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Oru Cultural Rojak, Bungkus, Please! Negotiating Hybridity in Everyday Moments

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*ORU CULTURAL ROJAK, BUNGKUS, PLEASE! NEGOTIATING HYBRIDITY IN
EVERYDAY MOMENTS*

by

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B.A., Saint Cloud State University, 2012

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Arts Degree.

Department of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School
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Research Paper APPROVAL

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A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

in the field of Communication Studies

Approved by:

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May 11, 2015

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH REPORT OF

KARTHIGA DEVI VEERAMANI, for the Masters of Arts degree in COMMUNICATION STUDIES, presented on MAY 11TH 2015, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: *ORU CULTURAL ROJAK, BUNGKUS, PLEASE!*¹ NEGOTIATING HYBRIDITY IN EVERYDAY MOMENTS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Satoshi Toyosaki

In this research report, I analyze my diaspora lived experiences to understand how I experience post-colonial diaspora hybridity as a subject position and as a mode of resistance. I use Pathak's (2013) post-colonial autoethnography as my methodology to present my narratives about my experiences of hybridity. I use memory recollection as my data and analyze specific memories of mine to learn how my border crossings and transnational movements shape the way I experience hybridity. I specifically write about moments in which essentialist cultural identities were imposed upon me. I analyze how I understand my hybridity in relation to such essentialist and categorical discourses. Ultimately, I attend to the theoretical question of how my diaspora hybridity can transform into a mode of resistance. I discuss the potential of hybridity as a mode of post-colonial resistance and discuss the ways I resist in subtle and non-oppositional ways to hegemonic and essentialist discourses about identity.

¹ *Oru* is a Tamil word which means one. *Rojak* is a mixed salad. *Bungkus* is a Malay word that means pack. The entire title means, "One cultural mixed salad, to-go, please!"

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the matriarchs and the patriarchs of my family. And thank you *amma* and *appa*, for everything.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you *amma* and *appa*. Your support and encouragement is the reason I made it through the painstaking process of getting this master's degree.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I was 13 years old when it happened. I had exactly 30 days to wrap up my life in Teck Whye Lane,¹ Singapore. The life I thought would never change transformed completely after one phone call. *Appa*² called to tell us that he got a job in the United States. My family and I uprooted and migrated to Saint Cloud, Minnesota, United States. I landed in Minneapolis mid-December 2004. This white thing called snow surrounded us. It was not all white, however. There was some brown mixed with it. It seemed very unpleasant. The concrete pavement outside the airport was cold and slippery. I was wearing shoes I had bought in Malaysia. These shoes were supposed to protect me from this snow. Contrary to my hopes, these shoes helped me slip and fall. This was all new to me. I learned very quickly that the fashionable sweatshirt I was wearing as I entered the United States was just not going to be enough to survive the cold. Until I moved to Minnesota, I did not understand what “cold” meant. I was mesmerized by the heating system in the apartment my family rented. Until that point, I never needed my house to be heated through a human-made heat-generating system. That December, heating systems became my reality.

Writing this narrative made me curious about the weather in December 2004. I searched for winter temperature records on the Internet. The Saint Cloud State University weather records indicated that it was an “abnormally mild” winter with the average temperature of 19.6 °F, which was 5.2 °F above normal (Saint Cloud Weather Summary for December 2004 and Annual Weather Summary for 2004, n.d.). After growing up in a tropical country for thirteen years, 19.6 °F weather seemed abnormally cold to me. It made me giggle to think Saint Cloud State

¹ Singapore is a small city-island-country. I grew up in an area called Teck Whye Lane.

² *Appa* means father in Tamil.

University meteorologists concluded that 19.6 °F indicated a relatively warm winter. After my move to Minnesota, I gained a nuanced understanding of the cold, snow, and ice. Ten years of living in the North Midwestern United States has made me skilled at using terms, such as slush, sleet, flurry, hail, and freezing rain and knowing the subtle differences among them. My journey of learning about the cold was similar to my intercultural, post-colonial discovery of who I was in the larger context of Midwestern US America. I moved from Singapore as a 13-year-old teenage girl who was identified as Indian (race)³. After the move, I understood the different categories that defined me and the ways I was alienated within communities to which I thought I belonged. My understanding of identity became more nuanced as I struggled to explain my messy identity to others.

My identity pastiche begins with being born as Malaysian and being raised in Singapore. I am Tamilian⁴ as a result of my parents' intra-ethnic orthodox arranged marriage. Tamil is my ethnic identity. I have legal access to India because I was able to prove my Indian ancestry to the Indian government. I am Indian by race but do not have an Indian citizenship. And now, I am a permanent resident of the United States. I speak English with a US American accent. I can code-switch among different English dialects and Tamil fairly conveniently. These various national and cultural identity markers give me different points of access to various cultural spaces.

In this research report, I strive to explain my identity struggle in post-colonial terms. I use post-colonial, intercultural communication as a framework to deconstruct my identity struggle because it most aptly describes my migrant experience in the United States. My identity struggle is an everyday reality for me. Post-colonial works on identity tackle essentialist discourses,

³In Singapore, the term "Indian" is used to denote race identity. That is why I understand Indian as a race identity and use it as such in this paper.

⁴Tamil is one of the many ethnic identities that are associated with South India. The Tamil diaspora has settled predominantly in Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka.

messy identities, and the ways multiple identities of a person can be a form of resistance in the mundane (Bardhan, 2012; Bhabha, 1994). I take a communicative approach to understand my messy identities, because it allows me to focus on the mundane-ness of my lived identity experience. Within a communication framework, I can research how my identities manifest in micro spaces.

First, I review the literature on the post-colonial concept of hybridity. I begin the literature review by explaining the post-colonial framework. Then, I discuss the concept of diaspora and eventually focus my literature review on the concept of hybridity. I discuss key hybridity theorists and related concepts to hybridity and criticism of hybridity. Following the literature review, I present my three research questions. Based on the research questions, I present my method section. I explain my choice of research method, which is autoethnography. I contextualize autoethnography within communication studies. Then, I provide a general description of autoethnography. Next, I map the components of post-colonial autoethnography. From there, I present my analysis section. I use the metaphor of *rojak*⁵ to analyze and understand my diaspora hybridity. Following the analysis, I provide methodological reflections. I explain the potential benefits of using autoethnography as a method to engage in intercultural and post-colonial research. Finally, I conclude my research report by addressing limitations of my research and my future research goals.

⁵ *Rojak* is a Southeast Asian mixed salad.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hybridity is a widely researched topic in various disciplines, such as Cultural Studies, Communication Studies, and Literary Studies. Scholarship on hybridity greatly differs among these disciplines. There are several conceptual gaps in how hybridity is understood within these disciplines. Hybridity can be understood as multicultural hybridity, racial hybridity, biological hybridity, etc. In this literature review, I discuss hybridity in relation to post-colonial studies. Post-colonial hybridity is a condition of the post-colonial subject that results from diaspora movements. Post-colonial scholars understand hybridity to be cultural mixing that happens through the processes of colonization, imperialism, or border crossing (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996b). Hybridity is generally used to understand how cultural differences are simultaneously negotiated and understood in various cultural contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996b).

In order to understand post-colonial hybridity, I summarize six different published works by three post-colonial scholars. I use Bhabha's *Location of Culture* (1994) and "Culture's In-between" (1996); Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Double Consciousness and Modernity* (1993a) and *Between Camp: Nations, Cultures, and the Allure of Race* (2004); and Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990) and "Who Needs Identity?" (1996b). Most of my literature review focuses on Bhabha's work because he first coined the term hybridity in post-colonial studies. I review these scholars' works because their research has been monumental in developing the concept of hybridity. Hall and Gilroy complicate the notion of hybridity and develop similar concepts that are associated with post-colonial hybridity, such as double diasporization (Hall, 1996b) and double consciousness (Gilroy, 1993a, 1994). Also, these scholars have responded to critiques regarding their development of the concept of hybridity. Response to criticism has

created a more nuanced understanding of hybridity amongst these scholars. This serves as a signal that their scholarship is well-developed.

Before delving into hybridity theorizations, it is important to map the theoretical background from which post-colonial hybridity was developed. Therefore, I begin with a brief description of post-colonial theory. Then, I explain the concept of diaspora, which is the foundation on which post-colonial hybridity is theorized (Brazier & Mannur, 2003). Finally, I overview Bhabha's, Gilroy's, and Hall's conceptualizations of hybridity. I define hybridity, discuss related concepts, and address the critiques launched against hybridity and the responses to the critiques.

Post-Colonial Theory

Post-colonial studies mark how “radically unalterably different the world is” (Hall, 1996a, p. 257) and strives to overcome the gaps in understandings produced by old, insufficient, modernist categories that are used to categorize the world. Hall (1996a) extrapolates four tenets of post-colonial studies: 1) colonial implications are everlasting; 2) post-colonial movements differ across the globe; 3) post-colonial studies blur binaries; and 4) post-colonial studies strive to deconstruct nation-state imperialism. These four tenets map the foundation of post-colonial scholarship.

First, post-colonial studies starts with the fundamental understanding that implications of colonialism are everlasting (Loomba, 1998). Hall (1996a) refers to Peter Hulme's (1995) definition of the *post*: The post is a process of many ways of disengaging from the colonial syndrome. Therefore, the post is not merely a badge of merit for being done and moving on (Hall, 1996a). The use of the prefix “post” marks a productive ambivalence of going beyond colonialism while carrying the burden of the past (Hall, 1996a; Loomba, 1998).

Second, post-colonial movements are not the same everywhere; colonialism and post-colonialism manifest differently in various parts of the world due to the varying colonial regimes and unique ways of resisting colonial powers. Hall (1996a) argues for post-colonialisms rather than one grand narrative of post-colonial theory. A grand narrative of post-colonial theory only perpetuates the same colonial hegemony that it strives to dismantle. Post-colonial research exposes various forms of colonial oppression and silencing imposed upon the colonized subjects.

Third, post-colonial studies serve to trouble here/there, inside/outside, and then/now cultural logics that constantly categorize the colonial experience and the colonial subject in false dichotomies (Hall, 1996a; Loomba, 1998; Said, 1994). These false dichotomies reinforce the oppositional inferiority of the colonized subject constructed through the ideologies of the “superior” colonizer (Hall, 1996a). Such dichotomies limit the colonized subject to singular identity categories. Thus, post-colonial scholarships strive to deconstruct the dichotomous logic imposed on the colonized to liberate the post-colonial subject (Hall, 1996a; Loomba, 1998).

The fourth tenet of post-colonial studies is to re-read colonization as part of a transcultural and transnational global process that deconstructs the grand narrative of nation-state imperialism (Hall, 1996a). Post-colonial scholarships produce a de-centered diasporic global re-writing of the colonial narrative by disrupting Eurocentric, Enlightenment grand narratives that deny difference and specificity (Hall, 1996a). These four tenets explain the implications of the colonial encounter in complicated and productive ways.

In the next section, I explain the concept of diaspora and how it links post-colonial studies and hybridity. Much post-colonial research deals with diaspora populations.

Understanding the diaspora experience and identity negotiation has been integral in further

complicating the understanding of post-colonial experiences. The concept of hybridity stems from the research that has been done with diaspora populations.

