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Non-Resident Cinema: Transnational Audiences for Indian Films

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Adrian Mabbott Athique, BA (Hons)

Communications and Cultural Studies
Faculty of Arts
2005

CERTIFICATION

I, Adrian Mabbott Athique, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Adrian Mabbott Athique
29th August 2005

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Thesis Abstract:

In this thesis the popular Indian film is described as an object of global significance. It is argued that understanding Indian films on a global scale requires different governing structures to existing paradigms of national media research and that, in particular, this requires a focus upon the consumption, rather than the production, of cinema. This thesis will also argue that the Australian media environment is constituted by a complex matrix of transnational cultural flows that spread beyond the boundaries of nationalist discourse, and that understanding the social dynamics of cinema in Australia requires an intellectual engagement with the phenomenon of globalisation.

This thesis seeks to locate the cultural geography of Indian films in a global context before presenting a local case study that draws on a body of interviews and survey exercises conducted during 2003-04 with film-viewers and media professionals in the Greater Sydney and Illawarra regions of New South Wales, Australia. My immediate concern is with the manner in which Indian movies reach an audience within this social environment and how that audience is described, both by themselves and by those who seek to cater to them. Thus, a further intention of this study overall is to conduct a re-evaluation of the nature of the social imagination which has been assumed to operate around participation in communities defined by media use. This study therefore combines three major points of enquiry: Indian films as globally dispersed media artefacts, Australia as a site of complex transnational cultural practices, and media audiences as sites of relational social imagination. The theoretical framework that I advance here reformulates the conception of media audiences as 'imagined communities' by replacing a demographically constituted ethnographic model with an emphasis on surveying the diverse inhabitants of a 'cultural field' constructed around the Indian movie in a specific Australian social context.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to all the study participants who helped to make this a work founded on collaboration, and were willing to do so without recompense. I would also like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Kate Bowles and Dr. Brian Yecies, who gave me the benefit of their immense experience as well as healthy doses of enthusiasm and scepticism where and when each was required. Many thanks also to Tim McDonald who responded to my many administrative queries with enormous goodwill.

I would like to acknowledge the generous support of my colleagues in the School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication at the University of Wollongong, and in the Centre for Asia Pacific Transformation Studies (CAPSTRANS). I would also like to thank the Communications and Cultural Transformations Group at the University of Wollongong for giving me a forum to share some of these ideas. For the same reason, I am indebted to the Indian Association for the Study of Australia (IASA), the Film and History Association of Australia and New Zealand (FHANZ) and the National Centre for South Asian Studies (NCSAS) who all provided me with a platform for my research. I would also like to thank Graeme Turner and the Australian Cultural Research Network for taking an interest in my work. Sincere thanks are also due to Chris Rodrigues and Phil Ellis at the University of Plymouth who encouraged me to get the ball rolling in the first place. Even with all of this help, this study would not have been possible without the financial support of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Finally, I would like to recognise the important contribution made by my friends in Wollongong who listened with patience, found time to share their own ideas with me and were too generous to remark on my atrocious bowling action.

Introduction To The Study

The export of Indian films has always been a component feature of the Indian film industry. Nonetheless, while the spectacular success of cinema as popular culture *inside* modern India has been well-known for decades, the international dimension of Indian cinema as a widely exported form of entertainment received very little academic attention before the mid-1990s. It seems most likely that the neglect of the transnational aspects of Indian film culture has been due to two dominant theoretical concerns. The first of these concerns has been common to film studies worldwide, that is, the long-standing convention of positioning the cinemas of the world as primarily national, indigenous institutions arranged around a hub-and-spoke relationship to an ‘international’ Hollywood industry. The second concern is more particular to Indian film studies and involves situating the cinema within the construction of a coherent post-colonial narrative within India itself. In both cases there has been a tendency to focus on the *production* of films. While, this thesis will begin by exploring these themes, it is my argument that understanding the significance of Indian films on a global scale requires different governing structures and, in particular, a focus upon the *consumption* of cinema.

Much of the existing scholarship on transnational modes of cinema that was available at the time that this study commenced, despite the invocation of a global condition, did not appear to represent any radical break from earlier national (and nationalist) debates on media audiences. In many respects, the questions being asked of transnational media

communities appeared to remain closely related to the lines of enquiry which led to the formation of earlier communications models, such as the relationships between media and power, and between narrative and community. I will argue, however, that the reasons for asking these questions, and the nature of the research environment, have changed enough that a new paradigm for thinking about *all* cinema in an explicitly transnational sense has now become inevitable. While the discursive importance of the nation has been by no means diminished, it is my contention that in the context of contemporary media use a nationalist optic may not be a suitable tool even for understanding the national itself, let alone the transnational or the global.

This thesis will seek in the first place to substantiate the claims which I have made here regarding the global significance of the Indian cinema and the role of Indian films in fostering numerous transnational relationships. I will then turn my attention to a localised frame of reference and present a case study that draws on a body of surveys and interviews with film-viewers, distributors and exhibitors of Indian movies in the adjacent Greater Sydney and Illawarra regions of the Australian state of New South Wales. This case study addresses an immediate concern with the manner in which Indian movies reach a transnational audience in this specific terrain and how that audience is described, and therefore imagined, both by members of that audience and by those who seek to cater to them. Thus, a further intention of this thesis overall is to conduct a re-evaluation of the nature of the social imagination which has been assumed to operate around participation in communities defined by media use. In pursuing this intention, I will visit a number of intellectual ‘base camps’ and in particular I will engage critically with the work of Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai and Pierre Bourdieu. This study therefore combines three major points of enquiry: Indian films as

a ‘non-resident’ media artefact, Australia as a site of complex transnational cultural practices, and media audiences as sites of social imagination.

As a piece of social research, this thesis is intended to make a contribution towards a wider transnational perspective on Indian films and the cultural practices which surround their consumption within and across specific localities. This is not social science, however, and this study operates outside of that disciplinary space despite sharing some similar concerns and methodological practices. The theoretical framework advanced in this thesis reformulates the conception of media audiences as ‘imagined communities’ by replacing a demographically constituted ethnographic model with an emphasis on surveying the diverse inhabitants of a ‘cultural field’ constructed around the Indian movie in an Australian social context.

The Research Standpoint

The self-reflexive positioning of the researcher within the context of their work has been in and out of fashion over the past decade. However, in the context of a study of transnational exchanges in which the subjective positions of the study participants are a major concern, it would seem entirely appropriate that I lay my own cards on the table at the outset and make my own position within this field of practices apparent to the reader. I am not a native of the social environment in which my research object originates, nor of the environment in which I have researched its use. This is obviously a point of epistemological significance. On that basis, it is also worth noting that I am neither an enthusiast for, nor a detractor of, Indian films.

The research presented here was conducted over a period of three and a half years from March 2002 to August 2005. As a UK citizen of a non-South Asian background, I came to Australia on an international research scholarship and, with the exception of a brief visit to North India early in 2004, I remained in my chosen research location for that entire period. As is, I suspect, the case with many doctoral research projects, this study underwent a substantial process of evolution. My original intention had been to undertake a comparative study of the development of the Australian and Indian film industries in the post-war period. This seemed to be a natural, although by no means direct, extension of the research I had undertaken for my honours thesis at the University of Plymouth which had focused on some of the major Indian feature films in the early years of Independence.

In the course of preparing the project, however, my research interests became more and more focused on the *uses* of cinema and the social practices which surround the medium in the twenty-first century. The thrust of the project therefore moved decisively towards the realm of ‘reception studies’ and from the international to the transnational. In some respects this marks the fact that my geographical relocation was also marked by a disciplinary shift where I moved from occupying the socio-historical end of a creative arts programme to the cultural studies end of a school of social sciences. However, given the freedom that I enjoyed as a doctoral student to pursue this research project, the reformulation of the study which took part during the first year of candidature did not ultimately result from any process of strategic assimilation. Indeed, what remained constant over that period of transition was the interests which had drawn me towards the scholarship of postcolonial studies as an undergraduate, towards the topic of Indian

cinema and, indeed, into the university sector in the first place. These were my acute awareness of the interfaces and disjunctures between culture and nation across the globe, a feeling that European media scholarship had at times been inattentive to the cultural topography of the world it was now living in, and a keen interest in the debates found across various academic disciplines regarding the social function of media use as a source of communal identification. The literature on national cinema, on nationalism, globalisation and transnationalism, on citizenship and political society, on migration and on consumerism are all bodies of work where such issues are of pressing concern. The Indian film seemed to me to have much to contribute to the discussion in all of these areas. My assumptions proved to be far from an individual insight since, although I did not anticipate it, the Indian film has become an increasingly fashionable object of discussion in media studies since I began looking seriously at Indian cinema in the late 1990s.

The Australian context of this study should not be seen as having been diminished by my decision to move away from the idea of comparative media analysis and focus instead upon a set of transnational exchanges in which India was the source of the object of interest and Australia the site of its consumption. Indeed, this thesis will go on to emphasise, and to illustrate, that the social environment in which media artefacts are consumed is at least as important in the construction of cultural meanings as the social context in which they are first produced. Too often the off-shore consumption of Indian films has been set analytically within a generic 'Western' society. Sydney is not London, Paris or New York, despite its cultural and political inter-relationships with those locations, in the same sense that Mumbai is not Colombo, Karachi or Suva. During the course of researching the transnational consumption of Indian films for this

study I became increasingly aware of the particularities of the cultural environment in which I was working: Australia is as much a site of cultural complexity and contradiction as modern India is so often claimed to be.

In this thesis I emphasise the importance of social context in understanding transnational media usage. At the same time, the necessarily broad range of this discussion has meant that it is not feasible to provide an exhaustive account here of either the Indian cinema or the cultural geography of the study area. A specialist in either subject may therefore find this thesis lacking in that regard. However, what is lost in terms of depth in relation to these two primary components of the study is, I think, compensated for by the intellectual value of their juxtaposition in the context of this enquiry. Given that only a small number of scholars are expert in both subjects, my approach here is to provide the reader with sufficient information to support the transnational and interdisciplinary conversations which are taking place throughout the body of this text.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is presented in two parts and seeks to provide space for many voices, including journalists, politicians, scholars, media professionals and consumers of Indian films. It also makes space for contributors from a range of social backgrounds and interrogates film culture as a phenomenon involving a wide range of practices within and beyond the cinema hall. The narrative here is not therefore a singular account, but

rather a meeting point for numerous discursive strands which exist in convergence, in parallel and in contradiction.

The first part of the thesis, 'Indian Cinema As A Global Cinema' consists of four chapters and is comprised of theoretical and historical analysis incorporating the review of both academic literature and popular discourse. This work provides the wider context within which the local case study in the second part of the thesis, 'Indian Films in an Australian Social Context', is situated. The case study is also presented in four chapters and provides a body of qualitative material collected through local fieldwork. Taken together, the two parts of the thesis seek to provide a contextualised enquiry into this particular transnational audience for Indian films.

The first two chapters presented here are located within the discourse of the national. Chapter One, 'Flags of Convenience: The Logic of National Cinema', anticipates my enquiry into the notion of a transnational media audience by considering in detail the nature of the 'national' cultures and audiences which are implicitly positioned as a point of prior, hermetic reference to the identification of a global condition. Chapter Two, 'How National is Indian Cinema?: Histories and Theories', addresses the historical development of Indian cinema and the debates which have surrounded it as an object of study. The purpose of this chapter is to situate Indian films within the complex social and historical contexts from which they have emerged. My intention here is to preclude the possibility, within the context of the overall study, of implicitly positioning Indian films in Australia as exotic cultural artefacts serving as a repository and measure of a coherent Indian-ness.

The third and fourth chapters of the thesis position Indian films and their audiences within a global setting. Chapter Three, 'The Global Dispersal of Indian Films' therefore provides a global account of the cultural geography within which the consumption of Indian films in Australia should be understood. The chapter does so by undertaking a macrological survey of worldwide audiences for Indian film exports and discusses in detail the formulation of various 'diasporic', 'Western' and 'parallel' audiences. Chapter Four, 'Global Audiences, Media Ethnography and the Notion of the Cultural Field', addresses the theoretical and methodological issues which are pertinent to researching transnational audiences. This chapter interrogates the role of media practices in structuring the social imagination under the conditions identified as 'globalisation'. Having done so, this chapter goes on to consider the implications of the claims made by theories of globalisation upon media spectators for the established practices of ethnographic audience research. Here, I propose the notion of a cultural field as an alternative framework for the investigation of a body of diverse and mobile social agents drawn together in a collaborative discussion of a media artefact of mutual interest.

The second part of the thesis presents the case study which considers the specific local environment where the research was conducted. Chapter Five, 'Introduction to the Case Study', provides a practical account of how, when and where my research was conducted before going on to introduce Australia as a cultural location. This chapter also introduces two 'imagined communities' which are of significance in the context of this enquiry, that is the 'Australian mainstream' audience and the 'diasporic audience' in Australia. In doing so, this chapter provides a review of two prior Australian studies which are of relevance to these two social imaginaries: Tony Bennett, Michael

Emmison and John Frow's *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* (1999) and Manas Ray's 'Bollywood Down Under: Fiji-Indian Cultural History and Popular Assertion' which was published in Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair's *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas* (2000).

The qualitative findings of my fieldwork are presented in chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Six, 'Locating A Field of Practices', serves to illuminate the cultural geography located within the field of practices centred on Indian films in Sydney and the Illawarra. A series of accounts by interviewees involved professionally with Indian film culture are presented here, and these contributions are structured by the identification of sites which are locations for the consumption of Indian film culture in the study area. This chapter also emphasises the global linkages active in this localised field of cultural practices. Chapter Seven, 'Talking About Films', presents a substantial body of interview material drawn from a self-selecting group of 'audience' volunteers interested in Indian film. Through the presentation of these voices, this chapter illustrates the subjective range of opinion and experience within this audience as a group. These enunciations also illustrate the strategic positioning of the self demonstrated by viewers of Indian films as they described the films and their uses of them. Chapter Eight, 'Imagining Audiences', is the final set of qualitative material and is focused upon the manner in which all the participants in my study, that is both media professionals and consumers of films, chose to construct 'diasporic' and 'mainstream' audience groups for Indian films in Australia. The discursive strategies through which the various contributors positioned other hypothetical viewers provides an important insight into the social imagination at work in this cultural field.

In concluding this thesis, I undertake a review of the nature of my research findings and look retrospectively at the outcomes generated by the research framework used in the study. On that basis, this final chapter of the thesis, ‘The Social Imagination of Media Audiences’, offers some further exploration of the imaginative relations which constitute media audiences and considers how effective the notion of a cultural field has been as a tool for understanding the dynamics of this transnational audience.

Part One: Indian Cinema as a Global Cinema

Fig. 1 Mural, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Authors Illustration).

Chapter One:

Flags of Convenience: The Logic of National Cinema

In an era where ever larger transnational media concerns cross the globe, and where they operate in a climate of rapidly accelerating technological and financial convergence, earlier debates on the preferred forms of national industries and national audiences may seem anachronous. However, despite the changing nature of the media environment, feature films continue to be linked (however tenuously) to nations at film festivals, and in the pages of film histories produced by critics and scholars (Gittings 2002, Hake 2002, Hu 2003). At the same time, the longevity of this discourse has been paralleled by an upsurge in what Charles Acland calls ‘popular and institutional talk about internationalization’ (2003:13). In recent years, alternative ways of thinking about media audiences have been suggested by studies of diasporic (Cunningham and Sinclair 2000, Desai 2004), ‘exilic’ (Naficy 1999) and transnational (An 2001, Iordanova 2001) modes of cinema. This co-existence of national and transnational analytical frameworks addresses both the nature of the contemporary world and the wide dispersal of media products. Therefore, in order to prefigure an interrogation of the transnational dynamics which are of central importance to a global understanding of cinema, and to the context of this particular study, it is necessary to first understand how the nationalisation of popular culture became so widely naturalised in both commercial and academic contexts.

The American cinema of ‘Hollywood’ has long been taken to embody the commercial, and universal, manifestation of movies as entertainment (see Miller et al 2001). Since

the early decades of the twentieth century Hollywood movies have been ‘products deliberately designed for global consumption’ (Vasey 1997:165). In contrast, film industries located elsewhere have been most typically seen as ‘national cinemas’ providing counter-narratives of cultural specificity (often, but not exclusively, in the form of art cinema) (see Crofts 2000). A ‘national cinema’ is therefore taken to represent a site of resistance, or at least an alternative, to the triumph of Hollywood as a globalising source of modern popular culture, insensitive to local cultural conditions. It is important to consider why alternatives to Hollywood have come to be figured as primarily national in nature. Therefore, this chapter will interrogate the theoretical relationship between cinema and nation, as an argument for the necessity of national industries, as a framework for academic research and as a component of nationalist discourse.

Arguments for National Cinema

The identification of a national cinema, and thus of cinema as a component of nationhood, rests upon certain foundational claims: that movies have countries of origin, address national audiences and belong therefore within national histories of movie production. As a theoretical concept, the idea of national cinemas also rests upon the acceptance of two key linkages between cinema and nation. The first purported linkage is that the cinema produced in any nation-state represents a distinct cultural identity and that, upon this basis, movies of the same ‘nationality’ can be seen as a body of work with a meaningful historical trajectory. The second linkage is dependent upon the notion that the watching of ‘national’ movies serves to acculturate a population within the

ideological framework of a nation. Where these two propositions are combined, movies are conceived of as culturally-specific products with socialising power where history is written. The theoretical notion of a national cinema is highly dependent, therefore, upon establishing links between popular culture and historical agency.

From a more functional perspective the discussion of national cinema, including its cultural significance, is structured by the logic of competitive nationalist economics. Andrew Higson (1995) identifies a combination of both economic and cultural arguments for the continued construction of national cinemas. Ian Jarvie (2000) also makes this observation, but goes on to identify three distinct arguments underpinning debates on national cinemas, one 'economic' and two 'cultural'. Jarvie describes these as the 'protectionist' argument, the 'cultural defence' argument and the 'nation building' argument. Jarvie's categorisations provide a useful framework for discussing the different dimensions of national cinema discourse, and I will use them here to outline the nature of these debates.

The Protectionist Argument

The protectionist argument focuses on the promotion of a national industry to produce the economic objectives of the creation of wealth, infrastructure and skilled employment. Protection of a national industry by the state is required where foreign industries are out-producing and/or undercutting local production through superior products or simply through economies of scale. The source of such threats are typically larger or more efficient foreign industries, which can out-compete the local product in

the national marketplace. The purpose of building protectionist structures around a national industry is to give it the necessary breathing space to improve its production capacity and produce a viable economic product. Protectionism, for cinema industries, entails imposing import restrictions, tariffs and/or fixed quotas of screen time for national and foreign products. Protectionism is generally a strategy for promoting a national industry, rather than a goal in itself. So from an economic perspective, the protection of a national cinema ceases to be necessary when the local industry reduces unit-costs and/or increases market share, thus maximising its profits, increasing production and, perhaps, also increasing employment. However, as Jarvie notes protectionism might be continued beyond this point if the ultimate goal is not simply to become viable domestically but to develop an excess capacity for export and earn more foreign currency for further growth (2000:77).

Economic arguments for national cinemas tend to be sublimated within other arguments for a number of reasons. Firstly since movies are luxury products unlikely to create national economic dependency it is not requisite in economic terms that the industry be nationally owned. A partially or wholly foreign-owned industry located within the national economy can produce the desired goals of profits and employment and also provides its own investment. Secondly, there are no purely economic prerogatives for national movies to be different from foreign ones; indeed they may be more competitive for export if they are virtually identical. Therefore, economically successful national industries do not always require, and sometimes may even suffer from, the creation of a locally-specific product. Thirdly, since profits from movies are collected through exhibition, it can be argued that there is more money to be made by allowing the cost of production to be borne elsewhere and then exacting taxation on both importation and

exhibition. Thus, there are valid economic arguments for not having a national industry. Another alternative is to encourage foreign producers to make movies in your country by ensuring cheaper production costs. A 'franchise' industry sustains skilled employment and profits from the more stable economics of material production costs, avoiding the risks of speculating on audience consumption by financing projects. The consumption of the finished products can, of course, still be taxed.

By the logic of 'economies of scale', the largest nations, since they possess a larger audience base, are in the most favourable position to achieve an economically viable product. Of course, they must possess sufficient access to capital and the technological capacity to construct the infrastructure of a film industry in the first place. Following that, provided that the national population demonstrates their preference for the national product, these products most likely dominate the 'domestic' market. If the nation in question has a sufficiently large movie audience then the national industry stands a good chance of recouping its costs domestically, and is therefore well placed to export movies at prices suitable to other receiving markets, which then represent pure profit. In contrast nations with a small audience base will find it difficult to return the considerable investment required for producing movies from their domestic box office and thus are compelled to enter the international market, at a considerable disadvantage, simply to break even. Some nations, both large and small, have also found it difficult to achieve viable national industries because their domestic audiences have consistently shown a preference for an imported product. This situation again makes an industry export-dependent on relatively unfavourable terms.

The three largest movie industries in the world (based in Hollywood, Hong Kong and India) all serve large ‘domestic’ audiences.¹ From an economic perspective, nations with a relatively small population or with audiences who appear to be more interested in imported products (or both) have two options. They can seek to achieve a consistent degree of success in a large foreign market in order to subsidise their weak national standing, which is a long-shot in economic terms since they must then compete with a larger established industry on its own ground in order to win a market share. Alternatively, smaller nations seeking to make a profit from cinema may be better advised to import-and-tax or take up franchise production. Whilst both of these strategies may well raise funds which might be used for the production of ‘national’ movies, neither could be considered to comprise a national industry in the fullest sense. It is not surprising, therefore, that arguments for national cinema, even where they employ some economic arguments relating to increased skilled employment, tend to emphasise Jarvie’s two non-economic arguments, cultural defence and nation building.

The Cultural Defence Argument

Cultural arguments for national movie production endow movies with a degree of socialising power, often described as ‘media effect’. The logic is that watching movies is likely to exert influence upon the social behaviour of viewers. The ‘cultural defence’ argument identified by Jarvie assumes nations naturally possess unique cultural formations or idioms and presumes that these idioms, which Jarvie describes as *mores*,

¹ According to Acland, Hollywood cinema considers both the United States and Canada as its domestic territory (2003:6-8). Hong Kong cinema, although based in a small territory, has a large audience base incorporating several countries (including mainland China, Taiwan and Singapore). In the Indian case, a number of domestic industries serve different segments of the billion-strong population of India, as well as neighbouring South Asian states.

will be disrupted by the intrusion of foreign cultural products with different ‘values’ and modes of address (2000:78). The notion of nationally-idiomatic cinema assumes that each nation possesses a culturally specific set of character types, narratives and/or aesthetics which assert their influence upon the cinema it produces. The cultural defence argument therefore is mobilised in order to defend this idiom by countering the threat of cultural re-inscription caused by the intrusion of an undesirable foreign discourse into the national space.

It is on this basis that movie critics and politicians have accused Hollywood of attempting global hegemony over popular culture – at the expense of what are assumed to be historically established and worthy national traditions. This understanding of national cinema originates in Europe during the 1920s, where it was feared that the growing economic and political power of the United States was being reflected in the popularity of Hollywood movies at the cinema. After World War Two, the Western European states continued to be gripped by a fear of cultural colonisation by the United States. At the height of Cold War propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s (and after the experience of mass-mediated fascism in Europe) it was commonly assumed that the power of the mass media was such that its audience were directly affected by its message. The fact that American movies were the most popular source of entertainment in post-war Europe therefore implied the Americanisation of people’s cultural behaviours.² This argument has also held some currency in the United States and is still being made today, as this retrospective viewpoint illustrates:

The United States was exporting not just American goods, but American values, propagated by two related means. One was the prevalence of the English language...A second, and related, mechanism was the international

² For more on the relationships between European and American film industries, see Nowell-Smith and Ricci (1998).

appeal of the English-language cinema, in which the United States was dominant (Reynolds 2002:253).

In the European context an anti-Hollywood cultural defence argument should also be seen as symptomatic of the crisis caused by the loss of the empires in which European notions of cultural supremacy had invested so heavily. The European states were simultaneously losing the colonial audiences to which they had long exported their own cultural artefacts. The cultural defence argument in relation to Hollywood has also been adopted elsewhere, notably in Latin America, although the association of Latin American cinema with leftist politics has meant that it has only rarely enjoyed state support (See Arnes 1987, Martin 1997). In English-speaking countries like Australia and Canada the cultural defence argument has been mobilised to promote national movie industries intended to differentiate their national media cultures from American concerns (See Jacka 1988, Madger 1993, Dorland 1996).

The logic behind the cultural defence argument is that media effects arising from foreign imports need to be countered by exposure to a local product which properly conveys the local cultural conditions, emphasising the local language, history, customs and social behaviours which determine the national character. While cultural defence arguments tend to be structured primarily by discourses of colonialism and dependency, they have also been inflected by modernist notions of high and low cultures (especially in the European context) and passive, susceptible media audiences. The 'national culture' is presented as a privileged 'heritage' whose influence over citizens must be protected, lest they be converted to a 'foreign' populism. Therefore, media content

funded under the logic of cultural defence has tended to promote a homogenising vision based upon elite conceptions of the national culture.³

There is an inherent weakness of the cultural defence argument in two of its assumptions: firstly that national culture represents a relatively stable discursive field prior to the influence of mass media, and secondly, that this formation is both readily accepted and widely imitated by the national audience. In terms of the former, this notion can really only be applied at best to handful of contemporary nation-states. In terms of the latter, it is certainly questionable whether national discourses of belonging have as great an influence upon citizens, or whether such influence is evenly distributed amongst citizens. National identity must also interact with other forms of social identification, for example, social class, educational background, faith-based, racial and regional identities, generational and gendered positioning, community groups, political or even aesthetic preferences.

The Nation-Building Argument

Where social conditions and/or understandings undermine the stable national identity promoted by the cultural defence argument, the debates surrounding cinema as a force of national culture are directed towards what Jarvie describes as the ‘nation-building’ argument (2000:79). This argument is conceptually linked with the cultural defence argument in terms of identifying movies as active social agents. However, this understanding of national cinemas is distinct because, as opposed to simply defending

³ As in the Reithian model of the early BBC or the Academie Francaise.

an existing national identity, the nation-building argument acknowledges that national cultures need to be constructed. From this perspective, a national cinema plays an active role in the creation of a new national popular culture. Jarvie (2000:84-86) is highly critical of the nation-building argument, primarily on the grounds that nation-building was taking place well before cinema. Jarvie concedes that cinema may have played some form of unofficial nation-building role in the United States, but points out that the nations which have most consistently presented arguments for national cinemas have all been long established and relatively stable polities (2000:80). However, it is worth pointing out at this stage that Jarvie's analysis of national cinema is entirely limited to Europe and North America and omits any discussion of the postcolonial states where the nation-building argument is probably most cogent.

The nation-building argument positions the national audience as a community being continually created and remade through storytelling and mass participation. It centralises the media as a force shaping commonality from diversity. A national cinema discussed along these lines begins from the recognition of a culturally diverse population typified by conflicting forms of social identification. Its purpose, however, continues to be largely didactic and homogenising. This model gives the greatest role to movies as agents of socialisation, since they do not simply address a stable cultural formation but rather they help to shape a national society, simply by speaking to their audience as a nation. This form of cultural argument has been employed by narrators of both Indian and Australian national cinema (Chakravarty 1993, O'Regan 1996).

In a Eurocentric context, Jarvie believes that the nation-building aims of national cinemas were to legitimise existing socio-political structures, created by and for

national elites, in the eyes of the lower social orders as the extension of the franchise gave them new political power. In other parts of the world a nation-building argument can be considered as an imperative for newly independent postcolonial states who often inherited multicultural populations, since the colonial states from which they emerged had been delineated by imperial interests rather than cultural 'cohesion'. Here a nation-building cinema assists in the creation of a unifying national consciousness by addressing the multicultural population in a manner conducive to consensus and integration, that is, as a nation.

Although Jarvie is dismissive of the nation-building model (2000:79-81), such an understanding of national cinema clearly allows for a more detailed discussion of a national culture than the cultural defence argument. From the nation-building perspective the media become pivotal centres of discourse rather than reflections of naturalised cultural conditions. However, Jarvie is right to suggest that we remain wary of overstating the power of cinema as a nation-builder. To support such a position in its strongest terms would direct us towards suggesting that national cinemas which have been unsuccessful, or which remain marginal in their country of origin, are indicative of failing nations. This of course would apply to almost all nations, since very few industries enjoy a large enough share of their domestic audience to undertake the role in any meaningful sense. Therefore, if national cinemas make some contribution towards national identity, it is not indispensable. For example, the chequered history of Australian cinema has certainly not prevented the growth of nationalist discourse in Australia, nor can the cinema be said to have ever led the charge in this respect.

Studies in National Cinema

The role of the academy is far from neutral in the articulation and analysis of nationalist media structures. Therefore it is worth considering broadly the development of academic interest in the systematic framework of national cinema. In the very early years of the medium conceptions of national cinema simply did not exist. The significant French share of the early motion-picture industry in the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century did not seemingly provoke fears of cultural colonisation in polyglot America. Cinema from its inception had been spread rapidly around the colonial world, first by an eclectic range of individual entrepreneurs and then by a smaller number of consolidating transnational companies. At this stage there was, from a national cinema perspective, simply nothing to write about. However, as noted by Kristin Thompson, the convulsion of Europe in the Great War of 1914-18 was a significant factor in the rise to pre-eminence of the American product and thus the re-birth of cinema as a source of national(ist) concern (1985).

The origins of national cinema discourse can be seen in the 1920s in the calls which emerged for economic protection for the ravaged European film industries (De Grazia 1998:20). However, state intervention at this time was not intended simply to protect domestic markets but equally to restore European industries to their 'rightful' share of the international market. It would be difficult to reconcile the Empire Films resolution adopted by the British Imperial Conference of 1926 with later claims of national cinema as valiant self-defence against cultural imperialism (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980, Skinner 2001) This was a discourse centred on imperial interests and influence, and one which saw no necessary contradiction between protectionism at home and the export of

its own cultural artefacts to Britain's colonial subjects. The British Film Institute started life, after all, as the Empire Film Institute. Aside from imperial competition, another major contributing factor to anti-Hollywood rhetoric in Europe between the wars was governmental concern about the social influence of the new medium, both on the lower social orders at home (Jarvie 2000:79-81) and on imperial subjects abroad (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:43). Views on the cinema as a potential site for sedition reflected a growing fear of the masses, set against the rise of communism in Europe and the rise of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia. Such mass movements had been further energised by the grisly and pathetic debacle of the Great War, which had also left European governments with a lingering sense of mutual distrust that prevented effective collaboration in countering Hollywood dominance of the cinema.⁴

Away from Europe much of the world was still under colonial occupation, and that part which wasn't was under considerable economic domination either from Europe or, increasingly, from the United States. A study on 'French West African National Cinema' was simply inconceivable in 1930, as there was neither an industry nor a nation-state to support such a study. Even in India where both anti-colonial nationalism and Indian cinema were strong by the mid-thirties, the formal narration of an Indian *national* cinema would logically have to wait for independence and the emergence of a formal nation-state. The Second World War between 1939 and 1945 again undermined European film production, although it also closed Europe to Hollywood imports for much of this time. In the years following the war, as Europe was re-built and the process of decolonisation gained momentum, the European states were forced to

⁴ Some respite was brought, in continental Europe at least, by the introduction of sound at the end of the 1920s and the subsequent demand for vernacular product. The introduction of exhibition quotas and import taxes by the major European states also had an impact but any significant gains were to be undone by the advent of the Second World War in 1939. For more on the coming of sound to non-US cinema, see Gomery (2004:105-114).

reinvent themselves as nation-states rather than imperial metropolises. The popularity of cinema was also at its pre-television peak at this time, and the Hollywood majors were aggressively re-establishing themselves in Western European markets. It was against this backdrop that Falcon Press of London published its series on European cinema as the 'national cinemas' series between 1947 and 1953 (Balcon, Hardy, Lindgren and Manvell 1947, Dickinson and De La Roche 1948, Wollenberg 1948, Jarratt 1951, Hardy 1952, Sadoul 1953). During the same period, the success of the neo-realists, originally in Italy, and the growth of *auteurist* cinema across continental Europe laid the ground for a system of nationally-defined art cinemas which would culminate in the New Wave movements of the 1960s.

Whilst European film criticism was contributing to discourses of national reconstruction and nationally-specific mass cultures, the post-war years also saw the emergence of the detailed analysis of media influence following the social science model. The role played by state propaganda cinema during the rise of fascism and by all sides during the war had made the psychological influence of the media a source of major concern, and one which was compounded by the rapid onset of the Cold War. By the end of the 1950s the growth of mass consumerism in Europe and the resulting explosion in the market for popular culture also provided another impetus for research into the social effects of the mass media. In Europe the growth of social communications theory was subsequently combined with the national aesthetics of *auteurist* film criticism. This combination provided the basis for national cinema studies, which have since been enshrined as subjects in university curricula. The normative logic of a world-system of nations embodied by the United Nations, as well as the anti-imperial politics of the late 1960s, eventually saw the extension of national cinema discourse beyond Europe to include,

somewhat fitfully, the cinema produced by the postcolonial states of the Third World. Hollywood cinema would seem to be the only film industry that is denied national cinema status, and continues to be studied, outside of the US at least, more for its influence overseas than for its impact on American identity.

There has been, in effect, a close relationship between the systematic ordering of cinema within academia, the aestheticisation of national 'flavours' by film criticism, and the marketing strategies of various film industries, as Stephen Crofts observes:

The idea of national cinema has long informed the promotion of non-Hollywood cinemas. Along with the name of the director-auteur, it has served as a means by which non-Hollywood films, most commonly art films – have been labelled, distributed, and reviewed. As a marketing strategy, where national labels have promised varieties of 'otherness' – of what is culturally different from Hollywood and the films of other importing countries (Crofts 2000:1).

Crofts claims that the notions underpinning national cinema as a governing structure are 'common-sense', although he notes that they have been powerfully challenged by the globalising conditions which have manifested themselves through the growth of communications technologies and the end of the Cold War (2000:1-2).⁵ Since the early 1990s capital has enjoyed more global mobility than it has for a century. Many nation-states have been unable, or unwilling, to provide secure borders against the movements of goods, including cultural goods.⁶ The reordering of capital relations has also been implicated in the disintegration of a number of nation-states and the resurgence of nationalist sentiment which has accompanied this climate of uncertainty.

Unsurprisingly, this has also resulted in a major growth in the academic literature on nationalism, as well as new editions of earlier works. Perhaps more interestingly, given

⁵ Notwithstanding these events, they are only 'common-sense' from a nationalist perspective.

⁶ In contrast numerous states have been prepared to defend their borders zealously against the movement of people which is equally symptomatic of the new economic conditions.

the location of media technologies at the heart of theories of globalisation, the instability of the national has also facilitated a further clutch of volumes on national cinema (Kinder 1993, Hayward 1993, O'Regan 1996, Sorlin 1996, Martin 1997, Street 1997, Iverson, Soderbergh-Widding, and Soila 1998, Gittings 2002, Hake 2002, Acevado-Munoz 2003, Hu 2003). One explanation for this is that the national dimension of cinema receives the greatest emphasis at moments when the stability of nations, and the status of national industries, is in question. This would seem to be congruent with the historical conditions which have accompanied the tides of national cinema discourse (post-WWI, post-WWII, post-Cold War).⁷ Doubtless, another factor in the persistence of the term 'national cinema' relates to an established reading market; it has now functioned for fifty years as a 'brand' for marketing certain kinds of film books.

Aside from its historiographic claims, national cinema analysis also represents the intersection of three other strands in humanities research: media studies, sociology and anthropology. Each of these disciplines brings into play different enquiries, theories and methodologies which provide the means and justifications for national cinema research as an academic practice. In turn, the academic production of national cinema knowledge fulfils the strategic function of combining both distinct and divergent research paradigms.

A further distinguishing feature of national cinema texts is their ability to conjoin what I will define here as the 'effective' and 'reflective' components of media artefacts as research objects. The reflective component of national cinema analysis claims that

⁷ This might be a Eurocentric explanation, however, as volumes on national cinema in postcolonial countries (such as India or Australia) have seemed to emerge more often in conjunction with national and/or industrial anniversaries.

cinema can *represent* the producing nation, the notion most central to the cultural defence argument presented earlier. In this context films are seen as indicative of the visual, aural and narrative form of a nationally-specific aesthetic, and thus the cultural identity, behaviours and beliefs of the producing society and, by extension, the ideological imperatives which govern the political and economic structure of that society. By locating films chronologically, they are also positioned as indicative of the social mores, politics and events of a particular period. In contrast, the research claims of an effective component of national cinema relate to the identification of the cinema as a *socialising* force with a degree of agency, and therefore to its purported role as a nation-builder. The interest here is in the efficacy and range of a national cinema as a socialising force and the likely effects of watching those films upon citizens. As an effective force, national films are presumed to have a transformative impact upon the cultural identity, behaviours and beliefs of their viewers. When positioning the effective component of national cinema discourse within an historical setting we are interested in the pedagogical function of cinematic historiography, the available evidence of its social impact at the time of its production and its accuracy or bias when compared to other historical records.

As applied research, national cinema studies thus combine a number of disciplinary positions within both effective and reflective claims. This is demonstrated by the following brief descriptions of national cinema found in the preface of recent studies (*my emphasis added*):

Not only do Indonesian films use the Indonesian language almost exclusively but [also] Indonesian films *depict* generalized Indonesian behaviour patterns as well, stripped of regional markers. And in doing so, these films have become an important medium for the *shaping* of an emergent national Indonesian culture...Made in Jakarta, they are exported,

in fixed form, all over the archipelago. They are “modern Indonesian culture”...This is what it means to speak of a “national cinema” (Heider 1991:10-11).

The film medium has always been an important vehicle for *constructing* images of a unified national identity out of regional and ethnic diversity and for *transmitting* them both within and beyond its national borders (Kinder 1993:7-8).

Cinema, both as a general cultural experience and entertainment form, and as the individual films which contribute to that experience, is of course one of those ‘mass’ communications systems, one of the means by which the public sphere is *constructed* on a national scale. Individual films will serve to *represent* the nation to itself as a nation (Higson 1995:7).

national cinemas do not only persist as a means to counter or accommodate Hollywood, they are sustained and *shaped by* local purposes of a social, cultural and national nature...[there are] two features of the common national culture that are important to any discussion of a national cinema. There is the *national political* – the common political and civic culture involving citizenship and equality before the law; and there is the *national cultural* – the cultural core of memories, values, customs, myths, symbols, solidarities and significant landscapes *shaping* ‘Australian’ identity (O’Regan 1996:65/67).

That feature films play a crucial role in the *making* of national identities and the *creation* of a national imaginary is undeniable. On a less obvious level, the same holds true for film history...As historical documents, feature films *offer unique insights* into everyday life, *illuminate* the social imaginary, and *show the formation* of collective memory and national identity (Hake 2002:4).

A national cinema means a national film industry; a national cinema refers to film content and style, and the *reflection* and *construction* of national character in the film; a national cinema counters the foreign domination of the domestic film market; and a national cinema is an art cinema (Hu 2003:7-8).

National cinema texts are thus notable not only for their various invocations of the social, cultural, historical and aesthetic modes of the national, but also for this reflective/effective dualism, where cinema is both ‘shaped by’ and ‘shaping’ national identity. In drawing these enquiries together within specific territorial contexts, national cinema research also becomes aligned with another post-war development within the academy: the interdisciplinary and geographically-specified expertise traditions

associated with area studies. It is the concept of the nation as a bounded space which facilitates the pursuit of a located study able to combine these temporal, social, cultural and aesthetic concerns, drawing on both material and metaphorical findings. The drawback, however, is, as Susan Hayward notes:

this territorialisation makes cinema into a historical subject. It stands for the nation – it is a means by which the nation can represent itself to itself (*qua* subject) and to its subjects (as object). This produces a narcissistic, self-reflexive and self-fulfilling view of national cinema, one in which the historical subject-object becomes knowledge of itself and not the subject of knowledge. Writing a national cinema as a territorialized historical subject runs the risk then of colluding with the idea of (re)producing the meaning (a history) of the nation, of setting false boundaries that limit one's understanding of what really might be occurring in terms of practices of power and knowledge (Hayward 2000:92).

Put more simply, the project of national cinema cannot avoid falling within the dictates of nationalism and its inherent discourses of historicity and internal self-justification. In addition, since all cinema, national or otherwise, is a commercial endeavour, the academic production of national cinema is further inflected by its relationship to local production lobbies, and the marketing strategies employed by publishers in relation to non-Hollywood cinema subjects. Thus as O'Regan observes: 'National cinemas provide a means to identify, assist, legitimate, polemicize, project and otherwise create a space nationally and internationally for non-Hollywood film-making activity' (2002:143). Film research therefore carries a practical as well as a theoretical dualism, since it serves to create national cinemas as much as it does to survey them. As Christopher E. Gittings, author of *Canadian National Cinema* explains:

Inevitably, questions of inclusion and exclusion – canon formation – confront the author of a book on national cinema... The establishing of a canon is not necessarily a 'bad thing'; in Canada, a country where feature film production had really become viable only in the last thirty years, the delineation of a canon was proof-positive that we had a national cinema (2002:1-2).

Where a visit to a local cinema is not enough to provide evidence of a national industry, then it falls upon commentators to bring together examples of national films, and to arrange them as a series of texts, genres and/or periods which provide narrative evidence of a national cinema story. There may be a number of reasons to do so, not least of which is it that is probably easier to lobby for government support of an existing endeavour than to propose a quixotic project to create an industry from scratch. There are also certain well-established markets for such books, particularly in the education sector. Courses in the national film culture can be offered to overseas or exchange students as a method of promoting the cultural credentials of a nation. They might also be offered to domestic students in order to increase awareness of national cultural production, where such an awareness is largely superseded by knowledge of a foreign product, as in Australia or Canada. Such courses can also be used to inform, or foreclose, debates about cultural identity in nations which are ‘managing diversity’ (which is, perhaps contrary to popular belief, all nations). The academic dimension of national cinema publishing is important because its didactic intent is often analogous to the theoretical claims being made about the impact of the cinema itself, although few national cinema texts make reference to their own implication in the construction of their subject.

The concept of national cinemas as a systematic ordering of media cultures claims to offer a unitary context for understanding diverse social and cultural formations. In practice, while there are tangible similarities in the cultural arguments adopted around the world for national production, and for the analysis of that production, their application in any particular national context inevitably raises different sets of disputes concerning the complex interaction between mass entertainment, national culture and

identity. Thus what a French or Italian critic considers of primary importance in a national cinema may not be an ingredient in the national cinema produced in Brazil or the Philippines. This contradiction lies in the national part of the national cinema equation. Nations are by definition considered to be different from each other in a describable sense, yet it is their possession of a set of standard geographic and cultural characteristics which allows them to be considered as part of a system of nations which are under those terms the same, i.e. they are all nations. The foundational communality upon which such a system is based is predicated upon the purported possession of cultural autonomy suggested by the concept of the nation-state. As such national cinema, either as an object of cultural policy or as a comparative model of academic analysis is unequivocally political in an explicitly nationalist sense. To understand both the longevity and the widespread legitimacy of this kind of thinking we need to further examine discourses of nationalism and the particular views of culture which they expound.

Historical Understandings of Nationalism and National Cultures

Nationalism is arguably the most widespread and influential political ideology of the modern world. As a social and historical meta-narrative it continues to provide the rhetorical framework for describing and connecting historical and contemporary political communities, regardless of the disparities commonly found between them. A cultural analysis of nationalism faces a particular set of problems in the modern world since it is national frameworks which typically provide the systematic parameters for discussing culture, but in itself nationalism, from a historical perspective, is a

phenomenon of culture. It is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of national cinema studies tend to be prefaced with references to the work of historians such as Ernest Gellner (1983, 1998), Benedict Anderson (1991, 1998), Eric Hobsbawm (1983, 1990) and Anthony Smith (1988, 1998, 1999 et. al.) who have all produced authoritative works on the origins of nationalism.⁸ Whilst there are tangible differences between the explanations which they offer, all of their respective positions rest upon the role they attribute to culture. As such the ways in which they choose to define culture are of central importance to an understanding of the national claims being made by others about the cinema.

Ernest Gellner (1983, 1996, 1998) observed in his writings on nationalism that the collectivities of the pre-modern, or more specifically pre-industrial, period in Europe were emphatically non-national in character. The hierarchies of power were rigid and constituted a huge cultural divide between rulers and ruled. The 'high culture' of the dynastic aristocracies was typically supra-national and provided a shared reference for elite groups in various European dynastic states. Contrastingly, the 'low cultures' of the masses were extremely local, lacking any larger 'national' conception. Gellner thus contrasts a continental aristocratic high culture with a large number of local peasant cultures, themselves far too small to constitute anything as big as a national space with 'shared cultural boundaries'. Importantly though, Gellner explicitly posits culture as already constituting an organising social force in this stage, simply not a 'national' one:

⁸ What is of further interest in a disciplinary sense is Hopkins' claim that the literature on globalisation has in contrast tended to emerge from the social sciences (See Hopkins 2002:1-9). This is a situation which has contributed perhaps to the presentation of the forces of globalisation as primarily economic and technological forces, producing a set of ahistorical and somewhat universal conditions. Correspondingly, national discourses are figured as oppositional forces which are cultural in their formation, territorially particular in their occurrence and historical in their origins.

in agrarian society: its main function is to reinforce, underwrite and render visible and authoritative, the hierarchical status system of the social order...if this is the primary role of culture in a society it cannot at the same time perform a quite different role: namely, to mark the boundaries of the polity. This is the basic reason why nationalism – the view that the legitimate political unit is made up of members of the same culture – cannot easily operate in agrarian society. It is deeply antithetical to its main organising principle, status organised by culture...Similarity of culture does not constitute a political bond within agrarian society (Gellner 1998:20-21).

Gellner claims that the organising principle for the role of culture changed radically with the advent of the modern society. Modern (taken to be industrial) society required large numbers of peasant low cultures to be re-located into urban centres where their distinct dialects and idiosyncratic customs required a high degree of standardisation in order to create the huge workforce needed to populate the new factories and workshops. The abstraction, or alienation, of production from serving local needs towards urban mass-production meant that socio-economic dependencies in this new world became at once both more numerous and more distant from personal experience. Correspondingly the successful negotiation of modernity required improved and standardised communication which could be disseminated through an increasingly inclusive (and monopolistic) system of education. This formed the basis for a new and larger communality, activating the connection between culture and the state which had been dormant in pre-industrial society – namely nationalism. In this way modernity ultimately transformed the plural and stable hierarchies of dynastic state into the more homogenised, mobile hierarchies of the nation-state. For Gellner this new relationship between social organisation and culture is the key to the emergence of nationalisms.

The capacity to either to articulate or comprehend context-free messages is not an easy one to acquire. It requires schooling, prolonged schooling. And modern society, given that work is semantic in this manner, requires everyone to possess this skill. It is the first society in history in which literacy is near universal...And the communication must take place not merely in a 'high' (i.e. codified, script-linked, educationally transmitted) code, but in a definite code,

say Mandarin Chinese or Oxford English. That is all. It is this which explains nationalism: the principle, so strange in the age of agrarian cultural diversity and of the 'ethnic' division of labour – that homogeneity of culture is the political bond, that mastery of (and one should add, acceptability in) a given high culture...is the precondition of political, economic and social citizenship (Gellner 1998:29).

For Gellner the catalyst for the emergence of modern nationalisms and national cultures is a system of education spreading a standardised script-based language throughout the old state. This device is at the root of all the modern institutions which constitute the nation-state – schools and universities, the press, bureaucracy and industry alike. Nationality is standardised by a clerical elite in the commercial and political interests of the state and then passed to the population in order to achieve the imperatives of modernity, such as economic development and civic society. The development of a national culture is shaped by the development of the 'national language' of the state. The explicit suggestion here is that where the imposition of a standard language and education is not possible due to the linguistic diversity of the inhabitants of the state, for example in the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, then the new nationalism will be unsuccessful and the old state will splinter into smaller nations on linguistic lines. Equally, where many small states share a language, then unification along monolingual lines will form the basis for a new nation-state, as in Germany or Italy.

By following the logic of an industrial catalyst there also seems to be a possibility that the growth of industrial and economic complexity worldwide could create an environment where one language became necessary, and where over time national cultures would be subsumed into a single global linguistic-nationalism. At present this seems very unlikely, and in response to this Gellner concedes that the subsumption of local low cultures has not yet led exponentially to a single super-culture, but rather to a

number of large conglomerate cultures which vie for supremacy - he defines this as the 'age of nationalism'. He attributes these conditions to the uneven access to the benefits of education given to different social and ethnic groups, and to the different timescales through which states and peoples have approached modernity. Another obstacle has been the artificial intrusion of societies who have already achieved modernisation - in the form of imperialism and colonialism. Nonetheless Gellner seeks to remind protagonists in this 'age of nationalism' that:

Nationalism is not a zero-sum game, it is a minus-sum game, because the majority of cultures-participants is bound to lose: there are simply too many cultures, as it were potential state-definers, for the amount of space available on this earth for viable states. So, most of the cultures are bound to go to the wall and fail to attain their fulfilment, that is, the marriage of the culturally defined nation with its own state (Gellner 1996:127).

The definition of culture which supports Gellner's theory of nationalism has two distinctive features. Firstly, cultural differences are figured as primarily linguistic differences. This is understandable from a European perspective, where the major nations are identified along linguistic lines, but this argument is difficult to apply in other parts of the world where this is much less the case.⁹ The second distinctive feature of Gellner's definition of culture is that its purpose is essentially functionalist and pedagogical – existing primarily in order to engender the skills which allow us to function efficiently within a society which is structured by economic concerns. This is of course a particularly materialist conception of culture where differences (between national cinemas for example) would be seen as primarily linguistic, with any variations

⁹ It is also pertinent that this model downplays the historical role of religion in defining some of Europe's national borders as well as the continued existence of multi-lingual states like Belgium and Switzerland. There are also differences between nations created along linguistic lines (e.g. Germany) and those which imposed a national language well after their creation as states (e.g. Spain). For more on this, see Gellner (1998).

in content dependent on the different economic conditions prevailing in national economies.

Gellner's theory of nationalism shares ground with the analysis of Eric Hobsbawm (1983,1990) in claiming emphatically that the nation is a modern phenomenon. They both agree that nationalism is a product of industrialisation and various nationalist claims to ancient mythologies and symbols are therefore dubious. For Hobsbawm the fact that this particular apparition of modernity is required to wear a fabricated antiquity as a legitimising badge serves to further underscore its historical absence. Hobsbawm and Ranger adopt a corrective position in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), which interrogates the historicist symbols so integral to nationalist discourse. They see the emergence of liberal nationalisms (as in Latin America) in the early modern period as positive, emancipating processes necessary to eschew the *ancien regime* or later in the various colonial contexts, the colonial state. In contrast they see the ethno-nationalisms which have followed as reactionary, divisive and irrational responses to modernity. In this way, modernist studies of nationalism in Europe have tended to be informed by a desire to refute the ever-present spectre of the romantic *volk* nationalism of modern political fascism. The key role of historical nationalist myths in the traumatic violence of modern history are seen as an aberration in the path of progress taken by the Habermasian 'incomplete' project of modernity and a corruption of classical liberal nationalism.

Anthony Smith disputes the premise that 'not only is the nation recent and novel, it is the product of modernisation and modernity, and of the secular, modern intelligentsia which creates and disseminates the historical myths of nationhood' (Smith 2000:47).

For Smith the phenomenon of nationalism does have a historical past. In his model a national culture is powerfully embedded in an ethno-cultural subconscious in any given population and the demand for modern nationalism emanates from the inherent desires of the people to assert their ethno-cultural particularities. The driving force behind nationalism is the 'shared memories' buried in the subconscious of various 'ethnic' groups, along with a necessary sense of attachment to a historic 'national' territory. The definition of the normative nation for Smith is 'a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members' (1999:11). Such a definition has other proponents, for example, these criteria are largely compatible with the definition of the nation provided by Jurgen Habermas (1996:285-286).

Since the discourses of ethnic nationalism seem to enjoy particular credence at this present time, I will discuss Anthony Smith's theory of the national at some length here. The absence of nationalist sentiment in past historical periods is seen to suggest that ethno-nationalism (Smith calls it 'ethno-symbolic nationalism') is latent rather than absent; waiting for an opportunity to overcome the historical contingencies preventing its assertion in the form of a nation-state. These pre-modern social imaginaries are dubbed by Smith as 'ethnies'. These are the essential 'core' populations which create an 'authentic' national consciousness. Smith concedes that modernity has a powerful transformative effect upon pre-modern ethnies which result in demands for autonomy and statehood, but claims that it is not the creator of such desires, seen as inherent and instinctual traits of humanity. Smith does not, however, in his attempt to recover the historical role of nationalism formally endorse the primordialist and perennialist claims

of the nation. He observes that the historical basis for such arguments is almost always either absent or unproven. However, Smith claims that it is the necessity, and ubiquity, of such myths which empowers a nationalism and underpins a national culture. If there is no hegemonic ancient myth of cultural particularity and sacred homeland sharable by the population of the state then there can be no viable nation, since ‘what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted (Smith 1999:9).

Smith insists that ethnicities can accommodate processes of assimilation and exchange whilst remaining cohesive, i.e. that they can be inclusive rather than simply exclusive. Yet the very premise of his theory seems to suggest that this must be a subordinate process compared to the overwhelming strength of ethnic particularity on which his ethno-symbolic approach is founded. Both ethnicity and *ethnie* are collective nouns, and the criteria for assessing their membership are taken by Smith to be shared memories, myths, culture and historic homeland.¹⁰ The absence of the distinction of race seems somewhat strange, unless we assume that the term ethnicity can now be substituted for this more fraught classification. Nonetheless, whilst both myths and cultures can be learnt or unlearnt, the ‘inherited’ memories of Smith clearly have genealogical, and therefore racial, overtones. To concentrate only on the ‘symbolism’ of ethnicity, excluding the physical differences of race, is a convenient elision of the implicit meaning of the term. Of course, this is an elision common to this contemporary notion of ethnicity.¹¹ Even with the addition of race, we end up with a number of contributory

¹⁰ Since the other criteria of nationhood, ‘a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties’ are only formally obtained with the achievement of a state.

¹¹ The meaning of the word ethnic (*ethnikos* – *Gk.*) is ‘outsiders’ although its contemporary use typically denotes groupings on linguistic, racial and/or cultural grounds, shaping a concrete formation from these

factors to the identity of the *ethnie* which are all fluid and composite to a certain extent: languages evolve and interrelate, racial/ethnic classifications are not stable discourses, cultural borders are impossible to define, let alone enforce, and myths are recontextualised and refigured in each telling. Culture may be ‘shared’ but its meaning is not empirically fixed, even amongst the most uniform and cohesive population. In terms of the innate differences between *ethnies* being reproduced through historically distinct mythologies, it is worth recalling Vladimir Propp’s observation that folk cultures are notable primarily for their universality rather than specificity (1984). Smith is right to observe that this universality is always submerged beneath a *sense* of particularity, yet in substance this is primarily a matter of setting rather than content. His distinction *between* myths and culture is intriguing (but unsubstantiated) and more intriguing is the relative absence of language, so key to Gellner’s argument, now merely one of several possible markers of shared culture and not a prerequisite for Smith.

The key term in Smith’s definition of nationalism is the ‘shared historical memory’ of the *ethnie*. In *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999), he defines this ‘essential element’ of human identity as:

a reflective consciousness of personal connection with the past...later generations carry shared memories...of the experiences of earlier generations of the same collectivity ...defined, first of all by a collective belief in common origins and descent, however fictive...and thereafter by shared historical memories associated with a specific territory which they regard as their ‘homeland’. On this basis arises a shared culture (1999:208).

shifting components. Indeed the slippage between the terms race and ethnicity has become familiar in contemporary discourse, perhaps because the former has overwhelmingly discriminatory overtones and the latter is seen to have more ‘positive’ connotations, i.e. to label someone a cultural outsider is not ‘racist’. Unfortunately, and increasingly, the term ‘ethnicity’ is being used to essentialise difference, and to justify conflict and discrimination, along the grounds of all or any of its constituent features of race, language and cultural practice. So in practice its use is now more or less identical to that of the term ‘race’ during the colonial period.

Thus, myths of racial origin and sacred territory are the basis for nations, which originate amongst the ‘people’ rather than the elites, and are enforced through:

oral traditions of the family, clan or community, and its religious specialists...sometimes overshadowed by canonical texts – epics, chronicles, hymns, prophecies, law-codes, treatises, songs and the like – as well as by various forms of art, crafts, architecture, music and dance (Smith 1999:208).

Here ethnocentric storytelling is the primary function of cultural practice as a set of iterative processes which socialise a population towards its ethnic particularity; a totalising description of cultural practice as a mission of ethnic glorification. A further implicit assertion is that ethno-nationalism is a ‘natural’ discourse (due to its origin in the ‘ethnie’) whether its construction of ‘the people’ is accurate historically or not. In this way he opposes the modernist readings of nationalisms, which he criticises paradoxically for their disregard of history. Smith is not suggesting that these two discourses, of official-political and popular-ethnic nationalisms, do not overlap, but he infers that to ‘succeed’ official nationalism requires validation by ethno-cultural nationalism whilst the reverse is not true. Equally, the former may be undermined by historical fact but the other, being ‘mythic’, cannot.¹²

The notion of a ‘shared historical memory’, so essential to nationalist discourse, is highly dubious. On one level memory, with its selective and associative processes, seems to be a useful analogy for nationalist imaginings. However, it is difficult to reconcile the implicit and somewhat strange notion, when memory is coupled with the word ‘historical’, that it can be shared not only amongst the living but also

¹² A somewhat contradictory position which does much to reveal the unspoken political imperatives of historiography and myth-making. It may be useful to recall Eric Hobsbawm’s observation that ‘historians are to nationalism what poppy-growers in Pakistan are to heroin addicts: we supply the essential raw material for the market. Nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes the nation is the past; what justifies one nation against others is the past and historians are the people that produce it’ (Hobsbawm 1996:255).

meaningfully with the dead. ‘Inherited’ myths are narrative fantasies, not memories. Saying ‘shared historical memories’, as opposed to ‘shared historical myths’, suggests the recollection of experience rather than the mediated construction and reception of storytelling. If such ‘inherited’ nationalisms are also structured by the defining factor of ethnicity, then the claim being made is that the ancient imaginings of our ethnically distinct forebears are available to us across the gulf of history. If these memories are ethnically particular, then it follows that they are not fully comprehensible to those who don’t share our ancestry. Furthermore, these ‘shared historical memories’ are assumed here to be shared equally, evenly and unquestionably amongst the ethnic subconscious of a ‘people’. In an overall sense, Smith’s analysis of nationalism is difficult to distinguish from nationalist discourse itself, since it serves to naturalise both the political supremacy of the nation-state and the ethnic particularities which underpin the claims of nationalists.¹³

The emotive appeal of ethno-cultural discourse in constructing a historicist vision which legitimises the nation cannot be simply dismissed due to the relative weakness of its foundational arguments. As Benedict Anderson has observed:

nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word’s multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in which ways their meanings changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy (Anderson 1991:4).

¹³ By this logic a nation has no real validity or likely chance of success save in the form of a Wilsonian nation-state predicated on a single ethnic grouping sharing power amongst themselves and to the exclusion of their ‘others’, which is the lived reality of ‘self-determination’. This implies multi-ethnic states cannot assert an authentic ‘national’ culture, unless there is an ethnic grouping strong enough to monopolise the national imaginary with the imposition of its own particular myths. ‘Genuine’ nations are constituted by instinctually homogenising majorities and perpetually alien minorities. Therefore, the ‘popular living past’ of Anthony Smith is indicative of the naturalisation of contemporary power formations conjoined with a nostalgia for a model of historiography which is predicated on the civilisational struggle between genetically and culturally bounded ‘peoples’ (1999:9).

In *Imagined Communities* (1983 rev.1991), Anderson suggested the emergence of modern mass media was an essential component of the concurrent rise of modern nationalisms. Although his observations were based on the role of print-language, his formulation of a nationalism shaped through perceptions of a common experience amongst the members of a mass audience has, as I have indicated previously, been extensively applied to film studies. Anderson defines the nation as a conceptual space in the imagination of its citizens.

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion...The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history. An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his...fellow-Americans. He [sic] has no idea what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity (Anderson 1991:6/26).

Drawing on the Hegelian example of how reading the newspaper became the modern replacement for morning prayer, Anderson argues that the spread of print media, particularly newspapers, encouraged individuals to imagine themselves as forming part of new, larger and more abstracted communities. The effect of these new forms of mass address was to produce a radical shift in conceptions of community, which now passed, for unprecedented numbers of people, beyond the boundaries of those with whom they could physically converse to include all those who shared in the consumption of the same printed word. The spread of 'print-capitalism...made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways' (1991:36).

The centrality that Anderson gives to the print-media in creating communities argues for an industrial catalyst in the cultural construction of nationalism, which is complementary in this sense to Gellner's argument. However, this media-effect is more than didactic, since it is not simply the narrativising power, but also the *participatory nature* of the media which creates the new social imagination. A sense of 'fraternity' arises amongst readers because 'each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he [sic] performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion' (1991:35). Thus the unifying power of nationalist discourse lies not primarily in the efficacy of the message, but rather in the inherently social nature of storytelling and the abstracted, but powerful, bonds that it forges within its audience. Since the legitimacy of such imaginaries are established through discursive relationships, rather than on chimerical historical preconditions, they are subject to negotiation and thus open to social change. They can also contribute to national polities arising from quite different political and social contexts.

The 'imagined community' as a nationalising force driven by print-capitalism gives rise to two primary limitations: comprehension and persuasion. In terms of the former, the central role played by standardised print-language in creating national awareness was at once unifying and divisive. It was unifying because it brought together as fellow readers populations previously sequestered within the smaller imaginaries represented by various dialectical or parallel forms of the language employed. It was divisive because the sheer diversity of spoken human language placed limitations upon the reach of any standardising print-language, and the communities which could be imagined through it. However, whilst print-language is for Anderson a key determinant of national

communities, the essentially translatable and comparative functions of language also indicate the dispensability of any *particular* language. Therefore, given the continuing existence of numerous bilingual and multilingual nations as well as nation-states which share their languages with others, there must be other determinants which serve to extend and/or delimit the social imagination. This second set of determinants relate not to comprehension but to persuasion. The persuasive appeal of an imagined community is predicated upon the inclusive-exclusive nature of its collective address and, therefore, the terms under which it can be imagined. Each individual to be included must be able to identify themselves as contained within its address, as one amongst like others. Therefore the centralising concept around which a social imaginary is constructed might be (either singly or in combination) linguistic, racial, dynastic or geographic, but its particular discursive formation will of necessity set limits upon its persuasive power.

The concept of an imagined community encourages us to think of the nation as a contingent, dynamic and mediated event. If the rapid spread of print-capitalism facilitated the increasingly universal imagination of state-centred forms of nationhood, then its influence was compounded by parallel developments of the nation-state, such as cartography, the census and the building of museums which set territorial, demographic and cultural boundaries around newly-imagined national spaces and displayed them for shared viewing and identification by an *audience* of citizens (Anderson 1991:163-185). Building upon this notion, the proliferation of other forms of mass-media culture can be argued to have strengthened both the centrality and the intertextuality of mediated imagination as a social force. Developments in communications have also been densely intertwined with the ever-increasing mobility of capital and the growing power of states to regulate the lives of their citizens. Nonetheless, while various elite groups, and the

states which serve them, have a high degree of control over the means of communication, the participatory and narrated nature of the nation compels them to cajole and persuade, rather than instruct, the imagined communities in whose name they claim power.

It might be useful at this point to compare some of the relative positions adopted by these scholars on the intersection of nationalism and culture, all of which confirm (albeit in different ways) the assumption of national cinema analysis that culture is not merely reflective of national conditions but actually plays a pivotal role in creating those conditions. The primary differences between their respective positions relates to the precise role which culture is seen to play. Gellner sees culture as a didactic tool for social organisation which is shaped by pre-existing societal (mostly economic) concerns and disseminated to the population. Anderson sees the participatory nature of cultural practice as essential in shaping the social imagination which creates and transform social conditions, and therefore sees societal cohesion as dependent on the relative spread and accessibility of shared cultural practices. Both Gellner and Anderson see the emergence of mass media as shaping modern nationalism. Pre-modern cultural vehicles can only instruct a population or convey an imaginary in keeping with their reach as a medium, largely a local one. In contrast, modern mass media with their greater reach create a larger cultural context. Their shared emphasis on print-language belies an important difference between their two explanations of the national; a functionalist approach like Gellner's identifies the material realities of social existence as shaping the human consciousness, whilst Anderson's premise is that it is the human imagination which creates new social structures.

Eric Hobsbawm and Anthony Smith place emphasis on discourses of tradition, although their perspectives are diametrically opposed. For Hobsbawm, nationalism is a primitive local response to the global expansion of capital that could be overcome by the victory of an egalitarian international modern consciousness over the market. The role of culture in nationalist discourse is to provide belligerent assertions of appropriated or simply invented 'traditions' to support the interests of national elites. In contrast Smith views culture as primarily a vehicle for the reproduction of mythic traditions which form the natural basis of human societies. Cultural practice exists to replicate, for any given people, a set of 'shared historical memories' which are buried in their ethnic subconscious. These shared memories may antedate the nation-state, but their historical presence prefigures its existence. This historical role of tradition as the primary means of social organisation is a natural human condition which is destined to continue, and one which will always be ethnically specific. It is likely that both Gellner and Anderson would contest this approach, since they both refer to Ernst Renan's statement that the basis of national identity 'is not memory but amnesia' (Gellner 1996:138, Anderson 1991:6).

