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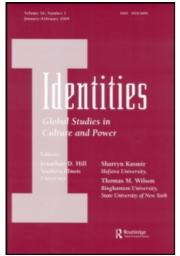
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Lived Hybridity: Second-Generation Identity Construction Through College Festival

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Recent research suggests that the children of recent immigrants, the so-called second generation, no longer choose to emphasize one identity over the other but that their identities are more fluid and multifaceted. College campuses are often the arenas in which a new hybrid identity develops. This article addresses how South Asian American college students make sense of and control their various identities through the celebration of Diwali, an event sponsored each year by the Indian Students Association (ISA) on a college campus in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. South Asian students use performative space to help them make sense of their backgrounds in ways that both differentiate them from and allow for association with the majority student population. They also use this space as a safe place for "coming out," that is, for communicating their hybrid identity to their parents. This hybrid identity is expressed through a discourse of "brownness" that marks something distinctive and that reflects the process by which the children of immigrants choose among a range of identities to create integrated selves. The campus Diwali festival is the expression of those selves.

Key Words: hybridity, identity, Diwali

From the brightly mirrored tables reflecting artfully strewn sand to the excessively vibrant clothing, color and light are everywhere. The women are dressed in shades of red, magenta, maroon, orange, and shocking pink adorned with heavy embroidery, gold work and ornate jewelry. The large ballroom is lit by what appear to be a hundred little oil lanterns. The air is thick with the fragrant smell of curry spice and sweet treats. The crowds of college students and parents hush as a parade of dancers carrying little lanterns open the evening with a choreographed dance that fuses hip-hop, Jazz, and traditional regional moves from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The college campus celebration of Diwali is in full swing.

This article addresses how second-generation South Asian American college students make sense of and control their various identities through the celebration of a major annual calendrical rite—Diwali—that is sponsored each year by the Indian Students Association (ISA) at Southwestern University (SWU, a pseudonym), a university in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metropolitan area. Using methods of participant observation, we followed the activities of the Indian Student Association (ISA) at SWU over a two-year period (2005–2007), in addition to conducting in-depth interviews, surveys, campus focus groups, and pile sorts.

The second generation has become a significant focus of research for scholars of immigration (Zhou 1997, 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Rumbaut and Portes 2001; Kibria 2002; Kasinitz et al. 2004, 2008). The earliest work theorized incorporation choices dichotomously; either the second generation assimilated into American social life (Gans 1979; Alba 1985) or resisted absorption into the majority (Massey and Denton 1993; Levitt and Waters 2002). The assimilationist perspective predicted that over time immigrants and their children would move in the direction of increasing identificational assimilation (i.e., an unhyphenated American) and increasing Anglicization (Rumbaut 1997). However, research focusing on post-1965 immigrants and their children suggests a more dynamic and complex pattern of identity formation and calls attention to various factors socio-economic status, type of school attended, generational status, neighborhood, United States racial hierarchies—that influence it (Gans 1992; Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1994; Portes and MacLeod 1996; Rumbaut 1996; Dhingra 2003; Louie 2004). These theoretical advances suggest that today's second generation no longer necessarily chooses to emphasize one identity over the other but that their identities are more fluid and multifaceted. Thus, Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters (2004: 9) argue that within the multi-ethnic context of the United States, second-generation identity development takes on a more creative aspect than previously thought, one that involves "the reshuffling of boundaries and the making of connections across boundaries in new and complex ways." As individual agents, these young people selectively choose defining ethnic characteristics from social domains in which they operate—their families, social networks, school environments, media images, popular culture, and the broader dominant culture.

These new and varied spheres of action and collaboration have led some scholars to predict the emergence of pan-ethnic identities (Cornell and Hartmann 1988; Espiritu and Lopez 1990; Espiritu 1992). Thus, second-generation regionally grouped children of immigrants, such as "Asians," would be expected to develop a pan Asian-American identity. Moreover, some scholars (Min and Kim 2000; Maira 2002; Purkayastha 2005) have suggested that as this

new second generation comes of age in America, the reduced social and spatial distances on college campuses would increase their chances of developing either pan-ethnic or hybrid identities in these contexts in particular.

