

Kamdar, Neha, Northwestern University, United States

Inherited Histories and the Lived present: Postcolonial Diasporic Identity as 'Palimpsestic Individualism'

This paper proposes the idea of 'palimpsestic individualism' as a mode of identity formation in postcolonial diaspora, explicating the idea through South Asian diasporic filmmaking in Britain.

Identity in postcoloniality and diaspora is often defined as an affiliation with a community of sameness. This paper, however, describes a different mode of identity-formation in the cinema of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, defining this as 'palimpsestic individualism'. British-South Asian cinema questions the relevance of the modern nation-state, and of communities based on nationality. It presents a decidedly individualistic mode of identity defined by consciously differentiating from the community of sameness. In *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1984), for instance, an individualism informed by sexuality, capitalism, and differentiation from the compatriot community defines the protagonist. However, this paper describes such individualism as 'palimpsestic', because even in its differentiation from the community, it bears traces of inherited colonial history, thereby complicating this individualistic identity.