated suburbs are not included in the research, limiting the findings of the study.

Further, the methodological approach is largely qualitative. While presenting depth in analysis, audience reception studies or surveys could provide additional insights into the represented community and audiences' perceptions of the sample of films, thereby enriching the study's findings. This is also applicable to the perspectives of the filmmakers who created the self-representations analysed in this research. The study does not incorporate primary data in the form of interviews with filmmakers or stakeholders involved in the production of the films. While excluded from the study due to the primary focus on assessing the existing displays of heterogeneity in the films, such data would provide context in elucidating the intentions behind narrative choices or characters' portrayals.

Additionally, in narrowing the scope of the study, the methodological framework also does not include a comparative analysis with films from other postcolonial contexts or diasporic communities, or films that feature representations of South African Indians from outside of the community. Such a comparison may highlight unique aspects of the South African Indian experience and notions of identity, as well as offer a broader national or more transnational perspective on how South African Indians are perceived with regard to issues of identity and representation in cinema. However, these perspectives from external sources would broaden the aims of the research, and with limited existing literature on South African Indian filmmaking, the localised focus is more suitable for such a study and makes a valuable and productive contribution to South African Indian filmmaking.

Furthermore, the exclusion of more recent first or second-generation migrants from the Indian subcontinent presents a further limitation of the research, which focuses on established, multi-generational South African Indian communities. Representations of experiences and perspectives of newer migrants and communities, who face unique challenges, can offer contributions to the cinematic discourses on identity formation by depicting narratives about their integration, acceptance, and identity negotiation

(perhaps even when engaging with South African Indian communities). One such film is *Florida Road* (2010), directed by Brad Glass; however, these are still uncommon in South Africa.

With regards to the theoretical contributions, while the presented concept of Prismatic Analysis provides a novel framework for analysing postcolonial diasporic films, its applicability is tailored to the specific context of South African Indian cinema as a case study. The scope of the study does not facilitate the engagement of the framework in other contexts, and its efficacy is theorised from the findings of the research that foreground South African Indian experiences. The framework might require further adaptation or modification to be fully applicable to other postcolonial contexts or diasporas with different historical and cultural backgrounds. These differences could mean that Prismatic Analysis, in its current form, might not fully encapsulate the complexities or adequately address the unique identity formations and cultural representations of these diverse groups.

Therefore, while Prismatic Analysis offers a tool for film analysis within the South African Indian context, its theoretical constructs and analytical categories may require careful reconsideration and adaptation to be effectively applied to other postcolonial diasporic films. This highlights the need for continuous evolution and contextual adaptation of theoretical frameworks in postcolonial film studies to ensure their relevance and applicability across diverse cultural and historical landscapes.

The limitations of this study highlight the complexities involved in studying South African Indian cinematic self-representations. They are not merely constraints, but rather serve as reflexive points that reflect the specificity and nuance required of the research, as well as the various considerations in the investigation of cinematic representations of negotiations of identity within multi-generational postcolonial communities and diasporas. Despite the limitations, the study presents a set of novel and productive insights in its focused analysis of South African Indian cinematic self-representations and offers valuable theoretical considerations that are applicable for future scholarship.

The limitations of the study offer useful navigational tools to areas that require further exploration, some of which are suggested in the next section.

Recommendations for Future Research

In conducting this research focusing on the cinematic self-representations of South African Indian communities, it has become increasingly evident that the topic of study and its situated fields of discourse are replete with subjects that warrant further scholarly attention. While the present study has endeavoured to complete a comprehensive analysis within its defined scope, its acknowledged limitations have identified several gaps within the field of research that offer scholars potential fertile areas for exploration. In light of this, recommendations for areas of further research are delineated below. These recommendations include topics beyond the limitations of this study and suggestions for new directions that may deepen the academic discourse on South African Indian filmmaking.

Expanding the Film Selection: One of the most immediate avenues for future research lies in expanding the film selection. The current study, while comprehensive within its scope, was limited to the analysis of three films in one genre. This constraint inherently narrows the breadth of experiences and perspectives that could be explored in other films of the same genre, as well as films in other genres. Future research could significantly benefit from a more extensive selection of films, thereby allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of South African Indian cinematic self-representations. Such an approach could potentially reveal trends or themes not apparent in the present study, thereby enriching the academic discourse on this subject.