As formulated by scholars such as Stuart Hall (1992) and Homi Bhabha (1994), hybridity refers to cultural mixedness and is closely linked in anthropological theory to concepts of creolization and mestizaje (Kapchan and Strong 1999; Boswell 2005; Wade 2005; Khan 2007). Much of the work on hybridity emphasizes the post colonial context as well as the relations of inequality and homogenization that are often the result of globalization (Garcia Canclini 1995; Stolle-McAllister 2004). Thus, Lisa Lowe (1996: 67) defines hybridity as "the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations." Concerns that hybridity or hybridization can be found everywhere and that it is often appropriated by Western cultures to obscure hierarchy and to reinforce power rather than to contest it, has resulted in what Pieterse (2001: 220, 221) refers to as an "anti-hybridity backlash" directed at what some consider to be a "multiculturalism lite" that obscures "deep cleavages on the ground." Pieterse suggests that the problem is not hybridity, which he observes has great historical depth, "but boundaries and the social proclivity to boundary fetishism." "The importance of hybridity," he asserts, "is that it problematizes boundaries."

Such boundaries are particularly significant to the process of immigrant incorporation and to the multicultural politics of host societies (Modood and Werbner 1997; Werbner and Modood 1997). Boundaries, and hence hybrid identities, are contingent, fluid, and emerging; they are, as Plaza (2006: 214) has argued, volitional and dynamic. In our analysis here, we draw in particular on Pawan Dhingra's formulation of "lived hybridity" because it emphasizes the element of volition and agency in boundary and identity construction and transgression. Dhingra (2007: 8263) defines lived hybridity as the "practices and decision-making processes by which migrants bring together elements of their ethnic, racial, and American lifestyles, at times simultaneously, to form a distinctive way of being." They do this, he suggests, to work out the fragmentation that results from being pulled in opposing directions (p. 263). This fragmentation is especially challenging for the children of immigrants. Dhingra points to cultural locations where hybrid moments take place. Our emphasis here is on one such cultural location—the celebration of the festival of Diwali on a university campus—and describes how second-generation Asian Indians, together with the children from other South Asian countries, engage in a self-conscious exploration, construction, and performance of a culturally-hybrid identity.

Asian Indians in the DFW metropolitan area

Asian Indians are one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the United States. Although individuals from the Indian subcontinent have been in the United States since the nineteenth century (Leonard 1997), their numbers remained relatively small. The United States Census broke them out as a separate group only in 1980 when 387,223 were counted nationwide. By 2000, there were just over one million foreign born from Indians in the United States, representing 3.3 percent of the United States foreign-born population.

The largest areas of settlement for Asian Indians are on the East Coast (largely concentrated around the New York City area); on the West Coast (largely the Los Angeles and San Francisco/San Jose areas); and in Illinois (largely in Chicago). However, there are also growing populations of Asian Indians in the Greater Washington, D.C., area, in Atlanta, in Phoenix and in DFW.² A small number of Indians arrived in DFW in the early 1960s to work in scientific and technical fields at local universities and with companies such as Texas Instruments. With the development of these hi-tech industries, the growth of the city, including growth in the health sector, the number of Asian Indians also increased, especially after 1980. As some of this first wave became citizens, they began to sponsor relatives, some of whom did not have the same level of education. Second-wave immigrants found employment as small business owners, providing a range of services from restaurants, to motels, to grocery and convenience stores, to jewelry and sari shops. In the 1990s, a new boom in technology and the expansion of the H1B highly-skilled worker visa category, resulted in a new wave of young and well-educated Indians, many of them software engineers. By 2000, the census enumerated 49,669 foreign-born Indians in the DFW Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical area.³ However, if native-born children are included, the numbers probably rise to where the India Association of North Texas estimates their population—at between 75,000 and 80,000.

Although some of these native-born children are entering prestigious East Coast schools, others have chosen to attend universities in Texas, including SWU. Furthermore, Asian Indians make up the highest percentage of international students in DFW-area universities and many of them are enrolled at SWU. Although these international students are not considered second generation, they do interact on college campuses with second-generation South Asians and hence

provide another domain for the construction, negotiation, and/or renegotiation of identity.

Campus student organizations as arenas for renegotiating identity

Ethnic identity development comprises a major emotional and social component of the life of young adults, including the children of immigrants (Erikson 1968; Espiritu 1994; Huang and Yeh 1996). Vivian Louie (2004: 113) has argued that the college years are "a time of growing ethnic identification for Asian Americans: a time when their sense of who they are and who they want to become is increasingly shaped by the belief that they share a common cultural background forged by ethnicity." Plaza (2006: 224) reaffirms this assessment, identifying the university as a place to "reprogram the self" and a "site of ethnic recovery." In the college domain actors have more agency than elsewhere to create group boundaries as they choose. Those who grew up with traditional expectations befitting the norms of their heritage are released from the parental management of those obligations in the college setting. Purkayastha (2005: 147) suggests that campus ethnic organizations become not only a place of belonging but also a space to disengage or "valorize versions of ethnic identities." An SWU student of Indian heritage described this process:

My parents were concerned about exposure more than what would personally happen to me. Now my parents say that I am more Indian now than when I left for college. It's like, when culture is shoved down your throat then you fight everything, because it's not you, and not how everyone around you is. You just want to blend in. But when you come here, to a different campus, away from those people who have told you to be "cultural," to be Indian and American at the same time, you finally have your choice as to how you want to embrace that culture.

