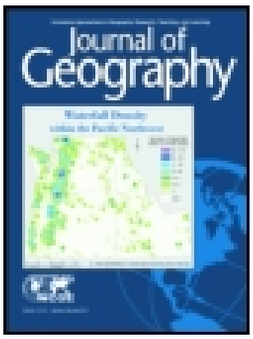

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Teaching Cultural Geography with *Bend It Like Beckham*

Katie Algeo

Abstract

The British film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) is pedagogically useful in the cultural geography classroom for engaging students with core concepts, such as ethnicity, migration, acculturation, and assimilation, and with more advanced modes of analysis, such as the social construction of identity. Although the film depicts a particular ethnic community, British Sikhs in London, its representation of the betweenness of cultures is typical of the experience of many immigrants. This article provides background on Sikh religious belief, culture, and migration history to help viewers understand the rich cultural milieu depicted in the film. It models and provides suggestions for engaging students in critical analysis of the film in ways that highlight core cultural geography concepts.

Key Words: *cultural geography, pedagogy, identity, film, Sikhism*

Katie Algeo is an associate professor of geography at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA. She teaches a variety of classes in cultural geography, tourism, and geographic information systems. Her research interests include media representations and constructions of identity, the historical geography of tourism to Mammoth Cave, and agricultural change in the U.S. South.

Overview And Purpose

Film's place in the geography classroom has been secured by the immediacy and sensory vibrancy it brings to the portrayal of places and cultures. Film has the ability to virtually transport a classroom of students to a distant place for the space of several hours. While documentary films have long been used to compress space in this fashion, feature films also have the capacity to engage students through cinematic narrative. The rise of postmodern modes of popular media analysis also makes feature films attractive for use in the classroom (Cresswell and Dixon 2002, 1–10; Kennedy and Lukinbeal 1997). Although they usually portray fictional characters and are often shot in places other than those depicted, feature films nonetheless have the ability to vividly convey sense of place or the essence of a culture (Sutton 2004; Aitken 1994). As cultural artifacts themselves, however, films embody cultural values and practices. Movies are necessarily partial rather than complete portrayals of place and culture and often reflect a director's highly personal vision. Because movies, through their portrayal of peoples and places, are one of the ways that students come to know the world, classroom analysis of popular film encourages students to apply critical thinking to everyday experiences, to uncover ideologies embedded in their taken-for-granted world, and to be sensitive to the construction of meaning in popular culture (Staddon *et al.* 2002, 278; Kennedy and Lukinbeal 1997, 46; Gold and Revill 1996; Aitken 1994; Godfrey 1993; Jenkins and Youngs 1983).

This article will demonstrate how the British film *Bend It Like Beckham* can be used in cultural geography classes to illustrate core concepts and engage students in critical analysis. Released in 2002, the film is a sympathetic and lighthearted portrayal of a Sikh family living in London. The plot centers on the family's younger daughter, Jess Bhamra, who aspires to be a professional soccer player despite her family's insistence that she follow a more traditional path for young women of her background—a university education followed by a white-collar job. Through Jess's struggles to reconcile traditional Sikh values with life in modern Britain and a side plot dealing with the marriage of her sister, the audience is treated to a fascinating and colorful slice of British Sikh life. To help instructors guide students' understanding, this article provides background on Sikh religious beliefs and migration history. It identifies and explains cultural practices, poses a framework for interpreting the film centered on cultural geography concepts, and suggests pedagogical strategies for use of the film in the classroom. The materials presented here are adaptable to several different levels. In introductory courses, *Bend It Like Beckham* may be used to teach core concepts such as ethnicity, migration, acculturation, and assimilation, as well as to introduce students to a distinctive culture of which few are likely to have prior knowledge. In more advanced classes, the film may be used to explore the complex processes of social interaction that are behind both the formation of cultural identity and its interpretation by members of other groups. This article focuses on two such concepts, the social construction of identity and "othering" (Crang 1998, 57–79).