Diaspora Identities

The “ancient word” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 207) diaspora is derived from the Greek word *diasperian*, which means to scatter seeds or to sow seeds across (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). This word was first used in 3rd Century BCE to describe Hellenic Jewish communities living in Alexandria (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Since then, this word has been used to describe dislocation from an original geographic space or relocation to a foreign territory. Historical references to diaspora reveal that many of these moves were not voluntary (Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Gilroy, 2004). Some of the early theorizations about diaspora populations stem from migration theories. Migration theories generally focused on movements from a “home” place to a “host” place (Grewal, 2008, p. 184) and theoretically assumed assimilation and acculturation from one pure culture to another pure culture. The emergence of diaspora studies problematized the theoretical assumption that nation-states were homogenous cultural units. To understand diaspora identity formation, I turn to post-colonial theorizations of diaspora. I use the works of Braziel and Mannur (2003), Gilroy (2004), and Hall (1990) to discuss diaspora identity formation. I first define terms such as diaspora community, diaspora consciousness, and diaspora identity. Then, I discuss how diaspora subjects disrupt homogenized notions of national identities. I specifically address how diaspora subjectivities disrupt essentialist logics that explain nation-state formation and national identity.

Gilroy (2004) defines diaspora communities as groups of people who geographically relocate as a result of coercion and violence. Hall (1990) includes people who voluntarily move across borders for better economic opportunities into the category of diaspora communities. Hall

(1990) criticizes the misleading conceptualization of diaspora consciousness as the nostalgic dislocation from homeland. He argues that such a shallow understanding of diaspora consciousness is a product of imperialism (Hall, 1990). Similarly, Gilroy (2004) argues that diaspora consciousness is seen as a threat to modern structures and modes of power that sustain methodological nationalism (Gilroy, 2004). Gilroy (1993a) and Hall (1990) reject the notion that identity can be culturally pure. They question rigid notions of diaspora identities. Therefore, Hall redefines diaspora consciousness and identity as a negotiation of “necessary heterogeneity and diversity” (Hall, 1990, p. 235). Diaspora communities live by working through difference rather than despite difference. Diaspora subjectivities constantly “produce and reproduce themselves anew” as they mediate the differences of identities (Hall, 1990, p. 235).

Diaspora communities disrupt the cultural and national “mechanics of belonging” (Gilroy, 2004, p. 123). Diaspora consciousness demands that the concept of nationhood take into account geopolitical circumstances that displace and move people (Brazier & Mannur, 2003). These circumstances include displacements and dislocations caused by genocide or war and movements that result from the search for better economic opportunities (Brazier & Mannur, 2003). These various diaspora movements disrupt the ideal of national identity and who gets to claim citizenship. The ideologies that reinforce who can belong to a nation may be disrupted when diaspora subjects claim home and citizenship in the nation in which they have settled. A diaspora subject does not just belong to either a home or a host country; a diaspora subject blurs the sense of where one should belong. The diaspora subject simultaneously belongs to and longs for acceptance in both spaces. This proves that identity is not formed primarily because of ties to a national territory. Yet, nation-state ideologies fail to explain the presence of diaspora communities and their right to claim a recently located national space as home (Gilroy, 1997).

This failure subsequently leads to the alienation and marginalization of diaspora communities. Diaspora populations become the unknown and unwanted Other.

Diaspora is a contested term; its meanings and theorizations are constantly debated. However, this debate marks the ambiguity of diaspora and diaspora subjectivities, which only further reinforces that dominant narratives of national identity and of collective belonging are insufficient to understand diaspora identities. Understanding diaspora identity formations can explain the lived ambivalence and contradictions that people who have traversed national boundaries experience (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). Even though using national categorizations risks reinforcing ideologies about nationhood, they are the only terms available to discuss specific borders and boundaries. In post-colonial diaspora studies, national categories are used consciously and strategically to subvert ideologies of nationhood that often oppress post-colonial diaspora subjects.

Diaspora subjectivities are marked by heterogeneity, which manifests through linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national practices (Bhabha, 1994; Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Hall, 1990). Diaspora subjectivities negotiate liminal spaces of here and there, now and then, and self and other (Bhabha, 1994; Braziel & Mannur, 2003; Hall, 1990). Diaspora identities must be understood as identities that “scatter . . . and regroup . . . into new points of becoming” (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 3). Diaspora identities create mundane, innovative ways to use the modernist categories of identity to form new realities and ways to interrogate the very same markers of identities (Braziel & Mannur, 2003). One of the innovative ways diaspora subjects negotiate identity is through hybridity. In the next section, I discuss the origins of the term hybridity and how it is theorized by Bhabha (1994, 1996), Gilroy (1993a, 2004) and Hall (1990, 1996b). I

identify concepts related to hybridity and address critiques launched against their research on hybridity.

Hybridity

The term hybridity originates in biology but has recently become very significant to Cultural Studies and post-colonial theory (Black, 2003). Originating from the Latin word *hybrida*, a hybrid refers to anything that is mixed (Black, 2003). In the nineteenth century, during European colonization, hybridity was used as a tool of scientific racism. Racial purity became the trait of the ideal White human being; therefore, hybrid identities were deemed impure and were demonized (Black, 2003; Young, 1995). In colonial contexts, hybrid identities were understood to be different and unfamiliar. Thus, hybrid identities were othered through colonial discourses (Bardhan, 2012). Within post-colonial theorizing, hybridity was reappropriated as a tool of subversion to challenge colonial ideologies about cultural Others.

Hybridity has been theorized in several contexts, each disparate from the others. Some scholars are skeptical of hybridity and dismiss it as an elitist concept exclusive to metropolitan émigrés (Parry, 1994). Some scholars consider the material reality of hybridity that manifests through the history of slavery and colonialism in the form of racial identities (Bettez, 2012). Interracial identity plays a central role in such theorizations (Verges, 1999, as cited in Prabhu, 2007). Other scholars, specifically post-colonial scholars, theorize that hybridity is a tool of resistance used by post-colonial subaltern subjects (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996b; Gilroy, 1989). In the next section of the paper, I review literature on post-colonial conceptualizations of hybridity to understand how this concept is used as a tool of resistance by diaspora subjects.

Key Hybridity Thinkers

Hybridity is a post-colonial concept developed to expose inequalities produced by colonial machinations (Prabhu, 2007). Key hybridity theorists in post-colonial studies are Bhabha, Gilroy, and Hall (Prabhu, 2007). Hybridity theorizing disrupts binary thinking and aims to destabilize power. Post-colonial hybridity conceptualizations balance the relationships between culture and social reality to explicate moments of mundane agency and resistance (Bhabha, 1994). These conceptualizations complicate identity performance by recognizing difference, heterogeneity, and multiplicity of identities (Prabhu, 2007).

Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Bhabha develops his concept of hybridity from literary and cultural theory. He regards hybridity as a construction of culture and identity that forms within conditions of colonial aggression and inequity (Bhabha, 1994, 1996). For Bhabha (1994), hybridity is the process that the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonized (Other) within a singular universal framework. However, this framework fails to categorize the colonized subject and produces something familiar but new. Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges when the colonizer and colonized recognize the failure of any essentialist cultural identity. Bhabha positions hybridity as an antidote to essentialism.

Bhabha (1994) extends his conceptualization of hybridity to his theory of third space, which is a “precondition for the articulation of cultural difference” (p. 209). His designation of the third space is derived from linguistic terminology. Bhabha's notion of hybridity is positioned within a third space as a hinge between cultures. Third space can be understood as the “inter” space where struggles in-between cultural borders and identities occur. This concept's potential lies in the ability to transverse multiple cultures and to translate, negotiate, and mediate familiarity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion.

Hybridity within third space embodies a counter-hegemonic agency that breaks binaristic thinking. When the colonizer presents a normalizing hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy opens up a third space of and for rearticulation of negotiation (Bhabha, 1996). Therefore, third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive and reflexive space of new possibilities. It is an “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 92) space for new forms of cultural and identity production. These new forms of production blur the limitations of existing boundaries and call into question established categorizations of culture and identity. According to Bhabha (1994), this hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no, “primordial unity or fixity” (p. 101). The concept of third space is useful for analyzing the enunciation, transgression, and subversion of dualistic categories. This enables researchers to move beyond the realm of colonial binaristic thinking and oppositional positioning.

Bhabha (1996) uses hybridity to forefront the struggles of the subaltern subject. This makes room for the articulation of a cultural space where objectified others can reclaim their subjectivity. Bhabha (1994, 1996) theorizes hybridity as fractured, doubled, and unstable, emphasizing the incongruity between the unifying dominant discourse and the ways hybrid identities are actually performed. Thus, Bhabha uses hybridity as a tool to interrogate the universal discourses of boundaries and identities that erase difference. Within this framework, culture is understood as a site of enunciation; culture is a hybrid articulation of multiple factors and is not as unified as modernist conceptions of culture may suggest. Hybrid spaces enable the subaltern to exercise agency. Hybridity is negotiated by cultural agents, not by passive colonized subjects. Within a hybrid space, which is a result of the colonial effect, the subaltern subject can enact agentic hybrid performances to resist unifying discourses. The ambivalence revealed in this

space between boundaries of colonial conditioning and selfhood enables subtle subversion that turns “discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 173). Therefore, Bhabha (1994) re-positions hybridity within the unequal power relations that creates hybridity in the first place.

Hall’s notion of hybridity. Hall (1990) explicates two ways identity can be understood; identity as being, which offers a sense of unity or commonality, and identity as becoming, which is a process of identification that shows the discontinuity in our identity formation. Hall uses the Caribbean identities, including his own, to explain how the first one (identity as being) is necessary, but the second one (identity as becoming) is truer to the post-colonial conditions. Hybridity privileges the resistance that post-colonial subjectivities enact in the present by engaging in the process of becoming (Hall, 1996b). This disrupts the notion that post-colonial subjects are nostalgic of the pure culture of the past (Hall, 1996b). Hall (1996b) uses the term “diasporization,” (p. 293) to name diaspora hybridity. Diasporization is the process of, “cut-and-mix” (Hall, 1996b, p. 403) hybridization that is used by diaspora subjects to constitute and reconstitute self.

Gilroy’s notion of hybridity. Gilroy (1993a) aligns with Hall (1996b) in identifying the critical potential of the concept of hybridity. Gilroy (1993a) positions diaspora identity as the fragmented opposite of a pure racial essence. He asserts that diaspora and hybridity interrogate the ideology of pure origin, which is produced by contemporary racism that urges one to find roots of origin or to belong elsewhere. Hybridized identities are not just different identity markers blending together like a melting pot, but are pastiches of oppositional forces speaking through the same voice.

Gilroy (1993a, 1994, 2004) discusses hybridity using Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. He argues that being both European and Black requires a type of double consciousness. This assertion attacks exclusivist discourses of either/or that often characterize nationalistic stances. The dual identity of the Western Black is not composed of essential historical roots, for the subject's original identity and the European modern world have undergone transformation and reconfiguration over time. Gilroy claims that the subjective dichotomy of Black and White, introduced in modern times, is far from a thing of the past. The dichotomy still continues to function by relating nationality with culture. Gilroy (1993b, 1994) argues that this dichotomy perpetuates essentialist logics.