In any of these divergent views, the nation does not necessarily fit the boundaries or structural form of the nation-state, which all agree is a modern occurrence, and they all attempt to a certain extent to uncouple the study of nation and state. Yet for Gellner and Hobsbawm, the nation is a modern appendage acquired by the state, whilst for Anderson and Smith the nation may both predate and continue to exist without the state. Perhaps most strikingly, all agree that contemporary nationalism, like modernity, is a European achievement which has spread across the globe. Even the ethnocentric Smith requires the arrival of European progress to activate the indigenous ethnies. Nationalisms

outside of Europe are seen as derivative, ‘borrowed’ or ‘pirate’ discourses. This is a key issue in understanding the national dimensions of Indian cinema, and one which I will address in Chapter Two.

Since these various theories of nationalism all make the claim that it is the socialising power of cultural activity which underpins the idea of the nation as a community, the mass media would seem to be a logical indicator of, if not national identity, then at least of nationalist discourse. Related more specifically to the claims of national cinema, I believe Gellner would have seen a national cinema as a viable means of transmitting certain semantic skills to the national population. His ‘that is all’ theory of nationalism would deny the historicist and culturally specific claims of national cinema, but he would doubtless have identified that a group of language-specific cinemas would be a logical outcome of modernity. National cinemas from this theoretical perspective would address primarily the economic conditions of the producing country, and would function more or less perfectly depending on how widely modernity was diffused within that society. Aside from their linguistic difference, we would not therefore expect the cinema of France to be much different from the cinema of Germany or Japan. The equation of culture with language and communication in Gellner’s model is barely supportive of culturally specific cinema in a broader sense. In relation to Jarvie’s taxonomy, I believe that the dissemination of communication skills by a modernising centre would best fit the nation-building model.¹⁴ Hobsbawm would most likely dismiss national cinema, seeing it as a conduit for invented traditions functioning as state propaganda.

¹⁴ Jarvie, however, interprets Gellner somewhat differently (see Jarvie 2000:86).

In contrast, the ethno-symbolic approach of Smith would be entirely congruent with cultural defence arguments for national cinema. It would also support the nation-building argument if the cinema was directed towards establishing the primacy of a 'majority' ethnic mythology by monopolising the cultural machinery of the nation. An ethno-symbolic approach of this kind would also adequately support the various effective and reflective claims of national cinema research. In fact, Smith has specifically addressed the national role of cinema in *Images of the Nation: Cinema, Art and National Identity* (2000). Smith compares the cinema to classical painting and demonstrates the cinematic construction of ethnically specific mythologies by analysing, predictably enough, a number of historical war films. For quite different reasons, Benedict Anderson's model of imagined community is also supportive of national cinema functioning as a powerful nation-builder. In fact it is more so, since Anderson's emphasis on the constructed-ness of nationhood is more supportive of the effective, rather than reflective, mode of national cinema.

Cinema as Nation: Theoretical Implications

If we accept Anderson's assertion that the medium of print language itself creates a sense of commonality underpinning modern nationalisms, then the communal context of exhibition in which the medium of cinema operates certainly seems to make an even stronger case for his 'Imagined Community'. The formation of audiences for the moving image worldwide has also been far greater numerically than those addressed by print-language. If the nation is considered as a space defined by a consensus in perception amongst its citizens, then the role of cultural production in forming the

national identity can, and should, be productively examined. In fact, such media-orientated studies become essential in understanding the development of national consciousness. This understanding of the imagined community coincides with the view of Jurgen Habermas that the media in modern societies constitute a 'public sphere' which enacts, and formally represents civic society (1989). These media-centric notions of the national and the public are particularly resonant with the claims of national cinema:

In providing a place of public assembly and in functioning as a public sphere, the cinema – the first truly democratic mass medium – has from the beginning provided an important forum for debates about culture, politics, and society... This function has been especially pronounced in relation to questions of national culture and identity (Hake 2002:5).

While it would seem logical to propose that the cinema as a mass medium is a public space, there is considerable difficulty in assuming that such a space is coterminous with the nation, or that it is democratic. The vast majority of national citizens have little or no input on the theme and form of movies, and the ability of the state to proscribe a movie means that a truly 'national' cinema will always be constrained within discourses sanctioned by the state. This may explain the preoccupation with national identity observed by Hake. Two major factors mitigate the power of the state in this regard. One is the internal diversity of the national audience, and the ability of viewers to read texts in any number of ways. We must remain wary of the notion of a singular 'mass audience' or national 'psyche', addressed by the cinema, since the shared experience of reading or viewing is balanced by more specific processes of interpretation undertaken by each receiver. As Andrew Higson notes: 'debates about national cinema need to take greater account of the diversity of reception, the recognition that the meanings an audience reads into a film are heavily dependent on the cultural setting in which they

watch it (2000:68-69). The second factor is the demonstrable demand of national audiences for extra-national media products. What tends to be ignored in arguments about the national of cinema is why people seem to like depictions of faraway lands and lives somewhat unlike their own and not just to hear their 'own' stories. A Hong Kong gangster movie may employ Cantonese language, display Chinese locations and actors, but it is still part of a transnational genre of gangster movies and with the addition of subtitles it can become relatively accessible and comprehensible to an American or Indian audience or, at least, provide enough that can be appropriated for local use (See An 2001, Srinivas 2003a/b). This is a function which has been profitably fulfilled by cinema and one which also arguably has the effect of reinforcing a sense of particularity and communality by its portrayal of external difference. Indeed if this was not the case, it would be unlikely that arguments about national cinemas would be made at all. As Tom O'Regan has observed 'national cinemas can be seen as a response to the internationalisation of the cinema. They are not alternatives to internationalisation, they are one of its manifestations' (2002:143). This recognition highlights the dual purpose of national cinema, where local production is intended not just for the domestic audience, but also to entertain (or at least generate profits from) foreign audiences. Cultural defence arguments, with their emphasis on the cultural suitability of a local product, cannot explain this extra-national role since the foreign audience would, by this premise, surely prefer its own product where there is one available. In practice, it is difficult to find an example of a non-exporting cinema or a non-importing nation.

Despite the fact that national cinemas are defined as much by their exterior, comparative functions as their interior social significance, the focus of national cinema studies tends to be overwhelmingly inwards. Aside from the obvious parallel with

nationalist thought, Philip Schlesinger believes that this perspective is also a legacy of the social communication theory which informs media studies.

Social communications theories have two key features: a tendency to think in terms of a close functional fit between communication and the nation; and an overwhelming concern with the interior of the communicative space... This internalism may at times acknowledge how nations are defined by their positions in the relations of an interstate world, but that is of secondary interest (2000:24).

Schlesinger believes that this 'inherently internalist' tendency is reflected in the work of Gellner and Anderson, as well as the earlier work of Karl Deutsch (1966), and has been reproduced by national cinema studies which have drawn heavily on this sociological framework. Thus, despite the obvious, albeit complicated, relationships between various national media industries and audiences, there is still:

no general principle for analysing the interaction between communicative communities, for assessing cultural and communicative flows in a global system... because that is not where the theoretical interest lies. Social communication theory is therefore about how shared cultural and communicative practices strengthen the identity of a group by creating boundaries (Schlesinger 2000:21).

It may be for this reason, as much as nationalist vigour, that the circulation of extra-national media products within a national space tends to be figured either as outright cultural imperialism, or at least an obstruction to the cultural cohesion promised by advocates of national production. Is there then an alternative? Can the various contradictions and dualisms within national media theory be reconciled, or further nuanced, to produce a less contradictory set of claims about media use? Or are there opportunities to develop a non-nationalist model of media analysis that is not reduced to a vague universalism, lacking in specific application to lived social and cultural relations?

At this stage it can be tentatively suggested that to understand the global conditions of cinema without relying on nationalist discourse, we need to account for the internal diversity of movie audiences, and the *different*, rather than identical, ways in which they might imagine a connection to their fellow consumers. We also need to understand the nature of the pleasures they seek from the cinema, and how this might account for the inherent intertextuality of all films. We will also need to account for the varied social lives of films themselves; how they travel from place to place, and media to media, and how specific contexts of consumption inflect the construction of social meanings. However, before I go on to recast my enquiry at a global scale, it is imperative, in the context of Indian films, to first redress the overwhelmingly Eurocentric bias in the accounts of the national addressed here by considering the conditions of the ‘national’ as they relate specifically to India.

Chapter Two: **How National is Indian Cinema?: Histories and Theories**

The theories of national cinema discussed in the previous chapter have for the most part arisen upon discursive terrain which is resonant with the historical experiences of European nations. Nonetheless, despite the important differences between the experiences of nationalism found in Europe and in the Indian subcontinent, the national has also provided the most common framework for the narration of the cinema in India. Therefore, the Indian film, which I will subsequently go to consider in a transnational context, will be first located here within the specificities of India's 'national' trajectory through a discussion of the literature on Indian films and the search for social explanation as it has emerged to date in that literature. As with the medium itself, this discussion will begin prior to the establishment of an independent Indian nation in 1947.

Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture

The first moving picture shows came to India in 1896, within months of the first shows in Europe and America. At this time, the British Raj was at the height of its power, but anti-colonial nationalism was also emerging as a powerful political force. The Indian National Congress had been founded in 1885 and calls, first for home rule and then for full independence, would gather in strength in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The early years of the cinema in India were accompanied by the catalytic events (such as the abortive partition of Bengal in 1905, the Great War 1914-18, and the massacre at Amritsar in 1919) which were to lead eventually to the independence and

partition of the patchwork of territories assembled under British paramountcy. The advent of moving pictures, and their subsequent growth in popularity as a mass medium in India took place against the backdrop of increasing mass mobilisation against colonial occupation.

Initially the exhibition of film reels in India consisted of imported material from Europe and America screened for what was a predominantly European audience (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:6). The first motion pictures filmed in India were colonial newsreels in 1898 and the first permanent cinema halls were established in 1900. As the film medium evolved in the early years of the twentieth century from an ocular curiosity into a widely accessible narrative form, a network of cinema halls was constructed by local entrepreneurs in the major cities of Britain's Asian territories. The production of Indian-made films developed rapidly, with the first Indian features being produced before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.¹⁵ Although imported movies, predominantly American, would initially dominate cinema programmes after the war, as they did elsewhere, a growing demand amongst Indians for local productions provided the basis for nascent film industries to develop in British India's Bombay, Bengal and Madras presidencies.¹⁶

Given the rise of anti-colonial feeling, the Government of India had little interest in subsidising or supporting the development of a cultural industry predicated upon public assembly and accessible to the lower social orders. The primary interest of the

¹⁵ *Pundalik* (1912) was a filming of a staged play. The first feature film, *Raja Harishchandra*, directed by D.G. Phalke, was made in 1913, and remade in 1917. For a more detailed account of early Indian production see Barnouw and Krishnaswamy (1980) and Willemen and Rajadhyaksha (1999).

¹⁶ For empirical data on the film industry in India during the 1920s, the definitive work is the four volumes (evidence and report) of the Indian Cinematograph Committee (1928). For a digest of the empirical data, see Way (1929).

government was in controlling the construction and programmes of cinema halls in order to prevent the inculcation of seditious ideas, whether they resulted from American or Indian movies. Accordingly the censorship of films in India was instituted in 1918 with the Indian Cinematograph Act. Censorship of the cinema sought to prevent the degradation of the image of the white race arising from the exposure of the natives to Hollywood films, and to restrict the ability of Indian film makers to make films which sympathised with the growing nationalist movement (Prasad 1998:78). As such Indian films were forbidden to ferment unrest or criticise colonial rule. The suspicion with which the colonial government regarded Indian film production was an extension of their earlier concern with the emergence of the modern Indian theatre which they also feared as a potentially influential source of anti-colonial sentiment (Hughes 2000:43). This paranoia surrounding new forms of mass culture, and their social impact, was also being felt at home by European elites in the wake of socialist agitation. However, in the case of British India, a colonial government which was rapidly losing legitimacy had even more cause to experience trepidation about the growth of a modern public culture.

The anxieties felt by the colonial authorities in India regarding the cinema reflected wider discourses on the social effects of mass media as well as some of the specific concerns of British rule in India, such as a heightened fear of public assembly and the investment of moral authority in the 'status' of the white woman (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:43, Hughes 2000:50). More importantly the growth of mass media addressing an Indian 'national' public could not help but underscore the lack of cultural legitimacy intrinsic to colonial rule. The British were always keen to assert that India was not and never had been a nation, and claimed their rights to governance on the basis that the colonial state served as an arbiter between disparate ethnic, linguistic and

religious communities which would otherwise descend into a state of conflict (Oomen 2000:1). The legitimacy of British rule depended therefore on a claim of cultural impartiality, which was becoming increasingly untenable in a world where nationalism, and its linking of cultural particularity and political identity, was in the ascendant. The nature of British arbitration and its doctrine of divide-and-conquer in the political arena was also in discord with Britain's economic interests in India which required an ever-greater integration of the subcontinent. If pre-colonial India can be seen as a disparate collection of dynastic polities which were nonetheless characterised by a significant degree of cultural affinity and interchange, then the imperial discourse constructed by the British fostered political and commercial integration whilst seeking to exacerbate cultural differences. By the twentieth century India under the Raj was not only closely linked to the imperial global economy but was also internally more cohesive in communications due to the effects of industrial capitalism. The standardisation and centralisation of administration, the advent of mass media and the growth of urbanisation and internal migration all serve to indicate that modernity was decisively at large in the subcontinent.

By the time the cinema arrived in India, the presence of an Indian press, both in English and in the Indian languages, was already well established (Thussu 2000). Indian publications were an integral component in the rise of anti-colonial nationalism, providing a vehicle for nationalist discourse as well as serving to develop political constituencies amongst their readerships. Whilst explicit political discourse could be repressed through censorship, the supposed cultural impartiality of the Raj made it difficult to censure discussion of India's cultural heritage. However, given the cultural logic of nationalism, such debates became central in the formation of Indian nationalist

movements. For as long as these debates were limited to print media, their impact was likely to be relatively restricted due to a low level of literacy. The cinema, on the other hand, was developing a potentially far greater mass audience and it was being introduced in India at the same time that nationalist leaders were seeking to win popular support for the nationalist movement gathering force within the literate middle classes.

The extension of censorship to the cinema, which quickly followed the advent of Indian film production, employed a similar logic to British censorship of other forms of media. Political themes were forbidden and 'public morality' strictly enforced. Accordingly the genres which dominated Indian film making in the colonial period were the 'mythological' and the 'social'. The former presented portrayals of Indian, particularly Hindu, narrative traditions, and the latter focused on issues of social reform (for example, the status of women and the plight of untouchables) which had risen to prominence as the process of modernisation gained pace. Nationalist leaders were espousing both cultural revival and social reform as intrinsic components in the achievement of an independent India, and although explicit political statements were suppressed by the censor, the centrality of both historicist and reformist themes in the cinema indicates a close relationship between cinematic subjects and public debates on India's future. For its part, the colonial government was ill-placed to proscribe this socio-cultural discourse in the cinema and elsewhere without undermining its claim to impartiality by intruding into Indian social life, thus further evidencing its own cultural illegitimacy.

By focusing on the social and cultural components of nationhood, Indian nationalists were able to monopolise both poles of a tradition-modernity oppositional binary

exacerbated by colonial rule. The British Raj, as a colonial state, was predicated upon the ideological construction of the racial supremacy of the rulers and of inimical differences between its subjects. A state in this form was unable to transform itself into a nation-state since it could not, by its own premise, successfully establish a vision of 'deep horizontal comradeship' amongst its population (Anderson 1991:7). Where a colonial power controls the institutions of state, no union of nation and state through shared cultural identity is likely to take place. Partha Chatterjee has claimed that this resulted in certain particularities in the impact of modernity and the growth of the public sphere in colonial societies, and in the conception, by both coloniser and colonised alike, of distinct 'public' and 'private' domains of the nation.

By my reading, anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa (Chatterjee 1993:6).

Under colonial conditions mobilising a discourse centred on cultural identity provides a powerful means of challenging the illegitimacy of the state. In the case of India, nationalist politicians, whether secularist or communalist, socialist or capitalist, employed various rhetorical constructions of a 'traditional' India in order to forge connections between a pre-colonial past and the possibility of a postcolonial future. This 're-awakening' or 'invention' of tradition was an essential precursor for making claims for self-determination, and for gaining control of the state itself. This is a somewhat

different set of conditions to those identified by Gellner in Europe, where the spread of nationalism typically legitimised the state after the fact. An anti-colonial nationalism acts in opposition to the state, rather than in its service. Therefore, in contrast to the self-legitimising discourses of ‘official’ nationalism, anti-colonial nationalism seeks in the first place to make explicit the *disconnection* between nation and state.

In the late colonial period in India the growth of mass media took place in a social environment where cultural activity was seen as, if not entirely antagonistic to the state, then at least existing largely beyond the purview of state control. For its part the colonial regime was not therefore disposed to support or encourage the growth of Indian cinema. The Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927 which was set up to review the conditions of cinema exhibition and film production was intended to encourage India to restrict film imports from the United States and introduce a quota of ‘Empire’ (read British) films. When the Indian members of the committee proposed instead that a quota be imposed for Indian-made films, the British members of the committee dissented and the report was shelved (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:39-58, Jaikumar 2003). Nonetheless, Indian-made films became dominant in Indian cinema halls by the end of the decade and 1,323 silent features were produced in India prior to the coming of sound production in 1931 (Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:32).

Although the British Raj was a complex, contradictory and colonial political construction, it did function as a common economic market encompassing the subcontinent. Early entrepreneurs in cinema, such as J. F. Madan, sought to overcome regional differences and cater to this larger market right from the outset, with all-India distribution and exhibition concerns emerging as early as the 1920s (Barnouw and

Krishnaswamy 1980:7-9). The development of cinema infrastructure across the Raj can be seen as an indication of the communicative integration of the subcontinent in the early part of the century. This intrinsic mobility of the modern media was also conducive to the all-India entity promoted by the anti-colonial nationalist movement. Therefore it can be claimed that the establishment of an all-India distribution and exhibition infrastructure during the silent years of cinema, along with the further growth of the Indian press, played some role in fostering a national imaginary amongst the inhabitants of the British Raj.¹⁷

The Indian subcontinent, however, is host to a considerable linguistic diversity. Thus while the coming of sound production with the first talkie, *Alam Ara*, in 1931, bolstered local production by creating demand for features made in the Indian vernaculars, it also made it inevitable that Indian film production would become centred around the largest linguistic groups. Film makers addressed this fragmentation of the audience for Indian talkies in a number of ways: through dubbing, making films in several languages simultaneously and by translatative reproduction, that is by re-making successful films from other parts of the country. The willingness to innovate in this way can be related to the specific discourses of nationalism emanating from the subcontinent. Whilst European accounts of the nation have emphasised that linguistic homogenisation is a central component of, and inherent limitation to, a national consciousness, this has proved to be less the case in India. The major divisions which were to emerge in the Indian nationalist movement through the 1930s and 1940s were not between linguistic communities but between secularists and communalists. The legitimacy of competing Indian nations was to be contested along religious lines, and this proved to be a more

¹⁷ In order to make this claim, it is necessary to support the nation-building argument for national cinema, see Chapter One, pp 21-23.

consistent factor in the imagined communities which gained political ground in late colonial India. Nationalist leaders promoting a secularist platform, such as Nehru and Azad sought to create a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-faith nation from the territories occupied by the Raj (Azad 1959, Nehru 1961). Mahatma Gandhi was not in favour of a secular India, or an 'Indian Raj', but was nonetheless publicly committed to a pluralistic society (Parel 1997). In contrast, communalists such as Golwalkar, Savarkar and Jinnah variously proposed that India's major religious communities represented separate constituencies requiring either the establishment of separate national homelands or the submission of religious minorities to majority rule (Savarkar 1923, Jinnah 1984, Kohli 1993). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that even the communal nationalists sought to incorporate co-religionists on an all-India basis, regardless of their differing geographic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.¹⁸

Whilst India's linguistic diversity was to prove a secondary consideration in political discourses leading up to independence, it has nonetheless exercised a profound structuring influence over the nature of the media, including the cinema. India has no hegemonic cultural centre. Given the complex cultural and linguistic topography of the subcontinent and its sheer size, the rise of a mediasphere comprising of multiple production centres making films in a number of languages intelligible to different segments of India's film-going public was a logical outcome. Prior to independence there were four main production centres in colonial India, located in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore. In Bombay films were produced in Hindustani, the most widely understood language of North-West India, and to a lesser extent in the local Marathi

¹⁸ The literature on the development of nationalisms in South Asia, and the competing conceptualisations of nation which have contributed to it, is understandably vast. I believe that Ahmed (1996) and Sharma and Oomen (2000) may provide useful points of entry to this body of work:

language (as were films made at Prabhat Studios in nearby Kohlapur).¹⁹ The Calcutta film industry in Eastern India produced Bengali-language films whilst studios in Lahore made films in Punjabi. Studios in Madras had begun to produce films in all the main South Indian languages, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam as well as in Sinhala for audiences in neighbouring Ceylon (See Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha 1999, Thoraval 2001). A linguistically plural internal market has been a distinctive feature of the Indian cinema since the coming of sound, and this would prove salient to the development of a 'national media' in the years following independence. Prior to independence however, the relatively short space of time between the coming of sound and independence (sixteen years) and the natural inclination of commercial film producers to cater to the largest possible market made language a challenge, rather than an outright bar, to the growth of the cinema market. Since the 1930s the exchange of narrative themes, visual aesthetics and personnel between the various Indian cinemas has always presented a counterpoint to the relative independence of the different production centres.

¹⁹ Modern Hindi is descended from Hindustani, a link language which developed in Northern India in mediaeval times. This language was descended from vulgar forms of ancient Sanskrit and it provided a means of communication between speakers of various North Indian languages of similar descent. Given the large Muslim presence in the region, however, the language also made extensive use of Persian and Arabic vocabulary. Over time this colloquial language was adopted as a courtly language written in Arabic (Urdu) and also began to develop a literary form in both Arabic and Devanagari script. The language used in 'Hindi' films however is not the literary form but the colloquial dialect. Given the political development of modern South Asia, conscious attempts have been made to achieve a separation of Hindustani into two different languages: Hindi, written in the Devanagari script, which became the official national language of India in 1950 and Urdu, written in Arabic script which became the national language of Pakistan in 1952. Officially sanctioned Hindi has seen the erasure of Arabic and Persian words and a project of Sanskritization, and officially sanctioned Urdu has undergone a similar process of Arabisation. Nonetheless, the vernacular form of the language remains mutually intelligible, and it is this form, Hindustani, which is often used in 'Hindi' films, as opposed to the more Sanskritized Hindi used by the Indian state media. Although widely understood across the northern part of the subcontinent, and now a required component of their respective educational systems, neither Hindi nor Urdu are the mother tongues of a majority of people in their respective nations. In the Indian case many of the languages which have now been officially classified as dialects of Hindi are actually older than Hindi. In addition, although all the major languages of Northern India are seen to share the Sanskrit origins of Hindi/Urdu, the Dravidian languages of South India are not.

Fig 2. Linguistic Map of Colonial India, Burma and Ceylon 1936 showing main centres of film production (Authors Illustration).²⁰

By the end of the 1930s Indian films had become more popular with audiences than foreign imports. The cinema in India had established the major features of a film industry: organised studio production, an extensive system of distribution, a star system and a range of genres. The major genres were the ‘mythological’ which was centred on (primarily) Hindu religious texts, and the ‘social’ film which focused on issues of contemporary concern. There were also minor genres such as ‘stunt’ films, comedies and ‘historicals’.²¹ The 1940s saw a massive boom in both cinema hall construction and film production, as the Second World War had radical effects upon the economy of the film business. The funds for the expansion of Indian production came primarily from

²⁰ Although Ceylon was initially administered from Madras, it was administered separately after 1833. Burma was only formally separated from British India in 1937.

²¹ As opposed to the primordial religious focus of the ‘mythologicals’, ‘historical’ films dealt with popular tales from India’s more recent past, particularly the mediaeval and Moghul periods.

non-institutional sources of finance outside of the industry. Businessmen with large sums of cash which they wished to place beyond the reach of British taxation began to offer large sums to finance film making. Before very long, independent productions had managed to lure the major stars away from the studios which promptly collapsed. Consequently, from the 1940s onwards, the vast majority of films in India have been made as one-off productions intended to recoup all their costs in one go, as opposed to a studio system offsetting risks by producing a clutch of films at any one time. This structural change to industry practices during the 1940s resulted in the formalisation of the *masala* film, a super-genre (typically in the thematic mould of the 'social film') comprising of a three hour spectacular providing something for everyone: comedy, romance, action, family drama and numerous songs. This proved to be the best way to maximise audience share in a increasingly anarchic industry with extremely narrow profit margins and the imperative for each film to succeed with a large proportion of the mass audience.

The development of 'native' cinemas, as found in India, was an extremely rare condition among colonial societies and has some significance in how we conceive of the relationship between cinema and nation, and between nation and state. Most theories of national cinema focus on mobilising state support for an economically marginalized film-production industry performing a professed cultural good. They do not account for the cluster of privately-funded industries which dominated the Indian market without such support, and which were also able to do so under foreign occupation. The proliferation of Indian cinema in a space beyond the official discourses of the state, but very much within the articulation of the nation, has a great deal of significance in understanding the subsequent history of the media in India. Since the discourses of

modernity and nationalism which were prevalent in constructing modern India were articulated under the influence of the experiences of colonialism, there is also some cause to consider that there may be qualitative differences between these discursive structures and the assumed 'parent' discourses identified by European scholars.

Anderson, for example, claims that nationalism was conceived in, and disseminated from, Europe; albeit finding the right historical (and communicative) conditions to emerge first in Europe's American colonies (1991:47-66). This essentially European formulation is then assumed to have spread across the globe, that is to Asia and Africa. This premise is probably the most significant point upon which Western scholars of nationalism achieve consent.²² Nationalism, for both good and ill, is seen as a European invention which was appropriated by its colonial subjects in a form proscribed by the established limitations of the doctrine itself. Chatterjee, however, contests such universalising and diffusionist theories of nationalism founded on the European experience:

If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized (Chatterjee 1993:5).

It is the Eurocentric bias of this perspective which Chatterjee highlights in his criticism of Anderson's model, rather than the idea of an 'imagined community' per se. Thus it is the *nature* of this imagination which is primarily at question. The focus of Chatterjee's query rests upon the different sociological contexts in which anti-colonial nationalisms became political forces. A general theory of nationalism may well stand up in an

²² Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm and Smith all agree on the European origins of nationalisms. For a fuller discussion of the significance of this for scholars of Asia, see Tonnesson and Antlov (1998).

examination of some of the state forms adopted and inherited by postcolonial states, such as the derivative intertextuality of formal entities like institutions, constitutions and flags, and the transnational political terminology which has evolved to serve inter-state relations. It does not however, account so easily for the complex contestations and divisions between anti-colonial nationalism and the colonial state, nor for the echoes of these relationships which persist in many postcolonial societies.

Anti-colonial nationalisms can be seen as a particularly modern form of political response, constituting a political imaginary bound by a 'shared cultural identity' centred upon the concept of indigeneity.²³ In India, the political standing of tradition, whether perennial or invented, was enhanced by its symbolic role as a site of resistance to the foreign imposition of colonial rule. However, the historicist notions which underpinned such an endeavour were articulated at least partially as a response to the advent of modernity. The structuring terminology of a political and economic public domain and a socio-cultural private domain in Chatterjee's description of anti-colonial nationalism may illustrate of itself how powerfully modernity informed nationalist discourse in India. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that due to their marginal position within imperialist grand narratives of progress, the inhabitants of colonial societies were required to engage critically with the logic of the modern long before the advent of Western postmodernism.

Modernity was associated positively with scientific and industrial progress and social and political reform, but it was also associated negatively with the intrusion of a colonial power into the public realms of politics, industry and commerce, and with the

²³ That is, according to a Gellnerian perspective, see Chapter One, pp 34-38.

disparagement and subjugation of traditional society. Nonetheless, the harnessing of diverse cultural formations to the imperatives of a Janus-faced modernity, tainted by colonialism, was an intrinsic component in the formulation of Indian nationalism. As a quintessentially modern medium derived from an imported technology, cinema was thus far from a neutral practice, as a communicative form or as a social space, in the discursive contest between tradition and modernity. Charges were frequently made against the cinema as an agent of westernisation and a polluting source of western morality (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:137). Nonetheless, film producers such as Mehboob Khan sought to express the zeitgeist of national liberation, and to employ the cinema in the reinvention of 'indigenous' cultural narratives *and* in the imaginings of social reform. Thus the 'social film', which by independence had largely supplanted the 'mythological' and 'stunt' films of the early years, articulated both the 'need to maintain indigenous realities against the fascination for Western cultural behaviour' *as well as* a 'critique of Indian society...setting up an agenda for change' (Vasudevan 2000a:133).

The Media in Postcolonial India

The social conditions within which cinema in the subcontinent operated were to change dramatically once more with the end of colonial rule and the August 1947 partition of British India into two independent nation-states, the Indian Union and Pakistan. Although the cinema had enjoyed an enormous boom in popularity and in production capacity during the last years of the Raj, the division of the subcontinent had powerful effects upon the film industry. In Punjab, partition brought film production to a halt as

personnel and capital relocated to Bombay, where the Punjabis have subsequently become an ever more significant presence in the film industry (Dwyer and Patel 2002:82). In Bengal, partition cost the Calcutta industry a major part of its audience as Eastern Bengal became part of Pakistan, and many leading figures from the industry also made the move to Bombay.²⁴ Although South Indian cinema developed steadily in the years after independence, the Bombay Hindi-language cinema was the undisputed film capital of South Asia in the early decades after independence. This period has therefore been referred to as the ‘Golden Age of Hindi Cinema’ (Kasbekar 1996:402, Gokulsing and Dissanyake 1998:16, Thoraval 2000:49-51).

A Suitable Cinema

Once the anti-colonial movement had achieved its primary goal of displacing the colonial power and gaining control of the state, its next objective became the foundation of a legitimate (or at least legitimising) nation-state. The development of an ‘official’ nationalism for the new India sought to connect nation to state, and this required the unification of the previously split identities of the public-political and the private-cultural. This was a reversal of the earlier cultural logic of the nationalist movement, which denied the state any significant authority over the cultural domain. However, the mobilisation of a unifying national identity on cultural grounds was no simple matter since India, like many former colonial states, was bequeathed a territorial and institutional form which had been constructed by foreign interests, with little reference to the topography of cultural practice. The debilitating classifications of the native

²⁴ Such as former New Theatres directors, Nitin Bose and Bimal Roy, editor/director Hrishikesh Mukherjee and scenarist/writer/director Kidar Nath Sharma. Bengali playwright and film director Ritwik Ghatak was also active as a scenarist and writer in Bombay in the 1950s. See Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha (1999).

populations engendered and fostered by colonial rule had already made the question of representation a critical one.²⁵ Accordingly, the rhetorical construction of a more positive 'national image' had been integral in building the momentum of the anti-colonial movement.

In the aftermath of independence, the only available institutions of state with which to engage in nation-building, initially at least, were those moulded by the former colonial power. Thus there continued to be a bifurcation between the 'authoritative' discourse of the nation-state and the articulations of popular nationalism. The politicisation of culture, as a site of resistance, had already been well advanced during the rise of the anti-colonial movement. This previous independence of the cultural sphere from the state could not be fully negated by the removal of the colonial presence. In the early tumultuous years of postcolonial India, there was some cause to believe that the consensus forged by resistance to foreign rule might unravel entirely. Despite the carving out of Pakistan, the Indian Union continued to encompass a number of linguistic, religious and/or ethnic imaginaries.²⁶ At the same time, the new state had only a tenuous hold upon the cultural legitimacy seen as essential for underpinning a national imaginary, and an indigenous government could not hide behind a mask of cultural impartiality as the British had done. For postcolonial India, as a nascent nation-state, the logic of cultural nationalism was at once requisite yet also threatening to its success, since the nationalist 'invention of tradition' designed to wed nation and state

²⁵ Probably the best known example of colonialist slander is Katherine Mayo's notorious *Mother India*, originally published in 1927 (see Sinha 2000).

²⁶ Even after the accession of Muslim majority provinces in the North-East and North-West to Pakistan, India's Muslims still represent 10% of the population. There are also millions of Indians who are adherents of Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Jainism and Buddhism. Millions more have been classified as Adivasi, followers of pre-Aryan indigenous religious practices. The Indian constitution recognises 16 official languages from over 800 recognised languages and dialects. The ethnic make-up of India is characterised by both the mixture and the segregation of the diverse Aryan and Dravidian peoples who have inhabited the subcontinent since Vedic times, along with numerous other groups of Tibeto-Burmese, Turkic and Persian origin.

through a standardisation of cultures was likely to be a contested, even divisive, process.

By the time independence had been achieved, India was already host to a viable film industry popular with its domestic audiences, possessing much of the infrastructure which national cinema proponents identify as highly suitable, if not essential, for the construction of a national (id)entity in the modern world. In this sense, the Indian experience was extraordinary compared to other postcolonial states which were to emerge elsewhere over the next two decades. However, according to Chakravarty, while the creation of an appropriately 'national' culture was a key aim of the new leadership, the commercial Indian film was seen as a crass and hybrid cultural form and deemed unsuitable for the national-building project envisaged through the government's didactic and developmentalist project of modernity (1993:55-79).²⁷

During the 1950s and 1960s the mass media in the decolonising world was understood largely in terms of a developmental logic. The project of constructing state hegemony over the nation encouraged moves towards the institutionalisation of the economy and, to a certain extent, over cultural production. The imperatives of modernist thinking directed Indian economic planning towards large-scale industrialisation, and the influence upon cultural production at a policy level was an inclination towards the promotion of modernist realism. Barnouw and Krishnaswamy recount how the government film unit, Information Films of India, which had been actively disparaged by the anti-colonial movement as a propaganda machine, was reconstituted in 1947 as

²⁷ The Indian government formed national academies in 1953/4 for dance, drama and music (Sangeet Natak Akademi) letters (Sahitya Akademi) and art and architecture (Lalit Kala Akademi), whilst increasing its powers of censorship over the film industry, placing a ban on the construction of new film theatres and at one stage, limiting the import of raw film stock. Taxation of the industry also increased dramatically in the 1950s. See Chakravarty (1993:63) and Armes (1987:118).

the Films Division, enjoying what was effectively a monopoly over documentary production. Exhibitors were required to show its films at screenings of commercial features (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 138-139). This use of the documentary medium was an indication of how:

nationalist reconstruction agendas adopt[ed] economic programmes based on the principles of scientific rationalism and its aesthetic counterpart of realism...Between 1945 and 1975, which Aijaz Ahmad identifies as the 'high period of decolonization', indigenous realism played a crucial role in nation-building. In the words of Gyanendra Pandey, realism – or rather, various national realisms – were important in writing up the 'biography of the emerging nation-state' and creating the *authoritative* self-image of the nation (Rajadhyaksha 2000a:31-32). (*my emphasis*)

While consciously excluded from the 'authoritative' discourse of nationhood, the fantasies produced by the commercial film industry articulated, just as consciously, nationalist themes within the super-genre of the social film. This no doubt reflected the zeitgeist of independence, and content of this kind may also have helped to avoid further government interference in the industry. However, the discursive mobilisation of the nation was also a logical thematic parallel to the all-India public sphere that the cinema (as an institution of modern popular culture serving that market) had been in the process of forming for three decades. Thus, while the cinema was hampered in some ways by the lack of government recognition, it was nonetheless able to continue in its role as a popular institution mediating the project of Indian modernity in a space at least partially independent of the state. Rajadhyaksha argues that this gave the cinema greater legitimacy as a national medium amongst the general population (2003:35).

It would seem logical that the national status of the Hindi cinema would have been further enhanced by the government's choice of Hindi as the national language of India in 1950. However, resistance to the promotion of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking areas,

particularly in the South, and the administrative reorganisation of state governance along linguistic lines in 1956 also paralleled the steady growth of the non-Hindi, commonly called 'regional', cinemas of India.

Two developments marked the postwar decade in the Madras film world. They seemed to move in opposite directions. One was the rise of southern linguistic nationalism. It was anti-Hindi, anti-north, and extolled the glories of the ancient Dravidian languages and culture. It made Hindi a symbol of northern domination to be feared and averted. It became a highly emotional force in politics. It also became strong in the southern film world and made extraordinarily successful use of film in its drive for power. The other phenomenon, ironically, was the successful entry of Madras into production in Hindi and its triumphant invasion of northern Hindi markets (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:172-173).

Whilst studios in Madras initially provided the infrastructure for the majority of South Indian film production, the linguistic reorganisation of the Indian states resulted in state governments amenable to local language production. The Telugu cinema (in Andhra Pradesh), Malayalam cinema (in Kerala) and Kannada cinema (in Karnataka) developed into distinct industries. Given that linguistic identities provided a focal point for state politics in South India, close ties developed between the cinema and politics in South India. Movie stars have been chief ministers in the state governments of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, while the Malayalam cinema has enjoyed a close relationship with the communist and left-front governments which have dominated politics in Kerala (Dickey 1993, Srinivas 2000b, Pandian 2000 et al). Although the Hindi cinema has been predominant across North India throughout the postcolonial period, the Bengali film industry in Calcutta has continued to operate, albeit within a more limited local market, and with less success in the all-India market than it enjoyed prior to independence.

By the 1960s, the government of India had become committed to the development of a 'quality' Indian cinema. Elsewhere in the world (but particularly in Europe), a blend of

social-realism and literary *auterist* film-making had become the *cause celebre* of non-Hollywood cinema. Thus ‘art’ cinema became the dominant motif at international film festivals throughout the 1950s. The success of Bengali cineaste Satyajit Ray at Cannes and Venice in 1956 and 1957 encouraged the Indian government to foster the production of art films as an alternative to the products of India’s commercial film industries.²⁸ The Film Finance Corporation (FFC) was established in 1960 to provide finance for the production of quality films. The Film Institute of India was established in Pune in 1961 to develop the talent which might produce such films, and subsequently the National Film Archive of India was created and co-located in Pune in 1964 to preserve India’s film heritage. Together these institutions were intended to provide the means for a ‘New Indian Cinema’. This cinema, sometimes dubbed the ‘parallel’ cinema, was born out of a ‘realist critique of the melodramatic and distractive form of Indian popular cinema, of its excessively pitched histrionic narratives punctuated by ‘untidily’ placed musical and comedy sequences’ and ‘was very much part of a cultural-political project to develop a realist and rationalist disposition in the citizen-spectator’ (Vasudevan 2000a:123).

The obligations of the FFC were to ‘develop the film in India into an effective instrument for the promotion of national culture, education and healthy entertainment...granting loans for modest but off-beat films of talented and promising people in the field’ (Willemen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:162). By the end of the 1960s, the success of low-budget FFC-financed art films directed by Mrinal Sen (*Bhuvan Shome*, 1969) and Mani Kaul (*Uski Roti*, 1969) seemed to offer some promise for the art film movement. However, the lack of an alternative infrastructure for the distribution of

²⁸ Ray’s debut and the first of the films in his Apu trilogy, *Pather Panchali* (1955) won the Best Human Document prize at Cannes in 1956. The sequel *Aparajito* (1956) was awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice festival of 1957. For more on the international reception of the Apu Triology, See Ray (1997).

FFC-financed films, and the continued preference for popular films amongst audiences, and hence exhibitors, meant that the vast majority of these art films received relatively little exposure beyond film festivals. Although Satyajit Ray, on at least one occasion, publicly distanced himself from the 'New Indian Cinema' (Ray 1976:81-99), he was nonetheless consistently presented as its figurehead and as its inspiration (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980, Bannerjee 1982). This had important ramifications due to the nature of Ray's own work, because his disavowal of the 'illogical' structures of the Indian commercial film was also accompanied by a critique of the cultural hybridity of the all-India movie. To Ray, the gaudy pan-Indian address of the popular film constituted a failure to represent the realities of life in any part of the country. Thus the vast majority of his works were specifically located in his native Bengal, paying meticulous attention to the details of the period in which they were set. Accordingly, the influence of a realist aesthetic created a certain paradox, in that it prompted the Indian government to pursue a national film funding policy which favoured regionally specific films, whose opportunities in the all-India market were necessarily limited.

Despite the government endorsement of 'quality' films, and the theoretical dominance of realism in official and academic discourses on cinema, Indian audiences continued to demonstrate a preference for movies delivering fantasy and spectacle. The hybrid culture of the Indian *masala* film, a decidedly unrealistic but undeniably modern form, remained overwhelmingly India's most popular mode of mass culture. During the 1970s the budget and scale of popular films increased with the advent of 'multi-starrers', such as the hugely successful *Sholay* (1975) (Dissanayake and Shahai 1992, Hariharan 1999, Kazmi 1999b:99-115). There were also marked changes in the themes of commercial films. If the films of the 1950s had been characterised by the sympathetic portrayal of

the ‘common man’ in rapidly urbanising India, and the 1960s by the ‘romantic’ star, then the 1970s and 1980s were dominated by the rise of the vigilante genre. Many of the most popular films of the period focused on social injustice, and endorsed the violent rebellion of macho heroes from the disenfranchised classes against a corrupt establishment. Such themes were distinct from the optimism of the 1950s cinema, and this period of the commercial cinema, strongly associated with the major star of Bombay cinema in those two decades, Amitabh Bachchan, has been classified by film critics as the time of ‘the angry young man’ (Chakravarty 1993:228-233, Kasbekar 1996:406, Prasad 1998:138-159, Kazmi 1999a, Mazumdar 2000).

The social and political context in which such films flourished was marked by a breakdown in the credibility of the state. In an attempt to crack down on fiscal corruption and labour unrest, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in 1975 and suspended the democratic process in India. The draconian measures which were introduced to accelerate Indian ‘modernisation’ finally brought an end to the contradictory politics of compromise pursued by Jawaharlal Nehru in the first two decades of independence. State media institutions such as the Films Division and All-India Radio (AIR) became even more strictly regulated proponents of the official line. The same was true of broadcast television, which had been introduced in India in 1959 as another government media monopoly, Doordarshan.²⁹

The commercial film industry, meanwhile, continued to be a highly fragmented association of independent producers, distributors and exhibitors financed in a large part

²⁹ After its limited implementation in 1959, there was a considerable delay in further developing television infrastructure in India. The size of India also meant that television, although controlled centrally, had to be implemented initially at a regional level in different parts of the country. The ‘National Network’ was not launched until 1982. For more on the development of Doordarshan, and the role of the state in broadcasting, see Ohm (1999).

by the same ‘black money’ interests being targeted by the government.³⁰ The lack of access to any institutional finance and the promise of quick profits, and the laundering effects of financing even a loss-making picture, continued to encourage the independent financing of movies. It also contributed to a commercial film-making culture where the vertical integration which has characterised Hollywood production was notably absent, with scores of independent producers, distributors and exhibitors competing within a saturated market. This in turn has inevitably resulted in the long-term over-production of films in the Indian market.

During Indira’s ‘Emergency’, it was unwise to criticise the government directly. Nonetheless, the angry, nihilistic, anti-establishment films of the period struck a chord with the public, and dominated the box office (Kazmi 1999a:138). After the reinstatement of democracy in 1977, the popularity of such films continued well into the 1980s. In contrast, the government-sponsored project of ‘quality’ cinema had gone into serious decline. The remit of the Film Finance Corporation was expanded to include a monopoly over the importation of foreign movies, and it was subsequently renamed the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC). Despite this more overt operating title, the role of the NFDC as a producer of films has decreased in significance since the 1980s (Willemen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:162).

Several major shifts in the ecology of Indian cinema took place during the 1980s. The ‘golden age’ of Hindi cinema had passed and the production levels of the Telugu and Tamil commercial film industries in South India began to match, and then overtake,

³⁰ The term ‘black money’, which is commonly used in India, is employed to indicate funds that operate within the unregulated economy. These might be illegal funds that arise from criminal activities, or funds that are ‘black’ because they consist of capital, typically cash, that has avoided taxation. Black money cash payments have long been a major part of the Indian film economy (see Appadurai 2000:633).

those of the Bombay industry (Willemen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:30-31). Perhaps more significant than this, however, was the gradual, but steady, growth of television ownership amongst the middle classes coupled with the rapid spread of the VCR. This was a combination which damaged domestic and export revenues for film exhibition as those able to afford recorders took to watching movies at home and a large scale piracy industry was quick to emerge (see Friedberg 2000). A contrasting outcome of the spread of playback technologies was the mass availability of cheap cassettes of film songs which cemented the marriage between the film industry and modern Indian popular music, becoming a major source of film-derived revenue (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996:83).

The New World Order

The demise of the Soviet Union and the economic and political realignments which followed it during the 1990s had a sizeable impact on the Indian economy, and therefore upon the nature of the media in India. After 1991 developments in digital media technologies were accompanied by the deregulation of certain parts of the Indian economy. One of the most visible outcomes was the end of state monopoly on television broadcast and a dramatic increase in television ownership. Cable and satellite technologies facilitated the arrival of media multinationals as well as a proliferation of private Indian concerns. Cable television has since become relatively widespread amongst the more affluent sections of urban India (see Mishra 1999, McMillin 2001:47). The migration of Western media content into India since 1991, the ‘invasion from the skies’, has provided a focal point for the discussion of mediated cultural exchange, and thus of globalisation and social change (Chacko 2002, Fernandes 2000a,

McMillin 2001, 2002, Scrase 2002). Rupert Murdoch's STAR TV entered the Indian market with a staple of US re-runs but subsequently moved into local production after India-based competitor ZEE TV eclipsed it in the Indian market with Hindi language programming drawing heavily on Hindi films and film-orientated content such as song sequences and star gossip (Ohm 1999:92, Chacko 2002:113, McMillin 2001:56).³¹

Thus a paradoxical outcome of the Western media invasion was a domestic media production boom providing content for the new medium, since the sudden availability of foreign content arising from deregulation has been offset by audience demand for locally produced content. In addition, the popular demand for regional-language broadcasting has led to the growth of channels such as Sun TV (Tamil), Udaya TV (Kannada) and Eenadu (Telugu). This has prompted ZEE and even Doordarshan into developing more regional production and broadcast (McMillin 2001). The liberalisation of television from a state monopoly to a commercial environment has therefore, in a shorter space of time, replicated patterns in the development of regional audiences for the cinema. On a more modest scale, a large number of independent cable operators have supplied urban neighbourhoods with low-cost access to a vast range of content ranging from intensely localised events to a large number of foreign channels (Mishra 1999).

The proliferation of television has not as yet undermined the domestic market for Indian cinema, although it is fast changing the nature of that market. The importance of cinema seems likely to continue because it will be a long time before television ownership becomes ubiquitous outside of the middle class (indeed, this might never happen). The cinema has also long enjoyed a central place in Indian visual culture, and therefore

³¹ This claim of early competition between STAR and ZEE must be clarified as *competing streams of content* since STAR initially owned a 49% stake in ZEE TV. Bombay industrialist Subhash Chandra acquired complete control in 1994.

much of the content of commercial television during the 1990s continued to be heavily derived from the cinema (Pendakur and Subramanyam:1996:68-69). The growth in small screen capacity has also presented movie producers with a new opportunity to re-market back catalogues and provided a platform for extending the use of picturised film-songs and star appearances to promote films. However, it has also become clear that the rise of a large television market for movies has affected the relations between producers, distributors and exhibitors, and this is now causing some friction between these sectors.³²

The nature of cinema exhibition itself is changing to suit the new economic climate. The spread of multiplex cinemas in India's main cities, offering screenings in more exclusive surroundings, has had some success in facilitating a revival of the middle-class audiences which had deserted the cinema halls during the 1980s (Inden 1999). Budgets for the major Indian features have increased, and the technical sophistication of Indian films has shown an overall improvement as production facilities have been modernised. It can be argued that, taken in conjunction, the emergence of playback, private broadcasters and multiplex theatres (which all favour the exploitation of 'niche' markets) has undermined the one-size-fits-all economics under which the 'all-India' movie evolved. Accordingly, there has also been a diversification in the range of styles and genres being tackled by Indian cinema since the mid-1990s. This can be seen as a positive indication of a more sophisticated media environment, but could also be diagnosed negatively as the beginning of more entrenched narrowcast taste cultures separating the haves and have-nots in the new Indian economy.

³² In April 2003 producers associations in Mumbai withheld film releases in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh/Delhi and Punjab in order to negotiate a 9 month delay on the sale by distributors of broadcast rights, which they argued were undermining their share of cinema profits (see Gupta 2003).

In the production sector, the arrival of large, integrated media combines from abroad (such as Sony) has prompted a review of the anarchic conditions of mass independent production which have existed since the 1940s. Although these new players have only been partially successful in expanding the market for dubbed US imports in theatres, media multinationals such as Fox have now begun to provide some finance for local production.³³ This no doubt builds upon the lessons which have been learnt in the broadcast environment. In response to these developments, major Indian producers (such as Yash Raj films) are making efforts to co-ordinate their activities as production houses with the marketing and distribution of their films. The liberalisation of government controls on transnational media trade, has seen more emphasis placed upon expanding export opportunities through the ‘internationalisation’ of the industry. While leading industry figures, such as producer-director Yash Chopra and megastar Amitabh Bachchan, have been upbeat about new opportunities for Indian cinema in the global market, the industry overall remains fractured and dependent on uncertain forms of finance. The majority of Indian movies continue to barely break even at the box office and many do not recoup their costs. Fewer films are reaching the ‘big C’ mark of earning a crore of rupees in each domestic distribution territory and an even smaller number are able to gain access to foreign markets. Those that do, however, are seeing a dramatic increase in foreign earnings. The importance of foreign currency reserves for the gradual shift from socialist to capitalist principles in India’s ‘organised sector’ may serve to explain why the Government of India finally gave up its quest for a more ‘suitable’ national cinema and granted ‘official industry status’ to the commercial film industry in 2001.³⁴

³³ The first feature to receive backing from Fox was *Ek Hasina Thi* (2003, Dir. Sriram Raghavan).

³⁴ The term ‘organised sector’ is typically used to indicate the proportion of the Indian economy which has been regulated by the Indian government and which has served as a source of tax revenue. In postcolonial India, the organised sector includes private employers but has always been dominated by

At the time of writing in 2005 the Bombay Hindi-language industry continues to lead in the all-India market although the top rank of Tamil films from Madras are also competitive at this level. In South India, the Telugu and Malayalam cinemas enjoy a prominent position in their own local markets, although the Kannada cinema faces stiffer competition from Hindi films. There is little alternative production to Hindi cinema in North India. The market for commercial Bengali films remains largely confined to Bengal, although successive film *auteurs* have made Calcutta the home of India's art-house cinema. Nonetheless, aside from the major centres of industrial production, small numbers of lower budget films are also made regularly in all parts of India in as many as fifteen languages. All the Indian cinemas combine cater to an annual attendance of some 3 billion visits in various sectors of the theatrical exhibition market (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 1999). The television audience for films is difficult to estimate, given the proliferation of cable 'pirates', but there were 30 million official cable connections by 2000 in addition to the footprint of Doordarshan which claims to reach 87.2 percent of India (McMillin 2001:46-47).

government employment. The organised sector owes much of its structure to socialist economic policies adopted as part of the 'mixed economy' model originating in the Nehruvian period. However, the organised sector has always been *comparatively* small. According to Dutt and Rao, the organised sector represents only 10% of employment in India (Dutt and Rao 2000:27). Much of the vast 'disorganised sector' falls within the purview of informal economic activity and the 'black money' economy which operates under almost unrestricted capitalist principles. The granting of 'official status' to the film industries means that producers may now be able to obtain certain forms of institutional finance from state-owned and private banks in the organised sector rather than from the private moneylenders on which they have relied in the past. At present, however, the uncertain economics of the cinema seems to be forestalling a major shift in methods of film financing.

Fig 3. Administrative map of India 2003 showing main centres of film production (Authors Illustration).

The Literature on Indian Cinema

Since its inception the cinema has received substantial discussion in the Indian press. Trade journals were established in the late colonial period, and a small number of books on the Indian film scene were published in the 1930s (for example, Rangaswami 1933, Fazalbhoy 1939). Although omitted from the Falcon Press *National Cinemas* series discussed in Chapter One (see p 25), a chapter on the Indian film industry was included in Penguin Books *Film Review* in 1947 and a monograph entitled *The Indian Film* was

published by the Motion Picture Society of India in 1950 (Shah 1950). In 1956 the Film Federation of India published a collection of writings on the Indian cinema as *Indian Talkie 1931-1956*. The first comprehensive history of Indian film production was the 1963 edition of Barnouw and Krishnaswamy's *Indian Film*. On a popular level there have been numerous periodicals providing a focus upon the cinema. Probably the best known publication is the English-language *Filmfare* which was launched in March 1952 and is still in publication today. *Filmfare* combines features on stars along with a production industry focus in a glossy magazine format. More frivolous star vehicles in wide circulation are monthlies such as *CineBlitz* and *Stardust* (See Dwyer 2000a:168-201). There are also a large number of Indian-language film publications and fanzines circulating in most Indian languages (Agrawal 1984:182, Srinivas 2000a). Most of the 'serious' writing on Indian cinema prior to the 1990s came from the perspective of the film society movement, the Directorate of Film Festivals and the NFDC (for example Dasgupta 1981, Bannerjee 1982). The journal *Cinemaya*, edited by Aruna Vasudev, has a similar viewpoint, focusing on Asian cinema with an emphasis on 'quality' films. Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, the popular Indian cinema has received an unprecedented degree of attention from scholars in a range of academic disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology and media and cultural studies.

The Search for Explanation in Indian Film Studies

There is no doubt that the popular film has exerted a profound influence over the aesthetic sensibilities of modern India. As the predominant form of mass visual culture, the style and form of the Indian movie is either reproduced or closely referenced in other media forms such as television, magazines, pop music and advertising. The film

world has also intruded into a wide range of other cultural rituals and practices, such as fashion, portrait photography and contemporary dance. It has exerted its influence upon numerous aspects of the modern Indian wedding (Sengupta 1999, McMillin 2003) and upon the rhetoric of Indian politics (Appadurai 1996:36). If the range of social practices which have been subject to its influence are taken into account as well as practices of direct media consumption, then the cultural footprint of the commercial cinema is undeniably large. Dwyer and Patel (2002) note that the popular Indian film has represented the major source of modern visual culture for almost a century, and it is this ubiquity that explains the various attempts which have been made both to describe the phenomenon of the Indian cinema itself and to correlate its discursive agency with the nature of Indian social life. It is these discursive processes of description and explanation, that I will focus upon for the remainder of this chapter.

Chatterjee's explanation of Indian nationalism is based upon a division articulated between the domains of the 'material' and 'spiritual', the 'public and the 'private' (1993). Similarly, attempts to provide explanations for both the textual form and the social significance of the Indian cinema have been structured by a binary opposition of 'modernity' and 'tradition'. As Madhava Prasad has noted:

The binary modernity/tradition, whether it is employed to indicate conflict or complementarity, amounts to an explanation, 'a conceptual or belief system' which regulates thinking about the modern Indian social formation....Thus the disavowal of modernity on an ideological plane has co-existed with the contrary drive to modernisation (Prasad 1998:7-8)

This binary relationship between modernity and tradition is not one of simple opposition, recalling Hobsbawm's argument that modernity validates itself through the

production or ‘invention’ of traditions.³⁵ Nonetheless, it is useful to employ the notions of the traditional and the modern in making a broad distinction between two major approaches used to explain the phenomena of the cinema in India. The ‘modernist’ approach is concerned primarily with the relationship of the medium to both the popular audience and the state itself, seeking to explain these relationships in reference to the demographic structure of Indian society and the political tensions at play within it. The ‘traditionalist’ approach is more concerned with the ‘Indian-ness’ of the popular film and seeks to find an explanation for its popularity within the context of India’s cultural traditions.

Modernist Approaches

The long-running contest between the realist aesthetic of the state media and the commercial populism of the film industry highlighted the off-set relationship between the spheres of official nationalism and popular nationalist cultural discourse in postcolonial India. This contest has prompted Madhava Prasad to assay extensively the idea of an Indian public sphere, and claim that the postcolonial Indian state and the cinema have worked both in contest and in parallel to attempt, *but not quite achieve*, cultural hegemony over a diverse national body (1998). Prasad portrays Indian nationhood as an incomplete ideological project, stating that ‘What the allegorical dimension of texts represents is the continuing necessity to conceive the state form which will serve as the ground for cultural signification’ (1998:9). Prasad believes that the socio-political formation of the postcolonial Indian state, and its insistence upon a

³⁵ There is also plentiful evidence of how the assertion of the ‘traditional’ in today’s world is increasingly dependent upon both the technologies and the political logic of the ‘modern’ world (e.g. the growth of ‘fundamentalist’ cults in Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism). The invocation of the traditional and the modern should not be seen, therefore, as resting upon their exclusivity, but rather as a discursive juxtaposition employed for both understanding and intervening in social change.

clear separation between the traditional and the modern had a structuring effect upon the evolution of the textual structure of the Indian 'social' film where this inconsistency was first foregrounded, and then annulled, by an 'ideology of formal subsumption' (1998:6-14). The 'ideological' mission' of this textual form 'was to produce a coherent subject position in a situation where the democratic revolution had been broached and then indefinitely suspended' (Prasad 1998:117). The modernist discourse of the 'traditional' was thus employed in order to formally negate, but subliminally legitimate, the project of the modern, and ensure an elite hegemony over progress. This textual form began to unravel during the crisis of the 1970s as state-sponsored realism and the suppressed anti-state rhetoric of the 'angry young man' collided in a 'moment of disaggregation'. Following this overt rupture between elite discourse and the national-popular, it has become the symbolic role of the middle-class to 'bear the burden of national identity' and to negotiate ideological reform (Prasad 1998:163). Prasad is dismissive of the reflective claims of national cinema, asserting that Indian films must be understood in relation to the contradictions of the Indian state, and are 'works of ideology, not mirrors of reality' (1998:237).

Ashish Rajadhyaksha makes a case for positioning the cinema as a mediating institution between population and state, since understanding the cinema in this way permits a critical focus on the political discourses at play in movies (2003:34-36). Elsewhere Rajadhyaksha parallels the search for a modern spectator in the cinema with the achievement of a normative model of Indian citizenship (2000b). For Ashis Nandy, the popular cinema represents the only forum in which the idea of the nation as an ideological whole interacts with the 'slum's eye view of politics' in urban India (1999:1-19). In this conception the cinema represents the fantasy existence of those

constrained within, or immediately threatened by, the material base of poverty and exclusion from sanctioned social space. The popular cinema therefore is an ideological form which inversely reveals the political imperatives of the struggling lower middle-class, rather than that of the state.³⁶ This analysis positions the commercial cinema as a manifestation of a fourth estate which addresses those existing beyond the normative domain of the literate upper middle-class citizen-spectator, articulating the subjectivity of what Partha Chatterjee has termed ‘political society’ as opposed to ‘civil society’ (1998). However, this does not necessarily indicate that the industry has always functioned as either a coherent or a progressive political force. Kazmi opposes this notion of a grass-roots subjectivity and describes Indian conventional cinema as a propaganda vehicle which reiterates myths favourable to dominant groups at the expense of subordinate voices, that is the lower social classes and castes and the religious minorities (1999b).³⁷

Ravi Vasudevan claims that the *masala* film of the 1950s was able to address simultaneously the different forms of spectatorial sophistication and subjectivity present in different social classes in India (2000a:133). Nonetheless, Vasudevan also recognises that the inclusive tendency which this implies is contradicted in the form of Hindi cinema by the consistent exposition of an ideological hegemony which ‘positions other national/ethnic/socio-religious identities in stereotypical ways under an overarching north Indian, majoritarian Hindu identity’ (2000a:133). Malhotra and Alagh, focusing

³⁶ The translation of orthodox class-based terminologies into the Indian socio-economic context has typically resulted in the definition of the ‘middle-class’ becoming rather elastic, since it often indicates a broad spectrum existing between an impoverished peasantry (the majority of the population) and the super-rich elite (a numerically tiny group). As such the Indian ‘middle-class’ which has received so much interest in recent years from commentators on India’s potential for consumerism ranges in practice from families whose economic conditions are those of perilous subsistence to a far smaller sub-group with access to significant capital resources and a transnational lifestyle. The broad term ‘middle-class’ can only fitfully connect these differing social conditions. For a fuller discussion of the discursive creation of the Indian middle classes, see Fernandes (2000b).

³⁷ Shoesmith and Mecklai (2002) also see Hindi cinema as particularly antipathetic to India’s Muslims.

on post-1990 cinema, make a similar claim that Hindi films continue to ‘display a remarkably consistent pattern in producing a monolithic Indian identity that is Hindu, wealthy and patriarchal in nature’ (2004:19). For Ronald Inden, the commercial Indian cinema of the 1990s has addressed a desire by the Indian middle classes to ‘reclaim the cinema as a vehicle for representing themselves not only to themselves but to the nation and the world’ (1999:64). Inden sees evidence of this in the return of romantic films and the spread of new exhibition spaces designed to exclude the ‘street rowdies’ who monopolised the cinema during the reign of the vigilante movies of the 1970 and 1980s. The realist critique of the 1950s and 1960s (which was symbolised by Satyajit Ray and the parallel cinema) displayed a distaste for the vulgar pleasures of lumpen cinema audiences, proposing that the educated elite should have a monopoly over the discourse of modernity. In contrast the 1990s commercial film articulated the aspirations of a new ideological position within a more widely defined ‘middle class’ which desired a more populist interpretation of modernity configured by a growing literacy in transnational consumerism and a veneer of (mono)cultural affirmation. Thus this new configuration of the ‘middle class’, whilst still displaying a distaste for the mass audience itself, has been reconciled with the aesthetics of the popular film.

Traditionalist Approaches

As opposed to exploring Indian cinema through the discourses of normative citizenship and class conflicts, traditionalist approaches seek to explain both the form and popularity of Indian cinema as manifestations of indigenous meta-narratives. Binod Agrawal, for instance, emphasises the influence of traditional Indian dramatic forms, both folk and classical, over the narrative and visual style of the popular film (1984).

Agrawal claims that the popular film is able to engage India's literate *and* illiterate classes by drawing on the elements common to both classical and folk performance traditions. For Agrawal the treatise of the *Natyashastra* provides an explanation for both the narrative address and the social organisation of the Indian cinema (1984:189-190).³⁸ Sandria Freitag also identifies connections between the Indian cinema and the classical traditions of live performance, claiming that such a link is 'astonishingly obvious' (2001:46).

The two major narrative traditions of Hinduism, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, are seen by various commentators to function directly as governing structures for Indian film narratives (Booth 1995, Lal 1999, Lutze 1985, Mishra 1985, 2002), and by others to provide at least a significant component of the repertoire of Indian cinema (Chakravarty 1993, Gokulsing and Dissanyake 1998, Inden 1999). Gregory Booth observes that the epics: 'offer endless patterns that are taken full advantage of in the Hindi films. Together with other pan-Indian tales, they offer primary connective links between contemporary films and audiences on one side, and a centuries-old tradition of religious and social concepts, character types, and themes on the other' (1995:177). The epics do not exist only in their literal re-enactment as 'mythological' films. They often form a sub-text (implied by referential characterisation, narrative structure and iconography) even within films where the explicit focus is upon contemporary issues. Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayake describe such appropriations as not simply subconscious reiterations, but also active appropriations, since the 'central ideology

³⁸ The *Natyashastra* is an ancient Sanskrit treatise on the performing arts which is believed to have been written between 200 BC and 200 AD. The *Natyashastra* lays down a framework for both the aesthetic framework of the arts performance and the social organisation of the performance space. The *Natyashastra* is the source of *Rasa* theory which describes how the experience of aesthetic pleasure is constructed. According to Chakravarty (2004), *Rasa* theory conceptualises the appropriate combination in performance practice of the visual and aural stimulants required to stimulate different forms of emotive response in the spectator arising from eight primary emotions (love, humour, courage, disgust, anger, astonishment, terror, and pity) and 33 transitory emotions.

underpinning the two epics is of preserving the existing social order and its privileged values', and that, 'there is also a significant way in which the Indian popular cinema legitimises its existence through a reinscription of its values onto those of the two epics' (1998:18). Thus the socialist politics of the 1950s cinema and the capitalist politics of the 1990s cinema have both in turn sought legitimacy through their incorporation of references to the epics. Gregory Booth sees this incorporation as the central appeal of the popular cinema, claiming that: 'beneath the Westernized gloss of the commercial cinema, and despite its manipulative capitalist tendencies...it is the continued use of these traditional elements that explains the ongoing popularity of Hindi films' (1995:171).

Vijay Mishra emphasises the coercive power of Hindu cultural traditions functioning through the discourse of the Indian film. For Mishra, the Hindi popular film can be read as an ideological apparatus which establishes, transgresses and reaffirms the dharmik order (2002:4-8). Dharma can be described as the spiritual, natural and social law which perpetuates its own equilibrium. Patricia Uberoi also describes the Indian film as a textual exposition of the conflict between dharma and desire, claiming that Hindi cinema 'seeks to resolve in the course of the unfolding of the narrative, a tension between the 'desire' of the romantic protagonists for each other, and their '*dharma*' or social responsibility...between their exercise of free will and choice in the manner of marriage, and social (or cosmic) imperative' (2001:321).

Frietag (2001) describes a parallel between *darshan*, the reciprocal visual exchange between deity and devotee in Hindu religious practice, and theorisations of the cinematic gaze constructed by psychoanalytical theories of spectatorship in the West

during the 1970s. This allows for an emphasis on cultural continuity between traditional and modern cultural practices, and implies an inherent religiosity within Indian visual practice which positions movie viewing as a sublimated form of devotional practice concordant with India's *Bhakti* traditions.³⁹ Prasad, however, describes the *darshan*ic gaze more negatively: 'in the Hindi film the gaze is mobilised according to the rules of a hierarchical despotic public spectacle in which the political subjects witness and legitimize the splendour of the ruling class' (1998:78). Vasudevan recognises both devotional and authoritarian aspects of *darsana*, and analyses its function not simply as a theory of spectatorship but also in relation to the *darshan*ic relations between protagonists within the film frame. Nonetheless, Vasudevan counsels against a totalising notion of *darsana* as an explanation for visual communication, since this 'could lead to the conclusion that the cinema is merely the vehicle of an archaic way of inscribing power on the visual field. Instead of seeing the discourse of *darsana* framing cinematic narration, we need to think of *darsana* as being enframed and reconstructed by it' (2000a:140).