Preparing to View

Most American students lack the specific cultural knowledge needed to identify and interpret practices depicted in *Bend It Like Beckham*. The film presents a fast-paced mosaic of Anglo-Sikh culture with a minimum of exposition. It is, in many ways, an insider's film, depicting a world familiar to writer and director Gurinder Chadha, whose family followed the same migration path from northern India to Kenya to London as the fictional Bhamra family. Yet the film has an internal logic that renders it comprehensible even to viewers unfamiliar with Sikh culture. Didactic use of the film for critical analysis, however, requires

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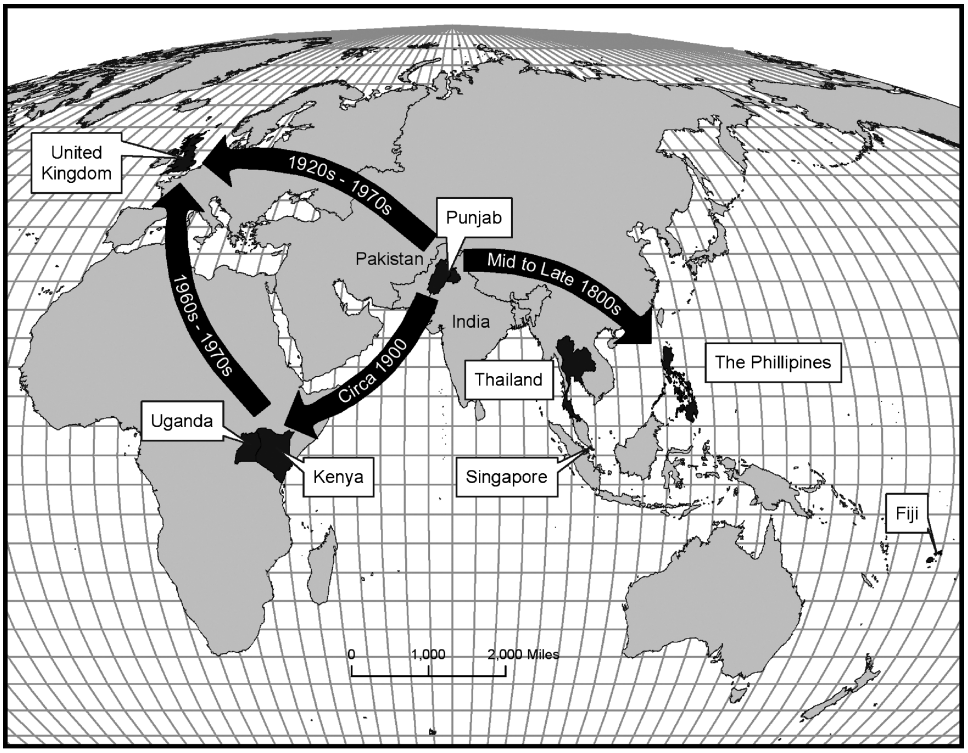

Culture Hearth: The Punjab (early 1500s). Sikhism forms around the teachings of Guru Nanak.

Migration Linked to British Colonialism and Empire:

Mid to Late 1800s: Sikhs in the British Indian Army are stationed in British outposts throughout Southeast Asia and the western Pacific.

1897-1901: Sikhs and other Indians recruited as indentured workers by the British East Africa Company to build a railroad in Uganda and Kenya.

1920s: Small scale migration to Britain possible because of freedom of movement within the British Empire.

1945-1970s: Larger scale movement to Britain to fill post-WWII labor demand, followed by family reunification.

1960s-1970s: Sikh exodus to Britain from Uganda and Kenya following independence creates "twice migrants."

Sources: Tatla 2004a, Bhachu 1985, Cole and Sambhi 1978. Cartography by Katie Algeo

Figure 1. Sikh migration: Source and major destination regions.

grounding in at least the basics of Sikh religious belief and culture history. Thus, one purpose of this paper is to explicate those aspects of Sikh culture portrayed in *Bend It Like Beckham* and to provide a historical context for understanding the Sikh presence in Britain. One cautionary note is in order. The film does not represent all Sikhs or all of Sikh culture or even all Sikhs in Britain. Sikhs have a rich and complex culture history that originated in the Punjab, a region of cross-cultural influences, and that was further elaborated through a global diaspora. Distinctive subgroups exist, and scholars debate whether Sikhism is best viewed as religion or ethnicity. The film does, however, relate a tale that will be familiar in its outlines to many who find themselves between cultures, and it is this fashioning of universals out of such fascinating particulars that makes the film useful pedagogically.