Research on ethnic identity suggests that as individuals move from one situation to the next, they call on different aspects of their identity (Banks 1996; Jenkens 1997). As Dhingra (2007: 8) observes "ethnic minorities supposedly act "American" in mainstream, public spheres and "ethnic" in marginal, private ones." A college student's ability to switch between identities as context dictates was illustrated by one student who said:

A lot of it was learning to adapt to American and Indian culture. I definitely was American. I think I didn't begin to embrace the Indian

experience until College. I joined the ISA and found out that I got completely immersed in it. I feel like there is a difference between your Indian heritage and your American heritage, it's like I'm bi-cultural, and can turn on either side here at school. It's not hard for me to watch an Indian movie, or do an Indian dance; it's like two separate lives that I fluctuate between. I've completely adapted and am comfortable functioning in both cultural worlds.

Within the space of a student organization, second-generation South Asians have the ability to "control at least some of the social symbols that constrain their lives" (Purkayastha 2005: 147). These organizations become group-level expressions of how South Asian Americans "negotiate their structural location by shaping the content, understanding, and boundaries of their ethnicity" (148). About her own decision to join the Indian Student Association (ISA) at SWU, one student said:

When I came into the ISA, I already had my own perceptions of how to be, or what my culture should be. When we get together [as an organization], that mix of all our perceptions somehow becomes the ISA. It's not like we intentionally sit down and sort out how much Indian and how much American we should be, but somehow, it seems to sort itself out to this middle ground when so many ideas come together. I guess that is the major difference between this organization and the kind of cultural clubs our parents brought us up in. The goal of those organizations was to make you into who they are. The ISA becomes who we are.

Her ISA experience led this student to realize that while ethnicity might have been something that simply happened to her as a child, she now has agency and can define and negotiate it for herself.

The Indian Student Association at SWU

It is difficult to define precisely who or what the ISA is. Started in 1979 as an Indian Student Association, its official "non-religious student organization" designation has allowed the organization to expand over the years to encompass myriad South Asian groups of various religious backgrounds. While the majority of the roughly 100 active members are still of Indian descent, the 2006–2007 academic year roster included students of Pakistani (40 percent), Bangladeshi (5 percent), and Nepalese (3 percent) origins/descent. Two members were Caucasian, one of them a student studying Indian history and Hindi. The ISA's Executive Board is elected by the membership and is representative of this diversity with positions held by both men and women of various national origin and religious backgrounds.

This diversity of origins, with the concomitant diversity of cultural traditions, often results in struggles to define the overall identity of the group. Thus, debates have emerged within the SWU organization over its name, specifically, the "Indian" portion of ISA. "It's not really representative of who we are," said one Pakistani member. "We are more regional, more South Asian." This sentiment is echoed even by Indian-origin members who insist that the organization has "grown more representative of a regional culture than a particular people or country." Other students emphasize that they are neither, claiming, for example, "We are American with a South Asian background." Purkayastha (2005: 146) has suggested that an organization eventually takes on a version of ethnicity that is the outcome of "sifting through these cultural practices." The debate over the name, as yet unresolved during our field research, represents this sifting process.

It may, in fact, be easier to define what the ISA is not. When asked why they exist as an organization, the President responded, "We are here to celebrate our culture, heritage and traditions. It was just Indian, but over time that has expanded to encompass all of South Asia." While students of other backgrounds are invited, and even encouraged, to be a part of this group, the bylaws make it clear that the goal of the ISA is to promote and celebrate what members called "the flavors and sounds and traditions" of South Asia. One respondent described the ISA as "a community of shared experiences, in a sea of other communities on campus. It empowers us because it's *our* organization. It's how we draw up our community on campus. It's our version of community. We may only have formal meetings once a week, but the community we have drawn is experienced every day."

While controversy over the name remains, the expression of "our" organization indicates the construction of a South Asian identity that is different from an Asian identity for which there is yet another campus organization. While the first generation of Asian Indians in the United States is often puzzled by the term South Asian, their children appear to have accepted or even embraced it together with the term "Desi," which also has a South Asian meaning (Maira 2002; Khandelwal 2002; Kurien 2003). The history of India and the political divisions clearly make the differences among South Asian countries (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) more significant to those born in these countries who have emigrated compared with their offspring born in America who emphasize their shared culture (food, clothing, music, etc.).