Analysis of Different Cinematic Forms: With the present study focusing on feature-length films, other formats are excluded. Future researchers may address this limitation by exploring and analysing alternative formats, contributing to the discourse on South African Indian filmmaking and cultural expression.

Diversification of Locale: Future research may broaden the discourses on South African Indian filmmaking and cinematic representation to include research on film productions set and produced in other regions of South Africa. Such an approach would also contribute to exploring how locale, geographical factors, and regional nuances influence South African Indian identities.

Diversification of Genre: The genre constraints of the current study, primarily focused on family drama-comedy, offer another avenue for future research. Expanding the genre scope to include other categories such as crime dramas, romance, thrillers, or historical films could provide a more comprehensive view of how genre influences the portrayal of identity, cultural norms, and social dynamics within South African Indian communities.

Comparative Analysis: Future studies could also benefit from a comparative analysis with films from other postcolonial contexts or diasporic communities. Such an approach would not only broaden the academic discourse but also offer a more transnational perspective on issues of identity and representation in cinema. This could illuminate unique aspects of the South African Indian experience compared to other communities.

Analysis of Representation and Self-Representations: An analysis could be conducted of representations of South African Indian communities by external sources. The degrees of stereotyping or homogenisation could be assessed, as well as South African Indians' responses to such representations. The study could include a comparative analysis of self-representations of South African Indians.

Audience Perspectives: An avenue for future research would comprise audience research, utilising surveys or questionnaires engaging with audience members or consumers who have watched South African Indian film productions. This research could determine various audiences' reception of the films, as well as their feelings about the representations that have been created of the various communities.

Focus on More Recent Streams of Migrants: Exploring the experiences and cinematic representations of more recent first or second-generation migrants from the Indian subcontinent living in South Africa, as well as their community members' perspectives on these representations, could offer valuable insights into the discourses of identity formation under various circumstances. This would also explore the shared or divergent cultural practices with South African Indians that stem from a common heritage but have evolved under differing conditions.

Technological Changes and Access: The current study presents an analysis of films that were produced from 2004 to 2017. Scholars have the potential to research how more recent advancements (in technology, platforms of exhibition, access to funding, state support) have influenced South African Indian filmmaking, including its frequency and representation.

Testing the Efficacy of Prismatic Analysis Through Cross-Cultural Comparisons: By applying the Prismatic analytical framework to a diverse range of cinematic narratives from various communities, researchers can assess its universality and adaptability. Such comparative studies can highlight the framework's strengths and limitations in capturing the nuances of identity formation across different postcolonial settings. This approach not only validates the Prismatic analytical framework in a broader context but also enriches our understanding of global diasporic experiences, offering a comprehensive perspective on the portrayal of hybrid identities in postcolonial cinema.

From expanding the film sample and incorporating different cinematic forms to exploring locale and genre diversification, the recommendations for future research offer unique avenues through which the underrepresented area of study pertaining to the filmmaking practices of South African Indian communities can be examined and situated within existing bodies of scholarly literature. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a diversified understanding of South African Indian filmmaking practices and notions of identity, also offering enriching socio-cultural insights that could have broader implications in postcolonial studies. While this research contributes to a specific understanding of its subject matter, it can serve as a stepping

stone in the larger academic trajectory in understanding cinematic self-representations of identity formation in multi-generational postcolonial communities, starting at the underrepresented subject matter of South African Indians and their communities' filmmaking practices.

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Appendix 1: *Broken Promises* (2004) Figures 1a – 1c



Figure 1a: Natasha and Ruben at Bollywood Cafe



Figure 1b: Natasha and Amsugi meet



Figure 1c: Meal-sharing Indian cuisine

Appendix 2: *For Better For Worse* (2010) Figures 2a – 2f



Figure 2a: Meal-sharing in the Khan home



Figure 2b: Anisa partakes in private prayer



Figure 2c: Anisa is comforted by her parents



Figure 2d: The temple aunty exorcises Merv



Figure 2e: Close-up of the temple aunty



Figure 2f: Choreographed dance sequence

Appendix 3: *Keeping Up with the Kandasamys* (2017) Figures 3a – 3e



Figure 3a: Hindi wedding procession



Figure 3b: Jennifer, Aya and Shanti at the wedding



Figure 3c: Meal-sharing in the Naidoo home



Figure 3d: Satsang at the Kandasamy home



Figure 3e: Jennifer and Aya at the satsang