

## The South Asian Neighbour and Her/His Stereotype Goes Global

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### Abstract

Television drama is one of the most remarkable cultural lenses through which to evaluate the presence and the recurrence of stereotypical artistic constructions of the many identities that coexist in the “Diaspora Space” (Brah 1996). It is in this light that this paper will introduce and discuss *The Kumars at No. 42*, a British sitcom that portrayed a British South Asian family living in the London district of Wembley (UK) during the first years of the Noughties (2001-2006). The show, which enjoyed the benefit of the British audience and critics alike (it won two International Emmy Awards in 2002 and 2003), portrayed the daily routines of Sanjeev, a thirty-something British Indian man dreaming of becoming a TV presenter and Shushila, his grandmother, who constantly mocks her grandson’s obsession with money and his social incompetence to integrate the South Asian distinctiveness into what she calls the “British way of life”.

The present paper has a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it analyses the construction of this pair of characters as illustrative of the stereotypes that are still created by the British society about the South Asian community: the old *auntie* stuck in the old traditions from the Sub-Continent and the *first generation British Indian* man only eager to work and earn money. Secondly, it studies how these two characters have been re-written in the adaptations of *The Kumars at No. 42* that have been produced in Australia, India and Pakistan. By so doing, this essay will ultimately aim at further contextualising the derogatory and cultural reading of South Asian difference that, both in the British and the global productions of *The Kumars*, are designed for these two recurrent constructions of the next-door South Asian migrant.

Once upon a time, a character was only a mask and a neighbour was but a person living next door. Nowadays, in a so-called transcultural world and in an academic stage such as this SELICUP 2010 Conference, the character of the neighbour becomes one of the most recurrent figures in contemporary popular culture, where culture is, as following Raymond Williams famous approach, a set of social practices (1961, 1968, 1974, 1989). Thus considering the topic of the Conference, *Past, Present and Future of Popular Culture: Spaces and Contexts*, I want to focus on how old and new stereotypes about the figure of the person living next door have been represented in television series during the decade of the Noughties (2000-2010).

This paper explicitly works on how *The Kumars at No. 42* presented a *new* reading of the stereotype of the South Asian migrant in London (UK) and how the latter adaptations of the show produced in Australia, the US, India and Pakistan failed to depict that *new* vision. In this sense, by *new* readings of stereotype I mean that *The Kumars* offered different constructions about immigrant South Asianness that contrasted to the popular portrayals seen, for instance, in the character played by Peter Sellers in Blake Andrews’ *The Party* (1968), in the racist perception that the Simpson family has about Apu Nahasapeemapieton in the US

comedy series *The Simpsons* (1989-) or in the cover to the “Millenium Supplement” in the August 1999 US issue of *National Geographic*.<sup>1</sup> These three examples give an idea about how the South Asian neighbour is still portrayed under Orientalist perceptions that always involve a certain set of hegemonic viissions about the South Asian Sub-Continent and its diaspora clearly inherited from colonial times.

Consequently, I understand that a representational stereotype stands for a static representation of a certain type of character with a specific function in any artistic narration (Frye 1984; Kristeva 1993) as well as it refers to a recurrent construction of a character that embodies and refers to a set of ideals or behaviours (Abirached 1994; Pavis 1998; Shukla 2003; Pascual 2010). Accordingly, it is my intention to promote the idea that popular culture produces both static and dynamic stereotypes, a notion that depends on that double characterisation about the representational stereotype. On the one hand, *a static stereotype* would endorse a monolithic production of a character that reduces the concept of cultural difference to a mere tokenistic visualization (as seen in the three examples of South Asianness previously cited). On the other, *a dynamic stereotype* would foster a new and different interpretation that would go beyond that set of fixed standards, therefore seeking to display a new depiction about that recurrent and preceding cliché. As related to this theoretical context, I will propose that the *The Kumars at No. 42* (2001-2007) is an example of the second trend as opposed to the adaptations produced in the US, Australia, India and Pakistan. By so doing, I intend to confirm how a character/stereotype can present a dynamic reading of contemporary culture as well as it can involve a denigrating, static construction of any social group.

The structure of the paper will be three-fold. Firstly, I will contextualise the members of the Kumar family as inhabitants of a space of diaspora, the “Diaspora Space” (Brah 1996), where transcultural and transnational identities coalesce and transform each other. Likewise, I will be able to propose the terms diaspora, globalisation and hybridity as theoretical lenses that will prove that *The Kumars at No. 42* parodies the typical South Asian stereotype so as to provide a dynamic interpretation of the current transcultural momentum. Secondly, and by focusing on the notions of family, race and employment, I will illustrate how the Kumar family can be simplified to mere static and derogatory representations if these theoretical implications of diaspora and hybridity are obviated. In order to confirm this essentialist

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<sup>1</sup> Under the heading “Global Culture” the cover portrayed an old woman wearing a sari and a young woman dressed with a black-leather stretch uniform. Both of them had South Asian features and seemed to display a message of how the cultures of the East were on their way to get rid of cultural specialities (such as the sari) to assume the new Western apparel of the times (black leather). By presenting the two women, the message proved both its sexism and its racist nature, as the young woman would fit with the image of a sexy *femme fatale* that will become a business woman by leaving all their true cultural tradition.

construction of *the person living next door*, I will analyse the versions produced in the US and Australia as instances of the static understanding of the original show that portrayed the US and Australian characters as simple *foreign neighbours* of a major culture. Thirdly, I will study how the two female characters in *The Kumars* are reduced to subaltern figures not only in the Australian and the US adaptations but also in the versions produced in India and Pakistan. The overall study of all the adaptations together will therefore attest that the concepts of nation, race and cultural difference are subject to be *constructed* with a double burden placed on women. The paper will then finish confirming that popular culture produces stereotypes that can challenge as well as strengthen hegemonic assumptions placed upon those who live in the *intersite* of diaspora. Here, the creators as well as the audience, both social agents in popular culture, decide who *dwells* in and who *is slotted* out.

## **1 A Migrant Family Inhabiting the Diaspora Space: Neighbours Becoming Citizens of the World**

We all now live within a far-reaching debate of cultural interplay and, as a result, our identities (both as individual and social entities) become enriched by a process of constant change and transformation, a consequence of the continuous sociological, political and artistic negotiation among cultures. As a result, if as Stuart Hall proclaims that “things are related as much by their differences as through their similarities” (1980: 328), the cultural and social encounter that characterises the twenty-first century reveals that we all cohabit in a heterogeneous world where the concept of diaspora trespasses its original etymological roots (“scatter through”, from the Greek terms *dia* and *sperein*) and goes beyond a mere dispersal of peoples.

