No Longer a Frivolous Singing and Dancing Nation of Movie-Makers: The Hindi Film Industry and Its Quest for Global Distinction

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This article discusses the unexpected trajectories of media production under the conditions of neoliberalism in India. Focusing on the Hindi-language film industry (better known as ''Bollywood''), the article describes how the rise of neoliberal economic ideals in state policy has produced conditions within the film industry that make it possible for concerns about prestige, symbolic capital, and global distinction to take precedence over ideologies of comparative advantage and branding that are more commonly associated with neoliberalism. It illustrates how Hindi filmmakers regard their cinema's cultural distinctiveness as alienating and limiting rather than as an asset within the larger global cultural economy. The article argues that the contemporary moment of Hindi filmmaking is marked by efforts to erase, rather than highlight, the signs of cultural difference in order to circulate and accrue distinction globally. However, the article relates the challenges faced by Hindi filmmakers in trying to fashion a ''global'' and culturally unmarked cinema.

THE LIP-SYNCHED SONG

In the summer of 2010 I came across a Facebook page entitled, ''Bring Back the Lip-Synched Song—Save Our Heritage,'' which served as a forum for fans and aficionados of the music created by the Hindi film industry—commonly known by the moniker ''Bollywood''—to communicate their passion for this music, mostly by way of posting links to video clips of Hindi film songs available on YouTube. Created by a Mumbai-based journalist and writer, the page offers the following description:

The lip-synched song is unique to Indian cinema—and the main reason why songs and even films live on besides their intrinsic qualities. Thanks to a combination of shortsighted music companies, a warped ''global'' dream and inferiority complex (the world loves our songs and dances) and incompetent filmmakers, we are watching the lip-synched song get restricted to very few in a year.

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After quoting some laments by a film lyricist and a couple of trade journalists the page lists a number of actors who have been associated with some of the most popular songs of Hindi cinema. The description ends with a metaphorical call to arms, "Imagine Hindi films without them . . . Rise and Save—the lip-sync song."[1]

What might have provoked this militant nostalgia? Since 2008 diegetic song sequences, those moments when characters burst into song (and often dance) within a film's narrative, have been drastically reduced or nearly disappeared from prominent Hindi films, in particular those featuring top stars and produced by the leading production companies.[2] Music continues to have an important presence in Hindi cinema—the biggest box-office successes of the last decade have all featured diegetic music—but the increasing use of non-lip-synch songs at the expense of lip-synch sequences and the change in attitudes regarding the narrative and commercial necessity of such sequences represent a sharp break from the norms and conventions of mainstream filmmaking practice.

Ironically, while the significance of diegetic song-and-dance sequences appears to be on the wane in Hindi cinema, scholarly interest in them is growing, after years of disdain, disinterest or neglect [Adamu 2008; Booth 2008a, 2008b; Gopal and Moorti 2008; Sarazzin 2008]. These sequences—often elaborately choreographed and lavishly produced, and with their own particular division of artistic labor whereby the songs are actually rendered by off-screen "playback singers" rather than the onscreen actors—are characterized in academic, media and audience discourses as the quintessential feature of popular Hindi cinema, and an index of its distinctiveness in the global media landscape.[3] Many scholars attribute the broad appeal of Hindi cinema to these sequences which, they argue, enable the global circulation of Bollywood films to a vast array of non-South Asian audiences in locations as diverse as Greece, Indonesia, the former Soviet Union, Nigeria and China [Abadzi 1998; David 2008; Gopal and Moorti 2008; Larkin 2004; Manuel 1988]. Paradoxically Hindi filmmakers regard songs as the main obstacle to global circulation: in an attempt to make their films more appealing internationally, many have excised the songs from their films when screening them at international film festivals or distributing them in non-traditional markets.[4]

In this article I explain why Hindi filmmakers hold these beliefs about film music and examine the changes that have occurred within the media world [Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002] of Hindi film production, which have led to the conditions lamented by the author of the Facebook page mentioned above. The case of Hindi filmmakers and their ambivalence about film music sheds light on the complexities and ironies of the global circulation of cultural commodities such as film. Rather than providing a textual analysis elaborating the narrative or aesthetic functions of film music, my focus here is on the social and economic significance of music within the Hindi film industry, specifically industry discourses and filmmakers' attitudes regarding the necessity of lip-synch song sequences. Over the course of 15 years of research on the social world and production practices of the Hindi film industry, I have observed that, rather than being a taken-for-granted or unquestioned feature of Hindi cinema, the production of lip-synch song sequences becomes a site of tension, debate and intense negotiation among workers in the Hindi film industry. Through examining Hindi

filmmakers' attitudes and practices regarding lip-synch song sequences, this article reveals how the production of commercially driven, box-office-oriented cinema is not only concerned with profit but is also critically shaped by concerns about prestige, symbolic capital and global distinction.