Thorough and thoughtful analysis by students following a single viewing of a film may be difficult, but the instructor can maximize students' learning experience by using techniques and materials presented here. Before seeing the film, students should be introduced to basic factual information about the origin and core beliefs of Sikhism, Sikh migration history, and the diaspora experience. The essentials are covered in this article and summarized in a handout (Fig. 1). A viewing guide can relieve anxiety about recall of details such as characters' names, as well as guide note taking, allowing students to concentrate on cultural analysis (Appendix). Although the film is in English except for a few Punjabi phrases, some students may have difficulty comprehending the rapid, British-accented dialog. Setting the VCR or DVD player to show English subtitles while playing the film will allow students to read as well as hear the dialog and will likely improve comprehension. Rather than showing the film in one extended session, the instructor may want to break it into several class periods. Discussion following a viewing session can immediately clarify any confusing points and help students initiate critical analysis. The alternation of viewing and analysis will also mitigate the tendency for students to be overwhelmed by the film's entertainment value.

Beginning to Sikh: Origins

The Sikh faith of *Bend It Like Beckham*'s Bhamra family is at once manifest and taken for granted. In the film, none of the characters identify themselves as Sikh. Indeed, there is no need for them to do so because the religious tradition is part of their everyday experience. The term Sikh is mentioned only once when an older female relative asks Jess whether she wants to marry "a clean-shaven boy like your sister or a proper Sikh with a full beard and a turban?" Film viewers will immediately recognize the characters as Anglo-Indian, but may need some guidance

to understand the visual clues that confirm their Sikh identity. The first of these is the turban that Jess's father wears with his airline uniform. Decidedly western and vaguely militaristic, the uniform, which includes shoulder epaulettes and a tie, is a foil for that most easily identifiable marker of Sikhism, the turban. Wearing a turban is a matter of custom rather than religious mandate (Cole and Sambhi 1978, 110–112). Its use has much to do with the desire to maintain social cohesion through creating a distinctive and visually identifiable community. The turban is often associated with the Sikh practice of not cutting the hair, which *is* a religious mandate. Uncut hair or *kesh* is one of the five Ks (*panj kakke*), practices that are symbolic of maintaining proper spiritual order. The others are wearing the *kanga*, a comb used to arrange uncut hair, the *kirpan*, a ceremonial dagger that reflects a militaristic tradition of self-defense, the *kara*, a steel bracelet whose circular shape suggests both the cycle of rebirth and the unity of God, and *kaach*, short trousers often now used as an undergarment but formerly, like the turban, part of a visually distinctive Sikh dress. The only one of the five Ks directly observable in *Bend It Like Beckham* is the *kara* or bracelet. During the older sister's engagement ceremony, her father makes a traditional gift of a *kara* to his daughter's fiancée, Teetu—a bit of unexplained stage action that is easily lost by viewers following the larger narrative. *Kirpans* or daggers are not in evidence, but many Sikhs have turned to miniature representations since the article of faith's dual function as a weapon has made it problematic to wear a full-sized *kirpan* in schools, airplanes, and other areas of heightened security.

Sikhism originated in the Punjabi region of northern India and Pakistan (Fig. 1). It is conventionally described as a syncretic blend of Hinduism and Islam, a characterization enhanced by the position of its culture hearth between those of the larger religions. Sikhism is monotheistic, like Islam, and adheres to doctrines of karma and reincarnation, like Hinduism. Sikhism's most significant departure from Hindu tradition lies in its rejection of caste as a marker of religious status with two consequences: first, salvation is obtainable by all, not just members of the castes considered ritually pure by Hindu standards, and second, caste-occupation associations are weakened. It asserts the equality of men and women, and the latter generally have opportunities for educational and economic advancement. Sikhism also explicitly rejects several traditional Hindu paths to liberation from the cycle of rebirth, including yoga and asceticism. Extremes of ritual or self-denial will not lead to release; only an inwardly focused meditation on the name and nature of God that seeks the God-presence in the self will do so. The life of a householder is the proper one for a Sikh. One ought to marry, raise a family, and be a conscientious member of the community.

Sikhism became a distinct religious tradition in the early sixteenth century with the formation of a group of disciples[1] around the charismatic spiritual teacher Guru Nanak. The portrait of Guru Nanak Singh, prominently placed in the Bhamra's living room, allows us to conclude that the family is Sikh rather than members of another turban-wearing group. Sikhism does not share the Islamic aversion to human images in art, and portraits of the gurus, sometimes executed in garish colors, are part of popular culture. We first glimpse Nanak's portrait over Mrs. Bhamra's shoulder as she lifts a finger to scold Jess for wearing shorts and roughhousing with boys while playing soccer. For an instant, her stance mirrors that of the guru whose hand is raised in benediction. Does Nanak, with his benevolent gaze, the embodiment of Sikh tradition, reinforce or undercut Mrs. Bhamra's furious appeal to traditional values? The Guru's central role in the household is made apparent by the way family members turn to the portrait at moments of heightened tension. When Jess's exam scores arrive in the mail, she and her parents stand ritually in front of the painting, her mother uttering a prayer before opening the envelope. In a playful revision of this tradition, Jess mirrors her mother's appeals for guidance to the portrait of Nanak, except that Jess pours out her problems and hopes to a poster of soccer superstar David Beckham, who with his shaven head is the antithesis of *kesh* or uncut hair.