Diaspora then accounts for the multiple passage created in the current transcultural map that results from what Paul Gilroy defines as the collision between “roots and routes” (2000: 34). The consequent dilemmas then wonder and wander about possible new “locations of residence” and “locations of the belonging” (2000: 36), therefore producing an abstract space where cultures and identities are situated in a context of border meddling, a resultant plurality that surfaces out of a process of mutual and symbiotic influence. This space of diaspora, “Diaspora Space<sup>2</sup>” as Avtar Brah (1996) names it, contains a complex system of many

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<sup>2</sup> Hence I will be using diaspora space, without capital letters, to refer to the same concept coined by Avtar Brah in *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities* (1996).

variables which, as Sandhya Shukla writes, “Exists not in the borderlands of a nation, but within and through central spaces of several nations” (2003: 17).

Consequently, this permanent relationship of cultural interference enhances what Irene López Fernández calls “fluid identities” (2009: 144) that are “always transformed” and “always in the making” as Stuart Hall (1992:17) and Sujata Moorti (2003: 358) respectively define. Equally, as Steven Vertoveck confirms the existence of “a diasporic mode of cultural production” (2000: 199; 2009: 24), the existence of this diaspora space then becomes a conceptual, agglutinating site of immanence that functions as a representational cartography from where to analyse the cultural and social dynamics of our contemporary age. Accordingly, diaspora space gathers *complex figures* that remind us that “history is happening” (Bhabha 1994: 1, 25) and that we all inhabit in a global contact zone<sup>3</sup> where hybrid identities are produced.

In my opinion, it is only by acknowledging the hybridity of cultures and the existence of hybrid identities that the contemporary cultural ambivalence can be regarded. For that reason, hybridity subsists as a “natural phenomenon” (García Canclini 1997: 47, my translation) that guarantees the premise of the world as a “heterogenous amalgam” (Lomba 1996: 4), not a unitary whole or a mere multicultural puzzle where differences are presented but never embroidered together. Ella Shohat also analyses hybridity as the only conceptual consideration that assures “non-universalising, neo-colonial *perspectives*” (1996: 329, my emphasis added), limiting *perspectives* that I recognise in definitions of multiculturalism such as those encouraged by, for example, Samuel Huntington’s description of the diversity of cultures as a mere “clash of civilisations” (1998, 2004). Here, let me illustrate the concept of diaspora space as a three dimension tapestry where the diversity of cultures is both seen in the surface and in its own embroidery, whereas a discourse of multiculturalism as Huntington’s is constructed as a mere jigsaw structure, only recognising the visible layer.

This conceptualisation of diaspora as an *iceberg term* relates to the production and perception of *global identities* that should not be understood as a homogenised whole but as an opportunity to look at the whole global heterogeneity inherent to the hybrid identities.

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Louise J. Pratt, in her book *Imperial Eyes* (1992), defines contact zone as follows:

[The] space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict[...] contact zone is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect (6).

In other words, the concept of contact zone becomes pretty much illustrative of Bhabha’s “Third Space”, which he defines as “the middle passage of contemporary culture where culture eludes the politics of polarity” (1994: 38).

Globalisation, in this sense and as Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Shandya Shukla (2003) also point out, embodies the hope of a common future and a global contestation towards a better conceptualisation of the necessities of our world.

It is then that the concept of the hybridity of cultures helps us understand, as Sunil Bhati recognises, how “immigrants living in postcolonial and diasporic locations are negotiating and reconciling conflicting histories and incompatible subject positions” (2007: 233). The idea of coming to terms with history can therefore lead us to categorically state that terms such as *diaspora* and *hybridity* are outcomes of colonial and postcolonial stories that go beyond its historical conflicts by integrating them as another layer of that heterogeneous palimpsest through which history can be defined. According to this postcolonial reading of terms, *The Kumars at No. 42* represents a reality beyond the premises stated by the BBC about the Kumar family as a British Asian family of four members living at a house in Wembley.

Likewise, the first season of the show gives more details about the Kumar’s own postcolonial history as Ashwin, the father, states that he came to the UK “in 1963” to find a job despite the fact that there was “no proper work in the UK and none of those Asians, either brown or Chinese, that now reside in Shepherd’s Bush” (ep. 2, 22’).<sup>4</sup> Ashwin, thus, has traced down the postcolonial cartography for the Kumar family: he came into the UK during the “1963-1972 post-Partition phase” (Raghuram *et al.* 2008: 17) pursuing a future that seemed rather difficult for middle class South Asians in the post-Partition Sub-Continent. The fact that I am using South Asian, despite the Kumar family recognises their “background history of Punjabi sayings” (ep. 1, 12’), is important because there was no further reference found in the show apart from “a family house in Delhi” (ep 4. 22’). In this view, I believe that the term South Asian most of the times helps gather the agglutination of cultures inherent to the South Asian Sub-Continent<sup>5</sup> beyond the restricting national, religious, linguistic or economic labels that, as a colonial and postcolonial outcome, reduced South Asia to a continuously bordered site.

It is so that the label South Asia disrupts the notion that India as a country merely refers to Hindu people who speak Hindi, inheritance of the colonial presence in South Asia, and a very recurrent comment in the country this conference is being celebrated. Moreover, it

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper I will only focus on the first season of *The Kumars at No. 42*. Also, I will be referring to the corresponding episode as preceded by ep. and then I will refer to the minute as matching with the DVD edition of the First Season published in 2008 by HatTrick Productions.

<sup>5</sup> The South Asian Sub-Continent agglutinates the following politically recognised nations: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma/Myanmar, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

breaks with the Orientalist (Said 1979) portrayal of India as an exotic touristic resort that is still sold worldwide reproducing Mark Twain's words "Oh! This is India!".<sup>6</sup> As another random instance of this wrong conceptualisation, let me refer to the Hay Festival celebrated last September (2010) in Segovia (Spain) where the advertising brochures presented the Indian writer Tishani Doshi as a "Hindu writer". This clearly contrasts to her semi autobiographical novel *The Pleasure Seekers* (2010), where she tells the story of a Jain and Catholic family, as well as to her interviews, where she defines herself as an Indian and a Welsh person that was brought up following Jainist and Protestant values. Thus, the territorial inexactitude that defines South Asia<sup>7</sup> also illustrates the Kumar family as inhabitants of a diaspora space where geographical, racial, religious and linguistic delimitations are always rather biased and incomplete. Thus, as far as *The Kumars at No. 42* is concerned, the label South Asian connects to other terms such as "BrAsian" (Ali et al. 2004: 161) or "The Apna Generation" (Bhattacharyya and Gabriel 1994) which deal with the multiplicity of the South Asian Sub-Continent diaspora in the UK or in the US as dwellers of that space, not as *only visiting* aliens or *foreign* neighbours.