Balancing Traditionalist and Modernist Approaches

Although these two frameworks for explanation receive a different degree of emphasis across various sources, they are only rarely employed exclusively of each other. One approach is often used to support another, such as Agrawal's conflation of caste with class, or to qualify an argument and avoid over-simplification, as with Vasudevan's

³⁹ The *Bhakti* traditions originated in the South of India during the classical period and were later taken up with enthusiasm in the North of India during the mediaeval period. *Bhakti* is a term denoting a range of devotional practices that emphasise a direct relationship between devotee and god. *Bhakti* can therefore be contrasted with the more ritualised, brahmanical traditions. Bhakti traditions in the North were also influenced by Islamic traditions such as Sufism. As a form of religious practice favouring the layperson over the priesthood, Bhakti is an important element in the religious traditions of India, and has had great influence upon folk and oral traditions. For more on Bhakti, and a challenge to the generic use of the term by colonial scholars, see Sharma (1987).

discussion of darsana. Indeed, some explanations of the Indian cinema as a social indicator cannot be usefully located as either modernist or traditionalist approaches, and this is particularly true of the investigation of ideologies of gender in the Indian cinema. The explicit juxtaposition of tradition and modernity has long been central to female roles in Indian cinema. Thus, the bifurcation of the public-private which Chatterjee identifies as central to Indian nationalism is played out literally in Indian films upon the female body. The 'bad' woman has long been indicated by 'Westernised' habits (western dress, atheism, promiscuity, over-assertiveness) and the 'good' woman by Indian virtues (traditional dress, religiosity, chastity and servility). This is a textual opposition which seemingly remains central to the discourse of Indian nationalism, where the modern (equated with Westernisation) may be desirable in the public realm (that is for the male protagonist) but is dangerous and threatening in the private realm (where the female is required to maintain cultural authenticity by rejecting modernity). However, as Western-style capitalism has become an increasingly legitimate desire, the nature of femininity seen in Hindi films has gradually become more complex, as heroines are required to display a literacy in Western taste-cultures alongside an ultimate desire for a more conservative domesticity (see Vitali 2000, Jain and Rai 2002).

The Western origins of cinema technology have made the cinema a far from neutral technology for articulating the relationships between India and the West, and between the traditional and the modern. Nonetheless, Indian films have consistently championed an Indian cultural nationalism which is constructed most of all by its oppositional comparison to the occidental. Therefore, the processes of translation through which even the most obviously borrowed plot is adapted for Indian audiences by film makers

indicate something far more complicated than simple plagiarism. Even where the equation of modernity and Westernisation is put aside, modernist tools of explanation may not provide an overarching explanation for the form, popularity or influence of the Indian cinema. An orthodox materialist exposition inevitably foregrounds the political tensions existing between social classes, between majority and minority positions, and between citizens and the state. Yet an economically or politically-deterministic explanation of the cinema does not adequately explain the specific patterns of cultural knowledge which form a frame of reference for the consumption of popular culture in India. Neither the cinema hall nor the Indian state was built on a blank canvas; they were both required to garner popular support within an actually-existing social order.

The parallel challenge for traditionalist explanations is to account for the inherent modernity of the medium itself, and the obvious connection between Indian films, industrial capitalism and the wider global phenomena of the moving image.

Emphasising a continuity between ancient and modern cultural practice carries the risk of creating a vision of India as a static, religiously-ordained society where the social hierarchy is a product of an eternal philosophical consensus. This does not account convincingly for India's long history of external influences, indigenous modernity and social change, nor the inherent diversity of its cultural terrain. The argument, for example, that the sacred texts of Hinduism function as the governing structures for film narratives must be qualified by the recognition that Indian movies draw as much on international film genres and contemporary Indian social discourse as they do on their borrowings from the *Ramayana*. The influence of pan-Indian texts must also be juxtaposed with the more localised cultural traditions of various linguistic and ethnic communities which create the demand for regional cinema. It is worth remembering that

there are many different versions of the *Ramayana* to be found across India.

Traditionalist explanations also typically fail to explain the significant role played by Muslims, Parsees and others in the film industry. If the Indian film is understood to reflect the unique visual dimensions of Hindu religious practice, then the iconoclastic traditions of Islam would by the same argument preclude Muslim participation in the production and consumption of cinema. This is clearly not the case; Muslim stars and personnel are commonplace and Islamic influences in dialogue, music and dance have become integral components of the Indian film. An explanation centred on pan-Indian metanarratives also serves to downplay the cultural diversity of Hinduism itself. It is upon this basis that Ashis Nandy (2002) has argued that the search for cultural explanation in modern India should employ an emphasis on India's diverse folk traditions as opposed to either secularism or a monolithic classicism. Vasudevan also makes a distinction between 'culturalist' explanations of Indian cinema which emphasise either the classical traditions or the folk traditions (2000b:9). Interestingly, such a distinction echoes the elite-popular relationships which structure modernist approaches, suggesting that both avenues of interrogation (the modern and the traditional) entail an investigation of the balance between democracy and orthodoxy.

The disjointed omnibus structure of the *masala* film can be explained by the influence of ancient dramatic principles, but as Vasudevan observes, it also bears similarities to the 'cinema of attractions' constructed in Europe and America and exported to India in the early part of the twentieth century (2000a:151). Equally, the sacralisation of authority through the *darshan*ic gaze has equivalents in other traditions and cultures. The devotion of Indian audiences to film stars, on screen and in political office, can be seen as evidence of an indigenous pre-modern sensibility unable to distinguish between

the bearer of the sign and the sign itself. However, given the rise of American and Filipino movie stars to the highest political offices, and the devotional aspects of the mediated cults of celebrity found elsewhere, this sensibility also seems to be widespread outside of India. The early unofficial organisation of the Indian cinema hall on caste and gender lines identified by Agrawal can be seen to emanate from the treatise of the *Natyashastra*, but it can also be argued that similar racial, gender and/or class-based segregations have been a feature of the social organisation of cinema in other countries (1984).⁴⁰

The complex nature of the debates surrounding an explanation for the cinema in India arises from a recognition that for cinema-goers the consumption of films, and the derivation of meanings, is deeply connected to their broader social experience. This indicates a need to situate the Indian cinema within both socio-political structures and cultural practices, without seeing either as necessarily discrete or static configurations. Any serious attempt, therefore, to theorise Indian cinema as a ‘national’ object must achieve a balance between modernist and traditionalist explanations. Its inherent modernity must be juxtaposed with its traditional influences, its indigeneity with its foreign appropriations, its classical allusions with its populist vulgarity, its elite production base with its commercial dependence on mass patronage, and its specific registers with its universal themes.

⁴⁰ Agrawal’s explanation is, in any case, too simplistic to account for the organisation of the Indian cinema hall. For a more detailed account of the dynamics of film theatres as social space, see Srinivas (2000a).

Indian Cinema As A National Cinema

Madhava Prasad has noted that India makes a stronger economic case for the status of a national cinema than the weak state-sponsored cinemas of Europe, in terms of its domination of its domestic markets. However, Prasad also sees a problem of internal segmentation, observing that the Hindi film industry in Bombay can only be given a national banner at the expense of the regional industries in Hyderabad, Calcutta and elsewhere (1998:4). However, it could also be argued that the various Indian cinemas represent components of a national cinema, rather than discrete cinemas in themselves. The Bombay industry incorporates trappings from India's regional cultures within its pan-Indian fantasy, while the regional industries in turn localise the all-India aesthetic within their own films. Given that there is a degree of mobility between the different cinemas, in terms of stars, writers, directors and other personnel, as well as themes and visual style, there is clearly a significant dialogue between the various Indian cinemas which make the story of each intrinsic to the history of the others. This raises a number of questions for a national historiography: Can we conceive of a multilingual and composite 'imagined community' or is Madhava Prasad correct in stating that a national history entails an inevitable opposition between the Hindi cinema and other strands of film production? Does the identification of Indian cinema as a national cinema demand a singularity contradicted by the multiple strands of Indian film production?

Sumita Chakravarty argues that Indian films do provide a means for tracing the evolution of India's national identity. Offering the concept of 'imperso-nation', Chakravarty suggests that Indian films represent the nation, not realistically, but through caricature, and that they may therefore be deconstructed to reveal the real face of Indian

nationhood behind its popular ‘mask’ (1993:4-7). However the postcolonial history outlined by Chakravarty is constructed solely through Hindi films (albeit with the anomalous inclusion of Satyajit Ray). Dwyer also disregards the regional cinemas and asserts that Hindi cinema is India’s primary form of public culture, and that this is essentially a Punjabi culture (Dwyer and Patel 2002:9,19). Even Kazmi’s polemic against Indian commercial cinema pays scant attention to non-Hindi cinema (1999b). However, both the vibrancy of the regional cultural industries and the contemporary Indian political landscape seem to suggest that the dominance of the north-west over India’s national imaginary may be far from absolute.

In contrast to the Hindi-centric accounts of Chakravarty and Kazmi, Paul Willemen and Ashish Rajadhyaksha’s *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* presents a national history combining Bombay-based and ‘regional’ production as well as popular and ‘parallel’ films (Willemen and Rajadhyaksha 1999). What concerns Willemen, however, is that since the story of the cinema in India has been accompanied by a changing political landscape, various films and film makers compiled in the volume could be claimed by other national cinemas. Willemen concedes, therefore, that the history of Indian film cannot in fact be written without reference to ‘various bits and pieces of geography’ in the rest of South Asia and beyond (Willemen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:9).

It is to these extra-national aspects of the Indian cinema story that my attention will be turned in the next chapter of this study. Before I reset my focus upon the ‘various bits and pieces of geography’ worldwide to which Indian films have been dispersed, I would like to reiterate some of the key points of reference which have emerged in this chapter. It has become clear that the dynamics of the cinema in India challenge the Eurocentric

models of national cinema discussed in chapter one; not simply in relation to the existence of a multiple production base but also in terms of their relationship to the state and their commercial foundations. It is only possible to conclude that the general logic of national cinema studies is not particularly amenable to a postcolonial and multicultural polity such as India. The review of the distinctive national conditions given here has been essential, therefore, for adequately contextualising the social and historical conditions under which the Indian cinemas have developed. As the attention of this study is redirected towards the transnational dimensions of Indian cinema, it is perhaps most important to remain aware of the fact that Indian films cannot be seen as stable, straightforward and uncontested 'national' objects at their point of origin.

Chapter Three:

The Global Dispersal of Indian Films

I will begin this chapter by revisiting briefly the historical account of Indian cinema in order to incorporate the extra-national dimensions of this story which have commonly been neglected in various constructions of a national historiography. Having done so, the remainder of this chapter will be concerned primarily with identifying the varying social and cultural conditions within which Indian films operate outside of India. The emphasis here will necessarily be placed upon the discursive construction of Indian films as objects for transnational consumption and the complex nature of their reception by audiences located outside of India.

Global Markets for Indian Cinema

As early as the era of silent cinema, Indian films were in circulation across large distances, playing to culturally diverse audiences. Entrepreneurs quickly established a network of picture houses during the 1920s that spread from Lahore to Colombo and to Rangoon. In addition to the early establishment of a market across South Asia, Indian films also quickly found their way to various parts of Britain's empire where significant numbers of Indians had relocated as either businessmen, civil servants or as indentured labour. So by the time of the coming of sound in the 1930s, Indian films had been exported to British territories in Southeast Asia and Africa (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:168). Indian success in entering the global marketplace for movies at this early stage is quite remarkable given the absence of support from a flagging

colonial administration whose main interest in the cinema was enforcing political suppression upon local producers. Indian films also began to achieve some popularity with audiences in the Dutch East Indies and the Near East, before the advent of the Second World War brought a hiatus to some of these export relationships. However, since the Indian film industries enjoyed a domestic boom during the war, this downturn in film exports was not of great significance. Equally, after 1945 the rapid onset of Indian independence and partition in 1947 made issues at home within the subcontinent of more pressing concern to film makers than the pursuit of export markets.

The new political and economic context in which the Indian film industries operated in the first three decades after independence did not make the small scale export of film prints a particularly lucrative undertaking. Nonetheless, exports to Southeast Asia and the Levant were renewed after the war. The political ties forged with the Soviet Bloc after independence also opened up a market for Indian films there in the 1950s and 1960s where Raj Kapoor became a major star, particularly in the Central Asian republics. However, there was also a significant loss in revenue for the Indian film industry as the Indian government began to excise prohibitive taxation on the return of film prints from Pakistan (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy 1980:139). The Government of Pakistan later moved to ban the importation of Indian films, first in West Pakistan in 1952 and subsequently in largely Bengali East Pakistan in 1962 (Willemsen and Rajadhyaksha 1999:23-24).

In the 1970s Indian films were exported to Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Barbados, Burma, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand (Rajadhyaksha 2003:29). Two major new markets also developed for Indian cinema in

this decade, both of which were related to the growth of professional migration from South Asia. The quickest of these markets to grow was in Arabia, particularly in the Gulf States, where petrodollars brought an influx of Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans who patronised Indian films during their residency. This was also complemented by the popularity of Indian films with Arab audiences and the relative lack of film production to be found in the Middle East, where Egypt was the only significant producer of films. The other market to show major growth in the 1970s, and which is now the largest overseas territory, was the UK, where large numbers of South Asians settled initially in the 1960s, mainly from the divided regions of Punjab, Bengal and Kashmir as well as from some of the decolonising African states, such as Uganda, where local Indian communities were compelled to leave along with the colonialists. There were also a significant number of skilled workers and businessmen who migrated from the New Commonwealth to the former colonial centre at a time of relative economic prosperity. This was a population more characterised by long term settlement than those found in the Gulf States, and family-growth has subsequently made it the largest South Asian population outside of Asia.

The advent of the VCR at the end of the 1970s was a quantum shift in the relationship of the Indian cinema to audiences abroad. By the early 1980s the adoption of VCRs had revolutionised the nature of film exhibition. Anne Friedberg notes that the growth in use of this technology in Asia and Africa outstripped its growth in the so-called developed world (2000:444). There were a number of reasons for this, not least that strict government controls on film imports in a number of countries made consumers leap at a chance to circumvent them. Pakistani audiences, in their thirst for Indian films, were quick to take up the technology. The illegal circulation of Indian films on playback

formats became so common in Pakistan that the government ban on film imports was virtually meaningless.⁷ In Britain, the relatively small market for theatrical exhibition of Indian films was severely damaged by the advent of video as a much larger market for domestic viewing developed overnight (Dudrah 2002a:25). The Gulf States became a substantial video market as well as a transit point for films on the way to many other parts of the world. Indeed, the impact of the VCR on the distribution of Indian films, with its inherent portability, its domestic use and its ability where necessary to circumvent national and legal boundaries was the technological catalyst which heralded a new period of globalisation. The videocassette massively extended the global reach of Indian cinema. However, it also precipitated the crisis of film piracy that continues to grip the industry today. The easy access to mass duplication of films has meant that the vast majority of films consumed in homes around the world are unlicensed copies from which the producers gain no returns. For the interest of film scholars, such practices also made official export figures for film reels virtually meaningless as an indicator of the size and spread of what rapidly became a mixed-media audience. Empirical analysis of film exports in the Indian context has been, for all intents and purposes, a guessing game since the mid-1980s.

The arrival of playback technologies has ensured that the vast and diverse global audience for Indian films has been served by both official and unofficial networks of distribution for over two decades. However, whilst the advent of the videocassette prompted dire predictions of the end of cinema at the hands of media pirates during the 1980s, both strands of export activity have achieved substantial growth throughout the 1990s and into the present decade. Video, whether legally or illegally reproduced, has brought Indian films to many corners of the world where the exhibition of film prints

remains impracticable or economically unviable; whilst a new generation of South Asians brought up exposed to a diet of Indian films on videocassette in the West has rejuvenated theatrical exhibition in the last decade (Dudrah 2002a:25). Consequently Indian films on the big screen are more widely available and profitable now in a number of territories than they were prior to the video explosion. Indian films now consistently reach the top ten at the UK box office, with film exhibition operating alongside over 4,000 video outlets (Dudrah 2002a:22) The new digital formats which have begun to replace videocassettes, DVD and VCD, have further fuelled worldwide film piracy due to their even greater portability and the fact that their mass reproduction is not only quicker than the old video technology but also cheaper and of higher quality.

The digitisation of media technologies which occurred throughout the 1990s was contemporaneous with changes in the global economy which had important ramifications for India's national media environment. The deregulation of the Indian media market was accompanied by changes in foreign exchange priorities and import-export regulations which made foreign audiences a more accessible source of income. The demise of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent emergence of the 'New World Order' resulted in a decline in the small market for Indian films in Russia, but at the same time saw a steady increase in South Asian migration to North America, and the demand for Indian films there. This was accompanied by further growth in the well-established UK market. The relative strength of Western currencies has made the Euro-American market a major focus of export activity in the last decade (Dudrah 2002a, Rajadhyaksha 2003, Thussu 2000).

Prior to the 1990s overseas audiences were classified as one combined territory and rarely considered in the planning of a film (Rajadhyaksha 2003:29). Since then, however, a significant box office for Indian films in some Western markets, along with growing profits from ancillary products (such as music and broadcast rights) have made the export sector an important revenue stream for some parts of the Indian film industries. Export markets are now a major source of income according to Dudrah, and are: 'divided along 13 territories, 10 in Asia and the Middle East, and three which cover Britain and Europe, North America, and Australia' (2002a:28). Sporadic success in places like Israel, Japan and South America has also added to the new sense of internationalism within the industry. Private television networks promoting themselves with movie channels have also contributed to the growing availability of Indian films outside the country. Subhash Chandra's ZEE TV has actively pursued off-shore cable and satellite markets in the US, UK and Middle East as well as extending its footprint across South Asia (Sonwalkar 2001, Dudrah 2002b, Thussu 2000).

In an attempt to capitalise on growing press interest abroad, leading industry figures launched the International Indian Film Awards (IIFA) in 2000. The IIFA is an Oscars-style glamour event designed to promote Indian cinema on the international stage. The first event was held at London's Millennium Dome in 2000 and subsequently the IIFA have been held in Sun City, South Africa (2001), Genting Highlands, Malaysia (2002), Johannesburg, South Africa (2003), and Singapore (2004). Whilst the older Indian migrant populations in nations like Burma have little access to the Internet, the large scale migration of Indian IT professionals to the US has produced one of the most computer literate migrant communities in the world, and film producers, distributors and fans have been swift to make use of the new medium. Film magazines, such as

Filmfare, have put out electronic editions and major film projects and film stars are now commonly producing websites as part of their promotional strategy. India's internet portals themselves have, like television before them, made extensive use of film-related content to promote themselves with movie gossip and downloads of star images.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha has described recent export trends and the international rebranding of Indian commercial cinema as a process of 'Bollywoodization' (2003).

While the majority of popular discourse now seems to present Indian cinema and 'Bollywood' as effectively synonymous, Rajadhyaksha is at pains to make a distinction between the two: 'the cinema has been in existence as a national industry of sorts for the past fifty years...*Bollywood* has been around for only about a decade now' (2003:28).

Rajadhyaksha makes this distinction between Indian cinema and Bollywood for two major reasons, firstly because the cultural industry surrounding the 'Bollywood' brand extends far beyond the production and consumption of feature films, and secondly because the high-budget gloss and transnational themes of the major Bollywood films are far from representative of the majority of Indian film production.

Bollywood is *not* the Indian film industry, or at least not the film industry alone. Bollywood admittedly occupies a space analogous to the film industry, but might best be seen as a more diffuse cultural conglomeration involving a range of distribution and consumption activities from websites to music cassettes, from cable to radio. If so, the film industry itself – determined here solely in terms of its box office turnover and sales of print and music rights, all that actually comes back to the producer – can by definition constitute only a part, and perhaps an *alarmingly small* part of the overall culture industry that is currently being created and marketed... While Bollywood exists for, and prominently caters to, a diasporic audience of Indians... the Indian cinema – much as it would wish to tap this 'non-resident' audience – is only occasionally successful in doing so, and is in almost every instance able to do so only when it, so to say, *Bollywoodizes* itself, a transition that very few films in Hindi, and hardly any in other languages, are actually able to do (2003:27/29).

By Rajadhyaksha's definition, the Bollywood culture industry does not encompass India's small art, or 'parallel', cinema nor the regional-language cinemas which constitute the bulk of film production and consumption in the subcontinent. Even as a sector of Hindi cinema, the Bollywood brand seems to exclude the low-budget comedies and action films. Instead Bollywood is defined by the high-budget saccharine upper middle-class melodrama which represents a tongue-in-cheek repackaging of the masala movie within an affluent, nostalgic and highly exclusive view of Indian culture and society. These productions have also been increasingly saturated with product placements for global consumer fashions and multinational sponsors. So if Bollywood is not the Indian cinema per se, it might be described instead as the 'export lager' of the Indian cinema, since it is Bollywood productions which dominate India's film exports. The Bollywood Hindi-language film generates the vast majority of export returns and has become centrally positioned as the 'trademark' Indian film.

Hindi films are not however, the sum of India's film exports. Regional and art-house cinemas enjoy far smaller export audiences, but they are nonetheless distributed on a global scale. There is a small degree of international circulation for Indian art, or 'parallel', cinema drawn from across India. These films are distributed within the ambit of international art-house and festival cinema and 'multicultural' broadcast programming for niche audiences in the West and elsewhere. Film makers from Bengal and Kerala have been the most prolific and well-known contributors of such films.⁴¹

Tamil popular cinema also enjoys significant distribution overseas, particularly in

⁴¹ The most well known was Bengali cineaste Satyajit Ray who received a posthumous Oscar following his death in 1992. Other important directors include his contemporary Ritwik Ghatak and later Mrinal Sen (as part of the 'New Indian Cinema' movement of the 1970s). Other contemporary directors such as Buddhasev Dasgupta, Aparna Sen and Rituparno Ghosh continue to make films in the art film tradition which win national and international awards. Malayalam director Adoor Gopalkrishnan has also received significant international acclaim. For a list of international awards to Indian art cinema during the 1990s see Asian Film Connections (2005).

South-East Asia where there are large Tamil-speaking communities. In addition, Tamil cinema has been increasingly influential in the all-India market and has been very much involved with the evolution of the contemporary Bollywood aesthetic. As such, the top-end Tamil productions are also competitive within the Bollywood sphere. On the other hand, the majority of Tamil films and other regional-language cinemas, are restricted to relatively small-scale, often ‘unofficial’, distribution overseas.

During the last decade the rapid pace of technological change and India’s re-orientation within the global economy has had an observable impact on the relationship between the Indian film industries and their export markets. Nonetheless, as this brief ‘transnational’ history demonstrates, the global dispersal of Indian films has developed in parallel with their ‘national’ development. At present Indian cinema remains the dominant source of films throughout the subcontinent and Indian films remain popular in longstanding export markets in Africa, the Middle East and Central and South East Asia. The current export focus, however, is on more lucrative ‘Western’ markets. Despite the continuing major losses in revenue attributed to widespread international piracy, export success can no longer be considered marginal, either economically or symbolically, to the Indian film industries. As such, Indian cinema, or at least certain components of it, can make a powerful claim to be functioning as a global industry.

Identifying Transnational Audiences For Indian Films

Whilst the dispersal of media content can be discussed in terms of various extra-national markets, the use of nationally-centred economic terminologies which bifurcate

‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ audiences is insufficient to describe the full range of social and cultural contexts in which dispersed media artefacts operate. Seeing the circulation of cultural products primarily as material objects also constructs culture as a substance or commodity, as opposed to an adaptive set of discursive relations which inform social practice. It is necessary, therefore, to flesh out the cluster of global markets for Indian films described thus far with a discussion of the audiences who inhabit these transnational contexts of media consumption. For some viewers it might be a perceived cultural proximity which makes Indian films appealing, enacting discourses of affinity, cultural affirmation or imagined community. To others, perhaps it is the degree of cultural distance which makes Indian movies attractive, mobilizing an aesthetics of exoticism. The remainder of this chapter will identify three broad areas in which we might seek to locate transnational audiences for Indian films: in what has been called the ‘Indian diaspora’, in what has been called the ‘West’ and in a broader third area which exists beyond these two relatively privileged domains.

Before doing so, it is pertinent to recognise that, as a point of reference, film audiences in India itself are little-known. Although the nature of spectatorship can be seen as central to many of the social explanations of Indian cinema discussed in Chapter Two, comparatively little research has, in fact, been done on theatre audiences. Nonetheless, the ‘mass audience’ has been consistently blamed for all of the aesthetic ills of commercial cinema in film writing which, as Ashis Nandy has observed, has generally ‘paid little attention to the way the viewers, particularly, culturally and linguistically diverse viewers interpret Indian films outside urban, middle-class India’ (2003:79). The proletariat of the Indian cinema continues to be positioned as a vague entity which consumes a diet of escapist fare both voraciously and somewhat childishly. There are of

course some exceptions to this rule, notably S.V. Srinivas' work (2000a/b, 2003a/b), and also the theoretical reception work of Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2000b) and Arvind Rajagopal (1999, 2000). It is of some interest that following the rapid growth of the television medium in the 1990s, studies of television reception in a range of social settings have been comparatively quicker to get off the mark in India than research into cinema audiences has been (Monteiro 1999, Rao 1999, Chadha and Kavoori 2000, Malhotra and Rogers 2000, McMillin 2001, Juluri 2002, et al). For Lakshmi Srinivas, Indian cinema audiences are 'microcosms of Indian society' (2002:162), the meanings of which are inaccessible to 'those who do not know India' (2002:156).⁴² Nonetheless, even if significant resources were to be employed by those who claim to do so, the sheer scale and diversity of India's media audiences means that it will be many years before a comprehensive body of empirical or qualitative work will be available. The transnational audiences discussed here should not, therefore, be considered as implicit comparisons to any known, normative, national audience, but rather as sets of viewers whose social imaginations might employ different points of reference to discursively locate India, themselves and each other.

The Diasporic Audience

Diaspora, like ethnicity, is a term which originates from the Greek language. Until the 1990s the term diaspora was typically considered relative to a condition of exile based upon the Jewish experience of forced deportation and statelessness. Since then,

⁴² My instinct would be to contest the assumptions behind both those claims. I very much doubt that India is a knowable object and Srinivas' construction of an Indian cinema audience is heavily reliant in any case upon its juxtaposition of a normative Western audience which I would describe as an equally unknowable, if not entirely spurious, object.

however, the term has been extended to include any and all forms of ethnically-defined expatriate community (See Axel 2002, Gourgouris 2002). 'Diasporas' are now figured as migrant communities living outside their 'ancestral homeland'. Diasporic 'communities' are constituted as minority populations in their adopted places of residence, but taken together, they are seen to represent global formations based upon shared ethnicity rather than proximate habitation. The rise of diasporas as objects of study has been facilitated by a resurgence of interest in the cultural basis of nationalism, and has been paralleled by the widespread engagement of the humanities with post-Marxist ethnographic cultural studies. It is also a response to an escalation in migration on a global scale, particularly across the North-South axis.

The consumption by migrants of media artefacts addressing their own ethnic specificity is considered essential by Arjun Appadurai in the imagining of 'diasporic public spheres', mobile post-national communities constituted by globally dispersed ethnic networks linked through electronic media (1996:22). This is a claim which I will go on to address substantially in the following chapter, but for now it is sufficient to say that the analysis of a 'diasporic condition' constituted by the mobility of media, capital and human beings has given rise to the notion of 'diasporic audiences' providing global constituencies for ethnically-specific media. A significant degree of attention is now being directed to this type of audience in contemporary media research (Carstons 2003, Julian 2003, Panagakos 2003, Karim 2003, Chapman 2004, Shi 2005).

Stuart Cunningham describes diasporic audiences as inhabiting narrowcast media environments which are 'public sphericules', that is: they are 'ethno-specific global mediatized communities' which 'display in microcosm elements we would expect to

find in the public sphere' (Cunningham 2001:134). From the perspective of their host nations however, they are 'social fragments that do not have critical mass' (Cunningham 2001:134). Nonetheless, despite being seen as a *fragment* of social space the diasporic media audience is also seen as *globally* connected, representing a site where: 'Sophisticated cosmopolitanism and successful international business dealing sit alongside long-distance nationalism' (Cunningham 2002:273).⁴³ Elsewhere, Sinclair and Cunningham have asserted that the cultural orientation of diasporic communities remains 'toward those they see as their kind in other nations and (often still) in their nation of origin, even while they face the challenges of negotiating a place for themselves in the host culture' (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000:12).

An alternative reading of cultural identity amongst diasporic communities emphasized by Stuart Hall, argues for the inherent hybridity, reinvention and appropriation of various imagined identities forged through their cultural practices (Hall 1990, 1993, Hall, Morley and Chen 1996). Here the maintenance by migrants of ethno-cultural connections with 'homelands' are subject to a lack of stability, as cultural practices and identities are influenced by complex sets of shifting social referents. Rajinder Dudrah believes that diasporic social conditions 'can be considered as taking up the interplay of migrant people, their successive settled generations, and their ideas in terms of a triadic relationship. This relationship can be thought of as working between the place of origin, place of settlement, and a diasporic consciousness that shifts between the two' (2002a:20). Thus the diasporic media audience can *either* be considered to be engaged primarily with the maintenance of a global ethnic culture, *or* beset by the challenges of combining different cultural streams. In each case, the cultural practices of diasporic

⁴³ For a fuller discussion of the notion of 'long-distance nationalism' in relation to migrant communities, see Anderson (1994) .

communities, whilst described in the literature as exemplary of contemporary global modernity, are also seen primarily as ‘a struggle for survival, identity and assertion’ (Cunningham 2001:136).

Constructing the Indian Diaspora

The number of Indians residing elsewhere in the world has been estimated at around 20 million (Singhvi 2001). The wide dispersal of Indian communities has occurred over a long historical period but the two most prominent periods of migration in the modern era have been the recruitment of Indians as indentured labour destined for Southeast Asia, Africa and the Pacific during the nineteenth century and the postcolonial flow of migrants towards the wealthy states of the Persian Gulf and the ‘West’ since the 1960s.

Migrations in the early period were comprised mainly of the disadvantaged and such communities often led their lives under harsh economic conditions in their new homes, with few opportunities for sustained contact with or return to the subcontinent.

Postcolonial migrations, however, have more commonly represented economic gains for wealthier migrants and the growing availability of international travel and communications has, for some at least, reduced the subjective distance between the country of residence and the country of origin.⁴⁴ Singh claims that the ‘consciousness’ of Indian communities worldwide has been transformed by the impact of globalisation:

Since the late 1980s the limited patterns of exchange between the various settled communities of the Indian diaspora and India have been dramatically transformed in volume and content. Cheap travel, new communications

⁴⁴ However, to get beyond this generalisation, it must be recognised that not all Indian migrants were impoverished labourers before independence. Nor are all postcolonial migrants transnational professionals. The reality of the matter is that, whilst the more recent migrant communities are clearly more wealthy overall than their earlier counterparts (by some measure) a description of migrant experiences through community profiles does not account for the divergent economic experiences of actual migrants.

technologies and economic liberalisation have integrated these communities in a way that would have been unimaginable only a decade ago. Cultural flows in real time have led to sophisticated niche consumerism with a heightened sense of consciousness of Indianness fostered by growing transnational networks and deliberate efforts to construct overarching identities. Although London, New York and Toronto are the new cosmopolitan habitats of the Indian diaspora where ostentatious consumption reflects high-tech aspirational lifestyles, these locations remain intimately interconnected with cities in South Asia and elsewhere (Singh in Parekh, Singh and Vertovec 2003:5).

For their adopted nations, naturalized Indian migrants have been seen as valuable for fostering business connections with a liberalising Indian economy, an ‘emerging market’ for transnational capital. However, the same migrants have also been seen as potentially damaging to the cohesion of the national public sphere in the country of settlement, given their ‘cultural differences’ from the majority population. The project of ‘multiculturalism’ pursued in various forms in Western nations has therefore sought to harness the positive potential of a more culturally diverse society (particularly in economic terms) whilst simultaneously managing the potential for what are believed to be negative social outcomes (dilution of the existing ‘national’ culture). In the process a large body of literature has emerged from the Western academies on ‘ethnic minorities’, describing their economic structures, cultural practices and social behaviours. Thus, although there are sizeable populations of Indian origin in Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere in Asia, research on diasporic audiences for Indian films has tended to focus on Indians located in Western countries (Gillespie 1995, Ray 2000, Dudrah 2002a/b, Thompson 2003 et. al.). In part, this is a reflection of the relative dominance of Western academia, and its concerns, over the production of ‘global’ knowledge. Cunningham, for example, claims that ‘the diasporic subject is typically a citizen of a Western country’ (2002:273). However, this Western-centred notion of the Indian diaspora is not simply a Western or an academic preserve. It is also reproduced in official discourses

emanating from the Government of India, as well as in the popular discourse of the Indian media, in the print and electronic press, on television, in literature and in movies.

From 1998 to 2004, the government of Atal Bihari Vajpayee made considerable efforts to capitalise on the growing wealth and influence of India's expatriate communities.

The desire of non-resident Indians (NRIs) and persons of Indian origin (PIOs) for a cultural connection with the 'homeland' was greatly emphasised in official discourse, as was their potential as ideal foreign investors (Singhvi 2001).⁴⁵ As Rajadhyaksha has noted, the discourses projected upon offshore Indian communities were intended to be compatible with the project of *Hindutva* cultural nationalism fostered by the BJP at home (2003:12).⁴⁶ Within this discourse, Indians domiciled in the West were increasingly described as a national asset, rather than lamented as a brain-drain. Their potential, both as an economic bridgehead for India in the new 'global market' and as a political lobby looking after India's interests in the UK and US, encouraged the Government of India to emphasise cultural ties between India and these particular migrant populations.

In September 2000, the Government of India commissioned a High Level Committee on Diaspora which produced the L M Singhvi report in 2001. Amongst its

⁴⁵ According to the Singhvi report: 'NRIs or Non Resident Indians are Indian citizens, holding Indian passports and residing abroad for an indefinite period...the term PIO or Person of Indian Origin is applied to a foreign citizen of Indian origin or descent. Technically, he/she would belong to one of the following three categories, namely: A person who, at any time, has held an Indian passport; Any one, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents or great grandparents was born in and was permanently resident in India as defined in the Government of India Act, 1935 and other territories that became part of India thereafter provided he/she was not at any time a citizen of any of the aforesaid territories; The spouse of a citizen of India or a person of Indian origin covered in the above two categories of PIOs.' In a general sense however, the term NRI is more commonly used to generically describe ethnic Indians resident overseas.

⁴⁶ The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), which was formerly the BJS (Bharatiya Jana Sangh), emerged from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu fascist organisation formed in 1925. The party was the central constituent of the NDA coalition government led by Vajpayee from 1998 to 2004.

recommendations were a dual-citizenship scheme for NRIs and PIOs in 'selected countries', a central body for fostering the national-diaspora relationship, and a diaspora day (Pravasi Bharatiya Divas) to promote cultural links with the diaspora including an awards ceremony (Pravasi Bharatiya Samman) for high achievers from Indian communities overseas. The following excerpts from the report underscore something of the nature of the 'official imagining' of the Indian diasporas in the US and UK:

At 1.7 million and 0.6% of the total US population of 280 million, the Indian community enjoys the distinction of being one of the highest earning, best educated and fastest growing ethnic groups, and that too in the most powerful country in the world...A section of financially powerful and politically well-connected Indo-Americans has emerged during the last decade...For the first time, India has a constituency in the US with real influence and status...The Indian community in the United States constitutes an invaluable asset in strengthening India's relationship with the world's only superpower (Singhvi 2001).

Today the Indian community in the UK occupies a unique position, enriching British culture, society and politics and contributing to making the UK a genuinely multicultural society. Indians are considered a disciplined and model community with the lowest crime rates among all emigrant groups, in marked contrast to the Pakistani community... The PIOs have strong affinity and links with India and community leaders have displayed considerable interest in promoting bilateral relations and investment...They have lent significant support to efforts to form pro-India, lobby groups in the three major political parties (Singhvi 2001).

As Miriam Sharma has noted, 'Media representations - and self-representations - of Indians in the United States often represent them as a new "model minority," a "golden diaspora," and even as "the next Jews," in reference to their economic success in the country' (2002). This is an analogy also pursued by the Indian High Level Committee on Diaspora, albeit from a more exterior perspective: 'the Committee felt that the contribution of the Diaspora to Israel in the economic, political and cultural spheres contained important lessons for India. The activities of Jewish lobbies outside Israel, particularly in the US Congress, their extensive fund-raising abilities, large-scale

funding for the scientific and technological development of Israel, their global networks which link Jewish associations and organisations worldwide as well as with the State of Israel; could serve as an example' (Singhvi 2001). The example being imagined here is a 'model' offshore community from the perspective of its 'homeland' government (with its own 'national interests'). However, as Sharma points out, the 'dominating presence of more recent, highly-educated, and affluent [Indian] immigrants [in the US] may obscure the lives of others, as well as an earlier history of migration, for whom the celebration of the hyphen is often problematic' (2002). It is certainly far short of reality for the vast portion of 'overseas Indians', indeed, even amongst those found in the West.

Claiming that a 'deep commitment to their cultural identity has manifested itself in every component of the Indian Diaspora', the Singhvi report emphasized the role of the media in fostering the close cultural connections between India and the diaspora (2001). The report recommended a focus upon the role of 'ethnic' media, including print, radio and television but not, interestingly enough, cinema. However, the media panel at the inaugural *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* in 2003 was dominated by film industry figures including film actress and MP, Shabana Azmi, and directors Kamal Hassan, Vijay Singh, Subhash Ghai and Yash Chopra.⁴⁷ The recent export success of the film industry also dominated the keynote address by Sushma Swaraj, then Union Information & Broadcasting Minister in the NDA government:

The achievement of our entertainment sector, especially films, in the last two or three years needs no elaboration. The waves created by films like *Devdas*, *Lagaan*, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Amaar Bhuwan*, *Jamila*, *A Dog's Day*, *Tiladaanam*, *Naseem*, *Mando Meyer Upakhyam* etc. painted the global

⁴⁷ Yash Chopra was also then chairman of the FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) Entertainment Committee.

canvas with India. Then there is the category of films made by Indians abroad. *Bombay Dreams*, *Bend it like Beckham*, *Monsoon Wedding*, *Warriors*, *Hollywood Bollywood*, to name a few, have reinforced the India brand, made us all proud, and from what I understand, ensured that the producers of these films go laughing, repeatedly, all the way to the banks. Not only the films, it is the entire spectrum of the entertainment sector which has created an awareness as never before, about India all over the world. It is no wonder that Selfridges celebrated the Bollywood season, and British Film Institute organised the Imagine Asia festival. Indian films were shown at Cannes, Locarno and even Beijing... The exports of the entertainment industry from India which in 1998 stood at 40 million US dollars have in 2001 crossed more than 180 million US dollars. This entertainment and media explosion has brought India closer to our diaspora. More important is the fact that the diaspora has also majorly contributed in fuelling this growth. Perhaps geographical division between Indians in India and the Indian diaspora is blurring if not disappearing altogether. And with the announcement made by the Hon'ble Prime Minister at the yesterday's inaugural session, the dual citizenship will bring the diaspora closer to us not merely due to our cultural bonds but also by a legal system. Each entertainment and media icon of the Indian diaspora remains our unofficial ambassador abroad. We salute these leaders and assure them of our conducive policies to facilitate their endeavours (Swaraj 2003).

The economic and symbolic inequality in status between different parts of the Indian diaspora was made further explicit by the offer of dual nationality referred to here by Swaraj, which was extended in 2003 to expatriate Indians and those of Indian descent in the US, UK and Australia, but not to those in Malaysia or in Fiji.⁴⁸ As Jigna Desai observes:

From the development of state councils and academic centres on the diaspora to the prevalence of NRI characters in Bollywood cinema, the nation-state advances its interest in diasporas in different modalities, articulating its varying relationships with diaspora based on contradictory and complementary interests... the ideal diaspora is one that willingly exchanges economic and technological investments for national membership and state citizenship... Those diasporic subjects who may be migrant

⁴⁸ The Overseas Indian citizenship scheme which passed through the Indian parliament in 2003 allows for dual-citizenship with the following states: Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Republic of Cyprus, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the United States of America. When fully implemented it will be available to current Indian citizens, former Indian citizens, and PIOs (Persons of Indian Origin) of the 2nd and 3rd generation provided that they have never been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh. As such this provision will be available to around 30% of the total diasporic population as outlined in the Singhvi Report. See Pravasi Bharatiyas Divas (14/05/2004).

workers, exiles or refugees need not apply for cultural citizenship as deterritorialised nationals (Desai 2003:46).

For the Indian business press, the idealisation of a Western-based professional diaspora as the diaspora that matters is equally explicit. It is the young CEOs and rising IT professionals who are the ideal(ised) NRIs here, stirring national pride and deserving cultural citizenship, not the politically marginalized Indians of Fiji or Burma, or the taxi drivers and waiters of London or Leeds. Immediately prior to the *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* 2004, the English-language periodical *India Today* ran a special feature on the overseas born Indians who exemplified this discourse of expatriate success (Bamzai et al 2004). Over eleven pages it included eight young politicians (seven in the US, one in the UK), five medical researchers (four US, one UK), two IT entrepreneurs (one UK and one in Australia), two economists (one US, one UK), a PR consultant (UK), a magazine owner (US), a writer (born US, resident UK), four musicians (three US, one UK), a radio DJ (UK), a model (US), six film directors (four UK, two US) and three actors (two UK, one US).⁴⁹ Their pop profiles were introduced in an upbeat tone:

To us they may be foreigners, to them, they are probably Indians. To themselves, they are Americans, British, even Australian... Yet all of them have [India] encrypted in their DNA. It is this DNA that took 31-year-old Tejal Desai from a sunny Santa Barbara childhood into the cutting edge of bio-medical engineering. It is this gene that transported a 29-year-old Monita Rajpal from the colonial calm of Hong Kong to the hubbub of an Atlanta news centre... and it is these successful transitions that the Indian government is getting ready to celebrate at the second Pravasis Bharitya Divas in Delhi this month' (Bamzai et al 2004:35).

This feature demonstrates succinctly how over the last decade of economic liberalization discourses surrounding the notion of an Indian diaspora have become increasingly positioned as those communities existing within developed Western

⁴⁹ The film directors included Gurinder Chadha (*Bhaji On The Beach* (1993), *Bend it like Beckham* (2002), *Bride and Prejudice* (2004)), Asif Kapadia (*The Warrior* (2001)) and M Night Shyamalan (*The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Signs* (2002)).

nations. It also indicates both the ‘what’ and ‘where’ of what continues to constitute a postcolonial Indian vision of ‘international’ success, as well the inferences of the genealogical transmission of culture which are central to nationalist discourse. Indian cinema is also invoked here: ‘As Indian movies acquire iconic status, what was an embarrassment has become a proud anthem’ (Bamzai et al 2004:35). The Indian cinema has evidently been seen as an effective source for appealing to the youth of the diaspora, and film celebrities have provided the mainstay of the entertainment nights staged for the *Pravasis Bharitya Divas*.

‘Bollywood’ and Cultural Affirmation

Vijay Mishra places great emphasis on the popularity of Indian films across the Indian diaspora (2002). In reference to high levels of ‘diasporic’ consumption of Indian films, as well as the increasing characterisation of transnationally located subjects in film narratives, Mishra states that ‘A study of Bombay cinema will no longer be complete without a theory of diasporic desire because this cinema is now global in a specifically diasporic sense’ (2002:269). Manas Ray describes participation by ethnic Indians overseas in Bollywood spectatorship (and cultural practices derived from the Indian cinema such as fashion, music and dance) as expressions of ‘cultural affirmation’ by these groups (2000, 2003). Immediately prior to the boom in Western export markets in the mid-nineties, Marie Gillespie also saw the domestic consumption of Indian films by British Asians as an act of cultural affirmation and communal identification, in this case acting as a response to the inherent racism of the national media in Britain (1995). Gillespie concluded that British broadcasters had failed to address the cultural needs of minority groups; hence their engagement with these media products imported from

home was figured as a result of exclusion and as an essentially defensive act. Rajinder Dudrah reminds us that the limited representation of South Asians in the British media also has to be considered alongside their marginalisation in the wider social sphere, and ‘in the context of a racist Britain in which Black settlers had made their home’ (2002a:27).

Asserting one’s claim to urban space is often tied up with wider experiences of racist and exclusionary discourses from everyday direct or indirect racism on the streets to wider immigration policies which seek to keep out Black “others” from entry into the nation-state. Bollywood cinema-going itself can be considered as part of the makings of urban social formations... The act of viewing Bollywood films in Britain, whether in the personal space of the home and/or in the public space of the cinema, can be considered as a cultural practice wherein notions of becoming and being “Asian” are able to flourish on the terms of British Asians themselves (Dudrah: 2002a:27).

This is a rather different articulation of British Asian experience from that described by the Singhvi report. Here diasporic cultural practices are seen as structured by a form of ‘cultural resistance’ compensating for social exclusion. On the other hand, this engagement with Western spaces can also be figured triumphantly, for example, by Gargi Bhattacharyya who claims that: ‘We occupy by force the place that Asian modernity must learn to become, the place between over here and back home, another form of double consciousness for a global age’ (2003:10). This is a good example of the often heroic description of diasporas where migrants are both victims (of Western racism) and colonisers (of Western knowledge and capital).

The changing representation on-screen of the NRI in Bollywood films noted by Mishra is also central to Ronald Inden’s analysis of contemporary Indian cinema. Inden claims that prior to the mid-1990s ‘foreign’ Indians were often villains in film texts, financially enriched and morally corrupted by the west and lacking in the ‘Indian values’ of

humility and integrity. However since this time the cinematic NRI has been reconfigured as an 'Indian at heart', reconnecting with his homeland whilst also displaying the transnational consumer literacy which is now aspired to by the Indian middle class (Inden 1999). Dudrah also supports this analysis, emphasising a market imperative for abandoning the 'Westernised and bad' ethos:

Bollywood of the nineties took note of the NRIs as cosmopolitan in mind, speaking in English or American accents, but with their heart and soul in the right place respecting all things Indian. Nineties film plots spanned several cities across several continents with diasporic characters taking centre stage...characters could be in middle-class India or the urban diaspora of the West thereby opening up affinities with audiences across the globe (Dudrah 2002:29).

There are clearly some risks, however, in overstating the overlap between an 'Indian diaspora' and a 'diasporic audience' for Indian films. Firstly, this audience becomes positioned as a glamorous off-shore component of the Indian audience. This is an audience constructed around what is not so much a global but more a spatial extension of the national(ist) model of the media audience.⁵⁰ Secondly, focusing on an essential connection to India articulated through film-viewing tends to circumvent discursively the transnational and multicultural dimensions of these migrant populations. Thirdly, it does not address adequately the specificities of the environments occupied by migrants residing in different states and social conditions.

In the UK and the Middle East, currently two of the largest overseas markets for Indian films, the large proportion of the audience made up by persons whose origins lie elsewhere in South Asia demonstrates that the audience there exceeds the political

⁵⁰ Their close relationship is evidenced by the common emphasis on fraternal homogeneity (referenced as identity) and transcendent loyalty to a common heritage (referenced as ethnicity). Thus, the idealised imagining of a diasporic subject remains limited by the imagination of its parent discourse, that is, by the logic of cultural nationalism.

boundaries found within the subcontinent. This is consistent with the fact that both the market and the aesthetic of the commercial Indian film were well established before partition in 1947. That the Indian film industry continues to serve, not simply an 'Indian' diaspora, but a wider 'South Asian' audience located overseas underscores the close cultural relationships which continue to exist between South Asians despite the rise of mutually antagonistic nationalisms. This vast field of the 'local' is transposed onto the globally dispersed and re-territorialized diasporic audience, which therefore arguably reflects a larger South Asian cultural sphere.⁵¹

The weakness of a strictly nationalist reading of this audience, however, does not necessarily discount the available evidence that there are indeed cultural connections within and between South Asian migrant communities. For example, Hindi film songs are remixed by DJs in Birmingham, England and blasted out at India-themed dance events in Toronto, New York and Sydney. Increasingly they are also, depending on your point of view, either exported or 'returned' to India. The Indian cinema has provided much of the *materiel* for this global youth subculture, although it is equally clear that these diasporic practices also intersect with other media trends in these far flung locations to produce a set of even further hybridized cultural products which draw upon influences such as Jamaican Dub, Afro-American rap and mainstream urban club cultures. While there may be a popular conception of transnational 'cultural affirmation' enacted through such practices, it can also be argued that diasporic refashionings of

⁵¹ Even if such an assertion was to be rejected, it would still have to be recognized that, by headcount, South Asian political others located in the subcontinent and elsewhere probably make up the largest transnational audience for Indian films - far larger in fact than the supposedly central 'Indian diaspora'. However, a wider émigré South Asian participation in Indian film culture does not entirely negate nationalist and fundamentalist friction. For example, J.P. Dutta's anti-Pakistan war film *Border* (1996), caused violent agitations against video stores by Muslim South Asians overseas. However, rather than dwell on the divisive nature of these occurrences, it remains worth pointing out that these protestors were normally regular customers of these same rental outlets and aside from such rare exceptions were avid consumers of Indian movies (see Varma 1997).

Indian film culture represent a relatively ‘Westernised’ context of cultural consumption which builds upon the strong Euro-American influences already at play in the Indian cinema. The influence of MTV on the contemporary song-and-dance sequence for example, is quite obvious (see Juluri 2002, Asthana 2003). Contemporary Bollywood films provide audiences in India with a diet of free romance and consumer affluence, which are typically associated in India with Western culture. Simultaneously, the same films also provide a source of cultural consumption figured upon ideas or ‘Eastern’ and ‘Asian’ cultures to some South Asians who reside in the West, and for whom its Western influences may perhaps be less apparent. For example, in a recent study of Indian women watching Indian films in the USA, it was noted that:

One Bollywood film that was volunteered as 29 percent of the respondents’ general favourite, was the 1975 blockbuster *Sholay*...*Sholay*, however, is significantly embedded in or indebted to Western films – as literally a remake of *The Magnificent Seven* and as inaugurating and assimilating the Western into Bollywood – this fact was not noted by any of the respondents. Instead, they found this film to incorporate quintessential and timeless ‘Indian’ issues, interpreting the film, however hybrid its provenance, as a representation of the Real in India (Bhattacharya 2004:171).

The various factors discussed here demonstrate an ill fit between audiences arising out of migration and the essential notion of an Indian diaspora, challenging the notion that the use of ethnically-specific media presents an effective opportunity for examining a diasporic population as a homogenous whole. This gets to the heart of the contradictory nature of diasporas, since the very hybridity and border-spanning subjectivities which have caused them to be posited as the exemplars of globalisation also clearly undermine attempts to examine them effectively under any single classification. The plurality of the diasporic audience is not entirely surprising in this case given that the idea of Indian-ness as an ethnic identity can really only make sense to those located subjectively outside of the subcontinent, that is to *outsiders*. The identification of an

‘NRI’ audience for Indian films implies a cultural and subjective continuity between migrants of Indian origin and their descendants worldwide. However, the notion of a unifying diasporic identity is highly contestable in reality, as Nandini Bhattacharya observes:

there are many Indian ‘Diasporas’. Bollywood has travelled with or to all of these Indian diasporas – in Southeast Asia, East and South Africa, the Caribbean, Fiji, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the North and South Americas – and has made different inroads into the social and national-identity construction of these diasporas....However, the viewing practices and subsequent mediated identity-constructions of these diasporas cannot be uniform or even similar (Bhattacharya 2004:162).

Whether affirmative or defensive in posture, or perhaps both, diasporic cultural practices can be perceived from the perspective of the ‘host’ nation as indicative of a ‘fragmentation’ (i.e. a crisis of assimilation) within the national public sphere, and therefore as an imperative for social science research and public policy. Thus, from the perspective of migrants *and* of those who make policies about migrants, the identification of a transnational media practice is often seen *primarily* as a failure in the interaction (or contract) between citizens and the national media. However, it might be argued that audiences everywhere now engage with transnational media flows, including ‘majority’ citizens. In a putative ‘global’ media environment such behaviour would appear to be a relatively logical pattern of consumption, as evidenced by the emergence everywhere of outlets for narrowcast programming. In addition, watching an Indian movie is not *only* a personal or social statement of identity, it is also a choice of entertainment and therefore a source of gratification. The role of pleasure in the media choices made by ‘ethnic’ communities should not be made entirely subservient to explanations which portray ethnic media use as primarily a statement of (either heroic or threatening) social and cultural identification. For many people watching Indian

movies may be as much an act of pleasure as it is of political loyalty or cultural solidarity.

Imagining a Western Audience

The notion of a ‘Western viewer’ is as old as the study of Indian cinema. Since the days of the Indian Film Society movements in the 1950s there has been a comparison between an Indian audience, typified by illiteracy and an enthusiasm for escapist fare, and an occidental viewer acculturated to a diet of realism rather than fantasy, drama rather than melodrama and psychological motivation over musical excess (see Vasudevan 2000a). In essence, the Western viewer has been related to a diet of modernity. Of course, aside from the music, this realist model of Western audiences rather contradicts the popular fare consumed in European, North American and Australasian cinemas. It does, perhaps, suit the kind of audiences addressed by art-house cinemas and film festivals, which in Anglophone countries have traditionally been the most common environment for the screening of foreign-language films. Prior to the 1990s the only Indian films to reach any significant Western audiences were art films operating in this niche market, described by Jigna Desai as:

based on positioning “foreign” films as ethnographic documents of “other” (national) cultures and therefore as representatives of national cinemas. In particular, foreign Third World films that can be read as portraying the other through cultural difference (i.e., gender and sexual experiences or nativist renderings of rural village life) (Desai 2004:39).

The art-house audience in the West represents a collection of consumers with various degrees of investment in an ethno-cultural scheme of ‘World Cinema’. This coalition of

interests might include those with an academic or professional interest either in cinema or in the ‘producing culture’. It also encompasses viewers whose consumption of foreign films represents a mixture of auto-didacticism and aesthetic pleasure-seeking gaining them a measure of cosmopolitan cultural capital. Art-house outlets often co-locate a Third World ‘exotic’ with European *auteur* cinema and with the alternative or independent sector of the host nation’s local film culture. The art-house audience is not strictly defined in terms of socio-economic class, but the boundary between, and branding of, art-house and mainstream cinema is often structured by a distinction between popular and bourgeois aesthetics, or taste cultures, which are often identified respectively with middle-class and lower-class constituencies.

During the last decade, South Asians resident in the West, and inhabiting the same metropolises as art-house audiences, have given *popular* Indian cinema a commercially viable presence there. The subsequent ringing of cash registers has instigated a sudden affection for Indian films in the Western media. Attention has focused upon figures in the Indian film industry who have proved most popular with Indian cinema’s diasporic audiences in the West, and who have used this popularity to re-position themselves within the international market (See Dwyer 2000b). Aside from an interest in the profits being made from these films in the West, the newly fashionable status of Indian films there can also be related to the economic shifts in the Indian mediascape where Western media concerns are seeking to become major players.⁵² For their part, Indian producers have attempted to consolidate their success in the West by widely promoting the Bollywood aesthetic as an ‘India brand’ in a Euro-American market that continues to see itself as the central hegemonic field of global media culture.

⁵² See Chapter Two, pp 79-82.

Another factor at play in ‘buzz’ surrounding Bollywood has been the success of a number of directors of Indian origin working within various Western film industries who have produced Indian-themed films which have successfully targeted art-house audiences in the West. The films of US-based Mira Nair, Canadian-based Deepa Mehta and UK-based Gurinder Chadha have frequently been conflated with Bollywood in the Western media, despite the obvious differences between these films and mainstream Indian cinema.⁵³ However, with the growing profile of Bollywood as a recognizable ‘brand’, both Indian and NRI directors have benefited from this popular association. Indian films have been associated, for example, with the success of Nair’s *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), whilst the ‘colour as culture’ connotations of Bollywood have also been used to market the films of NRI directors.

The success of Bollywood and NRI films with niche audiences in the UK has brought them into multiplex cinemas in parts of the mainstream exhibition sector (Kerrigan and Ozbilgin 2002:200). This has encouraged the staging of events designed to promote Indian films amongst a more ‘mainstream’ audience. For example, in 2002 the British Film Institute (BFI) organized an extensive showcase of Indian cinema, *ImagineAsia*, as part of an nationwide *Indian Summer* festival which also included the use of Bollywood themes in department store merchandise, visual art exhibitions and theatrical

⁵³ In an aesthetic sense, these directors have tended to produce films which are modelled more upon European and American narrative cinema than Indian popular films. They have also been able to access considerable financial and technical resources for film making from their countries of residence, thus making the Indian-ness of such films questionable by the terms of the production-based logic of traditional film studies. Nonetheless, they have also worked with personnel from the Indian film industries and incorporated some elements of Indian film style. They have also achieved success with at least a small part of the cinema audience in India. The situation of their work across Western and Indian cinemas is rather unlike Hamid Naficy’s (1999, 2001) model of an ‘exilic cinema’ operating within a closed migrant community. This multiple (dis)location of their work has prompted Jigna Desai (2004) to argue that their work represents a ‘diasporic cinema’.

productions.⁵⁴ This celebration of Indian popular culture under the rubric of ‘multiculturalism’ was designed to promote Indo-British trade exchanges, emphasise official recognition of Britain’s large South Asian population and also to draw profits from providing a context for the consumption of Indian cultural products by the UK’s majority white population.⁵⁵

In practice however, the discourse of the *Indian Summer* became somewhat incongruous with other points of official discourse on race and culture in Britain during 2002. It was subject to the impact of the US-led globalisation of the long-running Middle East war, and was also undermined by domestic racial unrest in Britain. Gurinder Chadha’s ‘multicultural’ soccer film *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002), which received generous support from Britain’s film establishment, enjoyed global success on the back of the soccer World Cup. It painted a picture of diasporic prosperity and British racial integration for cinema audiences. However, whilst the film was being shot in the summer of 2001, white racists and police were fighting Asian youths on the streets of Bradford in Britain’s North, and during the post-production of the film, then British Home Secretary David Blunkett made a series of remarks which publicly questioned the cultural loyalties of the UK’s minority populations.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, Chadha’s feel-good tale of middle-class assimilation was certainly popular with white

⁵⁴ The London stores of UK retailer Selfridges carried a range of goods inspired by Bollywood fashions. The Victoria and Albert Museum showcased an exhibition of Indian film posters and Andrew Lloyd Weber launched his West End musical *Bollywood Dreams*, a collaboration with Indian composer A.R. Rahman.

⁵⁵ UK Prime Minister Tony Blair endorsed *ImagineAsia* with the following introduction: ‘I very much welcome Britain’s growing film links with South Asian countries. More is available from South Asia on screen in Britain than at any time and is attracting ever growing audiences. The industries are working together on production too. This festival will, I am sure, help to bring to audiences in Britain a much larger range of opportunities, giving us access to a huge store of cultural riches we can all enjoy. It is of great importance to everyone that we celebrate the cultural diversity which we have in this country, and film is an art form which reaches out to more people than any other. A sharing of cultures brings people closer together, and the more we know about, understand and enjoy the range of cultures which we have in Britain, the better’ (in White and Rughani 2003:2).

⁵⁶ See ‘If We Want Social Cohesion We Need a Sense of Identity’ (Blunkett 2001).

audiences in Britain, and elsewhere, following its release in April 2002. It was an on-message film in an off-message world.⁵⁷ The BFI's *ImagineAsia* festival of Indian cinema was also considered a success since it drew almost a third of its audience from outside of Britain's Asian population (White and Rughani 2003).

ImagineAsia was a hugely successful, all-singing all-dancing masala festival. There hasn't been anything quite like it before. As one of the *bfi*'s largest ever events it broke new ground on several fronts: introducing a broader appreciation and mainstreaming of South Asian film cultures to a cross over audience in the UK (White and Rughani 2003:9).

The term 'crossover' deserves some attention because, as Desai has also observed, its use is synonymous with the quest for white audiences for 'ethnic' media artefacts (2004:66). Films which move from the more limited art-house market to the mainstream exhibitors, or from ethnically-defined distribution to mainstream outlets, or both, can be considered as 'crossover' artefacts. The crossing described by the term is from an established niche audience to a larger 'identified' audience which promises greater exposure and profits. This 'crossover audience' for both Indian-produced and NRI-directed films is imagined as a desired market based upon a collective notion of culturally literate cosmopolitan members of the majority population willing to extend their consumption of media cultures (and media *as* culture). Within the context of multiculturalism, this crossover can also be portrayed as the success of a media artefact located in one ethnic culture with an audience located in another. This is because, whilst the logic of multiculturalism challenges the idea of a culturally homogenous national audience, it continues to assume 'that there are certain audiences that are commensurate with communities and demographic populations' (Desai 2004:66). Desai considers the implications of multicultural 'crossing' for ethnic films in Britain, claiming that:

⁵⁷ Shoba Rajgopal (2003) sees the work of Chadha differently, claiming that it represents an extension of the project of subaltern studies in gaining recognition for marginalised identities and histories. I disagree, and see little radical potential in these bourgeois fictions.

the emphasis on crossover success shifts discussion away from the issues associated with the burden of representation and the relations between cultural producers and black British communities to appealing to white demographic markets. Hence, the discourse implies the differentiation of national viewers into target groups but focuses on those white and other audiences interested in multicultural fare. Consequently, unified national cinema and culture are no longer seen as serving a unified nation, instead, late capitalist diversification has brought a decentered approach that favors plurality in constructing and penetrating its differentiated target markets. These shifts do not mean that black visibility is no longer regulated by dominant interests. To the contrary, the visibility of black representation in the public sphere is still dependent on the political economy of the culture industry and has been integrated into capitalist expansion through the logic and rhetoric of multiculturalism (Desai 2004:66).

Multiculturalism is not only a rhetorical project, it also employs an industrial base with both internal and external aspects. Within the host nation the consumption, possession and display of products of foreign cultural provenance is facilitated by a range of leisure industries providing music, textiles, movies, literature, furniture and food. The external interests of the multicultural industry facilitate this trade in commodities between the importing and exporting nation, but are also incorporated with other aspects of inter-state trade and the movements, in both directions, of financial, military and ideological capital. In the case of cinema, the celebration of the media projects of other 'cultures' is also related to furthering desires to extend economic opportunities for the national media industry in those markets.⁵⁸

It is clear that, for Indian producers, success in Western markets (given their economic and symbolic power) continues to be endowed with significant cultural capital. So,

⁵⁸ For example, by gaining access to foreign locations, expertise and distribution or by hosting off-shore production and receiving the benefits of the expense. Here, perhaps, is an 'economic world reversed', since several Western countries are now keen to host more Indian production to support their own industries. Britain has expended some effort trying to attract Indian film productions to Britain, despatching film industry delegations, the Culture Secretary and even Prince Charles to 'Bollywood' in recent years. (see BBC Online 04/11/2003, 09/02/2004 and 15/03/2004).

although migrant audiences in the same territories are a far more reliable source of patronage, a crossover audience is a highly desirable outcome. The re-branding of commercial Indian films in the West as postmodern pop art, as exemplified by *Indian Summer's* use of Bollywood, also contributes to the continuing cycle of orientalism. From the Western perspective it is possible to discern a certain cultural ennui couched in this latest commercialisation of liberal multiculturalism as cosmopolitan 'ethnic chic', whilst in India the imagination on-screen of a transnationally orientated middle-class and its occupation and consumption of the West represents the symbolic counterweight of the orientalist binary (see Kaur 2002). It is imperative, therefore, to recognize that any discussion of cultural consumption which juxtaposes East and West remains powerfully inflected by the historical exercise of power in the Indo-European encounter. Indian films are currently being promoted as a form of cultural currency in the ongoing exchange between India and this highly significant 'Other'. We are left to ponder the conversion rate.

Beyond the East-West Binary: 'Parallel' Audiences for Indian Films

As I have identified previously, Indian films have continued to find an audience in most of the markets which were established in the first part of the twentieth-century such as the Middle East and Indonesia. However, it is inadvisable to over-generalize and present these audiences as a stable third category of transnational consumption. It is more prudent, perhaps, to deal with each mediated relationship separately since in the dynamics of any cross-cultural exchange context matters a great deal. Therefore, as

opposed to discussing this group as a whole, I will discuss a handful of examples drawn from this third grouping of transnational audiences.

Indian films first appeared in the Indonesian archipelago during the final decades of Dutch Rule. Despite the Japanese interregnum which closed the market from 1942-1945, Indian films had become popular with local audiences by the time of Indonesia's independence in 1949. Indeed, as the Indonesian film industry was attempting to establish itself in the 1950s a strike was staged against Indian film imports, due to their popularity with the mass audience and the fact that they were cheap for local distributors to import. This made them a direct form of competition for Indonesian producers, whereas American films mostly patronized by the upper classes were not (Said 1991:44). Such protests proved unsuccessful and the importation of Indian films into Indonesia has continued over the past fifty years. Pam Nilan has observed that in Indonesia today, contemporary geopolitical events have 'been reflected in the ratings decline for American programs and films while other exogenous content – South American soap operas, Bollywood films, and Hong Kong martial arts epics – remain hugely popular' (2003:188). Nilan believes that: 'A major reason 'Bollywood' has millions of non-Indian fans in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia is because of the non-American quality of Indian films' (2003:296). In the years following the Asian currency crisis of 1997, Indian films certainly became far more commercially viable for Indonesian distributors than the more expensive American product. The production of Indonesian films was also virtually halted by the increased cost of film stock and processing and it was Indian and Hong Kong films which filled the vacuum (Sumarno and Achnas 2002:160). However, the consumption in post-colonial Indonesia of films imported from other Asian nations has been too consistent to be only a phenomenon of

current affairs. As an alternative explanation, a contributor to an Indonesian website, 'Taman Bollywood', points out the historical influence of Indian narrative forms upon Indonesian culture:

Most Indonesian people, especially who live in the island of Java (about 60 % of Indonesian population lived here), have a Hindu background. Their culture, dances, language (base on Sanskrit), philosophy, and their traditional ceremonies, all reflect this Hindu influence in their lives which has come to be a mix between Hinduism and Islam (Sufism). We don't say that Hindi films are only loved by the Javanese, but also loved by so many Indonesians who live in other islands and also watched by many people who live in Islamic countries (Khan 2003).