Nanak was followed by nine other gurus in a direct succession that ended with the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708. The gurus jointly articulated and elaborated a rich doctrine that is recorded in the hymns of the chief spiritual text, the Adi Granth. The Adi Granth is glimpsed briefly once in *Bend It Like Beckham*. It is visible resting open on a lectern as the wedding party enters the *Gurdwara* or temple. This casual background placement of a central element of Sikhism is typical of the embeddedness of the religion in the film's world. The final visual clues to the Bhamras' faith are two depictions of the Golden Temple of Amritsar in their living room. One is a small gold model sitting on a shelf to the left of the bar area. The other is a painting that hangs over the telephone. The Golden Temple, located in Amritsar, India, is the chief *Gurdwara* and a major pilgrimage site of the Sikh religion.

Sikhing Further—Diffusion

The Bhamra family's position as a visible minority in English society is central to the film's narrative tension. Sizeable Sikh communities have developed in large to mid-sized cities throughout England; the 2001 United Kingdom census recorded about 330,000 Sikhs. Much of the film is shot on location in West London suburbs such as Southall, Heston, and Hounslow, where concentrations of Sikhs reside. Hounslow, for instance, has a population that is almost nine percent Sikh (Office for National Statistics 2001). The Anglo-Sikh population is a result of twin migration paths, one directly from India and the other via East Africa (Fig. 1). Sikh out-migration from the Punjab started in the middle of the nineteenth century and initially was associated with employment in the British army both in India and in other British colonies, including

Hong Kong, Singapore, Fiji, Thailand, and the Philippines. Migration of Sikhs from the Punjab to Britain began as a trickle in the 1920s and 1930s. Such migration was generally undertaken by young men and was intended to be temporary with the goal of accumulating capital to buy land in India or to relieve family financial distress (Ballard and Ballard 1977, 24–26). British colonial subjects were free to migrate within the borders of the empire or even take up residence in Britain itself until 1945 (Hansen 1999, 815). The trickle of immigrants swelled to a steady stream in the years following World War II in response to the post-war labor shortage. During the 1960s, changes in British immigration laws and the realization that their return home would be delayed led many Sikhs to bring their wives and children to Britain. The Sikh community dispersed to the suburbs as individual family households replaced all-male households. While ties to the ethnic homeland were maintained through visits, remittances, and other material aid to kin, return migration faded as an aspiration for most British Sikhs.

The majority of Sikhs in Britain took the migration path previously described. Comments made by Jess's father as he explains why he opposes her playing soccer reveal that the Bhamra family are "twice migrants" (Bhachu 1985): East African Sikhs who migrated to Britain following Kenyan independence. The Sikh presence in East Africa stemmed from their recruitment by the British East Africa Company as indentured workers for the construction of the Ugandan railroad. From 1897 to 1901 about 32,000 Indians were recruited; 3,000 were Sikh (Tatla 2004a, 274; Bhachu 1985, 21–22). By 1960 more than 21,000 Sikhs lived in Kenya (Tatla 2004a, 274). Migration of Kenyan Sikhs to Britain was a consequence of social turmoil following Kenyan independence. In colonial British East Africa, Sikhs were part of the middle tier of a three-tier society. Europeans dominated administration, Indians filled positions in white-collar support, construction, and infrastructure development, and black Africans were relegated to manual labor. After Kenyan independence in 1963 the government policy of Africanization strove to place black Africans in government and service sector jobs with the consequence that many Sikhs lost their positions. This and other social and economic restrictions led to a mass exodus of South Asians from Kenya. Most chose to go to Britain. The exodus continued into the early 1970s, and in 1972 Idi Amin expelled Asians from recently independent Uganda, most of whom also went to Britain.