The characters in *The Kumars* can consequently be defined as South Asian citizens of the world, British Asians or Brasians of "fluid identities" (Pérez Alonso 2009). Moreover, *The Kumars*, as a show and as Sunny Handal openly admitted on the article "How Television still Suffers from Stereotyping", was the first mediascape<sup>8</sup> that portrayed South Asians living in Britain with a "broader appeal than merely brown representations" (Handal 2005: 1) and that

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<sup>6</sup> Full quote by Mark Twain (1897) as it follows:

This is indeed India; the land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendor and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of a thousand nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods, cradle of the human race, birthplace of human speech, mother of history, grandmother of legend, great-grandmother of tradition, whose yesterdays bear date with the mouldering antiquities of the rest of the nations—the one sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the globe combined.

<sup>7</sup> The critical bibliography that accounts for a South Asian diaspora that studies the syncretism of cultures from the South Asian Sub-Continent in the diaspora has been very extensive since the 1990s onwards as a way to challenge academic discourses that could not explain the multiplicity of nations of texts such as Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000) or Bali Rai's *(Un)Arranged Marriages* (2005). The most important references are Peter van der Veer's *Nation and Migration: the Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (1990); Colin Clarkem, Ceri Peach and Steven Vertovec's *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity* (1990); Carla Petievich's *The Expanding Landscape: South Asians and the Diaspora* (1999); Crispin Bates's *Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora* (2001); Amitava Kumar's *Passport Photos* (2000); Vijay Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk* (2000); Sunaina Maira's *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City* (2002) or Nasreen Ali and Virinder S. Kalra and Siddiq Sayyid's *A Postcolonial People. South Asians in Britain* (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Arjun Appadurai defines *mediascape* in his book *Modernity at Large* (1996) as the way that visual imagery impacts the world. Such imagery comes from books, magazines, television or cinema.

was broadcasted on BBC1 in 2006 because previous shows displaying South Asians in the diaspora such as *The Real McCoy* (1991-1996) and *God Graciousness Me* (1996-1998 as a radio series, 1998-2001 as a TV series) were only shown on minor channels like BBC2 or BBC4. Previous representations of British South Asians on TV or radio series were merely based on static stereotypes and so they displayed derogatory caricatures as the portrayal of the Ferreira marriage shown in *Eastenders* (seasons among 2003-2005). In this sense, *The Kumars* offered a new kind of *Britishness* that mixed both English and South Asian stereotypes together as firstly portrayed in Gurinder Chadha's *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993), where Dwivalli was celebrated in a strip club in Blackpool.

In other words, *The Kumars* portrayed new identities based on a dynamic reading of the stereotypes of the South Asian immigrant living next door that parodied the static and essentialist constructions normally offered on mainstream TV programmes. It is so that I believe that *The Kumars* subverted the tokenistic vision of the South Asian neighbour living in the UK. Anil Gupta, writer and producer of the show, recalls how “he was anxious to destroy stereotypes [because in late 1990s] minority programming had a genre of its own. It was only made for those [white British or poor immigrants from the Asian continent] audiences. Asian people being funny wasn't on the radar” (Gupta quoted in Handal 2005: 1). The title of the show itself illustrates this crossover, mixing the stereotypical South Asian surname Kumar (also used in, for example, the *Harold & Kumar* movie series) with the number 42, which is taken out from Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Galaxy* (1978-2009) as Sanjeev Bhaskar points out in the “Director's Commentary” to the DVD edition of *The Kumars* (2009). This idea clearly reconceives the negative visions of *The Kumars* found in articles such as Hasan Suroor's “British Asian Life: Parodies and Stereotypes” (2005) where he criticised *The Kumars* for being “a mere stereotype” (1) and demanded more South Asian presence in mainstream British popular culture. Nevertheless, I believe that *The Kumars* creates their own stereotype to subvert it with a great sense of humour and right on the mainstream primetime.

So as to prove this point, let us see how each character in *The Kumars* is constructed as based on an expected stereotype. The Kumar family is composed by three generations: Umami (Ushumi, the *granny* starred by Meera Syal), Ashwin and Madhuri (played by Vincent Ibrahim and Indira Joshi) and Sanjeev (the only character of the family born in the UK and portrayed by Sanjeev Bhaskar). The concept of generation used here consequently trespasses the simple notion of members of an age group to circumscribe Sadhya Shukla's premises that “generation addresses a form of processing a cultural change [as that experienced by the

individuals in the diaspora]” (2003: 20). This reading of generation in relation to the notion of dynamic stereotypes in *The Kumars at No. 42* does not seek to look for references to the *homelands* in the show but to present how each character stands as courier of the different clichés expected from each generation. Here, subversion takes part in the form of parody and therefore acts as a way to attain the true representation of the crossculturality inherent to *The Kumars* as well as other successful shows such as *Ali G*, an idea already suggested in Hillary Dannenberg’s “Hybrid Genres and Crosscultural Dialogues in Contemporary British Television Comedy” (2005).

It is in this sense that Ummi is portrayed as the typical South Asian grandmother that can only think about getting her grandchildren married. Ummi is always cooking and offering South Asian food to the guests. She constantly makes references to her saris and *salwar kameezes* as the “only proper clothes” (ep. 2, 8’) and she repetitiously recalls the weather conditions back in the Sub-Continent. These presumably static and stereotypical representations are clearly summarised when Ummi firstly appears in the chapter with Sir Michael Parkinson and she starts singing to him “Hari Parky, Hary Parky [...]” (ep. 1, 4’) as mocking a devotional *bhajan*. She continues on and states to Sir Parkinson, “You know, we came here on holydays by mistake” just before Ashwin is about to start one of his long anecdotes about his arrival in the UK in 1963 “as a great enterprise” for the sake “of business” (ep. 1, 5’). Afterwards, Ummi starts offering to Sir Parkinson a Campbell carrot Southall *samosa* and then she starts flirting with him by telling the story about how her body “felt under her baggiest sari on a buffalo” (ep. 1, 6’) as well as, in another episode, she asks Lorraine Kelly if she has ever worn a sari because “dressing up with one is pure tantric sex” (ep. 4, 12’). Hence, all these remarks illustrate how Ummi adds a twist of parody that clearly desintegrates the easy joke expected by British spectators to happen in the show.

Therefore, what could simply seem to correspond to the static stereotype of the South Asian grandmother in Wembley is re-created as a dynamic tool to subvert that very same representation. It is so that actress and screenplay writer Meera Syal got all the attention in the different seasons of the show as she had no script to play Ummi (a fact that the audience knew). Ummi then was enhanced as a clear instance of how the concept of South Asian *roots* finds a new *route* in Britain, illustrating that there is something beyond that conception of the *rooted* and *rotten* South Asian, immigrant granny cooking *samosas* and performing *poojas* all day long.