Though the histories of the global circulation of Hindi cinema in a variety of national sites challenge and counter filmmakers' assertions about the alienating nature of song sequences [Abadzi 1998; Iordanova *et al.* 2006; Larkin 2008; Rajagopalan 2008], filmmakers' perceptions of their markets shape their practice more directly than such histories of circulation. In my interactions with filmmakers I discovered that they regarded lip-synch song sequences as the ultimate index of popular Indian cinema's alterity and cultural unintelligibility: the reason for its inability to ''cross-over'' to Euro-American audiences. I discuss these attitudes and examine how song sequences are implicated in filmmakers' attempts to garner symbolic capital and global distinction. While recent scholars have maintained that cultural objectification and ethnic commodification are the hallmarks of capitalist cultural production in a global neoliberal economic order [Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Davila 2001; Harvey 1992; Mazzarella 2003b], I argue that the contemporary moment of Hindi filmmaking is marked by efforts to erase, rather than highlight, the signs of cultural difference in order to circulate and accrue distinction globally. Hindi filmmakers regard their cinema's cultural distinctiveness, signified by lip-synch song sequences, as alienating and limiting rather than as an ''arena for profit-making'' [Harvey 1992] within the larger global cultural economy. However, as ''forms of cultural objectification that circulate and create cultural and national identity'' [Larkin 2008: 209], popular films are densely entangled in questions of culture and difference. Though some Hindi filmmakers are attempting to create films that, from their perspective, are culturally unmarked, the critical reception of such attempts reveals how difficult it is to erase the ''culture'' from a cultural commodity. How does one produce distinction and value in an unmarked and generic way in the field of cultural production?

While there are parallels with William Mazzarella's discussion of the Bombay advertising world's negotiations around the categories of ''Indianness'' and ''globality'' [2003a], some key differences exist between producing advertisements for consumer goods and entertainment cinema. First, in contrast to the electronics brand that Mazzarella analyzes, the ''Indianness'' of a Hindi film is not a liability but an asset *within* India. Secondly, Hindi filmmakers' desires to seek new untapped markets do not arise out of any dire economic necessity, as the domestic and diasporic markets provide the bulk of the industry's revenues. Finally, unlike the Indian advertisers in Mazzarella's ethnography who were trying to re-signify their brand's ''Indianness'' for a domestic market, Hindi filmmakers attempt to re-signify or even evacuate their films' Indianness for a global market. That Hindi filmmakers are perhaps doing away with the very characteristic that distinguishes their cinema in the global media landscape is, I contend, an unexpected consequence of media production under the conditions of neoliberalism. Paradoxically the rise of neoliberal economic ideals in India has produced conditions within the Hindi film industry that make it possible for concerns about prestige, symbolic capital and global distinction to take precedence over

ideologies of comparative advantage and branding that are more commonly associated with neoliberalism.

This article is divided into four main sections. First, in order to provide the broader context of film production, I highlight some of the key changes in the political economy of Hindi filmmaking precipitated by the advent of neoliberal reforms in India. Then I describe how film music took on an increased economic and aesthetic role within the Hindi film industry after the introduction of satellite television in 1992; a situation that filmmakers frequently perceived as constraining, but which was also credited with warding off competition from the increased presence of Hollywood films in India. Third, I discuss how this very protection from Hollywood was understood by Hindi filmmakers as an impediment to their own abilities to circulate successfully among non-South Asian audiences. Finally, I detail the ironies and challenges faced by Hindi filmmakers when they consciously aim for ''global'' appeal.

THE CHANGING POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE HINDI FILM INDUSTRY

After the neoliberal restructuring of the Indian state and economy in 1991 under IMF-mandated structural adjustment—more commonly referred to as ''liberalization'' in India—the media landscape in India changed dramatically, with the entry of satellite television in 1992 and an increased presence of Hollywood films in their dubbed or original English versions. These new modes of electronically mediated entertainment posed new challenges for the Hindi film industry and critically reshaped its filmmaking practices to deal with the competition for audiences posed by television and Hollywood. Then in 2000 the Indian state recognized filmmaking as an ''approved activity under 'industrial concerns','' according to the Industrial Development Bank of India Act of 1964, marking what I would argue is a ''taxonomic shift'' [Clifford 1988]: from a Nehruvian developmentalist paradigm in which film was solely valued for its pedagogical and communicative potential, to the contemporary neoliberal conjuncture where the existence of prolific filmmaking traditions is regarded as examples of native ingenuity and a source of economic growth.[5] Prior to this recognition, state policies, especially taxation, treated commercial filmmaking as an activity akin to vices like gambling or horse-racing, rather than as a viable, legitimate economic activity to be nurtured and supported [Ganti 2000, 2012].

Official designation as an industry precipitated dramatic changes in the political economy of the Hindi film industry beginning in 2002 and continuing to the present. It paved the way for a greater variety of financing for filmmaking, including loans from banks and other financial institutions, which before this announcement had chosen not to get involved in filmmaking due to its high-risk nature. It also initiated a number of structural changes commonly referred to as ''corporatization,'' ranging from the establishment of new production–distribution companies by high-profile Indian corporations and conglomerates to the transformation of existing production, distribution or exhibition companies into public limited companies listed and traded on the Indian stock market. These new regimes of finance and organization within the film industry have transformed

it from being a very under-capitalized enterprise to one where raising capital is no longer regarded as a significant challenge.

Therefore Hindi filmmakers' desires to be "global" arise not out of economic necessity but for symbolic value. The most apparent case in point is Reliance Big Pictures, one of the most prominent and the only vertically-integrated film company in the industry, which has been infusing large amounts of capital into Hollywood producers; the most notable being an $825 million deal in August 2009 with Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks Studios [Jamkhandikar 2009]. Thus the example of a large-scale media industry like Bollywood complicates the standard narratives offered about the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on media industries outside the U.S. context, which usually equate these processes with the ascendancy of U.S.-based or -identified media corporations to the disadvantage of national media institutions. In the case of the Hindi film industry these processes have made it an increasingly powerful media institution within and outside India.