Bend It Like Beckham hints at status distinctions between the Bhamra family and the family of Pinky's fiancé that may relate to these different migration paths. Mrs. Bhamra suspects that Teetu's parents called off the engagement with Pinky because "we've never been good enough for them." East African Sikhs tend to come from a lower status caste background than direct migrants. Although Sikh theology abjures recognition of caste, caste considerations have not disappeared, and, in particular, marriage partners are typically sought within the caste (Tatla 2004b, 1088; Gall 1998, 692). During a visit by Teetu's parents to reinstate the engagement, Pinky comments sotto voce about her future mother-in-law, "Stupid cow. I don't know who she thinks she is in that sari." Traditional dress for Punjabi women is the *salwar kamiz*, consisting of trousers and a long tunic, with a *dupatta,* or scarf, over the shoulders or head. This is the outfit that Mrs. Bhamra wears most of the time. Everyday use of the sari by Teetu's mother reflects an elevated class consciousness and perhaps a desire to shed any provincial associations of the *salwar kamiz*.

Sikhing Identity

All immigrants face a tension between maintaining traditions from the homeland and assimilating to the customs of the new home, choices that affect cultural identity. Identity is a composite concept whose complexity is augmented by its fluid nature. Individual identity refers to a person's sense of self, as formulated by self-consciousness and possession of a more or less unique set of characteristics. Cultural identity relates to the common characteristics of a group felt, by the group and others, to distinguish that group from another. Clearly, individual identity draws upon cultural identity as a person relates to a greater or lesser extent with specific aspects of their ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, and national communities. Both kinds of identity are negotiated rather than essential. That is, neither individual nor group identity is fixed and unchanging, and the salient characteristics are not inherent either. Rather, people and groups define themselves through their interactions with others at the same time that they are defined by others through those same interactions. This idea is known as social constructionism (Norton 2000, 272). *Bend It Like Beckham* invites analysis of the social construction of identity because it aptly depicts the microscale processes of social interaction that contribute to the formation of identity. Likewise, careful attention to the background metanarrative of colonialism and empire allows illustration of macroscale processes contributing to historic shifts in group cultural identities.

Three characters—Jess, Jules, and Tony—negotiate conflicting identities of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in ways that are particularly revealing of social processes that influence identity. Jess Bhamra seems irreconcilably caught between the traditional values of her Sikh family and modern British youth culture. She dresses like any British teen, speaks in British slang, and has a burning desire to play the national sport, soccer. Her parents wish her to conform to Sikh norms for young women—to dress modestly, to pursue a university degree and a professional career, and to prepare for marriage by learning to cook Punjabi cuisine. Cultural norms are stressed by other family members as well, such as the aunt who asks about marriage plans and the sister who, despite avid adoption of western consumer culture, is rather traditionally focused on dating and marriage. Jess's betweenness of cultures is emblematic of the immigrant experience. She seeks

to negotiate an identity that combines ancestral culture and the culture of the new homeland, occupying what Homi Bhabha (1990, 9) has termed *third space*. That the negotiation is not an easy one is conveyed by her lament, "Anything I want is just not Indian enough for [my parents]." Jess is experiencing a kind of destabilization of identity theorized by geographers Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon (2002, 6) in *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity*. Cultural identities with long-term ties to specific places, such as the Sikh identity and the Punjab, become destabilized with migration as group members are exposed to new cultural influences. Acculturation and assimilation in the new homeland produce anxieties about the hybridization of traditionally fixed identities. Assimilation among Sikhs is most advanced in superficial aspects of culture such as dress, music, and sport, while choice of marriage partner shows a remarkable degree of conformity to traditional expectations, with the result that interethnic marriages are rare (Thompson 1974). A central thread of *Bend It Like Beckham,* Jess's budding romance with her *goreh* (non-Sikh) coach Joe, illustrates the anxiety attendant on this source of hybridity.

Jess's dilemma is compounded by gender issues. She is a woman playing a traditionally male sport, and women's soccer has historically not been well-supported in Britain. Only in 1971 did the national Football Association lift a ban that prohibited women from playing on associated clubs' fields, and not until 1991 did the Women's Football Association establish a national league (Football Association 2004). Both Jess and Jules, her English soccer-playing friend, dream of going to the United States where they might play for a professional team, so the quest to realize their individual identities is tied to further mobility and hybridization. Their fictional team, the Hounslow Harriers, is a model of ethnic diversity, and one of the elements binding the teammates is their common experience as women trying to establish themselves in what is still seen as a man's sport. "Indian girls aren't supposed to play football," Jess tells her teammates. "It's not just an Indian thing," a teammate replies, "How many people come out and support us?" Even the apparent support displayed by a group of young Anglo-Sikhs attending a Harriers match is undercut by their overtly sexualized gaze. Only Tony, who has his own identity issues, protests—"Why can't you just see them as footballers?" This objectification of the female players is all the more dissonant because these young men are the ones with whom Jess plays soccer in the park. Director Chadha's commentary on the DVD version of the film reveals that Tony fell for what is, in colloquial British, a "piss take," or joke, for the young men were self-consciously playing with gender-based stereotyping (Chadha 2003).