It may be unwise to over-emphasize a direct link between two periods of cultural exchange between South and Southeast Asia which are separated by some 500 years, but there is doubtless some sense of a contemporary inter-Asian dialogue in Indonesian discourse on Bollywood. India has historically been a major centre of culture, and an exporter of culture, within Asia, and it is relatively unsurprising that it remains so today. However, the same website also offers other reasons for the popularity of Indian films in the archipelago, such as the physical and symbolic attraction to film stars, the cross-cultural appeal of pop music and the desire for entertainment 'when many people are crazy and bored with political issues and bad economic conditions' (Khan 2003).

Indonesia today has a diverse transnational mediascape which has been enriched by the diffusion of new media technologies and further complemented by the proliferation of new media outlets after the end of Suharto's New Order government in 1998. Therefore, Indian film culture in Indonesia is disseminated across a multi-media environment which includes cinema exhibition, various forms of TV broadcast, pirated digital playback formats, magazines, music recordings and websites. Indian films are not merely objects of consumption but also represent a site of performance as fans attend

star appearances and/or engage in imitations and appropriations of the Bollywood aesthetic. Lidia Oostepeev, a secondary educator based in Australia, was impressed during a visit to Indonesia by the broad range of media activities centred on Indian film culture:

Stuck on a housing estate in Semarang during the rainy season of '01, I found myself watching a lot of T.V. Via programs chosen by Maman and Taufik, my hostess's servants, I realized that "Bollywood" (or the Hindi-language film industry based in Mumbai,) was providing entertainment for many Indonesians. Every few minutes a shampoo ad would flash across the screen featuring a male celebrity with dandruff free, glossy hair. A popular Indonesian actor I thought but no, upon enquiry it turned out to be none other than Shah Rukh Khan – a Bollywood superstar. Dangdut singers clearly singing in Indonesian not Hindi but outfitted in saris and wearing bindis also made for some interesting viewing.⁵⁹ Then of course there were the Bollywood films dubbed in Indonesian running for close to 3 hours and longer if commercial breaks were included... The Hindi film "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai" (1998) was a bigger box office success than the "Titanic" when it was screened in Indonesia and when the same film was shown on T.V. (2002), ratings "shot through the roof". In 2002 three major Bollywood stars appeared in concert at Hall C Pekan Raya, in Jakarta before an audience of approximately 2 thousand wealthy people. Tickets for the extravaganza ranged from 600 thousand to 3 million rupiah (\$100 - \$500 AU) and there was live coverage by INDOSIAR across the archipelago (Oostepeev 2004).

Outside of Asia, Manjanath Pendakur claims that 'Many African people and people from the Middle East are full of praise for the melodramatic elements of the feature film, the song numbers, the costumes and the 'beautiful ladies'' (1996:81). This receives substantial validation in Brian Larkin's work on the indigenous interpretation of Indian films in Nigeria which describes the emergence of local cultural forms modelled on their themes of familial loyalty and romantic desire (Larkin 1997, 2003). Larkin describes the dominant position of Indian films in the exhibition circuits of northern Nigeria:

⁵⁹ *Dangdut* music first became a popular style in Indonesia during the 1960s. *Dangdut* blended earlier forms of Indonesian and Malay music inspired by Indian and Arabic classical influences with Western pop and modern Indian film-song styles (see Lockard 1996:12).

When I first visited Kano, the major city in northern Nigeria, it came as a surprise...that Indian films are shown five nights a week at the cinemas (compared with one night for Hollywood films and one night for Chinese films); that the most popular programme on television was the Sunday morning Indian film...and that most video shops reserved the bulk of their space for Indian films (Larkin 1997:1).

According to Larkin, the distribution of Indian films in Nigeria was pioneered by independent Lebanese distributors in the 1950s. Since the majority of Indian films are imported into Nigeria through a 'grey market' they are curiously absent from the official film import figures, despite being 'unofficially' the 'all-time favourite' of audiences (1997:4). Larkin believes that the popularity of Indian films amongst the Hausa people of northern Nigeria, is an important example of the kind of transnational cultural exchanges which are too often overlooked in discussions of the global media environment. The popularity of Indian films in Nigeria does not reference discourses of Western 'cultural imperialism', nor the long-distance ethnic nationalism which has been emphasised by Anderson (1994) and by Appadurai (1996). Instead, Larkin describes the processes of translation and appropriation which surround Indian films in Nigeria as examples of the 'ability of the media to create parallel modernities' (1997:2).

I use the term 'parallel modernities' to refer to the coexistence in space and time of multiple economic, religious and cultural flows that are often subsumed within the term 'modernity...the experience of parallel modernities is not necessarily linked with the needs of relocated populations...My concern, by contrast, is with an Indian film-watching Hausa populace who are not involved in nostalgic imaginings of a partly invented native land but who participate in the imagined realities of other cultures as part of their daily lives (Larkin 1997:2).

For Larkin, the pan-Indian commercial film is a genre designed for cross-cultural appeal within India, and this hybrid address also facilitates its overseas appeal. Larkin therefore

sees ethnic particularity as a far from insurmountable barrier between Indians films and non-Indian audiences, observing that: ‘Despite the cultural gap between the Hindu Indian audience to which the filmic text is being addressed and the Muslim Hausa one watching in northern Nigeria, what is remarkable is how well the main messages of the films are communicated’ (1997:5). Larkin asserts that the renunciation, negotiation and appropriation of modernity found in Indian films, emanating as it does from another non-Western perspective, is also particularly resonant with the experiences of Nigerian audiences:

Indian film has been a popular form of entertainment in urban West Africa for well over forty years and commands viewers because it engages with real desires and conflicts in African societies...Indian films are popular because they provide a parallel modernity, a way of imaginatively engaging with the changing social basis of contemporary life that is an alternative to the pervasive influence of a secular West. Through spectacle and fantasy, romance and sexuality, Indian films provide arenas to consider what it means to be modern and what is the place of Hausa society within that modernity. For northern Nigerians...Indian films are just one part of the heterogeneity of everyday life (Larkin 1997:16).

If audiences for Indian films in Indonesia and Nigeria are able to envisage shared cultural traditions or parallel modernities in the discourse of Indian films, then they are nonetheless likely to do so in a manner which is congruent with their different relative understandings of Indian cultures and their own local and national cultures. Indian films will also be considered relatively to other available sources of transnational media, such as Hollywood or Hong Kong cinema. When considering the nature of ‘parallel’ audiences for Indian films in terms of their relative positioning, it is also worth noting that audiences for Indian films within the region identified as South Asia have a particular set of cultural, economic and political relationships with India and the Indian cinema which cannot be explained through discourses of non-Western fraternity.

During the early years of the cinema these nations were part of an integrated market with a number of well-established genres and film styles. They all inherited the same regulatory legacies related to film-making and censorship. The national film industries developed by Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh during the postcolonial era have all been under the influence of, and to a certain extent, imitated the Indian film world (Lent 1990: 253). As such, whilst Indian films may be seen as a non-threatening alternative to US cultural production in Africa or South-East Asia, they could be regarded as a source of cultural imperialism within other South Asian states, or, as with the case of India's North-East, even within the Republic of India itself.⁶⁰

An audience for Indian films in other South Asian states seems logical enough given that they share languages with different parts of their larger neighbour: Bengali is spoken in eastern India and in Bangladesh, Tamil in South India and Sri Lanka and Hindi/Urdu in North-West India and Pakistan.⁶¹ Such seemingly natural markets for Indian films are however subject to political tensions within the region. As I have previously stated, the importation of Indian films has long been officially restricted in Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, government regulation has not negated the demand for Indian films and the unofficial distribution of Indian movies in those countries (in playback formats and on cable) is widespread. Interestingly enough, such audiences have received little attention in discussions surrounding the internationalisation of Indian cinema.

⁶⁰ In 2000 a separatist organisation in the state of Manipur, the Revolutionary Peoples Front (RPF), threatened to bomb cinema halls which screened Hindi films claiming that they were undermining the cultural values of the local population. (see Bhaumik 2000). A coalition of separatist groups, including the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) also called for a ban on Hindi films in 2003 (BBC Online 08/08/2003, 10/11/2003). In June 2004, after exhibitors and distributors had defied the ban, a number of patrons were seriously injured when a grenade was lobbed into a cinema in the town of Tinsukia in the state of Assam (BBC Online 09/06/2004).

⁶¹ See Chapter Two, p 65.

In the current thawing of relations between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the Kargil conflict, Indian films have been seen as a source of potential bridge-building between the two states. Despite tensions caused by anti-Pakistan rhetoric in some Indian films, Pakistan sent a delegation to the Indian film industries FRAMES convention hosted by the FICCI in 2004 and commentators in Pakistan have observed that the future of cinema there looks bleak without access to Indian films. As noted by Pakistan's *Daily Times*:

Pakistani cinemas have spent a long time trying to convince the government that screening Indian films is the only solution to the low audiences at cinemas. They have threatened to close down cinemas over the unavailability of Pakistani films. Quite a few cinemas have already been closed and several have been converted into theatres (Gill 2004).

Cable TV operators in Pakistan went as far as striking in 2003 when the Government of Pakistan attempted to restrict their broadcasting of Indian entertainment channels, an event recorded with some triumphalism by India's *The Hindu*:

every new attempt by Islamabad to deny its people access to Indian entertainment has had the opposite effect. Bollywood films, soap operas, filmi and non-filmi songs and Indian pop groups (mostly Hindi) have become the staple diet of majority of the Pakistani society (Reddy 2003).

Writing for the BBC, Sanjoy Majumder also notes the prominent role played in cross-border trade by the illicit circulation of Indian movies in Lahore. Majumder describes the ubiquitous presence of Indian films in Lahore:

Large posters of Bollywood actresses share space with Pakistani independence leader Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Store-owner Nafeez grins as he shows off the latest film releases from across the border, illegally smuggled in via Dubai. "I sell about a couple of thousand cassettes a week. Everyone here loves Bollywood films. Last month, the Bollywood actress Urmila Matondkar was here. You should have seen the crowds - thousands and thousands gathered to catch a glimpse. There was almost a mini stampede" (Majumder 2004).

The continuing popularity of Indian cinema in the rest of South Asia has been seen as damaging competition for local film production in those states, and has at times inflamed nationalist sentiments. So while Indian films may be seen as a non-threatening alternative to US cultural production in Africa or Southeast Asia, they have been regarded as a source of cultural imperialism acting upon other South Asian states (see Sonwalkar 2001). For example, Indian films have proved both popular and controversial in Nepal (see Burch 2001), and the resumption of screenings of Indian films was one of the first media developments in post-Taleban Afghanistan.⁶² However, despite the frequency of political tensions, Indian films seemingly enjoy consistent favour from non-Indians. It can be argued, therefore, that Indian media products are playing an important role in the development of a South Asian media sphere and might, over time, contribute to the rapprochement and economic co-operation of the South Asian nations. Even if this proves not to be the case, it seems that both regular demand for, and sporadic resistance to, Indian films by culturally-proximate audiences throughout South Asia will continue and so, either legally or otherwise, will their distribution.

Situating Transnational Audiences

It is clear that identifying transnational audiences for Indian cinema at a global scale is a massive and complex undertaking, even at a fairly superficial level. This chapter has identified a number of transnational exchanges by which Indian films become objects of consumption beyond India, and hence beyond the boundaries of explanations offered by national cinema theory. This chapter has therefore constituted a double shift, most

⁶² The influence of Indian cinema in neighbouring states has been mentioned frequently in the press (see for example: BBC Online 27/12/2000, Srivastava 2001, Reddy 2003, Majumder 2004). Indian films also remain popular in Central Asia (see Whitlock and Rahimian 2004 and Hidalgo 1998).

obviously from India to various ‘off-shore’ locations but also from the discussion of media ‘markets’ or ‘territories’ to the differing social contexts inhabited by the consumers of Indian films. In the course of this transition I have identified a global geography of Indian films which will provide an important point of reference for the case study which I will undertake in the second part of this thesis. What is also critical here is that this chapter has also demonstrated that any investigation of the extra-territorial life of the Indian movie is inevitably implicated in the wider discussions surrounding the consumption of media and the interrelated processes of social identification from which meanings are constructed. In particular, an investigation of this kind must be situated within an analysis of the contemporary manifestations of the phenomena which are collectively referenced as ‘globalisation’, within which transnational cultural relationships are seen as both effective and reflective components of a world marked by increasingly mobile forms of understanding and agency. The chapter which follows will therefore address the cultural production of globalisation, and the situation of media audiences within those conditions.

Chapter Four:

Global Audiences, Media Ethnography and the Notion of Cultural Field

In this chapter I will discuss arguments which claim that the national narratives with which media products have often been associated in the past have given way to various manifestations of a global imagination. The importance of such imaginative relations in the construction of a media audience as a putative community will therefore be discussed here in depth. I will also go on to consider what the implications of this theoretical notion might be for existing paradigms of ethnographic audience research. Finally, I will introduce the notion of the ‘cultural field’ research model which I will employ in my subsequent case study as an alternative structure for locating media communities as sites of social practice.

The Cultural Production of Globalisation

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the popular Indian film is far from an obscure choice for transnational media research. Indeed, the Indian cinema could be adequately described as an inherently transcultural mode of entertainment throughout the trajectory of its hundred year history. Its suitability is also compounded by its contemporary currency. The Indian movie has been a particular object of fashionable interest in the ‘Western’ world during the period in which this study has been conducted. It has been so due to its relative position within a matrix of what could currently be considered the paramount concerns of cultural analysis:

- a) the transformative potential of new media technologies,
- b) the re-ordering of capital markets (and thus power) due to the implementation of such technologies,
- c) the consequent developments in patterns of human migration,
- d) subsequent shifts in the modes of cultural 'belonging' which can be conceived of within such a powerfully re-territorialized human sphere.

This matrix is that of globalisation, articulating as eternally-new what Arjun Appadurai has called 'modernity at large' (1996). However, taken as a causal progression from a) to d), the description of the phenomenon given here is displeasingly lateral. Starting from a media catalyst, it is technologically-deterministic and underestimates human agency. Such a linear description of contemporary cultural change is based, somewhat paradoxically, upon a view-from-nowhere which is profoundly acultural. I would suggest that this is a description of globalisation under its own terminology, the reiteration of a self-fulfilling prophecy. An alternative perspective is needed. It is necessary, first of all, to reconsider the downward progression from a) to d), and to conceive of it instead as a circular process where paradigm shifts in technology do not emerge from a vacuum. Instead, technological innovations and their implementation should be seen as outcomes stemming from the desires and demands generated by human interactions, that is by the mobility of culture.

In a cyclic model the important linkages and causal effects between the different components of globalisation are preserved. In addition, it becomes possible to conceive of all these aspects (economic, scientific, spatial, political, social and personal) as facets

of a cultural model of social change. This, in turn, allows an alternative perspective to the self-defining rhetoric of globalisation, where this phenomenon is regarded as an inherently dynamic process structured at every level by human volition (and thus contingency). From this perspective it is possible to see the profound ahistoricism of globalisation, and its 'radical new-ness', as a discursive strategy rather than a prescient analysis of the (ever)present. The teleological justification of the emergence of globalisation might then be juxtaposed with a more foundational focus on the reasons why humanity has consistently sought to reinvent itself in such a way.

The Geopolitics of Cinema

As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have observed 'The centrifugal forces of the globalizing process, and the global reach of the media, virtually oblige the contemporary media theorist to move beyond the restrictive framework of the nation-state' (1996:145). Certainly, few would now argue that an analysis of either the aesthetics or the sociological dimension of any media source can be presented convincingly within the closed frame of a strictly national history. However, national frameworks for media analysis, in their attempts to map out a cultural topography based upon the assumptions of the Westphalian system, were not necessarily oblivious to the global dimension. It is more the case that this version of the global was constructed around a different set of doxological structures than more recent transnational approaches. National media theories rely on the notion of a world structured by national components, the 'international'. The discourse of the transnational emphasises instead the cultural flows which circumvent those national structures. The approach to global

media flows taken here, therefore, seeks to emphasise the action of diffuse transnational media practices rather than seek a relative understanding of national cultural formations. It does not claim, however, that the relationships between globalisation and mass media have entirely overwritten the discursive power of the national.

Two reasons for this immediately spring to mind. Both serve to indicate that we live in a world which is increasingly *transnational*, rather than post-national. Firstly, the official production and circulation of cinematic images as an economic activity continues to operate within a system of exchange where national governments at least nominally regulate, subsidise and/or tax the production, distribution and exhibition of media products. This authority may be at times coerced and is increasingly subverted, but almost all filmmakers still need to carry passports, request filming permits and operate within at least one, but typically several, national economic systems. The second reason is that the contemporary articulation of globalisation continues to be framed by the linguistic and semantic dominance of the nation-state. The invocation of ‘national interest’ remains an everyday feature of our ‘globalised’ world. In some cases ‘national interest’ is seen to be furthered by the aggressive pursuit of the further globalisation of capital, in others the ‘national interest’ is invoked to promote legalistic or violent resistance to such forces in favour of the local. It is hardly ever a clear-cut issue, particularly since the political leaderships of various nations are inclined to switch freely between these two positions in order to improve their standing with different sectors of their populations or within various transnational coalitions. A more interconnected globe may sit uneasily within the discursive framework of nationalism. Nonetheless, it is clear that some fifteen years after the ‘end of history’ the sense of the ‘nation in crisis’ appears paradoxically to feed rather than dampen the flames of

nationalist discourse. This ensures that national imaginaries continue to provide key staging grounds for transnational politics.

In a globalising world of this kind, marked by what Shohat and Stam describe as ‘the entrenched asymmetries of international power’ (2000:381), the globalisation of cultural production has received both utopian and dystopian readings. In the first case, Shohat and Stam suggest a ‘euphoric’ dimension to discourse on globalisation, which is seen as offering opportunities for ‘the transcendence of rigid ideological and political divisions, and the worldwide availability of cultural products and information’ (2000:384). In the latter, ‘dystopic’ reading, globalisation ‘evokes the homogenisation of culture, the annihilation of local political and cultural autonomy’ (Shohat and Stam 2000:384). According to Shohat and Stam, the ‘euphoric’ position fails to adequately recognise the asymmetries of power between different parts of the globe in terms of both media ownership and the volume of media content being produced and distributed. However, the dystopic vision is also suspect. The ‘homogenisation’ thesis on globalisation is almost identical to the ‘cultural imperialism’ thesis which underpinned the longstanding ‘Hollywood versus National Cinema’ debates discussed in Chapter One. Certainly, it continues to assume that the export of an aggressive and destructive US media culture to other parts of the world is a threat to existing ‘indigenous’ cultural localisms taken to be widely accepted and ‘genuine’ cultural formations within their own social locations. Whilst this formulation continues to enjoy a degree of academic and popular credibility, it makes certain assumptions about the straightforward displacement of local culture by American media products and about the supposed stability of such ‘indigenous’ traditions, as well ignoring the mobility of such ‘oppositional’ localisms.

It is simplistic to imagine an active First World simply forcing its products on a passive Third world. ..global mass culture does not so much replace local culture as coexist with it, providing a cultural lingua franca...the imported mass culture can also be indigenised, put to local use, given a local accent...there are powerful reverse currents as a number of Third World countries (Mexico, Brazil, India, Egypt) dominate their own markets and even become cultural exporters (Shohat and Stam 1996:149).

The observation here that imported cultural products are typically consumed within localised frames of reference is extremely important. This is not just the case with American or 'First World' products in the 'Third World' but with all media everywhere, as spectators 'read' narratives in close reference to their own experiences. A flaw in Shohat and Stam's argument, however, is their implicit description of 'global mass culture' as Western or American culture. Indian cinema is not simply a 'reverse current' reacting to the energising force of First World cinema, although its borrowings from Hollywood are quite obvious. The Indian film industries were exporters from their very inception. The majority of these exports were not directed towards California or to Paris but to other parts of Asia and to Africa and elsewhere. Therefore the 'reverse current' has certainly not been the only axis of transnational movement for modern Indian popular culture. It is my contention that Indian movies are objects which contribute to global mass culture in their own right. This study therefore will follow the premise that media audiences and industries inhabit a world where commercial and cultural exchange is notably uneven, but is nonetheless multi-polar and diffuse.

Media and 'Modernity at Large'

Shohat and Stam choose to emphasise the continuity between theories of globalisation and earlier theories of modernisation, seeing both as rooted in the diffusionist model of

the ‘imperial imaginary’ of the colonial world (1996). In contrast, Arjun Appadurai argues that modernity is no longer confined to the centre-periphery model of transmission, and that in the contemporary imagination modernity has become ‘decisively at large’ (1996:3). Appadurai presents ‘a theory of rupture that takes media and migration as its two major, and interconnected, diacritics and explores their joint effect on the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity’ (1996:3), going as far as to suggest that a ‘mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass-mediated events and migratory audiences defines the core of the link between globalization and the modern’ (1996:4). From this perspective Appadurai points to the role played by transnational media currents in shaping and sustaining equally transnational audiences by addressing ‘deterritorialized’ ethnic subjectivities, which he describes as ‘diasporic public spheres’:

Diasporic public spheres, diverse amongst themselves, are the crucibles of a postnational political order. The engines of their discourse are mass media (both interactive and expressive) and the movement of refugees, activists, students and laborers (Appadurai 1996:22).

Appadurai extends Benedict Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined community’ beyond the confines of its original purpose, that is explaining the emergence of national imaginaries.⁶³ Appadurai emphasises instead the emergence of complex transnational ‘imagined worlds’ inhabited by dispersed ethnic communities. By proposing that media-use is absolutely central to this new subjectivity, Appadurai prefigures the identification of the ‘diasporic audiences’ discussed in the previous chapter. The centralising of diasporic subjects within the discursive construction of the cultural dimensions of globalisation is underlined by John Sinclair and Stuart Cunningham, who suggest that:

⁶³ See Chapter One, pp 44-47.

to the extent globalization presents more and more people with the experience of difference and displacement, the diasporic experience becomes not so much a metaphor as the archetype for the kind of cultural adaptiveness which our era demands (2000:15).

Such a position is also indicative of Stuart Hall's proposition that diasporas 'are at the leading edge of what is destined to become the truly representative 'late-modern' experience' (Hall 1993:362). Indeed, the position taken by Appadurai enjoys widespread authority in the discussion of media and globalisation. It is certainly far from contentious to claim that in the case of Indian cinema, mass migration from South Asia has facilitated the entry of Indian movies into various other national spaces. This does indeed support Appadurai's assertion that 'deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, impresarios and travel agencies, which thrive on the need of the relocated population for contact with its homeland' (1996:49). Therefore the role played by the diaspora of human beings in shaping currents within the worldwide diaspora of media content necessarily forms an important component of transnational media consumption. However, it is the diaspora of *content* that I am primarily concerned with here and unlike Appadurai and Hall I will not seek to present the subjectivities fostered by migration as exemplary or definitive of the global imagination. As I have already established in the previous chapter, diasporic consumption does not account exclusively for the mobility of Indian films. It can, therefore, only represent one piece of the puzzle.

The 'work of the imagination' which is so central to Appadurai's notion of 'modernity at large' is a good example of how the influence of Anderson's notion of an 'imagined community' has informed subsequent discussion on how the interactions between media practices and social identification serve to shape relational subjectivities. The

widespread adoption of this model of describing audiences by scholars in film studies, and the extension of his observations on community in Anderson's later work to encompass 'the representations of popular performance' (1998:29), has provided the conceptual ground for consumers of visual media to be considered as communities. Although Anderson's explanation is also technologically deterministic, the centrality given to the media in creating communities remains complementary to the manner in which I have described the phenomenon of globalisation. That is, if we focus on the communicative content of the media rather than simply the existence of its infrastructure, then communities arising from media use must be seen as culturally constructed collectives. Media *technologies* themselves may indicate the potential, and even the inevitability of modern community formation, but they cannot be used to explain the nature of such communities. Therefore, if the connection which Anderson proposes between media sources and communal identity is to be accepted, what then requires a great degree of further study is the nature of the imaginings which make such a connection possible.

This case study which I will go to present in the second part of this thesis seeks to make a modest contribution towards this enquiry. Before doing so, it is important to clarify what an emphasis on imagination implies in the context of social research. I adopt the premise here that imagination is not simply a device for the narration of abstract symbolic relations. The imagination is understood as connecting humanity with the material world, providing the terrain for collaboration in social behaviours with a seemingly endless potential for transformation. It is conceded that imagination cannot be concretely understood, either at the individual level addressed by psychoanalysis or as the massified social force addressed by the grand narratives of

political thought. Nonetheless, since I am concurring with the claims of both Anderson and Appadurai that it is in the imagination that social identity exists, it becomes necessary to investigate the actions and articulations which seek to return the imagination to the realm from which it draws its inspiration.

My investigation of the work of the imagination will be focused therefore upon the imprint of what is produced by such ‘actions and articulations’, namely culture.

Culture is seen here as the product of imagination, and the sum of cultural production as constructing the order of social life. In this sense, culture is ultimately as vast and unknowable as the imagination. However, since I have positioned cultural practice as *manifest* imagination, it is logical that its manifestation can at least be observed in part. The Indian movie functions as the particular point of cultural reference for this study because I believe that the inherent diversity of its imagining by globally dispersed audiences makes it a useful site to facilitate the investigation of a dynamic transnational imaginary, structured by the mobility of people and images operating variously in confluence, in parallel or in isolation from each other.

Appadurai puts the electronic visual media at the heart of contemporary global discourse, locating transnational media practices as both catalyst and primary evidence of a changing world. Appadurai’s focus upon the media is also significant in that he seeks to discard rather than nuance the centre-periphery models of modernisation which have dominated sociological thinking on the media in the past.

The crucial point is that the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes. The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially

mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations, which is no more and no less real than the collective representations of Emile Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media. The image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice... The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order (Appadurai 1996:31).

As I have indicated, the 'complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes' and the 'imagination as a social practice' will both be central concerns throughout the body of this thesis. However, I do not accept Appadurai's 'theory of rupture', where the imagination has been largely subject to the imposition of a radical new form by the deterministic power of electronic media. Instead the transformative power of print media (discussed by Anderson) and of electronic media (discussed by Appadurai) are seen here as points of exponential increase in the potential of dialogic technologies which are nonetheless *subject* in their creation to the aspirations of the imagination. As Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davies have stated: 'The faculty of the imagination not only conditions *how* sensual data are transformed into conscious knowledge... the imagination is also fundamental to *why*, *whether* and *what* we are ready to experience, perceive and know in the first place' (2002:325). If media technologies are catalytic forces acting upon the imagination, then they are also in themselves outcomes of cultural practices (science, commerce, leisure, politics) which are shaped by the imagination. To do the human imagination justice, this cyclical causality between delivery and demand must be recognised.

Therefore, we may have to discard the 'moment of rupture'. We might also concede that the United States may never have been the 'puppeteer of a world system of

images'; it may have always been just 'one node' of mass culture, however powerful or persuasive that node may have been in recent history. Equally, the imagination as social practice may not be a radically new phenomenon, but a persistent discursive mode through which the phantasms of the 'modern' and 'traditional', and the 'global' and 'local' have appeared historically. In this respect I feel that I must also contest Appadurai's claim that due to the advent of the electronic media:

the imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies. It has entered the logic of ordinary life from which it had largely been successfully sequestered...it is no longer a matter of specially endowed (charismatic) individuals, injecting the imagination where it does not belong. Ordinary people have begun to deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives (1996:5).

I reject this proposition because it remains an equally valid proposition to consider the imagination of ordinary people as a powerful historical force. It is absurd to suggest that the 'ordinary' have ever lacked an imagination or the ability to use it. 'Specially endowed' leaders might be better seen as successful applicants to roles created by social discourses emerging under the influence of various cumulative forces of human imagination, rather than prophetic figures emerging from a vacuum with a big idea. I would also contend that the 'special expressive place of art, myth and ritual' in different temporal and social conditions has always been *created* and *defined*, in the first place, by the cultural logic of everyday life.

The moment of new-ness, and hence rupture, emphasised so strongly by Appadurai rests upon the top-down transmission of the social imagination to the proletariat, positing a shift from 'charismatic' leaders to prescient technologies. Not only is this position anti-democratic, but the contemporaneity of such a shift is also questionable.

Appadurai asserts that: 'it is only in the past two decades or so that media and migration have become so massively globalized, that is to say, active across large and irregular transnational terrains' (1996:9). Certainly both phenomena have become increasingly significant for the upper middle classes of the subcontinent during this period, yet this media-migration nexus has some precedents. For example, the role of *The Times* of London was influential in the fostering of a transnational imaginary amongst the globally dispersed functionaries and subjects of Empire in the nineteenth century. Perhaps there are now a greater number of such transnational imaginaries in existence combining communicative and physical mobility, and it could certainly be argued that media audiences are bigger and media production more prolific at a global scale, but I would argue that this is primarily an increase in scale rather than a 'moment of rupture'.

It is possible, therefore, to challenge Appadurai's analysis on the grounds that it demonstrates a certain ahistoricism as well as a lack of democratic credentials. However, for my purposes, what gives great strength to Appadurai's reading of the mediated social imagination is not his 'theory of rupture' but his (paradoxical?) emphasis on 'everyday cultural practice through which the work of the imagination is transformed' (1996:9). So whereas Shohat and Stam's description of the global imaginary remains largely concerned with media production, Appadurai emphasises instead the role of media consumption in the social imagination:

it is wrong to assume that the electronic media are the opium of the masses. This view, which is only beginning to be corrected, is based upon the notion that the mechanical arts of reproduction largely reprimed ordinary people for industrial work. It is far too simple. There is growing evidence that the consumption of the mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and in general, *agency*...this is not to suggest that consumers are free agents, living happily in a world of safe malls, free

lunches, and quick fixes...Nevertheless, where there is consumption there is pleasure, and where there is pleasure there is agency (1996:7).

The notion that individuals are active agents in processes of mediation due to their experiential frames of reference is as important to the study of transnational media flows as the 'indigenization' of media production observed by Shohat and Stam. The first step towards a transnational paradigm for media research has been clearly identified, by Shohat and Stam and by Appadurai. The 'cultural imperialism' thesis should be discarded as a totalising explanation. Even where media dispersal is conceived of and undertaken with such an outcome in mind, the effects on the ground are far from certain. Furthermore, the inherent portability of media products which allows for the 'media outreach' ambitions of dominant states also facilitates the widespread dispersal of alternative products. Transnational media flows simply cannot be explained through any of the unidirectional models of dissemination constructed by the mass communications theories of the mid-twentieth century. Even in the United States, Hollywood is not the *only* source of media products. All film industries, however discursively orientated they might be towards cultural nationalism and a national public, have histories of exporting films to audiences outside of the 'national' domain.

Resident and Non-Resident Modes of Cinema

In recognition of the 'increasing volume and velocity of multi-directional media flows that emanate from particular cities, such as Bombay, Cairo and Hong Kong', Michael Curtin has proposed that we think of the global media as a more complex matrix linking

media capitals (2003:202). These media hubs, or ‘capitals’, have ‘specific logics of their own; ones that do not necessarily correspond to the geography, interests or policies of nation-states’ (Curtin 2003:203). However, whilst valuable in itself, the problem with simply multiplying the number of hegemonic centres is that, again, the focus remains largely centred on media production. Perhaps the greatest opportunity offered by the turn towards transnational modes of media analysis is the opportunity to interrogate the nature of reception manifested across so many different contexts. Since the dispersal of media content across a global cultural geography is seen as destabilising the analytical logic of the communicative community laid down by nationalist logic, this would seem to suggest that it is imperative to re-think the terms through which the audience is imagined. If this is not done, our model of the audiences inhabiting a global media sphere will remain confined within the more limited definition of audiences as consuming communities occupying ‘territories’ or representing ‘markets’. The notion of an inhabited *market* as a collective social formation does have some merit, but it is a limited basis for enquiry. An audience seen in this way is conceived of in terms of an interdependency between media producers and consumers which attributes agency, albeit unequally, to both. However, the limitations of a market-based definition of community arise from the restriction of social agency to choices based upon consumption. Although such a model might allow some questioning of why consuming-agents make their viewing choices, the terms of the enquiry will always attribute more weight to the decisive act of consumption than to the production of meanings.

My intention in this thesis, therefore, is to shift the discussion of transnational media flows away from the political-economies of production and towards the variable conditions of media reception in a world structured semantically by transnational

politics. To deal with the dispersal of feature films, I suggest a relatively simplistic formulation of *resident* and *non-resident* modes of cinema. A film could be considered resident under conditions where viewers can be persuaded to perceive its milieu (in terms of both fantastic and realist representations) as somehow coterminous with the society which they inhabit. This is the mode of cinema promulgated by exponents of ‘national cinema’, matching national representations, nationally-produced objects and national audiences comprised of national subjects. When a media artefact operates outside of an environment where it can claim to present a social imagination ‘about here and about us’, then the artefact and the audiences it addresses cannot be discursively contained within such a relationship. There is no moment of rupture here; the global dispersal of cinema has always had the effect of facilitating conditions of reception founded upon a *non-resident* relationship.

The dispersal of feature films since the early days of cinema has inevitably brought them into contact with a range of audiences who most likely did not perceive the narrative address of the product as allegorical of the social conditions which they themselves inhabited. Contemporary audiences for a non-resident mode of cinema might be comprised of ‘foreign’ viewers in other nation-states, of ‘foreigners’ domiciled ‘domestically’ or of expatriate citizens. In much of the world where imports make up the bulk of films screened various non-resident experiences of cinema are in fact the most common, and most purportedly ‘national cinemas’ also serve significant non-resident audiences elsewhere. Indeed, it would be difficult to entirely dismiss Appadurai’s observation that the increased levels of mobility amongst both media products and their viewers could be seen as creating conditions under which a purported normative ‘resident’ condition becomes more and more tenuous. However, this does not

of itself indicate the post-national world suggested by Appadurai. I also believe that care must be taken to distinguish between the diaspora of ethnic populations and the global dispersal of media products; the two are clearly related, but not, in my opinion, directly comparable. Accordingly, the non-resident model offered here would encompass Appadurai's 'diasporic public spheres' where migrants interact with media imported from 'home', but it also seeks to recognise their knowledge of other media sources (both from 'here' and from 'elsewhere') as well as the interaction of non-migrant populations with various non-resident media streams. None of these configurations are considered as more or less exemplary of global or national imaginaries, since *taken together* they are all components which structure the inter-referential system of transnational media.

Media Studies, Ethnographic Practice and the 'Situated Imagination'

One of the major constitutive features of Anderson's model of the 'imagined community' is that it emphasises the common over the particular and suggests that each member of an imagined community conceives of other unknown members in terms of a 'deep horizontal comradeship' or 'fraternity' (1991:7). In turn the social model of media studies assumes that each viewer hypothetically positions other viewers as taking part in the same mythic and textual engagement, of watching the same film *similarly*. Whilst this sameness of experience might be said to have been disproved consistently by qualitative research into 'active' audiences, it is an optical and subjective illusion which continues to influence how we relate our personal media use to a wider social sphere. As a paradigm for media research, however, the use of an 'imagined community'

argument tends to rely on the prior establishment of a collective entity under terms that are extraneous to media use. Therefore, it is in circumstances where shared media use is in the first place coterminous with other parameters of social classification that the notion of imagined community most typically forms the basis for a large scale reading of social identification. It is often assumed that where a relatively discrete community can be established, in terms of nationality, ethnicity, class or otherwise, the media practices of that categorical group can be analysed in order to make a cultural assessment of the collective social imagination of a 'community'. This can be done empirically (through observation), qualitatively (through interviews), or psychoanalytically (through textual analysis related to a hypothetical, generic member of that group).

The great benefit of an ethnographic study analysing trends in media-use amongst a categorically defined community is that it possesses a certain narrative cohesion, since it dovetails neatly with demographic understandings of human populations as constituted by a series of classifiable types. In considering the drawbacks, however, it is first of all worth recognising that most anthropologists have long conceded that there is no such thing as a homogenous cultural community with fixed boundaries. Faye Ginsberg, for example, states that an investigation of the 'social relations of media production, circulation, and reception' requires an understanding of how even a single audience subject may be the site of plural and complex social identities' (2002:363). In the anthropology of the contemporary media, researchers need to consider a subject employing multiple identities interacting with an object which is itself active across multiple social terrains. Any investigation of media reception, and of the construction of

social meanings, therefore, has to be considered as an enquiry which juxtaposes what are essentially moving objects.

Even without facing this challenge to cultural identity as a reliable anthropological metre, a media audience is not likely to fit absolutely with any identified social group. A 'blunt' ethnographic approach towards media audiences is likely to ignore such discrepancies. This is particularly tempting when there is a demonstrably high incidence of a given media practice amongst the population in question - few would deny that the audience for Indian movies is comprised of Indians in a large part. However, there are many non-Indians who also watch Indian films. A natural inclination to look at the use of media in identity construction by Indians resident overseas as a nexus of globalized cultural positioning in this case should also be tempered by the recognition that many of Indians overseas do not watch Indian films. If we position the consumption of films as constitutive of an act of long-distance cultural maintenance or ethnic belonging, it would still be absurd to suggest that those who do not patronize Indian films are relatively lacking in Indian-ness. Too many factors come into play, such as social class, educational background, regional orientation, lifestyle and cultural environment, generational and gendered positioning, political stance and even personal taste. Indeed those who are most concerned with maintaining Indian-ness may well have cause to see popular films as a hybrid and ersatz form, threatening in their own right. To complicate matters even further, in a more connected world viewers are almost certainly not fixated upon any single media diet. To presume otherwise almost inevitably leads to essentialism of the following kind: all Indians (regardless of their ethnic, gendered, professional, political or personal differences) are obsessed with Indian movies (regardless of the differences between movies) and this is an essential component, and

therefore measure, of their identity (regardless of their other media use and the influence of other non-media practices which might also affect social identification). In such a reading non-Indian fans of Indian movies and Indians who are not movie fans, or are fans of other kinds of movies, become marginalized as agents whose behaviour is anomalous to the normative conditions set by the research paradigm. This is because their 'social identity' as the inhabitants of a certain 'ethnicity' cannot be correlated directly, and empirically, to their personal practices of media consumption.

A more sophisticated, or 'situated', ethnographic approach towards media audiences takes into account the heterogeneity of the population in question and the internal contradictions which are likely to exist within it. It also recognises the external influences which both reinforce and destabilise the social identity of the group. In its most convincing form, a situated approach seeks to evaluate the whole range of cultural practices present within a sampled group which might be variously constituted as forms of production-reproduction, import-export and relation-translation. In attempting to do justice to the complexity of social life, a situated study cannot be plausibly restricted to, or draw conclusions from, media use alone. In this sense, the situated model of media ethnography is much closer to the classical anthropological model where an extensive cultural enquiry into social relations must be enacted in order to adequately contextualise the discussion of any particular detail. Correspondingly, where the situated ethnographic method is most useful is in understanding the context of media use within a given locality which can be observed either in totality or by a reasonably dense sample - thus a household, a street, a suburb. In addition, as with more contemporary anthropology, studies of this kind must also account for the temporal dimension - the recognition that all cultural practices are dynamic and change over time

without necessarily becoming ‘corrupted’ or less ‘authentic’ behaviours. Where the situated model becomes difficult to apply successfully is when dealing with large (and therefore unobservable) samples, for example national populations, or with dispersed social formations which can only be identified in the first place as a community through the application of an essentialism of some kind, at which point a ‘blunt’ ethnography becomes inevitable.

The distinction which I have sought to establish here between two different forms of ethnographic practice, which have arguably become implicitly positioned as examples of good and bad practice, can only be loosely determined. Ethnographic studies will most likely combine both ‘blunt’ and ‘situated’ elements within their research practice according to the available means and the context of the research. This does not mean all ethnographic media studies are essentialist and therefore compromised, and in any case the essentialist problem also arises when using other methodologies. Nonetheless, Arild Fetveit is probably right to point out that any assumption that human research is of necessity *less* essentialist than textual research of the human condition is dangerous, and most likely, indefensible (2001).

For some, the benefits of ethnographic practice operate along a quantitative scale, where research based on a handful of subjects is seen to be a less solid or ‘rigorous’ basis for conjecture than a study which includes thousands. However, sample size has surprisingly little bearing on the likely occurrence of essentialism, partly because a preponderance towards essentialism is built into our signifying system. This is a problem which can therefore only be partially overcome through intellectual diligence, both by researchers and their readership. In the case of media-centric ethnography,

however, I think there is a significant additional danger in the transfer of ethnographic models of community from classical anthropological studies to a media-research environment. First of all, it is worth recalling Philip Schlesinger's observation that there has typically been an internalist focus towards the socialising agency of media in modern communications theory (2000:21).⁶⁴ If this internalist focus is coupled with the use of ethnographic terminology originally developed by anthropologists for the analysis of what were then presumed to be relatively stable and located cultural communities, then there is likely to be a bias towards conceiving of a media audience as a discrete, and culturally similar, population.

In order to correlate the methodological dimension of this argument with the theoretical basis of my enquiry it is necessary to consider the nature of the social imagination at work in the ethnographic method. In the first place, ethnography is an empirical tradition which seeks to manufacture situated knowledge. The *nature* of this situated knowledge derives from its origin within the lived social relations from which it is purportedly drawn, and for which it provides evidence. The *authority* of situated knowledge in ethnographic practice is based upon the particularity of the quantitative and/or qualitative evidence gathered at any site of social practice, but the ultimate *production* of that knowledge nonetheless occurs elsewhere. While the authority of situated knowledge is located in the research subject, the *agency* inherent in the production of such knowledge is epistemological. It occurs at the moment where quantitative data is inscribed with meaning through qualified explanation and, conversely, where qualitative data is assumed by extension to represent a social truth operating at a larger scale. The moment of epistemological agency is a moment of

⁶⁴ See Chapter One, pp 52-53.

position-taking, one where the creative imagination of the researcher *claims* situated knowledge. It is, of necessity, a point at which articulations of various individual and collective senses of self and other are defined, stabilised and inter-related from a particular standpoint.

Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davies make the argument that the production of situated knowledge can no longer base its authority upon the masking notions of an objective research position or a universal set of truths within which any particular manifestation of social practice or location can be encapsulated. Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies propose instead that the production of situated knowledge should be predicated in the first place upon the notion of a 'situated imagination'. They indicate that the idea of a situated subject has received substantial discussion under the guise of standpoint theories which:

claim, in somewhat different ways, that it is vital to account for the social positioning of the social agent. This accounting for the situatedness of the knowing subject has been used epistemologically in standpoint theories in at least two different ways: the first claims that a specific social situatedness...endows the subject with a privileged access to truth; the other...rejects such a position and views the process of approximating truth as part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differentially situated (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002:315).

The first set of perspectives on the significance of subjective positioning is one which invokes the *authoritative* ethnographic subject. This is the position which allows for only a subject occupying a particular social category to speak for others in that category. It is predicated upon the inimical difference of any given subjective position as categorized by ideologies of class, gender, ethnicity, faith etc. when compared to another subject position categorized differently under the same terms. This is the point where subjectivity becomes identity, and where individual characteristics are assumed

to merge with collectives of shared categorization. A more ‘rigorous’ approach would most likely require the matching of several strata of subject categorization in order to construct the authoritative informant as a representative embodiment of a purported subject position. The overall premise, however, remains the same.

By contrast, the second set of perspectives seek instead to emphasise the *particular situatedness* of experiential understandings, and thus subjective agency in each and any case. In this model every subject possesses a different standpoint, constructed around their own imaginative interactions with various ideological and material articulations of the social imaginary. The agency of subjects stems from their ability to creatively imagine the complex interfaces between individual *experiential* and collective *relational* ontologies. This ‘situated imagination’ of subjects suggests a far greater degree of agency for media viewers than that which might be measured by choices of consumption. It is far more individuated than the model of agency which allows the authoritative ethnographic research subject to stand for, but *only* for, a collective expression of similar social type. Nonetheless, freed of the burden of representing anything other than their own standpoint, subjects must of necessity articulate their *relation* to others in order to describe their own position. On this basis, this ‘situated imagination’ is also a site where situated knowledge is produced and contested, in a form which might be defined as anchored ‘in actual social practices (that are linked, but not reducible to certain social positionings)’ (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies 2002:317).

The integrity of knowledge purported to originate in the ‘situated imagination’ is more difficult to ‘claim’ at the moment of writing; since it operates without a normative representative position and can only be managed imaginatively by the researcher. Here,

epistemological authority does not rest upon an ability to provide explanation, but on an ability to successfully convey the *relatively* different explanations of others, which in turn, the reader may compare to their own imaginative position. The agency arising from this form of producing knowledge is not concentrated in any writer, speaker or reader; it is widespread throughout the communicative process. This model of the research relationship also appears to be somewhat analogous to the model of social imagination which it is intended to describe, that is a dialogic relationship constructed across a variety of subjective standpoints which are created imaginatively by socially-situated agents.

The Cultural Field as a Site of Relational Imagining

The production of situated knowledge which underpins ethnographic enquiries also has great significance in the construction of an alternative relational model of the media audience. The formulation of such a model that I will propose here is the conception of a media audience as inhabitants of a 'cultural field' centred on the media product in question. The community being referenced here is simply formulated as a population constructed through their participation in the production, distribution or consumption of a media artefact. This artefact is further perceived of as having the potential to enact diverse cultural dialogues across a wide and variegated social space. It is not assumed that members of the audience possess a shared identity which can be measured through the product itself. It does however assume that they have a shared interest (which in this case is Indian films) and that mapping the different subjective positions from which they understand or imagine those films is most useful, not for the centralising of the

object itself, but rather for an analysis of position-takings and the agencies at play in the situation of the social experiences which surround it.

Theorising the Cultural Field

Despite the obvious similarity of the term ‘cultural field’, the notion I am employing here differs from Pierre Bourdieu’s *Field of Cultural Production* (1993). This is primarily a question of purpose. I do not intend to undertake a Marxist analysis of a systematic power structure of aesthetics. My concern is not with hierarchies of production, but with the varied situation of cultural consumption. Nonetheless, it may be worth considering Bourdieu’s theory in order to make these distinctions more apparent. For Bourdieu the ‘field of cultural production’ is an area of activity bounded by an internal logic which exists within a hierarchy of larger homologous fields (of power, economics, education), but which is nonetheless relatively autonomous from them. The field is inhabited by active agents involved in the production of cultural forms who struggle to achieve hegemony over the means of production and thus the field itself. It is this struggle for control which creates volition within the field, and in this sense the cultural field reflects the ‘social relations of which these symbolic systems are a more or less transformed expression’ (1993:32). Bourdieu also describes the field of culture as an ‘economic world reversed’, where the symbolic capital being contested has an inverse value to its economic potential. It is in this way that the superiority of a ‘restricted field’, described as the ‘most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers’ is preserved

(1993:39). It is in this way that Bourdieu describes the divide between elite culture and popular culture.

What structures Bourdieu's cultural field is not only the internal logic of an economic world reversed, but also the 'position-takings' of agents (cultural producers). In turn their position in the field is relative to their contestation of the 'legitimate' form of cultural production as well as subject to the influence of their *habitus*. The habitus is the product of their education (the sum of familial, institutional and diffuse didacticism) and it is this which gives them the means to comprehend the code of the cultural product in question and the rules of the field. This ability in turn allows them to unconsciously translate the 'cultural capital' inherent to the field into the maintenance or improvement of their position in the field or into other forms of capital (economic, political, educational). Bourdieu claims that habitus produces a superior understanding of forms closer to the 'restricted field' by members of the dominant classes, since cultural capital is distributed unevenly amongst social classes who are acculturated for different purposes. A suitable habitus is required to 'enter' the field of cultural production, and some are more suitable than others according to its system of value. From this perspective, Bourdieu sees the role of the cultural field, as with the educational field, as reinforcing the class differences found in the fields of power and economics. So despite the relative autonomy of the cultural field, the collective affect of their own habitus upon agents is to generate practices within the field which reinforce class relations.

The 'cultural field' research model that I propose has goals, and assumptions, which are markedly different from the prerogatives which guide Bourdieu's use of the term 'field'. First of all, I reject even a qualified notion that there are other fields, such as economics

or power, which exist outside of the realm of culture. Culture, as I have described it in this study, is the sum of 'actions and articulations' stemming from the human imagination, and as such represents the totality of social life. Commerce and politics are both cultural activities, and they are neither outside of, nor autonomous in relation to, culture; nor is any observable instance of cultural practice autonomous in relation to their influence. In short, I am unconvinced by variants of the base-superstructure argument which present capitalism as a force external to and governing the social imagination. However, even when taken on its own terms as a realm of activity distinct from other forms of practice, Bourdieu's 'field of cultural production' represents a different understanding of the cultural in certain key areas. First of all is his insistence that the 'restricted production' of high cultures is inherently of greater symbolic worth than the 'mass production' of popular culture. Such a formulation only makes sense where the term 'culture' is made effectively synonymous with the term 'art', which is in all fairness the consistent object of Bourdieu's attention. However, it is not my intention in this thesis to make any explicit or implicit value judgement between different formations of cultural practice. Even were I to do so, Bourdieu's notion that the apex of cultural production is a 'restricted' field operating outside of commercial interests and interested only in symbolic rewards or 'prestige' is unconvincing. Although it seeks other forms of remuneration, high culture is a financially lucrative business and producers of popular culture often display an interest in various forms of prestige. All in all, Bourdieu's 'field of cultural production' might be seen as simply the cultural field generated around the idea of 'art'; where he perceives that a majority of the participants imagine that artistic freedom is the ultimate goal (central to the field) and that commercial success is debasing (therefore peripheral).

There are also differences in approach which I wish to emphasise when we turn from the hierarchical principles which structure Bourdieu's field and focus instead on its inhabitants. The agents within Bourdieu's field are all in some sense involved in the production of cultural artefacts. He attributes little, or no, agency to the consumers of those artefacts which implies that they exist outside the field of cultural production and have no meaningful influence upon it. Bourdieu rejects 'the hypothesis of the spontaneous correspondence or deliberate matching of production to demand or commissions' (1993:34). He is only able to do so, I would suggest, by first supposing that commercial activities are of necessity peripheral to the field and that the centre of the field is 'perfectly autonomous' from the need for an audience. This seems to contradict his enquiry into the social relations which constitute cultural production, or at least limit that enquiry to a 'perfect' closed society of producers. For my purposes, I would concur instead with Appadurai's formulation that there is also a degree of agency inherent in the consumption of a cultural artefact, and I would suggest that these consuming agents therefore exert a powerful force upon the field associated with it (1996:7).

Taken together, rejecting the existence of external non-cultural fields and attributing agency to consumers prompts us to re-evaluate the nature of the 'position-takings' within the field. If consumers of cultural products may not all have a vested interest in a struggle for control of the legitimate method of production, then what explains their position as agents within the field? Are there more or less 'perfect' forms of consumption (where the symbolic struggle is for pleasure rather than prestige) to be contested along with those of production? Clearly if the field is inhabited by both producers and consumers and also contains varied forces or relations of aesthetics,

commerce, politics and social interaction then its nature as a 'field of struggles' is much more complex. It may not, for example, possess the discernible positive and negative poles which are essential to Bourdieu's formulation. Without the presumption of such a binary struggle, or of a 'perfect' centre, the inculcation of their habitus is left as the sole determinant of the situation of agents in relation to cultural production. However, since processes of education (be they formal or diffuse) are inherently cultural practices, and thus part of the field itself, the habitus implies a profoundly structuralist argument; that is, our position in relation to culture is determined by our cultural position. In this case, then why should there ever be any movement in the field? The notion of the habitus seems to limit human agency to, at best, an unconscious pursuit in the cultural field of inculcated class interests which are inherent and self-replicating within that field. What places does this leave for the social imagination, as Appadurai puts it, 'as a staging ground for action' (1996:7)?

Inhabiting the Cultural Field

Bourdieu's theoretical model of the field of cultural production suffers from its restrictive definition of culture, its inherent elitism and its elevation of a 'perfect' aesthetic world of cultural production without consumption, not to mention a population of more and less cultured people. I am unconvinced both by the governing structure of the 'economic world reversed' and by the 'structuring structure' described by the habitus. What I would seek to preserve from Bourdieu, however, is the interrogation of the practices which surround a cultural product as essential to an understanding of it, and the presence of both agency and volition within that field of practices. My departure from Bourdieu must be understood in relation to the different contexts of our enquiry. I

am seeking to propose a model for the analysis of a cultural artefact which takes into account the varied social practices and environments where that artefact is materially or symbolically present. Bourdieu seeks to construct a hierarchy of cultural production which represents and reinforces class relations. Clearly these are endeavours of a different kind. However, the notion of a *field*, which is what brings these divergent concerns together in the first place, is extremely important because I believe it offers the best possibility of researching a cultural product not simply in and of itself, nor as a straightforward allegorical transposition of a society or societal group. It differs, therefore, from the ethnographic model of the media audience since ‘what can be constituted as a system for the sake of analysis’ is not assumed to be ‘the product of a coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus’ (Bourdieu 1993:34). However, I depart from Bourdieu’s subsequent conclusion that the field must therefore be ‘the product and prize of a permanent conflict’ (1993:34) and suggest instead that the cultural field is a discursive space representing the area of influence surrounding any given artefact, idea or practice, and that, following Appadurai, this cultural field is defined by the imaginative work of its participants.

The cultural field I propose here is conceived as a radial zone of influence within which viewers engage with a cultural artefact for different purposes, and from different standpoints, thus generating different meanings and pleasures. Within this field of practices there will be participants who occupy different positions in relation to the object of interest, ranging from those with a deep degree of investment, either personally or professionally, to those who are disinterested or only dimly aware of that artefact, idea or practice. However, positionality within a field is not restricted to centre and periphery, since it is also affected by the relative influence of other overlapping

fields imagined around other ideas and practices, against which participation in this field is understood by participants in relative terms. The inhabitants of any cultural field will therefore understand their participation, and situation, within that field relative to the intersection of the field with a wide range of other ideas and practices (therefore other fields) which contribute to their social and cultural literacy. Thus, there is virtually no limit to the number of positionalities available within the field itself. Furthermore for participants, the imagined relations between themselves, the object at the centre of the field and the fields formed around overlapping ideas or practices are likely to change over time. Therefore the relative position of agents in a field is also subject to temporal change. Finally, the situation, or position-taking of agents will also be articulated relative to at least the hypothetical presence of other agents within the field. A cultural field is therefore a dynamic site constructed from the sum of participants understood as a body of diverse and mobile agents engaged in particular and relative forms of social imagination.

It is particularly helpful to think of media audiences in this way because under the aegis of 'globalisation' any community imagined through media-use is likely to be shaped by multiple practices of cultural consumption and association. What most characterises the contemporary media as a discursive force in society is its multiple sources and its intertextuality. Therefore, it is hoped that the notion proposed here of a cultural field may facilitate a more dynamic enquiry into both the Indian film and the social imagination than the arbitrary or 'blunt' imposition of sameness. The cultural field model, unlike ethnographic enquiry, does not bear the burden of providing a *representative* sample of a collective truth. What it allows for is the inclusion of participants whose situated imaginations have a bearing upon the enquiry; the wider the

enquiry, the larger the field from which they can be drawn. Nonetheless, in a certain sense a 'cultural field' model of analysis still represents an arbitrary closure. It recognises that no artefact, idea or practice is a discrete entity, but nonetheless delimits the size of the field being surveyed solely in relation to the object of analysis which defines the field *and the questions being asked of it*.

A practical methodological structure remains essential in order to conduct meaningful research into this complex melange of objects, practices and occurrences. However, since it remains the case that no practical study is likely to exhaust the range of positionalities and linkages which are extent in any field of cultural practices, what we are seeking to obtain is a *selection* of point samples from within the field whose position-takings might be understood in relative terms. In practice, the method of selection will always be conducted along a spectrum of intervention by the researcher, since there can be no perfectly representative subject, nor any method of selection which is truly 'imperfect'. In practice, again, there is only limited equality of position amongst agents in any qualitative study. The articulate, informed and compliant will always be better represented in scholarly text than their opposites.

In a general sense the proposition of this 'cultural field' model is predicated upon my own position-taking as a researcher. Appadurai, as an anthropologist, remains primarily interested in the cultural lives of human communities, and his interest in the media and globalisation is directed towards that goal. This explains his proposition 'that we regard as cultural only those differences that either express, or set the groundwork for, the mobilization of group identities' and that therefore 'we restrict the term culture as a marked term to the subset of these differences that has been mobilized to articulate the

boundary of difference' (1996:13). Bourdieu on the other hand, as a sociologist, seeks a systematic understanding of cultural practice as part of a larger social system. In both these instances culture is employed as a means of assessing social groups. However, what I am seeking to achieve as a media researcher is in some senses the inverse of these enquiries, that is, to interrogate the nature of the community formed around engagement with a media artefact. Therefore my analytical goal here is not to use Indian movies as a measure of an existing social group, but instead as a focal point around which the various purported relationships which I have discussed between media use and the social imagination might be tested. In doing so, my method is to engage holders of other situated knowledges in a collaborative analysis of Indian film culture. These goals are by no means exclusive to the other enquiries discussed here, but there is an important shift in emphasis in each case.

A further dimension of the cultural field which is also highly relevant to the transnational context of this enquiry, and the phenomenon of globalisation as a research subject, is the *scale* of the field. The emphasis placed upon the significance of media use by theories of globalisation stems from the belief that the media is implicated in the construction of a social imagination producing conditions where the local *everywhere* is interlaced with the articulation of the global. The technological developments which have given rise to an increasingly media-saturated global environment, and which have been seen as a catalyst for the global imagination, have also clearly extended the available means of academic enquiry to the extent that the situation of agents can now be researched across a broad scale of proximity.

Nonetheless, the dense interaction of local and global frames of reference active within any site of social practice would appear to indicate that the local continues to be a useful context for understanding the global. The first part of this thesis has attempted to consider the Indian cinema as a global phenomenon, and has therefore cast its field of analysis at a global scale. In the second part of this thesis which follows, I will recast this field of analysis at a local scale by presenting a case study which will consider the field of practices constructed around Indian film culture in a social context specific to a small region found on the East coast of Australia. Taken together, the global context which I have provided to date and the material arising from the local application of my proposed research model comprise the ‘fieldwork’ around which my hypothesis of a relational imagination will be explored.

Part Two: Indian Films in an Australian Social Context

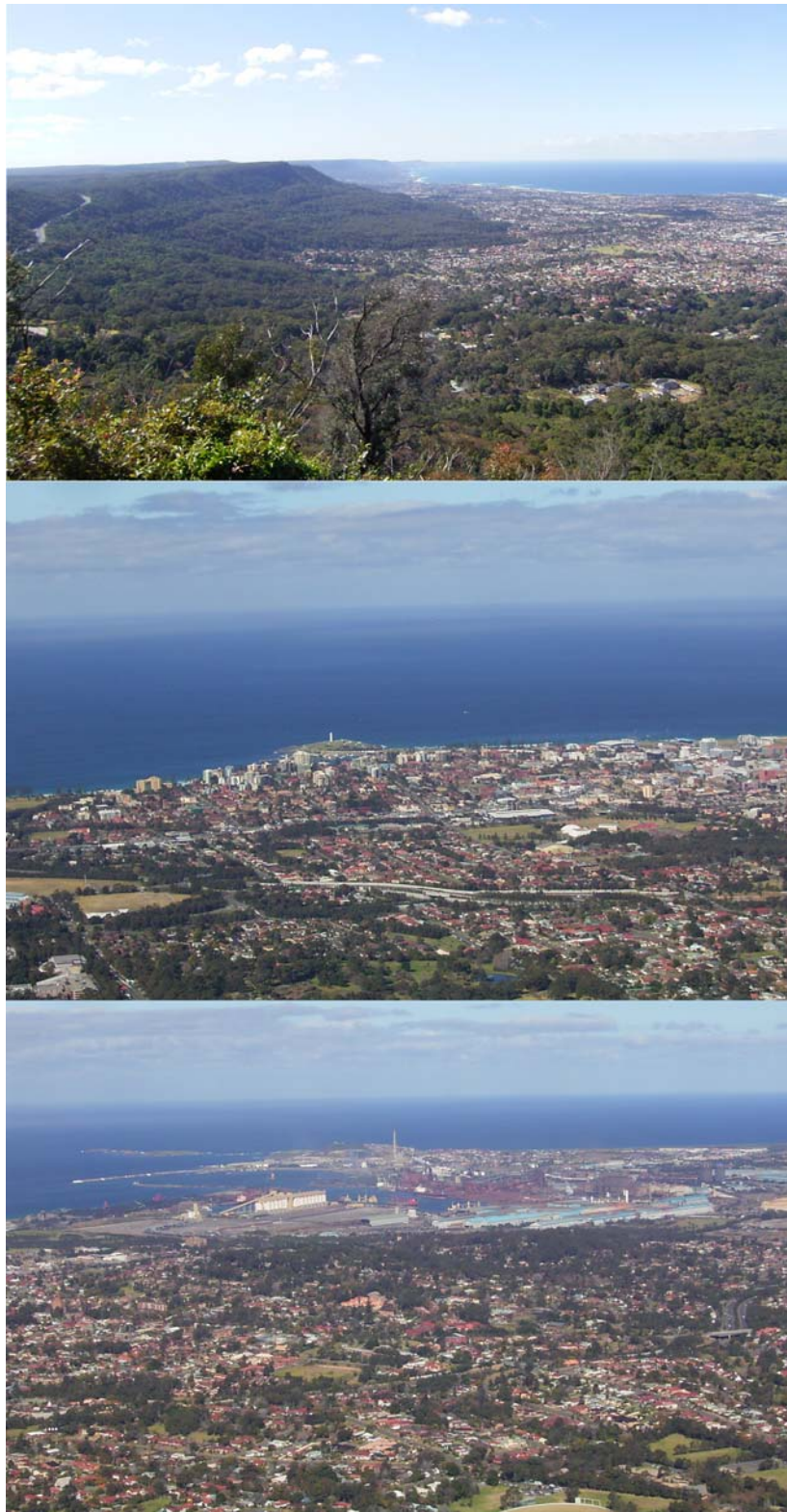


Fig. 4 Conurbation of Wollongong, Illawarra Region, New South Wales, Australia (Top to bottom: Northern, Central, Southern districts, Author's Illustration).

Chapter Five:

Introduction to the Case Study

During 2002-2004 I conducted an enquiry into the ‘cultural field’ of Indian films as manifested in the Sydney and Illawarra regions of New South Wales, Australia. The Sydney region was taken here to include the entire contiguous conurbation of Greater Sydney, including outlying areas which are administered as separate ‘cities’ according to local government structures. The Illawarra region is a coastal area adjacent to Greater Sydney and lying to its south. The largest population centre in the Illawarra is the city of Wollongong, which is located some 80 kilometres south of Sydney and is the second largest city in the state of New South Wales.

Fig. 5: Case Study Research Area (Author’s Illustration).

The object of research was a heterogenous and mobile body of social agents comprising the audience for Indian films, for whom this particular instance of media use was seen

as only forming part of their cultural lives. The hypothesis was advanced that this ‘cultural field’ would not be overwhelmingly characterised by similarity of imagination and demarcated by clear boundaries, and that within this field of practices the Indian movie would be used, and described, differently. In this case study, the cultural field around Indian movies in this part of Australia was not seen to represent a discrete environment. Participants in this field were assumed to be, to differing degrees and in different combinations, under the influence of other concepts and practices which could be considered as cultural fields in their own right, such as:

- Various social practices of cinema (mainstream and niche cinema, movie festivals, domestic playback, community media-projects or events, educational or leisurely use of films) and various aesthetic practices of cinema genres and styles (action, romance, art-house).
- Other sources of media (internet, television, magazines) and other sources of cinema (Australian, American et. al.).
- Various ‘imagined communities’ which are referenced either geo-spatially (for example: the local community), demographically (for example: generational groupings) or ideologically (for example: followers of a certain religion) or which might employ a combination of these discursive rationales (such as nation, gender, ethnicity).

Within the field of practices surrounding the use of Indian films, the study sought to encourage discussion of the following topics:

- The social practices which surround Indian movies (for example film festivals or domestic playback) and the cultural practices which are derived from Indian movies in different social contexts (for example, 'Bollywood' dance routines or wedding fashions).
- The different perspectives from which people do (or do not) enjoy those movies.
- The influence of other media sources on the interpretation/use of Indian movies by different viewers.
- The influence of the social environment of different viewers upon their interpretation/use of Indian movies.
- The varied ways in which viewers, producers, distributors and exhibitors imagine audiences for Indian movies.

The stated aim of this case study was to establish whether the notion of a cultural field could be employed to make a practical contribution towards a framework for transnational media analysis. There was also an explicit intention to investigate the role of the social imagination in the construction of media audiences. From that perspective simply analysing the movies themselves was not likely to sufficiently explain their non-resident conditions in Australia, since the films themselves as audiovisual artefacts remain largely unchanged across the different social contexts in which they are put to use. Equally, since I have proposed that the cultural field of a media product is structured by diverse subjective positions related to its reception, my own analysis of a movie cannot speak for others members of its audience. This case study therefore sought to include contributions from people with differing interests in the presence of Indian movies in Australia.

The Conduct and Structure of the Case Study

A mixed methodological approach was employed during the conduct of the case study. The first stage of my investigation took the form of an ‘online survey’ of globally dispersed ‘diasporic’ Indian youth. This survey was conducted during 2002-2003 and was intended to provide, along with the research presented in chapter three, a global frame of reference for the local case study. This component of my research will be referred to hereafter as the ‘online survey’. The second stage of my field research took the form of two sets of substantial one-on-one interviews. In one set of interviews I met with seven individuals who were engaged in the dissemination of Indian film culture in the study area in various forms. This body of research will be referred to hereafter as the ‘professional interviews’. In another set of interviews I met with volunteers living in the study area who identified themselves as having a prior interest in watching Indian films. This body of research will be referred to hereafter as the ‘audience interviews’. The final component of the research process was the screening of Indian film excerpts to a body of ninety students enrolled on a film studies course at the University of Wollongong, and the collection of short written responses from those students in a survey format. This material will be referred to hereafter as the ‘screening survey’.