The parody is also inherent to Ashwin and Madhuri. Ashwin keeps on stating that, when he first arrived in Britain he encountered London “without a single Indian restaurant” (ep. 2,

8'). It was previously reported that Ashwin arrived in England in the early 1960s, when the social politics were founded over an increasing racist attitude against *black* and *brown* neighbours, summarised in Margaret Thatcher's remark, "this country might be *swamped* by people with a different culture"<sup>9</sup> (January 27<sup>th</sup> 1978, my emphasis added). It is in this sense that the character of Ashwin mocks a double stereotype: the Indian man who constantly feels *displaced* and the business Indian man who cannot stop thinking about getting property in both the UK and in India. The episode with Swazilandian actor Richard E. Grant stands as a clear representative of the first line. In this programme, Ashwin insists on asking Grant if "he still feels as an outsider", repeating that "you know, I too am an immigrant in this country [*sic*]", "you probably know a Naidu family member in South Africa from India" and "I also had to share a flat with 15 more people on arrival in the UK" (ep 1, 18'). Instances of the economical interest are found in how he always tries to save up money on the payment done to the guests by giving them some "special chutney made by a friend" (ep. 6, 19') or how he always advertises his friends' *tandooring services* for any kind of event that the guest plans to celebrate. Besides, Ashwin always interrogates about property with constant questions like "Do you live in Richmond?" (ep. 1, 22'), "how is it your flat, very big?" (ep. 3, 4'), "How many houses do you have?" (ep. 3, 22'), while he aims at extending his social circle by inviting the "very important guests" to the Kumar's house in India, so that "Indian neighbours know that they have important friends from England" (ep. 3, 12'). Nevertheless, Ashwin would furthermore illustrate the stereotype of the South Asian obsession with economic profit, telling that his prospect for future is that of creating a business based on selling chutney to all Indian restaurants in London as well as he will turn his own house, his so-called "place of exile", into a "mega-project" for a global show, where "the Kumars will be able to be recognised everywhere in the world" (ep. 6, 12'). The character of Ashwin then clearly mocks what could have been expected for his clichéd first representation and so he is described as an emerging global entrepreneur aware of his possibilities in the diaspora space, where his *Southasinaness* has become intermingled into a new conception for *Britishness*.

The character of Madhuri also follows a double recurrent cliché applied to the South Asian community: the obsession on marriage and the constant offering of presents. She always asks the guests if they are engaged or how their marriage ceremony was celebrated. In between, she keeps on constantly bringing more *ladhus* and *samosas* on stage, as well as decorative representations of Indian tourist resorts where, she informs the guests, "the sweets

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<sup>9</sup> The speech can be accessed on the following link: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485> (last accessed December 20th, 2010).

can be stored” (ep. 4, 28’). The stereotypical strategies to construct the character of Madhuri could be defined as tokenistic at first glance so that they are later subverted either by Madhuri herself or by Ashwin. Same as Ashwin turns his feeling of displacement into an opportunity to make economic profit, Madhuri challenges her own clichés within the show and, for example, she asks TV famous couple Richard and Judy, “What was the secret of your marriage to be so lucrative” (ep. 3, 18’), where she is obviously making fun at British sensationalist media.

Besides, it is sometimes Ummi who dismantles Madhuri’s constant interest on Indian marriages and Ashwin’s entrepreneur obsession. For instance, Ummi recommends Ashwin and Sanjeev to “put all your ideas to make Bollywood films with American stars and British blondes and then we will get the world. If not, another big American head will go ahead” (ep. 5, 8’). All in all, the clichés that used to criticise the British preconceived set of ideas about South Asian immigrants can be summarised when Ummi herself talks about the “British obsession about kitchy funny east meets west fashion” or that “academic obsession in guessing how one art influences one another art in India, we just love and respect our history” (ep. 4, 17’). Thus, not only does Ummi challenge the expected clichés about South Asians but also the British mainstream standards.

The character of Sanjeev is constructed *through* these two generations (Ummi and Madhuri/Ashwin) integrating, assimilating and finally redefining the notion of *being British* in the contemporary UK. Accordingly, Sanjeev is a character that performs that fluid and hybrid identity living in the diaspora space previously described. His idea of becoming the new British sensation on the media business is a clear illustration of this point. It is in this line that Sanjeev is played by Sanjeev Bhaskar as quite confident in his hope to find a job as the best British front man on TV meanwhile he is unaware about the fact that his own South Asianess may result in a kind of socio-economic burden to his future. In relation to Sanjeev’s attitude, we can point back at the stage designed for the show as an epitome of the dismantling of boundaries and identities in the British cultural space. In this sense, Sanjeev Kumar is portrayed as a new kind of British host inviting British guests (both to be interviewed and as audience) to his family’s British house which, at the same time, displays a South Asian decoration. This space thence becomes an extraordinary representation of the new British identity that, as famously acknowledged, defines chicken *tikka masala* as the UK’s national dish.<sup>10</sup> The resultant multi-layered construction is correspondent with that

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<sup>10</sup> Popular sources like *The Daily Mail* ([www.dailymail.co.uk/.../Taste-Britains-Curry-Festival-Chicken-tikka-masala-headlines-India.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/.../Taste-Britains-Curry-Festival-Chicken-tikka-masala-headlines-India.html)) or webs for the Indian communities in the diaspora like *Indiacurry*

definition of “Diaspora Space” (Brah 1996) as a multi-sided interstice as well as with the resultant hybrid identity that is consequence of a true intermingling of cultures.

Thence, *The Kumars at No. 42* clearly challenge the static productions about the South Asian stereotype by looking straight at how that stereotype is constructed. This is the promising idea that de-stereotypes the notion of a South Asian neighbour that lives next door to, instead, present the three Kumar generations as inhabitants of a diaspora space that integrates the cultural hybridity beyond the clichés that would have otherwise be placed on them by other popular British cultural manifestations (as the previously referred *Eastenders*). This dynamic reading and construction of the Kumar family would foster what Anil Gupta remarks as a “cross-over appeal” (quoted in Handal 2005: 1) that could grant that Sanjeev finally replaces Michael Parkinson on BBC1. Nevertheless, the same notions of family, race, and employment can be derogated to a static and essentialist representation, as it was the case in the versions of the original British show produced in the US and Australia that are to be now analysed.

