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SHAPING HYBRID IDENTITIES:  
A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF BRITISH BHANGRA LYRICS

The hired musicians began to play (shehnai and vina were present;  
sarangi and sarod had their turns;  
tabla and sitar performed their virtuosistic cross-examinations).  
Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, 1981, Bk. II

“My favourite Indian instrument is the bass guitar”  
Interview with Dr. Das, of *Asian Dub Foundation*

*1. Study design and methodology*

This paper argues that popular music as a form of “mediation between discourse and society” (Wodak: 2006, 179) can provide a few insights into the sensitive issue of identity, now challenging multicultural societies in the age of globalisation with unsolved tensions and unexpected icons of difference. Taking British bhangra – an urban music genre characteristic of British Asian communities – as a significant case study in identity formation, it aims to describe how identities are discursively constructed in bhangra songs, stressing at the same time the interactional, social, political and cultural functions of media texts within youth subcultures.

Firstly, the analysis moves from the awareness of the significance of language in social transformation (Fairclough: 2003, 2004) and of new forms of mediation – musical, verbal, visual and technological – in artistic production (Zuberi: 2004). It situates music production and consumption in the characteristic post-modern “re-scaling of relations between the global and the local” (Fairclough: 2004) that also informs music studies:

Music studies increasingly mediate the local and the global through conceptions of music scenes and culture as mobile networks and circuits rather than as geographically bounded structures and processes. These include diasporic and linguistically based networks (Zuberi: 2004, 441).

From this perspective British bhangra, characterised by the hybridisation of musical and linguistic codes, is interpreted as a form of “mediated action” in which “people use texts as cultural tools to create collective and individual identities” (Fornäs: 2000, 58).

Secondly, the paper draws upon a social constructionist approach to identity as currently espoused by discourse analysis (Wodak *et al.*: 1999, Duszak: 2002; Ainsworth and Hardy: 2004), regarding identities as diachronically mutant formations which people constantly negotiate through their interaction with others. This approach emphasizes the role played by language in the ways in which individuals and groups choose to express, display and accomplish their identities. It also stresses the dialogic nature of identity formation as a constant struggle to overcome derogative stereotypes and discriminatory practices on the part of socially marginalised groups (Reisigl and Wodak: 2001).

Thirdly, the analysis postulates identity as performance (Butler: 1990), resting on the assumption that, in the postmodern condition, identities are experienced as masks to wear temporarily and then to discard. It hypothesizes that this position is retraceable in bhangra songs and aims to identify the linguistic tools employed in the construction of identity and in the simultaneous deconstruction of essentialist notions of authenticity.

Rather than reflecting the authentic voice(s) of a community in a particular place, music mediates subjective and collective identities (Zuberi: 2004, 440).

Among the several case studies offered by the vibrant British musical scene, the analysis has selected two bhangra bands, Cornershop and Asian Dub Foundation, which in fact exemplify quite distinct ways of making music and encoding multicultural identity. While Cornershop display “a prodigious love and knowledge of pop history, with traces of everything from heavy rock to reggae to Indian soundtracks in their music” (*The Guardian*, 16.7.2004), Asian Dub Foundation are “a cosmopolitan rap-based” “post-bhangra” band (Dudrah: 2002, 365), characterised by a remarkable dose of political outspokenness.

Despite the inseparable nature of words and music in songs as “a multisemiotic form of discourse” (Hodge: 1985, 121) and the inevitable loss of the “connotative, associative-affective character” (Tagg: 1987, 4) of music in this analysis, the choice to focus exclusively on the lyrics has appeared fully compatible with the aim of this research, i.e. an investigation of the ways in which social groups use

the resources of language to construct identity and negotiate their roles within and outside their communities. To this purpose, the distinctive linguistic features and discursive strategies marking the ways in which identity is encoded in the songs of the two bands have been identified and interpreted. The tools offered by text linguistics (Titscher *et al.*, 2000) have been exploited for insights into semantic coherence, rhetorical devices and pragmatic effects, as well as for a survey of recurrent themes, images and topoi.

## *2. Tradition and Change*

Bhangra was originally the traditional folk music of the Punjab – a historical region of the northwest Indian subcontinent partitioned between India and Pakistan in 1947 – and was usually performed at harvest time. Nowadays, because of Punjabi influence worldwide, bhangra has evolved from a dance and music only performed in the Punjab region to a popular style of music and dance that people perform throughout South Asia and around the world on occasions such as weddings, receptions and parties.

