

**Postponing the Indian Ocean:  
Bollywood Map-making and Nostalgia for Community in the New Indian Diaspora with  
Particular Reference to Mauritius**

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This paper proceeds in three tempos. The first identifies *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* as part of a new film category, Bollywood, born of commercial Hindi cinema. The second tempo follows the re-mapping of Mauritius as new diaspora by the Bollywood text in terms of representation and reception. The third tempo locates Mauritius among South-West Indian Ocean Islands and in terms of the new *zeitgeist* which are described phenomenologically as particularly given to fluidity.

Bollywood, the new commercial Indian cinema is culturally and industrially, and therefore narratively dependent on the Indian diaspora as increasingly the main market audience (see Mishra 2002). In a song sequence from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (Johar, 2001), a Bollywood film largely set within a diasporic Indian context in the UK, as the camera pans across Central London, the old colonial power of most of India, the UK is overwritten and re-mapped, the music score is of “Vande Mataram”, the Indian National Song plays (see figure below).



Using the metaphor of the lost brother in London, initially vilified by the father, then sought by the younger brother from India, begging him to return home, it might symbolise reconciliation with the long-maligned diasporic Indian. In support (directly or indirectly) of the Republic of India's seduction of its rich (literally) diaspora, Bollywood specifically supports the diasporic condition, arguing, much like Arjun Appadurai's formulation of ethnoscape, for 'modernity at large', modernity cleansed of the mechanics of geographical belonging by the diaspora and where the cyber-neighbourhood is acted out (Appadurai 1997) and a virtual community is established.

*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* ('Only the Daring get the Bride', henceforth known simply as *Dilwale*) is the story of two young first generation diasporic Indians living in

London: Raj Malhotra and Simran Singh. Simran is the daughter of convenience store owner Chaudhry Baldev Singh, whose only dream is to return to his native Punjab. Baldev has arranged for his best friend's son in India, Kuljeet, to marry his daughter. Simran agrees out of respect for her father, but she begs her father to first allow her to go on a trip across Europe with her female friends. During the trip, Simran meets Raj, and they fall in love with each other. When he finds out, Baldev is furious and gets the family to return to the Punjab. Ahead of his marriage, Kuljeet boasts that he will engage in marital infidelity. Raj follows Simran to the Punjab to marry her but only with Baldev's blessing. In fact, Baldev slaps him, and angrily tells him to leave. As Raj boards a train out of the village, Simran tries to follow, and is stopped by Baldev's hand. She begs him to let her go, and realising that no one will ever love his daughter as much as Raj does, he tells Simran to join Raj on the train.

Based on most methods of evaluation, Bollywood is the world's foremost film industry. Increasingly, NRIs (literally non-resident Indians, but extensible to all South Asian diaspora) make up the largest portion of the Bollywood market. After Ashish Rajadhyaksha's distinction between the wider Indian cinema and Bollywood, which he argues in 1999, "has been around for only about a decade now", Bollywood deals with multi-million franchise approaches to cinema both in terms of means and in terms of content. Bollywood content tends to correspond to India as it views itself now – not a land of poverty and defeatist kismet but one of the world's economic superpowers. While the content of Bollywood text is often daring, it is almost always unapologetically popular in scheme.

One of the biggest blockbusters in Hindi cinema, *Dilwale* appears twelfth on the British Institute's list of the top Indian films of all time. There was a quick follow-up to *Dilwale* with such major Bollywood films as *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (2001), *Kal Ho Na Ho* (Advani, 2003), *Salaam Namaste* (Anand, 2005) and *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (Akhtar, 2011), but also beyond Bollywood, in an entirely new genre, diasporic Indian cinema in such films as *East is East* (O'Donnell, 1999), *Monsoon Wedding* (Mira Nair, 2001). In structuralist terms, the plot of the best-known international success of diasporic Indian cinema, *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) is in many ways narratologically identical to *Dilwale*. In turn, *Dhan Dhana Dhan Goal!* (Agnihotri, 2007) follows the blueprint of *Bend It Like Beckham* rather closely.

While it is in some ways a subversion of the old 'map', the plot of *Dilwale* is typical of Hindi melodrama for instance in terms of the boy-meets-girl formula with Romeo-and-Juliet overtones, overall sentimentality, filial duty, a 'feelgood' ending. Yet, it can be said to have initiated a new map of narrative and ethical postures. *Dilwale* does not merely create a variation within a world but a world within which variations occur. In *Tanu Weds Manu* (Rai, 2011), the bases established by *Dilwale* such as deconstructing the mawkish attachment to the village belle as a carrier of values (*guna*) are replicated to comic effect. In this instance, the Non Resident Indian (NRI) London returned hero is impossibly naïve and anti-heroically shy whereas the village girl that he intends to marry is impossibly world-savvy. She even goes as far as to suggest she keeps a number of boyfriends. *Tanu Weds Manu* is in fact merely responding to the map already drawn by *Dilwale* by implying that in the brave new world, the diasporic Indian is first an Indian, but correspondingly, the sedentary Indian is diasporic.