Industry status also set the tone for state governments to rethink their policies toward filmmaking; many of them offer tax breaks for films shot in the state, while others have enabled the current boom in multiplex theater construction all across India by offering tax holidays to exhibitors and real-estate developers. Like satellite television in the 1990s, the emergence of the multiplex theater in the mid-2000s has had a significant impact on the film industry, by restructuring the relationships between exhibitors, distributors and producers, revising filmmakers' audience imaginaries,[6] and reshaping filmmaking practices. With much smaller seating capacities and much higher ticket prices than traditional single-screen theaters, multiplexes have been credited with making cinematic risk-taking commercially viable [Athique and Hill 2010; Ganti 2012].

Hindi films after the coming of satellite television (1994–2004), which were often elaborate cultural spectacles populated by wealthy extended families and filled with lavish song-and-dance sequences, exhibited the characteristics of cultural objectification and ethnic commodification that scholars pinpoint as hallmarks of capitalist cultural production in a global neoliberal economic order [Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Davila 2001; Harvey 1992; Mazzarella 2003b]. The widespread circulation of Hindi films from this period established "Bollywood" as a globally recognized brand that indexed a particular style of filmmaking— songs, spectacle, stars, melodrama and broad audience appeal—from India. During my early fieldwork within the industry between 1996 and 2001, filmmakers consistently emphasized the absolute cultural and commercial indispensability of lip-synch song sequences for popular cinema. As their presence signaled a filmmaker's intention to aim for wide audiences, lip-synch songs were cited as the single most important element in denoting an Indian film as "commercial" or aiming for greatest box-office appeal. Songs also served as one of the most concrete signifiers of the "Indianness" of Indian cinema, apparent from their key role in the Hindi film industry's practice of remaking Hollywood films, referred to as "Indianization" [Ganti 2002].

However, Hindi films since the advent of multiplexes have been challenging the norms and conventions of filmmaking that were established in the prior period, most noticeably in their use of music. As mentioned in the opening of this

article, the number of lip-synch song sequences has reduced in contemporary Hindi films, a fact lamented by the author of the Facebook page. While music continues to play an important economic role within the film industry as a way to market and promote films, lip-synch songs are not regarded as mandatory for commercial success, for a number of films without such sequences have become box-office hits.[7] In order to ascertain this change in attitude about the necessity of lip-synch songs, it is important to understand the commercial significance of songs in mainstream filmmaking and how filmmakers characterized that significance.

SONG SEQUENCES AS TRADITION AND COMMERCIAL COMPULSION

During fieldwork I asked one of my key informants, Tarun Kumar, a young and successful director, what his feelings were about songs in films. His immediate response was almost an academic explanation about the cultural antecedents of Indian cinema and cinema's similarity with other performance traditions. He stated: ''Cinema in India has to be viewed differently because we belong to the *nautanki* art form and that has been the tradition of entertainment, so the natural occurrence of songs in our movies is but an extension of that art form.[8] Whether you see a street play or you see the *Ramlila* they are all incomplete without songs, so they are to be viewed in that respect'' [ICQ chat 1999]. When I reminded Kumar that I had observed him during scripting sessions being periodically frustrated with songs, he replied: ''Of course one would love to make a movie without songs but the only really hampering factor is the economic and marketing aspect of songs. I am all for movies without songs unless you are making a musical[9] because not only is it frustrating to conjure up situations but I feel songs also to an extent change the characters in a movie and sometimes also retard the narrative'' [ICQ chat 1999].

Kumar's attitudes are not singular: such ambivalence about the presence of songs in cinema has a very long history, going back to the beginning of the talkie era in India. Two strands of discourse regarding film music that persist till today were initiated by the release of the first sound film in 1931, which featured seven song sequences. First, the proliferation of songs in films was criticized as an obstacle to good cinema, for which audiences were blamed. An editorial in the 1935 Annual Issue of the *Moving Picture Monthly* complained, ''In the early days of the talkies the outlook was a bit bright. Everybody expected that intelligent pictures would soon come into their own. But the success of *Shirin Farhad* caused not a little tremor. Audiences wanted songs and songs. Songs used to take up nearly half the length of the picture'' [quoted in Bandyopadhyay 1993: 21]. Secondly, Indian cinema was represented as distinct from Western films because of the presence of music. For example, N. R. Desai, a distributor in the 1930s, remarked, ''With the coming of the talkies, the Indian motion picture came into its own as a definite and distinctive piece of creation. This was achieved by music . . . it gives us musical entertainment which even the best of Hollywood pictures cannot'' [quoted in Garga 1996: 80]. Historians of Indian cinema [Garga 1996; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999] trace the distinctive form of popular

cinema to theatrical traditions such as classical Sanskrit drama, various forms of folk theater, and a 19th-century performance genre known as Parsi theater. All of these traditions tightly integrated music, song and dance, with each element being essential to the entire performance.