Related Concepts

There are similarities between Bhabha's (1994) notion of third space and Hall's (1990) use of Derrida's concept of *différance*. The metaphor often used to explain third space is the act of straddling both (or multiple) cultures as if straddling a horse (Bardhan, 2012). Thus, hybridity materializes in a way that there are shades of the given components of culture in the newly created hybrid or third space. This third space is not merely additive; it is something new that contains shades of the old. Similarly, Hall (1990) explains the process of identity formation using Derrida's concept of *différance*. He particularly uses *différance* to understand cultural difference. Hall explains that cultural differences are strategic and arbitrary. Hall (1990) describes "*différance*" as the "difference which is positional, conditional, and conjunctural" (p. 233). *Différance* occurs in the gap where the cultural signifiers seem similar, yet different. There is an element of ambivalence between them. With this articulation of cultural ambivalence, Hall uses the three presences (African, European, and US American) in the Caribbean to illustrate the traces of the Caribbean identity. The three presences and the multiple traces of identities disrupt

the logic of one essential Caribbean identity. So, Hall defines the Caribbean identity as a disaporized identity or as a hybrid identity, because of the various influences that construct Caribbean identities and the many ways Caribbean identities are experienced.

Gilroy (1993a) and Bhabha (1994) theorize the colonizer-colonized relationship in similar ways. Gilroy (1993a) claims that the notion of hybridity applies not only to the colonized but also to the colonizer. He says that even the brutality of Western European colonists towards other colonized cultures did not prevent the colonists from being also influenced by their subordinates. Gilroy (1993a) examines the impact of Black thought on nationalistic ideologies or “cultural insiderism” (p. 84). “Cultural insiderism” constructs the nation as an ethnically homogenous object. Gilroy, by foregrounding the influences of Black thought on European thought, challenges how racial politics transverse and change European identity. This relational aspect of hybridity is similar to Bhabha’s (1994) notion of ambivalence. Bhabha also asserts that it is not only the colonized who are changed in the colonial encounter; the colonizers are also changed. By attending to the relational aspect of hybridity, Bhabha and Gilroy nuance and complicate hybridity in insightful ways.

In the context of increasing global interconnectivity, differences must be theorized as positive and productive phenomena. Hybridity theorizations done by the aforementioned scholars focus on cultural and identity differences. Hybridity allows subjects to renounce traditional discourses of trauma (of leaving the motherland) in order to speak about the diaspora experience (Bhabha, 1994; Gilroy, 1993b, 2004; Hall, 1990). The diaspora imagination is not limited to the trauma of border crossing (Appadurai, 1996) but engages in trauma as one of many elements of diaspora movement. Hybridity makes space to understand difference as strategic and as a process of negotiation. Hybridity is a tool for alternative performances of mundane

resistance against hegemonic and oppressive forces (Bhabha, 1994, 1996). In the next section, I address the critiques launched against the concept of post-colonial hybridity.

Critiques of Hybridity

Since Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) was published, the concept of hybridity has been controversial and has been subjected to critique within the field of post-colonial theory. Some critics, like Easthope (1998), directly critique Bhabha's work. Easthope argues that Bhabha's concept of hybridity positions hybrid cultures or identities as oppositional to non-hybrid cultures or identities, which Easthope does not regard as being part of reality.

Other critics are skeptical of how Bhabha's concept has come to be understood and integrated into post-colonial study. Radhakrishnan (2000) critiques hybridity on the grounds that, like much of post-colonial theory, it is the product of Western thinkers, and as such, the theories may still be linked to cultural imperialism. Radhakrishnan (2000) questions the value Westerners give to certain types of hybridity: "For example, why is it more fashionable and/or acceptable to transgress Islam towards a secular constituency rather than the other way around? Why do Islamic forms of hybridity, such as women wearing veils and attending western school . . . , encounter resistance and ridicule?" (p. 755). Other critics like Prabhu (2007) argue that championing hybridity theoretically is not enough; hybridity must be applicable in practical ways for it to be a productive theory.

Many critiques about the concept of hybridity mostly take issue with how the concept is used in post-colonial theory. Hybridity's oversimplification, overuse, and applications as a merely descriptive term, rather than an analytic term, reduce the value of the concept. One of the primary arguments from critics such as Radhakrishnan (2000) and Drichel (2008) is that hybridity, initially conceived of as a challenge to pre-existing categorical descriptions of people

and culture, has itself become a fixed, stable, and simplified reduction of culture. This critique, however, is specifically targeted toward misapplications of Bhabha's theory. As Drichel (2008) explains, within Bhabha's writing, "Hybridity is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures but rather one that holds the tension of the opposition and explores the spaces in-between fixed identities through their continuous reiterations" (p. 605). The concept of hybridity will necessarily continue to be negotiated and rearticulated. The critiques mentioned above caution against allowing hybridity to become a fixed descriptor. These critiques serve as a reminder that Bhabha intends hybrid spaces to be studied as spaces of dynamic, productive play between and among cultures. It is important to recognize that the scholars critiquing hybridity are also working to nuance the definition of hybridity.

Responses to Critiques

Hybridity critics do not reject the entire concept of hybridity but critique parts of the concept, and they seek to complicate the notion of hybridity (Drichel, 2008; Radhakrishnan, 2000). This is the reason the contemporary application of Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity has become much more complex and more nuanced. Friedman (1999) and Anthais (2001) are two of the few scholars who have directly launched critiques against Hall's (1990, 1996b) and Gilroy's (1993b, 1994) conceptualization of hybridity. Most of the critiques launched against Hall and Gilroy are similar to the critique Bhabha received. The critiques given by Friedman (1999) and Anthais (2001) have been repeatedly launched at Gilroy and Hall in the past two decades. Hybridity scholars have been striving to respond and grow from these critiques. I use Nederveen Pieterse's (2001), Bardhan's (2012), and Prabhu's (2007) works to address the responses to the critiques hybridity has received over time.

Hybridity has been accused of rarely addressing power differences in hybrid situations. The counter argument to this critique is that no cultural politic ensures equality (Bardhan, 2012; Gilroy, 2004; Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). However, hybridity can be used to interrogate cultural inequalities, which can be productive (Bardhan, 2012). Similarly, hybridity has been critiqued for only deconstructing essentialism. Hybridity scholars argue that because there is enough destructive essentialist discourse being perpetuated, hybridity's function in disrupting essentialist cultural, national, and colonial discourses is valuable (Bardhan, 2012; Gilroy, 2004). It is important to recognize that colonial discourse is essentialist enough to despise and suppress hybrid identities (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). In contemporary hybridity theorization, we need to make space to discuss the functions of hybridity as resistance against such oppression and dominance (Bardhan, 2012).

Another critique launched against hybridity is that it only functions in micro spaces. Hybridity does function in the space of self-identification. Contrary to the critique, Bardhan (2012) and Bhabha (1994) find hybridity's function in micro spaces to be strategic and useful. In intercultural communication, self is understood in relation to others. Self-identification is a strategic tool to interrupt the national, cultural, and racial categorizations that present false purity (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). The next critique of hybridity is a useful one; scholars charge that claiming all cultures are mixed is unproductive and trivial (Anthias, 2001). Nederveen Pieterse (2001) points out the differences in theorizing hybridity: Werbner (1997, as cited in Bardhan, 2012) distinguishes between intentional hybridity and organic hybridity. Bhavani (1999, as cited in Nederveen Pieterse, 2001) theorizes situational and organic hybridity as distinct processes. Organic hybridity refers to the cultural mixing that happens over time (Werbner, 1997, as cited in Bardhan, 2012). Thus, patterns of production over time in cultural spaces may be trivial to

identify (organic hybridity), but individual and particular modes of resistance and production of identity (situational and intentional hybridity) are important to the disrupting of essentialism (Bardhan, 2012; Bhabha, 1994).

Another critique that hybridity receives is that it is hard to distinguish the hybridity hailed by capitalism as a result of the movement of technology, culture, people, and capital across borders from the hybridity of resistance (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001; Prabhu, 2007). Prabhu (2007) pushes the conceptual boundaries of hybridity by questioning the emptiness and confusion of the use of the term hybridity. She critiques the lack of work done to complicate the concept of hybridity. The critiques are concerns that scholars of hybridity must tackle. Distinct modalities and forms of hybridity are grouped under an overarching label causing much confusion (Bardhan, 2012). Scholars need to identify the nuances of hybridity and theorize the complications, fears, and challenges that hybridity brings (Bardhan, 2012).

The accusation that hybridity is elitist signals a narrow, reductive understanding of border crossing. The claim that hybridity is an experience of the elite post-colonial immigrant erases the realities of several diaspora populations and how they make sense of their hybrid spaces (Bardhan, 2012). Not all border crossers come from wealth and opportunities. Many who cross borders are in search of possibilities of survival. Hybridity is not a celebration of elitism, but rather a mode to discuss the fears, ambivalence, and resistance that is experienced when crossing borders (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). There are many spaces where mundane hybridities are realities for people who occupy different positionalities (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001). Furthermore, hybridity does not have to be exclusive to national border crossers. Hybridity can be used in different contexts to theorize about the ambivalence of fragmented, yet connected, identities (i.e., queer hybridities) (Muñoz, 1999; Anzaldúa, 2002).

Finally, the critique of hybridity exploiting difference for neoliberal globalization is an important one. Capitalism and neoliberal globalization are known for exploiting differences, but to conflate hybridity with mechanics of exploitation is dangerous. Hall (1996a) warns critiques of post-colonial studies to avoid conflating global relationships caused by global capital economy with colonial imperialism. A similar warning is apt here. Defining hybridity as a celebration of cultural fusion that neoliberal capitalism perpetuates dangerously simplifies complex, ambivalent, and, many times, violent phenomena. Hybridity is a performance of survival. Misrepresenting hybridity as product of neoliberal celebration of multiculturalism silences many narratives of identity negotiation and border survival.

Hybridity is not a flawless concept. However, I, like the hybridity scholars I mentioned in this literature review, argue that hybridity is a productive concept for understanding the negotiation of diaspora identities. Hybridity is a well-published concept, not only in post-colonial studies, but also in other disciplines. Every time hybridity is used in scholarly works, it seems to be used differently. This complicates how hybridity can be defined. The assemblage of hybridity definitions I describe here points to many conceptual gaps that scholars need to bridge. Hybridity is often used as an empty concept. The critical potential of hybridity has yet to be further developed theoretically (Bardhan, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Bardhan (2012), a post-colonial intercultural communication scholar, positions hybridity as a strategic performance. She cites Sharrad's (2007) research to explain that strategic hybridity can enable the post-colonial subject to maintain in-between identity positions. Hybridity can be performed in the space between being assimilated and being different (Bardhan, 2012). Strategic hybridity is a "self-conscious, critical mode of performance" that uses the "connective tissue" of seemingly incommensurable cultural entities to engage in intercultural bridgework (Bardhan, 2012, p. 161). Strategic hybridity privileges the engagement of everyday resistance through individual agency. This performance of hybridity has the potential to break stereotypes and other inaccurate ideas of the Other. Using mimicry, the performance of mimicking the colonizer (Bhabha, 1994), individuals practicing strategic hybridity disrupt cultural scripts of the cultural Other. Thus, the individual is same (achieved through mimicry) and different (experienced through ambivalence) simultaneously, e.g. Gandhi's use of the colonial language of English to advocate for Indian Independence.