Festivals are one element of this shared culture, "moments in the annual cycle when . . . a community publicly celebrates itself . . . and a public culture emerges" (Lavenda 1992: 77). Through festivals,

communities and the individuals who participate in them can promote important versions of self. Festivals provide a momentary opportunity to transcend differences and come together as a collective body to celebrate, reflect upon, and perform community ideals and identity. As Guss (2000: 12) has observed, people use the festive form "to rethink the boundaries of a community or to reconsider issues of race and ethnicity" (see also Kuutma 1998).

Student-run festivals sponsored by campus ethnic organizations can become a showcase for new blended versions of community and identity. By engaging in practices and decision-making that simultaneously bring together elements of ethnic, racial, religious, and American lifestyles, campus ethnic festivals provide a showcase for the "lived hybridity" of the second generation. The multiple identities of the members of the ISA are manifest in their annual event, Diwali, which has become a significant element of the negotiated ethnic land-scape for SWU students.

Identity construction through Diwali

Diwali, the "Festival of Lights," commemorates the victory of the Hindu Lord Rama over demon King Ravana, reminding Indians that "truth always triumphs over evil" (SCFI 2007). At night oil lamps and firework displays light Rama's way home from his period of exile. Traditionally, the festival lasts for five days beginning with a ceremonial cleansing of houses and the decoration of doorsteps with intricate and colorful chalk designs called *rangolis*. The second day involves a pre-dawn "ritual" bath and the donning of new clothes that are supposed to attract the gods and angels roaming the earth before sunrise. On the third day, Diwali celebrants worship Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune. This act commemorates the beginning of a new fiscal year. Over time, holiday feasting and family visits have become as much a part of Diwali tradition as the lighting of oil lamps and the firework displays. At these feasts, and similar to the Christian celebration of Christmas, adults give children presents. The Jains [a sect of Hindus] celebrate Diwali as their New Year's Day. As a result of the Indian Diaspora, Diwali is now celebrated as a Hindu holiday all over the world, and in the city of Dallas, with efforts of the local chapter of the Indian-American Friendship Council, was officially recognized by the mayor.⁵

On the SWU campus, the celebration of Diwali can be read as a text of South Asian second-generation identity construction. From the planning stages through to an evening that includes a talent and fashion show as well as a dinner, members of ISA express and negotiate who they are, enacting cultural symbols and values that are central to their organization and their identity. For several weeks, the ISA Executive Committee meets to plan their signature event. They emphasize that even though Diwali is a Hindu holiday, the celebration should be secular because ISA members are of several different faiths. "It's crucial that when we put it on it becomes more of a festival celebrating more of what it is symbolic of, rather than the religious aspect of it," said a former ISA President. "It's got to be universal and secular at the same time." A Christian ISA member explained, "I celebrate the essence of the Diwali spirit, a time for the celebration of culture and beauty." This is far different from the traditional celebrations that many ISA members participated in as children as well as from those currently practiced by the Indian communities here in Dallas:

At home we would typically have a small prayer service in the morning. Everyone washes their hair and takes showers and puts on new clothes. My Mom might light incense sticks and have a small family prayer and cook food, invite the neighbors over. People would come in and out of the house all day. You might go to an event where you would mingle with a bunch of other Indians and watch cultural shows and eat dinner . . . Here [at SWU] everything in a religious context is removed . . . it's more of a party aspect, more of a social aspect.

Removed from the ideologies and controlling imageries of their parents, the members of ISA use their organization as a mechanism through which to renegotiate some of the symbols of identity that might have constrained them as children and to develop their own "ethnic repertoires" (Purkayastha 2005: 147) by deciding what elements of Diwali they want to include, to discard, or to transpose into new meanings. The result of this renegotiation was manifest at the beginning of the SWU celebration one year in the welcoming address made by the ISA president:

We'd like to welcome you to our cultural show. Diwali is known as an extravagant celebration. It involves diya lamps, fireworks, colors, family, food, and friends. Diwali signifies the triumph of good over evil, darkness over light, virtue over vice. Diwali is a time of unity, togetherness, new beginnings, and a time for family and friends.

What is most revealing here is what the ISA president did not say in describing the SWU Diwali festival. She did not describe it as an Indian festival or a religious festival. This is a second-generation representation of culture, not that of their parents.