‘Online Survey’:

A small-scale exploratory study was conducted early in the study through an online survey targeting Indian student organisations in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. This survey sought to provide an indicative account of the ‘taste culture’ of young ‘non-resident’ Indians by which the claims made by Appadurai and others pertaining to the central importance of ethnically defined

media use might be tested. The electronic survey was conducted from 2002 to 2003 and received 54 responses to an electronic form. The form was located within a small website outlining the purpose of the enquiry. A paper copy of the online survey can be found in the appendix of this thesis, on pages 382-383.

'Professional Interviews':

The seven 'professional' interviewees included in the study were selected on the basis of their involvement with the commercial life of Indian films in the study area. Interviewees were introduced to the context of my enquiry into transnational audiences, and invited to discuss their own activities with particular attention to the consumption of Indian films in Australia. The professional 'roles' of the seven interviewees included:

- Vijay (pseudonym): A director of a cinema exhibiting Indian films in South West Sydney.
- Niru (pseudonym): A grocery-store owner in the Illawarra running a rental outlet for Indian films in playback formats.
- Mitu Lange: A manager of a Melbourne-based distribution company distributing Indian films across Australia.
- John Winter: An Australian film producer seeking to undertake a co-produced feature involving the Australian and Indian film industries.
- Anuparm Sharma: A Sydney-based film-maker and line producer for Indian film projects in Australia, who is also the chairman of the newly constituted Australia-India Film, Media and Entertainment Council (FAME).
- Safina Uberoi: An Australian-Indian documentary film-maker

- Anoushka Nand: The webmaster of a website dedicated to ‘South Asian Youth’ in the Greater Sydney region.

‘Audience Interviews’:

The audience interviews conducted during the study were interviews of around one hour’s duration. The interview process was intended to explore how participants in the study area positioned themselves discursively in relation to Indian films and their own uses of them, as well as to the imagining of audiences for those films. Volunteers for the audience interviews were solicited through flyer advertising at local campuses and at a playback outlet for Indian films in the Illawarra. The interviewees were all young people (19-32 years of age) undertaking tertiary education (undergraduate and postgraduate). No further selection was made from those who expressed an interest, although some volunteers ultimately proved unable to take part in the study due to their own commitments. The gender mix of the thirteen interviewees who did take part in the study was three males and ten females. They included a range of ethnicities (Anglo-Saxon, Bengali, Chinese, Kannadiga, Malay, Punjabi, Tamil, Timorese). The interviewees are identified in this thesis by the following pseudonyms:

- Amita (Temporary Resident of Australia, Indian national)
- Asha (Australian Citizen, born in India)
- Carly (Australian Citizen, born in Australia)
- David (Australian citizen, born in Australia)
- Iqbal (Permanent Resident of Australia, originally from Bangladesh).
- Jose (Temporary Resident of Australia, East Timor National)

- Lalitha (Australian Citizen, born in Sri Lanka)
- Leela (Permanent Resident of Australia, originally from Singapore)
- Priya (Australian Citizen, born in India)
- Tina (Permanent Resident of Australia, originally from China)
- Sharmila (Temporary Resident of Australia, Indian national)
- Sunita (Temporary Resident of Australia, Indian national)
- Suzanne (Temporary Resident of Australia, United States national)

A list of interview questions can be found in the appendix of this thesis, see page 381.

‘Screening Survey’:

The screening survey was a reception study which sought to complement the responses of the self-selecting audience interviewees by providing a comparative selection of qualitative responses from a group with no prior stated interest in Indian films.

Participants in the survey exercise were students at the University of Wollongong from a number of disciplines who were enrolled in a subject entitled ‘Film Form and Style’. Of the enrolment group of 153 students, 90 students chose to attend the workshop and complete the survey. They were not required to do so as part of their course, nor were they obliged to take part in the exercise. The survey group was comprised largely of domestic students although there were 15 international exchange students who also took part (mostly US citizens but also including 3 Koreans and 1 Japanese). The age range of the group was 18-34 with two thirds of participants aged 19-21. The gender balance of the group was approximately 2.5 females to each male. Only one participating student was of a South Asian background (Tamil).

Participants were asked to complete a paper questionnaire before, during and after being shown 20-minute excerpts from four different contemporary Indian films. The films were: *Dil Chatha Hai* (2001), *Supari* (2001), *Devdas* (2002) and *Boom* (2003). The questionnaire prompted participants to provide short qualitative responses describing their preconceptions, analysis and reaction to the films. Participants were also asked to rate each film clip on a numerical scale. No introduction to Indian cinema was given prior to the exercise, with a lecture on Indian cinema promised for the week following the research exercise. A facsimile of the 'screening survey' questionnaire can be found in the appendix of this thesis, on pages 384-390.

The Field of Analysis

This case study is not an ethnographic study. The various contributors do not constitute a representative sample of any known community, but offer instead a series of point samples occupying different positions within the field of practices constructed around Indian films in the study area. As a piece of social research this case study remains very much concerned with the 'work of the imagination' and the 'cultural dimensions of globalisation' which are theorised by Appadurai, and with the social relations which impact on cultural practice which concern Bourdieu. However, my use of a 'cultural field' research model is intended to facilitate a different analytical focus, one which is founded upon a different understanding of culture. Here cultural practices and the articulation of relational imagination are the primary interests and I have attempted throughout to avoid essentialising linkages between cultural practice and ethnicity, class et. al. at the expense of cultural positionings which might complicate such categorisations. That is not to say that I have discarded the highly significant presence

of these forms of social categorisation. The collective nouns distinguishing or binding together large and/or dispersed populations within an increasingly globalised imagination are undeniably important. However, I have taken the position that the analysis of culture itself should not be reduced to *simply* the production and affirmation of the boundary markers of difference. It is also the means by which diverse individuals are drawn together in social groups in the first instance as well the means by which discourse between both individuals and groups is made possible. Difference is, after all, something we all have in common.

An Australian Social Context

In the context of researching the social imagination constructed around Indian films in the research locality, it is crucial to consider the discursive formations which act upon an enquiry of this kind. Therefore, before I go on to present the material collected through the research exercises, it is necessary to provide some further material pertaining to the particularities of the local research environment. In doing so, I will introduce two significant imaginaries which consistently proved themselves as points of reference, and providers of terminology, during the course of the study. I have defined these two formations here as the ‘Australian mainstream’ and as the ‘diasporic audience’ in Australia. Although the concept of the diasporic audience has been formally introduced in Chapter Three, my task here will be to provide an account of the specificities of the Australian case.⁶⁵ In contrast, the notion of an Australian mainstream media audience, against which discussions of niche media practices are positioned, is

⁶⁵ See pages 111-114.

introduced here for the first time. I will be drawing upon two pieces of prior research pertinent to the exploration of each of these two audiences as social formations, discursive devices and/or purported taste cultures. In relation to a mainstream media audience in Australia, I will discuss Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow's empirical study of an Australian taste culture, entitled *Accounting for Tastes* (1999). In relation to a diasporic audience for Indian films in Australia, I will discuss Manas Ray's ethnographic study *Bollywood Down Under* (2000). In moving from the former to the latter, I will argue that the discursive construction of mainstream and 'ethnic' media practices in Australia is highly contingent upon the histories of migration and multiculturalism particular to an Australian social context.

The 'Mainstream' Media in Australia

Although geographically paradoxical, it seems natural to position mainstream media consumption by Australians within a 'Western' media sphere, or at least within the structuring discourses (whiteness, modernity, affluence, power, Christianity) that produce the cumulative notion of something signified as 'the West'. The majority of the Australian population continues to be of European descent, although the proportion of British and Irish descent has gradually decreased over the last half century. However, the broadening of Australian 'cultural diversity' through changes to its migration programme has not necessarily displaced the 'normative' status of an 'Anglo-Celtic' conception of Australian identity in the representations found in popular media (See O'Regan 1996:305).

Whilst the seemingly endless procession of beach babes, bushrangers and home renovators on Australian screens may be manifestly unsatisfactory as components of a system of representation laying claim to an Australian 'real', or to a 'fair go' for all, the national media in Australia continues to claim much of its legitimacy on the basis of its 'resident' condition. The existence of the Australian media industries has been repeatedly emphasised as an important means of telling 'our story' and asserting national identity and solidarity (See Moran and O'Regan 1985). Australian-produced audiovisual material has therefore been the subject of numerous policy initiatives at both federal and state level (see Cunningham 1992, Moran 1994). Continuing government support has been the subject of intensive lobbying by Australian media personnel, most recently in the run up to the signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Australia and the United States in 2004. Government assistance has been particularly important because Australian-produced media content has, despite sporadic successes, always enjoyed a relatively small share of the Australian market and the industry has therefore been seen as unable to sustain itself without government protection. With the very important exception of live sports coverage, by far the most prevalent, and by far the most popular, source of audio-visual media to be found in Australia is that from the United States.

Australia has five major free-to-air television broadcasters and Australian television production has the protection of a quota system to guarantee a significant level of national production. Two of the major Australian broadcasters are public services funded by the federal government and three are privately owned. Despite the legislation requiring a minimum quota of Australian content, the three private networks (Seven,

Nine and Ten) are dominated by syndicated US television.⁶⁶ Hollywood produced programming is augmented on the commercial channels by a range of Australian shows, some of which are ‘original’ shows but many of which are simply remakes or adaptations of successful ‘international’ formats (for example, *Big Brother*, *Australian Pop Idol*, *Sixty Minutes*, plus various generic ‘lifestyle’ formats). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is the premier public broadcaster and delivers a range of Australian-made content, augmented by a large section of programming imported from the BBC, which dominates its prime time viewing. The second public broadcaster is the national ‘multicultural’ broadcaster since 1980, SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) which is chartered to serve Australians categorized as from a ‘non-English Speaking background’ whilst at the same time remaining of potential interest to ‘all Australians’ (Special Broadcasting Service 2005). Although SBS is generally perceived as the ‘ethnic’ channel, the service also has ‘a disproportionately large number of professional middle class viewers in its audience’ (Field 2001:16). SBS devotes a significant amount of airtime to Australian and other niche cinemas, although its audience share was just 4.8 percent of the urban population in May 2004 (OzTam 2004). It has been argued that the existence of SBS has reinforced rather than destabilised the ‘Anglo-Celtic’ bias of Australian broadcasting, and that it has ‘allowed the television industry in general to remain largely unaffected by the cultural changes wrought by migration’ (Jakubowicz et. al. in Cunningham and Sinclair 2000:25).

The dominance of American media content at the cinema is far greater than it is on television since there is no quota of Australian content imposed upon the major Australian cinema exhibitors. Protection for movie making is restricted to federal and

⁶⁶ Australian content provisions were extended in 1999 to include content produced in New Zealand as part of the Australian quota. For a detailed exposition of current Australian content requirements, see Australian Broadcasting Authority (1999).

state production subsidies and taxation minimisation schemes for private investors in film production. Three companies dominate the exhibition market, owning 55% of Australia's screen capacity between them. These are Amalgamated Holdings (owners of the Greater Union/Birch, Carroll & Coyle chains), Village Roadshow Ltd. (Village cinemas) and Consolidated Press Holdings (Hoyts cinemas). Amalgamated Holdings and Village Roadshow Ltd. jointly own Roadshow Film Distributors which is in a longstanding partnership with US-major Warner Bros. Roadshow Film Distributors is the only Australian company in the five company partnership that makes up the Motion Pictures Distributors Association of Australia (MPDAA), the other four all being US majors (Australian Film Commission 2004a:9-10).

The Australian film industry has always functioned on the margins of its own markets, and has come to rely financially on a mixture of direct and indirect government support, tax breaks, co-productions and the provision of facilities to other industries to pay for its infrastructure, most notably Hollywood off-shore productions (see Australian Film Commission 2002). The Australian Tax Office (ATO) offers production cost rebates to both foreign and domestic media producers. Despite this pragmatic approach to the international economics of the film medium, the Australian industry has also promoted itself historically on nationalist grounds, importing European national cinema theory with enthusiasm and articulating both cultural defence and nation-building arguments to construct a rationale for state support (for example, Lawson 1965). For its part the Australian government has been amenable to facilitating a small scale of Australian production under the understanding that the body which co-ordinates film production, the Australian Film Commission (AFC), has a mandate to 'enrich Australian national identity' and to develop projects which are suitably 'Australian'. In effect this means

that funds for Australian films, raised primarily from private-sector tax incentives, are subject to AFC approval on the grounds of a proven Australian cast, location and theme. The funding itself is administered by another body, the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) which has a similar 'mission' to 'strengthen a sense of Australian identity'. Projects are also expected to make a profit and must provide evidence of domestic and international market interest to be eligible for funding. Australian creative personnel work, therefore, within a difficult set of competing criteria where films must be 'national interest' in theme but also appealing to international markets. Export returns are crucial, particularly since Australian audiences have generally only shown enthusiasm for Australian films which have achieved the quality benchmark of success 'overseas'.⁶⁷

The AFC and FFC, as with other federally-directed bodies such as SBS and the ABC, have been particularly susceptible to changes in federal cultural policy. Since their inception there has been a steady shift in emphasis from 'quality' projects towards more commercially-oriented productions. There has also been a movement over the last two decades towards, and then away from, a more 'culturally diverse' representation of Australian society. The importance, therefore, of the 'Australian-ness' of any project as a prerequisite for funding should not be underestimated. The desire to use cinema for perpetuating Anglo-Australian mythologies (or 'shared historical memories') has been demonstrated by numerous features focusing on Australian military history and 'bushranger' figures such as Ned Kelly or *Crocodile Dundee*. However, the promotion of 'multiculturalism' from the late-1980s to the mid-1990s also saw a number of films which attempted to incorporate the experiences of non-Anglo Australians within their

⁶⁷ There have been some exceptions to this rule, such as suburban comedy *The Castle* (1997, dir. Rob Sitch) which was successful in Australia but largely ignored overseas. A number of low cost teen comedies are also made exclusively for the local youth market, such as *Blurred* (2002, dir. Evan Clarry) and *You and Your Stupid Mate* (2005, dir. Marc Gracie).

narration of Australian-ness.⁶⁸ This process of ‘de-wogging’ suggested the integration of Southern European migrant groups with a mainstream Anglo-Australian society and was often presented allegorically in narrative terms through the friendship and/or nuptial union of protagonists from the ‘different’ communities. Whilst the production of these features has been seen as exploitative of ethnic stereotypes and favouring the continued hegemony of a fundamentally ‘British’ core to Australian society, it has also been seen as at least a valuable step towards the representation of a more diverse Australia (Aquila 2001). However, the incorporation of Asian-Australians has been much more limited. Clara Law’s account of a family of Chinese migrants to Australia, *Floating Life* (1996), has probably been the most significant feature despite failing to secure a mainstream audience (see Roxburgh 1997). In contrast to the ongoing relative neglect of Asian-Australians in Australian features, indigenous Australians have been a favoured choice of subject matter. The steady stream of films including indigenous characters cannot, of course, obscure the fact that they have overwhelmingly been the cinematic subjects, and almost never the narrators, of Australian-ness (see Meadows and Molnar 2002). Their long-standing position as a cinematic subject might well be related to the interest in Aboriginal cultures found in overseas markets in North America and Europe, since the representation of Aboriginal Australians in the more domestically situated media of television is far less prevalent.

Despite being inhabitants of a highly patriotic society saturated with statements of national pride on bumper stickers, billboards and in the schoolyard, Australian cinema audiences have long been acculturated to a predominantly Hollywood product at the cinema hall. Therefore, the experience of cinema-going itself, which is most likely to be

⁶⁸ Such as *Death in Brunswick* (1991, dir. John Ruane), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992, dir. Baz Luhrmann), *Head On* (1998, dir. Ana Kokkinos) *The Wog Boy* (2000, dir. Aleksis Vellis).

the experience of going to watch an American film, takes place within undeniably Australian (and often significantly local) social and cultural referents (see Huggett 2002). One of the distinctive features of the Australian mediascape in this regard is the divide between metropolitan and rural areas when it comes to the range of cultural products available for consumption. Although mainstream American product (and occasional Australian export successes) are guaranteed nation-wide exhibition, the screening of other Australian and non-US foreign movies is generally restricted to the small number of art-house cinemas to be found in the state capitals. As Deb Verhoeven relates: 'The vast majority of Australian films seldom make a profit on their local theatrical release – should they be lucky enough to enjoy one' (2002:167). 'Mainstream' cinema in Australia is not at all synonymous with nationally-produced features. According to the AFC, Australian features took only 1.3% of the Australian box office in 2004, compared to 85.9% for US features and 5.1% for UK features.⁶⁹ It has been unsurprising, therefore, that Australian commentaries on transnational cultural exchange operating through the cinema have been overwhelmingly centred on the subordinate relationship of the local industries to American market dominance.

Academic writing on cinema in Australia has generally taken the form of the canonical arrangement of a counterweight represented by Australian 'national cinema' (McFarlane et al 1999, Rayner 2000, Collins and Davis 2005). The narration of a 'national cinema' story in Australia has addressed fairly familiar themes: the recounting and periodisation of a national-industrial history, disquiet about the cultural influence of the United States, the search for a suitably national aesthetic or genre, the exegesis of a

⁶⁹ 2004 was admittedly a 'bad year' for Australian-produced features. The average market share for Australian features in the Australian market over the five year period 2000-2004 was 5.8%. For a breakdown of the Australian market in 2004, see Australian Film Commission (2005), and for more detailed information, see Australian Film Commission (2004a).

putative 'national identity' from film narratives and a lobby for more production support from the public sector. In this regard, the Australian cinema story has been told in remarkably similar terms to the narration of, say, French or Canadian cinemas.⁷⁰ The production focus of Australian accounts are therefore by no means discordant with the conventions found in other areas of film studies (or film studies of other areas). However, it has arguably had the effect of neglecting the media environment within which film consumption takes place. The ill-fit between accounts of Australian film production and the taste culture of Australian audiences is typically seen as an obstacle to be overcome, that is, as the result of economic imperialism. However, it can also be argued that the commercial environment constructed around the long-standing cumulative patterns of viewing exhibited by several generations of Australians represents a logical, and even natural, condition for a nation whose cultural history has been overwhelmingly transnational. Even from a traditional production-based perspective, the current economic climate fostered by the globalisation of media operations stands in contrast to the Keynesian definitions of Australian cinema history produced to date (see Maher 2004). After all, the highest-grossing film ever *produced* in Australia is probably *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003, dir. Wachowski and Wachowski), and by the end of 2005 George Lucas' 'American' film *Star Wars Episode III* (which was produced in Australia and the UK) may well be a contender. Equally, if Yash Raj Films achieve their customary level of success with *Salaam Namaste* (currently being filmed in Melbourne), the film will reach an audience of some 300 million, a figure to which no 'Australian' feature can reasonably aspire (see Premier of Victoria 2005). This is not an argument for giving up on Australian-authored films as a commercially marginal endeavour, or to stop writing about them. It is important, however, to illustrate

⁷⁰ Although, it would also be fair to say that writing on Australian cinema has been distinguished by a particular preoccupation with the analysis of masculinity.

that the epistemological conventions of national cinema have no necessary correlation to the environments in which Australians make, watch or describe films, nor to Australia's place in the film world.

Accounting for Tastes

There is now growing interest amongst Australian media scholars in exploring cinema in Australia through a consideration of its audience rather than through a national film history constructed around an analysis of Australian production (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999, Balnaves and O'Regan 2002). When the audience is given precedence over production, then the story of cinema in Australia is revealed as *mainly* one of transnational cultural practices. These include the majority experience of movie consumption, watching Hollywood movies, as well as the proliferation of niche movie practices within Australia's many migrant communities.

From late 1994 to early 1995, Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow conducted a substantial Australian Research Council (ARC) funded survey of 2756 adult Australians which sought to analyse in detail the formation of 'Australian everyday cultures' across a broad range of demographic parameters. Their survey was published in book form in 1999 as *Accounting For Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*. The most categorical findings of this empirical study were that age and gender differences were the most crucial factors in accounting for popular cultural preferences. Having claimed that Australia has 'traditionally looked outwards for its cultural pleasures' (1999:201), the authors identified a shift away from the United Kingdom to the United States in terms of cultural influence. For Bennett, Emmison and Frow, this

indicated a ‘generational transformation in taste which dramatically highlights the extent to which American culture has come to occupy an ascendant position in Australian society’ (1999:202).

In attempting to analyse this ‘Americanisation’ of Australian culture, Bennett, Emmison and Frow assessed tastes in recorded music and literature as well as ‘the core domains of media culture: television and film’ (1999:201).⁷¹ In terms of television, the *Australian Everyday Cultures Survey* found that whilst older Australians overwhelmingly picked Australian-made television shows as their favourites, younger Australians overwhelmingly picked American-produced shows. There are likely to be many factors affecting such a finding, not least the scheduling of programming, but more important overall is the nature of what is being defined here as Australian product. The study identified a roughly equal mix between imported and Australian programming in Australian television schedules.

In compiling the survey findings, ‘Australian shows’ were defined as being *produced* in Australia. Therefore, programmes classified as Australian here would include the franchise production of imported formats. In addition, the inclusion of sports coverage and television news does much to bolster the Australian presence in the top 30 choices. Live cricket alone probably accounts for a major component of Australian content during the Australian summer. If sports and news coverage is removed (since in the majority of instances there is no obvious choice being made between an Australian and an imported product) then US-productions alone account for half the most popular

⁷¹ The *Australian Everyday Cultures Survey* found a relatively similar shift in the ‘national origins’ of favourite texts amongst readers of printed literature, in this case from predominantly British authors chosen by older Australians to predominantly US authors chosen by younger Australians. Readership of Australian literature remained fairly constant: under ten percent across all age groups (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999:213).

choices and Australian-made shows just over a third. If we limited the equation further, by omitting generic game-shows and lifestyle programming, then a preference of two-to-one for US narrative entertainment over Australian drama emerges from the *Everyday Australian Cultures* data. This is obviously significant for broadcasters when they are considering the types of programming that will make up their Australian content.⁷² In 2000 the ratio between imported and Australian drama broadcast free-to-air 5pm to midnight by commercial broadcasters was five-to-one in favour of imported productions (AFC 2004:49). The 2,098 broadcast hours of movies and drama on the ABC in 2002/3 favoured imported productions by ten-to-one. (AFC 2004:50).

It should be recognised, therefore, that a list of favourite shows is not a concrete method of calculating audience share. A viewer who identifies *Blue Heelers* as their favourite show might also watch a range of other ‘cop’ shows imported from the US and UK, and thus actually be consuming more imported content than Australian content despite the fact that their favourite show is Australian-made. It is my contention overall that the dominance of imported content and formats is probably greater than that which Bennett, Emmison and Frow have identified by this method. Nonetheless, this does not indicate any necessary extension of the ‘Americanisation’ of the Australian television environment and the younger generation, since in contrast to the transnational flavour of programming, the generous complement of advertising time on the commercial networks is dominated by resolutely local sentiments. In the course of watching Australian television the viewer is moved seamlessly from high budget Hollywood sets to colourful, cheery pitches for the local small businesses they see routinely in their

⁷² Another area in which Australian content has a major presence is children’s programming, which does not enter the survey account because children were not included.

daily lives. This suturing of the local and the global will of course bring little comfort to Australian producers of television drama.

In relation to the film industry, the identification by respondents of their favourite feature films demonstrated an even clearer bias towards Hollywood. Specifically, the survey found that all of the top 30 favourite films were Anglophone productions:

‘Eighty-two per cent of preferences are for Hollywood productions, 13 per cent are for Australian films and the remainder for UK releases’ (1999:218). The survey findings here were in contrast to those drawn from television preferences, in that the youngest demographic category (18-25) were the group most likely to choose an Australian film as their favourite feature. The cinema, therefore, appeared to be the one area which bucked the ‘ascendancy’ of American culture amongst the younger generation.

However, having said that, it should be noted that the American share of favourite films was far greater than its share of any other medium, ranging from 76.9% percent in the youngest cohort to 88.8% in the oldest. Such an overwhelming presence in the cultural tastes of audiences of all ages leaves little room in fact for further ascendancy; indeed, this was a larger American share of choices than was found in any of the other media forms assessed.

Bennett, Emmison and Frow saw the choice of Australian films by 20.4% of the youngest cohort as a positive outcome in an environment when going to the cinema ‘still largely remains an ‘American’ experience’ (1999:216). The greater popularity of Australian features was seen as resulting from ‘the appropriate financial and cultural circumstances’ allowing the Australian industry to ‘produce films which have attracted local and international attention’ (1999:216). Consequently, the authors claim that the

‘lesson for cultural policy development implicit in this trend should not be overlooked’, which appears to be a statement in favour of continuing government support for the industry (1999:216). The idea that government support is paying dividends in weaning the important youth-group away from American and towards Australian media culture was seen by the authors as a positive sign, a chink in the armour of Hollywood dominance (1999:215). However, whilst axiomatic, it is not at all clear that going to the cinema in Australia is ‘a largely ‘American’ experience’ simply because the film chosen happens to be American. The question of when exactly the experience of going to the cinema becomes divorced from its geographic/cultural location in Australia is a complex one: Does this happen if the film being watched is American, or at the point where American junk food is eaten during the film, or is it necessary to go to the cinema hall with friends who are all Americans? Is any of this enough? Since the findings of the survey appear to overwhelmingly indicate that American cultural products are part of everyday Australian cultural life, going to see an American film at the cinema in Brisbane or Ballarat could even be said to be a quintessentially Australian experience. Bennett, Emmison and Frow seem to move towards such a position in their conclusion since, despite the substantial evidence of American ‘cultural imperialism’ provided by their respondents, they ultimately conclude that Australian cultural identity is, nonetheless, alive and well.

although Australians appear to be inhabiting cultural worlds which are more and more likely to be dominated by overseas products, there seems to be very little change in a belief that Australia remains a culturally distinct nation. At one level these findings appear contradictory, but at another level we can find tacit support in them for arguments in favour of the globalisation of culture, particularly those variants which see globalisation not as a process of standardisation and cultural uniformity but rather a more complex situation of intermixing or hybridity (1999:225).

Despite the obvious differences between the two nations, the evidence of cultural hybridity in the Australian media environment found by Bennett, Emmison and Frow can be paralleled with the dynamics of hybridity which characterise the media environment in India. In both cases the cultural interchanges emphasised by theories of mediated globalisation can be clearly seen. At the same time, the most obvious contrast is that Indian media products continue to dominate their own market despite the growing availability of non-resident media sources, while the Australian media industries are more often conduits for imported products than they are vehicles for Australian products. It is not my intention to pursue any further comparison of the two media spheres. In fact what seems most crucial in the context of this enquiry is that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that situating Indian media products within an Australian taste culture is by no means a simple matter of bilateral cultural exchange.

Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia

The transnational nature, and inherent hybridity, of the Anglophone media sphere in Australia identified by the *Everyday Australian Cultures Survey* has been generally neglected in discussions of ‘multiculturalism’ in Australia. Debates on multiculturalism have traditionally juxtaposed a monocultural model of an Australian majority with the growing presence since the early fifties of various groups of migrants from a ‘non-English speaking background’. This is the logic which constructs British and Irish ‘heritage’ and American trend-setting as firmly part of the Australian ‘mainstream’ whilst all other cultures remain confined within the notion of ‘ethnic’ minorities and their own particular cultural needs. As Cunningham and Sinclair observe, the ‘media’s, and most mainstream cultural institutions’, embrace of cultural diversity goes little

beyond a sort of mutual distance and monolingual incomprehension' (Cunningham and Sinclair 2000:22). It is not possible, in the space available, to address the complexities of Australia's cultural history and the robust debates which surround historiographic practice in Australia. Nonetheless, the distinction between the transnational exchanges which structure the Australian mainstream (for example, Hollywood films or British television dramas) and the transnational exchanges which are situated within the discourses of 'multiculturalism' (for example, Italian or Indian films) clearly has its origins in Australia's history of selective migration.

As is generally well known, the European settlement of Australia in the late eighteenth century and its subsequent development into a colonial society stemmed from the expansion of the British Empire into South East Asia and the South Pacific. The overwhelming majority of settlers, comprised of penal labourers, colonial functionaries and free settlers, who inhabited the early colonies in Australia were of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish extraction (See Hughes 1988). European settlement rapidly displaced the indigenous population of the continent over the course of the nineteenth century. Originally founded as a number of separate colonies under the British Crown, the Australian colonies were federated into a Commonwealth in 1901 and Australia became a nation-building project figured upon a 'British' society. However, the new opportunities to be found in Australia had by this time already begun to attract significant numbers of non-British migrants. The new nation responded to these developments by passing the Immigration Restriction Act that came to be known unofficially as the 'White Australia' policy, which largely prohibited the migration of 'foreigners' into Australia. Nonetheless, significant numbers of migrants who were not

British, but still of Northern European extraction, such as Germans and Dutch, were still able to gain entry to Australia.

The collapse of the European powers in Asia and the expansion of imperial Japanese control right up to its borders during the Second World War highlighted the vulnerability of this Antipodean British society. Accordingly the Australian government progressively embarked after 1945 upon a programme which sought to strengthen Australia economically and militarily by dramatically increasing its seven million strong population (Brawley 1995:235-237). While British migrants continued to be the first choice, in order to achieve immigration targets the 'White Australia' policy was gradually relaxed to include those who had previously been considered racially undesirable, such as Southern Europeans (notably Italians and Greeks) and even some Eurasians (D'Cruz 2000). By the 1970s with the high tide of anti-colonial movements worldwide, even this expanded definition of the 'White Australia' policy had become untenable. Opinions on human rights in Australia had also shifted and following a referendum in 1967, Australia's indigenous peoples had been belatedly granted the right to apply for citizenship in their own country. During its brief period in office, the Whitlam (Labor) (1972-1975) government rapidly dismantled the framework of the 'White Australia' policy. Racial immigration policies were replaced with a skills-based selection criteria as well as a significant quota for refugees. Thus, while many British and other European migrants continued to come to Australia, large numbers of Vietnamese and Lebanese also came to Australia in the 1970s to escape the violence and turmoil which had overtaken their homelands. The passing of the Immigration Restriction Act also marked a resumption of migration by Chinese migrants to Australia which bolstered the numbers of the Australian-Chinese community which had been

particularly targeted by the original 1901 legislation. Immigration policy continued to undergo reform during the subsequent Fraser (Liberal) (1975-1983) government in favour of a policy of 'multiculturalism'.

the organising principle of the policy was to construct a formal organisation of Australian culture which distinguished between a core and a periphery. The core culture was that which was considered to exist already in Australia, what had been formed through the pressures of Anglo-conformity... The periphery cultures were those of the European and Levantine migrant groups who had been allowed into Australia from the time of Arthur Calwell's broadening of the White Australia policy in the period following the end of the second world war (Stratton 2000: 24).

According to Jon Stratton, Australian multiculturalism was to reach its apogee under the Hawke/Keating (Labor) governments (1983-1996) which attempted to move 'away from the acceptance that British migrants should have a privileged place in Australian society' and therefore 'to shift the thinking about Australia itself from the idea that it is some sort of offshoot of British society in the southern Pacific to seeing Australia as being, and always having been, engaged in, and to some extent moulded by, the South Asian region' (Stratton 2000:23). The reference here to South Asia may be a misnomer in the context of this study, however, since the discourses surrounding Australia's engagement with Asia in the 1980s were firmly centred upon neighbouring ASEAN states and the major Asian economies on the Pacific rim. Indeed, Australian-Indian political relations were frequently strained during the Cold War and economic ties were also relatively undeveloped throughout that period. Advances have been made, however, in bilateral relations since 1991 (see Yadav 2004).

Australia has now managed to achieve the population of twenty million seen as so crucial in the post-war years. In the process of doing so over the last half of the twentieth century, Australia has further extended its position as one of the world's most

migration-oriented societies. However, the growing racial diversity of migrants, and the increasing demands of indigenous Australians to be given title rights to some of the lands lost to European settlement, produced what Ommundsen calls a 'backlash' by the majority European population during the 1990s (2000:9). Multiculturalism came to be seen by some as little more than a policy framework for ethnic lobby groups or 'special interests' enriching themselves at the expense of the majority. Lopez, however, argues that ethnic organisations had little to do with the emergence of multicultural policy in Australia during the 1970s. Lopez instead describes multiculturalism as a policy shift resulting from the successful lobbying of a small number of left-leaning intellectuals, and as a policy which at the time lacked any broad popular support (2000). Both of these 'special interest' groups ('ethnics' and 'lefties') are blamed for the institutional evils of multiculturalism by its more extreme opponents (see Spry 2002).

Multiculturalism, thus 'moved in a few years from being the most celebrated concept in Australian social discourse to one of the most vilified' (Ommundsen 2000:5). However, this growing negativity towards the idea of a multicultural Australia, personified by Pauline Hanson and her short-lived One Nation Party in the mid-1990s, has not proved to be the end of multiculturalism in Australia. Indeed, this political turn was not, in the first place, motivated entirely by racial anxiety. As Anthony Burke observes: 'The widely criticized xenophobia of Pauline Hanson's One Nation, for example, arises not merely from the ongoing strength of historic images of White Australia, but from a resentment at the changes forced on Australians through structural economic reform and the increasing 'globalisation' of the economy' (Burke 2001:184). In any case, Australia's trading relationship with Asia over the past three decades, along with the economic necessities which drive its migration programme, have made a return to the

days of White Australia an economic impossibility, despite its usefulness as a point of political mobilisation for some Australians.

Under the government of John Howard (Liberal-National Coalition 1996-) the official discourse on 'multiculturalism' in Australia has been subject to a 'New Agenda' set out in 1999 which was intended to make multiculturalism a policy framework which benefits all Australians rather than just minority groups (DIMIA 1999). The major thrust of this new multicultural policy is directed at countering the negative image of multiculturalism by selling the (mainly economic) benefits of 'cultural diversity' to the Australian majority. This focus on the majority interest has been seen as important, since: 'For multiculturalism to be a unifying force in our developing nationhood and identity, it needs to be inclusive. It is about and for all Australians; it is not concerned mainly with immigration and minority ethnic communities' (DIMIA 1999:7). The New Agenda has therefore steered away from the celebratory pluralism of the early 1990s and sought instead to affirm the democratic, tolerant values of mainstream Australian society as the basis for a mutually beneficial engagement with recent arrivals from a culturally different background. The overall intent of this policy is to restore the balance between Australia's core cultural identity and the contribution made by other groups, which taken together constitute an Australian culture and society which draws upon: 'the heritage of indigenous Australians, our British and Irish settlers, our Australian-grown customs, and those of our more recently arrived migrant groups (DIMIA 1999:6). When reviewed in 2003 the various programmes carried out in support of the New Agenda by the Council for Multicultural Australia were found to have been highly successful (DIMIA 2003). However, the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) conceded that much work still needed to be done to make

the majority of Australians realise that the New Agenda is intended to benefit their own interests rather than those of minority groups (DIMIA 2003:13).

Although the majority British and Irish segments of Australia's population are arguably as 'diasporic' as other migrant groups, the largest Australian communities from a 'non-English speaking background' according to the 2001 national census are (in descending order): Italians, Germans, Chinese, Greeks, Dutch.⁷³ The number of Australians from a South Asian background is comparable to the Lebanese, Polish or Vietnamese communities, that is around 0.9 percent of the population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003a). As with all communities positioned within the larger notion of an 'Indian' diaspora, there is a considerable overlap with the presence of other South Asians who share languages, cultural practices and migratory routes with Indian migrants. The Australian case also has its own particular set of socio-historical contingencies. The legacy of the 'White Australia' policy, the Colombo plan and the more recent emphasis on skilled migration have all structured the Australian subcontinental community.⁷⁴ Whilst some Indians and Ceylonese arrived in Australia in the nineteenth century, the Immigration Restriction Act foreclosed further migration and

⁷³ Given the historical application of a language-test as a means of administering the 'White Australia' policy, the term 'English-speaking' is far from neutral. Under the earlier regime, potential migrants of non-European descent were required to take a test in a 'European' language which they were required to transcribe. The language did not necessarily have to be in English, in which many non-white migrants were proficient, and multiple tests in different languages could be administered if the applicant was not considered desirable, usually on racial grounds (See D'Cruz 2000:141). The acronym NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) continues to symbolically separate both migrants and Australian-born citizens, the vast majority of whom are English-speakers, which suggests that 'Background' itself continues to be a major concern.

⁷⁴ The 'Colombo Plan for the Economic and Social Development of South Asia and Southeast Asia' was inaugurated at a meeting of Commonwealth leaders in what was the capital of Ceylon in 1950. The plan was conceived of as a Marshall Plan for Asia, which would co-ordinate economic development (and thus fend off communism) in the region. As part of its mandate, the Colombo Plan awarded 350,000 scholarships over three decades for Asians to study abroad. The major Commonwealth donors were Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Britain. The United States also joined the plan. Although membership of the Colombo plan was steadily extended to include non-Commonwealth (non-communist) Asian countries, the South Asian states remained major beneficiaries. The Colombo plan has been progressively scaled back over the past two decades as it has been superseded by other transnational development organisations. For more on the history of Australian involvement in the Colombo Plan, see Oakman (2004).

prohibited the arrival of spouses and relatives of those already residing in Australia.

This kept their numbers to just a few thousand until the mid-twentieth century (Bilimoria 1996:7-14). The gradual loosening of the White Australia policy in the post-Second World War ‘populate or perish’ period opened the door to some emigration from South Asia during the 1960s. A significant number Anglo-Indians and Ceylonese Burghers relocated from their homelands as the rise of postcolonial nationalisms in the subcontinent affected their status there (D’Cruz 2000:139). Australia’s role in the Colombo plan also brought a number of students and academics from South Asia on a temporary basis, some of whom would later return to Australia. However, South Asian migration to Australia only really got underway after 1973 when the emphasis within immigration policy changed from racialised to skills-based criteria.

The vast majority of South Asian migrants have settled in the two most populous states, New South Wales and Victoria. Given the skills-focus of the immigration policy under which they have arrived, their English-language proficiency is high compared to other migrant groups (for example South-East Europeans or North-East Asians) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003b).⁷⁵ South Asians in Australia have a high incidence of tertiary education, and this has also favoured an urban pattern of settlement. The presence of South Asians in rural Australia is extremely low and this reflects the essentially urban nature of Australian multiculturalism generally.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Despite the extensive English skills of most South Asian migrants which, given the history of the subcontinent, often reach back through several generations, they continue to be classified as having a non-English speaking background (NESB), because the majority population in the South Asian countries is not English-speaking. Thus ‘English-speaking background’ functions effectively as Australian officialese for Anglo-Saxon or Irish migrants.

⁷⁶ One notable exception to this rule would be the highly visible Sikh farming community in Woolgoolga in the North-Eastern corner of New South Wales. The forebears of this community came to Australia originally as plantation labour before the introduction of the Immigration Restriction Act, but were nonetheless forced out of Queensland by racially restrictive labour laws at the end of the nineteenth century. They settled just south of the state border in New South Wales where they enjoyed success as Banana farmers. The large Gurdwaras of the town of Woolgoolga are today its most striking features.

In comparison to the subcontinent itself, as well to the South Asian population in the UK and US, the South Asian presence in Australia today includes a relatively higher proportion of Anglo-Indians as well as a notably large presence of Sri Lankans of all ethnic backgrounds. The Sri Lankans, both Tamils and Sinhalese, have arrived since the 1970s as Sri Lanka descended progressively into economic stagnation and ethnic civil war. Events within the Pacific region have also had an impact demographically, with a large number of Fijian Indians resettling in Australia following the 1987 coups when their political status in Fiji was further marginalised in favour of native Fijian Islanders. Numbers of Indian migrants to Australia from various parts of India, as well as from Malaysia and Singapore, have increased dramatically during the 1990s, becoming the fastest growing ethnically-defined migrant population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005:122). Although Australian immigration policies are strictly based upon the skills criteria 'points system' set out by DIMIA, one group which has been particularly well represented in Australia's migrant intake is Indians of a Christian background. According to a 2005 report in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Christian Indians have made up 31% of all Indian migrants (Dale 2005). However, despite the prevalence of certain groups, the South Asian population in Australia encompasses most of the ethnic, religious and national identities of the subcontinent. Therefore, whilst the points system used in Australia has ensured that the South Asian population is strikingly homogenous in terms of social class, this is a notably heterogonous community in terms of cultural identity and practice.

Within any broad construction of a South Asian-Australian community there are notably different degrees of attachment to Australia, ranging from the Australian-born to those

However, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, post-war migration has been concentrated in urban areas with 81% of the overseas-born population living in the State capitals (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004).

whose residency could be as little as one year. The growing success of the Australian higher education sector in attracting international students has brought an influx of South Asian students who now form a significant transient population (see Voigt-Graf 2003). This ‘temporary’ diaspora now has a notable presence in the urban spaces where the longer-term South Asian population is resident. As such they boost the clientele for South Asian cultural and commercial activities in the major Australian cities.

Ultimately, many of these young people will return to their countries of origin in the subcontinent, the Gulf States or South-East Asia whilst others will venture to America or Europe in search of employment opportunities. A proportion of them, however, will choose to stay on in Australia.

Bollywood Down Under

The transfer of an ethnographic model of study to a diasporic context is, due to its paradigmatic accessibility and legibility, the means by which minority media-use is generally assayed in multicultural societies.⁷⁷ Focus is typically given to a specific group which can be discursively self-contained within the idea of an ethnic community, and media use within that community is then analysed as a means of gauging the relative manifestations of cultural assimilation or cultural continuity within that community. In the Australian context an ethnographic approach to the consumption of Indian films has previously been undertaken by Manas Ray from Calcutta’s Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, who received a visiting research fellowship from the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy at the Queensland University of Technology during 1996-1998. This research was financed by an ARC grant directed

⁷⁷ See Chapter Four, pp 159-164.

towards 'Audiovisual Media Use for Cultural Maintenance and Negotiation by Diasporic Communities of Asian Origin in Australia'. The findings from Ray's research were published along with studies of media use amongst other Asian-Australian communities in Stuart Cunningham and John Sinclair's *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas* (2000).

As a point of departure, Ray's account of 'Bollywood Down Under' begins with a critique of Marie Gillespie's well-known work on media use by British Punjabis in London's Southall district (1995), which he describes as:

A replay of classic ethnographic persuasion in a new form: she respectfully watches the Dhanis watch the teleserial, *Mahabharata*, as an authentic moment of Indian devotion...what is privileged is her attention to the values "rooted in the subcontinent" (1995:46). To which the youth are attached even as they try to "maximise their chance of acceptance" in British society (1995:5). Gillespie's mutual stress on the irreducible difference of migrant cultures and evolving trajectories of assimilation is in a way the crux of contemporary multiculturalism: "it 'respects' the Other's identity, conceiving the Other as a self-enclosed 'authentic' community towards which he, the multiculturalist, maintains a distance rendered possible by his privileged universal position" (Zizek 1997:44)' (Ray 2000:139).

Ray's critique has considerable merit. Despite Gillespie's meticulous 'fly on the wall' ethnographic style, a study in which 'Indian' culture was represented by B.R. Chopra's televised *Mahabharata* and 'Western' culture by an episode of *Neighbours* was unlikely to provide a nuanced account of either British or Indian cultures (1995:87-98,142-174). Instead Gillespie finds an older generation locked in conservative patriarchal religiosity and a younger generation struggling to reconcile parental expectations, particularly for arranged marriage and the social confinement of women, with their growing desire to be a part of a secular, Western youth culture. All of this reflects officially sanctioned discourses on Asians in Britain, as exemplified by Gurinder Chadha's 'multicultural'

box-office success *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Both Gillespie and Chadha's texts also demonstrate, arguably due to the demographics of Britain's Asian population, an explicit equation of Indian culture with Punjabi culture.

A further point of contention for Ray is that 'Gillespie makes little or no attempt to link diasporic media use with the life of media back in India' (2000:139). For Ray 'such depoliticised understandings of Indian films inevitably gives them the look of self-enclosed, exotic cultural artefacts whose consumption in the Western world by the Indian diaspora makes the centrepiece of her careful ethnography' (2000:140). In relation to the Australian case, Ray is keen to point out that the social environments in which the consumption of Indian media products takes place in Australia are notably different from those found in Britain, largely because the 'size of diasporic Indian groupings found in a country like Australia rarely reaches "critical mass"' (2000:144).⁷⁸ The particular trajectories of South Asian settlement in Australia are also important, since 'the cultural implications of numerical strength of a particular grouping depend upon the specificity of its diasporic postcolonial subjectivity' (2000:144). Nonetheless, when considering a documentary film produced by Kay Rasool ('a young graduate') from the Punjabi community in Woolgoolga in northern New South Wales which describes that community, Ray observed many of the same tropes present in Gillespie's study (2000:136-137).⁷⁹ The community was portrayed as a site of religiosity with a patriarchal social structure where women undertook a submissive role and members of the younger generation were expressing their desire to break free from the diasporic reproduction of Punjabi traditions and take part in a wider (white) Australian society. Ray concluded that the film 'manages to encapsulate a whole portfolio of accepted

⁷⁸ Ray does not extrapolate on which other countries might be considered to be 'like' Australia.

⁷⁹ The title of the documentary was *Temple on the Hill* (1997), Dir. Kay Rasool.

Orientalist “knowledge” (2000:137) and that therefore Rasool and Gillespie’s studies were alike in that they both drew upon an ‘essentialised understanding of an *oriental* community’ (2000:138).

What Ray found far more fruitful in his exploration of the cultural life of diasporic Indians in Australia was the enthusiastic engagement of Fijian Indians with contemporary Bollywood culture. The sites for these activities described by Ray were Brisbane and Sydney, although the latter provides the greater part of his account. There is plenty of readily accessible evidence of the popularity of Bombay cinema amongst Sydney’s 25,000 Fijian Indians. This ranges from the racks of Indian videos and DVDs in the Fijian Indian grocery stores to Bollywood-centred dance events and imitative local productions. Bollywood is also a major topic of discussion in the local Fijian-Indian press. Ray suggests that it is the historical preservation by Fijian-Indians of various folk traditions associated with the Tulsi Das *Ramcharitmanas* that underlies the strength of their connection to Indian cinema, which he describes as structured by the popular and folk traditions associated with the epics (2000:153-158, 2003:24-27). Ray believes that the historical subjectivity formed through indenture, and sustained by Indian folk traditions drawn from the *Ramayana*, provides a fertile site for the sustenance of a diasporic communal identity where India occupies a purely symbolic, but absolutely central, space of identity which is invoked through participation in Bollywood culture.

Although their troubled history in the Pacific may have encouraged them to consider their identity as overwhelmingly Indian, the Fijian Indians in Australia have formed a community which remains distinct from Indian migrants from the subcontinent.

According to Ray this is because labourers recruited for indenture in the Pacific during the Raj were mainly drawn from the lower castes and also because traditional Indian social hierarchies were eroded by the social conditions of indenture (2000:152).⁸⁰ These factors distinguish them from the migrant communities who have come directly to Australia from India and who have been accused of treating the Fijian Indians with disdain for these reasons (Ray 2003:28). Nonetheless, the ancestral origins of the majority of Fijian Indians in India's Hindi-speaking north, and their subsequent retention of a localised dialect, Fiji Hindi, also makes the Bombay movie a relatively direct form of address for them in linguistic terms.⁸¹ This is not always the case with other diasporic Indian communities in Australia, as Bilmoria observes: 'From Fiji, A proportionately higher number of migrants of Indian descent [speak] Hindi, or the Hindi-Urdu amalgam known as Hindustani, widely used in Bollywood films, than their counterparts from India' (1996:55). Furthermore, the purported attachment to the popular Indian film by Fijian Indians has been presented by the 'Indian' community as compounding evidence of their cultural vulgarity (see Ghosh 2000:74-76).

As a counterpoint to the enthusiastic participation in a wide range of Bollywood-derived practices by the Fijian Indians, Ray found a notable lack of interest in Indian films amongst Australia's Bengali population. According to Ray, 'for the Indian Bengalis, Indian-sourced film and video is not only a private affair; in many cases, it is of little interest and even active disparagement' (Ray 2000:142). Ray explains this as a manifestation of cultural fossilisation amongst the Bengali migrants who cling

⁸⁰ However, Brij V. Lal, historian of indenture in Fiji, has also claimed that the stereotype of low caste and untouchable indentured labourers, whilst popularly accepted, may be a less than accurate representation of the social origins of the *girmityas* in Fiji (Lal 1979:22-24).

⁸¹ The majority of indentured labourers transported to Fiji for plantation work came from the Eastern portions of what is now the state of Uttar Pradesh and the western portion of what is now the state of Bihar. As such they were mainly speakers of a Hindi 'dialect' known as Bhojpuri. South Indians were later arrivals towards the end of the indenture period and Gujarati-speakers arrived in smaller numbers, largely as free migrants (See Lal 2000:99-120).

nostalgically to a vanished cultural past fixed on the anglicised *bhadralok* sensibilities of the Bengal renaissance of the late nineteenth century.⁸²

The Indian Bengali community's relation to their home country is marked by a past which is lost and a present which is a lack. Community members justify their rupture from the motherland by attempting to become "better" Bengalis: revoking a past when Bengal's "today" was India's "tomorrow" is what frames Indian Bengali diasporic cultural life. This has meant framing their cultural lives around the high culture of the past, which has become a fossilised "taste culture" (Ray 2000:143).

There seems to be a contradiction within these two accounts. On the one hand Ray claims that 'the cultural life of Fiji Indians in their current Western locations is inextricably linked to their genealogy of the last hundred years' and figures this meta-narrative of identity formation in positive terms (2000:149). On the other hand, Ray describes the lack of interest by Bengalis in Bollywood culture and the perpetuation by Bengali migrants of an elitist Bengali 'taste culture' focused on their own cultural history as indicative of a fossilised, snobbish and essentially colonised consciousness. This distinction is framed by Ray in the following terms:

The identity politics of the Fiji Indian community in Australia is more a *postcolonial* practice, while that of the Indian Bengali community, their higher professional profile notwithstanding, is distinctly *postcolonial*. Being *postcolonial* means being beyond or outside nostalgia, while a *postcolonial* cultural politics is essentially an act or re-routing one's identity through the past (Ray 2000:144).

It is somewhat tenuous to make such overarching distinctions between historical subjectivity and nostalgia, since in everyday practice they are likely to be one and the

⁸² *Bhadralok* was the term given to Calcutta's Bengali intelligentsia, a cultural elite which gradually gained access to administrative positions in the colonial structure. The *bhadraloks* therefore represented an emerging middle class in the late colonial period. The *bhadraloks* were the driving force behind Bengal's 'cultural renaissance' in the nineteenth century which attempted to forge a synthesis of Indian philosophy and Western humanism. They subsequently became an important force in the nationalist movement during the early twentieth century, although their influence has declined as Calcutta lost much of its economic and political importance during the second half of the century.

same. There is also a further elision here for the reader of *Floating Lives*, that is while the Hindi-language fare of the Bombay cinema might be culturally proximate to the traditions preserved by the Fijian Indians it is far less so for the Bengali migrants. Bengal has its own language, its own distinct traditions of performance and its own media industries. Whilst researching media reception in West Bengal, Timothy Scrase found that many Bengalis associate Hindi cinema with the culture of India's North-West, and that some Bengalis at least are more concerned about these films as a source of 'cultural colonisation' in Bengal than they are about the importation of 'Western' media (see Scrase 2002). There would seem to be little imperative for such feelings to be replaced with a nostalgia for Bollywood films in diaspora, particularly when Bengali media products are also readily available (as they are in Sydney). However, it is important to avoid essentialism here: during the course of this study it was relatively easy to find Bengalis who were enthusiasts of Hindi movies, and Fijian Indians who were not.

Given its focus on Hindi films, an engagement with the media practices of South Indians in Australia is also missing from Ray's account of *Bollywood Down Under*. South Indians represent a significant proportion of the South Asian population in Australia and also have their own distinctive regional cultural traditions. Many South Indians in Australia engage in the distribution and consumption of their own regionally-specific media products, in some cases alongside engagement with Hindi Bollywood culture and in other cases more exclusively. Ray did note however, the prior role played by South Indians and Muslims within the Indian community in Fiji. However, Ray claims that bonds between these groups have been weakened since their emigration to Australia. In particular, Ray describes Bollywood as one of the few remaining links

between Fijian Indian Muslims and Hindus as the former became increasingly integrated within a larger Australian-Muslim community:

Mosques now play more significant roles in their lives and there is a marked emphasis on learning Arabic, the language with which Muslims identify globally. The world of Bollywood culture (where their influence is considerable) now provides the main cultural link with other members of the Fiji Indian community (2000:169).

The engagement of Muslims with the world of Bollywood seems incongruous with the influence of the *Ramayana* as an overarching explanation of the appeal of Indian cinema. However, Ray believes that the participation by Muslims and South Indians in Fiji in the cultural life of the mainly North Indian Hindu population in Fiji during their indenture has given them access to the meta-narratives of Indian cinema. Ray offers no explanation for the ‘marginal’ presence of Pakistanis within the sphere of Bollywood in Sydney, and the considerable ‘influence’ of Muslims in the Bombay industry to which he refers (2000:169). The integration of Fijian Indian Muslims within a wider Arabic-speaking Islamic community in Sydney suggested by Ray is of some interest when compared with Lakha and Stevenson’s description of Indian Muslim and Pakistani migrants in Melbourne (2001). According to Lakha and Stevenson, these groups had formed their own mosque and community centre due to their feelings of disconnection with the existing Muslim community arising from their lack of familiarity with Arabic. They therefore preferred to congregate together with other Urdu/Hindi speakers (Lakha and Stevenson 2001:257). Lakha and Stevenson emphasise the importance of language in migrant community formation and note that interaction between Indian and Bangladeshi Bengalis on the basis of shared language and other cultural traditions is also increasing amongst migrants in Melbourne (2001:250). Despite the many complex configurations of linguistic, regional, religious and national identities they found

amongst migrants of subcontinental origin, Lakha and Stevenson found that Indian films and popular music provided a source of cultural practices shared between all the South Asian communities.

Ultimately, both Gillespie and Ray's ethnographies would have to be considered 'blunt' under the terminology offered in Chapter Four.⁸³ Gillespie's study is able to situate itself due to the proximate habitation of her chosen community as well as through a detailed observation study. The study becomes blunt, however, because at a conceptual level it relies on a comparison of essentialist models of Indian and Western cultures which it seeks to evidence through the consumption of media objects by archetypal 'ethnic' subjects. In contrast, the Australian study by Manas Ray undoubtedly brings a wealth of historical and political knowledge to bear in its analysis of the Indian diaspora in Australia, their diasporic use of Indian films and of the films themselves. However, this knowledge does not allow Ray to avoid entirely the essentialism for which he criticises Gillespie, particularly in his juxtaposition of the Fijian Indians and the Bengalis.

Ray's dismissal of one set of diasporic practices in favour of another seems to rest less on arguments about historical subjectivity, and more upon their incongruity with his foundational position that 'the sway of Indian filmdom on Indians – *wherever they live* – is widely accepted' (Ray 2000:140). Since this turned out not to be the case in his engagement with the Australian Bengalis, Ray was required to provide a 'false-consciousness' argument to cover this anomaly. On the other hand, the Fijian Indians provided fertile ground for his study of diasporic mediation, since their particular

⁸³ See pp 161-164.

attachment to Hindi movie culture could serve as a measure of their cultural identity, figured along the lines of Smith's 'shared historical memory', which he was then able to assess ethnographically.⁸⁴ If Ray's theoretical arguments about *postcolonial* versus *postcolonial* subjectivities are taken aside, it seems more the case that the Fijian Indian story was privileged because it was better fitted to the premise of his media ethnography. Ray says as much himself: 'The reason for focusing on the Fiji Indian community is primarily because of its close attachment to Hindi movies' (Ray 2000:140). Similarly if Kay Rasool's film must be criticised for its encapsulation of Orientalist "knowledge", then the following statement by Ray must also be subject to that criticism: 'The viewing subject of Bollywood is not so much the individual of Western film theory but primarily the member of a "narrative community"' (Ray 2000:181). Ray's ethnographic practice is predicated on a close fit between media use (Hindi films), ethnicity (Indians) and 'genealogical' consciousness (*Ramayana*), and is unable (or unwilling) to accommodate various other positions that evidence themselves and which complicate this determining correlation.

Despite its transnational setting, Ray's explanation of Indian film culture in Australia is in essence a direct extension of the traditionalist arguments found in some 'national' accounts of Indian cinema.⁸⁵ It is not a lack of knowledge which creates a problem here but rather the particularity of knowledge. As a Calcuttan, it is unlikely that Manas Ray was unaware of the problematics of employing Hindi cinema as a relative measure of Indian identity amongst Bengalis. Perhaps, as an inhabitant of contemporary Bengal, Ray may have felt somewhat compelled to admonish the Australian-Bengalis for their claustrophobic and retrogressive (re)construction of Bengali identity. As a late

⁸⁴ See Chapter One, pp 41-43.

⁸⁵ See Chapter Two, pp 90-93.

twentieth-century Briton residing temporarily in Australia I have some sympathy with such a position. Being confronted by your diasporic 'other' can be powerfully disorientating. Nonetheless, my general point remains that it is untenable to present traditionalisms in one community as empowering and in another as debilitating. It is almost certain that there will be good and bad cultural outcomes in each case, and that a totalising explanation will be found in neither. If the work of Gillespie suffers from the external position from which it analyses the behaviour of Punjabis as an exotic minority excluded from a mainstream represented by the researcher, then Ray's study can also be said to suffer from the particular position-takings which Ray brings to bear. Ray's extension of discourses particular to certain constructions of Indian cultural nationalism brings ready-made explanations for cultural practices operating within an Australian context which is reduced to a fairly generic component of an occidental 'West'. It is certainly possible that my own British origins (hardly a neutral position in respect to discussions of either India or Australia) may incline me towards both errors. The situated imagination of the researcher is clearly of import in the construction of their intellectual position. Nonetheless, I do not believe that the categorical positionality of Gillespie, Ray or myself is the most determining factor underpinning or undermining our enquiries. More crucially, I would propose that many of the issues with which I have taken issue in the work of Gillespie and Ray arise through their application, in the context of media research, of the terminology of the ethnographic method itself. Thus the epistemological pitfalls of audience research do not result only from where we speak, but from the manner in which we choose to do so.

Presentation of the Case Study

In the chapters which follow, I will present the findings of my own research into the social imagination constructed around Indian films in Australia. The findings in this case study arise from the use of a ‘cultural field’ research framework which was conceived of as an alternative to established ethnographic practice. As such, this case study may not be a suitable vehicle for establishing any authoritative quantifiable social truth, nor for talking back to the prior studies referenced in this chapter under their own logic. Nonetheless, there are many instances where the discursive terrain which I describe can be usefully juxtaposed with the descriptions provided by Bennett, Emmison and Frow and by Ray. Indeed, the discursive formations of an Australian taste culture and a diasporic migrant audience addressed by these studies are both highly pertinent to understanding the terms of the discussion which follows, as are the complexities of cultural production in Australia which have been evoked in the context of discussing this prior research.

The material which I will now present is the outcome of an indicative study which sought to explore the cultural field around Indian films in a particular Australian social context, as well as the notion of an audience as a social entity. This material arises from the series of research exercises described at the beginning of this chapter and is presented here in a series of three chapters. Over the course of these three chapters I will seek to describe the dynamics of this cultural field as a site of social activity. In order to do so, I will apply three different tiers of analysis to the material I have collected, each of which will address a particular aspect of this cultural field as manifested through practices related to Indian film culture in the research area.

The first set of findings presented here, as Chapter Six of this thesis, will explore some of the ‘linkages and locations’ relevant to participation in this field of practices. The locations referenced in Chapter Six are all sites where activities surrounding Indian film culture are taking place. The discussion of these activities also provides an illustration of the local and global linkages through which commercial film practices operate within this cultural field. The second set of findings, Chapter Seven of this thesis, is focused upon the various ways in which agents within the field describe their relationship to Indian films, the object of shared interest which represents the centre of my analytical field. The third set of findings presented here, as Chapter Eight of this thesis, serves to illuminate some of the ways in which participants related their own engagement with Indian film culture to the collective notions of the ‘mainstream’ and ‘diasporic’ audiences which I have discussed in this chapter. In that context, emphasis has been placed upon the manner in which they chose to describe other hypothetical agents within this field of practices.

Chapter Six: Locating A Field of Practices

In this chapter, I will explore the cultural field of this enquiry spatially, balancing both material and symbolic constructions of social geography. The materiality of the field is indicative of its occupation of ‘real’ social spaces, notably at the specific locations where Indian films are consumed by viewers. The symbolic nature of this geography pertains to the imaginative construction of various locales where those spaces and the agents who inhabit them are imbued with certain characteristics, meanings or values. The field of practices surrounding Indian films in the research locality is figured here as a series of proximate locations which are connected by a range of globally situated activities (such as playback piracy, offshore production, multicultural mainstreaming and urban club cultures). In this reading, I will focus on practices taking place in three material locations within that field, as well as a ‘virtual’ location active in the area. Specifically, I will present material pertaining to a cinema in the Greater Western Sydney suburb of Fairfield, a grocery store video outlet in the city of Wollongong, a leisure megaplex in Sydney’s inner-city and a website serving urban youth edited from Parramatta. This is not an exhaustive list, and there are other relevant sites which might also have been included (for example the *Planet Bollywood* restaurant in Sydney’s Double Bay). However, the material presented here demonstrates sufficiently how the culturally and socially diverse local environment structures participation in transnational cultural activities and provides for the varied use of Indian films. The discussion of these activities also serves to demonstrate the ecology of distribution arising from the commercial interests responsible for the circulation of Indian films. In both respects, the material presented here will illustrate how cultural activity taking place at the local level

is everywhere interlaced with material and symbolic linkages which invoke the global imagination.

A 'Migrant' Cinema in Greater Western Sydney:

The first location which is described here is a small three-screen cinema (371, 217 and 100 seats) located on the roof of a shopping complex in the suburb of Fairfield in Sydney's sprawling South West. Until 2003 this was the only cinema in Sydney which screened Hindi movies daily. In the suburb of Fairfield, the 2001 Australian census recorded 14,468 residents, two thirds of whom were born overseas.⁸⁶ The area was relatively lightly populated prior to the post-war immigration boom, but now consists of one of the most heavily populated local government areas in Greater Sydney. The social indicators used by the Australian government to gauge the prosperity and social well-being of communities all serve to promote a negative view of the area: high levels of unemployment, a lack of skilled or professional employment opportunities and low levels of income, rising crime and assault rates including high numbers of serious drug offences and a large proportion of 'Non-English Speaking Background' migrants in the local population who are the most likely to be at risk from poverty and discrimination in the workforce. The 'State of the Community Report' issued by Fairfield City Council in 2003 provides a sobering assessment of this corner of what Cunningham has described

⁸⁶ The suburb of Fairfield is also the seat of Fairfield City Council which administers the Fairfield Local Government Area which had a population in 2001 of 181,936 and also includes the suburbs of: Abbotsbury, Bonnyrigg, Bonnyrigg Heights, Bossley Park, Cabramatta, Cabramatta West, Canley Heights, Canley Vale, Carramar, Cecil Park, Edensor Park, Fairfield Heights, Fairfield East, Fairfield West, Greenfield Park, Horsley Park, Lansvale, Mt Pritchard, Old Guildford, Prairiewood, Smithfield, St Johns Park, Villawood, Wakeley, Wetherill Park and Yennora. For demographic information on the City of Fairfield Local Government Area, see Fairfield City Council (2005a).

as ‘one of the most “multicultural” nations on Earth’ (2000:21).⁸⁷ Local respondents to the 2001 Australian census were asked to indicate one or more sources of ‘ancestry’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002). As described by those census respondents, the ‘ethnic’ composition of the suburb of Fairfield by largest regional and national configurations of ‘ancestry’ was recorded as follows:⁸⁸

3,861 North African and Middle Eastern (Lebanese 405)

2,925 Southern and Eastern Europeans (Italians 769)

2,016 South East Asians (Vietnamese 1,049)

1,714 Oceanians (Australians 1,297, Indigenous Persons 42)

1,567 North West Europeans (English 935)

1,487 North East Asians (Chinese 1,455)

319 Southern and Central Asian (Indian 171)

Although the numbers of South Asian migrants residing in the suburb itself are relatively low, the cinema in Fairfield has nonetheless become the premier site for the exhibition of Indian films in Sydney. In September 2003, Vijay, a co-director of the cinema, explained how he came to be involved in film exhibition in South West Sydney:

this cinema has been exhibiting Indian film for the last six years, five or six years. It was run by a couple of Indian guys and a Sri Lankan Tamil and they were the only ones who were doing it and our brief, that’s my business partner and me, was really not only to do Indian film, it was actually to do

⁸⁷ For demographic information on the suburb of Fairfield see Fairfield City Council (2005b) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002).