During my fieldwork the recourse to tradition, assertion of cultural particularity, and laying of blame upon audiences were all present in Hindi filmmakers' discussions about film music. The director John Matthew Mathan explained that, after he made his first film, *Sarfarosh* [1999], which he would have preferred to have made without songs, he decided to travel throughout India for six months and observe how audiences were reacting to his film. He said:

I was watching the audience response in various rural areas of India and I discovered that certain areas of India, they will not accept a film without songs, like Rajasthan, no film has ever been a hit without songs. Similarly, Gujarat. Similarly in the South because in the South they don't understand Hindi. What lures them into Hindi cinema are the songs, so you [have] got to have brilliant songs well picturized. So are you going to lose this market, whether you are going to see it as an audience or as a market? If you are making a mainstream Hindi film, you want these people to come in and see the film and so you [have] got to put songs in. [J. M. Mathan, interview, October 27, 2000]

In addition to what Mathan implied were the cultural proclivities of audiences for songs, he also pointed to the important promotional role played by film songs. Characterizing it as the ''dictates of a system,'' Mathan's (as well as Tarun Kumar's) frustration was directed at the overwhelming role of music in the financing and marketing of popular Hindi films. In the early 1990s, when new entrants into audio production challenged the music company HMV's[10] monopoly, film music began to play an increasingly important economic function within the Bombay film industry. The sale of music rights had become another source of finance for filmmaking, as audio companies vying for the top production companies in the industry were willing to pay sums that amounted to as much as 25 percent of a film's budget. Albums from successful Hindi films sold in the millions, and a new high was achieved in 1995 when the music from the year's biggest hit, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, sold 100 million units [Chaya 1996: 39].[11] Flush with success in the marketing and sales of film music these companies also entered the realm of film production, where they poured resources into the song sequences.

Songs had also become the most significant form of a film's publicity, as Indian television was packed with film-based programming, mostly around film music, since the onset of cable and satellite television in 1992. Songs were recorded before a film commenced shooting, and a few of the song sequences were shot early on in the production phase, so that they could be used to sell a film to distributors as well as be broadcast on television. Even before a film had completed production, sometimes months in advance, its song sequences had started airing on the numerous film-based programs on television, or appeared as commercials in between other programs. Since songs were perceived as the main way of enticing audiences into theaters, producers spent inordinate amounts of money on the visualization of songs—between 30 and 50 percent of their total budgets. Many films regardless of their theme and plot had what was referred to as an ''item

number''—songs with lavish sets, spectacular costumes, hundreds of extras and dancers, and special effects, costing millions of rupees. An article in the English-language news magazine, *India Today*, explained that film scripts were increasingly demanding a ''mega song,'' and that ''song sequences today are autonomous entertainment attractions crafted with money, sweat and care. With the financial stakes being higher, producers, directors, and choreographers labour to create that one hit number, to make the box office jingle'' [Chopra 1997: 80].

However, many screenwriters and directors I met during fieldwork between 1996 and 2000 viewed having to create song situations—the points in a screenplay where a song appears appropriate and/or necessary—as burdensome. Most writers acknowledged that songs were not necessary to every film and could appear awkward in genres other than love stories or family dramas, but pointed to the economic significance of music within the industry. The screenwriter Sutanu Gupta resigned himself to their presence, citing the pressure of music companies: ''My kind of film, the kind of stories that I write, the song situations are difficult to find. I guess the songs have to be there and there have to be enough gaps between the songs, at least five or six songs are required, because the music companies want 40 minutes recorded tape, that is the contract'' [S. Gupta, interview, November 2 and 18, 1996].

As music was absolutely essential to the marketing and financing of popular Hindi films, on certain occasions financiers or distributors pressured filmmakers to include songs. One such example was the 1998 film that for the sake of confidentiality I have renamed *Darwaaza* (Door), which was originally planned as an entirely song-less film.[12] That film's screenwriter, Atul Rai, communicated with me at great length via e-mail about how songs got added to the film. Both the director, Jai Sinha, and Rai agreed that there was no place for songs because they wanted the film to be ''gritty and dry, dramatic, and intense.'' Soon after, Rai described how ''market anxiety'' took over as Sinha was assailed by the film's financier, distributors and music companies about the folly of his ways: '''In India these things don't work, Sir!' 'Jai-ji, music is a territory in itself; it will increase your recovery of money' blah, and more friggin' blah. So, Jai decides to include songs. We fight and fight; he agrees with everything I say, but the 'market' can become a bogeyman. So we incorporate songs into the script.'' As Rai and Sinha continued to work on the script they gained confidence with feedback from others about the strength of the screenplay and decided to revert to their original intentions. ''Jai says, to hell with the songs; in any case we had conceived of the film without music and we have a point to prove anyway. So, out goes the music,'' wrote Rai.

However, by the time the film was completed it had gone significantly over budget, and Rai described how songs ended up in the film as a form of insurance against box-office failure,

Panic buttons again. How do we recover the money? Suppose no one comes to see the film? Or if not enough people come? Distributors are getting shaky; smug smiles convey we-told-you-sos. Now the financier steps in with a firm stride. Put the music back in. The director's position has been weakened by his lack of control over the budget, so he has to compromise. We need one song at least to promote the film through TV and cassettes. So,

—— is conceived, written in, recorded, choreographed, a starlet contracted, and shot. And, it serves its purpose! It hits the top of the charts, makes for great TV promos, the film gets identified by the song and the music cassettes bring in some money, and everyone concerned is less depressed. [Personal communication, February 1, 2000]

Darwaaza was not a singular case. Rumors and stories circulated periodically within the industry about distributors and financiers pressuring filmmakers to add songs to films to increase prospects at the box-office. Not having songs signi-fied the film as being outside the mainstream of the Hindi film industry, possibly even being labeled an ''art film,'' which to most people in the industry meant death at the box-office. To anyone working within the dominant system of finan-cing, distribution and exhibition, songs were an indispensable element in films. To complicate matters further, Hindi filmmakers' penchant for shooting songs in foreign locations, especially in Europe, North America or Australia, led to new and unexpected value for these sequences in the eyes of some foreign govern-ments, resulting in financial incentives that in turn reinforced the presence of songs.[13] The overwhelming commercial significance of music however could be frustrating, according to Tarun Kumar, who complained, ''You see it should be a choice for the director to use songs or not, it is the compulsion that really wears us down'' [personal communication, May 4, 1999].