## **2 A Family Fitting into a Puzzle: Derogatory Representations of a Neighbouring Other**

Australian show *Greeks on the Roof* (2003) and US sitcom *The Ortegas* (2005) were adaptations of *The Kumars at No. 42* that depicted static cultural stereotypes. Both shows portrayed three generations of a migrant family that failed to apprehend the process of cultural change that is intrinsic to the diaspora space. The representative “cross-over appeal” (Gupta 2005: 1) of *The Kumars*’ success was all obviated in these two shows that only offered a tokenistic representation about Greek and Mexican communities living in, respectively, Australia and the US. In fact, *Greeks on the Roof* and *The Ortegas* may be described as instances of how cultural difference can be merely *slotted* under the notion of “the Other” (Said 1979; Fanon 1963) as opposed to the Kumar family in the original show, represented as *dwellers* of a diaspora space with a constantly changing identity.

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([www.indiacurry.com/.../cx007chixtikkamasala.htm](http://www.indiacurry.com/.../cx007chixtikkamasala.htm)) state that the *tikka masala* does not have an Indian origin but and it is an original British dish since post-Partition times (1950). Popular stories among Indians in the diaspora tell that, from the 1980s onwards, when they started to return to India, their children would order *tikka masala* dishes in Indian restaurants and canteens and nobody would understand what they meant. The British chicken *tikka masala* is made out of fried chicken, a *tikka* (bread) and the *masala* (a sauce made out of many species with no specific contents).

It is in this sense that I will be pointing out at how the families in the Australian and the US interpretations, the Stephanidies and the Ortegas correspondingly, were conceptualised as mere static stereotypes of an alien neighbour that did not have that cross-over appeal granted to *The Kumars at No. 42*. I will therefore claim that the creators of *Greeks on Roof* and *The Ortegas* never understood that the Kumar family represented a new kind of British identity. This idea will later prove that both *Greeks on the Roof* and *The Ortegas* were absolute failures because they looked at the original Kumars from a wrong lens that ignored the quirky illustration of the diaspora space in the original British programme.

*Greeks on the Roof* starred Effie in the role played by Sanjeev Kumar. The figure of Effie was a spin-off character played by Mary Coustas who, in the real life, was a very popular actress from a Greek family of immigrants that succeeded in Australian TV in the 80s and early 90s in the shows *Effie abroad* and *Acropolis Now*. *Effie Abroad* (1996-1998) portrayed the character of Effie visiting foreign countries to find herself in the most embarrassing situations due to her *excessive* Greek foolishness and lack of knowledge about the world. *Acropolis Now* (1989-1994) starred Mary Coustas as Effie, the cousin of Jim Stephanides, the main character who runs a Greek bar in a very unproductive way together with his Spanish friend Ricky Martínez. In both shows, Mary Coustas played Effie as a woman of Greek origin learning about Australian's open mind and social possibilities as opposed to her very religious and traditional Mediterranean background that always *pushed* her "[to] do everything with and for the family" (*Acropolis Now*, season 3, ep. 4). Both shows displayed very static representations of Greek immigrants as opposed to the great possibilities granted by the fact of being Australian in the 1990s.

*Greeks on the Roof* furthermore emphasised how Effie became Australian by losing her Greek roots. Coustas accompanied the release of *Greeks on the Roof* with an extensive series of interviews where she kept talking about her family, "a very unconventional modern and open Greek family", and education, pointing at how "eighty per cent of [her] friends only spoke English, there were three Greek kids in my primary school [but she] was the only Greek in [her] year level", as Coustas states in the interviews featured on the DVD edition of *Greeks on the Roof* for the second season. In the show, Effie lives with her mother Poppy, who always wears black to mourn her dead relatives, and her father Mitso, who keeps on referring to the grandiosity of Greek architecture and the Olympics. They are neighbours with her aunt Melina, a spinster who was abandoned by an Australian man and who now lives with her son Dimi, a sort of Greek hoodlum in his teen years. All live on the top floor of a Melbourne penthouse which was, according to the character of Effie, "decorated with all the

authentic Greek things such as marble kitchen and marble table [*sic*]” (season 1, ep. 4, 12’). Consequently, Greek roots are clearly defined as a mere set of diffident ideals and static white decoration that mocks better times. Accordingly, the concept of family is reduced to a mere *ghetto* and closed community that the Stephanidis are expected to abandon if the characters want to succeed in Melbourne.

This previous essentialist representation of roots, together with the simplistic vision of the cultural merging of a diasporic group, could be defined as reasons that explain why the show was very poorly received by the audience. *Being Australian* meant rejecting *being Greek* and the series likewise ignored the liaison, respect and integration of recognised Australian Greek personalities of the times such as politician Jenny Mikakos or sports man Mark Philippousis. It is so that *Greeks on the Roof* clearly missed the negotiation among cultures that was core of *The Kumars at No. 42* and that, for instance, portrayed Sanjeev Kumar’s desire to triumph in the UK as a BrAsian citizen who inhabits that BrAsian space that opposes the essentialist representations of the Greek communities in *Greeks on the Roof*. This statement can be applied as well to the representation of a Mexican family living in California (US) in *The Ortegas*, where the members of the Ortega family are plainly portrayed as static neighbours that live stuck in their own roots without integrating them in new routes.

*The Ortegas* presented a Mexican family of four members formed by Mary as the grandmother, Henry and Esmeralda as the parents and Luis as the son following the role of Sanjeev Kumar. The series followed *The Kumars* layout and was cancelled twice by Sony TV Channel before having been ever broadcasted. Lastly, only four of its episodes were aired. Throughout these chapters the Ortega family was never depicted as a family that lived within a hybrid socio-cultural dynamics in the US. In this sense, both Mary and Esmeralda offer “empanadillas” and “burritos” as “very latino, exotic food” (ep. 2, 3’) to the guests, something that did not correspond to the actual presence of Mexican food in the US. It is according to this idea that the members of the Ortega family were expected to renounce to their Mexican *difference* “to get a little bit of the gringo life” (ep. 1, 12’) as the character of Luis states. The very same idea of the Ortegas as a family living *in the margins* and never mixing with *the centre*, can also be seen in the programme that features Jessica Simpson as main guest. In this episode, Luis asks Ms Simpson, “Have you ever been interviewed by Mexicans? Have you ever met one Mexican?” (ep. 2, 18’). Thence, the show merely caricaturises the Ortegas’ Mexicaness, without pointing at the true intermingling of cultures that was used by the character of Ummi when referring to the Southall *samosas* in the original British show.

Thus, both *The Ortegas* and *Greeks on the Roof* lack *The Kumars'* original “cross-over appeal” (Gupta 2005: 1) and “crosscultural multiplicity” (Dannenberg 2005: 19). It is then that both series portray the Greek community in Australia and the Mexican population in the US following a racist conception of both groups as mere neighbours, *others* out of a vast white Australian and North American majority. This is clearly summarised in how the characters of Luis Ortega and Effie Stephanidies, both adaptations of the character played by Sanjeev Bhaksar in the original series, will be only able to triumph socially if they leave their Mexican and Greekness roots aside, as opposed to Sanjeev, who triumphs by negotiating them in the new reality that lies ahead of him as a BrAsian citizen of the diaspora space.