British bhangra, which is quite different from traditional bhangra and the music of the South-Asian diaspora worldwide (i.e. people from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives), is the fusion of traditional folk music original of the Punjab and of Western pop sounds. It is an original reinvention mixing old and new sonorities as well as Eastern and Western instruments (dholki, sitar, tabla, tamboura alongside guitar, bass, keyboards) with the support of new musical technologies and techniques, such as sampling, i.e. “the transfer of sounds from one recording to another” which allows “contemporary musicians unprecedented access to the global memory banks of recorded sound” (Hesmondhalgh: 2000, 280). As such, British bhangra cannot be compared to its versions as global dance music. British bhangra is the hybridized invention of Britain’s South Asians (Ballard: 1994), mixed communities constantly straddling both languages, cultures, and musical traditions in daily life. It reflects the upbringing of young, second-generation British Asians, born and bred in the U.K., who have infused the culture of the urban West – especially R&B, rock, rap and hip-hop – with elements of their parents’ roots. It should therefore be inscribed within the overall renegotiation of identity by the new Asian generations on their own terms, linguistic, cultural and musical (Ballard: 1994). It should also be noted, at this point, that bhangra cannot be described as a uniform phenomenon since young British Asians have different

ways of articulating their “Asianness” in words and music (Dudrah: 2002, 365). Nor is the South-Asian diaspora in the United Kingdom a uniform community, comprising Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans, the majority of whom live in the urban centres of London, Birmingham, Leicester and Bradford (Mishra: 2001).

First sponsored by independent labels such as Nation Records – a successful British record company “established, owned and managed by a black woman of Caribbean descent (Kath Canoville) and a Pakistani man (Aki Nawaz)” (Hesmondhalgh: 2000, p. 281) – the popularity of bhangra has increasingly risen (“The big bhangra”, *The Guardian*, 15.8.2003). Doubtless, this phenomenon is a consequence of the ever growing marketization of “ethnic” artefacts and, partly, of the country’s recognition of multiculturalism which has problematized the notion of national identity, generating more flexible and inclusive definitions of citizenship in order “to avoid the reproduction of essentializing practices of exclusion” (Heller: 2002, 3). As is shown by the following citation taken from official parliamentary reports, the acceptance of multiculturalism is now such a mainstream stance as to be embedded in institutional discourse itself and to elicit the (still patronizing) admission that the multiple British ethnicities (“minorities”) have not only enriched the developments of creativity, but also widened the scope of national identity within a “lively”, “resourceful”, generous and open-minded country.

Our ethnic minorities [...] have added a new range of idioms and images to the English language; provided new sources of humour; offered new insights into the British way of life and thought; and deepened our critical self-consciousness. All this has made Britain an immensely lively and resourceful country – a great tribute both to its own generosity and openness and to the talents and self-confidence of the ethnic minorities (Lord Parekh, in *Hansard*, House of Lords, 20.3.2002, Column 1394).

Indeed, British bhangra adds “a new range of idioms and images to the English language”; it thus represents an interesting case study in the discursive formulations of identity politics, as new definitions of the self emerge from the musical and verbal repertoires of British Asian communities.

The articulation of identity through a fusion-based music, therefore, opens up possibilities wherein people are able to identify in a number of ways and with a number of identifications from Asian, black and British that aren’t exclusively one of those identities, but a collective articulation of all three (Dudrah: 2002, 370).

A genre which fuses musical traditions of the East and the West as

well as Punjabi and English, bhangra ostends hybridity as its distinctive trait and performs the dynamic negotiation of multicultural scripts through the invention of a new style.

### *3. The bands: Cornershop and Asian Dub Foundation*

The two bands discussed here were formed in the early nineties, Cornershop in 1992 and Asian Dub Foundation in 1993. Cornershop, whose name plays with the stereotype of the Indian/Pakistani street-corner grocery store, emerged from the inspiration of the Anglo-Indian singer, guitarist and dholki player Tjinder Singh – brought up in Birmingham – and of guitarist, keyboardist and tamboura player Ben Ayres, who were roommates at the Preston Polytechnic. Instead of a concert, their first public move was the burning of Morrissey posters due to this singer's alleged anti-Asian prejudice.

Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) sprang from a music community project at Farringdon High School in the East End of London, where bassist Aniruddha Das (alias Dr. Das) and John Pandit (alias Pandit G.), a noted DJ and youth worker, taught summer workshops designed to teach Asian children the essentials of music technology and formed a sound system with one of their most brilliant students, the Bengali rapper Deeder Zaman (alias Master D.). As for their name, "dub" is a term coming from Jamaican music which describes a version of a song stripped of most of its lyrics and emphasizing the drums and bass. Though the band's lineup has changed over the years, ADF's strong commitment to music education has been channelled into ADFED, "now an independent project giving training to under-represented youth communities, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the East London region" (<http://www.adfed.com.uk>).

Both bands can be described as two "deshi" experiments mixing Eastern and Western music, languages and cultures. The adjective "deshi", a borrowed word that comes from Sanskrit and means "national"/"of the motherland", now works as an "ingroup" keyword for the heterogeneous South-Asian diaspora. The ethnic origins of the British-born musicians of both bands are in fact so diversified as to dislodge homogeneous identity labels, patronizing expectations and derogatory assumptions. As ADF sing, also implying that they do not make use of ecstasy,

We ain't ethnic, exotic or eclectic/ The only "e" we use is electric/ An Asian background that's what's reflected/ But this militant vibe ain't what you ex-

pected/ With your liberal minds you patronize our culture/ Scanning the surface like vultures/ With your tourist mentality/ We're still the natives/ You multicultural but we're anti-racist/ We ain't ethnic, exotic or eclectic/The only "e" we use is electric (*Strong Culture*).

#### 4. *Textual Analysis*

The textual analysis aims to describe the distinctive linguistic features and discursive strategies which mark the encoding of British Asian identity in the lyrics, to elicit their semantic import and, finally, to compare the corresponding representations of identity as they emerge from the two textual selections. As the following examples will show, these strategies are not the same for the two bands, because their discursive construction of identity-as-hybrid is modelled after different self-representations and political visions.

The selection has been collected in two ways, either from CD booklets displaying full text lyrics, or on a number of Internet sites that do not provide, however, any authoritative textual versions. Whenever Punjabi words were embedded in songs, they had already been transcribed to Latin characters by the songwriters themselves.

### **Asian Dub Foundation**

#### *a. Diastratic and diatopic variation*

ADF lyrics are diastratically marked texts that echo the substandard variety of language associated with working-class youth subcultures and their music. Thus, we find "ain't" for "aren't", "gonna" for "going to", "gotta" for "have got to", "cos" for "because", "wanna" for "want to", as well as expletives ("bullshit", "damn", "fucking"), colloquialisms ("So take my word, man", "yeah") and the ironic appropriation of racial slurs ("wog", "paki").

The deliberate choice of a substandard register of English can be interpreted as a form of social self-definition, iconoclastic in its violation of norms and manners and stressing working-class appurtenance. Not marked as recognizably "Asian", it looks rather like the demotic interethnic jargon which commonly circulates in popular music.

As for *diatopic variation*, this is apparent not so much in the sporadic adoption of an Asian ethnolect as, curiously enough, in the use of Black English – a language variety, colloquially known as Ebonics

(Rickford: 1999; Rickford and Rickford: 2000) – which is spoken by people of African and Caribbean descent. Thanks to the global phenomenon of musical contamination, ADF songs borrow some simplified traits of Black English from Caribbean and African-American popular music genres – especially rap – and from British experiments with these same genres.

We therefore find “dis”, “de”, “dem” for “this”, “the”, “they/them”, with the substitution of the voiced alveolar plosive [d] for the voiced fricative dental [ð].

Disya judgement (*Jericho*)

For every opportunity we squeeze de last drop (*Collective Mode*)

Dis is a 21st century Exodus (*Fortress Europe*)

Dem come for de rasta and you say nothing/Dem come for the muslims  
you say nothing/Dem come for the anti-globalists you say nothing (*The Round-Up*)

There is also a number of agrammatical sentences exhibiting several instances of morphosyntactic violation that are typical of Black English, such as the double negative, the use of “me” instead of “I” as a subject pronoun and the omission of the auxiliary “do” in the present tense.

We are not babies no more (*Strong Culture*)

It ain't no mystery (*Debris*)

Me say no Iraqi ever called me Paki (*Oil*)

We no ramp/We no play/ We get mad! (*Change*)

Where they get it from? Them can't understand/Just want to build up tension (*Change*)

Given the “Asianness” of the band, however, deviation from standard English resembles a form of mimicry rather than an “authentic” enactment of ethnic identity. Switching to Black English and black musical genres works as a way of foregrounding the hybrid quality of ADF’s language and music.