While filmmakers voiced their frustration with songs as a matter of artistic free-dom, representing songs as a commercial compulsion is ultimately a discussion about audiences. For decades the bulk of the Hindi film-viewing audience was understood to be and referred to as the ''masses''—the most common label for poor and working-class audiences—whose poverty and illiteracy were portrayed by filmmakers as significant constraints upon their filmmaking practice.[14] From the film industry's point of view songs were necessary for the success of a Hindi film because of the masses' need and demand for entertainment, which was understood mainly as an escape—most visibly manifest in song sequences—from the harsh realities of their daily life. The fact that music was explained in terms of pre-cinematic performance genres reveals how song sequences also operated as a site of tradition for filmmakers. Audiences, i.e., the masses, were represented by filmmakers as stubbornly clinging to the vestiges of the past, as demonstrated by their penchant for songs. Therefore from the filmmakers' point-of-view audi-ence taste and expectations were what ultimately constrained them.

This very constraint could also serve as a resource, especially since the song sequence was regarded as a form of protection against Hollywood's incursion into the domestic market through its films dubbed in various Indian languages. Exhibitors and others in the film trade asserted that songs gave Hindi films a com-petitive edge over Hollywood films. In an article about Hollywood's presence in India in the English-language film magazine *Filmfare,* the publicity manager of 20th Century Fox in India stated: ''Though 20th Century Fox is linked with the STAR network [satellite channels owned by Rupert Murdoch], Hindi films still have an advantage. They have songs to draw the audience. We don't!'' [Kumar 1995: 170]. In the same article the joint manager of two movie theaters in Bombay, one devoted to foreign films and the other to Hindi, explained his significantly lower box-office collections at the former theater: ''It's just that Hindi films have

songs, dances. . . emotions. Indians want everything and they get the works only in Indian cinema'' [Kumar 1995: 170]. However, this very ability to appeal to Indians (through songs) that protected the Hindi film industry from losing audiences to Hollywood was also construed by filmmakers as an obstacle to their ability to achieve cross-cultural and transnational appeal.

In the following sections I discuss how Hindi filmmakers understand their place in the global hierarchies of filmmaking and how song sequences are implicated in their aspirations for international acclaim and global circulation.

SONG SEQUENCES AS SIGNS OF CULTURAL ALTERITY

On February 12, 2002, the Hindi film *Lagaan* (Land Tax) was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Language Film category. The sense of joy, achievement, euphoria and immense collective pride engendered by that nomination was all over the print, broadcast and Internet media in India and among the Indian diaspora. This was only the third time that a film from India had been nominated for the Foreign Language Oscar,[15] an event so anomalous that even the American press deemed it newsworthy and articles appeared in various U.S. newspapers about *Lagaan*. In a *Washington Post* story entitled, ''Hooray for Bollywood: Oscar Bid Lifts Hopes. Often-Ignored Indian Film Industry Heartened by *Lagaan* Nomination,'' the Indian film critic Subhash Jha described the significance of the nomination: ''This is a major breakthrough. The Indian film industry feels it can hold its head high and reach out to the world'' [quoted in Lakshmi 2002].

That a film like *Lagaan*, one of the biggest commercial successes of the year in India and squarely within the conventions of mainstream Indian cinema, had received an Oscar nomination was interpreted as a validation of the form and style of mainstream Indian cinema, especially the presence of song sequences.[16] Jha asserted: ''The song-and-dance format we were infamous for may now become our advantage. The Oscar nomination puts a seal of international approval on it. We don't have to change ourselves; the world will accept us as we are'' [quoted in Lakshmi 2002]. With an entire nation's identity and reputation seemingly at stake, when *Lagaan* did not win the Oscar the disappointment was palpable in the Indian media. For example, the English language-newspaper *Mid-Day* carried an article, ''We Can Get the Oscar!'' in which the authors claimed, ''For the one billion Indians who prayed that *Lagaan* would bring home the Oscar, Monday was a disappointing day'' [Kidwai and Shekhar 2002]. Just as Jha was quick to claim that the Oscar nomination was an acceptance of Indian cinema's song and dance sequences, the blame for losing the Oscar was also attributed to such sequences.

Not only does this *Lagaan* episode reveal the significance of cinema to the politics of national pride but it also demonstrates how film music carries a tremendous symbolic weight. In filmmakers' explanations song sequences occupy a metonymic relationship to Indian culture and the Indian nation. For example, the screenwriter Rumi Jaffery asserted, ''Music is such an integral part of our Indian culture; without music there is nothing. Music is a very necessary part of life—we sing when we worship; we sing when our children are born, we sing

during weddings; even beggars sing when they beg. Music is such a part of our lives, that without music, our lives are empty. If you don't have songs in a film, the film doesn't run'' [R. Jaffery, interview, November 22, 1996]. In filmmaker and media discourses, songs are also the essence of Indian cinema's alterity; and a love for songs the basis of the Indian audience's alterity. If *Lagaan* had won the Oscar it would have been interpreted as a validation of Indian cinema, Indian culture, Indians themselves—sentiments expressed by Jha above. Since *Lagaan* lost the Oscar it appeared as if Indian cinema was simply too alien and its songs a form of cultural baggage that kept Indian filmmakers from competing globally.