Furthermore, the ensuing racist reading of cultural difference in *Greeks* and *The Ortegas* that is consequence of a wrong reading of *The Kumars* becomes most essentialist when both shows deal with the issues that, concerning gender representation, are challenged in the original version by the characters of Madhuri and Ummi. In this case, the racist representation illustrates the subaltern position and the patriarchal systems of domination that can still be found in the general portrayals of women in “mediascapes” (Apadurai 1996: 34) and, more particularly, when the figure of the migrant women appears on a popular cultural product. Here, *her* stereotype holds a double misrepresentation.

### **3 You’d Better Cook while I Make the Money: Her/His Stereotype Goes Global**

Diaspora and borders are prone to become gendered spaces. Hereby, the coexistence of identities in the diaspora space brings to surface the multiple factors that determine the subordinating role granted for female migrant characters that models the mainstream visual arts of our contemporary world. At this stage, the postcolonial and migrant woman is a figure interwoven in what bell hooks called “the interlocking systems of domination—sex, race, class” (1981: 21), holding the double burden of being an immigrant and a woman. It is in this sense that the dynamics of the diaspora space let us evaluate the patriarchal structures that currently exist in the previously so-called transcultural world, as Esha Niyogi De states that “the study of diaspora must deal with the ways border-crossers negotiate territorial barriers and otherness, paying special attention to how borders are gendered” (2008: 329). Avtar Brah clearly illustrates how gender discrimination is a burden strengthened whenever there are political or racial patterns of inequality. So she remarks:

[For] several hundred years now a global economic system has been in the making. It evolved out of the transatlantic trade in human beings, it flourished during the Industrial Revolution, it has been nurtured by colonialism and imperialism, and now it has achieved a new vitality in this age of microchip technology and multinational corporations. It is a system that has created lasting inequalities, both within nations and between nations. All of our fates are linked on a multiple of factors such as gender, class, colour, ethnicity, caste, and whether we practise a dominant or subordinate sexuality, and whether we live in a rich, industrially advanced society or a poor country in the Third World. *And gender enables all* (1996: 84, my emphasis added).

According to the importance of studying gender representations that are still existent on popular culture, I consider that a gender-based academic analysis always promotes the victory over the unfair structures that permeate contemporary structures of social power, because gender refers to “the social constructions created for feminine and masculine in the social and individual realm” (1999: 9), as Judith Butler states. As a result, an analysis of present gender discrimination from the postcolonial context proves the enduring subaltern position of women in the global contact of cultures. The urgency of a gender response then becomes key for, as Carol Boyce Davies points out, “although many women speak, have spoken and are speaking [...] [they] are rarely heard” (1994: 21). Similarly, this section aims at studying how Ummi and Madhuri in *The Kumars* offer a subversive reconsideration of the stereotypes laid upon South Asian women in the UK and so both characters un-gender diaspora to reassess what Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davis call “the double scheme of diasporic gender relations (host country-travelling community [as well as] the boundaries in which women still become the carriers of the cultural symbolism that marks out the boundaries of the diasporic group” (1992: 82). In order to confirm this point, I will later illustrate how the adaptations of Ummi and Madhuri in *The Ortegas* and *Greeks on the Roof*, as well as in the Indian and Pakistani versions of *The Kumars*, attest that female characters are subject to suffer a double burden of misrepresentation in a *product* of popular culture such as the referenced shows.

It is in this sense that it can be stated that Madhuri and Ummi from *The Kumars* position themselves “at the crossroads” (Anzaldúa 1987: 187) of the diaspora space with the possibility of *performing* a victory over prevailing patriarchal structures of power.<sup>11</sup> This is so because they dismantle the static stereotypes that previously reduced the South Asian woman in the diaspora to images of a woman walking in a sari around the streets of the Tower Hamlets district or a submissive wife suffering *izzat* crimes committed by alcoholic

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<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler states that feminism must be “performative” in order to disarm the “inequalities that are the consequence of gender differentiation” (1999: 9). Hers is a *feminism of performance* because it fosters a progressive commitment to un-gender society and its dynamics.

husbands.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the characters of Ummi and Madhuri provided a u-turn to the set of ideals that, at first glance, would have been expected to define them as, respectively, a mad Indian granny in Wembley and a passive wife waiting for her husband to come home. As this part of the paper should be the main matter for another research paper, let me quickly state that the parody inherent to both characters follows the South Asian feminist struggle that in the UK was started in the early 1980s by the NGO Southall Black Sisters, the critical writings by Avtar Brah and Pratibha Parmar, the political struggle triggered by Amrit Wilson, the earlier features shot by Gurinder Chadha and the first theatrical productions produced by Tara Arts and Tamasha Theatre Group.

More recently, this confronting feminism has been followed by the necessary socio-economic empowerment that is still to be achieved as it is proclaimed by many contemporary critical volumes such as Fauzia Ahmad et al.'s *South Asian Women & Employment in Britain—The Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity* (2003), Parvati Raghuran and Nirmal Puwar's *South Asian Women in the Diaspora* (2003), movies like Pratibha Parmar's *Nina Heavenly Delights* (2007) or the literary work written by Monica Ali or Yasmina Alishair-Brown. The global resonance of such an attitude finds its relevance in the way documents such as Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report "Contemporary Slavery in the UK: Overview and Key Issues" (Craig et al. 2007) or the UN campaign *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2008) illustrate the patterns of gender inequality are found in the UK as well in any other country, and that immigrant women are subject to suffer them in the worst possible conditions. It is so that the portrayals of Ummi and Madhuri challenge this trend and provide a *subverting* space from where to counteract racist stereotypes and ignorant assumptions.

In this sense, Ummi *subverts* the stereotypical constructions about her "incapacity to talk proper English" as she mentions to Stephen Frye (ep. 6, 8') as well as she dislocates the misconceptions placed on her by means of appearance as in the previously quoted examples of her own parody about wearing Indian clothes. Likewise, she deconstructs the Western ideas displayed by Lorraine Kelly on the show about how a difficult process "getting dressed with a sari" is to what Ummi answers, "you know, dressing up with a sari is like tantric sex" (ep. 4, 12') as well as she ironically praises the *salwar kameezes* because, in her own words, "when you are with a man, you know, getting rid of a salwar kameez is like going on a

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<sup>12</sup> This hegemonic discourse that simplifies the figure of the South Asian migrant is clearly correspondent to those patriarchal speeches that, as that famous "Act for the Abolition of Sati" enacted by the British colonial government in British India in 1815, defined South Asian women under the most derogatory Orientalist considerations that were later maintained in the British discourse laid upon the South Asian diaspora. Kumkun Sangari and Sudesh Vaid's *Recasting Women. Essays in Colonial History* offers a through account and many more examples of this attitude.

buffalo naked" (ep. 4, 17'). Ummi clearly parodies what could be expected from her and creates a dynamic stereotype that understands her new diasporic identity as well as she dismantles her presupposed lack of sexual affirmation.