ISA members also promote their celebration as an occasion to bring together the "brown" crowd to celebrate what they consider to be aspects common to all of their cultures. Said one Catholic participant:

Not every brown person celebrated it [Diwali]. Like, I have never celebrated it before I came to the SWU campus. But by stripping it of its religious orientation, people like me can be included in this South Asian holiday party and not feel like an outsider. Our purpose is to make this, I guess, a brown holiday, not a religious one.

The use of the racial term here is significant; these young people, unlike their parents, accept a shared phenotypical characteristic to unite them where other characteristics, like religion and national origins, divide them. South Asian identity becomes associated with brownness. In fact, two thirds of the respondents said they had used the term brown to describe themselves. However, brownness may in fact be more an ethnic demarcation than a racial demarcation, reflecting what other scholars (Rangaswamy 2000; Kurien 2005; Bhalla 2006) have identified as the ambiguity of the Indian (but by extension South Asian) position in the United States. Here is what one student had to say:

If you're not black or white, in America you're brown. It's not really in the color of our skin, I don't know why we name it brown, but if you look at people, there are whites and blacks, and then this whole spectrum of Asians in-between . . . It's like this slang term that we use. Not really even our parents. It's just easier than saying South Asian, or a region, we just say "brown." We all know what it means. We use it among each other all the time.

The struggle that these students are having with the United States racial hierarchies and where they fit in was most poignantly expressed by a male student who asserted, "I am not a white person trapped in an Indian body, nor am I a black person trapped; when I look at myself I say "Hey, I'm Indian." This comment reflects an effort to find some place in between where members of the Indian or South Asian second-generation can locate themselves. It evokes what Morning (2001) describes as the fluid state of South Asian racial classification or what Kibria (1998) refers to as the ambiguous non-whiteness of South Asians living in the United States. In either case it is indicative of how hybridity is lived and wrestled with on a daily basis. An identity that is brown (i.e., neither Hindu, nor Muslim, nor Christian) and that is "ours" in the sense of being different from their

parents can be located and expressed through the annual planning and performance of a campus Diwali celebration.

Dress and decor

Another attempt to negotiate culture and identity is evident in the evening's colorful décor and dress. One year, running with the theme, "Extravagant Festival of Lights," the ISA played up these symbols. Traditionally, a puja (prayer) is performed after sunset in all the homes where *diyas* (lamps) are lit in front of the deities. On this night, everywhere in India, you can see a spectacular illumination of tiny flickering lamps. At SWU, the diyas light the way for friends and family to the celebration, rather than the return of Lord Rama. Giant cutouts of the oil lanterns adorned the walls of the ballroom, and the talent show opened with a dance featuring women carrying these lamps. Candles were placed in bowls and put on top of mirrors to light the tables of their guests. Each mirror was artfully decorated with colorful rangolis, the powdered chalk designs made up by ISA committee members. "It's a means of auspicious welcoming for our guests." On these rangelis the traditional religious sayings that welcomed Lord Rama were replaced with more generic greetings such as "Happy Diwali." In the same way that the Christian symbol of the North Star has been transformed into a benign decoration of celebratory lights during the Christmas season, the ISA transformed the symbolism of the diya to suit the message they wanted to transmit.

Torans (door hangings) are another important feature of traditional Diwali celebrations. These are used to adorn the main entrance doors of temples and that of the worship rooms and are there to welcome the Goddess Lakshmi. Diwali Torans come in various styles and designs. They can be made of cloth or plastic flowers, and all are handcrafted and embellished with embroidery, bells, beads, mirror, and shells. At SWU, the ISA uses saris to create a door hanging at the entrance to the lobby of the student center ballroom where the festival takes place. One ISA member recalled, "To us, these represent the colors and fabrics of our region without making any particular religious reference."

Diwali is a time to buy new clothes and also to purchase gold and silver jewelry, another symbol of auspicious welcoming for Lord Rama. The Indian gowns worn by women at the ISA celebration were also of bright colors and laden with mirrors and sparkle, and many of the men wore traditional *kurtas* (a long shirt with a scarf). "None of us wear black, because it is not auspicious enough." However, the "shared South Asian or brown symbols" that they talked about were represented in the

fashion choices. While different regional and religious variations could be seen in the clothing, they all shared the same fabrics and look (saris, tops with sashes, kurtas) that the ISA members recognized as South Asian. When asked how they felt about non-South Asian guests showing up in jeans or black clothing, one member said:

It's cool. We don't care. It's more like a party, and we just want people to come and experience our idea of a traditional party. We really don't care what others wear, it's just an excuse for us to dress up . . . especially being here in America and at SWU, any chance we have to dress up in our traditional clothes, we take it!