Thus currently, when mainstream Hindi filmmakers consciously strive to reach an ''international'' or global audience, they forego the use of lip-synch songs.[17] A notable example is the film *My Name Is Khan*, directed by Karan Johar, a producer/ director known for punctuating his films with elaborate, lavish, eye-popping song-and-dance sequences. Centering on the ethnic profiling and discrimination faced by American Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, as experienced by a Muslim man with Asperger's Syndrome, this film represented a radical departure from Johar's previous films in terms of its content, treatment and narrative style, which eschewed lip-synch song sequences. The film attracted a great deal of media attention in India in 2009 for the unprecedented sum that Fox Star Studios, the Indian subsidiary of 20th Century Fox, paid to acquire the global distribution rights of the film—purportedly between 800 and 850 million rupees. In press conferences and interviews Johar represented his decision to sell the film to Fox as a step toward bringing a new global visibility to Hindi cinema, by partnering with an institution that would take the film to new, untapped and untraditional, i.e., non-diasporic, markets. Johar explained his choice of distributor as well as his decision to forego lip-synch songs in an article in *Screen*, a weekly newspaper that focuses on the entertainment industry in India:

We wanted to put Indian cinema on the map and which is why we teamed up with Fox. I wanted people of all cultures and communities to understand that the film resonated with the new age Indian cinema. We are not the frivolous singing and dancing nation of movie-makers. We are somebody who can project cinema soulfully, emotionally, and relevantly. [Vollans 2010]

Johar's statements clearly register a discomfort with the song sequences as well as express an aspiration and effort to recast the global perception of Indian cinema. By describing the mainstream form of cinema as ''frivolous'' and characterizing the absence of lip-synch songs as enabling a more meaningful cinema, Johar actually reproduces longstanding criticisms of popular cinema generated by nationalist leaders, state officials, the press and cultural elites. Though Bollywood's style of filmmaking may appear to be celebrated and legitimated because of its dominance over the contemporary Indian media landscape and its circulation and celebration in prestigious Western cultural spaces like international film festivals and elite universities, the equation of a realist aesthetic with good cinema continues to hold sway within the Hindi film industry. Johar described his decision not to have lip-synch songs in *My Name Is Khan* in the service of realism: ''A man with autism can't sing a song. You and I do not sing

to each other. When we are talking about a film that is highlighting such a rampant, relevant problem we can't break into songs'' [Vijayakar 2010a]. The history of Hindi cinema has been replete with instances of characters including those who were deaf and mute breaking into song, as the song sequence is the most common technique to represent characters' fantasies or desires; furthermore, song sequences have been used to great effect as forms of social critique and commentary. Johar's statements thus position himself and his film as being outside the norms and conventions of mainstream Hindi cinema.

The declining presence of lip-synch songs in prominent Hindi films is explained in terms of modern practice as well as realism in a story in the English-language newspaper, *Hindustan Times*, entitled ''Now, Songs Play in the Background.'' Various members of the film industry offered their explanations for why many of the recent hit songs from films were in the background rather than lip-synched onscreen. The playback singer Shaan asserted: ''The time when the hero and heroine ran around trees and sang to each other is gone. When we talk realistic cinema, we definitely do not talk singing songs. The public will not accept it'' [Rastogi 2010].

Shaan's statement about audiences not accepting the conventional lip-synch song sequence points to a significant shift in the film industry's understanding of its audiences. With the expansion of multiplexes and their high ticket prices translating into a disproportionate share of theatrical revenues, Hindi filmmakers regard urban middle-class and upper-class filmgoers—commonly referred to as the ''classes'' or the ''gentry''—who frequent the multiplex as their main target audience, rather than the ''masses'' who were thought to constitute the bulk of the audience until the early 2000s.[18] In filmmakers' discourses the taste of the classes is diametrically opposed to that of the masses; if the masses require lip-synch songs as an essential feature of an escapist cinema, the classes who prefer realism disapprove of the practice of lip-synch songs. Shaan's characterization of on-screen songs as artifacts of a past era is extended by the director Kunal Deshmukh to signal a more modern style of filmmaking: ''The new filmmakers have a new sensibility and they find the concept of the star singing a song on screen a little outdated'' [*ibid.*].

Foregoing lip-synch songs is not only represented as more realistic and modern, but as emblematic of a more ''Western'' style of filmmaking in the article. Shaan stated, ''We are, in a lot of ways, looking west. With the kind of films we are making, we may see many without any songs at all'' [*ibid.*]. Once again, from the point of view of Hindi filmmakers, song sequences signify a cultural essence which, if removed, erases Hindi cinema's cultural distinctiveness. Nothing else about the aesthetic style or narrative form of Hindi cinema is regarded as culturally distinctive. The author of that article associated the practice of non lip-synch songs as something more akin to Hollywood, and surmised: ''It's the kind of thing Hollywood movies do. Is this the way Bollywood is going?'' [*ibid.*]. However, appearing to resemble or emulate Hollywood is not always perceived as the most effective way of expanding into non-traditional markets.

In the next section I discuss the tensions and difficulties faced by Hindi filmmakers when they consciously attempt to make an ''international'' film, which invariably excludes the presence of lip-synch songs.