Also, she rather cunningly informs in another episode, "As an old migrant lady that is not able to talk proper English I spend the day cooking samosas and watching telly but I also watch Bollywood classics for the sake of Aamir Khan's well-being body as well as British indecency as shown in *Coronation Street* and non-suitable series like *Scum*. I need to know more about this culture and enjoy the knowledge of more men without t-shirts. Sanjeev could be a mixture of both" (ep. 5, 7'). Ummi chooses these programmes intentionally, anticipating Ashwin's reaction as he "cannot believe that either her mum or her wife watch those inappropriate series" (ep. 5, 8'). Nevertheless, Madhuri also watches the show and states to him "yes, I do watch them and I do enjoy them", a remark followed by Ummi screaming, "Yes sister, go sister" (ep. 5, 8'). It is at this moment that they clearly counteract the global gendered global dynamics within both the South Asian and British normativities by showing on mainstream prime time TV, back in the early Noughties, that the South Asian stereotype is a challenging social figure beyond the expected clichés.

After that referred story, Madhuri finally poses her own revolution to Ashwin's patriarchy when famous marriage of TV presenters Richard and Judy visit the 42. In this episode, Madhuri asks Richard if he is "supportive of his wife" because somebody has made a very vulgar gesture towards her and Ashwin has had "not a single reaction of defence" (ep. 5, 18'). After telling the whole anecdote, Madhuri exclaims to both Richard and Judy, "You know, my husband is not supportive of me" (ep. 5, 21'). Ummi rapidly joins in and points rather violently with her finger at Ashwin and Sanjeev saying, "They do not even know what an apron is for" (ep. 5, 22'). Afterwards, Madhuri stands up from the sofa and takes the following resolution: "I'm not preparing tea for today's show" (ep. 5, 22'). The idea trespasses the easy joke as the show goes to publicity and resumes presenting Ummi and Madhuri as the front spokespeople, therefore adding a double subversion to the challenge of *The Kumars* as the first show that ever presented dynamic South Asian migrants on mainstream media. Now, it is a couple of women with South Asian roots that are as British as new guest Loraine Kelly.

Thus, both Madhuri and Ummi empower themselves as women of the diaspora who do not reject their roots but incorporate them within a new route. They are described as characters of an identity in the making who offer a subversion to the way "[diasporas] maintain and consolidate connections and imaginings of the homeland by performing national

identities through gender and sexual normativities” (2004: 30), as Jigna Desai points out when defining the character of South Asian women in the 1990s decade visual industry. In other words, Ummi and Madhuri dismantle their own stereotype to engage and negotiate their own South Asian and British identities within the hybridity of the world, a subversion of their own stereotypes that is neglected in *The Ortegas* and *Greeks on the Roof*, where all female characters suffer a much more simplistic construction of the female characters as compared to the male characters in the show.

In both adaptations of *The Kumars*, the stereotype of the immigrant places a double representational burden on the female stereotype that links cultural difference with female sexuality. On the one hand, Effie in *Greeks on the Roof* informs that she had to leave her virginity behind to become an Australian presenter and that, by so doing, she “rejected all the Greek backwardness” (season 1, ep. 2, 12’). On the other hand, Esmeralda and María Ortega are portrayed under the similar essentialist terms but from the contrary, they stick to their Mexicanness and so they are devoted to do what “Mexican women should do: cooking and shouting up” (ep. 2, 17’). Therefore, the characters of Ummi and Madhuri are reduced to static tokens that stand on the opposite of cultures, as if the different cultures were never to intermix, especially if the character is a female migrant. Hereby, it can be stated that Ummi and Madhuri are absolutely misinterpreted in both *Greeks on Roof* and *The Ortegas*, what may be yet another reason to explain why both shows failed. At this stage, and before drawing conclusions, Ummi and Madhuri adaptations in India and Pakistan should also be analysed, as they placed the same racist and sexist upheaval on the female characters and the Indian adaptation did receive neither the audience nor the critic’s approval.

Indian *Batliwalla House No. 43* (2003) firstly portrayed a Parsi family living in Mumbai and then, after changing the family in a remake of the show to *Kudkuyiya House on No. 43* (2005), a Gujarati family in Rajkot (Gujarat Province). Both series adapted the character of Madhuri as a mother who either stayed the whole episode cooking in the kitchen (the kitchen appeared itself in the show to integrate her in the action) or gossiping about how his husband could improve his work as a merchant (the static stereotype of Gujaratis along the Sub-Continent grounded in ancient times and historical reasons). Likewise, the character of Ummi was reduced in both versions to a buffoon always telling vulgar jokes that ignored Meera Syal’s ironic and improvised performance. The sense of humour in both *Batliwalla* and *Kudkuyiya* was expected to be raised by the comical situations produced by the character playing the role of Sanjeev and his aim to triumph in Bollywood as an actor in *Batliwalla House* or as a rich Gujarati merchant all around India in *Kudkiya House*. Nevertheless, these

situations did not appeal to Indian audiences who, as in the case of *Greeks on the Roof* and *The Ortegas* kept enjoying the original British programme but rejected the two versions of the Indian adaptation.<sup>13</sup>

The Pakistani version *Ghaffars at Dhorajjee* (2005-2008) conversely enjoyed a certain success and stayed on air for three seasons. *Ghaffars at Dhorajjee* portrayed a Parsi family natural of Dhorajjee (India) living in Karachi (Pakistan). Dhorajjee is a town in the North West of the Gujarat Province and predominantly gathers Parsis, Hindues, Memons and Muslim inhabitants. Paradigmatically, the title of the show is the only version of *The Kumars* that refers to the crossover intentions of the original British show, as it plays with the Urdu surname Ghaffar (identified with Islam religion), the Indian city of Dhorajjee that displays a vast majority of Hindu and Parsi believers and the action being placed in Karachi. In this setting, the Ghaffar family is described as a mere *foreign neighbour* living in Karachi as they are always surrounded only by Parsis and the men are described as obsessed with getting economic prosperity and checking if members in the community are true or not true Parsis (as correspondent with the popular stereotype about Parsi people). Besides, female characters are described as figures who are too worried about fighting for their own equality (a stereotype laid upon Parsi women by Muslim Pakistanis) while always checking if their friends marry a Parsi man to ensure the true Parsi descendency. In this sense, the representation offered about the two main female characters is restricted to the double burden of being a Parsi and a Parsi woman in the daily life of Karachi (as can be seen throughout the whole Season Two of the show).