Jules Paxton, the Harriers player who recruits Jess and soon becomes her best friend, also grapples with gender expectations for behavior and dress. Her mother pushes her to accentuate her femininity with push-up bras and clothes in "lovely prints" and to focus on boys and dating. A parallel exists between Mrs. Paxton and Mrs. Bhamra as both urge their daughters to conform to traditional, almost stereotyped, standards of female behavior in their respective cultures. In both cases, the appeal to a feminine ideal is couched in terms of how others, particularly potential mates and in-laws, will view the girl. The fathers are more supportive of their daughters' sports aspirations. While Mrs. Paxton actively discourages Jules's soccer interests because, "No boy's going to want to go out with a girl with muscles bigger than him," Mr. Paxton helps Jules practice kicking goals in their backyard. When Mr. Bhamra realizes that Jess has feigned illness to attend a soccer game, he goes to the match and, for the first time, watches her compete. This parallelism between the parents in the two families highlights the role that mothers play in many societies in reproducing culture and is intriguingly suggestive of cross-cultural similarities in a film that, on its surface, is focused on cultural differences.

Jules's case also illustrates how sexual identity is socially constructed, particularly when norms of gender identity are violated. Mrs. Paxton becomes convinced that her daughter is a lesbian upon overhearing and misinterpreting a fragment of an argument between Jules and Jess over their feelings for their coach. After she recovers from being distraught, Mrs. Paxton gamely throws herself into learning soccer rules with the help of assorted condiment bottles. Mrs. Paxton had resisted her daughter's interest in soccer when trying to feminize her, but finds such sportiness consistent with the homosexual identity she now mistakenly construes for Jules. The confusion of identity surrounding Jules is echoed when Teetu's parents observe Jess and Jules laughingly hanging on each others' shoulders and think they have seen Jess kiss a boy. They have unknowingly misinterpreted Jules's gender because of her short hair in the same way that her mother has misinterpreted her sexuality.

Othering: Oppositional Formation of Identity

Tony's character is the sketchiest of the trio, and he is the only one whose conflicting identities are not resolved by the end of the film. Tony *is* gay, a fact that he has hidden from his soccer mates and family. His gayness serves mostly as a foil for the misconstrued sexuality of Jules and to underscore the nobility of his offer of marriage to Jess, which would allow her to pursue her dream of soccer stardom in the United States. Jess's reaction when Tony first reveals his sexual identity hints at the problems he is likely to face upon "coming out." "But you're Indian!" Jess exclaims, signaling a mindset in which "Indian" and "homosexual" are incompatible. Although Jess quickly accepts Tony's revelation, the viewer is left to wonder whether the rest of the community will be as understanding, particularly given the reaction of their older relatives to Mrs. Paxton's use of the word "lesbian," a confused cluelessness. Jess is familiar enough with homosexuality that Tony only has to hint at his

orientation, but in a classic example of "othering," it is an attribute that she reflexively assigns to the vast group that is "not us." "Othering" illustrates that cultural identities are not only subject to outside influence, but are often relational, constructed in opposition to another group by emphasizing differences from that group (Crang 1998, 61). Differences within a group that is "other" are ignored, and distinct groups are conceptually coalesced into a single "other." The 1960s and 1970s, which saw increased immigration from South Asia and the Caribbean, also saw the construction of "English" and "black" as mutually exclusive but comprehensive categories (Gilroy 1991). Asians, Afro-Caribbeans, and black Africans were all "black."