BOLLYWOOD AS INESCAPABLE GENRE AND BRAND IDENTITY

In Nov. 2009 I attended a panel discussion entitled ''East and West: A New Co-Dependency,'' held at the HBO headquarters in New York City (a part of the day-long ''Film India: The MIAAC-09 Industry Panels'' organized in conjunction with the Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Ninth Annual Indian Film Festival). One of the panelists, the filmmaker Sri Rao, was in conversation with his agents from William Morris Endeavor Entertainment, who asked him to relate his experience of working on the Bollywod film, *New York*, with Yashraj Films. Rao and his associates at his production company were the local line producers for the Hindi film that was shot extensively on location in New York and Philadelphia in the summer of 2008. Mentioning that he had had many conversations with Hindi filmmakers about what is necessary to reach beyond diasporic audiences within the United States, Rao expressed what he believed to be their prevailing sentiment: ''There is a large feeling that I sense from them, that Bollywood isn't all about song and dance. 'We're not all about the cheesy lip-synch numbers and the production numbers, and we can make films that are very international'—films that have more of a Western aesthetic'' [MIAAC 2009]. Despite his slightly disdainful description of the song sequences, Rao asserted that Hindi filmmakers needed to revise their opinions,

My feeling is that they're kind of missing the point. I have Caucasian-American friends who have been exposed to Bollywood through me who are now big fans of it, and the reason that they are fans of it is because of the song and dance and because of the production numbers and because of the costumes and the spectacle of it all. So I think that, in order for more American audiences to embrace Bollywood films, Bollywood needs to embrace what they do best, which is musical numbers. And I think that instead of shying away from it, they need to go towards it more. [MIAAC 2009]

Rao's statements interpret filmmaking through economistic logics of branding and theories of comparative advantage, i.e., by suggesting that Bollywood filmmakers ''brand their otherness'' and ''profit from what makes them different'' [Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 24]. In the global media marketplace, since Bollywood is known for and good at producing musical spectacles, that is what it should continue to produce, rather than attempting anything different. As evidence for his assertions, Rao pointed to the success of films like *Monsoon Wedding* and *Slumdog Millionaire*, both of which contained a dance sequence inspired by Hindi cinema.[19]

It is fitting that a diasporic South Asian like Rao expresses such sentiments, as that diaspora has not only been a lucrative market for Hindi cinema since the late 1990s but the song-and-dance sequences from Hindi films have also played an important role in the cultural and social lives of diasporic communities across North America and the United Kingdom. South Asian diasporic filmmakers like Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding, Vanity Fair*), Deepa Mehta (*Bollywood Hollywood*), and Gurinder Chadha (*Bhaji on the Beach, Bride and Prejudice*) have also utilized the lip-synch song sequence, which operates as an iconic ethnic signature in their filmmaking. Within the Anglo-American media worlds of the United States,

Canada and Britain, the presence of Hindi film-inspired song sequences showcases these filmmakers' distinctiveness and helps set them apart in a competitive media marketplace. Otherwise, unlike popular Hindi cinema, the narrative, visual and dramatic style of films by diasporic filmmakers does not depart drastically from the norms associated with Anglo-American independent or art-house cinema. In fact during the post-screening discussion of his film, *Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna* (Never Say Good-Bye), at New York University in February 2007, the producer/director Karan Johar stated flatly that films by Nair, Mehta and Chadha were not Indian in their aesthetic and style. He added:

When people say, ''Oh we love Indian films, we loved *Bend it like Beckham*.'' I say, ''That's not an Indian film.'' ''We love *Monsoon Wedding*.'' I say, ''Again, not an Indian film.'' You know, ''We like *Water*,'' not an Indian film. These are English language films made by filmmakers who don't live in India. Audiences have to learn to recognize what we do in Bollywood is different. [Johar 2007]

The interpretation of *Lagaan*'s inability to win the Oscar and Karan Johar's remarks about trying to rebrand Indian cinema with *My Name Is Khan* sans songs illustrate how Bombay filmmakers do not perceive cultural distinctiveness as an asset but a liability in their attempts to garner critical acclaim and conquer new markets. The critical and commercial reception in the United States of the 2010 big-budget, highly publicized, widely released film *Kites* appears to validate this view—except that it actually contained no lip-synch songs and was a film explicitly produced to ''tap the mainstream international audience'' [*Indian Express* 2009]. The production history and reception of *Kites* in the United States and India reveal the dilemmas and challenges facing Hindi filmmakers in their attempts to produce what they believe are culturally unmarked films.

Produced by Rakesh Roshan and starring his son Hrithik, one of contemporary Hindi cinema's biggest stars, *Kites* got a great deal of media attention in India during its production and pre-release promotion phases; not only because every film previously involving the father-son duo had been a top-grosser for that particular year, but also because the film's makers positioned the film as exceptional and path-breaking, something that had ''never been attempted in India before'' [*Indian Express* 2009]. Some features of this exceptionalism: the female lead was played by the Mexican actress Barbara Mori; the film was extensively shot in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and New Mexico; the film's dialogues were in English, Spanish and Hindi since it featured a love story between protagonists not speaking each others' languages; and a shorter even more ''international'' English version re-edited by the Hollywood action director Brett Ratner (*Rush Hour; X-Men*) and entitled *Kites: The Remix* was released a week after the original version.