In *Dilwale* this power is made less repressive in the end although it is also sustained – thus, the solution to Hindi cinema's iterative dialectic of arranged/love marriage isn't about eschewing the patriarch's physical presence; it is here resolved by an introverted change in the patriarch's worldview, a 'change of heart', but then it is also implied that Baldev Singh only caves in when he has clearly reached the limit of his natural authority. Baldev's 'change of heart' uncovers patriarchy as a performance – Baldev wasn't *in essentia* a patriarch. For, no one exists outside an environment. It isn't that Baldev himself isn't patriarchal, but as Judith Butler would argue when contrasting performance and performativity, it reveals that

patriarchy – like any identification - never exists – it is only performed. Baldev’s continual anger and violence (he slaps Raj) against the two first-generation diasporic couple is in fact a sign of his powerlessness, of how, often, in diasporic circumstances, choice is mostly held by the patriarch in the domestic space, not in the outside world (for instance as convenience store owner in a mostly alien Britain). Nostalgia for community also implies nostalgia for power, when its cultural legitimisation is perceived as in danger of assimilation.

The faultline has shifted subtly – away from an engagement with India-as-Indian to an engagement with the Indian-as-India. Existing post territory, Bollywood’s obsession is instead with family. The new context of the act of watching – DVD, satellite or cable designate the sitting-room instead of the cinema-hall. Between the ‘private’ and public space, Bollywood chooses to bring back and bring out a compromise: the family, which, in privatist logic (Habermas) exists in-between. Bollywood text, as noumena, reflects the phenomenal act of watching it by obsessively representing dramas about families, which can be rendered as: families phenomenally watching a noumenal family onscreen.

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The early Heidegger recognises two modes of temporality: *temporalität* and *Zeitlichkeit*. *Temporalität* is the illusory sequencing of past, present and future as distinct but also contiguous. He then opposed this mode of being to the *Zeitlichkeit*. The later (post-*kehre*, post-change) Heidegger, recognises *Zeitlichkeit* instead as the only temporal mode, concluding that there is no time outside human time. The distinction between the old and the new Indian diaspora has traditionally been based on linear chronic temporality and on location, whereby the older diaspora is associated with the indenture in Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana and Trinidad and Southern and Eastern Africa and the new diaspora mainly with Western (predominantly ‘Anglo-Saxon’) metropolitan centres like London, New York and Melbourne. A definition based on *Zeitlichkeit* instead allows for a nuanced existential reading of various diasporic conditions.

Concerning at least 25 million people, the Indian diaspora is the second largest in the world, next only to the Chinese diaspora. Within this diaspora, Mauritius is unique in that at least 68% of its population is of Indian origin, making it the only country where diasporic people of Indian origin form a clear majority. This puts Mauritians of Indian origin at an unusual crux of two nostalgic *Existentials*: the one dominated (present-as-past) and the other dominant (past-as-present). Thus, it can be argued the new relative affluence (including of Mauritians of Indian origin) has ushered the old diaspora into a mode that is in its present hardly distinguishable from the new diaspora. Bollywood aiding, this is representable as a shift from one mode of being to another – from being-determined-by-the-world to determining-the-world-out-of-our-own-will as two contrary conditions of agency can also be associated with Old and New Indian Diasporas.

The global assimilation of Mauritius to the liberal economy in an ecstatic present makes it an instant fit for shiny new Bollywood and the new diaspora, not the lament of old diaspora.

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In a paper that I gave at the University of Iowa in 2010, I call the South-West Indian Ocean, the ocean with a short memory.

Heidegger distinguishes between two primary modes of relating to objects in *Being and Time*: presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*) and readiness-to-hand (*zuhandenheit*). The use we ascribe to them determines the attitude we can have towards objects – what is present-at-hand corresponds to circumstances that allow for a better sense of the connectedness among objects that constitute an environment.

The diasporic condition is more propitious to presence-at-hand, which means a potential, though not necessarily an actual, higher awareness about the fluidity of identity, positing a quasi-agnostic horizon within which all identity is performed. The diasporic condition is, increasingly, and already, the common being-human. Thus, as has been argued, *Dilwale's* engagement not only uncovers the performativity of the patriarch but that of identity itself, with the diasporic condition denouncing all human condition as a becoming, as temporal (as in temporary). The South-Western Indian Ocean, *in essentia* a diasporic space, might be particularly apt for uncovering the motility of *all* territory.

*Eyes Across the Water - Navigating the Indian Ocean* asks— is there “an idea of the Indian Ocean”? For, the Indian Ocean describes a region of lands described as an Ocean, with little or no strong sense of indigenusness or ideology to bind that consciousness together into an imagined community (after Anderson 1991).

In Amitav Ghosh's prizewinning novels, *The Ibis Trilogy*, Mauritius itself, unsurprisingly, is more trip than destination. In an earlier novel, *In An Antique Land* as in “Of Fanás and Forecastles: The Indian Ocean and Some Lost Languages of the Age of Sail” (2010), Ghosh opens this to the entire Ocean, for instance in reference to its multilingual nautical language. The short memory and undecidability of the South-Western Indian Ocean serve as reminder that ultimately, all identities are temporal and above all, that their persistence is constructed.

In a world of increasingly iterable cultural locations (observable from the ubiquity and uniformity of restaurant chains to the panoptic nature of spectatorship), communities are often performed within virtual and shifting maps along ‘iso-semantic’ lines of common cultural referencing beyond physical territories. Paradoxically, more likely causatively, the nostalgic need to imagine a home as anchor has never been more rife.

To Debord 1967, describing the society of the spectacle: “The spectacle is the map of this new world.” Bollywood as spectacle is a map of a new world, where Mauritius is relocated. Mauritius is situated on the ideal coordinates in terms of space (South-West Indian Ocean) and time (the global present tense) for such a relocation, pointing to a shared global migrant future.