At one point during the Diwali celebration the ISA students include a choreographed fashion show of traditional as well as more Westernfusion South Asian clothing. When asked how their parents might carry out this part of the celebration, one student laughed:

The fashion show is *our* tradition. Our parents don't follow this format at all. That's'all us. Our parents would never consider having a fashion show as part of their celebration. It's . . . unheard of! Our parents would never *be* in a fashion show!

The clothes worn by those performing in the talent show are also quite different from the styles of traditional Diwali and chosen to communicate the essence of the act or skit. They often blend South Asian and American youth styles. Females dance in outfits that include traditional scarves tied over jeans, and the male acts incorporate tank T-shirts, jeans, baseball caps, and in one case an AC/DC T-shirt. While performers are given a lot of leeway in their choice of interpretive clothing, they are not completely unscripted. Strict guidelines are set down by the ISA that bar any showing of midriffs, shoulders, or anything else deemed risqué. "We have to approve what the acts are going to wear ahead of time, because there are parents in the audience, and we try to maintain this respect to the meaning of Diwali itself [religious] even if we don't openly include it."

In the SWU version of Diwali, second-generation South Asians use dress to express the diversity within the ISA. However, by placing restrictions on what can be worn, they both give a nod to the conservativeness and traditions of their parents while at the same time mixing them up in a way that is distinctly and purposively their own. They celebrate the auspicious nature of the holiday in their own bold and inventive form of a fashion show, both expanding and reinventing the tradition of donning new clothes for the celebration of Diwali.

The talent show

Etzioni et al. (2004: 132) suggest that by privileging certain cultural norms over others, community festivals function to promote a certain public identity as a sense of shared "we." The SWU Diwali talent show is an example of how the celebratory process is used by second-generation South Asian college students to perform selected cultural truths (i.e., what they perceive to be "authentic" representations of their present identity).

One year, an ongoing skit was performed intermittently between acts. It was about an Indian college student who "completely disassociates himself from anything Indian but deep inside he really wants to be a Bollywood actor." A former Bollywood star shows up at his dorm and spends the rest of the evening trying to make this college student of Indian descent more Indian. The student stumbles through singing, as his "style" is more American pop than Bollywood. This skit represented the conflicts that second-generation South Asians experience in their efforts to live between two cultures.

The diverse ethnic repertoires that members of the ISA have developed are also apparent in other acts. One act featured a Caucasian student dressed in Indian garb singing a traditional Indian song. In another act two South Asian men wearing black tank T-shirts and low slung jeans danced to an Indian pop song using a mix of choreography that included brake dancing, hip hop, and traditional Indian movements. Another act showcased two South Asians: one playing the electric guitar and the other drums. Both wore baseball caps and T-shirts from the legendary rock band AC/DC and sang a garage-band style rendition of an American rock song. Another number featured two South Asian women performing a duel of dance styles, one wearing American urban clothing dancing hip hop to an American song and the other dressed in Indian clothing dancing a traditional dance to a conservative Indian song. By the end of the number the two reached a reconciliation of sorts by combining the two movement and musical choices into one fusion-style dance they performed together. These acts exemplify lived hybridity and the process by which different elements are brought together into something new.

Family management

In their study of second-generation Americans, Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 190) point out that various social and psychological forces influence the paths to different forms of ethnic self-definition, not the least of which is the family. Dhingra (2007: 187) further suggests that in

sorting out and making sense of their identity, young adults who have left home and adopted a more blended identity will still act more "ethnic" during home visits to satisfy the expectations of the "home code." But what happens when visitors from home come to the student's campus as they do for Diwali? Aware of the different codes at play, how do the ISA students use their cultural performance to negotiate the tensions between their back home and college selves?

Theorists of the Birmingham School have conceptualized youth subcultures as attempts to mediate between the expectations of parents and those of peers (Cohen 1972; Clarke et al. 1976; Hebdige 1979). Maira (2002: 42) draws on this body of work to frame her discussion of Indian American youth at New York "Desi" parties who use American music remixes to integrate their sense of belonging to both worlds. While the ISA's Diwali celebration offers a space for SWU college students to work out their own identities, its performative dimension also provides an opportunity to communicate a blended identity to parents. Some students expressed apprehension about how this might be received:

My parents didn't even know that I was ISA president until the day before Diwali. . . . because, for me personally, even though this is a cultural organization they would think 'Why is she doing this. She is here to go to school.' But when she came to this event she loved the decorations and was so impressed by the big drawn Taj Mahal and rangoli. It seems like they thought it was surprisingly cool that I could have the opportunity to do this in college.