⁸⁸ As with most censuses which have sought to incorporate self-description of ethnicity, it was necessary in the Australian census (given the instability of ethnicity as a categorical term) to allow respondents to select more than one definition. This results in a significantly larger number of selections of ancestry than the number of actual respondents. The figures presented here therefore are relative statements of ethnic identification, not an accurate racial headcount.

world cinema...we were trying to get the Roxy cinemas in Parramatta, which is an old picture palace sort of thing, and we were going to revive that as an art-house-cum-foreign mainstream cinema in western Sydney. That was the brief, so we were going to do Polish and Arabic film, anything really that works for ethnicities around. So things that people call art-house in Australia because they're subtitled, but they could be mainstream in their countries of origin. So a Czech movie or whatever. Chinese films, that sort of thing. As it turned out we didn't get the Roxy, because after 73 years they shut down the cinema and they decided to start, have a nightclub there. So since that was closed we were looking around for a cinema. We found this one, and again with this one it had been closed intermittently for five or six years off and on it was open. It was only open for Indian film, and there weren't doing any other kinds of films. So we revitalised the place, we spent a fair bit of money on new projection equipment, new seats in all three cinemas and new screens and you know, new sound systems. And then we started with a combination of mainstream and Indian movies, because we knew the Indian movies were working here anyway. So we said "lets keep going with that" (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

In keeping with their vision for the venue, the directors of the cinema have attempted to develop a market for all kinds of non-mainstream movies. However, it is a staple of popular Hindi movies which continue to make up the bulk of the screenings and which draw an audience from the local community. As Vijay explains:

essentially Indian film is the mainstream, or the mainstay, of this place, because there's a large Indian audience that knows about film playing here. So we get regular calls so we put them on. And so I try to tie up with all the distributors around who bring in Indian movies and tell them to play them at my cinema as you would anywhere else. And so we've got quite good with the three or four people who mainly bring in the films. That's really the background there (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

Vijay identifies the largest group within this audience as members of the local Fijian-Indian community, although certain stars such as Shah Rukh Khan attract large numbers of other Indians as well as Pakistanis, Iranians and other Middle Eastern migrants in Sydney's west.

there's stars as well that have this, I find this quite bizarre here, everyone wants to know who's acting in the movie. They don't give a shit what the movie's about, only who is acting in it. And they have their favourites, I

think the Shahrukh Khan guy is absolutely hot. So if he's acting in it everybody shows up, the Pakistanis show up, the Indians show up, the Iranians show up. That sort of thing, so he attracts a lot of the Muslim Middle Eastern community. Whereas all these other guys, Ajay Devgan and...who are apparently big stars in India, so...Hrithik Roshan, all these, they don't really get that many people in (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

From 2003 onwards, the cinema has faced competition in the exhibition market as mainstream exhibitors have begun to offer subtitled Indian films on a couple of screens in the Greater Sydney area, and at sites in other Australian cities. Nonetheless, this 'mainstreaming' of Indian films has not yet managed to supplant the niche position enjoyed by the cinema in Fairfield.

Hoyts is now in competition with us. Because they are trying to get deals directly because they've got many more cinemas to offer across Australia. And we're saying: "That's fine if you go ahead and do that, but you should ensure you give us something. Because if you don't play it with us in western Sydney, you're losing the largest audience." We've proven to them time and time again, the larger Indian movies when they've brought them in over the last six months or eight months. That we play it here and they play it in six other locations and we do 60 percent more than anybody else. So its clearly, you know, the best location for Indian film. So that's where we are (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

However, despite the longstanding position of the cinema as the major venue for Indian films in Sydney, and despite the growing profile of Bollywood in the Australian media, the local audience here is currently declining:

about two or three years ago...average Indian movie playing here would get about a thousand people come and see it. Now...two hundred. So it's dropped eighty percent. Now part of that, about forty percent of that drop would be because of the piracy (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

Vijay believes the balance of the decline was due to a bad year for the Bombay industry in 2003. Although optimistic that the audience would recover, Vijay has pursued other

strategies for making the cinema pay, one of which has been hiring out the cinemas for community screenings.

We also do a lot of hiring you know the cinemas for regional Indian film so there's guys who show regional Indian movies like in Tamil language or Telugu or Malayalam and all those sort of things. So those movies I don't do anything for, I just hire the cinemas out. They sell the tickets, they get the people here. I just make money off the hiring and off the candy bar. But in a strategic sense its important because its bringing the entire Indian subcontinental community in (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

Vijay believes that to make an independent cinema viable in Sydney where exhibition is dominated by the three major chains (*Village*, *Greater Union* and *Hoyts*), it is essential to develop a niche market and community use of the cinema is part of developing that market.

There was a film that had been made by Fijian Indians, called...*Flight To Paradise*, and they're really trying to plug it. It's about migrant couples or a migrant couple from Fiji – their experiences of having migrated to Australia...So the guy came to me, said "Can You help out". I said "Sure. We'll do a screening for free. You invite people in". He invited fifty or so people and they had a Q & A to sort of say "Can we improve the movie"...I think they are going to release that (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

In keeping with this approach, and in recognition of local diversity in the South-West suburbs, the cinema has also recently been the venue for screenings by Sydney's Polish and Afghan communities. While Vijay feels that there may be a larger audience in Sydney for Indian movies, he also feels that the location of the cinema detracts from its chances of reaching beyond the local market.

these places are still largely very strong migrant communities, a lot of Assyrians, I mean you've just got to walk around this area in the day and you find lots of these old men drinking coffee, standing in the street, looking completely lost. Then you walk in the evening after, when you're leaving, you see no-one on the streets, it's like that, because of the crime and all sorts of shit. The shopping centre's a dive, no-one comes to it...So

that's why we have to attract like audiences who are coming here as a destination, for a particular kind of film (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

A combination of its distance from inner Sydney, and from the more affluent North-West suburbs, coupled with a reputation for crime after dark serves to ensure that there is, as Vijay puts it, 'No passing traffic'. Vijay describes the local population as:

largely Chinese and Asian, who are blue collar workers and/or businessmen who work very hard. It's Hispanics and people like that. All these first generation people who tend to go more to their little clubs for entertainment, of their communities rather than go to movies. Many of them don't speak English. And there's a whole large range of Eastern European types and I think largely they work hard in these areas. They do shift work, they work on businesses until eight or nine in the night and then they go home, relax, have a drink and watch a DVD at home (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

So long working hours and the spread of relatively cheap DVD players has made playback the most common context in which the local audience consumes movies.

Domestic media consumption on playback serves their entertainment needs, is low-cost, and can be consumed around their work commitments. However, it detracts from the public need for a local cinema. Exhibitors are thus required to either seek niche audiences, as Vijay has done, or to combine film exhibition with a larger 'night-out' experience. Vijay is unconvinced that the latter approach is really suited to the socio-economic conditions of Sydney's South-West, despite the significant distances which have to be travelled, and are travelled, to reach the entertainment centres in the inner-city. Interestingly, Vijay sees areas with a more 'mainstream' population as more viable markets for art-house-cum-foreign cinema than an area like Fairfield with a large migrant population.

I think Parramatta is a good place... Parramatta has a whole group of inner-city sort of, wouldn't call them yuppies, but young families who have for

more space moved to new developments around Western Sydney and around that end of Western Sydney which is sort of North West. This is more South West. In North Western Sydney areas like Kellyville where they're building all those, they call them McMansions. You know those large monstrosities that people are living in. And I think, I think those audiences would have had to go to Leichardt, or to Dee to see a movie. If they could now see it at Parramatta then they would. So I thought it would have, art-house would, one Western Sydney location in more of a hub area would have done well. Fairfield is probably that much more west, and that much more downmarket in terms of its audience...Parramatta I think captures a broad range of Australians who live around the western suburbs, who have developed their tastes for art-house films. But not this area...I mean even mainstream film places like Merrylands Hoyts doesn't do that well. That's not a good site you know. Castle Hill is booming. Because Castle Hill is that kind of north Western place where all these new developments are going up. So they're getting really mainstream people moving to those places (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).⁸⁹

Vijay believes that the recent fashionable status of Indian cinema will have little bearing on his own particular market, but might pay some dividends for major players in the industry able to apply a 'mainstreaming' approach elsewhere in the city. However, such a market would remain distinct from the role played by his cinema, and the operating logic of the small independent players who have pioneered Indian films on the big screen in Australia.

I think Indian film has opportunities in the world, but I think some of the key issues are they have to professionalise their distribution a lot more. They've got to recognise that they've got to invest in a particular marketplace for a period of time before realising whether it's worthwhile or not. And they got to actively market themselves to foreign audiences. By the subtitling, by like, you know, I guess getting into mainstream media. Getting publicity people for their films, but as it stands the Indian, other than the UK and the US, where people like Eros, there are some big distributors, what tends to happen is a 'in the boot of your car' sort of concept you know. One print from India, pick it up at the airport, go to the cinema, play it for the local Indian audience and send it back (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

⁸⁹ For more on Parramatta, see Parramatta City Council (2005).

It is clear from Vijay's description of his business that he sees the location of his cinema as falling outside of the media mainstream. Vijay's explanation for the niche role of his cinema is at various points configured as geographic, demographic or industrial. These are all factors which can be seen to converge within the local environment to produce the particular cultural terrain, and social context, within which Vijay's cinema is situated.

A Grocery Store in the Illawarra

As a result of playback technologies, migrant communities worldwide have experienced an explosion in the availability of media from 'back home'. As with many other imported sources of media consumed by a diasporic audience, the ubiquitous presence of Indian movies in Indian-owned grocery stores in Australia is largely a manifestation of endemic media piracy. Nonetheless, like the community-focused exhibition practices mentioned by Vijay, the exchange of movies on playback media through the practice of piracy also serves the cultural needs of local communities, albeit for domestic rather than public social practices.

Niru has run an urban grocery store in the city of Wollongong, one hour's drive south of Sydney, since migrating to Australia from the UK in 1984. Wollongong is the second largest city in the State of New South Wales, with a population of around a quarter of a million. Wollongong was founded in 1834, and in recent decades it has grown to encompass other nearby settlements, spreading both North and South along the narrow strip of low-lying coastal land between the Tasman Sea and the mountains of the Great

Dividing Range. These mountains stand particularly close to the sea along this stretch of Australia's East coast, forming the dramatic escarpment which dominates the local skyline. Wollongong is set in an area of extraordinary natural beauty, but is also an industrial town with a large steelworks as well as a port (Port Kembla). There are also several collieries located in the region. There was significant migration into the region in the 1950s and 1960s to provide labour for these local industries, although in recent years the major industrial employers in Wollongong, including the steel industry, have shed the bulk of their workforces.

The long boom of Australian real estate since the 1990s has seen the Northern coastal suburbs of Wollongong (which are closest to Greater Sydney) becoming a site of conspicuous wealth as property buyers invest large sums in beachside properties. In the suburbs south of the steelworks, however, there is chronic unemployment, industrial pollution and attendant social and health problems. Lying between these two areas, the local regional college has grown into a major Australian university, becoming an increasingly significant employer and bringing in large numbers of young people from the Southern suburbs of Sydney as well as a substantial cohort of international students. A combination of factors resulting from the changing conditions of the local economy, and Australia's residential building frenzy, are transforming Wollongong's suburban landscape as older style cottages on suburban blocks are being either renovated for resale, replaced with larger more expensive homes or torn down to make space for blocks of low cost apartments.

Wollongong's city centre has declined as a hub of commercial activity due to the construction of shopping malls providing substantial retail centres located in the

suburbs. At the same time, however, the downtown districts close to the beach are now dominated by high rise blocks of ‘penthouse’ apartments with ocean views. Beyond the older southern suburbs of the city, and past Port Kembla, much of the coastal strip from Wollongong southwards to the coastal resort of Kiama is undergoing new residential development. Wollongong is, in many respects, a social environment in the midst of structural transformation and has accurately described itself as a ‘City of Diversity’. In terms of the local population, the largest regional and national configurations of ‘ancestry’ indicated by 2001 census respondents in the Wollongong statistical district were recorded as follows (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003c):

137,583 North West Europeans (English: 86,230)

97,400 Oceanians (Australians: 94,340, Indigenous Persons: 4,085)

43,682 Southern and Eastern Europeans (Italians: 13,047)

3,654 North African and Middle Eastern (Lebanese: 1,520)

2,952 South East Asians (Filipinos: 1,250)

3,326 North East Asians (Chinese: 2,789)

2,273 People of the Americas

1,480 Southern and Central Asian (Indians: 872)

Whilst the resident Indian community in Wollongong remains relatively small it has grown steadily in recent years. For the last decade, Niru has been renting Indian movies to her customers from a small grocery store on the northern outskirts of Wollongong’s town centre. Initially these films were available for rent on videocassettes, although they are now gradually being replaced by DVDs. Niru’s shop holds a large collection of mainly Hindi movies which are available for rent at prices

comparable to those offered by mainstream rental outlets in the area. However, unlike the nearby VideoEzy franchise, Niru's stock of movies consists of, as she puts it, 'copies of copies of copies'.

there were not that many Indians to start with like you know, so slowly...maybe in the last ten years or so. Like people started showing interest and just for myself. I started with myself. Like you know I would just buy, whenever I saw a good movie I would buy it. And the people showed interest and I started slowly you know getting a few a week. You know like, not every movie but now I buy each and every movie which comes out because there's more demand and more people (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).

Although the majority of her movie club customers are longer term residents, the local student population also makes up a significant share. Niru describes Indian movie viewing as popular amongst students of South Asian descent studying at the local university and TAFE (Technical and Further Education) centres. For these young people spending months or years pursuing their studies, Indian movies on playback media provide a cheap means of entertainment as well as continuity with their viewing habits back home (which may not always be India).

You see most of the overseas students who come here, they come from India or even they come from Dubai or wherever they come from. Their background is Indian and they want to be in touch. Even these kids who just came in, after those three, one is from Tanzania, and the other two are from Dubai. But they're Indian and they go...India and Dubai is two hours flight, so they go to India two or three times a year. So they keep in touch. They do their shopping there...they all like, see, all the overseas students who come here, they have to be, have a very good back up from home. Because first of all it's so expensive to study. So they have to have so much fees to be able to afford for the children to come here and study. So they go to Pakistan quite regularly and they're in touch and all that (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).

The advent of the internet and cable and satellite broadcaster ZEE also means that customers can keep in touch with India's movie world, and often place requests for new

movies prior to their Indian release. Unlike the situation in India, however, cable subscription remains expensive in Australia and Niru believes that only a few families in Wollongong have the service. The students rely mainly on the internet, and also use their computers for watching the DVDs. Occasional visits to the subcontinent are also opportunities to stock up with movies.

some of these kids from Bangladesh, there the DVDs are I don't know two dollars or three dollars, so when they go home they buy a suitcase full of them for themselves or their friends... So they have plenty of movies like that. But even in Pakistan I think it's very cheap. Sometimes they have friends, they even send them a parcel (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).

Local students confirm this, for example Iqbal, a student from Bangladesh says that he knows people who 'when they go home, they bring all these CDs and things. It's cheaper and they just buy it and they watch it'. José, from East Timor, says that the small number of Timorese students receive postings of 'very updated' Indian movies from relatives back home. He explains that since there is no cinematic exhibition in East Timor, there are VCD rental stores with 'heaps of Indian movies' as well as Chinese and American movies. José believes these discs are imported from Kupang, and originate from Surabaya in Java.

So they send the CDs from East Timor here probably another...next month they'll send it here, I hope so. I have a collection there but when it's old, I mean the movie, because we watch it anytime or everyday, we used to, I used to give it for another person who haven't watch it. Give to a friend or, and I want to find a new one (Jose, interview 15/08/2003).

Niru, however, firmly believes that the majority of the pirated DVDs on sale in grocery stores in Australia originate from Pakistan where a large scale replication industry has

long served mainstream demand for Indian movies despite government bans on their exhibition.⁹⁰

all these movies are made in Pakistan. Indian movies, before they are released, I don't know how, the DVDs are made in Pakistan. All the DVDs come from Pakistan. Most of them, that's why they've gone down in price so much... You see because the labour is cheap, so cheap there, so that's why. If the labour was expensive... They've got all the equipment to do it and they... most of the movies the prints and all that, pretty good. It's very rarely that you get something which is not so good. Like you know there'll be defective DVD or something like that. But if there's an original one it will never be defective. And they're making two movies, three movies on one DVD. That's, I don't know, I mean they, no matter how much they... you see there is no, you know that, um, can't sue you, or like you know like in Pakistan, they can make copies but the same thing in India, they cannot do it. Because there is no rights or something like that in Pakistan... but in India the rights are there. But how they get the... they have to make the, have to have the movie from a movie, they can't just make it like that on a DVD. So how they do that, I don't know. But they print them there (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).

In addition to this unofficial off-shore distribution point for Hindi movies, both Iqbal and another student, Lalitha, explained that they also visited particular grocery stores in the Greater Sydney conurbation which serve as specific distribution centres for other sources of Indian media:

I tried to look in the spice shops here but, yeah, the majority of their films are Hindi or like an entirely different language, so. So I haven't watched any films in Wollongong at all. Most of it's like from Sydney... I used to, you know, we used to live out in Parkes, which is over the Blue Mountains and it's in the rural area so there's no spice shops nearby there, so we had to travel to Sydney to get the videos and things... Yeah, or what would happen is that other people would take them and bring them into the area and we'd just like share and record it or whatever. We'd share the movies and stuff. I think pirate videos are quite common in Australia though... I haven't seen many people that get, like, pulled up on using these videos, distributing them, renting them out... there's a lot of spice shops in Sydney that like, if you were deciding where to get your Tamil films, there's a video store, like a video franchise... which is like, I guess it's like a video company so they

⁹⁰ There would seem to be some substance to this claim, since other commentators also position Pakistan as a major site for media piracy, especially for Indian films (see BBC Online 15/03/2005 and Khan (2005a/b)).

Fig. 6 A Grocery store-cum-playback outlet in metropolitan Sydney, New South Wales, 2003.
(Authors illustration)

sell Tamil video all the time. Like you can trust them to supply those videos. Also spice shops that have, like, a Tamil person, like a Tamil owner. So, yeah, you would have to find certain stores, like the majority of the Hindi stores don't have them I don't think (Lalitha, interview 28/04/2004).

if you want to see Bengali movies, it is in the Bangladeshi grocery shop, all Calcutta, West Bengali and Bangladeshi movies as well... Just need a Bangladeshi grocery shop. It's available, it's very available. That is in Sydney, no... Sydney, Melbourne, perhaps, the big cities. But not in the other areas. Not in the rural or remote areas. Not in rural Australia. I don't know about Wollongong but probably there is not. But in Sydney, quite a few, yeah... Close to our home there is two places, three places actually. Three different shops. Three or four, I think. So I can go and get it... I mean my wife she prefers to stay there but I don't mind anywhere. But she prefers it there... because of the family, friends are there, you know, people from the same country. These kind of things. I mean I don't find any justification in that but she likes to do that so, I mean, well I just keep quiet (Iqbal, interview 21/04/2004).

Given the different ethnic and linguistic composition of Indian migrant communities residing in different countries, such outlets for Bengali and Tamil media might well be served by other trajectories of transnational exchange than those which contribute to the distribution of Hindi films. Nonetheless, taken together this 'unofficial' distribution of Indian media in Australia is able to supply a wide range of Indian media products to a diverse customer base. Such practices of media distribution involving mass piracy and small-scale unlicensed importation are common amongst many Australian communities (see Cunningham and Sinclair 2000). What is striking in relation to Indian media is the various routes by which movies arrive in Australia as well as the speed, with most arriving within days of, and even sometimes before, their release in India. The efficiency of these complex international operations is not lost on professional exhibitors:

Some of these DVDs are just brilliant... I am sure they are getting them in transit. I heard they arrested some guy in Chennai and he apparently had fifteen projectors and he was capturing the film on the way to the airport. So he was able to get the film for half an hour and record it in twenty minutes.

So the print is going from point A to the airport...and twenty minutes could be a traffic delay. That's really professional (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

The effect of Indian media piracy since the 1980s has been to massively increase the global reach of Indian movies, although it has also clearly detracted from the growth of official distribution networks and cheated producers of returns from their work. On a more positive note, it has helped to ensure that for NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) and PIOs (Person of Indian Origin), Indian movies have been an aspect of domestic life that has remained constant over shifting national terrains.⁹¹ Niru, while confirming that the majority of her film club customers in Wollongong were South Asians, also sought to emphasise a growing interest from other Australians in Indian films:

And good thing what happened now is with the DVDs. DVDs mostly have subtitle in English, OK, so a lot of the students or the Australians who would like to watch a movie, because its got subtitles they can watch it. You see like previously the movies didn't have subtitles so only the SBS movies would have a subtitle, and the normal movies don't. But since we've had this *Bend it Like Beckham*, *Hollywood/Bollywood*, and *Monsoon Wedding*, a few good movies have come. And the *My Fathers Daughter*, a few nice movies you know. People have shown interest even Australians have come and asked you know how do we rent, how do we do it and all that. They want to watch it too, some films I tell them they won't understand but the ones with the subtitles they can. There are some boys who have got Australian girlfriends and there are some girls who have got Australian, you know, and so whatever...but we have Greek, we have Lebanese and we have Aussies too wanting to join because they love Indian music. Like dances and all that so they specifically come and ask for, you know, like a movie with a lot of dances and you know most of the movies have dances like you know...Whether they understand the language or not, they love watching it. The other day, I don't know if it was a Greek guy or something. He came in and he wanted to get a particular movie, *Mother India*. He said I watched it when I was young (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).⁹²

⁹¹ I have drawn these definitions from the Singhvi report (see ft 45, p 115). It would seem that in practice, however, that the term NRI is commonly used to generically describe any member of the Indian 'diaspora'. NRI was widely used by my respondents, whereas PIO was not used at all.

⁹² An interest in Indian films by Wollongong's Greek community may not be entirely surprising, given that Helen Abadzi has documented the popularity of Indian films in post-War Greece during the 1950s (2001).

Although there are larger, or more specialist, Indian grocery stores-cum-video outlets to be found in Sydney, this small regional store is a good example of how playback media play a role in satisfying a niche demand for media products that broadens the diversity of cultural products available to local residents. The local South Asian community is not large enough to sustain regular cinema exhibition, and the student population in any case tends to favour domestic playback consumption, which is often a social occasion involving students of other backgrounds. The local grocery store, as a distribution point for spices and films, therefore serves to connect a varied community of South Asians not only with each other but also with the wider local community. However, the co-location of unofficial media networks with ethnically-oriented food products as a distribution structure for small diasporic communities and their friends is now coming under increasing pressure as media producers in India become keener and better able to capitalise their foreign markets, and following Australia's entry into a free trade agreement with the United States which has made copyright infringement a much more serious offence (Moore 2005).

Fox Studios Australia, Moore Park, Sydney

The third site described in this chapter is located in Sydney's fashionable inner-city. Fox Studios Australia is located in Moore Park which lies to the south of the Central Business District and is adjacent to the expensive real estate of Sydney's Eastern suburbs. Fox Studios Australia was opened in 1998 as a movie production studio conjoined with a shopping and entertainment complex, which was opened in 1999. The 29 hectare site, formerly the Sydney Showground, is situated next to Sydney's famous

cricket ground and exemplifies the ethos of multiplex exhibition, although a site at this scale might be better described as a 'megaplex' (see Acland 2000, 2003:107-129).⁹³ Goldsmith and O'Regan describe the Fox Studios site both as a 'locomotive' for production and as a 'stargate', a source of media glamour and a symbolic expression of an international, entrepreneurial city (2004). It is also a site of conspicuous consumption and the web portal for the complex provides the following pitch for its retail ambience:

Fox Studios is Sydney's most vibrant and colourful meeting place, within the setting of a real movie studio. As you wander along the curved streets you'll catch the best in entertainment, shopping and dining. All about you is the buzz of urban culture and entertainment. It's a great place for people of all ages to have a fantastic meal, spend an afternoon shopping, see a movie, take up the action of the showrning activities, hang out in the relaxed bars or just sit with a coffee and people watch...Fox Studios offers a global smorgasbord of dining, housing over 16 of Sydney's favourite restaurants, cafes and bars. A number of leading retailers bring you the newest lines in fashion and homewears [sic], and the entertainment options are amazing. There are 4 live venues show-casing the hottest acts, 16 state of the art cinemas, bungy trampolining, bowling and mini golf. It's all here at Fox Studios (Fox Studios 2005).

I will focus here on practices taking place in two locations within the Fox Studios complex which demonstrate both 'locomotive' and 'stargate' roles. Starting with the latter, the first location will be Hoyts Cinema Paris, one of the aforementioned 16 cinemas in the entertainment district and the site of 'Bollywood' film festivals recently staged in 2003 and 2004 by Hoyts and MG Distribution Pty. In relation to the 'locomotive' role of the complex, the second location will be an office within the Fox Studios complex from which a film production and liaison company called Films and Casting Temple Pty. directs its operations.

⁹³ For more on the development of the Fox Studios Australia site, see Harris (1997).

Hoyts Cinema Paris

Hoyts, one of the major nationwide Australian cinema exhibition chains, operates a flagship cinema at Fox Studios known as La Premiere, along with Hoyts Cinema Paris, a smaller four screen art-house venue. According to their publicity, Cinema Paris is dedicated to 'local, national & international art-house through to quality films of a wider appeal', and 'has become the new home for International film festivals'. Cinema Paris has therefore hosted festivals of Spanish, Mexican, Serbian, Irish and most recently 'Bollywood' films (Hoyts Cinema Paris 2005).

In recent years, the heightened profile of Indian movie culture in the wider Anglophone market has encouraged attempts to bring Indian movies to Australia's 'mainstream' audience.⁹⁴ It is in that context that Mira Nair and Gurinder Chadha have enjoyed success in Australia's mainstream distribution circuit with *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Subsequently, there have been one-off festivals directed at mainstreaming Indian commercial cinema in Sydney, such as *Bollywood At Bondi* (2002) and *Bollywood at Cremorne* (2003). More substantial vehicles have been the *Beginners Guide To Bollywood* (2003) and *Bollywood Masala* (2004) festivals which opened at Hoyts Cinema Paris and went on to tour Australia's state capitals. All of these events were directed towards developing a 'crossover' audience for Indian films, and have been accompanied by the re-branding of Indian movies as Bollywood *chic*, that is as objects of 'cult' aestheticism, in the Australian press (See, for example, Tadros 2003, Mahonen 2003, Arora and Moses 2004, Arora 2005).

⁹⁴ See Chapter Three, pp 128-132.

In the first place, this ‘Bollywoodization’ of Indian cinema clearly underscores the influence of ‘global’ media fashions in the US and UK upon the Australian market. As part of these trends, English-language movies such as *Moulin Rouge* (2001) or *The Guru* (2002) have ‘refashioned’ Bollywood movie stylistics, as have broadcast ads in Australia for yoghurt and for cars. So whilst a mainstream audience for Indian movies remained putative in 2003-2004, the profile of Indian films had undeniably been heightened within the intertextual and transnational media sphere operating across Australian society. *The Australian* newspaper was confident enough to claim:

Indian films make up the most enthusiastically fluorescent, kinetic and kaleidoscopic national cinema anywhere and slowly but surely Australian audiences are succumbing to the charms of these all-singing, all-dancing love stories (Higson 2003).

In September 2003, Hoyts Cinema Paris was host to a ten day festival entitled *A Beginners Guide To Bollywood* in partnership with Melbourne-based MG Distribution. This event was directed towards furthering the development of a white, urban audience for Indian films, and it was with this in mind that eleven movies were chosen for screening.⁹⁵ Festival co-director, Marcus Georgiades of MG Distribution, stated that the aim was “to introduce Indian cinema to Australian audiences, who have never seen an Indian film other than *Monsoon Wedding* and to build the crossover market” (Press Trust of India 2003). Mitu Lange, a co-director of the festival and also with MG Distribution, claims:

we had like around sixty percent who were a non-Asian Australian audience at the festival so that I think speaks volumes you know. And the rest of them were Indian students who were like “Oh I always wanted him to see this film in the big cinema”. You know like that kind of a thing and most of

⁹⁵ The ten-day roster for the *Beginners Guide To Bollywood* in 2003 included the following titles: *AKS* (2001), *Asoka* (2001), *Devdas* (2002), *Dil Se* (1998), *Dil To Pagalhai* (1997), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995), *Fiza* (2000), *Hero* (2003), *Khabhi Khushi Khabhie Gham* (2001), *Lagaan* (2001), *Saathiya* (2002).

the films, all the films had subtitles so it was just great. It was great to see like Indian wife with Australian husband, Australian father-in-law and mother-in-law coming to see *Lagaan* you know. So I think it was a really really good experience. It really worked out well. I mean we are all quite happy with it. We were expecting two thousand. That was the target, and we got three thousand and twelve patrons over the ten days. That's very good for a festival, for a film festival, so everyone was quite happy (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

The festival went on to tour other Australian capitals, and was relaunched in 2004 as 'Bollywood Masala'. *Bollywood Masala* offered urban Sydney-siders the major Indian blockbusters of 2004 alongside a couple of art-house features.⁹⁶ Each screening was proceeded by a festival trailer, with a filmed introduction by festival patron Yash Chopra and advertisements from festival sponsors. *Bollywood Masala* received sponsorship from a range of Australian concerns: Plan Australia (an overseas child sponsorship scheme), World Movies (a pay-TV foreign and art-house cinema channel), Sharwoods (the international food company), SBS Radio, Australia's Health Insurance Commission (with a Bollywood-themed ad), Australian carrier QANTAS (which had recently launched a direct service to India) and tourism operator Intrepid Travel.

For the opening night of *Bollywood Masala* festival-goers were showered with petals by sari-clad hostesses. Alongside the film screenings, *Bollywood Masala* also included Q & A sessions with young directors, Rohan Sippy and Nikhil Advani, and a ticketed opening-night party which sold itself on the chance to 'meet the directors'. This was held at Arena, an adjacent hospitality bar within the Fox Studios complex and was attended by a mix of local Indian fans and Australian media personnel. The glamour of this 'stargate' event provided a powerful contrast to the down-at-heel ambience of the

⁹⁶ The ten-day roster for *Bollywood Masala* in 2004 included the following titles: *Main Hoon Na* (2004), *3 Deewarein* (2003), *Ab Tak Chappan* (2003), *Chameli* (2004), *Chokher Bali* (2003), *Hum Tum* (2004), *Khakee* (2003), *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003), *Kuch Na Kaho* (2003), *Main Madhuri Dixit Banna Chahti Hoon* (2003), *Munna Bhai MBBS* (2003), *Meenaxi: Tale of 3 Cities* (2003).

Fairfield cinema. The opening film on two screens, *Main Hoon Na* (2004), was introduced by the Indian High Commissioner in Australia. Global synchronicities came into play here as the Commissioner introduced the film, a hostage drama which centres on terrorists who take over an upper class Indian college. The tragic events of the high school siege in Beslan in the Russian Federation Republic of North Ossetia had unfolded over the proceeding days, prompting the Commissioner to remind the festival audience that India too was deeply involved in a ‘war on terror’.

As with other cultural events staged in Sydney’s inner city, the Bollywood festivals at Cinema Paris have received substantial coverage in the mainstream press (see, for example, Moses and Arora 2004). Outside of the festival, the Cinema Paris is now a regular venue for a small number of Indian films throughout the year. Although Hoyts are providing the key site for ‘mainstreaming’ Indian films in Sydney, the site management of Cinema Paris informed me that their relationship with *Bollywood Masale* was primarily a hiring of screens to MG Distribution. However, the involvement of the Hoyts chain would seem to be more significant according to an article titled ‘Planet Bollywood’ published in Sydney’s *Sunday Telegraph’s Sunday Magazine* in August 2005:

“Bollywood is a trend that’s taking over the whole world and Australia is no exception,” says Mark Chamberlain, national film programmer for Hoyts Cinemas and the man responsible for making Bollywood films accessible to Australians. “On a trip to Birmingham in early 2002, I visited one of the city’s multiplexes. Out of its 12 screens, five were showing Bollywood movies. I remember asking myself if there was any reason why the same couldn’t happen in Australia. After all, we pride ourselves on our multiculturalism,” says Chamberlain, a die-hard fan of Bollywood movies...Chamberlain wasted no time and by mid-2002, *Devdas*, India’s first movie to be officially selected at Cannes (2002) also became the first-ever Bollywood flick to be screened at Hoyts. (Arora 2005:21)

The involvement of Hoyts in providing screens for Indian features is changing the nature of Indian film distribution in Australia, and represents a ‘mainstreaming’ agenda which is obviously distinct from the ‘boot of your car’ concepts which, for Vijay, have typified the circulation of Indian films in migrant neighbourhoods prior to 2003.⁹⁷ The back story behind the mainstreaming activities of Hoyts, for which the *Bollywood Masala* festivals are the publicity flagship, is a complex one arising from their partnership with MG Distribution (2005) which, in turn, has close links with one of India’s premier production houses, Yash Chopra’s Yash Raj Films (2005). Their relationship has been founded on a growing awareness amongst Australian media producers of India as a potentially lucrative media market and upon the ambitions of major players in the Indian film industry to legitimise, and therefore capitalise, on their presence in ‘Western’ markets. With Indian production budgets increasing, the Australian film industry has been keen to court Indian producers and their appetite for off-shore production as well as for post-production facilities. This is an extension of services and which the Australian industry is already providing to Hollywood producers (Australian Film Commission 2002). It was in the context of securing production work that Melbourne-based Black Cat Productions approached director Yash Chopra at the IIFA awards in Malaysia in 2002. As MG Distribution director, Mitu Lange explains:

I used to work in television in India and, mostly current affairs and news and entertainment, magazine shows which I used to direct. So I knew pretty much a lot of people within the industry. My husband’s a New Zealander, and he got a job here, so like a good wife I kind of followed him here and we both came here. And then a year back, I started looking for jobs everywhere. I was called by Black Cat...[which] does a lot of local production for films and ads which are shot in Australia, and he thought it would be good to explore the Indian market for production...my job was to get production work, you know films and songs and ads shot in Australia...then we went to IFA [sic] awards which are like Oscar awards, Indian Oscars, but they’re held at all international destinations, in Kuala

⁹⁷ See page 232.

Lumpur... We met Mr. Yash Chopra over there, and Yashji... I'd shot with Yashji a couple of times, so I think he was very happy to see me with a westerner because it gave him the comfort, the comfort of having a familiar face and the western professionalism packed in one. So he was like, "I don't shoot my films, I won't shoot my films in Australia because I shoot them in Switzerland and I get everything there, but take my films to distribute". And we were like "no, we're a production house, we are not a distribution set-up and we have no idea", and he was like "Don't worry, just start, because its...", I still remember his exact words when we were sitting in his hotel room, and it was like "It's full of grocery store pirates" (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

According to Mitu Lange, Chopra offered the distribution rights for his movies in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji.⁹⁸ A new company, MG Distribution, arose from this discussion, seeking to build a market for commercial Indian movies through mainstream Australian exhibitors. Lange describes their nascent audience:

Our first release was on 20th December [2002] with two really big films. One was Yash Chopra's *Saathiya*, Another was *Kaante*....we were screening them at Forum Cinema, which is one of the heritage cinemas in Melbourne... Its been really interesting for me to see the different kinds of audiences that we've been having... When we started it was just Indian students, and a few families. And when they started knowing the films were all subtitled for sure, then we started getting a lot of Indian students with their Australian spouses and their Australian friends and so on. And after a while we started getting Greek and Italian families ...then there was a significant amount from the gay community who came. They bought the CD's and we had a little bar at the Forum and they had scotch with a samosa and they just loved the film (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

Although based in Melbourne, MG Distribution co-ordinates its distribution activities across Australia. In Sydney, MG Distribution now supplies Vijay's cinema in Fairfield with mostly untitled prints but since 2003 has also been in partnership with Hoyts, screening a subtitled commercial Indian movie each month in two major theatres.

⁹⁸ According to Mitu Lange 'Fiji is actually a huge market, much, much bigger than Australia. And the good thing is...the Australian market is very spread out because it's all over Australia, but Fiji's just Suva and Nadi. So it's just two and so even you can just send two prints and get a lot more money than what you'd get in Australia...Fiji is easily the biggest market out of all three' (interview 17/10/2003). So although the presence of Indian movies in Australia has received far more press attention, the Fiji market (which receives virtually none) continues to be more lucrative in financial terms.

Over the first eight months that we have been screening, I think it almost comes to a thirty-five percent increase which is really good in such a short span of time. You know in the non-Asian mainstream Australian market... we have distributed all the big films and in such a short space of time, we've managed to get the films in all the major cinema exhibitors like Hoyts, Village, Greater Union, Birch, Carrol and Coyle...and on the other side we also have the best art-house cinemas where we are screening *Mr and Mrs Iyer* (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

Recognising that the mainstream market is limited compared to the number of movies available for release, the strategy of MG Distribution is to ensure that a small number of 'the best' Indian movies get a mainstream release in the main Australian cities.

it's still a very small market and initially, we've learned our lesson, initially we started, we were trying to take everything you know, all the big films. And we may have took some bad films. And I think one of the most telling moments was, I took a film...which was a terrible film, but it had all the stars and all the trappings and as you know most of the films we don't get to see like with American distributors, because they're ready at the last minute and you just buy them on buzz and star cast and the history of the director. So going by that we got the film and it was a terrible film. And in the intermission, one of the students and his Australian friend came up to me and they said that 'How could you take this film?'...that guy had obviously got his Aussie girlfriend along to see a great Indian film and it was so bad. And I think that was like a lesson to us that we have to be really selective you know because when you're making a market, it's so easy to break it as well, you know, with wrong choice and I knew that we could easily have lost that Australian girl because there's no way she would have come and watched another Indian film...it's a very small incident but it kind of really taught all of us a lesson and especially me because I pick the films. So since then we have become very strict, I mean we've turned down almost forty films so far. We are just going to release one film a month, but make sure it gets the best cinema, the best promotion (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

The company is also seeking to 'professionalise' the distribution of Indian films in Australia amongst their more established audiences. This has involved efforts to tackle playback piracy, and the network of unofficial distribution that has arisen from those practices. For Lange, this represents the most immediate challenge to building a solid commercial base for Indian producers in the Australian market. As Lange explains:

The films release on Friday, Monday the pirated DVD is out. So I have three days to make up that money. If it's a spectacular film, that's the only way the film will have some shelf life, otherwise three days...it's so hard because the films need to be classified...And sometimes it's stuck at customs and it has to release on the Friday and you're stressing because the film is not out as yet. Then you rush it to Sydney, get it classified, that takes three days and then it's out on screen. So it's a very stressful process and the producers don't send the films early from India because they're scared there might be a leak somewhere and there might, they might have this piracy thing (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

Although playback distribution networks have served niche audiences in Australia for two decades, the nature of such transactions denies Indian producers not only financial returns but also the box office information which might allow them to build a reliable picture of those audiences. MG Distribution has begun to provide the industry with market data and it has also publicly announced legal proceedings against playback distributors:

****ANTI-PIRACY ACTIONS - SYDNEY****

Legal action is currently underway in the Federal Magistrates Court against Rakesh Kumar and Nalisha Luthra, owners of the 'Indian Entertainment Centre' in Harris Park, NSW.

The decision of the magistrate in relation to the order to seize DVDs, VCDs and videos can be found [here](#).

Yash Raj Films, Eros Multimedia and MG Distribution will continue to protect their films against piracy with more action scheduled nationally over coming months (MG Distribution 2005).

These efforts to reduce the level of piracy in the Australian market have produced some tensions with Australian-Indian communities, as Lange explains: 'all these grocery-store owners, they are kind of irritated and spread vicious rumours and so on and we are more or less viewed as outsiders who are trying to come in' (interview 17/10/2003). However, Lange believes that litigation may not be the most effective way to deal with playback piracy, since:

I think also lot of the problem comes from the fact that they manage the original DVDs in the UK and everything is shipped from UK...what happens is by the time they come from UK it's almost thirty-five, forty bucks. You know, freight, this, that, shipment and all...So it has to be localised. In my mind I think that's the solution...you see these grocery stores are thriving because there's no other place to go. If you want to buy a DVD, an Indian DVD, you won't get it anywhere else you know. But if it's available at Sanity, HMV, Blockbuster, all these places, I'm not saying all the rubbish films also, but just the good ones. I mean what, why won't, the students and the guys who buy DVDs regularly then go here? (Mitu Lange, interview 17/10/2003).

Accordingly, MG Distribution has since teamed up with another Australian distribution company, Madman Entertainment, which produces and distributes niche media in playback formats (including Japanese Anime, Australian and other independent film, Asian martial arts, and sports features, see Madman Entertainment 2005). As a joint venture the two companies launched the 'Bollywood Masala' label in October 2004 to distribute Bollywood titles in the mainstream Australian playback market. The new label was announced by Lange at the opening of *Bollywood Masala* 2004 at Cinema Paris along with a polite plea to festival-goers to stay away from the video pirates. The first two titles on the label, *Chalte Chalte* (2003) and *Armaan* (2003), were publicised in the festival programme in terms favourable to a 'mainstream viewer' (Shah Rukh Khan was presented as the 'Indian Tom Cruise' and Amitabh Bachchan as the 'Indian Clint Eastwood'), and these and subsequent titles can now be found in the art-house sections of some of Australia's major rental franchises.

As opposed to the media practices, clientele and cultural geography previously described by Vijay and Niru, everything about the *Bollywood Masala* events falls within discourses of the 'mainstream'. The bright lights of showcase events in Sydney's rejuvenated inner-city are clearly in contrast to the more prosaic multicultural experiences and media practices of cinema audiences in Fairfield and playback viewers

in the Illawarra. According to Akash Arora, writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, *Bollywood Masala* has become ‘one of the most popular film events in Australia’ (2005:21). Mitu Lange claims that in the course of its tour across Australia in 2004/5, the festival ‘recorded an attendance of 40,000-odd people of which 80 percent were non-Indians’ (Lange in Arora 2005:22). The festival’s starting point at the Cinema Paris locates it within Sydney’s premier media exhibition infrastructure at Fox Studios, and amongst the city’s most prestigious entertainment venues. The commercial interests behind the festival which are brought into contact through MG Distribution (exhibitors Hoyts, producers Yash Raj Films and the various sponsors) are major players in their respective sectors. The *Bollywood Masala* event is pitched towards an affluent inner-city consumer sensitive to global fashions and can rely on coverage from Sydney’s leading mainstream press publications, the *Daily/Sunday Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This promotional drive towards an Australian mainstream has to be qualified, however, since it is important to remember that while the profile of film festivals in the inner-city may be high compared to everyday exhibition practices, such events are only able to access a relatively small component of the nationwide Australian cinema audience. *Bollywood Masala* must therefore also be regarded as a niche, or narrowcast, practice. It may not, in fact, reach as many consumers as practices operating in the ‘ethnic’ distribution structures. The discourse of mainstreaming which surrounds *Bollywood Masala* would therefore appear to rest heavily upon the greater relative value given to the social spaces in which it operates and the audience demographic which it claims to address.

Films and Casting Temple Pty.

The office of Films and Casting Temple Pty. is also located within the Fox Studios Complex, just a few hundred yards from the Cinema. The company is run by actor/director/producer Anuparm Sharma and has been active since 1998 in facilitating industry links between media professionals in India and Australia (Films and Casting Temple 2005). During this period there has been a surge in off-shore Indian productions in Australia. Films and Casting Temple has been involved in over a hundred media projects between the two countries, including Farhan Akhtar's major feature *Dil Chatha Hai* (2001), much of which was shot in Sydney. India-based projects have been seeking fresh locations (particularly for musical sequences) as well as post-production facilities. In turn, Australian media professionals have been keen to supply technical personnel and infrastructure for Indian projects. The Fox Studios complex, as a literal embodiment of Australia's status as an offshore production hub for Hollywood, and as a 'locomotive' behind Sydney's growing share of Australian media production, is a natural home for the company.

Functioning as a spokesman for Indo-Australian film ties, Sharma has spoken at a range of academic and business events around Australia in the last five years. He has co-ordinated the release of a guide for Indian media producers on filming in Australia with NSW's Film and Television Office (FTO). In December 2003, Sharma was appointed head of the newly formed Australia-India Film, Arts, Media, Entertainment council (FAME) and has since organised delegations from the Australian film industry to Mumbai's industry conference, FRAMES, in 2004 and 2005. He also organised a visit to 'Bollywood' in 2004 by the state premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, and the CEO

of Queensland's Pacific Film and Television Commission, Robin James. The purpose of this visit was to promote parallel offshore production facilities in that state to the Indian film industry (Films and Casting Temple 2005).

In addition to occupying a key liaison role between the Indian and Australian film industries, Sharma also remains active as a media producer and is pursuing a number of Indian-Australian production projects, including documentaries and feature films. In one such project, Sharma is providing support to a group of Indian-Australians who, having found it difficult to get into the Indian movie industry or get roles in Australia, now want to produce their own movie. Sharma believes they see it as a matter of national pride:

I would put Australia where Britain was ten years ago. When *Bhaji on the Beach* was being made and when other films were coming out. So at this stage the only advantage Australian-Indians have is the experience of British-Indian film makers or American-Indian film makers to learn from. It is going to be quicker, and it has been quicker in Australia as opposed to Britain and America. It's not so much because of an audience base but because of the exposure Australia has to all the Indian films coming out of UK. So hypothetically speaking *Bend it Like Beckham* took ten years because it was a pioneering film of its kind, blah, blah, blah. The moment it's released Australian-Indians go 'Why can't we do a *Bend it Like Beckham*?'. So they've got all these experiences to be inspired from which are pushing them towards it so it's going to be quicker. And it already is there...you are again going into the group mentality: How come British-Indians have got films coming out when Australian-Indians haven't. It's a question of pride you know, we need something out. So its sort of that kind of take...They're proudly Australians but they also know they are of Indian origin (Anuparm Sharma, interview 18/07/2003).

These observations construct a complex set of discourses, where the spirit of Anglophone competition which permeates Australian society is reproduced within a notion of transnational Indian-ness. However, this is not just a friendly competition of multiculturalisms, since the desire of Australian-Indians to pursue careers in the media

and performing arts typically results in frustration and feelings of exclusion. As Sharma explains:

it started off with a documentary which we were doing looking at this workshop which Amnesty and NIDA are doing. To cater for the thirst of Australian actors of Indian origin who want an outlet in their own language and in their own cultural form... we were covering it to do a documentary called *Colour Blind Casting* which looks at the fact that these guys have been given dreams that will never be fulfilled because statistics show that cross-cultural casting is not colour blind. Whites getting, Africans getting a role in India is absolutely zero in the same way Indians getting a role in Australia, a mainstream role, is. So we look at that and then the phone calls and the constant bickering about 'I want to work in film but I can't work in India and I want to, want to, want to...'. So I said 'OK' We threw a challenge 'Make your own film'... it's basically a scream of the Indian community in Australia to say 'OK. If we don't get an outlet. We're going to thumb our noses at the powers that be and make our own films.' Instead of knocking on doors, we'll take the power into our own hands. It's sort of a sociological and filmographic experience, an experiment (Anuparm Sharma, interview 18/07/2003).

Another project being pursued by Films and Casting Temple is a joint project with leading Australian film producer John Winter (*My Mother Frank* (2000), *Rabbit Proof Fence* (2002), *A Man's Gotta Do* (2004)). Entitled *The Film*, this project is currently being developed with the aid of the Australian Film Commission (AFC). Winter and Sharma are also actively seeking suitable partners and financiers in the Indian industry, pitching the project as an unofficial Indian-Australian co-production.⁹⁹

It's been written by John Winter who's producing it. I joined him as a co-producer and now as a producer. It's a film which deals with the two film cultures... it's a romantic comedy, it deals with the differences between the western film culture and the Indian film culture, more so it deals with the Indian film culture along with the fan following that film culture has, along with the extent to which that film culture is *ingrained* in the Indian society, it deals with that. And then it looks at what is the outcome; either, or, is it an either/or situation or is it a combination and a mixture of the best of both worlds. Something in the form of a global cinema. That's what it deals with,

⁹⁹ Australia does not have a co-production treaty with India, or with any other Asian country. Australia currently has eight formal co-production treaties (with Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, New Zealand and the UK). All of these, with the exception of Israel, 'Western' countries (Australian Film Commission 2004b/c). For more on Australian co-production see Hammett-Jamart (2004).

a story about films. Not so much about film making but a story about the film industry (Anuparm Sharma, interview 18/07/2003).

John Winter believes that despite current high expectations in India only a small number of Indian movies will have the potential to reach audiences in the West beyond the niche NRI and art-house audiences. A movie won't succeed at the national level in Australia unless it consciously addresses a 'crossover' audience in both plot and style. Winter identifies the hurdles to be overcome as: promoting a subtitled movie in a popular context, adjusting movie length and making the song sequences accessible to a Western audience. However, Winter believes that it is possible to make such translations, and is enthusiastic about this 'crossover' project, hoping that a film of this kind will succeed with mainstream western audiences as well as with a globally dispersed NRI audience.

if you can go to territories like the US and UK where Indian films are doing so well and they're getting up to number three in the box-office of whatever, and then you think this film should play well to the NRI audience and you're thinking ...It's actually designed for anyone who enjoys a romantic comedy that's fun, that's exotic, that's full of colour and dance and movement - in other words for that broader audience. I think it's got to be a win-win situation and that's what we're looking for. I want this to play in Sydney from Liverpool to inner-city to a non-Indian audience (John Winter, interview, 12/07/2003).

Winter also hopes to find a wide audience in India, a first for Australian film. However, while India has not traditionally been an area of much interest for Australian media producers until quite recently, the explicitly transnational address of projects designed to succeed primarily in overseas markets has long been a distinctive feature of the Australian film industry. Given that the proposed project is thematically concerned with the film business, it is perhaps unsurprising that it reflects the transnational themes and production practices which characterise contemporary media industries worldwide.

what we've got is an Australian writer, a director who is Indian, but he's Australian-resident...about half the film is set in Australia, half the film is set in India. But it is very much a story about, you know, with one of the leads being Australian and one of the leads being Indian, it's really balanced...but it's possible of that Indian half, we will shoot an element of that, or a good element of that, in New Zealand, which is what Indian film makers do. And for a long time I thought "I can't do that. We can't make a film about India..." and then I thought "Hang on, That's crazy. That's what India does. This is what this film is all about"...so it could easily happen over three countries (John Winter, interview 12/07/2003).

Like the *Bollywood Masala* festival, Films and Casting Temple has been well-placed at Fox Studios, both spatially and in a relational sense, to benefit from Australia's upgraded media infrastructure and India's offshore production spree. However, Sharma indicates that while this role is likely to continue, the industrial liaison activities of the company need to be balanced with its own creative ambitions. Whatever the outcomes of the various projects currently being pursued, it is clear that there is a significant degree of Australian interest in maintaining what Films and Casting Temple calls a 'multimillion dollar niche' relationship between the Australian and Indian media spheres, which now exists (literally) within the highly symbolic architecture of the far larger Australian-US production relationship. While the activities of Films and Casting Temple only represent a very small component of the 'locomotive' for transnational media activity which the Fox Studios complex represents, the Indian-Australian collaborations which it facilitates have proven substantial enough to warrant its continued presence within this premier real estate. The international presence of the Hollywood 'juggernaut' within the city has therefore proven to be of significant benefit not only for hosting the 'stargate' functions of cosmopolitan media consumption, but also for boosting the backlot activities of the local production industry which is now attracting an increasing range of customers for its 'off-shore' products.

Hot Ashes – Representin' Australian Indian Youth

The final 'location' which I will describe briefly here is not a physical one. However, as a web location which caters to and constructs a community inhabiting Sydney's urban space, it demonstrates a further dimension to the field of practices explored in this chapter. This dimension, which is the online presence of this field, is one which has already indicated its importance. All but one of the locations discussed so far have maintained a web presence, making them part of an electronic network mapping the cultural life of the region, whilst simultaneously claiming space in a global network. The location described here provides a specific example of the role of the internet in urban communication.

'Hot Ashes' began life in 1998 as a print publication, before moving online in 2000. The Hot Ashes website is largely the creation of two sisters, Ashlene and Anoushka Nand (Hot Ashes 2005). The impetus for starting Hot Ashes originally came from their experience of living and studying in Western Sydney:

My sister and I went to UWS (University of Western Sydney), it's a new uni and we were pretty isolated from the major unis where all the dance parties and social events were going on. We heard about events but never until after the fact. We wanted to find a way of improving communication between young people, particularly Indians, in the city. At that time there were some community newspapers in local Indian shops, but there was nothing at all in them for young people. So my sister started Hot Ashes as an Indian youth magazine, but it was just too expensive so it folded after two issues. Then I said to her why not put it online, and that's how the Hot Ashes site got started (Anoushka Nand, interview 24/02/2005).

Hot Ashes presents itself as a youth-oriented site for Australian-Indian culture seeking to improve communication between Sydney's dispersed South Asian youth. Hot Ashes features event publicity, reviews of popular music and Hollywood and Bollywood

films, as well as original articles on issues such as sexuality and cross-cultural identification. The site also has an range of user forums, an 'agony aunt' service and a subscription mail list. Contributors regularly write on Bollywood culture and there is a well-attended forum board for Bollywood/Hollywood discussions. Nand feels that the club culture focused on by Hot Ashes is more up to date in most respects than Bollywood films, but recognises the influence of Bollywood aesthetics

I realise it's very important, although I am not that interested in it myself. I have got a guy who writes most of that stuff... But Bollywood is a big part of Indian popular culture. Indians watch it, and the Sri Lankans also watch it, even though they don't know the language (Anoushka Nand, interview 24/02/2005).

Since going online in 2000, Hot Ashes has become a popular web portal and now has around 1,200 registered members and 5,000 mail list subscribers, although membership is not required to access the website itself. According to Nand, Hot Ashes members come from a range of South Asian backgrounds, some of whom are long term Australian residents and others, such as international students, who are more temporary sojourners. By 2005 Hot Ashes claimed it was receiving approximately two million hits per month and had clearly become an integral part of a Sydney Indian club scene. According to Nand, the 'majority of our members are Sydney based, although the user base reaches all over the Anglophone countries'. It is from other overseas Indian communities that the local scene draws most of its inspiration, rather than from India itself.

The local scene is not influenced by what's fashionable in India. The Sydney scene is...even Melbourne is very different, Indians there are more isolated...in the Sydney scene, it's the UK that is most influential. The way the UK flows here is in terms of artists. All the youth artists, music artists, are from the UK. America seems remote. No-one knows about American music. It's the music from the UK that is influential here. The UK has a lot more employment options for creative people, in music, in fashion, in

modelling. For Indians here, there's nothing really. It's just very business oriented' (Anoushka Nand, interview 24/02/2005).

The level of knowledge about South Asian culture in America may change as Hot Ashes is now going into partnership with DesiClub, a New York based site for South Asian youth. They will exchange some of their material and Hot Ashes users will get an insight into the New York scene. This may be followed by other international linkups, which according to Nand, will enable Hot Ashes members to become familiar with the Indian club scene in all the major world capitals, and to be ready to take part in it when they go abroad.

Nand believes the success of Hot Ashes has stemmed from its emphasis on original material as well as from a complete lack of youth focus amongst Indian 'diaspora' portals in Australia. These tend to be located around Indian cultural associations and religious organisations and run features on the lines of 'Australian-Indian businessman of the Month'.¹⁰⁰ In contrast Hot Ashes, alongside with promoting club culture, has encouraged provocative debate, particularly in the area of relationships and sexuality. Although Nand observes that the Indian community in Sydney is somewhat divided, the youth audience seems to be less so, at least within the confines of Hot Ashes forums: 'The Indian community in Sydney is highly political, in terms of different kinds of Indians. Some of them hold on to those identities online, but the majority are more accepting in that environment. We have a lot of Fijian Indians, for example, who are a minority that is looked down upon here' (Anoushka Nand, interview 24/02/2005).

¹⁰⁰ Anuparm Sharma was recently given one such accolade by an Indian-Australian portal, IndiaToday.com.au (See Rooma 2005).

Fig. 7 Electronic flyers circulated to promote Indian-themed club events in Australia.
(permission sought)

Nand is confident that Hot Ashes has had a significant impact upon achieving its goals of increasing connections between Sydney's South Asian youth and enabling them to achieve a 'critical mass' which supports their own club culture. For her own part she admits that she now finds it exhausting to continue maintaining such a substantial site and attending all the related social events on top of working full time. Although her sister has stopped working on Hot Ashes some years back, leaving her at the helm, Nand still has no immediate intention of quitting:

It's got the point where I feel quite obligated to the Hot Ashes community. I think there would be an outcry if we stopped maintaining the site, but it's a really full-time job so I have had to start finding ways to bring in revenue, so I can pay people to do more of the stuff, instead of doing it all myself. Anyway, I've still got lots of ideas, lots of things that I think Hot Ashes should put out there. We've got programmes for the next few years, and we are getting more interest than ever before so I imagine we'll go on being part of the Sydney scene (Anoushka Nand, interview 24/02/2005).

Local Geographies and Global Practice

In this chapter I have sought to explore this field of cultural practices in terms of the terrain upon which these activities are conducted. This has required an emphasis on the social geography specific to the case study area as well as upon the numerous transnational practices of media production and dispersal which link the various activities described here in ways that cannot be immediately explained within the boundaries of a strictly local topography. This is an approach which demonstrates the argument that this interlacing of local and global practices is a distinguishing feature of the activities brought together under the logic of media consumption.

The cultural field described here is not simply an abstract model of communications flows between texts and receivers. In contrast, this field of practices can be clearly situated within material social relations. At the same time, the systems of value which provide contrasting accounts of Indian film culture in the different locations described here provide an overlay of symbolic geography which also has a powerful structural effect upon descriptions of the social environment in which this case study has been conducted.

The varied uses of Indian films in the study area serves to demonstrate the importance of the idiosyncrasies of any social environment for the consideration of the cultural practices arising from the engagement of viewers with those artefacts. Fox Studios is not Fairfield, even when approached in a context where the practices under consideration arise from the consumption of an identical product in both locations. At the same time, it is equally obvious that the commercial linkages operating within the field, the geographic proximity of these sites and the focus of my enquiry all serve to bring them together in a complex field of related practices. To extend our understanding of those practices further, the following chapter will focus, not on the infrastructure or geography of the field, but upon the subjective position-takings of some of its inhabitants.

Chapter Seven: Talking About Films

This chapter will provide some point samples of the subjective relationships articulated between inhabitants of the field of analysis and the object of shared interest which defines that field. It will do so by presenting a sizeable selection of material drawn from the ‘audience interviews’, a series of one-on-one conversations with a self-selecting group of students who claimed to be interested in Indian films. This was a multinational and multiethnic group who had responded to flyer advertising for the study. All of the participants were resident in Sydney or the Illawarra during 2003-2004, the period when these interviews were conducted.¹⁰¹ As the central point of discussion, Indian films are described here by interviewees both as individual features and as a collective body of work. This is a selection of discourse which demonstrates a range of associative strategies used to describe Indian films. These range from disparagement to enthusiasm and from close social identification with Indian culture to more vague, exterior knowledge. These variations indicate a set of different spectatorial subjectivities which articulate some of the position-takings available within this field of practices.

The style of presentation employed in this chapter is distinct from that used to address other aspects of the field in the accompanying chapters, in that it provides the minimum of narratorial guidance. The rationale for this style of presentation is that my primary intention here is demonstrate the broad range of position-takings to be found within a ‘community’ constructed around participation in media practices. On this basis, it seems

¹⁰¹ See pages 186-187.

appropriate to use this chapter to give as much space as is feasible to the participants themselves.

The primary purpose of this component of the study was to investigate how varied the subjective range of a self-selecting audience group would prove to be. Thus, this component of my research was closely related to my enquiry into the nature of a spectatorial community. At the same time, the discussions which I took part in with these volunteers were also very much concerned with Indian films, and various facets of Indian film culture. The commentaries which were offered on this topic proved to be interesting, not simply due to their overall subjective variation but also in terms of the specific descriptions and explanations of Indian cinema which were being offered. Therefore, the material which has been drawn from this body of research for this chapter is able to address some of major concerns which have emerged in my previous discussion of Indian films. I have included responses here which demonstrate different understandings of how Indian films are, or are not, 'reflective' of Indian culture and society, what role those films have in influencing other areas of cultural activity, and how relevant Indian film narratives are for those located outside of India.

First Encounters

The first response requested from all interview participants was a description from memory of their first encounter with Indian film culture. From the outset, the varied positioning of each of these particular agents within the field was demonstrated though their description of the context in which their first encounter with Indian film culture

took place. Accordingly, the first set of excerpts included here serve as an introduction to the group and are drawn from all thirteen interviews.

Asha

Well being Indian they've been around me my whole life and probably my first encounter was because my father was very fond of film songs so they were always playing in the car and always around and late at night he would sit up and he would watch the old Indian movies. So I never started with the Bollywood movies. I started with the old movies and sort of progressed down and I realised that the Bollywood movies are quite different from these old black and white bad movies. Some of them are pretty decent. When I came out here my first encounter with Bollywood movies was about, maybe, five six years ago, I've only been here ten years, so five six years ago it was when you joined the Indian community it was the first thing everybody talks about: 'Have you seen this movie?' 'Have you seen that movie?' So sooner or later you just go 'yup' and you go and watch it.

Tina

I think long, long ago, that should be when I was twelve years old or ten years old, I can't remember exactly when I saw the first movie, first Indian movie, because at that moment I think, 1980s, and Indian movie was very popular in China. And at that moment just a few movies can be screened in China. But most of them are Indian movie. And my mother liked it very much, my father brought us to cinema and to watch the Indian movie.

Priya

Yes, I was, maybe, nine, about nine. I was in fourth grade or something like that and, because back home in Saudi Arabia there was clubs that had, like rental clubs for Indian movies and my parents always used to rent them. So I think my first time was when they got a movie home and I watched it with them.

David

The first real Indian movie I was taken to at the Uni Movies here was called *Monsoon Wedding*. Well, I was told it was a great way to be introduced into the Indian culture. So that's what I really liked about it.... We used to live in a college together. That's where we first met. Kinda part of the Indian community there. There's quite a large Indian community, so...It's the

international house so there's that influence. Influenced me in a big way. Introduced me, yeah, to a lot of the culture from outside of Australia...

Jose

The first time I watched an Indian movie is when I was in junior high school in the state high school. That's the first time I watched an Indian movie...In school in Dili.

Sharmila

the movie which pops in my mind is *Silsila*, that was in 1983. I was too young and it was my cousin-brother's marriage. It was my first cousin-brother... his marriage and it's kind of like we had, it was a tussle between the elders and the younger generation not letting us come in because that movie is censored movie and now I just can't understand what kind of censor did it have... family we just fought and we watched it because it was just fun for us to just watch amongst our elders, *Silsila*, and I remember little bit the gist of it what I watched, what I liked about, and a few years back I just saw for the second time the same movie. Then I realised what censor did it really have then.

Amita

It was in India with a friend and she took us on her birthday to see *Baazigar* and I don't usually watch Indian films so it was interesting to be there with a whole bunch of girls watching an Indian film. .. at that stage my Hindi wasn't that good so I needed help translating things. So I had this friend sit next to me and explain a lot of it. But I just remember the atmosphere and that's about it...it was large. Felt larger because it was emptier, and it was really dark walking in there considering we walked in late. Also not so many people so it was nicer in so many ways.

Carly

It would have been when I was in India as a sixteen year old, fifteen year old and I was there as part of a Christian mission group. And like seeing all the posters up, that would be the first time that I saw them, you know, and then also when I was there, you know, sometimes watching the news and if we actually had the chance and we actually had a TV in the room, that there would be, like you know, their...I heard about the controversy, like, the movies where devout, like, umm, what's their religion?, Hindu people, I'm not sure exactly, but the religious fundamentalists would then be burning down, you know, ransacking the cinemas, so that was sort of my first encounter I guess, seeing some of these posters and having a knowledge that

sometimes the content of the movies was rather controversial for the people of their religious persuasion. But my first Indian movie I saw in Australia on SBS and loved it. It was, I don't know what time it was, but I was up until two o'clock in the morning watching it. And completely unique in terms of anything I've ever seen before. Although I'd probably never be able to tell you the name of it or who the actors are in real life. It still left a great impression on myself.

Lalitha

Well, I've been watching them since I was very young because my parents watch it at home and, yeah, I was kinda introduced to it just through my...they kind of explained to me what was happening on the screen because some of the language I don't understand, like, because they use complicated terminology or whatever, so my parents have to explain it to me. But I've found that like after watching them for such a long time I don't have to ask my parents quite as often. I can kind of guess what is happening, you know like, make my own interpretations of what is happening on screen. So, yeah, my first film experience would probably be...I can't remember that far back, but I know one film that struck me when I was a child...it's about a couple that are killed, it's sort of a flashback story at the beginning and the father's killed and the mother is like pregnant with...Quintuplets or something like that and she's forced to drink acid and it was an action film and I think action and comedy, more people are more attracted to that nowadays and like, it's been constant in the movie industry. A lot of people like watching those sort of films.

Leela

Yeah, my mum watches Indian movies all the time so when I was twelve she was watching one, so I went down to sit and watch it with her. I got completely confused. I had no idea what was happening. I couldn't understand why they were singing. I think I got really worried about the costume changes as well, like how did you have time to go behind that tree and make up! It was good though. It got me hooked.

Suzanne

It was my freshman year in college. So, two years ago. A little bit over two years ago and I got, I met my roommate and she was Caribbean and I went to a lot of cultural events with her at the cultural center at our school. And I became friends with a whole bunch of the Indian students there and they would get together at one of the houses at the campus and just watch movies and at first they were like "You don't wanna come. You won't like them" and then I went every once in a while and they were fun. It's just a good time. I enjoyed watching them. And then they had to put on the English

subtitles for me and they hated it. They made fun of me: “Oh, Suzanne is here. We’ve gotta put on the English subtitles.”

Sunita

The first one I remember seeing in a theatre was a film called *Mirch Masala*, that’s like an art-movie type. It was just the colours. I didn’t really understand the story. But it was just the colours and I watched it like years later and sort of remembered bits of it and the one that I really liked, first one, I watched was *Mr. India*, there was all these kids and stuff. That was pretty cool and I watched it twice or thrice. Made my parents like “Take me. Take me. Take me.” But yeah like in my younger days I just grew up on Amitabh Bachchan films, all of his movies like the whole series of them. Yeah, the only thing was if he died in the end, I wouldn’t watch them because that was so bad.

Iqbal

I remember the first time I went to see a movie with my mum and with one of my aunties and I was probably, that was *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, so I was a kid at that time. I really didn’t just understand but we just went to it then. That was my first movie if I am not incorrect. Probably I was at that time five or six years old. That was the first movie I watched in the cinema. But in TV, on television, like we used to watch but I didn’t really have any idea what it is, what is the movie because I was a kid and I didn’t have a really good idea of what am I watching and what is the significance in terms of society or of the culture. So I didn’t have a really good idea at that time. Gradually when I became older and I went to a school and then college, I started a much more comprehensive idea that I had. I started learning what is that.