Listen to the sound of the drum and the bass/Different communities meet  
up in the same place/We are mixing the flavours to suit every taste (*Dub Mentality*)

By mimicking several musical traditions and accents, this attitude contests the essentialist belief that there is only one identity. Bhangra does not recreate any pre-existing Asian/Punjabi essence or exotic mood. The East is now the East End of London, while Asian rap is just one of the several faces of “deshi” music.

I'm not a black man/This time it's an Asian / [...] Listen to this rap/ It's Asian  
guys coming correct (*Strong Culture*)

### *b. Self-definitions*

Commenting on the several lines of linguistic research into the role of language in the construction of social identities, Anna Duszak (2002, 7), quoting T. van Dijk (1997, 7), argues that “self-definitions in terms of social identities are ‘acquired and shared by group members in order to *protect* the interests of the group as a whole’”. In ADF lyrics, self-definitions are formulated as assertive first-person utterances:

Ami bidrohi/ I the rebel warrior/ I have risen alone with my head held high  
(*Rebel Warrior*)  
Militant scientists/ Yes, that's what we are (*Box*)  
I am just a Naxalite Warrior/ Fighting for survival and equality (*Naxalite*)  
I am a modern apprentice/ I believe in the life-long learning/ 'Ain't gonna  
take away this natural yearning/ To know the truth (*Modern Apprentice*).  
We're second generation/ But we're not second class (*TH9*)

Self-definitions introduce narratives in which rage is channelled into acts of empowerment. The frequent repetition of the first-person plural “we” frames the struggle as a collective effort, while the lexicon is a militant one (“attack”, “battle”, “challenge”, “defeat”, “retreat”, “struggle”, “war”, “warcry”, “warrior”, “incendiary”, “tough”, “hit”...).

Check my anger, it's real (*Rebel Warrior*)  
ADF, we're about to strike [...] / Now the wrath of the Asian will hit you like  
a blast (*TH9*)  
We don't stand for any bullshit/ We don't give a damn (*Strong Culture*)  
The music, we use it/ We're making a stand (*Jericho*)  
Like springing tigers/ We encircle the cities (*Naxalite*)  
We'll keep on fighting/ We've been a nation abused (*Assassin*)

Though a rhetoric of warfare innervates the lyrics, the war would seem to be mostly waged at the symbolic level of music exchange:

This militant vibe ain't what you expected (*Jericho*)  
We are gonna spread power with words (*Debris*)  
ADF back with a lyrical death threat (...) / We'll mash up your stereo (*Box*)  
Black noise will be a sound you can't avoid/ Listen to the sound of the  
drum and the bass (*Dub Mentality*)  
We're taking note of every brand new sound (*Collective Mode*)



In terms of identity construction, self-definitions can be interpreted as the attempt to debunk “stereotypical images of Asians, submissive, hard-working, passive and conformist” (Sharma *et al.*: 1996, 63) and to resist “dominant representations of Asians – caught between two cultures, desultory, directionless, confused” (*Ibid.*, 65).

### *c. Imperatives*

The self-representation of Asians as “tough” is enhanced in ADF lyrics by the frequent use of imperatives. Their pragmatic value – warning, request, suggestion, invitation – changes according to the implied interlocutor. Requests and warnings are addressed to “those in command” (*Witness*):

Hear my warcry (*Rebel Warrior*)  
 Check my anger, it's real (*Rebel Warrior*)  
 Don't look at me as an innocent bystander (*Strong Culture*)  
 Asian distortion/ Better tread it with caution/ Better treat it with caution  
 (*Box*)  
 See me, hear me (*Box*)  
 Free Satpal Ram (*Free Satpal Ram*)

Suggestions and invitations intend to appeal to the “community”, a keyword in ADF's ideology as well as the title of one of their best known CDs (*Community Music*, 2000), a community made of “brothers” and “sisters” of any age and ethnicity, composed of previously marginalised subjects.

If you're north or if you're south/ You know a change gonna come/ [...] If you're old or if you're young/ You know a change gonna come” (*Change*)

Community identity is discursively constructed in order to lend visibility, meaning and agency to the experiences of British Asians.