Another student made this observation: "My parents definitely don't accept my American side, so anything I do in college that is associated with being Indian they support." And from a third came the following comment:

My parents were happy that I not only get to do something like this, but that I want to. They had a fear that when I got to college that I would become white. Now they see it's not exactly like that. So they aren't really complaining that 'this [Diwali] isn't Indian or cultural enough" but rather, are complimenting me for being able to maintain a balance.

In light of comments quoted earlier about "being brown," the parents' racialized definition of becoming American as becoming white that this last student mentions is particularly interesting and again points to a contrast between the first-generation conception of a racial/cultural binary and the second-generation conception of a more fluid and complicated spectrum of racial/cultural/ethnic identities. Despite

the obvious display of hybridity, students indicated that their parents read the festival as an affirmation of their upbringing:

My parents are incredibly supportive of this event. Last year they brought all of their Indian friends. It's like they are so proud. They just want to show all their family and friends 'See, she is Indian.'

Once you are at home you are a certain way, and when you come here you are a certain way, but as far as the Indian part, I feel like I am the same inside. I hate Indian food, but when I ask my mom to make me some Indian food for the celebration, it's like a comfort thing. But my mom gets this big kick out of it, thinking I am becoming more Indian. I just let her think that, because it makes her happy, but I'm not more or less than I ever was. I just am what I am.

Even though the three major themes—ours, non-religious, and brown—are brought together by students into a performance of their lived hybridity, ultimately parents, students, and even non-South Asians apply their own interpretations in ways that affirm their own understanding of what it means to be sufficiently "cultural."

The dinner

Within anthropology, studies of food as a form of cultural expression and a symbol of personal and group identity are numerous (Bell and Valentine 1977; Douglas 1982; Wilk 1999). Ethnologists have documented the use of traditional regional food as a means to create a regional identity that serves simultaneously as substance and symbol (Köstlin 1973; Salomonsson 1984; Counihan and Van Esterik 1997). Through its ritual consumption in the context of a festival, food takes on an added performative value as the embodiment of its host community (Holton 2005: 132). Hindu festivals are no exception.

The ceremonial feast of Diwali offers opportunities for traditional Hindus to enact the auspiciousness of the festival through food. During Diwali, good friends and acquaintances, regardless of caste or religious community, are invited to eat with and meet the hosts, thus establishing a venue through which, if only temporarily, barriers can be broken down and bonds cemented (Khare 1976: 152). "The poor on these occasions carry the feeling of having plenty—of good food, of good clothing, and of generous hospitality" (Khare 1976: 146). By releasing special feelings of togetherness, human warmth, and a shared sense of plenty, these house-to-house dinners serve as more than appetite fillers; they also blur lines of distinction.

For the students at SWU, the food of Diwali is also an opportunity for them to recreate the symbols of auspiciousness and blur barriers and difference. ISA members spend considerable time discussing the menu for their celebration. They want the food they choose to communicate not only a sense of place or regional identity but also to attract non-South Asians on campus who are looking for an "authentic" food experience. ISA members recognize that food is a marker of ethnicity and a major facet of culture. But their dilemma is how to make what they serve appealing to both traditional parents and those outside their ethnic group, as well as how to encompass the enormous regional diversity in South Asian cuisine. A good deal of discussion is therefore focused on the menu, an activity that one committee member described as a "chore." While exact menu choices usually boil down to whatever local Indian parents offer to cook, one ISA member suggested that the students are mindful of keeping it mildly spicy for those not familiar with the regional flavors, offering vegetarian choices for those with dietary religious restrictions and including "South Asian Standards" such as samosas and Butter Chicken, which he referred to as the "hamburgers and French fries of the region." Although the students relinquish some control of how they represent themselves through their food when they tell parents to cook whatever they want, they are generally pleased that the food is always well received by both non-Asians and the most traditional of parents.

Each major festival has its edible specialties; the Diwali specialties are sweet sugary treats called *Mithai*. Once offered to the gods, these confectionary delights are also offered during this holiday to friends and guests (Khare 1976: 147). Likewise, the students of the ISA make sure they include an ample offering of sweets at their celebration. It is their way of presenting following a tradition that appeals simultaneously to the "sweet tooth" of their college student guests and the customs of their parents. However, as Banerji (2007: 2) notes, what constitutes "authentic" Indian cuisine is itself in constant negotiation. "With the passage of the centuries . . . cuisine has eagerly taken and absorbed exotic ingredients, and repeatedly been modified by external influences." In a diasporic context what the parents perceive as an authentic representation of their culture is no more or less authentic than the student's representation. For the non-South Asians, exotic food "must be situated so as to seem simultaneously exotic and familiar: distinguishable from mainstream cuisine and yet able to be assimilated as edible" college food (Lu and Fine 1995: 536). Members of the ISA understand that traditional culture is being altered in this process, but they believe that they are simultaneously educating both their parent and peers to their idea of culture.