This ongoing discussion of hybridity makes space for border anxiety to be transformed from a narrative of trauma to a narrative of agentic resistance (Bardhan, 2012). By theorizing hybridities, Bhabha (1994, 1996), Gilroy (1993a, 1994, 1997), and Hall (1990, 1996b) disrupt binaristic discourses about diaspora identities. Diaspora connectivities are formed by border crossing and post-colonial histories. These connectivities are negotiated by individuals who survive in spaces where they are not necessarily welcome. In this negotiation, hybridity allows for both-and approaches to identity rather than the dualistic either/or approach.

Bhabha (1994, 1996) finds much value in the ways hybridity can disrupt hegemonic discourses of political and national entities. The common misconception is that diaspora marks global homogenization, erasing the legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and domination. Hybridity subverts this misconception by centering the lived experiences of the self and the ways the self encounters and internalizes Otherness and difference. Fear and ambivalence become a productive space for negotiating identities of self in non-categorical ways. Hybridity signals the strategic, subconscious performance of self-hood and can be a form of resistance.

Based on this literature review, I have identified that post-colonial theorizations of hybridity do not primarily focus on how hybridity plays out in specific micro spaces. However, the scholars I have mentioned in this section point out the potential of the hybrid subject position and the value of hybridity in micro spaces. Since I take a communicative approach to post-colonial diaspora hybridity research, I want to focus my research on micro moments and individual subject-constructions. I pose three research questions that guide my research on how hybrid identity manifests in micro spaces.

RQ 1: How can my post-colonial diaspora hybridity manifest as resistance in micro moments?

RQ 2: How do my border crossings shape my understanding of my hybrid identity?

RQ 3: How do I understand my hybridity in relation to reductionist labels perpetuated during significant moments?

In the next section, I discuss the method I have chosen to guide my research on post-colonial diaspora hybridity. I make a case for why this particular method is the most apt to help me answer my research questions.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Much research has been done on the topic of identity within the field of communication studies. Identity research has been done in functionalist (Gudykunst, 1983; Ting-Toomey, 2005), interpretive (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Philipsen, 1972), and critical paradigms (Bardhan & Orbe, 2012; Warren, 2008) within this field. However, most of the research has been done in the functionalist paradigm. Functionalist research has been imperative in establishing and sustaining the communication studies discipline. The interpretive and critical paradigms make important turns in scholarship that allow space and voice for marginalized perspectives. Since I locate my research in the critical paradigm, I use autoethnography, one of the interpretive/critical research methodologies, to conduct my research. I use autoethnography to understand how I embody post-colonial diaspora hybridity in micro spaces. Autoethnography is a method that uses personal narratives and experiences from micro moments to understand and critique culture and macro systems of power (Adams, 2012; Pelias, 2004). With the framework of autoethnography, the researcher can center micro moments, and study how cultural systems manifest within micro spaces. Autoethnography can be defined as using self to get to culture (Pelias, 2004). I use autoethnography to understand how my post-colonial diaspora hybridity manifests in micro interactions.

In this method section, I advocate for autoethnography as the most apt method for my research on post-colonial diaspora hybridity. I establish the importance of autoethnography in studying identity in the field of communication studies, specifically critical intercultural communication. In what follows, I first establish my choice of research method. I explain the paradigmatic shifts that led to autoethnography. Second, I discuss the general definition of

autoethnography. Then, I map out the components and procedures of autoethnography specific to my research topic.

Paradigmatic Shifts in Communication Studies and the Need for Autoethnography

Historically, most research undertaken in the field of communication studies, specifically in the subfield of intercultural communication, has been largely functionalist or social scientific (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Chuang, 2003). The study of cultural norms in communication has consisted of the Western researcher venturing into the space of the Other to study how different the Other is from Westerners. Westerners were the standard for the ideal human and normality. Most of this research upholds modernist notions of culture and categorization (Sarup, 1996). The post-modern and social constructivist turn in the social sciences and humanities forced academics and researchers to rethink the notion of objectivity in relation to knowledge production and urged them to acknowledge the ways the researcher is always implicated in the research.

Following this post-modern turn, some communication scholars problematized the paradigmatic assumptions of the functional paradigm, which signaled the beginning of the interpretive paradigm, followed by the critical paradigm. Within post-modern frameworks, self and other are conceptualized relationally, disrupting the subject-object divide that is assumed in the functional paradigm. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) discuss this relationality as a spectrum between the interpersonal and the intercultural. When conducting intercultural research, interpersonal aspects need to be taken into account. The self-other relationality is understood as an intimate process of negotiation (Toyosaki, Pensoneau-Conway, Wendt, & Leathers, 2009).

These changes in paradigmatic assumptions are reflected in the different research methodologies used in the interpretive and critical paradigms. In Communication Studies,

autoethnography emerged as a research method in the borders of the interpretive and the critical paradigms. Depending on which paradigm autoethnography is employed in, it serves different functions. In the next section, I discuss a general description of interpretive and critical autoethnography.

General Description of Autoethnography

“Autoethnography creates a space for turn, change, a reconsideration of how we think, how we do research and relationships, and how we live” (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013, p. 21). Autoethnography, as a method, allows for both personal and cultural critique (Pelias, 2004). It involves the study of human experience. The post-modern turn acknowledges the multiplicity of identities and realities. Autoethnography engages in the plurality of lived experiences and how they relate to theories of communication and culture (Griffin, 2012). Autoethnography locates individuals as sites of research and makes space to study the multiple standpoints and intersections individuals occupy. “Self becomes a reflection of the larger world” (Pathak, 2013, p. 596). Micro moments can reflect macro systems that we occupy.

As I have mentioned earlier, autoethnography can be used as either an interpretive or a critical method. It is important to recognize that critical methods sometimes involve interpretive approaches. For purposes of clarity and simplicity, I will discuss each approach as distinct from the other because they both function under different paradigmatic assumptions. I present the similarities and differences between interpretive and critical autoethnography below.

Understanding the characteristics of different types of autoethnography can help locate the paradigm in which the corresponding autoethnography takes place.

Interpretive and critical autoethnographies share four major characteristics. These similarities can be attributed to the overlap in interpretive and critical paradigmatic goals. The

first similarity is the acknowledgment of voice. Both interpretive and critical autoethnographies make space for marginalized voices that usually are not represented in social scientific discourse. The second similarity is that both types of autoethnography address subjectivity as an integral part of research. The “I” of the researcher is located and foregrounded as an inherently biased individual. The awareness of self and bias defeats the notion of objectivity. The researcher acknowledges self and reflects on how the self influences research. The marking of subjectivity of the researcher is a practice of self-reflexivity, which is an important tenet shared by both paradigms.

The third similarity is the notion of relationality. The researcher’s “I” is defined in relation to the Other in a cultural context (Spry, 2001). Therefore, autoethnography deals with not just subjectivity, but also intersubjectivity. The fourth similarity is shared by most interpretive and critical autoethnographers. It is the use of theory to ground narratives that connects the micro to the meso (community) and to the macro (culture). Many interpretive and critical scholars advocate for the use of theory to support, analyze, and validate narratives. However, there are scholars who believe narratives are in themselves narratives of cultural critique; they claim that applied theory is not a mandatory practice of autoethnography (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2013). These four similarities are major components that define the use and purpose of autoethnography. Next, I address the differences between interpretive and critical autoethnographies.

Differences in the ways interpretive and critical autoethnographies are conducted are due to the varying paradigmatic tenets. The first difference is that interpretive autoethnography describes phenomena, but critical autoethnography disrupts and challenges the status quo. Critical autoethnography embodies a political impulse that necessitates resistance and

deconstruction (Griffin, 2012). Critical autoethnography is grounded in narratives that intend to interrogate larger systems of oppression. These narratives must illuminate the meticulous ways systemic oppression functions. The narratives used in autoethnographies are usually counter-narratives, which deconstruct grand narratives and provide a more nuanced picture of reality (Alexander, 2006). The second difference is that critical autoethnography demands a critical examination of voice, which interpretive autoethnography does not require. In critical autoethnography, voice is leveraged as tool for critical cultural commentary (Griffin, 2012). Critical examination of voice helps to connect the micro experiences to meso and to macro experiences of power and domination.

The third difference is that, while both the interpretive and critical paradigms necessitate self-reflexivity, the critical paradigm specifically requires the marking of privilege and marginalization of the researcher in autoethnography (Alexander, 1999; Toyosaki et al., 2009). Critical autoethnography “embodies cultural criticism, implicating authors’ bodies and their cultural locations in the world” (Toyosaki, et al., 2009, p. 58). Critical autoethnographies are articulated reflexively and are located in theory to strengthen the message scholars intend to convey. This allows for scholars to engage in social justice praxis. These similarities and differences are important in identifying the various types of autoethnography used in communication research. The purpose of autoethnography shifts depending on the paradigm in which research takes place. Since my research topic is located in the critical post-colonial paradigm, I use critical autoethnography for my research on post-colonial diaspora hybridity. I regard narratives as a component of autoethnography. For purposes of ease, I use autoethnography and narratives interchangeably. However, I recognize that my narratives need to be grounded in theory in critical autoethnography. From this point on, it can be assumed that

when I refer to narratives in relation to critical autoethnography, I refer to narratives grounded and weaved in theory. In the next section, I explain my choice of critical autoethnography and its components.

Methodological Procedure and Components

I use critical post-colonial autoethnography as my research methodology. In this section, I define post-colonial autoethnography and identify its functions. Then, I discuss the components of post-colonial autoethnography. I end this section with how I utilize post-colonial autoethnography in my research. The term post-colonial autoethnography was coined by Pathak (2010). She uses the term “post-colonial” as an adjective to describe the genre of autoethnography she writes. The use of the adjective signals that most autoethnographies are White and Western-centric. Griffin (2012) expresses a similar sentiment about autoethnography. She advocates for Black feminist autoethnography.

Both Griffin (2012) and Pathak (2010) mark the politics of autoethnography by cautiously creating a specific genre of autoethnography. Post-colonial autoethnography can be defined as a method that seeks to validate the everyday experiences of the colonized as valuable epistemologies (Pathak, 2010, 2013). Pathak (2013) writes, “A scholar of color can. . .disrupt the false binaries that drive her away from the work that impassions her while holding true to the mandates of ‘rigor’ that pervade the academy and its evaluative bodies” (p. 598). This quote exemplifies the purposes of post-colonial autoethnography.

There are three major goals of post-colonial autoethnography. Firstly, the autoethnographer analyzes herself as both the subject of study and as a product of larger social, political, and cultural systems. This approach reveals and disrupts dominant structures of oppression and constantly reminds us that the process of knowledge production itself must also

be scrutinized to assure that the scholarship does not reproduce the very systems it serves to dismantle. Post-colonial autoethnography becomes a platform for greater social critique. Secondly, post-colonial autoethnography validates marginalized epistemologies. Native stories and “lore” are usually seen as exotic, indigenous, and mythical in oppressive colonial discourses (Pathak, 2013). Pathak (2010, 2013) finds that autoethnography helps redefine these stories as valuable epistemologies. The post-colonial framework focus on the “in-betweenness” (Pathak, 2013, p. 593) of cultural identities, thus legitimizing the ways positionality changes within geopolitical contexts. Singular identity categorizations are inadequate to understand hybrid cultural identities. Thirdly, autoethnography can disrupt false binaries. In this framework, Pathak (2013) argues languages and narratives of the post-colonial can help articulate the ambiguity of occupying cultural locations or embodying certain identity markers. These three goals validate the experiences of the colonized subject. Next, I address the four components of post-colonial autoethnography.