This form of "othering" is evident during a soccer match when an opponent calls Jess a "Paki," a racial slur that, in Britain, has been applied to South Asians of all nationalities. This word so enrages Jess that she charges her opponent, shoving her twice. American students lack the context to understand how deeply offensive the term has become in Britain. Even American president George W. Bush thought the term a mere shorthand when he unwittingly used it during a January 2002 public address, causing a mild international flap (Basu 2002). In Britain, however, a court ruled in 2003 that the term is racially insulting and outlawed its use in football chants (Bowcott 2003). The conflation of South Asian identities under an umbrella term nominally associated with a Muslim state may be particularly painful to Punjabi Sikhs. Sikh history includes centuries of armed struggle against the Muslim Moghul empire invading from the north, as well as remembrances of tragic ethnic violence during the partition of British India, a time when many Sikhs fled the Pakistani portion of the Punjab. While all South Asians may look alike to white Britons, Sikh characters in the film on several occasions take pains to emphasize differences with Muslims. For instance, when Jess points to Nasser Hussein, captain of the English cricket team, as proof that British society is becoming more accepting of minorities, her mother responds: "Hussein is a Muslim name. Their families are different." When asked by a teammate if her family would let her marry a white boy, Jess reveals a hierarchy of intercultural dating that again emphasizes the difference of Muslims: "White? No. Black? Definitely not. Muslim? Eh-eh." This last, most definitive negative is accompanied by the gesture of a finger slicing the throat.

Part of the film's humor stems from the playful reversal of the usual "orientalism," in which former colonial identities are collectively a foil for white British identity (Said 1979). Jess's sister Pinky tries to discourage Jess's romantic interest in her coach by asking, "Do you really want to be the one that everybody looks at because you married the English bloke?" When Jess protests that he is Irish, Pinky retorts, "Yeah, well, they all look the bloody same." Joe's identity, in fact, bends both ways in relation to othering. As a white male he is part of the colonizing class, visibly British. As an Irishman, he is one of the colonized and understands, as he points out, what it feels like for Jess to be called a Paki.

Although the narrative of *Bend It Like Beckham* is superficially about duality—white/black, Sikh/Muslim, male/female, gay/straight—it is at a deeper level about unity, that is, common experiences and struggles. The point is made subtly throughout the film with segues between parallel scenes of Anglo and Anglo-Sikh culture. Pinky and Jess go shopping for the trousseau; cut to Jules and her mother shopping for lingerie in the Contessa shop; cut *back* to Pinky making the seeming throw-away comment

1. How do characters in the movie negotiate multiple identities? In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salmon Rushdie (1992, 15) reflects on his experience as a first generation British immigrant, "Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools." Do the film's characters feel uncomfortable straddling cultures? Or is an "Indobrit" fusion of East and West evident? Are generational differences evident?
2. Which culture groups are depicted in the film? What are the key components of cultural identity that are shown? What evidence do you see of the social construction of cultural identity? How do members of groups interact—is there evidence of "othering"?
3. What do representations of place and space add to the film? Which cultural landscapes are shown? Do they have any symbolic uses? How is the theme of mobility used in the film?
4. How does the movie's soundtrack use music symbolically? A number of Web sites devoted to music, such as allmusic.com, can be used to find the soundtrack song list and listen to samples. What are the origins of Bhangra music and how has it evolved in Britain in recent decades? What does the use of this musical style in a major feature film say about diffusion, cultural hybridity, and globalization?
5. What does "bend it" mean in the game of soccer? Why do you think the title was chosen for the film?
6. Writer and director Gurinder Chadha has stated that *Bend It Like Beckham* is largely autobiographical. Suppose you have the opportunity to interview her. Compose a set of questions to ask her during the interview, e.g., about her life growing up in a London suburb or her focus on cross-cultural settings in film. Justify each question by indicating how a response will enhance your ability to interpret the film.

Figure 2. Student essay topics.

"I really liked that lace Lycra one," before moving to the gist of that scene, an encounter with Tony and his mother. This quick, easily missed reference to the "unmentionable" portion of the trousseau is both subtle and playful. Can a message about the common thread of human experience really be made with something as trivial as underwear? Surely it is fitting that cultural commonality is positioned within the vast mundaneness of human experience as well as in the much rarer, more spectacular moments of triumph, such as that depicted with artful cinematography towards the end of the film. A series of rapid cuts between wedding guests dancing exultantly in a conga line at Pinky's wedding and Jess and Jules triumphantly leading the Hounslow Harriers to victory in the soccer finals establish a unity of spirit. As the roar of the soccer crowd merges into the cheers of the nuptials, there is but one voice—humanity.