The after party

In 2004 the ISA decided to incorporate an After Party into their celebration, a time to "unwind" after the hectic pace of pageant preparation and performance. The party begins after dinner as the tables are cleared and a DJ, disco lights, and dance floor move in. The After Party organizer recalled, "We get a DJ in who will play a purposeful mix of Indian music [often remixed with Western beats], hip hop, pop, everything. . . . Everyone gets out on the dance floor dancing American style. We prefer it." When asked if their parents participate in this part of the festival, one member laughed, "Never! Our parents who come, they don't even stay for this. They will watch the show and eat, but then they leave. It's just not their thing, or it's too foreign to how they know this celebration." But the fact that these second-generation college students choose to "unwind" dancing "American style" to American music signifies that this portion of the evening feels more natural to them than the more traditional segments during the first part of the evening. When asked if this showcased their American side, one ISA member explained:

The purpose of our Diwali isn't to prove that we are more or less Indian. We accept that we already are Indian to some extent, whatever percentage we are, however we as individuals associate ourselves. . . . We try to bring all of that together and then express it in Diwali.

This comment suggests that while festivals are scripted to some degree, there is also an inherently dynamic element to them. Different members embody multiple identities in which they have different degrees of interest or commitment. A campus Diwali celebration allows second-generation South Asians to socialize with ethnic peers while reinterpreting South Asian musical and dance traditions through the rituals of American popular culture, thereby appealing to both the worlds that they inhabit. In this way the campus Diwali festival can be looked at as a complex cultural text, constantly changing with the dynamics of its members, their values, and American popular culture.

Conclusion

Warikoo (2004: 385) argues that new cosmopolitan multi-ethnic domains like urban centers and college campuses "encourage the development of multi-valent ethnic identities rather than assimilation into a unitary American culture or an ethnic identity." In organizations

where second-generation students, free from parental limitations, can sift through cultural traditions and negotiate boundaries, they develop activities like the Diwali festival discussed here that become the embodiment of the hybridity that they are living. Benjamin Orlove (2007: 631) has suggested that cultural performances are a fruitful site in which to examine the mixing of categories. Here we have read one cultural performance as a text where second-generation South Asians author who they are becoming rather than parrot what others say or think they are. These young people use performative space to help them make sense of their backgrounds in ways that both differentiate them from and allow for association with SWU's majority student population. They also use this space as a safe place for "coming out" (i.e., for communicating their hybrid identity to their parents), although they are aware that sometimes their parents may not receive the message as they intend it. This hybrid identity is expressed through a discourse of "brownness" that marks something distinctive and that reflects the process by which the children of fourth-wave (i.e., post-1965) immigrants choose not between different identities but among them (Warikoo 2004: 384) to create integrated selves. The campus Diwali festival is the expression of those selves. It offers one rich illustration of how second-generation South Asians construct a hybrid culture that defines who they are and how they fit into the contested racial and ethnic hierarchies of United States society.

Notes

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- 1. The research on which the analysis here draws was part of a larger study of civic engagement and identity among Asian Indians immigrants and their children in DFW. The larger project was supported by the Russell Sage Foundation and includes a comparison with Vietnamese immigrants for which Deborah Reed-Danahay is co-investigator. Any ideas and opinions offered here are those of the authors and not of the Russell Sage Foundation or the co-PI.
- 2. Texas had 7.7 percent of all Indians in the United States in 2000.
- 3. For further discussion of these demographics, see Brettell 2005 and Dhingra 2007.
- 4. Shukla (2003: 299) cites a letter published in 2002 in *India Abroad*, a national newspaper for Indian immigrants written by a young woman of the second generation. The woman wrote, "As the American-born daughter of Indian immigrants, I rarely interacted with people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin or heard the words 'South Asian' until I went to College."
- 5. For further discussion of the IAFC, see Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2008).

6. The different attitudes toward race between first and second generation Indians in the United States has certainly been noted by other scholars (Visweswaran 1997; Khandelwal 2002; Koshy 2002; Dhingra 2003; Kurien 2005; Bhatia 2007). For a broader discussion of the concept of brownness among Latinos and Asian Americans, see Eileen O'Brien's (2005) provocative analysis of the "racial middle." Myers (2005: 129) emphasizes that brownness, unlike blackness and whiteness, is less "tied to one specific racial/ethnic group" and is also more fluid—"its signification varies across contexts more than blackness and whiteness do."

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