Pathak (2013) outlines four ethics that need to be present in post-colonial autoethnography. These ethics are accountability, truthfulness, context, and community. These four ethics also function as methodological components of post-colonial autoethnography. Pathak (2013) draws these ethics from Gonzalez (2003), which she provides to ensure post-colonial scholars do not reproduce the very systems they serve to dismantle. Accountability refers to the need to address how post-colonial autoethnographers arrive at the encounter about which they write. Pathak (2013) urges post-colonial autoethnographers not only to tell the story, but also the story of the story. Post-colonial autoethnographers must constantly engage the self-other relationship in a reflexive manner. Such reflexive engagement allows post-colonial autoethnographers to deconstruct hegemonic discourses without demonizing or romanticizing

others. Post-colonial autoethnographers must do research and present research with the same ethical standards and must be mindful of how they represent others. They must also hold themselves accountable for the stories and narratives about which they write.

The ethic of context refers to the systems of domination and oppression in which the narratives are situated. This ethic demands that post-colonial autoethnographers set the stage for their narratives. When autoethnographers describe the context of situations or narratives, they prevent the autoethnography from becoming a narcissistic reflection of themselves. Context situates the micro in relation to the meso and macro. The ethic of truthfulness is radical openness that makes visible stories that remain invisible through the colonial lens. By centering this ethic, Pathak (2013) urges post-colonial autoethnographers to write about the truths and realities that remain obscured in the colonial framework. This ethic also urges post-colonial autoethnographers to be cognizant of the ways their narratives may silence other narratives. For example, post-colonial autoethnographers have to acknowledge that their truth/story is only one perspective and that others may have experienced the same phenomenon differently. The ethic of community reminds post-colonial autoethnographers that a story cannot be told alone. Post-colonial autoethnographers must locate themselves as an individual existing in the larger world. Self and community are relational. Post-colonial autoethnography must connect micro to meso and to macro. Post-colonial autoethnography must center the self and understand the influences of larger systems of oppression on the self.

Structuring my Analysis

I am sitting in a café in a small town in Illinois. I am trying to apply Bhabha's concept of hybridity to analyze and understand my diaspora experiences. At this point, I have read several articles written about hybridity. Many hybridity scholars seem to use a metaphor to explain their

understanding of hybridity (Chawla, 2014b; Hao, 2014). This clearly indicates to me that I need a metaphor. I need a food metaphor. I need a culturally hybrid food that seems static, but is actually dynamic. . . . I know! *Rojak* is my metaphor!

Rojak, in Malay, translates to mixed salad. *Rojak* can be considered as Malaysian, Singaporean, or Indonesian food. The ingredients used to make *rojak* change depending on regional flavor preferences. There are Chinese, Malay, and Indian *rojaks*. The original recipes for these *rojaks* were created by diaspora populations who settled in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. I personally prefer Singapore Chinese *rojak* for its spicy and sweet flavors, and crunchy fried bread and smooth sauces. And I, like the food, am a cultural *rojak*. *Rojak* does not combine ingredients to produce a singular taste. The specialty of the *rojak* is the distinct flavors and textures that are present in every bite. Similarly, I am not a person made of a singular cultural essence. I am culturally hybrid. *Rojaks* manifests differently based on the various cultural contexts it was and is made. I understand my identities to also change and manifest differently in relation to context and time. My identities are not fixed or static positionalities (Hall, 1990).

The metaphor of the *Rojak* allows me to understand my various cultural identities as multiplicative, rather than additive (Bhabha, 1994), just like the ingredients of the *rojak*. Using the *rojak* metaphor leads me to interrogate origin of identity, identity “wholeness” (Hao, 2013, p. 101), and pure essence of identity. My cultural identities combine to produce a familiar yet different hybrid identity. I am never just one component of my identities. I always simultaneously embody all identities. I address some of my identities as static categories as an entry point into the identity discourse. However, I problematize the static labels through my narratives. I would like to provide a disclaimer: my Southeast Asian *rojak* metaphor must not be

confused or conflated with the US American assimilation metaphor of the salad bowl.⁶ Though both metaphors sound similar, each serves very different functions. *Rojak*, unlike the salad bowl, represents a survival strategy (Munoz, 1999; Picart, 2002) that resists assimilationist discourses and Otherizing discourses.

Diaspora hybridity is not just a theoretical concept but a lived reality that demands that my identities remain permeable and fluid. Hybrid identities are always in flux. In order to understand the permeability and the fluidity of my hybrid identity, I narrate particular lived experiences that occurred after I moved to Midwestern US America. These moments happened within and outside of US America. By analyzing these moments, I make sense of how I have lived with and through difference. Within these moments, I discuss how my hybrid identities manifested and how I understood my hybridity in relation to restrictive identity categories.

I write my narratives using the framework of post-colonial autoethnography (Pathak, 2013). Similar to Pratt (1992), I use autoethnography

to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways which engage with the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means in which Europeans represent to themselves their usually subjugated others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations. (p. 7)

As I write about my specific lived experiences using post-colonial autoethnography, I center the ethics of accountability, truthfulness, context, and community. I begin my analysis by providing

⁶ The salad bowl metaphor was proposed as resistance to US American Anglo-Saxon White Protestant metaphor of the melting pot. While the salad bowl represents cultural tolerance, it is also problematic, like the melting pot. The salad bowl does not engage with and through difference. The salad bowl does not account for power dynamics either. Therefore, the salad bowl metaphor is inadequate. See Rosaldo (1994) for more information.

a brief history of *rojak*. Then I explain my *amma*'s⁷ makeshift *rojak* recipe. Within that section I discuss the ways I experience diaspora hybridity through cultural practices. Following that, I list the *rojak* ingredients that are not available in Minnesota in the *Finding Ingredients* section. I use the search for ingredients as symbolic of my process of understanding my hybrid identity. The *Finding Ingredients* section has two parts. In these two sections, I analyze specific moments that exemplify hybrid identity as a site of struggle. Next, I explain the common misconceptions about the Indian *rojak* to explore the myth of identity origin. Following that, I narrate and reflect on two specific moments where my diaspora hybridity served as a form of resistance. Finally, I conclude with *amma*'s most current *rojak* recipe.

⁷ *Amma* means mother in Tamil.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS: LIVING LIKE A *ROJAK*

History of *Rojak*

History of *rojak* is unknown. No one knows how and where in Southeast Asia exactly various *rojak* recipes originated. All that is known is that *rojaks* were created by the various diaspora populations that settled in Southeast Asia. Each *rojak* recipe includes locally available ingredients and ingredients introduced to the region by diaspora populations. The mixing of diverse ingredients is a result of the process of organic hybridity (Werbner, 1997 as cited in Bardhan, 2012). Organic hybridity is the process of cultural exchange that happens over time among various cultures. Eventually, the cultural exchanges become ingrained in the corresponding cultural memory as a priori cultural knowledge. The ingredients used in *rojak* have become a component of Southeast Asian cultural memory. Similar to the various *rojak* ingredients, my diaspora hybrid identity is an amalgamation of my national, racial, and ethnic identities. I understand the intersections of my identities through my multiple border crossings and the different cultural contexts I encounter. I understand my identities in relation to my birthplace, Malaysia; the place I was raised, Singapore; the place where I have ancestral ties, India; and my current place of residency, US America. As a diaspora subject, I move back-and-forth between and among these spaces. I also live in-between these marked cultural spaces. The in-between space is where I experience my hybridized identity.

Makeshift *Rojak*

The Singapore Chinese *rojak*, my favorite type of *rojak*, is made with *cakwe*⁸, bean sprouts, *sengkuang*⁹, pineapple, cucumbers, and mangoes. There is a sauce that goes over this

⁸ *Cakwe* is fired bread.

⁹ *Sengkuang* is a type of sweet turnip.

salad. It is made of tamarind, sugar, lime juice, and *belacan*¹⁰. The salad is always topped with ground peanuts. However, in 2004, not all ingredients listed above were available in central Minnesota. Therefore, *amma* created a makeshift *rojak*. She used mayonnaise and honey to make a sauce that was similar to the sweet taste of *rojak* sauce. It was hard to find *sengkuang* in Minnesota, so *amma* used apples to add crunchiness to the salad. She always garnished the makeshift *rojak* with ground peanuts. This makeshift *rojak* was one of the many ways my family and I adapted to US America. We creatively engaged with the new context based on knowledges gained from our past experiences. *Amma* did not figure out this combination of makeshift ingredients overnight. She figured it out over time. After a few failures and some successes, *amma* found a combination of ingredients that worked together. The makeshift *rojak* tasted good, but the combination of the acidity from the fruits and the mayonnaise always left an unpleasant burn in the back of my throat.

* * *

My first Deepavali¹¹ in US America was largely underwhelming. I spent most of November 1st, 2005 nostalgic for a Malaysian Deepavali. When I lived in Singapore, my family had a tradition of traveling to Malaysia to be with my maternal grandparents during Deepavali. However, our move to Minnesota made our Deepavali celebrations impossible. We did not have Deepavali holidays in Minnesota like we did in Singapore, which was one of the reasons we could not travel to Malaysia to celebrate Deepavali. The flight tickets were also extremely expensive. I missed my cousins, friends, the fireworks, and the Deepavali cards we used to receive the week of Deepavali celebrations. Worst of all, I had to go to school on Deepavali in Minnesota. I remember thinking about how boring it was to celebrate the festival of lights by

¹⁰ *Belacan* is a Southeast Asian spicy shrimp paste.

¹¹ Deepavali is the Tamil name for Diwali, the festival of lights. Deepavali is a Hindu festival.

going to school! One of the Malaysian Deepavali practices I missed most was the receiving of *hong baos*.¹² Exchanging *hong baos* was a traditionally Chinese practice. However, because of the influences of the Chinese diaspora in Malaysia and Singapore, other ethnic populations within Malaysia and Singapore also participated in the practice of giving and receiving *hong baos* for different festivals. For Deepavali, Southeast Asian *hong bao* companies manufactured purple envelopes, instead of the traditional red envelopes. For *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*,¹³ *hong bao* companies manufactured green envelopes. During my Malaysian Deepavali celebrations, I received purple *hong baos* from all the elders in my family. By the end of the Deepavali day, I accumulated at least RM¹⁴ 50, minimum! As a Tamil Malaysian, the practice of receiving *hong bao* was ingrained into my family's cultural practices. This was one of the many ways I used to celebrate my diaspora hybridity with my family while I was living in Singapore. When my family moved to Minnesota, we did not have access to *hong baos*, and we knew no one to whom we could give *hong baos*. Unfortunately, the practice of giving and receiving Deepavali *hong baos* was lost in my family. The amount of money I received did not matter to me. However, the way the money was given had a lot of meaning. The act of receiving money in a purple *hong bao* signified celebration of Deepavali, marking that moment of *hong bao* receiving as different from ordinary other moments.