Take a chance/ Turn the tables/[...] Don't just consume/ Make your own tune (*Jericho*)  
 Youth Connection/ Stop this infection (*TH9*)  
 Keep bangin' on the wall / Keep bangin' on the wall/ OF FORTRESS EUROPE (*Fortress Europe*)  
 Rise to the challenge (*Rise to the Challenge*)  
 Step back from the blowback (*Blowback*)  
 Step forward Youth at the moment of truth/ don't be distracted don't be the fool/ step forward youth at the moment of truth/ go beyond the sense get a clear view (*Hope*)

At discourse level, imperatives encode identity as assertive and agentive, stressing action and power. They demand full legitimization and the vindication of a political space within “Fortress Europe”:

We got the right, know the situation/ We’re the children of globalisation/  
No borders only true connection/ Like the fuse of the insurrection/ This  
generation has no nation (*Fortress Europe*).

## Cornershop

### *a. Diastratic variation*

Like ADF, Cornershop lyrics reproduce the substandard variety of language conventionally associated with working-class youth subcultures. Only one song – *Breaking Every Rule Language English* – stands out for its paradoxical agrammaticality:

Got marriage problem/ & I’ve not even marriage/ I’m breaking every rule/  
In the English language/ Eating beef sandwih/ With no beef in it/ Ineed  
parental guidance/ ‘cos I think I’m daddy

These nonsensical lines, which convey the humorous impression of utter existential confusion, could perhaps be interpreted as one of the several experiments (verbal as well as musical) carried out by a band that seems to love eclecticism and often obscure lyrics.

### *b. Code-switching (English/Punjabi)*

Apart from some sporadic citations from Bengali, as in the song *Ami Bidrohi* – “Bidrohi”, which means “The Rebel”, is a poem of Bangladeshi literature – ADF sing in English. So do Cornershop, though they sometimes switch back to Punjabi. For example, *We’re in your corner*, *Counteraction* and *Tera Mera Pyar* (which means “You, my love”) are all songs in Punjabi and, quite memorably, Tjinder Singh translated Lennon/ McCartney’s *Norwegian Wood* into Punjabi (*Norwegian Lakri*).

As for the rest of their songs, Punjabi words and phrases are occasionally disseminated in the English lyrics. However, their occurrence seems so sporadic and so self-conscious as to downplay the potential cultural significance attributable to an Asian ethnolect. The communicative function of ethnolects as “varieties of a language which mark speakers as members of ethnic groups which originally used another

language” (Clyne *et al.*: 2002, 133) is usually to work as an in-group identity marker that resists complete assimilation by preserving some traces of the language of provenance of a given ethnic minority. As is demonstrated by the following quotation which is an excerpt of an interview with two British bhangra musicians, an ethnolect may be a strategy consciously adopted by the children of a diaspora, though not all siblings can speak their parents’ language fluently.

“It’s very important for us to try and use our music to pass on our Asian culture,” says Juggy D. “When I was a kid, we only spoke Punjabi at home and I am easily able to hold a conversation in it and I speak it a lot with my friends. But I know a lot of young Asians are not so fluent in their language and not so aware of their culture. We have made a real effort to try and include simple Punjabi phrases in our songs so that young Asians will be able to understand them and it might encourage them to learn the language.”

And Rich concludes: “For us, trying to maintain the Punjabi language is very important even if we don’t speak it very well ourselves. We want to show that we are not ashamed of our culture.” (*The Guardian*, 15.8.2003).

“The use of an ethnolect is thus a deliberate choice by second/third generation speakers as a means of establishing a distinctive linguistic identity” (Clyne *et al.*: 2002, 134). However, while ADF’s communicative style opts for a kind of assertive self-presentation and for a recognizable ideological framing of discourse which makes lyrics cohere semantically and symbolically, Cornershop songs are constantly detached from a stable identity project. The use of Punjabi as a marker of Asianness seems to be just one of the several masks/identities the band loves to wear. Identity, it appears, is multiple and mobile and is performed through a variety of voices that are histrionically reproduced with a ventriloquist’s ability.

### *c. Defamiliarization*

The proliferation of different narrative perspectives, which prevent any possible long-term identification with the singing voice beyond the boundaries of each single song, increases the effect of fragmentation and constant shift from one identity to another. The idiosyncratic and self-reflexive quality of the language is further complicated by the number of often esoteric pop culture references, a profusion of signs that the Black British novelist Zadie Smith would describe in her novel *White Teeth* as on “direct collision course” for their overlapping of cultural universes and their uncontrolled intertextuality. For example, the lyrics of *When the Light Appears Boy* are

a recitation of a poem by beat poet Allen Ginsberg, against the background sounds of an Indian bazaar and a wedding band.