Engaging Students

This paper has modeled several types of geographic analysis that can be undertaken using *Bend It Like Beckham* as a text, from using it as a framework for understanding the migration experience to exploring the social construction of identity through microscale analysis of interpersonal interactions. Instructors will want to highlight some of these approaches with examples during postviewing discussion. Students will need time to reflect and grapple with application of the techniques themselves, however, a process that might be encouraged by having them compose a focused four- to five-page essay on a related theme (Fig. 2). Alternatively, students could analyze one of the many other films that deal with issues of identity, migration, and colonialism, such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), which depicts the fate of half-Aboriginal children in Australia during the 1930s, or *Chocolat* (1988), set in Cameroon and French West Africa. Narrative film is an effective means of engaging undergraduates geographically, in part because it tends to hold their interest when print media fails to do so, but also because lessons learned about critical analysis of film in the classroom are perhaps more easily transferred to students' media-rich lives. *Bend It Like Beckham*'s subtext of universality renders it particularly useful in the classroom because students can see that it is not just a film about soccer or British Sikhs, but that it addresses issues of migration, assimilation, identity, and ethnic relations that are of concern worldwide.

Note

1. *Sisya*, Sanskrit for "disciple," is the origin of the term *Sikh*.

APPENDIX: VIEWING AND NOTE TAKING GUIDE

Bend It Like Beckham
Viewing Guide

Cast of Characters:

Jessminder (Jess) Bhamra:	protagonist
Pinky Bhamra:	Jess's older sister
Mr. and Mrs. Bhamra:	Jess's parents
Jules Paxton:	Jess's friend
Paula & Alan Paxton:	Jules' parents
Tony:	Jess's soccer-playing male friend
Teetu:	Pinky's fiancée
Joe:	coach of the Hounslow Harriers soccer team
Mel:	team captain of the Hounslow Harriers

Elements of Sikh material culture mentioned or depicted:

Food:

Chapatti:	flat bread
Daal:	lentils
Aloo gobi:	potatoes and cauliflower
Achar:	pickled relish
Samosas:	pastries stuffed with a savory filling

Bend It Like Beckham
Viewing Guide (continued)

Clothing and Adornment:

The Five K's : practices followed by strictly observant Sikhs. They include:

- Kesh: uncut hair
- Kanga: a comb used to hold long hair in place
- Kara: a steel bracelet whose circular shape symbolizes the cycle of rebirth and the unity of God
- Kirpan: a ceremonial dagger carried at all times
- Kaach: short trousers usually worn now as an undergarment

Turban: not required by the religion, but worn by more traditional Sikhs

Sari: a formal style of woman's dress in India that has national rather than regional connotations

Salwar kamiz: the trousers and long tunic that are the traditional dress of Punjabi women

Dupatta: a long scarf traditionally worn over the shoulders or head by women wearing the salwar kamiz

Religion:

Adi Granth: the main spiritual text of Sikhism, consisting of collected hymns, poems, and songs of the ten Sikh gurus

Gurdwara: a Sikh temple (e.g. where weddings are held) that often doubles as a community center

Golden Temple of Amritsar, India: the most important Sikh temple

Bend It Like Beckham
Note Taking Guide

Betweeness of Place
Jess occupies a place between two cultures – the Sikh traditions of her ancestral homeland and the English or British practices of her family's new home in a London suburb.

What expressions of Sikh culture do you see in the film?

Material Culture	**Cultural Practices** (e.g. religion, language, social relations)	**Values**

Bend It Like Beckham
Note Taking Guide (continued)

What evidence of acculturation to British culture by Jess or her family do you see?

Material Culture	**Cultural Practices** (e.g. religion, language, social relations)	**Values**

Othering & the Social Construction of Identity

"Othering" is the relational formation of identity whereby one person or group attributes a certain characteristic (A) to another culture group, thereby claiming the opposite characteristic (not A) as part of their own group identity. What specific examples of othering occur in the film? Social construction refers to the idea that cultural identities are not fixed and do not spring from the individual. Instead they are the product of social interactions between individuals and groups.

Character "othered"	**Character or Group doing the "othering"**	**Incident**
Character: Characteristic (A) attributed to the character:	Characteristic (not A) implicitly claimed by those doing the "othering":	
Character: Characteristic (A) attributed to the character:	Characteristic (not A) implicitly claimed by those doing the "othering":	
Character: Characteristic (A) attributed to the character:	Characteristic (not A) implicitly claimed by those doing the "othering":	

Bend It Like Beckham
Note Taking Guide (continued)

Symbolic Landscapes

In what ways are cultural landscapes or landscape elements are deployed symbolically in the film? Symbolism entails the use of one thing to represent or refer to (sometimes ironically or humorously) another thing, theme, or idea.

Landscape or Landscape Element	Symbolic Value

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