However, my family and I began creating different Deepavali traditions that fit our lifestyle in US America. For most years, Deepavali fell on a school day. In 2007, on the day of Deepavali, I woke up early and went upstairs to the kitchen of my family's Minnesotan home. *Amma* was in the kitchen, waiting with sesame oil. I stood facing east, while *amma* rubbed sesame oil on the top of my head. She blessed me to have a bright and happy life ahead, without

¹² *Hong bao* is a red envelop that contains money. *Hong bao* is usually exchanged during the Lunar New Year.

¹³ *Hari Raya Aidilfitri* marks the end of Ramadan and the beginning of the month of Shawwal.

¹⁴ RM stands for Ringgit Malaysia, which is Malaysian currency.

the influence of the evil of the past. Then I quickly ran back downstairs and took a meticulous shower in order to remove all the oil. The removing of the oil symbolized the removing of negative thoughts or influences. After the shower, my entire family assembled in our prayer room. *Amma* and *appa* lit the oil lamp, and finished all prayer rituals. Then, we all meditated together. After prayers, *amma* and *appa* gave my brother and me our new Deepavali clothes. I bent down and touched *appa's* and *amma's* feet to get their blessings, and then went to my room to change into my new clothes. That year, I received jeans and a gray sweater as my new clothes for Deepavali. If I had been in Singapore, I would have received *sarees*¹⁵ and *salwar kameez*¹⁶ for Deepavali, instead of jeans and sweater. The rest of the day of Deepavali continued like any other school day. However, on the weekend of the Deepavali week, my family got together with some of the Indian families who lived by us in Saint Cloud. We were not all Tamilians. Some of us were Telugu,¹⁷ some of us were Gujarati,¹⁸ and some of us were Oriya.¹⁹ We gathered at a club room in one of the nearby apartments to celebrate a festival that was common among our cultural practices. The celebrations included Indian foods from regions such as Andra Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, and Tamil Nadu, and US American foods such as chicken wings and pizza. The music played ranged from the Hannah Montana theme song, to ghazals²⁰, to the latest AR Rahman²¹ hits. And all of this felt natural to us. My Deepavali in US America became a culturally hybrid celebration that was not restricted to my Tamil identity or my Malaysian identity. This Deepavali celebration was also a confirmation of belonging in the Indian diaspora in Saint Cloud, Minnesota.

¹⁵ *Sarees* are long pieces of cloth that is wrapped and draped on women in a pattern.

¹⁶ *Salwar Kameez* is an outfit that consists of long shirts, pants and a shawl.

¹⁷ Telugu is an ethnic identity associated with Andra Pradesh, India.

¹⁸ Gujarati is an ethnic identity associated with Gujarat, India.

¹⁹ Oriya is an ethnic identity associated with Orissa, India.

²⁰ Ghazals are poetic forms that originate from Islamic mysticism.

²¹ A R Rahman is an Oscar winning Indian composer and musician.

Experiencing diaspora hybridity in US America helped me understand the myth of cultural purity. I understood myself as an upper-middle class, post-colonial subject who was a doubly diasporized Tamilian (Hall, 1996b). I found myself to be a part of the Southeast Asian diaspora and the US American Indian diaspora. My local and transnational diaspora identifications disrupted the primordial conceptions of cultural purity (Hall, 1996b). Hall (1990) explains, “Diaspora experience...is defined, not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity” (p. 235). The way my family celebrated Deepavali had not been “purely” Hindu or Tamilian. Our Deepavali was defined by the “cut-and-mix” (Hall, 1996b, p. 403) hybridization of cultural practices, such as exchanging *hong bao* or postponing celebrations, and the re-signification of those practices according to space and time. Practicing cultural purity is impossible because of various cultural negotiations that take place because of my hybridized positionality. This further disrupts the notion that culture is a singular pure essence.

Finding Ingredients: Understanding Identities

Three major *rojak* ingredients were not available in Minnesota: *Sengkuang*, *cakwe*, and *belacan*. *Sengkuang* was a sweet turnip that added crunchy texture to the *rojak*. *Cakwe* was fried dough that could be used in a variety of ways. It could also be simply consumed as a snack with hot tea. *Cakwe* was slightly salty. The saltiness helped bring out the sweetness of the sauce. It also added density to the dish. *Belacan* was a spicy shrimp paste that was popular in the Malay cuisine. *Belacan* was smelly but was absolutely delicious to cook with and eat! The spice from the *belacan* added a punch to the sweetness of the *rojak* sauce. Without these ingredients, *rojak* became a dull dish. All of *rojak's* ingredients had great qualities as standalone ingredients.

However, when they were tossed together, the ingredients brought forth something familiar yet different.

* * *

It was a bright summer day. I was a teenager. It had been three or four years since my family and I had moved to Saint Cloud, Minnesota. I cannot remember the exact year. My family, friends, and I went to visit the Mississippi headwaters located in the Itasca state park in Minnesota. It was a fun-filled trip. During the car ride up to Itasca state park, my friends and I were gossiping about our schoolmates, and our parents were chatting about grown-up matters. Once we reached the state park, we navigated through the entrance of the state park and proceeded to the parking area designated for visitors. We did all this with ease because of our Minnesota state park permit that was placed on the top right side of *appa's* car windshield. My family and I were frequent state park visitors. We had visited most of the state parks located between Northern and Central Minnesota. The Minnesota state park permit was a symbol of our Minnesotan identity and our appreciation for the state.

After we parked, we made our way to the headwaters. Our parents led my friends and I to the headwaters. We were still deep in conversation and gossip and followed our parents inattentively. A short walk brought us to the headwaters. The large Itasca Lake flowed into the beginnings of the Mississippi river. It was odd to see the very humble beginnings of the majestic Mississippi river. As my friends and I marveled at the source of the Mississippi river, we heard someone say, "Go back to where you came from!" I looked at my friends in shock, and then turned my head to look at the source of the voice. I think there was a group of more than five people, but less than 10 people; my memory is vague. I was taken aback by the sight of them. Fear gripped me. I was not sure what was going to happen next. Anger slowly brewed in me, but

I did not have the courage to talk back to those people. They stared and snickered for a painful second and walked away from us. I remember thinking that the group of people looked about my age. They looked White. My friends and I stood there by the headwaters in utter shock. I wondered, “How can people in my generation be so racist and xenophobic? Aren’t they educated?” These questions haunted my mind. We took a while to process what had happened, and then we informed our parents. Our parents just told us to forget that this ever happened, and we left the state park.

My initial reaction was a mixture of shock and anger. Upon reflection, I realized that this moment only exemplified the tensions of my hybrid identity. As someone who had accepted Minnesota as a new home space, I struggled when I was deemed an outsider. I had understood a part of my identity as Minnesotan. I studied in Saint Cloud public schools and invested myself in community activities around central Minnesota as a community member. I always introduced myself as, “I am from Saint Cloud, Minnesota.” I felt that I belonged in Minnesota as a part of my diaspora hybrid identity. However, when I was told to “go back,” I realized that cultural membership is arbitrary. Although I considered myself as Minnesotan, that did not mean I would be perceived as such. The comment, “go back” affected me emotionally, which signaled my need for identity validation. I was taken aback because I was not validated as a Minnesotan, or as just another teenager living in Minnesota. My diaspora hybridity made it “difficult to achieve ‘wholeness’” (Hao, 2014, p. 101) of identity because of my constant negotiation of multiple diaspora identities and my need for validation as Minnesotan.

Finding Ingredients: Entanglement of Physical Border Crossings

I received my US American permanent residency card (green card), five years after my family and I moved to Minnesota. Receiving the green card was a huge relief for my family. If

our green card application had been denied, my family and I would have had to relocate elsewhere. With the green card, I gained domestic student status at my undergraduate university. I was given access to scholarships and financial aid. Even though having a green card alleviated some tension and anxiety about surviving in the US, my green card labeled me an alien. I had to renew the green card every ten years. I could not leave the country as I wished. US American customs immigration officers always reminded me that my green card was a privilege, and not a right. They expected me to show gratitude and prove my loyalty in the long and tedious minutes they interrogated me. The question of cultural loyalty further reified the myth of cultural purity. As a diaspora subject who moved back and forth between cultural spaces, it was difficult for me to engage in nationalistic loyalty.

I was minutes away from seeing my family. I walked into a terminal in Chicago with a crowd of people. A customs immigration officer segregated arriving passengers into three groups: US citizens, green card holders, and visa holders. I joined the line formed by green card holders. I waited in line with my bags weighing down on my shoulders. The weight of the bags was leaving lines on my shoulder, but it didn't matter because I was going to see my family after eight months! I was so excited! Eventually, my turn came to step up to the customs immigration counter. As soon as the officer checked my passport and stamped it, I would be able to enter US America. I was nervous. I had spent the last eight months in Coimbatore, India, working on improving my dance skills. I had the legal access to enter India and return to US America. Yet, I felt nervous. During my stay in India, I collected important receipts from my hostel payment and dance school fees and organized them neatly in a folder. *Appa* sent me a copy of my graduate school acceptance letter to add to the folder. I made sure I had the folder out with me when I was in the Chicago customs. The customs officer did not care about my documents. He stood there

like he was born to question the legitimacy of my existence. The officer seemed very upset and angry. He spoke to me in an intimidating, angry voice. He used a scolding voice, like how a teacher would scold a student for doing something wrong. In that voice, he said, “You left the country for eight months!” Then he proceeded to ask me what I did for a living. Hiding my anger and humiliation, I explained that I was a student. He immediately shouted, “No, you are not!” I felt the stares of the people around me. I controlled my voice and attempted to show the officer my graduate school acceptance letter. The officer seemed irritated. He stared me down as he held up my green card and yelled, “Hey, hey! Look here! This is not a right. This is a privilege. If you want this card, you stay in this country. If you don’t want this card, you can leave this country.” He finally stamped my passport and let me enter US America.

I was shaken by the encounter with the customs officer. Before leaving US America and during my stay in India, I had called the US American consulate multiple times to ensure that I could leave US America and return after eight months without repercussions. The consulate did not inform me that I would be scolded when I re-entered US America. All I did during the encounter with the customs officer was smile, nod, and apologize for having left US America. I wanted to see my family, and I wanted to return home without any legal problems. So, I remained submissive. My in-between space of belonging and being alien caused much distress for the customs officer and me.

The officer was doing his duty of policing the borders of the US America. His policing performance informed me that I could not be an individual who could traverse multiple borders. I understood the officer’s message to be in congruence with former president Theodore Roosevelt’s (“Unhyphenated American”, 2015) infamous quotation, “When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. . . . A hyphenated American is not an

American at all. . . . The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.” Former president Woodrow Wilson (1919) followed suit and said, “Any man who carries a hyphen about with him carries a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic whenever he gets ready.” In both quotations, the idea of a true American was addressed in relation to hyphenated Americans, e.g., Mexican-American, Japanese-American, or Honduran-American. Both former presidents referred to people who occupy culturally hybrid positionalities, like me, as hyphenated Americans.