Besides ventriloquism, mimicry and allusion, defamiliarizing effects are also obtained through ellipsis, with a series of distancing techniques which build an impersonal setting where things happen apparently without any explicit human intervention.

There comes no telling/ How it will be (*Sleep on the Left Side*)  
 There's dancing/ behind the movie scenes (*Brimful of Asha*)  
 It's a brimful of Asha on the 45 (*Brimful of Asha*)  
 So it's this way to the tripping easy (*Trip Easy*)  
 Well, it seems like the funky days, they're back again (*Funky Days are Back Again*)  
 It's good to be on the road back home again (*Good to be on the Road Back Home*)

Since there isn't any stable reference point, whether linguistic, cultural or musical, extremes and paradoxes are experienced as normal, while life "lessons", are "learned from Rocky I to Rocky III", as the title of a song recites, that is, through commodified specimens of mass culture.

This Western Oriental's going full circle (*Wog*)  
 Get winterwear in the summer/ Your summer in the winter. Alright! (*Hong-Kong Book of Kung-Fu*)  
 Born disco, died heavy metal (*Born Disco, Died Heavy Metal*)

In Cornershop lyrics, identity is represented in constant transformation. The self is incessantly shaped by history (significantly the title of one of their records is *When I Was Born for the Seventh Time*), but this history is more prosaic than heroic ("the overgrown super-shit", *Lessons Learned from Rocky I to Rocky III*) and does not seem to engage the individual, who is just "going full circle" (*Wog*), in any responsible and long-lasting confrontation with the present.

## 5. Conclusions

The explicit political content of ADF lyrics seems to have preserved "the cutting edge and social realism" (*The Guardian*, 15.8.2003) of original bhangra and recontextualized them in contemporary Britain. The lyrics foreground identity as a collective and assertive project where ethnicities – and especially the younger gener-

ations – hope to form and inhabit an integrated community. “Community” is in fact a central topos in the band’s project of identity politics.

In spite of their initial militant stance, Cornershop mostly appear to eschew explicit political comments, though they sometimes surface in the lyrics (“again and again the racist grind”, *England’s Dreaming*; “From the East to the West/ To the shit that I’m in”, *Looking for a Way In*). Their textuality is more ironic, eclectic and experimental and thematizes identity as irretrievably nomadic, though not in a depressive way. Identities are discursively constructed as a sort of empty maps inscribed with a kaleidoscopic mix of globalized cultural citations. Politics, it seems, is just one of them, to the point of becoming utterly trivialized as in the slightly incongruous *Wogs Will Walk* (“It’s a World Wide Web wogs will walk”), a song “in the vein of Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* – a sardonic, naughty critique of selling out one’s ‘Mowgli’ alterity for dollars” (Singh: 2002, online text). Irreverent linguistic, cultural and musical nomadism is the band’s prevailing stance. Consonant with the well-known topos of the migrant self, typical of the age of globalisation, nomadism deconstructs the notion of national identity as irrelevant. It manifests itself in the absence of a strong identitarian discourse and in the lack of “perceptions, beliefs, opinions and memories as essential parts” of the discursive processes of “identity construction or narratives of the past” (Wodak: 2006, 180).

For both bands, the process of hybridisation – through the blending of local (Asian/British) traditions and global trends and through the polyphonic rendering of what being Asian in the U.K. may signify – has been successfully legitimized by the market of the culture industry. Peripheral representations, put forward by second-generation British youth and displacing conventional language (musical as well as verbal) from “inside out”, have been accepted into mainstream cultural production and allowed to participate in the interplay between dominant and marginal discourses. The legitimization of difference, however, does not erase ambiguities and forms of exploitation of the Other, for example the appropriation of “ethnic” music samples, directly recorded on the field without any compensation and then rearranged into new tracks (Hesmondhalgh: 2002, 281).

Nevertheless, it would seem that, instead of generating nostalgia and longing, the “deshi” condition has liberated an incredible amount of energy and creativity. While resisting the compartmentalization of languages and styles preposterously imposed by stereotypical identity markers, bhangra spells out new exciting ways of being British.

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