Thus, it is finally confirmed that whenever a stereotype is created about a certain social group the woman stands at *a crossroads* where she is to be misrepresented through a patriarchal and racist lens. Accordingly, Madhuri and Ummi were considered as female characters that offered a dynamic construction of the existent stereotype about South Asian migrants, a statement that can be extended to Sanjev, Ashwin, *The Kumars* as a show and the international success of the whole series during six seasons. Meanwhile, *Greeks on the Roof*, *The Ortegas*, *Batliwalla House No 43*, *Kudkuyiya House on No 43* and *Ghaffars at Dhorajjee* embodied a set of preconceived and static ideals for the female characters and so they strengthened the racist and static construction of the different migrant families starring in the adaptations of *The Kumars at No. 42*. By so doing, all the adaptations of the original British

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<sup>13</sup> *The Kumars at No. 42* was aired in Australia, the US, India, Pakistan and also in Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland or South Africa during 2002 and 2007 to a great success of audience and critics' rating. The British show thence was broadcasted at the same time as *The Ortegas*, *Greeks on the Roof*, *Batliwalla House* and *Kudkuyiya House* and its popularity counteracted the failure of the adaptations.

show confirm that a static stereotype is created and reinforced out of a female character by means of portraying tokenistic migrant figures within monolithic cultures that will never intermingle in a *receiving* culture. This consequent unawareness about contemporary hybridity portrayed characters of the neighbour that were merely *slotted in* as people *living out there*. Conversely and as previously stated, *The Kumars* offered a possibility for South Asian migrants to un-root the new route granted in the diaspora space, where all cultures dwell and where all popular cultural social practises have a cross-over possibility. In fact, and mocking *The Kumars at No. 42* title, there may be even 42 ways of confirming how *The Kumars* and popular culture can actually portray the contemporary cultural difference.

#### **4 Towards a Conclusion in-Progress: 42 Ways of Evaluating a Popular Culture's Stereotype Portraying Cultural Difference**

A product of popular culture displays a set of social practices. One of the most common *social practises* is that of stereotyping. Such overall and standardised statements illustrate how this paper has defined that there are two possible ways of constructing and interpreting a stereotype. The resultant dynamic and static categories have been clarified by analysing the characters in the British series *The Kumars at No. 42* as representative of the former and the Australian, the US, Indian and Pakistani versions of the series as instances of the latter. In this sense, it has been claimed that *The Kumars* had a “cross-over appeal” (Gupta 2005: 1) and a “sense of parody” (Donnenberg 2005: 191) that integrated their South Asianness as yet a feature within a new British identity that gathered all their BrAsianness, as explained in the first section of this paper. Beyond this illustration, the analysis about the adaptations of the original *The Kumars* has confirmed that they only portrayed static clichés and derogatory conceptualisations about the migrant person living next door. The failure of all these versions in contrast to the international success of the British show illustrates how the static stereotypes were not at all appealing to the audience. Likewise, the previous study proves that whenever there is a successful or unsuccessful product of popular culture it is our commitment to evaluate why that is so. Therefore, whenever a popular culture's stereotype portraying cultural difference is going to be analysed, our questions should always include overall inquiries such as: Is there a stereotyped character in that product?, With which aim?, how is he/she represented?, How *popular* with audiences was the product?, Is there any essentialist *intention* behind the popular culture's broadcast of the programme?

The underlying nuances become very significant when analysing the concept of the character of the neighbour and that social and political intention previously referred. Here, it is obvious that a neighbour is a person who lives next door and that you can interact with a neighbour and your neighbour can interact with you. Both may even interact together or may not consequently confirm the famous notion that *borders make good friends*. In this context, hybridity thence may be dangerous because it represents the subversive idea of the disappearance of borders. The Kumar family dwells in a diaspora space and so unveils the subversive discourse about hybridity that was developed in section two of this paper. Nevertheless, the international adaptations display the contrary: neighbours lead better lives by keeping well differentiated physical and figurative walls that, in relation to popular cultural manifestations, are very easy to laugh at as well as they act as great barriers of cultural isolation. So, whenever the character of a neighbour appears on a product of popular culture, questions such as the following should inevitably come up: Does the represented neighbour dwell in a neighbourhood or is slotted at his/her house within that neighbourhood?, How can that neighbourhood be described? Is there a homogenised cultural difference? How is that prominence of a certain cultural difference shown? Is there any alternative to such?

In this sense, we should bear in mind the definition of popular culture as a set of social practises and the racist ideas that may appear whenever a product of popular culture represents a neighbour. And, by so doing, we should pay attention to the strategies of differentiation that, by means of gender, stand as another powerful tool to enhance a constant study of gender discrimination. Gender studies thence advocate for a general equality between men and women that is clearly illustrated in all the possibilities that, for instance, lay in front of Madhuri and Ummi as South Asian women in the diaspora as opposed to the limiting perspective of another possibility shown in the adaptations where women of a different culture are very easy to be laughed at. Conversely, Madhuri and Ummi are themselves the jokers in the subversive role of parody that granted *The Kumars'* cross-over appeal. Likewise, and enhancing a certain progress inherent to eradicate some forms of not so funny clichés still found in popular culture, it should always be important to wonder about some of the next points: Do the women in the popular culture product have a special role in it? Have you seen more female characters doing the same? Is that linked to a very bad joke that still makes people laugh? Is that joke always told by men?

To conclude, there is no news that we live in a global world where all these static and dynamic stereotypes coalesce as well as no one would hesitate to state that globalisation is a consequence of our transcultural world. Our global world may be very well illustrated with an

evaluation about broadcasting communications and how *they have gone global*. However, there are certain areas that allegorically have very bad communications, and they are still addressed by adjectives such as underdeveloped, third world, other world or exotic reality. In is in this global stage that it is very important to remember that *The Kumars* was produced by BrAsian artists that launched a BrAsian message to the world from a British platform, the BBC. In fact, and as it has been formerly quoted, *The Kumars* was the first show that portrayed South Asians stereotypes that dynamically made the jokes about themselves. This is an interesting idea to reflect upon, especially if the description about the characters in the international adaptations is to be pointed and if we mention that it was the globally-powerful SONY the producing company who firstly bought the commercial and screenplay rights of *The Kumars at No. 42*. After this comment, who decides who goes global? What message goes global? Which are the interests behind a static stereotype? What is the challenge posed by a dynamic stereotype? Thus, if popular culture has gone global it is our responsibility now to measure how much progress is being made in the academic field as well as in the popular representations. That is the always-new space for the popular culture.

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