As an individual who had the privilege of traversing multiple borders, I could not renounce my relationship to other cultural spaces to be in US America. My identity could not fit into a singular category of, “True American” that I felt the officer was expecting of me. I did not pass as a loyal US American, and my green card marks me an alien. Even though I was waiting at the threshold of the customs immigration so that I could go home to my family, I felt alienated as I passed through the threshold. I had to mediate the tensions between returning home to US America, and returning to US America as an alien, because of my diaspora identity. The customs officer told me to leave if I did not want to be here, but I was there precisely because I wanted to be there. Yet, I had still failed to fulfill the identity expectations of the customs officer.

I turned to Bhabha’s (1994) notion of third space to understand the tensions I experienced. Third space is an in-between space where the struggles between cultural borders and identities occur. I found myself in the in-between space of a physical border that represented the US American cultural border and Other. The threshold of the customs office was an ambivalent site where my performance of identity had no, “primordial unity or fixity” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 101). The officer’s response could have resulted from my poor embodiment of a fixed US American identity. My encounter with the officer taught me that diaspora hybrid positionality

could be a site of struggle. I struggled as an insider and an outsider within the threshold of the Chicago customs. The encounter with the customs officer also exemplified the tensions of acceptance and alienation that I experienced because of my hybrid identities.

Popular Misconception about the Indian *Rojak*

The Indian *rojak* had been commonly misunderstood to have originated from India. The adjective “Indian” is generally associated with the geographic space of India. Research conducted by Nanyang Technical University’s sociology students showed that the Indian *rojak*, a mix of fried fritters, was actually created in Singapore by early Indian immigrants (Lin, 2013). More ingredients were added later to cater to the Chinese community and other customers’ demand for variety.

* * *

It was spring semester of my sophomore year as an undergraduate. Winter was loosening its cold grip on us, and the sun was welcoming us into spring. The president of the Indian Heritage Club, a few of his friends and I were sitting under the sun, outside the student center of our university. We were planning for the Indian culture show. It was a given that I was going to perform in the show because I was the only person in the university who was a semi-professional Bharatha Natyam²² dancer. I also participated in most South Asian culture shows in my undergraduate university. As we were planning performances for the culture show, the president began speaking in English, and then code-switched to Hindi. I jokingly reminded him, “Give me subtitles!” The president laughed and returned to speaking English. After a while the president looked at me and asked, “Why do you Tamilians never learn Hindi?” I was puzzled by his reference to all Tamilians. He continued, “You learn French! You learn Telugu! But you refuse to learn Hindi! What kind of Indian are you?” He seemed genuinely upset by this phenomenon

²² Bharatha Natyam is a South Indian classical dance form that originated from Tamil Nadu.

and I did not have an answer for him. For a moment, I felt like a cultural imposter. I wondered, “Did I need to know Hindi to be Indian?”

My racial identity was Indian. My Indian identity in Singapore and Malaysia was always conflated with my Tamil ethnic identity. So, I never felt the need to separate my ethnic and racial identity. In the context of US America, however, my Indian physical characteristics signaled a certain racial identity and ties to the geographic space of India. I was often labeled Indian when I interacted with fellow Minnesotans. This labeling privileged my race identity, rather than my diaspora identity. When I interacted with international students from India, specifically Hindi speaking students, my lack of Hindi skills made me a cultural outsider. My Indian identity constantly shifted in relation to the cultural context in which I was located. The shifting of my Indian identity urged me to interrogate the notion of authentic Indian. My Indian identity was entangled with my national, ethnic and racial identities. In some contexts, my Indian identity represented my Tamilian identity. In some contexts, my Indian identity was a race label. And in other contexts, I was outside of the identity category. These shifting meanings of Indian marked how identity is not a static and fixed category. The Indian identity was dynamic and constituted different meaning depending on the context.

The shifting meanings of Indian also calls into question the assumption of origin that comes with the label Indian. Just because someone self-identifies as Indian, it does not mean they are from India. This linear origin narrative is influenced by the notion of pure cultural essence. I am Indian, but I am from Malaysia and Singapore. I do not have a linear origin story. My origin is a result of multiple transnational movements. I identify as Indian, but my Indian identity is not directly connected to the geographic region of India. My non-linear origin narrative and the shifting meanings of my Indian identity are results of my diaspora hybridity.

My diaspora hybrid identity locates my Indian identity between a constant tension of being insider and outsider, simultaneously. My hybridized understanding of being Indian helps me understand the inadequacy of the trope of authentic identity.

Possibilities for Resistance: Strategic use of my *Rojak-ness*

It was my first day of teaching during the fall semester of 2014. Generally on the first day of the semester, a professor or instructor usually enters the classroom, introduces herself/himself then gives students an opportunity to introduce themselves. Then, the professor goes through the syllabus. I wanted to do something a little different on the first day. I walked in to my classroom and sat among the students. I was in class by 9:50 a.m. The class was supposed to begin at 10 a.m. The clock passed 10 a.m. and my students became restless. I waited to see who walked in late, who was excited to be in class, and who was hoping this class would be cancelled for the semester. While waiting for my arrival, the students, without realizing that I was already there, began talking among themselves. Most students were hoping class would be cancelled for the rest of the semester. Fifteen minutes passed, and finally a student looked up my name in their class schedule. After realizing that my name sounded different (not US American), the students began to discuss the accent that I would have, and how hard it would be to understand me. They were projecting their stereotypes upon me without ever meeting me. They forced my identity into a singular category just by looking up my name. They assumed I was not US American and otherized my cultural identity. I was shocked by the conversations, but I waited patiently before I talked back (hooks, 1989). Twenty minutes passed, and a student got up to leave. Just as the student was about to walk out, I revealed myself as their instructor. After clearly pronouncing my name for my students, I immediately asked them what accent I had. My students slowly answered that I have an Indian accent. I told them I grew up in Minnesota and asked them again

what accent I had. The class was filled with silence and surprised looks. This incident became an entry point into the discourse of essentialisms, stereotypes, and structural racism for the rest of the semester. In that moment, I was able to use my US American accent as a tool of hybrid resistance to discuss diversity, identities, and hybridities.

By engaging in the cultural logic of the US American college classroom, I subverted from the inside by disrupting the normative US American production of knowledge. I used my White US American accent to talk about multiple epistemologies within a classroom space, thus diversifying the intercultural conversations that happened in class. While my accent provided a level of comfort for my students, my stance on many issues, especially intercultural and international issues, did not fit the hegemonic ideological borders that confine a classroom. The classroom space produced ambiguity but also became a space to express discomfort. Such discomfort was productive when my students and I engaged in dialogue. I was able to use my hybrid identity performance to create a space that became more open to multiple realities.

* * *

During the final semester of my master's program, I did a week-long dance residency in an elementary school in Minnesota. I perceived majority of the students of the elementary school to be White. During the school assembly, I met the second graders I was about to teach. I saw only a few students who I perceived to be of minority race and ethnic identities. I taught five sections of second graders each day. In one of the classes, a student raised her hand and asked me if I had to fly all the way across the world to arrive at their school. This question signaled a normative discursive practice about community and belonging. I laughed and replied that I was from Saint Cloud. Many students immediately gasped! Some repeated, "You are from Saint Cloud?!" It was fun to playfully disrupt their sedimented notions of community and who gets to

be a part of the community. Simply reaffirming to the students that I am Minnesotan caused much unrest, in a good way. Bhabha (1985) theorized that the power of hybridity enables the colonized to appropriate the knowledge of the colonizer in such a way as to “estrangle the basis of its authority— its rules of recognition” (p. 175). By answering that I am from Saint Cloud, and not from an exotic place elsewhere, I was able to make them question who belonged in Minnesota.

I taught the class Sanskrit words, Tamil words, and a non-US American dance form. So, they felt that I must be from some place far beyond their imagination. Many students asked me if I came from India, and other students asked if I was Native American. They had confused American Indian and Indian American. One student asked about the kind of traditional attire I wear. I explained to the class that mostly Indians wear jeans and t-shirt, but on special occasions, we wear *sarees*, *kurta*,²³ and other traditional attire. Another student asked if I wore feathers and lived in a teepee. I was taken aback for a moment, but I strongly felt that as a class we needed to have a conversation about this. I explained to them that feathers and teepees are cultural stereotypes that are not accurate descriptors of the diverse Native American culture. I also drew a map of India and explained to them that India was in Asia. Sometimes a simple comment was enough to disrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. While teaching my students, I reappropriated the oppressive stereotypes perpetuated by racist, xenophobic and othering discourses to disrupt my students’ stereotyped notions of Indian and Native American. I also understood that my diaspora hybridity did not completely disrupt the assumptions held by the second graders. However, I would like to think of the moment when I surprised them as a small part of a series of disruptions the students would encounter in their lives. While teaching

²³ *Kurtas* are long shirts/tunics.

the second graders, my diaspora hybridity served a purpose within and beyond myself. However, moments like these were rare. So, I cherished these moments.

Our Own Twist: Vegetarian *Rojak*

Hybridity is hard. I had to disrupt my own sedimented assumptions about culture and identities over the course of many years to gain a better understanding of my diaspora hybridity. Hybridity is a processual phenomenon that is always in flux. I still do not claim to know everything there is to know about my hybrid identities. There are more ways my identities entangle than what I have analyzed here. As I write autoethnography, I gain a more nuanced understanding of my narrative of hybridity. Hybridity can aid in finding more creative and more strategic ways to modify already established practices, recipes, or cultural scripts. Through my hybrid performance of difference, I found a structure of subjectivity different from the dominant form (Hall, 1990).

I use Pathak's (2013) post-colonial ethics as my guideline to write my narratives. I hold myself accountable for all the narratives I have written. I have centered myself as the site of research and have provided pertinent information to contextualize the moments I have discussed in my autoethnography. I have tried not to demonize or romanticize the people who I encountered within those moments. I have overtly acknowledged any anger I felt in specific moments and have strived to channel that anger into productive analysis. I also recognize that this is only my perspective. My narratives are entangled with the narratives of the people about whom I have written. I cannot provide everyone else's narrative, only my own. Therefore, I recognize that my truth may not be another person's truth. I have situated my narratives in the contexts of normative cultural scripts and oppressive categorizations. I have done my best to contextualize my narratives in a way that focuses on the micro, yet comments of the macro.

Also, the ways I perform hybrid identity are unique to my lived experiences, and are not meant to be prescriptive. Through my research I want to convey that hybrid resistance and hybrid performance happens in unexpected moments in very subtle ways.

Amma is a frequent shopper at the local Vietnamese grocery store in Saint Cloud. She can request for different items to the store owners, if the store does not already carry those items. The store owners will try to order the items to make them available for their customers. Over the last ten years, *amma* has been able to buy almost every ingredient needed for the original recipe for *rojak*. *Cakwe* and *sengkuang* are now readily available at the Vietnamese store. The only ingredient that is tough to buy is *belacan*. *Amma* is not attached to using *belacan* anyway, because it is made of shrimp. My family rarely eats meat or seafood due to religious reasons. So, *amma* has found a more creative substitute for *belacan*. Instead of the shrimp paste, *amma* uses a garlic chili paste and adds that to the tamarind paste to create similar flavors. This version of *amma's rojak* is closer to the original recipe, but she did not fail to add her own twist according to our needs.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Upon reflection on my autoethnographic writing process, I explain how critical intercultural communication and post-colonial theorizing can benefit from autoethnography. I first discuss the methodological benefits for critical intercultural communication and then discuss methodological benefits for post-colonial studies. For critical intercultural communication, I focus specifically on how difference can be centered and rearticulated in autoethnography and how that can contribute to critical communication and postcolonial theories. For post-colonial studies, I provide two benefits based on my reflections and identify four post-colonial communication scholars who use autoethnography as a research method. I finally end this section by making a call for more research to be done using post-colonial autoethnography.