The Distinctiveness of Indian Cinema

The second set of responses presented here demonstrate how Indian cinema is described as a recognisable ‘brand’ of ‘world cinema’. Interviewees were asked to identify the distinguishing features of Indian films, and what, if anything, made Indian films distinctive from the films produced in other countries. As might be expected there was a general consensus on the centrality of music and dance to the aesthetics of Indian

cinema, although explanations offered for the importance of this aspect were quite varied. Other distinctive features identified by the study participants were related to setting, theme and visual style. I have included responses here from eight of the thirteen interviewees.

Jose

Specially characteristic of Indian movie: the first thing is I categorise that three, maybe three or four... firstly is the funny story, in Indian movie there is always one people or two, they used to kind of appear in funny, funny-men or they make a funny jokes. And another thing is about the fighting, I mean in Indian movie there is also about fighting, about rich against poor, about poor against rich, and also about love, I mean, someone from poor family married to rich family or from rich family vice versa. And also about singing, always the time in Indian movies all sing, sing, yes. That's the things that's different from other movies.

Iqbal

Well, what happens is, what I have found is that the Indian movies, they are very, they have this so called popularity because they provide a kind of thing what people want. Like a mixture of songs and dance and high melodrama, like a sort of sentimental thing. They are, like a problem in the family, problem in the marriage, problem in the, like, the gangster movies, like *Godfather* type of thing. So these are the common elements people like to see. And so they are really, they, these are the typicalities of Hindi movies. So these are the things people go and watch. Songs and dance are the part and parcel of Hindi movies. So they like to go and see and just for a few hours, two hours, three hours, they enjoy it. Rather than a kind of really like social message or something, learning things. No I don't think so, that's not very common in popular Hindi movies. But just a general type of entertainment.

Sharmila

I think everyone would say the music and dance... That's what. And the distinct is also the time length of the cinema, that is, and the story is very disintegrated because the story doesn't focus into one primary actor and one primary story. It just, it focuses too many characters, sometimes it's quite confusing. Because you know too many characters. Other distinctiveness I've found like I think patriarchy is overemphasised in Indian cinema, most of the Indian cinema. Yes, it is also in other cinemas as well. You don't see very women-orientated movies, very few of them. But even if it is in Indian

cinema, new Indian cinema, where, Hindi cinema I should say, where they are trying to make women orientated films that they still just can't come out of the domination of patriarchy. You still see it. It's very impressive. So that's one thing I have noticed it. And the glamour and a lot of westernisation values and all in recent films.

Tina

I think Indian movie emphasise the emotion, the feelings between human beings and other, I mean such as animal and I mean the emotion the feelings, but such as American movie just focus on look like commercial things. They focus on commercial things, action and based on the computers, computer technology, something like that. But Indian movie is based on, how to say, more emotional and the things more close to us, close to reality I mean. We can touch, we can feel it, not abstract I mean. And close to my thought, close to my feeling. I mean because we are Asian...

Suzanne

Well, they always have lots of musical interludes, which are awesome. And I think just the cinematography I find a lot more interesting. I feel like it's less, I don't know, it's much more idealised than, like a more beautiful world, in the ones I've seen, as opposed to like cinematography that focuses on just like conveying the story and the idea. It's like even if you could watch a section of it, to me I could watch a section of an Indian movie and enjoy it for just that section. Whereas I feel that a lot of the other movies you really have to watch the whole thing. So like I could walk in and watch one of the songs or one of the scenes and they're usually just really nice looking as far as the clothing goes, and the story and things like that, I guess.

Lalitha

I think it bases itself around the Indian love of music and the arts because there's that musical aspect of the films. And, yeah, like I don't know, like lately they've been sort of moving towards a Westernised sort of way of portraying films. Like they'll branch out into different countries of they'll like introduce characters that are English into the films so you'll have, it won't just be a Tamil film anymore. It will be kind of blended-culture film. I think that's kind of a reflection on how we've moved out into the world. Like we're not just all centred in, like the majority of the audience isn't centred in India. It's spread out all over the world, so in order to sort of attract that audience. Reflect the reality of blending cultures and stuff.

Carly

I think its still very much traditional in the sense of that it's very reflective of the culture and the clothes and its not westernised like a lot of other countries films are. The themes are somewhat reflective of the culture and village life and so forth. Whereas the more like I've seen of other countries films, they've become very westernised in the issues or content that they're dealing with. And then you just can't resist the breaking out into the song-and-dance, like that's just completely unique and I think sometimes in the western culture, unless you've got a love for musicals or theatre in that regard, like, I mean most people would try and stay away from musicals. They don't enjoy singing in their movies but this is unbelievable the way it just sort of...it just makes you feel good, the dancing around, completely unique in that regard.

Leela

I think with Indian cinema, there's a sort of innocence, in a way, that feelings and characters are portrayed. There's a lot, sometimes there just seems to be more trust with the characters between each other. I'm not sure how to describe it, I guess, the values are sort of different, like say if I was watching a romance, in a lot of Western movies, first date they'd be kissing or they'd be having sex or whatever. I think it's a bit different in Indian movies because that doesn't happen. It's more of a sweet kind of romance where you think that they're really falling in love and it kind of helps you to escape into another world, whereas Western movies often try to portray reality accurately, so you're not really escaping into another world. That's just what I see when I watch an Indian movie. It's kind of like whatever you dream about, whatever you're daydreaming about can really happen... It's a more gentle form of human interaction, I think.

The Reflective Nature of Indian Cinema

Building upon their analysis of Indian cinema as a distinct 'brand' of popular culture, I subsequently asked my interview subjects to engage with two further key claims of the 'national cinema' theories addressed in Chapter One. Specifically, these were the 'reflective' nature of a national cinema and its ability to serve as an historical index of a

national society.¹⁰² I posed two conjoined questions, firstly: ‘How do you think Indian films represent life in India today?’, and secondly: ‘Are they changing with the times?’. Since interviewees were engaged here with an ‘intellectual’ question rather than simply asked for a description of the films themselves or of their own personal habits or preferences, the responses given tended to be substantive in both length and scope. As such, this is the largest body of interview material which I will present in this chapter, drawn from nine of the thirteen interviews.

Iqbal

Not at all. Not at all. It’s a bit kind of gypsy, a bit kind of mythical things. It’s not the reality. It’s a hyper-reality. It’s, if you watch the Hindi movies, it’s always like it’s made up of the middle class context of things there. So won’t find a movie which is based on the lives and the experiences of the working class people. No, not at all. There are some, but really it is hooked with the middle class and you know this kind of thing. Like, in the Hindi movies you will always find the domestic servants in the movies, big house, domestic servants. It’s always very much this kind of thing, which I totally dislike. I totally dislike but it is the movies and people like it.

Lalitha

It is changing with the times. There are movies that sort of show people that have moved out of India to other countries or they’ll visit other countries and show the difference between other cultures and things like that. There’s a movie called *Jeans* which involves a girl, like, her grandma and her brother who travel to America for their grandma’s operation and, yeah, that was pretty different from the usual films which just involves a small community, two main characters, fall in love, that sort of thing. There’s a lot of mixed cultural films in Indian movies nowadays.

Jose

I mean with my counsel of knowledge about India, I think Indian movies reflect the reality of society in India. I mean the movies reflect, it’s similar in East Timor as well. I mean just give an example if a poor family they want to marry a rich man, a rich man they want to marry another I mean another female who has the same position as rich...I think it’s representative

¹⁰² See pp 28-30.

but sometimes they don't show the reality happen in India... Actually most of the Indian movie they don't show the reality of the poor people, what is happening. Just give you an example, about Calcutta, there are many poor people there. They don't show the reality about it, how people in the city lives, you know, the losers and things. Just the five star hotels and things but some of them show the slums and things in Indian movies. That's very good.

Sharmila

Well Hindi movies represent Punjabi culture. Strongly Punjabi culture, not North Indian culture but a strongly Punjabi culture. So I have seen people just not liking the movie because they have a lot, they don't identify themselves, other than Punjabis, they can. Because marriage is typical Punjabi marriage. Everything is very Punjabi. So it's like if you see a culture other than the culture of Delhi, it's the culture of Punjab, like you know it's a Punjabi culture by itself they just show it... [they are] changing with the times. That's I noticed it. Bengali it's more of I am seeing the movies are more like Hindi movies. Copy. You know it's more of a copy of Hindi movies so I don't see Bengali movies really depicting Bengali culture. New trends in Bengali culture... because movies show more the culture of the north than of Bengali, alright? These are the commercial movies I am talking. But what I like about Hindi movies nowadays is with the commercial culture is like, as I mentioned you before, it talks lot of issues that never been raised. People just had hush-hush about it or people just don't want to raise them. So they are introducing those issues, not really dealing with it properly, but introducing it, trying to just have a platform to discuss on it. That I like about Hindi movies. You don't see it in Bengali commercial movies. You see it in Hindi commercial movies often now... it's economic changes mostly because we always had... It's maybe those Raj Kapoor's films where the economic change was The people were really low middle class people reflected in the movies. And now in the new generation low middle class is not really reflected much in commercial movies. It is mainly the affluent classes reflected, let it be Hindi, let it be Tamil, let it be Bengali, let it be any movies you see, commercial movies are actually those affluent class, upper-middle class or maybe upper class. That's what economic changes is there. Don't really look into those low classes sectors. It's, if it is looked into it is looked by the parallel cinemas, not by commercial cinemas.

David

Depends, like, I've met a fair few Indians and no, movies can introduce you to what it is like there but it's not, that doesn't, that won't explain what is like in the county, like, you couldn't really gain much from what it is actually like in the country. It's a diverse country. It changes really quickly. Well, much faster than it would in a western society, especially population size of Australia. So there's much difference there.

Priya

Actually, I think its fantasy for everyone because sometimes it's, especially in Hindu families, it's always arranged marriage. So that means you can't date, you can't fall in love, you can't do anything. So that's the only place that they get to watch what it's like to go out. They see these people having fun. I think many of them get influenced by it and take it the wrong way and they try to do that and it turns out bad because parents find out and there's a big problem... what they show doesn't happen and if it happens it's a small percentage but these art movies, even though you might think "this is just appalling, it can't happen", it's very true. Like if you watch *Monsoon Wedding*, that, if they showed that as a commercial movie, nobody would watch and they would be ashamed of it but that happens and that's very true. That's exactly what happens in India, things like that happen all the time. But they don't show those in commercial movies they don't want to show those kind of issues. They want to show other kinds of things. I don't think that they do a very good representation of how India is today...people are not that crazy, they don't, I mean forget the fight scenes and all those things, even just the story is stupid. I don't, it's just too much, I mean how can people think like that. How can they be so intense and impulsive? I don't know. People don't...they're not like that. That's why it is fascinating to watch them, because it's different. Maybe they want to try that but it doesn't happen...

Carly

Well I think that they do sort of show certain levels of poverty and also the wealth as well. Generally I think that they are shown in their extremity. But I don't think that's necessarily representative of real life. I mean. In a sense that there are the extremes, you're either rich or you're poor. There might be a few turns that might get the poor people up there but, I don't know about that one.

Leela

I think in the last few years there have been a lot, a few movies, that have come out that have really captured what life in India is like because I think, I think that Indian society works in one way but likes to present itself in another way, so for example, if you take things like having sex before marriage or having a relationship, it's seen as a bad thing to do in society. But what is really going on is that people are having boyfriends. They are kissing boys before they get married. And I think Indian movies don't want to show that side to it, so even if it's not arranged marriages, because movies don't talk about arranged marriages, but even the falling in love, it's usually just they meet, they like each other and they get married. Then all that kind of stuff happens. Whereas if you take recent movies such as, umm, can't think of its name, *Kol Ha Naa Ho*, and *Hum Tum* and stuff, they, I think they portray quite accurately how Indian society is now. So, yeah, in

recent years, in the last two or three years, I think... I think if you take the more art-house type of films, I think that they have always portrayed quite accurately how life is as actually lived... I don't know if you've seen a movie called *Fire* and *Earth* and there was another one. I've just seen *Earth*. I thought that was quite accurate. So I think a lot of the art-house films do portray quite accurately.

Asha

They've always represented life in India as being this fantastic life, everybody always gets the better end of the deal. You go to school and you just have the opportunity to go to England or Cambridge or wherever they're sent. You're always from a high class family and that is not it. They show streets as being a lot cleaner than they are, they show the air as being clean, they show all this. You start at peripheral stuff like that, the stuff that really doesn't matter and you keep going and it doesn't do it justice at all...they definitely focus on the very rich, not people who have started at the very bottom and gone up, whereas I find old Indian movies used to do that. Old Indian movies started at the bottom and worked their way up and sometimes they didn't have to work their way up. My favourite Indian movie of all time was one like that. Didn't work himself up, worked himself quite far away down. Nobody was really from a high end family business or anything like that... I think they've gone from being movies about people, about people who lived, who actually, about who can say 'look I've seen something like that up the street' to glamour films. No rich person like Shahrukh Khan is going to want to play a beggar but somebody like Raj Kapoor would have done it. He would have been very happy to do it. That's just personal opinion. I don't think you can just get Shahrukh Khan or Salman Khan or Amitabh Bachchan to play a beggar like Raj Kapoor would have done. I don't think you can get the girls to play these low end of town girls because they just wouldn't do it... A lot of people in India don't even have a TV set, don't watch these movies, don't go out to this except for those with a little bit of money who can spare it on these things. And as such they don't want to know how the rest of India is living, they can see it, they want to know what glamour India is like and glamorous people in India they don't have time for movies.

Suzanne

I think in some ways they do and some ways they don't. I think the whole idea of the culture, really like there's a lot more emphasis on elders, like what your elders think and tradition. I think that's conveyed very well in the movies. Whereas they're also very fantasised a lot, like, for the culture. So like I don't know how much they really reflect the everyday culture but for the society's values, I think they're pretty representative. I don't know, I've noticed that they convey the idea of parents like really having a large say in what's going on and that's something I've noticed in the lives of my friends too. I think that's really carried through... I think they're really

representative of the greater society and culture, but probably not the everyday stuff like. And maybe, like, I don't think it is really everyday that you're going to go driving around in a convertible all the time. They always have amazing houses. I don't know how representative of everyday life they would be but...I think the Indian movies convey closer resemblance to the culture and life than the media I see on the news. Because it's very negative, like a lot of, there's always, they just show poverty. If I were to, before I went to college and I had to tell you what India looked like, I would give you just, "Oh. It's poverty, slums, it's overcrowded and there's lots of problems" and things like that. And I think that would be my image based on American media at least, in the US, but other than that I wouldn't really have any idea of what India looked like unless it was from a really old-fashioned colonial perspective, like the Bombay company sort of European colonial nation. So I think modern India is portrayed as really not a nice place to be before I went to college and after I started watching films and meeting people from there I really realised that it was a lot different from what I had always thought it was like. And I think the films take it a little bit to the extreme, how nice it is. But that is the same in any culture I think because I don't think American films portray everyday American life at all, for the same exact reasons, I think, that they don't always portray everyday Indian life. Like we don't always have amazing clothes and our make-up isn't always done and our hair doesn't always look great. So for the same reasons it's different from the everyday but it probably reflects a lot of the culture, a lot more than I would see through American media.

Bollywood As a Multi-Media Industry

During the course of these interviews, the participants in the study contributed to constructing a version of this field of practices that extended far beyond simply watching films. This wider cultural sphere was discussed by interviewees in terms of films as narrative forms, but was also articulated in relation to the external lives of film stars as celebrities, to the currency of Indian popular music and to the impact of film representation upon fashion.

Many interviewees related their interaction with specific films primarily as lists in the form of 'liked that, didn't like that'. Some participants gave more substantial responses,

although these in the most part consisted of plot synopses. Overall, well-known successful mainstream films were most commonly referenced, including both Indian-produced blockbusters (*Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Mohhabattein*, *Dil Chahta Hai*) and recent ‘crossover’ titles produced by diasporic Indian directors (*Monsoon Wedding*, *Bend It like Beckham*). Some interviewees also made reference to ‘regional’ and ‘parallel’ Indian films. Most of the study participants were not restricted to enjoying one particular genre, but enjoyed different kinds of films for different reasons. Lalitha’s response provides a good example of this:

I liked the film, *Roja*, which was a Mani Rathnam film...I liked it because of the music in that movie and there was another movie called *Indira* which was about a girl who sort of has to fight for her community and its like kind of similar to *Bombay* with the two conflicting cultures, except it’s two conflicting communities and she helps bring them together like she has to lead her community because her father gets killed. And so she has to sort of take over the leadership role in the community... So that was a pretty interesting movie because it was a kind of different way of portraying conflict between two opposing sides. It was different from seeing the usual sort of Tamil versus Sinhalese or Hindu versus whatever. Yeah it was probably one of my favourites. I think it’s *Indira*. What else is there? There’s a recent film called *Laysa Laysa* which is, I like it because there’s an interesting aspect in it where like one of the characters like he receives love letters from one of the female actresses, like there’s five or six female leads, but you’re never sure if it’s five or six because they change between the two and it’s one of those girls who’s writing the letters. So the whole movie you’re guessing which one it is. I don’t know, it’s kind of funny, like an interesting change to the normal romantic story involving one girl, one guy. It’s like a comedy like, yeah, that was just one, like a side story, what do you call them, a sub-plot. So it was pretty funny. There pretty good songs in that movie as well. A majority of films I like because of their songs.

Participants in the audience interviews were also prompted to indicate if there were any genres of Indian films that they particularly didn’t like. The majority of the group was in agreement that Indian ‘action’ and ‘gangster’ films were much less appealing than romances. This could be seen as a result of the group’s gender bias, although I wouldn’t rest too much upon such an assumption. What was interesting in gathering these

negative responses is that they proved overall to be far more idiosyncratic in nature than the positive selections of films made previously. Here are a couple of examples:

Carly

I saw one that was about a woman who must have lost her children at a young age and, or they were separated or something at birth and you know one grew up in quite a wealthy household or network or something and the other one they were in poverty, with the mother in poverty and it was sorta, there was a bit of killing and you know a bit of gory stuff and ghosts, which I suppose is, the spirits or something, I don't know if that has much to do with their religion or something, I'm not sure. So there was just that one, sort of like from what I'd seen before it was just that particular scene that threw me off a bit I think. It was quite vicious some of the way, some of the actors were as part of their role.

Sunita

I don't really like war movies. They are like so stupid and they are so one-sided. It's always against Pakistan and it's like "We're the best and they are scum" or something. They're too one-sided and they don't know how to direct them, like really well. It's too stereotypical, you can't, I mean I saw one of them recently and they were prisoners of war or something and it was so bad...It was horrible. And I don't like those copycat movies like "He's made a romance story so we will redirect the same story" and they actually expect it to run. They team up stupid actors and I think it's for tax avoidance purpose or something. Otherwise why would you make a movie like that? If you were previewing it somewhere, you should tell people it's only for that. Yeah, just those kinds. I'm pretty happy with all the genres as long as movie's good. It's just bad, bad script and bad actors that irritate you because they're in your face every day on TV and stuff, so you don't want to watch them.

In contrast to the *auteurist* strand in film studies, there was a strong consensus amongst interviewees that film directors were relatively unimportant in their selection of a film, and upon their interpretations of films. A small number of 'name' directors such as Yash Chopra, Karan Johar and Mani Rathnam were considered important enough to encourage watching a film, but overall it was the presence of film stars which had the most influence on viewing choices, and enjoyment of a film. The group was much more concerned overall with male stars than female ones, and the stars discussed by

interviewees were very much the top rank of stars, such as Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachchan. The non-South Asian interviewees were aware of certain key stars they had seen, but often unable to recall their names. South Asian interviewees of various backgrounds all showed a significant level of knowledge of Hindi cinema's major stars, including those who disparaged commercial cinema in favour of art-house features. Some of those South Asian interviewees were also interested in the stars of Bengali and South Indian cinema. I have chosen to include here responses from Priya and Sharmila which demonstrate how the celebrity persona is decoded as a star text, and in particular how their identification with Aamir Khan as an actor has been affected by his off-screen (but not off-media) relationships:

Priya

Aamir Khan...He's the only one who I think can act and he's, umm, I think he's very cute. And he's been acting for a long time and he's mature, he's decent. He's not commercial, he's not snobby. He's pretty serious, even as a guy. If you see his interviews, he's very stable, unlike other people, they don't know what the hell they're saying or they're drunk or whatever, but he's very calm and he is not making a movie to show off his ability to act...He's been my favourite since the first time I saw movies. He's been my favourite for ten years or so...When I was younger, I thought he was very cute and I liked him. Even his movies, the roles he plays are very sweet. He always used to play the sweet guy and all that they called him the chocolate actor, I don't know, because he's so sweet or something. But when I grew older I saw, I kept seeing all his movies, like 'He can really act. He's so mature and he's professional' and yeah, I like that. Very different from other actors.

Sharmila

Aamir Khan is not bad. Yes, he's not bad...Now he looks better because he's...but in a sense his kind of films because he's quite selective about his films and most of his films he does are like quite popular. It's kind of my personality I can say...I said not bad because his recent personal turmoil, that he had divorced from his wife and that's kind of ... OK, he had divorced his wife and his child is a very young child. It's because I remember when he was in the cinema we liked him because of his dedication towards his girlfriend and he got married and it was lot of, as a

model character, was very given a boost to him because he was very dedicated man to his family and being someone, not as you get in Bollywood because mostly people are really not so dedicated to family and having two wives, three wives is no problem in the Bollywood manner. So he was like that, so now I really liked him because of that and I think many people liked because of his dedication but now since he had split up so a little my respect came down which is not good obviously, it's a kind of personal judgement, but that is what is done in Bollywood. Personal judgement influences your quality of confidence.

The close relationship between cinema and contemporary music in Indian popular culture, which is so often seen as its most distinctive feature, is also the area of discussion which produced the most approving set of responses from my interviewees. All of them were enthusiastic for Indian film music, including those who claimed to be less than enamoured by the films themselves.

Priya

Yeah, Yeah. I love... I have all the CDs and I'm actually more interested in the soundtrack than the movies themselves. Even if I don't like the movie, if the songs are good I always buy them and play them and it's all good...

Carly

Yeah, it's brilliant. It's so unique. There's nothing in the Western world quite like it. I mean, with the lyrics and the movement. It's just, yeah, and it's so fresh and raw in so many ways too. So it's just brilliant. I love it.

Iqbal

Some of the music I like, I mean the singers, they're good, I mean just by what they are singing. I mean maybe they are singing a very trash song which doesn't have any taste sort of things of course... but they're quite a good singer, good voice, good rhythm, it's all there. And of course it is another big industry, music industry, which is related to the film. So before the films releases, so they just release the CD or cassettes to market the forthcoming film so it's a big market too. I think Hindi music and dance is part and parcel of the success of the Hindi movie as a whole.

Amita

Well, yeah, good film music always makes a film better I think. Well also if it has a lot of traditional instruments and beats in it. Well, maybe more than the more popular ones that are trying to be more upbeat and trying to get into like a younger crowd to be able to listen to it.

Lalitha

Yeah. The majority of the time that's what we do. Listen to the music rather than watch the film. Especially like the video clips. Like a lot of people prefer watching the video clips from the music rather than the actual film itself. ... you'll probably hear it when you go to people's houses. That's how it spreads, how the interest spreads from like other people introducing it to you. That's what we depend on here in Australia, like sort of word-of-mouth. People will say, like "This, the songs from this movie are really good. You should listen to them." Or something like that, so.

David

Well it does...it is surprising to see movies that have a storyline and then they jump into dance and music. I like them, they are about enjoying, about expressing themselves through dance and music...I do listen to Hindi music. I have a collection of some at home, yeah...

Jose

The music if, yeah, yeah, so on, in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* the music is the first time they request it they put it on the radio, the national radio in East Timor, the first time, many people liked it very much and even when they saw the movie and you know its very famous in East Timor so they translate it into the local language. Yeah...

Another cultural industry which operates in close conjunction with the Indian film world is the fashion industry. The costumes worn in Indian films were seen by some interviewees as important features of Indian films, but for others this aspect was of little interest. Male interviewees had little to say about film fashion, but it received substantial commentary from female participants. This commentary was not always favourable however. Here are some of the responses given when interviewees were asked if they were interested in the fashions seen in Indian films:

Asha

It does have an influence because I know the millions of times I've said 'I want to take that outfit and change it and make it mine' things like that or I've been influenced by someone I've seen in the movie. It's like 'okay I can wear that outfit, she's up there, she looks pretty good, I can do it' I think that's pretty influential, definitely

Priya

It's funny because there'll be a movie which is serious and it's a hit movie and a good movie and there's no fashion sense at all. It's just acting and the movie itself and the story and all that. And there might be another movie which is, the people are all wearing the latest stuff and maybe it's just a hopeless movie and it flopped and it's a stupid story. I'm not going to go and watch just because 'Oh. I think they're wearing good clothes and I'm gonna wear that.' No I don't.

Tina

Yes. Very interested in it. When I watch the Indian movie their beautiful dress caught my eyes. I admire because the dress can let me imagine the Indian culture because I couldn't have a chance to visit India for most of audience so we just can how to say imagine, based on the clothes they wear and the lifestyle, the style of life, they have had in the movie. So I think this is very important. If they use this kind of things show them in the movie you can... I think maybe if I try I could get but for me it doesn't make sense because in China our culture not as similar as here. Here maybe we have the party, you have to wear different dress so you can use these kind of things, but in China no special occasions for us to wear these kind of things. I like but maybe I will not buy it for my own use. I just watch it and appreciate. Something like that.

Carly

I don't think you'd ever be able to understand quite, you'd never be able to understand unless you've been there I don't think, like the extent of how precious sometimes clothing is. How much some women without their little tops on under their sarees because they didn't have one or couldn't afford it or whatever. So I don't think people in the West would really understand the fashion in that regard... I think the Punjab has some sort of, you know that pants and the, maybe there's a style there where the women wear their slacks and a short dress over the top or something like that or. So I guess there may be influences, I don't know, I mean I've got a saree but I wouldn't particularly wear it just on a Wednesday or a Thursday. It would have to be some sort of international night or some particular purpose in which to wear it, yeah.

Lalitha

I know like some of the wedding scenes influence some people in like the way that they have their own weddings and that sort of thing but the fashion, yeah, like when we have functions and things, people always think of what's in the movies. I mean, like the actual posters in the fashion shops in Australia, they have like pictures of the stars and what they wear. And you sort of go, "Well, if that person's wearing that, then why not me?". So, yeah, that promotes it a lot I think.

Leela

Yeah. Yes. Absolutely... I find that I'm, that I tend to look more at the Indian fashions than I do the Western fashions when they're shown in a movie, in the movies. I do always, like I watched *Main Hoon Na* recently and the actress was wearing these beautiful sarees and I just thought "I love those". Then I always find I don't have an occasion to wear them. But, yeah, I do, absolutely... I think in cities like Bombay and Delhi I think Western clothes are seen as normal so if someone is wearing Western clothes it's not such a big deal and I think they do take their cues from Indian movies. But if you go to a city like Madras, a lot of times if you're wearing Western clothes, it's not normal so you attract a lot of attention.

Suzanne

I love 'em... Yeah. I like the customs and the clothing in the movies. I liked in *Devdas* how it was an old style even though it was a newer movie. I hadn't really seen a newer movie that was set long ago. I've seen a lot of the newer ones that are set now, and those are kind of neat too. Lots of scarves, always scarves and driving the car with the scarf flying out of the convertible. I like that. I like it when they're driving around with the scarf flying out of the convertible for some reason. And they always have nice jewellery. So that's cool.

Sunita

Oh no! Can't. Indian movies you can't. It would be a freak. Sometimes for weddings and all, people do, like they could do that, but yeah. But I think it's like, like I think it is the other way round you know. The movies are probably following the fashions that we have. Because you know it used to be like outrageous clothes which no-one wears before, but now it's going towards like regular college kids or regular people who work and stuff. It's going more towards that. So I think it's the directors realising that young people don't dress like that. When they dress the actors like that then you don't really identify with that, so they're moving away from that. It's not how, people are just walking around wearing casual, like *Dil Chahta Hai*

sort of stuff like. The boys they are actually like walking around wearing polyester shirts like regular guys you know.

Indians Films as a Non-Resident Artefact

The final set of material which I will present in this chapter articulates how some of my interviewees felt about the relevance of Indian films to those living outside of India.

Although some interviewees expressed reservations about how audiences outside of India would be able to understand the cultural specificities of Indian films, the majority seemed to conclude that Indian films possessed a degree of cross-cultural appeal in terms of the themes and stories which they present.

Carly

I think the themes you can transfer between cultures. But definitely for entertainment value, definitely. I mean it's huge and the themes that come through, I mean you're always going to hit a winner if its got something to do with love or death or you know, because that's just what happens in life. So its relevant for all humans. To see it in a certain context, in a certain structure, as culture, it's quite fascinating to sort of see the similarities, differences, whatever.

Tina

I think not exactly but I mean human being is the same so it doesn't matter where you come from. I mean inside the things are the same, just the way you use, you express is different. So I think it doesn't matter. If you can provide an audience is quite different idea, is quite different concept. It works yeah.

Lalitha

Yeah. I think they'd be interpreted a little differently though, because outside India, like if you were just inside India and you only watched Indian films I think you'd probably be conditioned to watching such films and not comparing them to any other films. Whereas living in Australia or living in

America you'd sort of compare to American films or Australian films and sort of go "Oh. They've like developed the idea of this film from this movie which I saw here. Like *The Godfather* was adapted into a Tamil film called *Nahayan*". And that was pretty interesting. I didn't know it was, like, originally adapted from *The Godfather* until after I'd watched *The Godfather*. So I think, yeah, things like that affect the way that you watch an Indian film. If you were in Australia or if you were in India it would be very different...

Amita

the romance and the family would probably be relevant...because I've seen lots of people, well, being put into a situation where the family says they want them to marry someone whereas they don't really want to go into that right now, so, they have issues and you see a lot of that in Hindi films...to understand Indians, I think they would be relevant, because it is certainly hard to make somebody outside of India understand the kind of issues you would have being an Indian. So it, actually, probably, exaggerates the situation and makes it more understandable to the viewer who's not Indian. But I don't know if it helps much.

David

Well, it does appeal to, well I have more, a lot of them have to be explained to me, cos I wasn't brought up to know everything about their cultures. So I don't really, exactly, understand a lot of it and after it is explained, it does, it means a lot more, yeah...You would appreciate it, but if you, I think, firstly you need to understand their culture, like, yeah, well as much as I've seen of it, I love their culture. I haven't seen it at all, and I have only seen a fraction of it, so, yeah, have to really experience it.

Jose

It's the same in my culture. So it's a similar reality to what's happening in society, yeah...yeah. The mother crying, about the corruption of the official, it's very relevant. About the bribery, the bribery. The police you know, they go for help from some people, the rich people you know. There's no justice for the poor people... I think it's, maybe we can see it from different angles and firstly because of the culture, people in Asia they have the same culture, so it's very easy to adjust with other people in another culture. People are, I mean, I don't know, just given my experience, I came here, when I meet Asians it easy to talk to each other and to stay together. Pretty hard to, how to say, to mix up, to be together with the Australians, with the Western. Yeah, that's it.

Leela

I think they are. I think a lot of the, I think the issues are the same because even if you go to a Western family, I'm sure, like I know that there are many people whose parents want them to get married. It's the same issues but I just think that they are approached differently in different countries...

Suzanne

Yeah, I think they are. I think in some ways maybe they are more relevant, just because anytime you are exposed to another culture like that and you get to soak in some of the cultural ideas. Things that you wouldn't otherwise think of...I have a lot of respect for the heightened respect of the elders. So I think that's the, and how strongly tradition plays a role in life, and I think that's something a lot of American culture lacks. And I'm from a small town, so we have a lot of tradition where I live, but a lot of people in America I think are separated from tradition in a way which I think that Indian people aren't. So I think that that is something good to take away from the movies. Culture. Cultural...I like the universal romance too. I think the universal romance stories in Indian films are better than the ones in American films. I don't watch American romance. When I, I keep sounding like I like watching the romantic films, but I don't like American romantic films. I haven't watched one in about five years...But I do enjoy watching the romantic films from Bollywood. They're the only ones I watch.

Asha

They're more westernised. If you're are living outside of India they're relevant because they're more westernised. If you're living in India it is about the Western world, wow! Either way you sort of win. It's not relevant about India, it is strange, like, you have a marriage that has been arranged between two people who fell in love anyway. It is found somewhere in the middle of the best of both worlds. For people living in it is a little bit of the outside world, for people living out it is something they can relate to, something they can relate back to, if that makes sense... I think they found somewhere good in the middle where westerners can look east and easterners can look west and they still see the one thing. It is not always right but they see it, they're happy to see it, they'll pay to see it. Why change it at all?

A Strategic Media Community

It is quite clear that the voices of contributors to this chapter provide evidence of a close identification of Indian films with India as a culture and society. Most, but not all, of the study participants were of the belief that some knowledge of Indian social mores could be accessed through these films, although they also recognised that the films provided idealised representations rather than realistic accounts. This was as much the case for those who possessed lesser knowledge of Indian culture as it was for those who had the most, although the latter had far greater access to anecdotal evidence. The influence of Indian film culture as a multi-media industry spilling over into music, fashion and other areas of cultural practice was an important point of engagement in the interviews, which seems to support a critical position towards seeing films as discrete narrative devices. The conception of Hindi cinema as India's 'national cinema' was on the one hand supported by the fact that it was Hindi films and film stars that were best known amongst these volunteers. On the other hand, the construction of Hindi films as a national index was also challenged by numerous references to regional, 'parallel' and 'crossover' films which emerged during our discussions. Some interviewees saw the cultural particularity, or the 'Indian-ness', of Indian films as a potential bar to those occupying other cultural identities or literacies. A lack of knowledge of Indian cultures was considered likely to prevent non-Indians from gaining a full understanding of the 'meaning' of a film. However, some of those same interviewees were also in general agreement with other participants in claiming that such films dealt primarily in matters of universal appeal which were relevant across cultures.

Crucially, this interview material demonstrates something of the subjective range within this self-selecting group as a media community. In seeking to explain their varied relational understandings of Indian films, interviewees drew upon several discursive strands (gender, ethnicity, faith and social class) in order to articulate their understanding of the ‘meaning’ or social significance of Indian films. Given that these factors generally positioned members of the group differently as agents, there were marked variations in the issues of most concern for each member. Communal identification, along national, ethnic or linguistic lines, emerges therefore as a crucial component of the explanations provided. However, it should also be noted that even participants occupying similar positions in categorical terms within these ‘structuring structures’ clearly held different beliefs about Indian films and used them differently in their own lives. Since participants provided their explanations of Indian films by positioning those media objects, and themselves, *strategically* in relation to various social collectives of anecdotal ‘others’, there seems to be little evidence of a shared *horizontal* perspective amongst this community. This strategic positioning of self and collective articulation of otherness is without doubt the most important feature of the interview responses. In the third, and final, set of findings which I will present in this thesis, I will therefore focus exclusively on how my collaborators in this study employed their social imagination to describe others as audiences for Indian films.

Chapter Eight: Imagining Audiences

The linkages and locations explored in Chapter Six have served to construct an economic and spatial mapping of the field of practices associated with Indian films in the research locality. In Chapter Seven, the descriptions given of the films themselves by participants in the study have demonstrated a set of symbolic relations through which their personal interaction with Indian film culture was articulated. This second reading of the field provided strong evidence of the diverse readings of Indian films constructed by agents occupying different spectatorial positions within the field. In combination, the two readings of the field allow us to understand this ‘audience’ for Indian films as a community of subjective differences united, indirectly, by an object of shared interest and, temporarily, by their occupation of certain social spaces and practices. This is not sufficient, however, to either prove or disprove the function of the social imagination which both Anderson and Appadurai describe as an inevitable consequence of participation in communities arising from media use.

What, then, is still missing? We have evidence of both structure and agency. Specifically, we have evidence of a shared interest in Indian films linking different sites of social activity. We also have evidence of economic relations operating within the field of analysis. We have compelling evidence of the diverse reception of texts. However, none of these findings are entirely unexpected. The analysis of media communities through the political economy of their shared practice is an established technique. The individuation of reception has been well established, and extensively

discussed, under the rubric of ‘active’ audiences. The comparison of these two tiers of analysis alone would provide us with evidence of the abstracted collaboration of individual subjects in a collective endeavour. In terms of audience research, we have arrived at the key question, not at the answer. The question is: what evidence can be obtained of the conceptual relations by which participants understand not simply their own participation in mass media culture, but also the undeniable presence of other participants? What is missing thus far, as in a great deal of audience research, is an emphasis on how participants in media communities themselves describe the imagined social formations known as audiences.

From this position, where we have recognised and evidenced the distribution of agency and the mobility of media objects across different sets of social relations we now need to explore a third dimension of the cultural field. This relates very specifically to the notion of the ‘social imagination’ and, in particular, the ‘imagined community’. Both of these concepts are attempts to explain the processes of symbolic relations which serve to connect the positioning of individuals to a collective practice which they know extends beyond the boundaries of their own physical and interpersonal knowledge. It is these cognitive processes which make media use of social *and* personal significance. The method by which I have sought to elucidate this phenomenon of association is quite simple; in this third and final set of findings I will present material which illustrates how participants in the study employed descriptions of various others, both as social groups and as individuated archetypes, in order provide their explanations of the appeal of Indian films.

The Diasporic Audience

The first imagined community on which I will present a range of opinions drawn from interview responses is the ‘diasporic audience’ for Indian films in Australia. Such an audience can be said, on the evidence of the available literature to loom large, at least, in the *academic* imagination of media and globalisation as well in the *commercial* imagination of Indian media producers and the *political* imagination of the Government of India.¹⁰³ In each case, an idealised Indian diaspora has occupied a central position in discussions of the export fortunes of contemporary Indian cinema. Given, also, that the number of Indians migrants in Australia has dramatically increased during the last decade, it seems only logical to expect that a discussion of this ‘community’ as a media audience would occupy a privileged position within the body of this research.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, what makes this research most distinctive from the majority of studies of the reception of ‘Bollywood’ overseas is that it does not seek to limit the scope of its enquiry *exclusively* to such an audience.

In order to conduct a preliminary exploration of the various claims made by Appadurai, Cunningham, Hall and others concerning diasporic audiences, I conducted an online survey during 2003 which targeted young ‘non-resident Indians’ worldwide and collected basic quantitative information on their media consumption.¹⁰⁵ The survey sought its respondents by contacting members of both Indian and South Asian student associations in a number of Anglophone countries (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States). Since the majority of respondents could be assumed to have already stated a high degree of ethnic identification through their

¹⁰³ See Chapter Three, pp 111-126.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Five, pp 208-212.

¹⁰⁵ See Chapter Five, pp 184-185.

membership of such associations, and since youth groups are generally described in social science research as being particularly prone to employing media use as a means of establishing social identity, there was, therefore, some cause to expect that this information would demonstrate the strong correlation between ethnic identity and media choices identified by previous scholars. However, the 54 survey returns proved to be far from conclusive in this regard. Respondents were asked to list the origins of the films they most commonly watched. They were given the opportunity to present the most watched and the second most watched source of feature films, and their responses were weighted appropriately in gauging the overall profile of consumption. The processing of the data did indeed reveal an overall preference within this group for Indian films, but only by a very narrow margin. The consumption of Indian films (overwhelmingly Hindi-language but also including Tamil and Telugu features) constituted 52% of film viewing with the consumption of films from other countries (which included European cinemas but was overwhelmingly of Hollywood films) constituted 48% of viewing. Of itself this data demonstrated two fairly unremarkable facts, firstly that young people of Indian origin located overseas were quite likely to be viewers of Indians films, and secondly, that there were equally likely to also be viewers of American films. Thus, Manas Ray's thesis of cultural affirmation appeared to be about half true on the basis of diasporic survey returns, or at least it could only account for around half of the cultural activity of these diasporic subjects in relation to their media use.

The findings of this small-scale indicative exercise could not be seen to establish a conclusive quantitative profile of a 'diasporic audience' for Indian films. Whilst an assumption that 'Indian societies' would prove to be the most fruitful sites for evidencing 'cultural affirmation' through media choice was undermined by the survey

returns, there was, in any case, no ready means to ascertain whether people of Indian origin who did not join such organisations were any more or less likely to prefer Indian films. Certain things were suggested by the survey, however, that Hindi films were more popular overall than other Indian language films, that respondents spoke three languages on average, and that their favourite films and stars tended to be located in top-end commercial cinema rather than more obscure sources of media such as art-house or documentary. Students in the US also proved to be far more likely to respond to unsolicited electronic surveys than their UK counterparts. Such findings are, again, generally unremarkable and hardly conclusive. However, what proved to be most important about this preliminary study, in terms of its influence upon the subsequent interview stages, was that it powerfully destabilised from the outset of my research process any *totalising* explanation for Indian film consumption based upon ethnic determination.

In seeking out respondents for the subsequent ‘audience interviews’, I elected to solicit interest through flyer advertising under the banner ‘Interested in Indian Films?’, rather than through establishing contacts with Indian community associations.¹⁰⁶ The first finding therefore from this aspect of my research, and a possibility that I had at least anticipated, was that an interest in Indian films was not confined to Indians. This simple fact seemed to correlate the composition of the local audience with my global mapping of Indian film audiences.¹⁰⁷ During the interview stage, the ambit of the small group which took part in the research exercise extended beyond what could be described as members of an Indian diaspora. Of the thirteen audience interviewees, only six could be described as either short-term or long-term members of an Indian diasporic audience.

¹⁰⁶ See Chapter Five, pp186-187.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter Three, pp 109-140.

The remainder had identified themselves as interested in Indian films, but were of other ethnic backgrounds. It is worth noting that of my interviewees who could be considered diasporic subjects, all six were female. Although I had a number of lively discussions with males of South Asian origin regarding Indian films, none of them expressed a desire to take part in the study, regardless of whether their attitude to Indian films was favourable or dismissive.

There is no obvious explanation for the emergence of this gender bias in participation. During off-the-record discussions, the South Asian males I spoke to displayed quite an extensive knowledge of Indian cinema, despite their reluctance to take part in a formal academic exercise. There also seemed to be no obvious gender bias in any of audiences for Indian films that I encountered at the cinema. Sujata Moorti has claimed that there is a markedly gendered dimension to the ‘diasporic optic’ which structures the audiovisual engagement of diasporic subjects with India (2003). Moorti claims that the negative aspects of diasporic engagement with the homeland which ‘tend to focus on the political apparatus and state machinery’ can be characterised as ‘a masculine inscription of community’ (2003:356). By contrast, Moorti argues that ‘the gender identity assigned to the locus of enunciation (that is, female enunciatory practice) reveals a radical different sense of India than in male-authored practices’ (2003:358). Accordingly, Moorti argues that there is a ‘distinction between feminine and masculine modes of imagining community’ and between masculine and feminine modes of enunciation. The masculine mode of enunciation ‘is a backwards look’ whilst the ‘feminine diasporic imaginary deploys the sideways look’ (2003:360). Given the gender composition of my volunteers, I was unable to investigate the peculiarities of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, it might be argued that my diasporic respondents construct a particularly

gendered imagining of the diasporic audience. For my part, I would remain wary of any totalising explanations founded on notions of gendered subjectivity.

The ‘professional interviews’ were not self-selecting in the same way as the audience group. I sought them out because of their involvement in practices surrounding Indian film culture in Sydney and the Illawarra.¹⁰⁸ The gender mix of interviewees was more balanced in this group, four females and three males, although this was not a factor in their selection. The ‘professional’ interviewees were also asked what significance they attributed to a purported diasporic audience.

In recounting discussions pertaining to a diasporic audience for Indian films in Australia which emerged during the various stages of my research, I will present a selection of material drawn from interviews with both professional and audience interviewees, including both diasporic and non-diasporic, Indian and non-Indian commentators. The material presented here demonstrates some of the explanations they offered for the engagement of an imagined diasporic audience with Indian films.

When commenting on the appeal of Indian films to Indians living outside of India, participants in the study seemed to exhibit broad agreement that Indian films did have particular appeal to diasporic subjects. There was also a consensus that the most likely motivating factor was a nostalgia for their homeland, and thus these responses broadly echoed the cultural affirmation thesis.¹⁰⁹ Leela, for example, who now lives in Australia but had grown up in Singapore explained her desire for a cultural connection with a homeland to which she felt unlikely to ever ‘return’. Taking an exterior perspective on

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Five, pp185-186.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter Three, p 121.

non-resident Indians she observes that they exhibit a much greater investment in Indian-ness than other Indians:

I find that Indians that don't live in India are more obsessed with the dress, with the culture, with the movies, with the music. Because those people in India are overexposed. So I think they want to touch, which is what I feel like I'm doing, trying to touch roots with where I'm from, so they tend to watch a lot of movies...I find a cultural connection. 'Oh, it would be nice to live in India', but I know if I do go back to live there I probably wouldn't be very happy. But it's a kind of a connection thing (Leela, interview 10/09/2004).

Anuparm Sharma, in his response, claims that the nostalgic nature of the cultural connection which overseas Indians sought to maintain with India inevitably gave rise to a perpetual reconstruction of an India lost not only in space but also in time. Anuparm, who grew up in India and migrated to Australia as an adult, feels that this 'time-warp' phenomenon particularly effects those who had spent the longest time residing overseas as well as their offspring:

It's essentially dealing with another subculture of these Indians living around the world who, some of them work in a time capsule of an India which their parents left. So my uncle and aunt came here in 1971. Their kids were brought up in an India which they essentially left in 1971. So my cousins when they go back every two or three years for their two week visit, they get surprised all the more. They're more conservative, they're living in two worlds. But that's brings in the whole sociological aspect of any diaspora or any migrant family, be it Italian, Indian or so forth. The only difference with an Indian family is they're probably more fanatical about its film industry than any other community in the world (Anuparm Sharma, interview 18/07/2003).

Sharmila, who had only left India a year or so previously, also emphasises how she found Indians residing in Australia likely to display much more conservative attitudes towards Indian culture, and to social and political issues affecting the subcontinent, than her peers living in contemporary India. As she was herself beginning to adjust to a new

life in Australia, her attempt to explain the engagement of non-resident Indians with Indian popular culture is coloured by her own powerful sense of homesickness:

It's like, my guess is from my experience, when you are outside of home, you miss home. You like everything about home because, I think about two days back I was photocopying one of the books on a Saturday when no-one was around, not Saturday, Friday, no-one was around so I was all alone in the photocopying room, and I never hummed, never hummed in my life *Vande Mataram*.¹¹⁰ Which is, I've never hummed because of the fact there is issues regarding *Vande Mataram* and getting more of rightist people into it and I always think myself I am liberal and progressive. I'm not rightist and all, but I was humming it unconsciously and then my consciousness got back and I was thinking 'Why the hell am I just humming it. I never hummed it. I never dared to hum it in India and now I am humming it here.'...And I realised it's simply the missing of your culture you know, it's like whatever your culture you just miss it. However bad the culture is you miss it. You more become attached to it. See if an NRI person is in proximity with Indian culture based in NRI, based in his particular place, he wants to, it's very natural to be more kind of having Indian space, having a kind of glance at the culture that he left back at home. So it could be like Indian cinemas are the only straight path to glance home (Sharmila, interview 28/08/2004).

David and Carly, both Anglo-Australian interviewees, seemed to be unaware of any potentially political dimensions of the relationship between expatriate communities and contemporary Indian society. They see the power of a nostalgic appeal in straightforward terms. The desire of Indian-Australians to watch movies from 'their country' is perceived as natural behaviour to expect from anyone uprooted from the cultural milieu within which they had grown up.

What's the appeal for them? Well, I think it's the same drive as anyone else would, anywhere else in the world. Most people love watching movies. Indian friends of mine, they want to escape from, like, the life of Australia and watch a film from their country and it probably takes them back to what

¹¹⁰ Based on a poem by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee written in 1876 and put to music by Rabindranath Tagore, *Vande Mataram* became the anthem of India's nationalist movement, although it was not chosen as the national anthem in 1950 when India became a republic (*Jana Gana Mana* is the official anthem). However, in the spirit of compromise typical of the Nehruvian period *Vande Mataram* was given the status of India's 'national song'. The devotional origins of *Vande Mataram* and its association with Hinduism have made it a cause of controversy for some (for more on the history of *Vande Mataram*, see Bhattacharya, S., 2003).

it is like where they live, so, through movies helps you escape daily life (David, interview 30/08/2004).

Perhaps the fact it's homely. It's something to remind them of home. There's like that familiarity with language or with customs or that sort of thing. And also with any culture you've got your idols and so forth. So yeah. It'd sort of be very personal for them within that culture to have that attraction (Carly, interview 12/09/2004).

Iqbal's perspective is more complex, as he relates the notion of a diasporic audience for Indian films to his own nostalgia for Bengali films:

I think a kind of identity, they feel, if they watch this movie, for example, if I am an Indian, or as a Bangladeshi, if I see Bengali movies, which is of course in our own language, so kind of an identity or kind of the national feelings, we have at that moment. So this is, I think, the driving force which really prompts us to watch that kind of movie. But I am talking about in general, I watch a lot of Hollywood movies and the English movies, Hindi movies as well as Bangladeshi movies (Iqbal, interview 21/04/2004).

Overall, Iqbal stated his own preference for 'quality' films, specifically European and Bengali art-house films. However, he emphasised that he did enjoy Hindi and Hollywood cinema as a 'time-pass'.¹¹¹ Iqbal stated that his favourite feature film was Hollywood epic *Dances With Wolves*. However, he expresses concern that his five year old son shows little interest in Bengali films:

my son he doesn't like Hindi movies or Bangladeshi movies, he only likes English movies. The popular ones like *Harry Potter* sorts of things. He likes that... I think it depends on the whole cultural practice what we have at home. For the kids who are born here or who come here at the early age like my son, so he, his socialisation mainly, apart from home because he goes to school and he looks at his friends and they are all from here, from Australia, English-speaking kids. So his total socialisation it's growing in a different way. It's organised in a different way, so it certainly influences his cultural, or his understanding of life and society. ... although we speak in Bengali at home, he prefers to speak in English. I mean we are trying to, he speaks in Bengali when we speak, but other than that he doesn't want to, he isn't very willing to speak in Bengali. It's very strange and I am observing all these things. So he is, you know, his social mentality and his cultural things is

¹¹¹ This is an Indian-English expression similar to 'killing time'.

being changed...He is five and a half. So he is adapting. He is trying to adapt. We are trying, we are forcing, kind of a subtle, subtly we are forcing him to practice Bengali things. On the other hand, he is more willing to learn the different language and other things. I don't mind with that but what I am interested is how he is accommodating all these things and he is not, when it comes to the choice, he goes for *Harry Potter* first...So he will probably be more towards Hollywood English kind of films than other kinds of films (Iqbal, interview 21/04/2004).

The disjuncture of tastes in popular culture between migrants and their children which is causing concern to Iqbal and his wife was also noted by other interviewees. This generational divide was seen to affect their interaction with Indian films. During the course of my research, I saw clear examples of such a divide in the cinema hall. During 2004 MG Distribution briefly began supplying Hindi film prints for Sunday matinee screenings in Wollongong's Greater Union cinema. These screenings were not widely publicised and generally drew a small audience, leading to their curtailment. They were mainly attended by families from the local South Asian community. Whilst attending these screenings I observed a clear division between the different age groups of the audience. In the front rows were younger children who ate popcorn and watched the films in remarkable silence. The older generation sat at the back of the cinema, where they ate food brought from home and watched the feature with similar reserve. Located between the two groups, with several rows dividing them from each, was a group of teenagers who responded vocally to the films, punctuating the screening with raucous laughter and comments such as 'Oh no, that's so cheesy!', 'That is sooooo stupid!' and 'How shit is that?' articulated in broad Aussie accents. At a one-off screening of a Hindi feature, *Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon* (2003), at the Wollongong University cinema in 2003, a group of male South Asian-Australian youths expressed their disinterest in the film whilst standing outside during the interval. They did so in vocal tones which were clearly designed to convey their feelings to the wider group of people standing around,

rather than simply to themselves. It would seem, therefore, that Hindi films can produce a certain 'cultural cringe' for people of this age group. Amita's response supports this observation, although she also suggests that this may be a passing phase rather than a persistent disavowal of Indian films:

I think the younger generation would basically watch it to make fun of it, but I think it also, in a later stage, like I've noticed this with myself, that I like watching it because it helps me to go back to what life was in India. It may not have been the same for me per se, but it's so, say when you are homesick or something, watching an Indian films helps in certain ways (Amita, interview 07/09/2004).

Leela sees evidence of a more marked hostility towards all things Indian amongst young Australian-Indians. However, Leela also believes that this probably results from growing pains and may not continue into adulthood:

I find it funny because I have friends who are Indian and Australian. Like they've come from an Indian background and they've grown up in Australia and I find it so funny because they are trying so hard to be Australian. Like they're trying so hard to be, to run away from their Indian heritage that they don't want to watch it either...I got kinda yelled at by an Indian girl. Well, I didn't get yelled at, but my friend did, because she said 'Oh this girl, she's an Indian too' and we actually ended up having the same mother tongue but she's Australian born and brought up. And she's like 'why do people think that just because I'm Indian, I want to meet other Indian people?' I was like 'Why wouldn't you want to meet Indian people?' And then like, she kind of looks like me maybe, but somebody mistook her for me once and she was like, see 'I don't understand why you see one Indian and you think we all look the same'. I was like 'You know what, that's a bit harsh isn't it?'. I mean you don't want to make friends based upon where people are from or what they look like. I just find that a lot of Indians that are brought up in Western cultures until, in the teenage years or early twenties, they spend a lot of time trying to run away from the culture to prove how Australian or Singaporean, or whatever, they are (Leela, interview 10/09/2004).

In contrast to Leela's personal feelings concerning the ambivalence of some Australian-Indians to ethnic identification, Asha identifies her own discomfort with the burden of participation in ethnocentric social activities:

the thought of a room filled with like two hundred Indian people scares me...Don't ask me why, it just scares me. I'm not as cultured as them so I leave it up to them to do...Yes I will listen to Indian music. Yes I will watch Indian movies. Yes I know a little bit of Hindi and a little bit of Punjabi but I'm more western than I am of the eastern culture. I've grown up most of my life in the western world and I find it really hard to be around people, like family friends and stuff, people who have the very strong Indian accent, people who know everything about everything and everything about everything about India, about Indian culture when I don't know as much. People who go to clubs with Indian music and all. To me that taking it a little bit too far. I wouldn't really do it. I don't mind getting dressed up; I don't mind going to music; I don't mind going to the little fairs they have. I wouldn't go to the parties (Asha, interview 21/08/2003).

The position taken by Asha is a complex one. Although she stated her discomfort with inhabiting an 'Indian' social milieu in Australia, she was also proud of her dance performances at a number of Indian cultural events and was an enthusiastic Hindi film viewer. Thus engagement with Indian popular culture alone does not seem to automatically suggest the consensual rendering of shared historical memory suggested by Manas Ray, nor is such engagement necessarily a direct measure of the degree of identification with a larger Indian community by young Australian-Indians. The positions taken by Asha indicate a more selective engagement, interested in some aspects and ambivalent about others. To read such a position in terms of a process of a denial of Indian-ness among young people desperate to assimilate, as Leela does, may not prove to be an adequate explanation. Indeed, Leela's description of her own feelings regarding community expectations also displayed similar ambivalences. During our interview, she emphasised her many non-Indian friends and contrasted the modern, cosmopolitan views of her own family with those of her more hide-bound and rustic Indian relatives.

The generational divide described during explanations of the diasporic audience for Indian films in Australia was also augmented by the identification of differing degrees

of literacy and investment in Indian and Australian cultures as a basis for social interaction. In particular, interviewees highlighted differences between recent arrivals and more longstanding Australian residents in their description of this audience.

I think NRIs definitely go to them more than maybe someone like me because I've grown up here. I'm just as comfortable in the western culture and things that, you know, western people do. I say western people do but I mean Australian culture. I'm just as happy there as I am with a bunch of Indians, with my family and stuff like that. Whereas somebody who's just come over here from India they're probably in the middle of a huge culture shock, not as much, but a pretty huge culture shock so they want to go back to what is familiar to them but for me both are just as fine (Asha, interview 21/08/2003).

The exterior position taken by Asha in relation to her description of an NRI community was echoed by Sunita who also described NRIs as a group of 'others'. The two comments are of some interest, since Asha, who is a long term resident, positions 'NRIs' as off-the-plane arrivals, whilst Sunita, who is a recent arrival herself, applies the term to denote the longer term diasporic community:

As far as the NRIs go, I think movies do so well abroad because it is something that they miss, being NRIs and, but they know they have it there. So it's a good thing. It's exciting for them, you watch it and you think that you are there, places like that and doing those kind of things. So I think you kinda want to watch them more when you are living outside. Because it is such a cultural gap that you have that you miss home so much, so it kind of fills it in because probably you can't meet up with Indians every day or just have those kind of parties and dance around. When you watch a movie you can just get a part of it home (Sunita, interview 03/09/2004).

Both generational differences and duration of residence were clearly seen to have a relative effect upon the strength of appeal for Indian films amongst South Asians in Australia. A further discursive structure available for describing differences in cultural practice within a community, that of class, was notably absent. However, when participants in the study chose to position social practices surrounding Indian films in

terms relative to the function of such practices in India itself, class was the most common terminology of explanation. The Indian cinema audience described by some of my interviewees was remarkably similar to the lumpenproletariat described pejoratively in some academic accounts of the Indian cinema (for example, Kazmi 1999b).

see majority is like the working class, see like most of the taxi drivers, rickshaw wallahs, like all the, you know, small...the people who have these kiosks and things like that, something...so they work all day from morning to evening like that you see. So the only relaxation they have is to go and watch a movie at twelve o'clock, midnight show. See the late night show. Normally if you go and see a movie at night you will only see these people. No respectable people would be going there at that time (Niru, interview 13/10/2003).

the main population who watch Indian movies are middle class Indian people or even lower middle class and to them, this is something they can never have and they want to enjoy the movie they want to look at something that is different from everyday problems and the rush and corruption and everything's expensive and they go to the movies for three hours and they just want to enjoy or perve or whatever, but take their mind of the normal because in, if you go to India, in the cinema there are three levels in the theatre. The top level is the very expensive one, usually it's always empty. Middle one is normal people and the lowest level is for, it's a very cheap ticket and the people who come there are drivers and, like, maybe poor people and they always, it's always packed, and they always whistle at the songs and they're just perving and just looking...to them it's something they can never see, so they are just enjoying it (Priya, interview 15/08/2003).

I would rather say that it is a popular form of entertainment for the working class people rather than the middle class or upper middle class people. So here there are also class distinctions, like working people, for example the rickshaw pullers or the daily waged labourers, they just go to the cinemas because most of them they don't have the television at home. So they have simply nothing to do (Iqbal, interview 21/04/2004).

These descriptions of subcontinental audiences reveal something about the class composition of the South Asian community in Australia. Clearly, they do not consider themselves to share the taste culture of the primary audience for which they believe

Indian films are designed.¹¹² The national audience being employed by interviewees as a point of comparison here would also appear to be constituted as a community of difference, and their ability to function as informed commentators on Indian society should not therefore be seen to imply that they necessarily perceive a close relationship between their own cultural tastes and social experiences and those of their former compatriots.

For interviewees who had a professional interest in the notion of a diasporic audience, this community was imagined not simply as a relational social entity but also as a commercial market. The outcome of their endeavours, and their personal ambitions, could be seen to be dependent upon their ability to accurately read the desires of this imagined audience. Documentary film-maker Safina Uberoi noted in an address to Sydney's Asia-Pacific film festival in 2002, that her feature, *My Mother India* (which dealt with the experiences of her Anglo-Australian mother living in India with her Punjabi husband) was conceived with a worldwide diasporic audience in mind. Uberoi claimed that the worldwide audience of diasporic Indians would be more significant to the commercial success of the film than the limited audience for multicultural films in Australia. Uberoi believes that the experience of living in two worlds makes a global 'NRI audience' the most obvious constituency for her work.

I am betting on it. Because I am actually going to the UK, and I have pitched that to the Australian film funding bodies and said that I need a marketing grant, to do things rather differently. So I believe in it... We'll see. I believe that there is an audience out there. Which has a shared, in a sense, a shared essential concern (Safina Uberoi, interview 16/07/2003).

¹¹² The figure of the rickshaw-wallah emerges as an archetype for the Indian masses, perhaps these are the 'ordinary' Indians that middle class Indians associate the most with the cinema or are simply the people that they are most likely to have had some form of interaction with, however limited such a fare-paying relationship may be in social terms.

Similarly, John Winter, has conceived his 'crossover' film project with an eye to the commercial potential of this diasporic audience which, as a film producer with a project to promote, he constructs imaginatively as an appreciative audience.

the NRIs, I think they'll love it, because they're actually, they're the people that are most easily suited into a film like this because they go 'Oh, we know Indian film, we know Australian film, we know American film, we see lots of both. We know the two cultures and we're going to be able to enjoy the contrast' (John Winter, interview 12/07/2003).

Winter's partner in the proposed film project, Anuparm Sharma, elaborates by explaining the appeal of diasporic narratives to audiences in India:

you know Kaizad Gustad grew up partly in Australia. He grew up in an environment where they shared stories of people going back to India and finding all these interesting experiences...all of us in the West have grown up going back to India, getting an arranged marriage. It's an everyday event...Now what makes these things interesting is by virtue of being written by Indians, they appeal to the Indian audience. They at least incite some sort of curiosity in the Indian audience in India. At least the A centres. And because they are a Western perspective of an Indian theme, someone, an Indian living in Australia for twenty years going to India for the first time will have exactly the same experience as you will going to India. So they are closer to the Western perspective of India than an Indian grown up in India doing an Indian thing. Because he has never been out of India and come back to feel how it feels to land in a an airport and smell that smell of how does it feel to be treated by rude excise inspector who, the customs inspector, as in *Bombay Boys*. Those nuances and cultural experiences which they are documenting (Anuparm Sharma, interview 18/07/2003).

A number of participants in the study sought to describe the South Asian community in Britain, rather than Indian audiences, as the most natural comparison for describing the diasporic audience in Australia. Vijay's response is interesting in this respect as he combines the concepts of the diasporic audience in Australia as a social entity and as a consumer market, as well as imagining various differentiated diasporic subjects inhabiting the Anglophone world:

I don't think the Australian market is anywhere comparable to the UK market. Because I think the UK market has a much larger group of subcontinental people, you know people like Indians, Pakistanis and all that for starters. They've had a lot more assimilation into UK society because you know they are second or third generation and there a lot of East Africans and that sort of thing. So I think to that extent it's probably more widespread, you know, you've got shops doing things and you've got the Indians themselves, who live in India, going to the UK far more frequently than they'd come to Australia. So there's you know...I know friends of mine in India who have to go to Wimbledon every year and who have to shop once a year in Harrods and things like that. So to that extent as long as that's there, there will always be that much stronger closeness than there is with Australia. Australia's Indian community is much smaller. It's certainly not as broad and diverse as the UK community, so it's largely made up of I guess students, Fijian Indians who came here as refugees and very small, sort of I'd say, computer programming type fellows, you know, professionals. So it doesn't really have a much broader base. The US again has a much broader base as anyone with a decent education in India will want to go to the US and study at one of the Ivy League schools. And they work there, if you go into any of the companies in the US, any of the multinationals, whether it be Citibank or you know, whoever. There are loads and loads of Indians in very senior positions who still watch Indian film because they're still, you know, Indians. And so it's a different game all together. Their ability to influence the broader community is a lot more than the Indians here who hardly even mix on a regular basis with non-Indians. So I don't, I think it's not a comparable market in my opinion. But the second issue here I think is that, it will change. It's a matter of, because Australia is becoming a destination of choice, so I think that will happen in the next few years (Vijay, interview 02/09/2003).

In course of describing the Australian market for Indian films, Vijay positions the diasporic community in Australia as marginal in relation to a broader transnational Indian community as well as to the wider Australian community. He indicates that this has been caused by Australia's relatively peripheral position within the imagination of the 'Western' world by aspiring migrants from the subcontinent. Nonetheless, Vijay is also confident that those conditions are changing and that Australia is 'becoming a destination of choice'. Vijay clearly believes that the lack of a 'critical mass' of South Asian migrants identified by Ray will be overcome if this trend continues, and that a growth in the visibility of subcontinental people in Australia could lead to new

opportunities for commercial activity within the community as well as greater scope for making a mark upon the Australian mainstream.

The Australian ‘Mainstream’ Audience

The second audience that will receive substantial discussion here is an imagined Australian ‘mainstream’ audience. As with the diasporic audience described previously I will combine descriptions provided by those with a professional interest in the imagining of this audience alongside those given by participants who inhabited various different spectatorial positions in the field, and placed themselves variously within and outside the idea of an ‘Australian mainstream’. In addition, my exploration of an Australian audience is also augmented here by responses drawn from the ‘screening survey’ in which 90 young Australians responded to excerpts of Indian features.¹¹³

In relation to the efforts being made by MG Distribution to cultivate a ‘crossover’ audience in Australia, Mitu Lange described the established audience for Indian films in Australia as being composed of South Asians, both international students and resident families, as well as members of Asian and Middle Eastern communities. She claimed however, that Indian film screenings were beginning to attract others, specifically Greek and Italian families (attracted to the ‘family values’ of Indian films), a few film students and the Australian spouses and families of South Asian migrants.¹¹⁴ Both Mitu and

¹¹³ See Chapter Five, p 187.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter Six, p 250.

Vijay observed that there was a 'gay audience' for Indian films in Australia, although they did not attempt to elaborate on this observation.¹¹⁵

In commenting on his proposed crossover film project, John Winter, one of Australia's leading film producers, is emphatic in his belief that Indian films are not so radically different from Australian films that they cannot aspire to widen their audience base in Australia:

Indian films aren't that different from Australian/American films in terms of structure, in terms of storytelling. They're linear, they have the same use of past, present and future that we use as devices. They have the same characterisation in terms of goodies and baddies and conflict and resolution of conflict. They're really not that different. People think they are, and I don't know anything about the, some of the, say, the other Asian films which can be far more structurally different I think. *Crouching Tiger* is probably far more different. But the Indian films really follow a pattern that's very understandable (John Winter, interview 12/07/2003).