Methodological Benefits for Critical Intercultural Communication

Autoethnography can be a strategic tool for intercultural communication. It has the potential to center difference and to re-theorize Western-centric, modernist, and negative notions of difference. Firstly, writing autoethnography allows for difference and similarities of intersectional identities to be confronted. Secondly, autoethnographies resist binary logics. Thirdly, through autoethnography, identity and culture can be understood as a process of being and becoming simultaneously.

Autoethnography can be useful to study intersectional identities. Similarities are viewed as salient, and differences are reconceptualized as everyday experience (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Dominant discourses stress identity as sameness, but identity is only conceivable in and through difference (Sarup, 1996). Self is constructed not only by what self is, but also by what self is not. Self cannot be independent from Other (difference). This creates space for self to be identified in

relation to difference (Other), rather than to be identified as opposed to difference (Other). Hall (1990), like many other critical scholars, emphasizes the need to rethink agency as subjectivity (Sarup, 1996; Warren, 2008). He calls for a new construction of ethnicities: a politic that engages difference rather than suppresses it (Hall, 1990). He insists that a new politic of difference needs to aid in rethinking difference as agency. The labor that needs to happen in order to rethink difference as agency can happen through reflexive autoethnographies.

Identities can unfold as personal, political, social, and cultural constructs when interrogated through the lens of autoethnography. Autoethnography can forefront the dialectic relationship between identity and difference (Berry, 2013). In critical autoethnography, the subject is located in cultural systems that suppress or deny difference. Through autoethnographies, one can explicate the ways difference is negotiated in everyday life (Berry, 2013). Differences are negotiated by the individual and the negotiation marks the individual as an agent of culture instead of a passive consumer or recipient of culture (Sarup, 1996; Warren, 2008). These moments can be reconceptualized as moments of creative resistance through autoethnography.

Next, autoethnography can emphasize variability within binary categories (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Recognizing variability within presumed categories of people is important to understand how power and binary logics work (Warren, 2008). This process of becoming is obscured in the essentialist logic of belonging to one place or one race. By theorizing difference and how difference is perceived, autoethnography can disrupt normative research that does not account for diversity of race, age, class, gender, sex, sexuality, religion, ability, education, and much more (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2006; Griffin, 2012). As Alexander (2006) states:

Autoethnography is an articulation based on the determinate memory and recall of experience via the lens of traumatically constrained ideology that undergirds cultural encounters, but autoethnography is also a particular stratagem to describe the continuing racialization of politics in ethnographic and intercultural research. (p. XX)

Autoethnography can be used to make space for authors to problematize mainstream research and the lack of representation of marginalized positionalities.

Lastly, autoethnography can reflect the fragmentary and contradictory process of identity and difference (i.e., Chawla, 2014a). Identity and culture need to be understood as processes of being and becoming simultaneously (Hall, 1990). The fragmented and processual experience of identity should be perceived as a positive experience (Sarup, 1996). Identity is not a stagnant whole that represents an individual. Rather, it is fractured and contradictory (Sarup, 1996). Just like identity, difference is an ongoing, interactional accomplishment (Warren, 2008).

Autoethnography can explicate the fragments of identity and the ways these fragments are constantly in flux.

Autoethnography is a very beneficial tool for studying difference and identity in critical intercultural communication. Sarup (1996) argues that everyone has the right to have their difference respected. Autoethnography can be a platform to rethink difference. In the next section, I discuss autoethnography's methodological contribution to post-colonial Communication Studies. I provide two characteristics of autoethnography that can be useful to achieve the paradigmatic goals of post-colonial studies.

Methodological Contributions to Post-Colonial Communication Studies

In this section, I provide two characteristics of autoethnography that can serve the tenets of post-colonial studies. Autoethnography can be used in post-colonial research for many

different reasons, but I provide two specific characteristics based on my reflections. Then, I identify four post-colonial scholars Chawla (2014a, 2014b), Dutta & Basu (2013), and Pathak (2013) who have used autoethnography for their research. Using the four scholars' works as exemplars, I advocate for more post-colonial autoethnographic scholarship to be done.

The first characteristic of autoethnography that is useful for post-colonial scholarship is that autoethnography attends to the micro moments. Post-colonial studies functions primarily in the critical paradigm. While the critical paradigm is effective at attending to macro systems, it is poor at attending to the micro and the meso. Theoretically, the critical paradigm, specifically post-colonial studies, is supposed to make space for particularities, but this is rarely operationalized. This is where autoethnography can fill in some of the paradigmatic gaps. Autoethnography can attend to the particularities of post-colonialisms. This method can engage in the micro by identifying self as the site of research. Focusing on the experiences of the individual can illuminate how macro systems can manifest in meso and micro spaces. By centering the individual (self) in discourses of change and in identity research, scholars can inject hegemonic discourses with multiple perspectives and realities (Dutta & Basu, 2013).

These multiple realities can provide a more nuanced understanding of how post-colonial subjectivities are formed. Post-colonial subjects are entangled in other positionalities and particularities that are negotiated in everyday moments. Autoethnography can make space in scholarship to discuss the non-normative ways in which bodies, identities, and post-colonialisms are negotiated. Implicating the post-colonial "I" enables scholars to forefront post-colonial subjectivities that have been obscured by singular colonial logics. The "I" can also disrupt the singular notions of identity reproduced by colonial discourse (Dutta & Basu, 2013).

The second characteristic that is advantageous for post-colonial scholarship is that autoethnography can attend to the relational moments of self and other. Autoethnography can aid the researcher to discuss the ways self and other are co-constituted. The self-other dialectic is important in post-colonial studies to study the relationship between the colonizer and colonized. Bhabha (1994) states that the colonized is not the only one changed in the oppressive or submissive relationship between colonizer and colonized. The colonizer is also affected in the relationship. Autoethnographies can illuminate how self and other are influenced by each other. These narratives can be a reflexive tool to deconstruct self and other interactions in micro moments within the matrix of power and domination.

Autoethnography is valuable for post-colonial studies and should be used more frequently. Autoethnography attends to the relational moments of life, and can therefore aid in post-colonial research. Most post-colonial scholars use research methodologies such as ethnography, rhetorical analysis, and interviewing. A bleak number of scholars use autoethnography as a research method in post-colonial theorizing. Some of these scholars locate their work in the intersections of communication studies and cultural studies. For example, Chawla (2014a, 2014b), Dutta and Basu (2013), and Pathak (2013) are some of the scholars who function at the interstices of cultural studies and Communication Studies and engage in post-colonial theorizing. These particular scholars use autoethnography as a research method. For example, Chawla blends ethnography and autoethnography in many of her works by locating herself in the research that she does as demonstrated in *Home Uprooted* (2014a).

It is rare to find post-colonial scholars using autoethnography, but autoethnography can serve the tenets of post-colonial studies. Autoethnography can exemplify the particularities of a mundane situation and complicate the ways larger systems are negotiated and implemented in

micro, everyday spaces. Autoethnography can aid the study of the multiplicity of post-colonial realities and subjectivities. Therefore, I urge more post-colonial scholars to use autoethnography for their research.

Response to Research Questions

In this section, I would like to address my research questions, having done my analysis. My Theoretical research question is, “How can my post-colonial diaspora hybridity manifest as resistance in micro moments?” Through my lived experience, I understand my hybrid resistance as non-oppositional (Bhabha, 1994). When I was working with elementary school students, I did not consciously intend to resist their sedimented notions of community belonging. My reply happened in the moment, with no planning. This kind of hybrid resistance is not completely oppositional. It happens in the moment and works to resist dominant discourse in subtle ways. This resistance is also dialogic. While I was able to resist the labels enforced on me when I was asked if I had flown across the world to get to the elementary school, I was also able to disrupt my elementary students’ Minnesotan identity. Furthermore, my response to them incited a response from them, which further clarified my understanding of dialogic resistance that I was performing with my students. I understood that my identity is entangled with the identity of my students.

My analytical questions are, “How do my border crossings shape my understanding of my hybrid identity?” and “How do I understand my hybridity in relation to reductionist labels perpetuated during significant moments?” These two research questions helped me understand that I will never achieve cultural wholeness (Bhabha, 1994; Hao, 2014). In my autoethnography I was reminded of the ways I move back and forth between places and cultural spaces. And in those moments, I realized that the labels imposed on me were never adequate to explain my

identity. I also understood that I do not have complete cultural membership anywhere. My identity is a cultural pastiche that is influenced by border crossings, constant back and forth movements, legal access and economic privilege. My identity is influenced by how I categorize myself and how others categorize me. All these factors have helped me understand that discourse that champions cultural purity, cultural essence and singular origin is very misleading and perpetuates dangerous stereotypes.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In this research report, I discussed the concept of hybridity; I formulated three research questions that guiding my research about my diaspora hybridity; I chose autoethnography as my method to help me answer my research questions; I presented my analysis; and shared my methodological reflections. Within my analysis, I interrogated the ways I came to understand my performance of hybrid identities in a US American context. I analyzed how border crossing affected my understanding of hybridity. I also discussed the nuances of my hybrid identity in relation to restrictive discourses and categories. I connected my newly acquired understandings of hybridity to theoretical discourses about how hybridity can be a mode of resistance in micro moments.

Hybridity is messy and complicated. It is by no means an easy concept to grasp. Hybridity functions in the in-between spaces of inside/outside, familiar/different, self/other (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996b). The in-between spaces are where culture, identity, boundaries and politics are negotiated. Hybridity can be conceptualized as an identity, as a sense-making process and as a mode of resistance (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001).

Limitations and Future Research

Due to the scope of the research report, I could not interrogate the intersections of my caste identity, ethnic identity, and Indian identity. For future research, I would like to engage in a research project where I can specifically address the intersections of caste, ethnicity, and race. I would like to study the entanglement of my caste-ethnic identities in relation to the multiple historicities of Tamilians in India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Furthermore, my autoethnography is limited to me. I have centered my voice in this research. I regard my research as one of the many

perspectives on hybridity. For future research on post-colonial diaspora hybridity, I would like to engage with different methods that may be more inclusive of other perspectives and voices. I would do collaborative autoethnography, layered accounts, or interactive interviews (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010) to diversify the voices represented in my research. Furthermore, my autoethnography is a narrative of the privileged, in some ways. Not everyone who is a diaspora subject has the legal access to multiple places and can cross borders like I do. Therefore, I would interrogate how hybridity manifests when there is a lack of legal validation. I would also interrogate how the notion of home is experienced by different diaspora subjects when legal validation is limited.

My research report is only one of the many projects I hope to do as part of my research agenda on post-colonial modes of resistance. Through my research, I presented how I understand some of the functions of hybridity in my daily life. Until I analyzed the moments I described in my autoethnography, I did not consciously realize how important and inevitable hybridity was for my survival. A lot of hybridity scholars I cited in this research have worked to study how hybridity is operationalized in everyday moments. I hope my research has extended some of the work they were doing to engage the micro moments of people's lives.

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