However, Winter also believed that some elements of the standard Indian feature would require modification in order to cultivate a clientele with the audiences whose demographic profile he was required to consider when contemplating the likely success of a feature in various sectors of the Australian market.

Where they are inaccessible is foreign language for a start, so you've got a foreign language film but it is obviously clearly commercial. So we're used to seeing foreign language films that are designed for...we'll more likely go for them that are art-house, you know. That collection of the Australian public will go to see a art-house film, they'll got to see a French film with subtitles, that's OK, but if it was a totally commercial film, which the Indian ones are, I can see that with subtitles you have a crossing of demographics you know. The people who would go and see something with subtitles are not going to go and see a completely commercial film, so there's that element of it, the language. The second thing is the length, is trying to convince people that going to see, you know, a three and a half hour film is a good

¹¹⁵ There may be some basis to these claims, however, since Akash Arora, writing recently in Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph* claims that 'at The Midnight Shift on Sydney's Oxford Street, there's now a popular Bollywood drag show' (Arora 2005:21).

idea. The third thing is the song-and-dance... we may do an extended version for India, play the songs out to full length which we wouldn't do here (John Winter, interview 12/07/2003).

Within the larger notion of an Australian audience, Winter identifies a smaller subgroup of India-literate Australians who would complement the interest he expects to receive from an NRI audience.

Those who have some contact with India, or with Indian films, outside of the NRI, I think they'll be a natural audience because they'll say 'That's going to be fun', you know, 'I've heard a bit about Bollywood' or 'I've seen a few clips'. You know someone who hasn't heard anything about this at all, but they hear that this is a really fun, romantic comedy...a fish out-of-water story, like *Crocodile Dundee* is a fish-out-of-water story, but instead of Australia and America, it's Australia and India. Well, you should be able to seduce people into that world...especially when it's such a fun world...You don't have to do it out of America you know. *Shine* was an Australian film, but you know, it was standing up there with the Oscars you know. So it doesn't have to be that way, and I also said that when comparing Australia and India, we're a much better match. We understand each other better. Culturally we've had more in common over the years. We've had more contact culturally over the years. And Cricket has a huge part to play in that, but just being part of the Commonwealth and all that (John Winter, interview 12/07/2003).

During my individual audience interviews, I asked participants in the study if they thought that Indian films could find a larger audience in Australia. In contrast to John Winter's optimism, the non-professional South Asian interviewees in the study saw a much greater divide between the sensibilities of Australian and South Asian audiences. These respondents were in broad agreement, based largely upon their knowledge of Anglo-Australians, that there was little chance of Indian films succeeding with a 'mainstream' audience. In this regard, Priya's response is simple and direct:

Not Aussies, no...I don't think that's going to happen. I mean, no...I think that Indian movies are too different to be something that everyone might want to watch. They're dealing with different things that you wouldn't see in normal movies (Priya, interview 15/08/2003).

Asha emphasised the unwillingness of Australians to watch foreign language films. She believes that Indian films cannot be translated for mainstream consumption in Australia, and at the same time she also feels that attempts to undertake such a translation would probably alienate the niche audience which may be prepared to watch Indian films:

No. Simply the language barrier. You could screen *Bootmen*, a completely Australian movie in the UK and people would still go and watch it. But you can't put in an Indian movie, in a different language and expect people to sit, people want to go there and turn their mind off, they don't want to sit there and read the screen. They go there and they don't have to read, they don't have to write or anything like that...It wouldn't work and people who, the ones that wanted to watch it because it was an Indian film, would want Indian accents, the ones who wanted to know what it was all about would just go 'that's the cheesiest thing I've ever seen' and walk out of there or enjoy the backseat very much (Asha, interview 20/08/2003).

Asha claims that mainstream Australians employed a particular set of associations in relation to India which, in her opinion, they had no desire to extend.

For some reason India and Asia has held some mystery for people, they've wanted to go there, backpack around there, travel around there. They have some sort of mental image of it being some glamorous place. In all reality it is not. They don't. Nobody is going to want to see a movie about a horrible, I say horrible but I know it is not, place where the air smells and the streets are dirty they're not going to watch they're going to want to watch the high end of town. Think of movies, like western movies like *Ocean's Eleven*, you think of movies like *Coyote Ugly*, *Centrestage* you want to know about people doing well. Doing well, high end of town they always have that spare hundred and twenty bucks to get that cute little outfit. They don't want to know about India as it is. They've got this image of India in their head which they're happy to be left with (Asha, interview 20/08/2003).

In her response to this question, Leela observed that from her experience, there was simply little chance of 'mainstream' Australians bringing themselves into contact with commercial Indian films in the first place, since they held negative preconceptions regarding the quality of Indian films. Leela described the audiences she encountered at Indian film screenings as overwhelmingly Asian. However, Leela believes that the

commercial fortunes of some 'art' films might be different as they attract a different audience and are judged by different standards to more mainstream features:

Not a mainstream audience. I don't think so. Not really. I'm just going on my own personal experience but most of my friends here are Australian. And I've tried to get them to come with me, but they're just not interested. And a few of the make fun of the movies and I think, I don't think it will really catch on. I think maybe with Indian, but ... So I'm not sure if it will catch on. Indian movies. I don't see a lot of Australian people wanting to watch them. Like even when they showed the movie, they showed *Main Hoon Na*, in Wollongong. It was all Indians or Malays or people from the Middle East. There were no others there... I don't think mainstream movies will but I think art films will because I think Indian art films are taken at just the same standard as any other art film around the world (Leela, interview 10/09/2004).

Amita also saw little opportunity for Indian films to enjoy success with a larger Australian audience. She felt that the non-Indian audience for Indian films in Australia would remain limited to cineastes and other Asian viewers who had been introduced to Indian cinema in their countries of origin.

Don't think so. Can't see Australians, too many of them, watching it. There are a couple of exceptions that are interested in viewing other cultures like of different foreign films, like... most of the people here that I've been to films with are either interested in learning more about the culture or they've seen films in the parts of the world that they've been in, like, there are a couple of Singapore Chinese who watch Indian films but they need subtitles. But they enjoy watching them as much as we do (Amita, interview 06/09/2004).

As a more recent arrival, Sunita felt less confident about her ability to predict the tastes of the Australian audience. Instead she chose to focus on the limited availability of Non-Hollywood cinema in Australia and felt that increasing the level of access might lead to the growing revenues taken by Indian films elsewhere. She echoed John Winter's view, however, that 'foreign' audiences suffered an attention deficit which might discourage them from enjoying Indian films.

I won't say mainstream, because mainstream I wouldn't know, but the way it is being marketed right now, I don't think so, because it just comes to like one theatre. Entire Sydney is just one theatre and one show inside a small niche in the schedule that's it...so the marketing has to be much better. It could capture an audience but yeah it has to get people in like play it in regular theatres where somebody will come in and watch it. Probably they have to look at profitability and Wollongong doesn't have so many Indians. But if they would dare just introduce the movies in a way and publicise it, publicise it well with trailers and stuff then people might just come. I think especially the length wears foreigners out in our movies. You have to sit for three hours and just watch. People should try. It's a good thing. Very entertaining. But I think it will take some time. But I do believe that in the US they are getting a good release now in big theatres with plenty of shows and playing to packed houses. But it might take some time in Australia to come into the mainstream... Even Australian films have not done well because Hollywood has totally taken over...I know a lot of people, even from Malaysia and all who watch Indian movies because they understand the language, they have a lot of Indian movies in Malaysia and they have it on TV and stuff. But they can't watch it here because there is no access to movies. They just don't play it in theatres and stuff (Sunita, interview 03/09/2004).

In contrast to the generally confident descriptions of an 'Aussie' audience provided by Asian-Australians, Anglo-Australian interviewees were more hesitant about providing a generic description of this imagined collective. The implicit positioning of a mainstream Australian audience as a body of white viewers made it imperative for them to consider their own positioning within this imagined community, leading to more qualified and differentiated descriptions of this audience.

I think that's a really hard question. I think if people are like me, they'll love it, but I know that even with raving about a couple of the movies that I've seen, you know, the looks that I get from...like 'what the hype about it?' I think it has to be seen to be believed. And I don't know that there's a great deal of exposure like if people are going to pay to go and see a movie, they want to know that they're going to enjoy it before they go and see it. And I think there's still that element of uncertainty, not knowing what's going to be in an Indian movie to really enjoy, you know. So I think people might psych themselves out before they actually get there. But I think if people were to actually give it a go, I think it'd definitely be a following in Australia. I'd like to think that there would be anyway. It could go either way (Carly, interview 12/09/2004).

It depends on the audience, like I know are a lot of people who are interested in that sort of thing, but you need to appreciate their culture to actually really understand what the film is about....I think Australians are a bit, well, they have no culture or they don't...well, they're always after just what's on at the time. They don't think about...its action that's all, really...They're influenced by other countries like America. Their films appeal mostly here. And, yeah, everyone is focused on American ways and they don't really...Australia is still developing their own, like, their own sort of culture. So it's not as diverse as what an Indian culture is. But we're a young country, so, yeah we're influenced by other countries too easily (David, interview 30/08/2004).

Carly also believed that there was a significant taste gap between rural and metropolitan audiences in Australia, with the former far less likely to experiment with foreign, that is non-Anglophone, films. David's identification of the influence of trends in other Anglophone markets on audience behaviours in Australia was also referred to by Lalitha. Along with most other respondents, Lalitha believed that an important bridging role between Indian and 'English' cinemas was being performed by diasporic film-makers such as Gurinder Chadha and Mira Nair who managed to present Indian themes in a package amenable to the tastes of 'Western' audiences.

I think the latest British movies like *Bend It Like Beckham*, *Monsoon Wedding* as well, which a lot of people recognise as being Indian films. I think it is sort of branching out to a wider audience, to like, even those people who haven't even been to India or who don't have any experience with Indian culture. I guess it's sort of reaching out to different cultures. I think a lot of the English movies, like the English movie industry is sort of focusing on that... A lot of the reasons people [in Australia] go to the cinema to see a film is because its been successful in the States or because it's been big elsewhere (Lalitha, interview 28/05/2004).

In order to further explore some of the key claims made by interviewees regarding the Australian audience, for example, the influence of an American taste culture or the degree of affinity or disinterest in Indian culture, I conducted a 'screening survey' with a group of 90 Australians in March 2004. Participants in this exercise were comprised of a body of students at the University of Wollongong enrolled in a number of

disciplines who were taking a subject entitled 'Film Form and Style'. Students were asked to complete a paper questionnaire before, during and after being shown four 20-minute excerpts from four different contemporary Indian films.

This body of respondents was not taken to be representative of an Australian mass audience. Nor was this a completely 'media naïve' community in relation to Indian films. Twenty four participants indicated that they had previously seen at least one Indian film against sixty six who claimed to have had no previous exposure. Of those who had seen an Indian film before, the most common context of viewing was the publicly-owned multicultural broadcaster SBS which occasionally screens Indian films, the majority of which are 'parallel' or 'art' features. Whilst this group should not be considered as a test group which might prove or disprove claims made during the imagined construction of an Australian audience by the interview participants, it was intended to *extend* the exploration of such an audience to include those with no stated interest in Indian films, as well further broadening the range of participant positionalities. Whilst, this primarily meant the inclusion of a sizeable number of Australians of European heritage, there were also a small number of Asian-Australians in the survey group as well fifteen international students. Only one participating student, however, was of a South Asian background (Tamil).¹¹⁶

Respondents were invited to complete a written survey during the exercise where they first noted down their expectations of Indian films and were then shown four twenty minute clips from films on which they were invited to comment. Following the screenings, participants were asked to contribute their overall impressions of Indian

¹¹⁶ See Chapter Five, p187.

films based upon the screened excerpts and to further my investigation of the notion of an Australian audience by writing down what they thought would be required to build an Australian audience for Indian films. Here are a selection of short written responses, reproduced exactly from the handwritten questionnaires, to the initial question: ‘Based upon whatever you know about Indian films, what do you expect to see in an Indian movie?’:

Mud bricks, coloured sarongs, a very slow temporal building up of themes and slow, reserved more life-like playing-out of the story.

Indians Religious references: a conflict between living life and religious requirements/commitments.

Traditional music and clothing, large families.

Fat guys and girl with beautiful eyes & hair. Extravagant clothes and lots of dancing. All the movies seem to have the same storyline, boy meets girl, falls in love with her at first sight but she’s respectable and just teases him! Then she becomes engaged through the family’s arranged marriage agreement but runs away to be with the other guy.

an adaptation of traditional ‘Hollywood’ films with a more musical/traditional Indian feel – e.g. music w/sitars etc. Traditional stories of man gets girl after having to overcome huge obstacles & happily ever after.

flamboyant male protagonist wooing cutesy/sensual female protagonist in a fifteen minute long extravagant singing and dancing setpiece – and Indian culture beyond the stereotypes Western media proliferate.

I expect to see love scenarios, fighting scenes, family problems which leads to revenge and hate. There would be sentiments of mother love.

music, singing and dancing, ideas of Bollywood, cultural/national identity emphasised, subtitles, national e.g. religious/cultural themes, use of colour + film techniques e.g. like music clips.

I expect the films to be less action and more simple filming. I don’t expect there to be so much technological details in it.

dancing, insights to culture, elaborate costumes/jewelry, tribes (gang-like), family.

I have an impression that Indian films are very colourful and over the top. Possibly very melodramatic in trying to copy Hollywood films. Also I expect a lot of vibrant colour in the sets and costumes and music within the films.

I expect to see cortosans. Based on what the Moulin rouge based its play on, full of dancing

Beautiful ladies – I heard the story about Indian films that there are always beautiful oriental ladies that attract men, also music and mysterious dances.

Bad films, cheap & tacky, low budget.

I've a vague idea that Indian cinema is often referred to as 'bollywood' and that it takes a lot of conventions from western film. Such as the roles of characters e.g. the hero, the mafia boss, the mother, I think I remember some of this from comments in the movie 'The Guru'.

A very long, dramatic film made w/ lots of action and intense drama. Bollywood produces movies rapidly, so perhaps it will be not as clearly edited as American films.

I expect to see a movie with Indian characters who struggle between class within a romance. I expect also to see some basis of religion and males being the predominant characters.

Participants in the survey were then shown excerpts from the following features: *Dil Chatha Hai* (2001), *Supari* (2001), *Devdas* (2002), *Boom* (2003). As might be expected, responses to the films were mixed in terms of positive and negative responses. *Dil Chatha Hai* was rated collectively as the best of the four and *Supari* the worst. All of the films were appreciated by some participants and disparaged by others. The following responses indicate how closely the films were seen to correspond with previously held expectations of Indian films.

There was a lot more variety than I expected – a lot more modern, my impression before this on Indian film was that it was far more traditional, and reflective of traditional Indian values.

They have changed my views of bollywood films being kitch & poorly made. Editing & director's viewpoints on modern filmmaking has changed to suit current demands.

I'd never seen a Bollywood film before. Really shocked at what I've seen. Violence, blood etc. Devdas was pretty much what I was expecting all the films to be.

I expected more dancing and weird clothes. I thought there would be more poverty shown in their society but there wasn't.

did not correspond at all – I expected a much more traditional Indian film, in terms of costume, sound + themes. However was much more modern – western influenced than anticipated. I enjoyed watching Indian film much more than anticipated.

I didn't expect that some of them were presented in English. It wasn't hard to figure out what was going on through subtitles. I thought Indian films were going to be western genres with Indian style dressed people.

The films correspond to what I was expecting of Indian films. I think that the themes and plot match to those in popular western films. They are more or less the same on the overall plot and story, just represented differently.

They were nothing like my expectations at all. So much more interesting. They were all very modern in style. More colorful and fun than I expected.

didn't like the tight shiny pants. I thought India was close to a 3rd world country? Realistic? Funny! Very cheesy. Cutting in a lot of Indian and English, Very cheap and cheesy.

Actually pretty similar. Some films were more Indian culture than I had expected & some had less. There was a lot of dancing as I had anticipated but all of the 'music-video' type interludes were a surprise, the humor was pretty modern and easy to connect with. The subtitles didn't even bother me'.

they didn't at all. What I saw was heaps better than my expectations.

the scenes with big music numbers are what I expected of Indian films. I enjoyed Dil Chahta Hai, it was different to what I was expecting and looked interesting. I like the blending of Eastern and Western ideas and themes, and the use of both English and Indian language.

they seemed very similar to any other film that comes from Hollywood, Australia or England. However, they have a quirky style that probably links them more so to Australian movies.

Devdas was what I expected to see more of but the others went beyond my expectations. They were fun and fresh, dark and serious. There seems to be great variation in the types of films made in India which I didn't expect.

Following exposure to the film excerpts, participants in the survey were asked if, based upon what they had seen, they would be interested in seeing more Indian films in the future. Sixty-three participants expressed an interest in doing so. Participants were asked to comment on their rationale for wanting, or not wanting, to see more Indian films in the future. Here are some of the responses provided:

They are entertaining, professional and fulfil the viewers expectations of what they want from films – ENTERTAINMENT (primarily).

They were very comic and yet showed good insight into creating emotion such as suspense. The characters were easy to become involved with and interested in.

It's something different and Indian films seem to be quite entertaining. I also like the high levels of music and dancing.

Provide a different cultural viewpoint on issues felt here in Australia as well as India.

They are boring and cheesy.

they are a refreshing stray from the norm, entertaining, although not realistic.

They weren't what I expected, so they came as a pleasant surprise. I also didn't think they'd be as professional – an unqualified bias – but they proved to be as competent as most Hollywood films.

interesting to learn their modern culture and portrayal of events.

They were good. The quality and ideas were original and clever. I loved the use of music clips to introduce and emphasise certain ideas.

they are behind the times, dragged out dialogue + dubbing is exhausting.

I thought the acting wasn't too good, plots and story lines were kind of cheesy + fake but I did like the action and suspense and characters in some of the films. I also thought the 'music video' parts were interesting.

I think its because they have their own style. Bollywood imitates Hollywood, but it's not just imitation. They digest the style by their own culture.

Because I found Indian films might fill my expectation for hilarious films, but not others like love story, suspense etc. Especially I can't agree the way Indian women live for love.

They're really entertaining, and I like the romance theme. It reminds me of the type of movies I enjoy – Hollywood-type romantic comedies. They're beautiful & well-shot which I appreciate in films.

they can be very cheesy and hard to relate to.

it is a different experience to see an Indian film, but I would not go out and hunt one. It was a chance to see what Indian films are like, but they are very different from the videos I am used to watching and enjoy.

At the conclusion of the exercise, participants in the survey group were asked to provide comments in response to the following question: 'What do you think it would take for Indian films to gain a significant audience in Australia?'

I don't really want to claim that musical set-pieces are inimical to all Australians (in fact, most of my female friends love musicals), but the inclusion/interruption of song and dance (despite Moulin rouge's success) has become, to say the least, a box-office risk in Australia + the US.

give everybody in Australia a head re-adjustment – most Australians probably wouldn't get past the subtitles.

Greater cultural understanding of India developed in Australia. Dubbing for mainstream audience appeal.

No. love story only appeal to women. Aussie men are more Marco.

Marketing. Cinemas willing to show it would be a good start. If proven to work somewhere else in world, e.g. US or Britain, Australia would follow lead.

Indian stories in Australia, a la Bend It like Beckham or something. As for Bollywood films: international mainstream acceptance, I guess.

a great deal. I don't think they would get an audience. We are too happily saturated with American products. Our cinema culture is American.

Advertising. Media exposure. Possibly big Western stars to capture attention, then Indian stars will have a name for themselves. The reputation would have to grow.

I think it would be difficult. Perhaps if they use less imitation of Hollywood and more reliance on cultural differences and reality, they might find an audience that appreciates difference.

Better acting + special effects – music sequences that were more fitting to the story (they weren't always bad).

Less Americanisation in our youth. I work for a cinema and most of our customers are teens or young people. These people are very Americanised so much so that watching foreign films would hardly occur to them.

more Australians to become more open minded about watching something other than a Hollywood blockbuster. After being spoonfed the same thing for so long. It might be hard to convince people to watch something that they are not used to.

translation in text, many people would not gain same awareness from film because reading subtitles to many takes a bit of effort, that is on a mass market basis.

more advertising. However, this is difficult. Aussie films don't even do well here.

to have well known actors, gain arthouse appreciation.

a story everyone can relate to, for instance a story involving Indian cultural which is common to Australia. Ultimately though, interesting unique storylines and bright and witty scripts.

The conduct of this survey exercise served to broaden the discussion of the taste culture attributed to an imagined Australian 'mainstream' audience, providing some interesting correlations and contradictions with the Australian audience described by respondents during the interview phase of the research. Taken together, the respondents in all the various components of my research can be considered to be, if not representative of, then at least as participants in, an Australian community of media use. They were all conversant with the forms of content, and the sites of consumption, which construct the Australian media environment and were confident in translating those particular literacies into conjectural statements about Australian audiences as one or more social imaginaries.

The responses here would also appear to bear out some of the findings of Bennett, Emmison and Frow's *Australian Everyday Cultures Survey* (1999), since they indicate that the natural point of comparison for young Australians encountering Indian films is overwhelmingly Hollywood films, rather than Australian films.¹¹⁷ The semantic dominance of American media content in Australia might be seen to suggest that American cinema is as much a 'resident' source of media in Australia, in terms of audience reception, as Australian features are. It may even be possible to argue, on the basis of the responses here, that is more so. On the same basis, however, it is also clear that Australians maintain a strong sense of national identification. Taken together, these two points of reference represented an interesting feature of this discussion about audiences, where a shifting position was often adopted between a subjective identification with Australian or Western culture.¹¹⁸ This seems to be a marked feature of Australian responses to the media. This was evidenced by the comparison of Indian films with an Australian aesthetic preference that was in one instance conflated with a larger 'Western' culture, and in another, described in terms of an antagonistic stance towards an American 'media imperialism'.

The first instance can be usefully paralleled with the comments offered by John Winter: 'we know Indian film, we know Australian film, we know American film, we see lots of both' and 'Indian films aren't that different from Australian/American films'. Here American and Australian film cultures are positioned as occupying the same aesthetic space. As examples of the second instance, other participants identified negatively the 'Americanisation of our youth' and claimed 'we are too happily saturated with American products' to take an interest in the films made in other countries. Some

¹¹⁷ See Chapter Five, pp 198-203.

¹¹⁸ The invocation of 'Western' culture would also seem to be, in the context of discussing popular culture in Australia, a cipher for Anglophone, rather than European, culture.

respondents also saw this as an explanation for the low level of interest in Australian films indicated in box office returns.

It is interesting at one level that, unlike the United States, the United Kingdom was never attacked as a cultural coloniser by this group, but what is more pertinent is that collectively my respondents consistently imagined the Australian audience as a follower of cultural fashions, not an innovator. So a certain superiority exhibited towards Indian culture by a number of the survey respondents was juxtaposed with this evidence of an uncertain response to Australia's own cultural identity, and various enunciations of the so-called 'cultural cringe'. In terms of the manner in which India was imagined by those of a non-South Asian background, the findings are, perhaps, generally unremarkable. Indian culture is largely associated with religiosity and ethnic 'colour'. For some, it is also positioned in derogatory terms as pre-modern and assumed to be a technologically backward and poverty stricken 'third world' society. By extension Indian films were duly expected to present either unsophisticated and clumsy uses of the medium, or to be overwhelmingly concerned with religious matters. For those who seemed inclined to see Indian culture in a more positive light, expectations proved to be strikingly similar: Indian film culture was expected to present the mores of a 'traditional' society untainted by modernity and capitalist consumerism. Survey respondents seemed to be generally surprised that Indian films were so convincingly 'modern', although a conflation of modernity with 'Western' culture, also caused some respondents to lament that Indian films also appeared to be *Americanised*. On the other hand, some respondents were pleasantly surprised to find that Indian films were not too dissimilar to Hollywood films, and therefore more accessible than they had expected them to be.

Only one respondent saw the connection between the ‘quirky style’ of Australian and Indian films which might support the identification of a cultural affinity between India and Australia identified by John Winter. However, the survey did demonstrate Winter’s claim that Australians might pay more attention when cricket was involved. This seemed to be true at least of male respondents (the narrative of *Supari* is centred on sports gambling and match-fixing). A further finding challenges the common wisdom that the biggest obstacle separating Indian films from a Western audience is the proliferation of song and dance sequences: Of those respondents who did describe the Indian films viewed in favourable terms, it was the musical interludes which seemed to emerge as the most popular element.

A Tale of Two Audiences

In this chapter, I have presented a broad range of imaginative descriptions of two audiences, the ‘South Asian Diasporic’ and the ‘Australian Mainstream’. These were two imagined collectives to which the collaborators in my ‘fieldwork’ attributed various aesthetic tastes and social behaviours. To a certain extent, both sets of descriptions provided some indications of the phenomena found by previous research. The diasporic audience was imagined as engaged in various processes of nostalgia, hybridity and identity. In relation to Indian films, an Australian mainstream audience was described through complex forms of cultural relativism which demonstrated the centrality of American popular culture in Australia as well as a popularly assumed British-core to Australian society.

Both of these audiences described themselves and each other in transnational terms, positioning their media practices within a global communicative economy. Overall, participants in the various components of the study, regardless of their ethnicity, seemed to find general agreement that the fortunes of Indian films in Australia, and trends in Australian taste culture more generally, were more likely to be influenced by trends in the United States and the United Kingdom than anything else. Interestingly, these observations emerged in relation to the discussions surrounding *both* ‘diasporic’ South Asian and Australian ‘mainstream’ audiences. Since this discussion was constructed around Indian films, both audiences were also juxtaposed against the almost entirely imagined inhabitants of a mythic India. In this study both media audiences discussed were imagined by participants as communities which looked out as much as inwards.

Given that this study was focused upon media audiences, that is, communities formulated upon the basis of their engagement with a commercial media form, these collectives were also often imagined here as bodies of consumer-agents inhabiting markets. These markets might be figured as encompassing a wide range of describable taste cultures constructing a media sphere which draws upon numerous sources of global culture. However, despite the fact that all audience research is inevitably market-research in some form, it is not possible, on the basis of the comments presented here, to clearly establish whether Indian films will, or will not, establish a larger audience in Australia. Nonetheless, it has, I think, been established that the very notion of a commercial audience as a social entity is constructed through relational imagination, both by media professionals imagining consumers for their products and by film viewers seeking to imagine those to whom they are linked by this act of consumption.

Despite the fact that all research of 'ethnic' media products in the 'multicultural' West inevitably has certain phrenological overtones to it, this study is equally unable to clearly establish whether the diasporic Indian population in Australia is engaged primarily in multicultural mixing or long-distance ethnic maintenance, although it does indicate that such processes are more likely to be employed in combination than in exclusion of each other. All I can definitively offer in regard to those debates is the well-worn adage that more research is probably needed. Doubtless such knowledge will accumulate from other studies of various 'non-resident' audiences. These can only multiply as long as humanity remains on the move and continues to trade in images.

There is, however, something else of perhaps greater significance evidenced by the material presented here. That is the ease with which respondents were able to attribute a purported taste culture to a generic group of 'others' when compared with the instinctive differentiation of groups to which they felt affinity (or which they felt that the researcher might see them inhabiting). Many of the South Asian respondents predicted, for example, that an Australian mainstream audience would be dismissive of Indian films *en masse*. The screening survey returns, however, indicated that this was somewhere around half true, and that this group was keen (as were the Anglo-Australian interview subjects) to differentiate between various aesthetic choices made within the Australian audience on the basis of age, gender, and cultural influences.

In the other direction, David and Carly identified the desire of diasporic viewers to look back to their home culture as a natural and logical outcome of their relocation.

Diasporic respondents themselves, however, described a differentiated diasporic audience along the lines of several fissures, including age, language, class, migratory

trajectory and cultural literacies (in relation to both home and host cultures). In contrast to their *external* identification as stable formations making predictable cultural choices, the two media audiences named in this study were therefore also described by respondents as *internally* diverse social bodies contingent in their composition on a range of position-takings, personal choices and identarian options. This would appear, on the basis of these findings, to be a consistent feature of the imagination of media audiences.

Chapter Nine: The Social Imagination of Media Audiences

During the course of the local fieldwork conducted in this study, I examined some of the uses of Indian films in Sydney and the Illawarra using a cultural field model of analysis. In the first reading, I focused upon the cultural geography within which Indians films were brought to their audiences. Here I argued that the use of Indian films was heavily influenced by the spatial and cultural politics of a local environment that was nonetheless interlaced everywhere with the influence of practices operating at a global level. Therefore, the cultural geography relevant to this enquiry was constituted by a wide range of transnational relationships. In the second reading of the field, I focused primarily upon the descriptions of Indian films offered by study participants in relation to their personal use of these artefacts. I found that the audience for Indian films extended well beyond ‘Indian’ viewers, and that those viewers who shared Indian-ness as well as other categorisations such as age and gender did not necessarily watch those films for the same reasons. Indian films *were* being used for different reasons and from different subjective positions. On this basis, I described the community formed around those films as a strategic media community, one which catered to range of possible choices and motivations. An additional finding was that discussion about Indian films was not limited to the films themselves, but spilled over into observations about music, fashion, stars and other components of what might be called ‘film culture’. In the final reading of the field, I focused upon how study participants described two imagined audiences. This involved the description, in both cases, of imagined collectives of which the participants themselves may have considered themselves members as well as their description of groups which they described as ‘others’. I found that agents within this

field of practices tended to imagine communities in which they were themselves invested as communities internally differentiated by aesthetic prerogatives and preferences. Alternatively, when describing communities to which they could apply an external perspective, they were prone to describe those communities in fairly generic terms. This demonstrated a relational imagination which was also employed strategically. In my closing remarks, I would like to address three areas of particular significance derived from these findings: the transnational relations which constitute both the local and the global, the media audience as a community of imaginative relations and, finally, the implications of using the cultural field model for this study as a piece of social research.

The Transnational as a Relational Spectrum

At the beginning of this thesis I argued that it was necessary to think of media audiences in an explicitly transnational sense. The imperative for adopting this perspective was the recognition that media artefacts are inherently mobile and intertextual. Indian films are widely dispersed across a world where they both co-exist and interact with other sources of media in numerous global localities.

The mobility and pluralism of modern popular culture has been seen consistently as one of the major harbingers of globalisation. Although commonly conflated, I think it is important to make a distinction between ‘globalisation’ and the ‘transnational’.

Globalisation is a term which denotes increasing interactivity and exchange and the collapse of the barriers of distance and ideology which have previously served to

frustrate the triumph of a universal capitalist order. The transnational on the other hand is seen to denote human practices which take place across the national boundaries which have structured the discussion of human geography for much of the twentieth century. Transnational phenomena do not of themselves necessarily infer, as does the term globalisation, any particular ideological cohesion or historical volition. Nonetheless, the identification of a purported condition of globalisation is itself predicated upon establishing the existence of such transnational exchanges as well as evidence of their increase, either in numerical terms or in terms of their significance or influence.

Steven Vertovec has described 'transnationalism' as broadly referring to the 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states' (1999:447). Vertovec claims that the discussion of such interactions across a wide range of enquiries and disciplines has produced a degree of 'conceptual muddling' (1999:448). Amongst the existing literature, Vertovec identifies six major strands of enquiry into transnationalism: as a social morphology, a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement and as a reconstruction of place and locality (1999:449-456). Although there are some other players, such as transnational corporations or NGOs, all of these strands are seen by Vertovec to be particularly relevant to, and exemplified by, the experiences of diasporic communities arising from migration. Although the media, and 'telecommunications' in particular, are seen as crucial in all of these strands, narrative media artefacts are seen to be most influential in two instances: as a mode of cultural reproduction and as a reconstruction of 'place' or locality.

The role of the cultural is much more limited in Vertovec's definition of the transnational than it is in the definition which I have myself employed.¹¹⁹ Vertovec sees some value in the discussion of cross-cultural flows but also believes that 'Cultural Studies' approaches should be seconded to detailed, comparative, materialist studies (1999:456). In contrast to this reassertion of knowable, quantifiable and hence comparable social truth, my invocation of the transnational in this thesis has been predicated upon the disavowal of the dichotomy of the material and cultural upon which such critiques are based. What has also been crucial to the matter in hand is my claim that a focus on migratory flows seen as definitive of a global consciousness is too limited a site, and far too literal a metaphor, for understanding the global practices and knowledges which scholars of globalisation claim now inform the everyday lives of humanity. In this regard, the bulk of humanity would be relegated to a kind of 'observer-status' on the emerging global conditions, themselves becoming of transnational significance only when they conduct 'border-crossings' across the largely administrative barriers that are somehow assumed to have transformative effects upon the human consciousness. In this sense, the majority of both 'Cultural Studies' and 'materialist' approaches continue to position human migration as an extraordinary form of behaviour, a premise which is completely undermined by even the most cursory historical analysis. It is also an ontology which is structured in every sense by the same logics of governmentality which have arisen with the nation-state.

As I have argued, there is plenty of evidence that national formations will continue to have much discursive force and thus a putative transnational framework cannot assume a post-national world.¹²⁰ Nonetheless, a transnational mode of analysis for scholars of

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Four, pp 152.

¹²⁰ See Chapter Four, pp 146-147.

the cultural cannot be reduced to the comparison of one administrative zone to another. This constitutes an *international* mode of enquiry, one which is likely to be conducted through largely stable territorial and subjective definitions of the world. The transnational, in my opinion, is more useful when considered as *a spectrum of relational understandings*. Along this spectrum various signifying configurations of the local, national and global (or indeed the familial, social or civilisational) are constructed, contested and juxtaposed against each other in order to give semantic order to a universal scale of the familiar and the strange. Within this framework we might have cause to consider transnational relationships occurring between both individuals and mass movements and between both localities and broad regions rather than simply as exchanges taking place between nations.

The national, however, continues to occupy the fulcrum point in this spectrum. This is because the nation continues to function as a privileged term for a relational polity positioned somewhere between the experiential world of the face-to-face and the abstracted, but undeniable existence of a vast heterogeneous world. As a basis for power and the construction of a state, the negotiated space of the national claims to be distinct from both the personal and the universal, but also lays claim to a measure of authority over both. The national is always a largely symbolic construction, since in practice the 'borders' between different zones along the transnational spectrum are largely illusory. They exist only through the desire, and the necessary force, to police them. Thus the 'national' is by no means an alternative space to the 'local' and the 'global' since without their comparative influence it is itself an almost entirely meaningless term. The policing of the borders of various zones along the transnational spectrum is therefore

contingent upon circumstance, selective in its application and to a certain extent *necessarily* inefficient.

For the purposes of this study, there were a number of models available for describing the relationship between feature films dispersed from India and some of their viewers inhabiting a small part of the South East corner of the Australian continent. These explanations can be seen to operate at three scales of reference across the transnational spectrum. First of all, the dispersal of media artefacts can be seen as a manifestation of cosmopolitanism emerging from the mosaic of globally dispersed ethnic cultures re-territorialized under the auspices of globalisation theory. Here the ‘archetypal’ diasporic subject is claimed to occupy an interstitial location straddling the border zone between two or more sets of historical subjectivities (Bhabha 1994). To use another geographical metaphor, globalisation theory also allows for the positioning of re-territorialized audiences for media products either as various dislocated ethnic enclaves (Appadurai 1996, Cunningham 2001) or as hybrid currents found within the stream of global culture (Hall 1990). Occupying the second scale of reference, that is the frequencies of the national, the presence of Indian films in Australia might be considered in terms of bilateral exchanges of cultural and economic capital between two self-contained national entities. This small-scale trade in cultural artefacts, and even populations, represents a necessary consequence of furthering the respective national economic and political interests of the two states within a world system of nationalist economics. However, for nationalists the relative measure of economic gain versus cultural contamination must remain at a scale acceptable to the cultural majority for whom each of the two nation-states have been constructed (see Smith 1999). The third scale of reference can be seen to operate in terms of local conditions and their social topography. Localisms are manifested in the

commercial and spatial relations between different sites of cultural activity and their relative descriptions by local inhabitants. The privileging of the local scale provides for an examination of the distinctiveness of the local taste culture when set against either other locals, the national 'average' or a broad notion of global media trends. In practice all three scales of reference proved to be equally relevant to this enquiry since there was plenty of evidence to suggest that all three acted upon the field of practices under examination. The local, national and global points of relation should not be seen therefore as mutually exclusive terminologies; it is apparent that in any identifiable social environment there are numerous conceptual linkages operating along the transnational spectrum.

The linkages which I have explored in my case study have illustrated something of the complex interface of the local, national and global likely to arise in any discussion of contemporary media culture. The exchange of Indian films in the study area was implicated in global patterns of official and unofficial media distribution connecting sites as far apart as Britain, Pakistan and East Timor. The multicultural nature of urban Australia has also ensured that the explanations provided by study participants of Indian film culture, and its place in their social lives, has incorporated references not only to India, but also to China, Fiji and the United States. Explanations of cultural practices relating to Indian films offered by study participants employed numerous points of comparison: between Sydney and Melbourne, between Fairfield and Parramatta, and between Australia and 'overseas'.

In the two parts of this thesis, I have juxtaposed the proposition that Indian cinema functions as a global industry with the proposition that the Australian national media

sphere is an inherently transnational environment. I have gone on to demonstrate, with the aid of my collaborators, how the two scales of reference are evidenced within the specific local conditions within which I conducted my research. For example, the broad groupings of audiences identified in my macrological analysis of transnational audiences for Indian films at a global scale were all represented in the small self-selecting interview group which assembled for my research. Similarly the complex jigsaw of linguistic and aesthetic modes of film production which make up the Indian cinemas at a 'national' scale were all found to be circulating within the Greater Sydney region. At another level, Indian films contribute to Australia's diverse media spectrum, where the discourse of multiculturalism, the pursuit by local politicians of off-shore production work, the desire of media producers for export markets, and the influence of trends in the larger Anglophone markets have cumulatively served to make the Indian film an object of fashionable interest. Perhaps this is a sign of a broadening Australian taste culture, or perhaps it represents little more than a short-term appropriation of the exotic or a minor extension of a natural niche market. In any case, Indian films are only one small part of a very large range of transnational exchanges which make up the cultural landscape of Australia.

A Community of Differences

The point at which arguments about the nation, globalisation and media audiences intersect is at the foundational level of communications theory where the audience is imagined as a community of media use. All of the various arguments which I have discussed in this thesis, such as 'shared historical memories' or 'diasporic public

spheres' hinge upon the role of cultural practice in fostering a social imagination. The theoretical notion which has been most central to discussions of the social imagination for two decades is Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community, or rather, the various conceptions by other scholars of its significance. In the national models for understanding cinema, the idea of an imagined community has been employed to support both components of the effective/reflective dualism which constitutes their various claims on the social significance of film culture. The idea of a collective imagination has facilitated the reading of cultural artefacts as allegorical renditions of identifiable societies with which the media audience has been considered coterminous. This notion that the social is imagined into being through readership has also been employed to support theories of media effect, where media consumers are considered susceptible to nation-building messages encoded into media artefacts. In theories of globalisation advanced by scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, essentially the same claims are made in reference to the role of media in the affirmation and maintenance of ethnic societies and polities operating at a global scale. The idea of the imagined community as a social entity activated by shared participation in mass culture has also been seen to support the absolute centrality attributed to media texts and their consumption in the construction of the world view of the modern citizen. On this basis, the imagined community concept is used to support the notion that a deconstruction of a media artefact can serve to exhume its overall social meaning and predict its likely persuasive effect upon spectators.

Critiques of the notion of the audience as an imagined community by scholars such as Andrew Higson have pointed out audiences may not be constituted by the subjective homogeneity implied by such arguments (2000). Anderson, however, claimed that print-

capitalism allowed participants in mass culture to imagine social formations as comparable and related. He did not claim that they *necessarily* imagined them all in the same way, or for the same reasons. I have used the term *necessarily* here, because there does appear to be a certain indication of a homogenising effect in Anderson's proposition in the second edition of *Imagined Communities* that 'the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship' and as a 'fraternity' (1991:7). Whilst this is certainly true of the claims made by nationalism as an ideology, the actual existence of such a deep, horizontal subjectivity amongst national citizens has by no means been established within the 'field of struggles' which constitute any national polity. Any accepted 'sameness' of perspective figured on nationality only really emerges when the nation is juxtaposed against an imagined, generic community of outsiders. Without such an external reference the imagined community of the nation is more commonly understood as a community structured by a significant degree of difference, and a range of widely recognised inequalities amongst citizens. As Gopal Balakrishnan has observed:

Imagined nationhood, with its sacral affinities to religion, does not always seem to be deeply rooted in the everyday life of modern society. Under normal conditions, individuals belong to, and identify with, a vast number of overlapping associations, membership in which can be, to some degree, instrumentally evaluated. This means that most of the time the experience of national membership is faint and superficial. Only in struggle does the nation seem to cease to be an informal, contestable and taken-for-granted frame of reference, and become a community which seizes hold of the imagination (Balakrishnan 1996: 210).

In this study I have sought to investigate the media audience not as an allegorical shadow of a national population, but as an imagined community in its own right. In this context, the collectivity founded upon shared participation in spectatorship has been found to be based upon *different* tastes and standpoints. Anderson claims that

communities 'are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (1991:6). On this basis, it would be fair to say that in this study the 'community' in question was imagined not as a deep, horizontal fraternity but instead a community of complex relational differences. This community of differences was seen nonetheless seen by participants as being served collectively by various gratifications obtainable from narrative features, of which nationalism was only one in a range of possible emotive rewards. In describing the audience of which they were part, the imaginings of participants were highly contingent upon their own relative standpoint (or categorical positioning) and their strategic identification (or subjective positioning).

The 'deep, horizontal comradeship' identified by Anderson was only articulated when agents were describing hypothetical others understood to occupy standpoints associated with various categorical markers of otherness. When describing those closest to themselves in terms of categorical positioning, the same agents emphasised the diverse range of personal choices which allowed for markedly different explanations for participation, or non-participation, in the audience for Indian films. I would conclude therefore that the deep, horizontal comradeship of an imagined community is, in the first place, more readily apparent from without than within. Secondly, it is highly contingent upon the relative identification of others. In the specific context of media audiences it must also be added that this is a community which is particularly amenable to Balakrishnan's analysis, since it cannot be reasonably claimed to have a regular level of effect or a prior claim over its members. Members of an audience for any media product must always be understood as likely to also be members of audiences for numerous other cultural products, as well as participants in a wide range of other collective behaviours arising from other forms of social interaction. No necessary

separation can be made between participation in this particular media audience and the participation of each member in a wide range (and not necessarily the same range) of other such communities. This multiple membership does not even occur in any clear structure of temporal or spatial differentiation, since each viewer may be simultaneously engaged in a range of imaginative relations even during this particular instance of viewing, and they are equally capable of imagining themselves as part of an audience for Indian films at times when they are engaged in other activities. Membership of this particular imagined community does not therefore appear to preclude other such imaginaries exerting their influence upon its members, or marked variations in the configurations of relations which constitute this community in the first place.

Although my findings would appear to contest the idea of a ‘deep, horizontal’ social imagination, they have at the same time been powerfully indicative of the imaginative nature of community itself. To address the lack of a ‘deep, horizontal’ sense of commonality amongst members of this audience on the one hand, and support for the idea of a media audience as an imagined community on the other, it is useful to reference Anderson’s less well-known text, ‘Nationalism, Identity and the Logic of Seriality’, which was re-published in the volume entitled *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998). Here Anderson forges a distinction between two intrinsically different forms of ‘serialisation’ which he terms ‘bound’ and ‘unbound’ serialities. His intention is ‘to reframe the problem of the formation of collective subjectivities in the modern world by consideration of the material, institutional, and discursive bases that necessarily generate two profoundly contrasting types of seriality’ (1998:29).

Unbound seriality, which has its origins in the print market, especially in newspapers, and in the representations of popular performance, is exemplified by such open-to-the-world plurals as nationalists, anarchists,

bureaucrats, and workers. It is, for example, the seriality that makes the United Nations a normal, wholly unparadoxical institution. Bound seriality, which has its origins in governmentality, especially in such institutions as the census and elections, is exemplified by finite series like Asian-Americans, *beurs*, and Tutsis. It is the seriality that makes a United Ethnicities or a United Identities unthinkable (Anderson 1998:29).

By making this distinction between the two forms of imagining communities which have arisen with print culture, Anderson is distinguishing between two imaginative sets of relations. First of all, the 'unbound' series, which emerged on the basis of the symbolic comparisons made possible by the spread of common descriptive terms fostered by forms of popular representation. Anderson sees these imaginings as, potentially at least, infinite in their membership, indicating the possibility of an inclusive and expansive social imagination leading to the conception of a universal humanism. In the second definition, that of 'bound' series, Anderson indicates the quantifiable and numerical forms of representation which emerged from the textual institutions of the state, namely statistics. In this case, Anderson sees a dangerous rendering of the social imagination based upon the arbitrary imposition of an essentially false integer-driven and finite rendering of the world likely to result in a conflictual, dialectical politics of mutually inimical difference.

Anderson's distinction between bound and unbound series both parallels and inverts Vertovec's calls for materialist, rather than representational, accounts of the social phenomena of the transnational. Anderson appears to feel that the comparative nature of symbolic representations of the social is more inherently progressive than the numerical model of representation employed by the state (and by social science). In contrast, Vertovec demonstrates a bias towards the 'materialist' which infers that the numerical mode of representation is somehow a better indication of the 'real' than the social

imagination manifested in symbolic representations. This is disingenuous, because, as Anderson has indicated, they are both forms of representation which can only partially and inaccurately describe the world. On the other hand, the flaw in Anderson's critique is the inference that any choice exists between the two. What I think is most significant here is not the relative merits of the two forms of imagination, but the recognition that both forms of imagining the social are primarily textual. What is therefore most relevant to the epistemology of social research is that although the two forms arise upon logics which are seemingly incommensurable, and irreducible to each other, both coding systems are likely to co-exist in any discussion of the social sphere. After all, the census is flawed not simply by its mathematical account of humanity but by the symbolic representations printed next to the various boxes.

How, then, might this theory of seriality inform our understanding of the media audience? First of all, a conception of an audience as an unbound series of 'viewers' allows us to formulate a notion of a collective engaged in a shared social practice which does not require, and may not necessarily be explained through categorical positioning. It allows us to refute the bound logic of asserting the primacy of any normative categorical basis for membership, the Weberian *idealtipe*, or the purely numerical logic of assessing *how many* viewpoints constitute adequate representation. Since the unbound series is not dialectical, it also allows us to accommodate the recognition that any viewer will be part of more than one audience, and also that a viewer (never *the* viewer) exists simultaneously within different frames of social reference without being necessarily plagued with existential angst about the resulting instability of their 'identity'. The conception of a bound series of social imagining, whilst a poor measure of human subjectivity, nonetheless continues to have some significance for

understanding the media audience as a site of cumulative, if not collective, behaviours. It is the numerical imagination that allows us to hypothesise and examine an audience as a social category through the various bound series of box-office statistics, industry output, export/import exchanges, the supply and demand logic of distribution and exhibition and the quantitative structures of state cultural policy. All of these series have demonstrable importance as representations of the social interactions which bring media artefacts to their audiences. In this sense, it is still beneficial to interrogate cinema through its relationship with the numerical imagination. After all, a film continues to be 'popular' not on the basis of how much any one person likes it, or how representative it is, but squarely on the grounds of how many people go and see it. The numerical measures shared by capitalism and all forms of state politics which structure the worldwide trade in images are, if not well understood in their specifics, then at least known to exist by film viewers and they therefore enter into the social imagination and acquire symbolic relational significance of their own.

The notion that imagined communities are articulated in terms of their interaction with these two forms of textual series is important because it moves away from the use of the imagined community to underwrite the primarily internalist analysis of media 'communities' identified by Schlesinger (2000). Both bound and unbound serialities stem from the recognition that the social imagination arises from the relative identification of similarity *and* difference, that it is essentially comparative. By extension, communities are constructed externally as much as internally. In essence, both forms of articulating the social are founded upon the 'spectre of comparisons'. Understood in this way, the imagined community is not predicated as a research tool upon the arbitrary imposition of homogeneity upon a social body in order to describe it

as a cohesive whole. In contrast, the study of any community constructed around media use is *never* a stand-alone project and all reception studies must be understood as inherently comparative projects. They are, obviously enough, constituted by comparisons between those taking part but, crucially, those voices are also implicitly positioned against a spectral world of imagined others.

A Field of Cultural Practices

Rather than simply assuming that media artefacts have a socialising effect and extrapolating from them an allegorical transposition of various ideological renderings of the social condition, I have sought during the course of this study to provide some primary evidence of just how the audience is imagined, and how the imagination of audiences appears to interact with their object of shared interest. In order to do so I proposed the notion of a cultural field as a theoretical and methodological framework. This notion was intended to incorporate my understandings of the transnational as a relational spectrum rather than a set of bilateral exchanges and of the serial nature of the social imagination which permits co-existing but irreducible modes of explanation.

The hypothesis of a cultural field was conceived as a radial zone of influence around a cultural artefact. It was intended to facilitate an enquiry into an imaginative community composed of persons occupying different social categories, and different subjective positions, but who were nonetheless linked by their shared interest in this artefact. From this premise I was able to explore the notion of a media community without relying on an assumption that it would necessarily correlate to an imagined community that was

either homogenous or ‘actually existing’ under other terms of categorisation. In this sense, I have attempted a level of reform, both theoretically and in method. I have not simply asked quantity X members of an ‘Indian’ ethnic community about their personal media habits and then unproblematically collated their responses within an imagination of their ‘community’ which is largely my own. While there is no obvious way of conducting a study centred upon artefacts which are ethnically-defined, in this case *Indian* films, without engaging in a discussion about ethnicity, to assume from the outset that these objects could be matched to any bound ethnic constituency would have severely limited the terms of my enquiry. By employing the notion of a cultural field which had the potential to be inhabited by a wider range of participants, I set the ground for a multi-ethnic participant group and a collaborative discussion of globalised media practices which occupied a much broader conceptual base. It was not the case that the importance of ethnicity in making media choices was entirely disregarded, and indeed, the individuals taking part in my study will inevitably continue to be seen by some to represent, either implicitly or explicitly, their own ethnic type. The form of language, either numerical or symbolic, for discussing cultural practice without reference to ethnicity does not yet seem to exist, and may not even be desirable. Therefore, the importance of ethnicity as one of the most fundamental discourses of social relations was amply demonstrated within the responses obtained by the study. However, on the basis of these findings alone it seems less likely to provide the overarching explanation of culture that Arjun Appadurai has suggested.

As with the majority of academic media research, my interest here was not simply in the details of participants media habits but in the broader nature of the social imagination manifested in discussions about media use. In this sense there is almost always a degree

of deception in the terms under which participants are invited to join such a study. However, I have also attempted a level of reform here by choosing to engage my collaborators on more transparent terms in relation to the sociological component of my enquiry. They were asked not simply about their own personal media use but also about what *they* thought of various purported media audiences. I have subsequently presented in this thesis various examples of their imaginative construction of audiences as social groups in a way which illustrates the actions of their own agency, that is, their social imagination articulated in their own words. This study has therefore been able to demonstrate the strategic positioning employed by participants when describing their own media use as well as the relational imaginings by which they strategically positioned various imagined others. In both cases the imagination was employed creatively by respondents to articulate various position-takings within the field of practices defined by the subject of the enquiry. This approach can be related to the identification by Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies of a situated social imagination, where ‘Creative imagination is crucially involved in the construction of the situated subject and, even more obviously so, the collective subject (2002:328).

The study presented here has sought to ‘provide a basis for a dialogue with people who, although from other social positionings, share similar practices’ (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies 2002:318). It has not sought to extricate the subjectivities of agents from the social conditions which they inhabit, it is not therefore ‘de-materialized’. Nonetheless, this study has consistently found that the articulation of the social by participants was never directly reducible to their categorical positioning. In contrast, it has generally provided support for Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies’ proposition that ‘the positionings of social individuals or groups are multifaceted, intersectional, shifting and contradictory’

(2002:325). I, too, have found that ‘Subjectivity in this sense is ambivalent, unstable and shifting and is not ‘identical’ (in the strong sense of the word ‘identity’, suggesting being stable and constant – the ‘same’)’ (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies 2002:325-326). The idea of a field of cultural practices has allowed this study to meet the challenge of remaining situated in lived social relations without relying on the spurious stability of identarian logics. The boundaries of my enquiry have not therefore been set by a bound series; it has instead encompassed ‘only those dimensions of the specific situatedness that are considered/imagined to be the most relevant to it and to the politics involved ‘ (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies 2002:328). The consistent emphasis placed on individual agency may be troubling for some, particularly since I have suggested that one of the foundational purposes of the cultural field model was to free participants of the burden of being re-cast as representative subjects. It is not, however, a utopian proposition, since whilst the idea of a situated social agent is remarkable for the potential for social transformation which it seems to suggest, it is equally clear that the ‘imagination that allows for emancipation and border crossing is the same faculty that constructs and fixes the borders’ in the first place (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davies 2002:324).

During this study, I have used a range of methods to describe the cultural field with which I have been concerned, all of which can be seen to be implicated in both bound and unbound configurations of my own social imagination. Therefore, if this thesis proves to be ‘representative’, it is most likely to represent the researcher who conceived it, carried it out and collated the findings. Nonetheless, this is also an indicative study founded on collaboration which is intended to demonstrate the complex relations which constituted this particular piece of social terrain during the period of research.

The global dispersal of Indian films and the complex transnational flows which make up the Australian media environment are both fascinating topics and I hope that this thesis will come to be seen as making a useful contribution to the literature in both of these areas. At the same time, the theoretical and methodological dimensions of this study have been intended to make a wider contribution towards the evolution of media studies as social research and to offer some potential for further use in relation to the study of other research topics. There is clearly scope for the further extension, discussion and revision of the ideas which have been canvassed here. It is in the situated social imagination of the reader where the next stage of this work may be most productively done.

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Ab Tak Chappan

Dir. Shimit Amin (2004) India (Hindi) K. Sera Sera.

A Dog's Day (AKA Pattiyude Divasam)

Dir. Murali Nair (2001) India (Malayalam) Flying Elephant Films Ltd.

AKS

Dir. Rakesh Omprakash Mehra (2001) India (Hindi) AB Corp Ltd./Flicks Motion Pictures Co. Pvt. Ltd.

Alam Ara

Dir. Ardeshir Irani (1931) India (Hindi/Urdu) Imperial Movietone.

Amaar Bhuwan

Dir. Mrinal Sen (2002) India (Bengali) PDG Productions.

A Man's Gotta Do

Dir. Chris Kennedy (2004) Australia (English) Movie Network/Film Finance Corporation/NSW Film and Television Office.

Aparajito

Dir. Satyajit Ray (1956) India (Bengali) Epic Films.

Apu Sansur

Dir. Satyajit Ray (1959) India (Bengali) Satyajit Ray Productions.

Asoka

Dir. Santosh Shivan (2001) India (Hindi and Tamil versions) Arclightz and Films Pvt./Dreamz Unlimited.

Armaan

Dir. Honey Irani (2003) India (Hindi) Arti Enterprises.

Baazigar

Dir. Abbas Alibhai Burmawalla and Mastan Alibhai Burmawalla (1993) India (Hindi) United Seven.

Bend it like Beckham

Dir. Gurinder Chadha (2002) UK/Germany (English/Punjabi) Bend It Films.

Bhaji On The Beach

Dir. Gurinder Chadha (1993) UK (English/Punjabi) Channel Four Films/Umbi Films.

Bhuvan Shome

Dir. Mrinal Sen (1969) India (Bengali) Mrinal Sen Productions.

Blurred

Dir. Evan Clarry (2002) Australia (English) AFC/Becker Entertainment/Claymoss Productions Ltd. et. al.

Bombay Boys

Dir. Kaizad Gustad (1998) India (English) Kismet Talkies.

Boom

Dir. Kaizad Gustad (2003) India (English/Hindi) Quest Films.

Bootmen

Dir. Dein Parry (2000) Australia/USA (English) Bootmen Productions/Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Border

Dir. J.P. Dutta (1997) India (Hindi/Punjabi/Rajasthani/English) J.P. Films.

Bride and Prejudice

Dir. Gurinder Chadha (2004) UK/USA (English and Hindi Versions) Bride Pictures/Kintop Pictures/Pathe Pictures/UK Film Council.

Centrestage

Dir. Nicholas Hytner (2000) USA (English) Columbia Pictures Corporation/Laurence Mark Productions.

Chalte Chalte

Dir. Aziz Mirza (2003) India (Hindi) Dreamz Unlimited/United Motion Pictures.

Chameli

Dir. Sudir Mishra (2004) India (Hindi) Pritish Nandy Communications.

Chokher Bali

Dir. Rituparno Ghosh (2003) India (Bengali/Hindi) Shree Venkatesh Films.

Coyote Ugly

Dir. David McNally (2000) USA (English) Jerry Bruckheimer Films/Touchstone Pictures.

Crocodile Dundee

Dir. Peter Faiman (1986) Australia (English) Rimfire Films/Paramount Pictures.

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (AKA Wo Hu Cang Long)

Dir. Ang Lee (2000) Hong Kong/China/Taiwan/USA (Mandarin) Asia Union Film and Entertainment Ltd./China Film Co-Production Corporation/Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia et. al.

Dances with Wolves

Dir. Kevin Costner (1990) USA (English/Sioux/Pawnee) Tig Productions/Majestic Films International.

Death in Brunswick

Dir. John Ruane (1991) Australia (English) FFC/Film Victoria/Meridian Films/Overseas FilmGroup.

3 Deewarein

Dir. Nagesh Kukunoor (2003) India (Hindi) Metalight Productions.

Devdas

Dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2002) India (Hindi) Bharat Shah.

Dil Chahta Hai

Dir. Farhan Akhtar (2001) India (Hindi/Urdu) Excel Entertainment.

Dil Se

Dir. Mani Ratnam (1998) India (Hindi, Telugu and Tamil versions) India Talkies/Madras Talkies.

Dil To Pagalhai

Dir. Yash Chopra (1997) India (Hindi) Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge

Dir. Aditya Chopra (1995) India (Hindi/English) Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Earth

Dir. Deepa Mehta (Hindi/Urdu/Parsee/Punjabi/English) Cracking the Earth Films Inc.

Ek Hasina Thi

Dir. Sriram Raghavan (2003) K Sera Sera/S.R.B. Films/Varma Corporation Ltd.

Fire

Dir. Deepa Mehta (1996) Kaleidoscope India (Pvt.) Ltd./Trial By Fire Films.

Fiza

Dir. Khalid Mohamed (2000) India (Hindi/Urdu) Culture Company/UTV.

Floating Life

Dir. Clara Law (1996) Australia (Cantonese/English) Southern Star Entertainment Pty.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Dir. Chris Columbus (2001) USA (English) 1492 Pictures/Heyday Films/Warner Bros.

The Hero

Dir. Anil Sharma (2003) India (Hindi) Time Movies.

Head On

Dir. Ana Kokkinos (1998) Australia (English/Greek) Great Scott Productions Pty. Ltd.

Bollywood/Hollywood

Dir. Deepa Mehta (2002) Canada (English/Hindi/Spanish) Bollywood/Hollywood Productions/Different Tree Same Wood/Fortissimo films/iDream Productions.

Hum Tum

Dir. Kunal Kohli (2004) India (Hindi/English) Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Indira

Dir. Suhasini (1996) India (Tamil) G.V. Films Ltd.

Jamila (AKA Nadhi Karaiyinilae)

Dir. Ponvannan (2001) India (Tamil) V. Sundar.

Kal Ho Naa Ho

Dir. Nikhil Advani (2003) India (Hindi/English/Gujarati/Punjabi) Dharma Productions.

Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham

Dir. Karan Johar (2001) India/UK (Hindi/English) Dharma Productions.

Khakee

Dir. Rajkumar Santoshi (2004) India/Pakistan (Hindi/Urdu) D.M.S Films.

Kuch Kuch Hota Hai

Dir. Karan Johar (1998) India (Hindi/English) Dharma Productions.

Kuch Naa Kaho

Dir. Rohan Sippy (2003) India (Hindi) R.S Entertainment Pvt. Ltd.

Lagaan: Once Upon A Time in India

Dir. Ashutosh Gowariker (2001) India (Hindi/English/Bhojpuri) Aamir Khan Productions Ltd.

Laysa Laysa

Dir. Priyadarshan (2002) India (Tamil) Vikram Singh Productions.

Main Hoon Na

Dir. Farah Khan (2004) India (Hindi) Red Chillies Entertainment/Venus Films.

Main Madhuri Dixit Banna Chahti Hoon

Dir. Chandan Arora (2003) India (Hindi) Verma Corporation/Entertainment One.

Main Prem Ki Diwani Hoon

Dir. Sooraj Barjataya (2003) India (Hindi) Rajshri Productions (P) Ltd.

Mando Meyer Upakhyam

Dir. Buddadev Dasgupta (2002) India (Bengali) Arjoe entertainment (India) Pvt. Ltd.

Meenaxi: Tale of 3 Cities

Dir. M.F Hussain (2003) India (Hindi/Urdu) Culture of the Street Films.

Mirch Masala

Dir. Ketan Mehta (1985) UK/India (Hindi) Channel four Films/NFDC.

Mohabbatein

Dir. Aditya Chopra (2000) India (Hindi) Yash Raj films Pvt. Ltd.

Monsoon Wedding

Dir. Mira Nair (2001) India/USA/France/Italy/Germany (Hindi/Punjabi/English/Urdu)
IFC Productions/Mirabai Films/Key Films/Pandora Films/Paradis Films.

Moulin Rouge

Dir. Baz Luhrmann (2001) Australia/USA (English/French/Spanish) Bazmark Films.

Mr. India

Dir. Shekhar Kapur (1987) India (Hindi) Narsimha Enterprises.

Mr and Mrs Iyer

Dir. Aparna Sen (2002) India (English/Tamil/Bengali/Punjabi/Hindi/Urdu) Triplecorn Media.

Munna Bhai MBBS

Dir. Rajkumar Hirani (2003) India (Hindi) Vinod Chopra Productions.

My Fathers Daughter

Dir. Parul Bhatia (2002) USA (Hindi) 4 Visions Inc.

My Mother Frank

Dir. Mark Lamprell (2000) Australia (English) Beyond Films/Intrepid Films.

My Mother India

Dir. Safina Uberoi (2001) Australia (English) Chilli films Pty. Ltd./SBS Independent.

Nayakan

Dir. Mani Rathnam (1987) India (Tamil) Sujatha Films/Mukta Films.

Naseem

Dir. Saeed Akhtar Mirza (1995) India (Hindi) Doordarshan/NFDC.

Ocean's Eleven

Dir. Steven Soderburgh (2001) USA (English/Italian/Japanese) Jerry Weintraub Productions/NPV Entertainment/Section Eight Ltd./Village Roadshow Pictures/WV Films II LLC.

Pather Panchali

Dir. Satyajit Ray (1955) India (Bengali) Government of West Bengal.

Pundalik

Dir. N.G. Chitre and P.R. Tipnis (1912) India (Silent).

Raja Harishchandra

Dir. D.G. Phalke (1913/1917) India (Silent) Phalke Films.

Rabbit Proof Fence

Dir. Phillip Noyce (2002) Australia (English) AFC/FFC/HanWay/Olsen Levy/Rumbalara Films/Showtime Australia.

Roja

Dir. Mani Rathnam (1992) India (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Hindi versions) Hansa Pictures (P) Ltd./Kavitthalayaa Productions.

Signs

Dir. M Night Shyamalan (2002) USA (English/Portugese) Blinding Edge Pictures/The Kennedy/Marshall Company/Touchstone Pictures.

The Sixth Sense

Dir. M Night Shyamalan (1999) USA (English/Spanish) Hollywood Pictures/Spyglass entertainment/The Kennedy/Marshall Company.

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

Dir. George Lucas (2005) USA (English) Lucasfilm Ltd.

Saathiya

Dir. Shaad Ali (2002) India (Hindi) Kaleidoscope Entertainment Pvt. Ltd./Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Salaam Namaste

Dir. Siddharth Anand (2005) India (Hindi) Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Shine

Dir. Scott Hicks (1996) Australia (English) FFC/Film Victoria/Momentum Films.

Sholay

Dir. Ramesh Sippy (1975) India (Hindi) Sippy Films Pvt. Ltd.

Silsila

Dir. Yash Chopra (1981) India (Hindi) Yash Raj Films Pvt. Ltd.

Strictly Ballroom

Dir. Baz Luhrmann (1992) Australia (English) M & A/FFC/Beyond Films/Rank Organisation Films Productions.

Supari

Dir. Padam Kumar (2003) India (Hindi) World Wide Entertainment.

Tiladaanam

Dir. Sastry K.N.T (2001) India (Telugu) NFDC.

The Castle

Dir. Rob Sitch (1997) Australia (English) Working Dog.

The Godfather

Dir. Francis Ford Coppola (1972) USA (English/Italian) Paramount Pictures.

The Guru

Dir. Daisy Von Scherler Mayer (2002) UK/France/USA (English) Studio Canal/Working Title Films.

The Matrix Reloaded

Dir. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (2003) USA (English/French) Warner Bros./Village Roadshow/Silver Pictures/NPV Entertainment.

The Warrior

Dir. Asif Kapadia (2001) UK/France (Hindi) The Bureau/British Screen Productions/Filmfour/Senator Film Produktion GmbH/Les Productions Lazenec.

The Wog Boy

Dir. Aleksis Vellis (2000) Australia (English) Film Victoria/G.O Films Pty. Ltd./Third Costa.

Uski Roti

Dir. Mani Kaul (1969) India (Hindi) FFC.

You and Your Stupid Mate

Dir. Marc Gracie (2005) Australia (English) Modayitis Productions/FFC/Film Victoria/Macquarie Film Corporation.