In interviews for the news media the film's director Anurag Basu described it as an attempt to reach new audiences, thus making Indian cinema more ''global.'' He said:

I won't say ''Kites'' will change everything, but it's a step to make Indian films global and to lure non-Hindi speaking people to come, see and like the film. The filmmakers of our generation are starving to get international recognition. We say we are global but we are

far from being global. That was the drive behind making this film. I'm hoping the film is not only liked by Indian audiences, but it also appeals to the international audiences. [Baksi 2010]

Given that Hindi films have been circulating internationally since the 1950s and have been popular among non-Hindi speaking, non-South Asian audiences in Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe, and Central and Southeast Asia for decades [Abadzi 1998; David 2008; Gopal and Moorti 2008; Iordanova *et al.* 2006; Larkin 2008; Manuel 1988; Rajagopalan 2008], Basu's statements represent a very circumscribed notion of ''international'' or ''global'' audiences. In my conversations with Hindi filmmakers during fieldwork it became apparent that ''international'' or ''mainstream'' audiences basically meant white audiences primarily in the United States, Canada, Britain and Western Europe.

The basic story of *Kites*—star-crossed lovers from widely disparate social backgrounds whose efforts to surmount numerous obstacles to their relationship end in their tragic deaths—is a staple of popular Indian cinema's narrative repertoire. The film also contained other elements and tropes common to Indian cinema such as the use of flashback to convey the narrative; the presence of nefarious villains; the plot device of love at first sight; and the overall theme of love transcending all social and cultural barriers. More than the foreign locations and foreign actress— all with precedents in Hindi cinema—from the point of view of its producers, it was the absence of lip-synch song sequences and the resulting shorter (130 minutes *vs.* the more standard 165 minutes) running-time of *Kites* that rendered it more ''international.''

Still unsure of the film's ability to appeal broadly, *Kites*' producers enlisted Brett Ratner to transform the film further.[20] Ratner cut the film down to 90 minutes, re-mixed the sound more in line with the conventions of mainstream Hollywood action films, and re-scored the entire film with music by Graeme Revell. Ratner was interviewed extensively by the Indian and American press about this experiment where he represented himself as Bollywood's cultural ambassador for mainstream America [Pais 2010; Radish 2010]. His remarks regarding the aesthetics and conventions of Hindi cinema, based on *Kites* (apparently the only Bollywood film he had seen) portray it as a filmmaking tradition that is exotic and steeped in otherness, revealing the formidable challenge faced by Hindi filmmakers to make what they believe is a culturally unmarked film even when they omit lip-synch songs. Though *Kites* contained only one dance sequence of $3\frac{1}{2}$ minutes in a nightclub with no lip-synch—narratively motivated by the fact that Roshan's character J plays a street-smart hustler in Las Vegas who makes a living as a dance instructor[21]—in all of his interviews Ratner discusses how he did away with ''most of the dancing'' to make it more suitable for international audiences. In an interview with the online film/video review site *Screenjabber.com*, Ratner's description of how his version differed from the original posited *Kites* as following the norms and conventions of Hindi cinema:

I think what's so great about Bollywood movies is that you can have a mixture of genres and also all of a sudden in the middle of it you break into a dance and that's culturally what works. But I think the difference between these two movies [*Kites* vs. *Kites; The*

Remix], this one has a narrative through line—a pace—and you're never stopping to dance, you're never stopping to do other things, so the story is just constantly moving forward, moving forward. [Martin 2010]

Since the film contained neither subplots nor lip-synch songs Ratner's remarks most probably refer to the use of background songs to convey mood, characterization and passage of time, and reveal his complete unfamiliarity with Hindi cinema. Though *Kites'* relatively linear structure did not even begin to approach the complex, multifaceted narrative form punctuated by lip-synch songs that is regarded as a quintessential feature of popular Indian cinema [Ganti 2002], Ratner's comments illustrate how Hindi filmmakers' difficulties in reaching new audiences are not simply about problems of form or content but also about conditions of reception, which are much harder to control.

Heavily promoted by Reliance BIG Pictures at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009 and 2010, *Kites* probably had the widest release ever for a Hindi film—an unprecedented 2000 screens in India and 500 screens overseas, of which 207 were in the United States alone. Reviews and features about the film appeared in most major U.S. media outlets like National Public Radio, the *New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, Christian Science Monitor, Boston Herald, Philadelphia Inquirer, Village Voice,* as well as specialized publications like *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. While the film's producers and the Indian press described these reviews as ''raving'' and printed positive quotes selectively from leading publications, a closer examination of these reviews shows that *Kites*'s critical reception in the United States was a far cry from the respect and acceptance that Hindi filmmakers desired. In totality the reviews exemplified what the Hindi filmmaker Dibakar Banerjee, at a roundtable discussion on the state of South Asian cinema (organized by the Engendered I-View Film Festival in New York City), characterized as the dominant attitude toward Bollywood found in the West: ''Though I find there is interest in Bollywood, it's not the same thing as respect. It could be the interest that you reserve for a fairground carnival show or a vaudeville act'' [Engendered 2010]. With descriptions like ''overwrought,'' ''visual overkill,'' ''outlandish,'' ''over-the-moon,'' ''loony'' and ''preposterously entertaining,'' many of the reviews did present the film as the cinematic equivalent of a carnival freak show. The *New York Times* review exemplified this tone: ''The movie harnesses English, Hindi and Hispanic talent to an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink plot, replaces dancing with explosions, and choreographers with stunt specialists. The result is a lovers-on-the-lam blast of pure pulp escapism, so devoted to diversion that you probably won't even notice the corn'' [Catsoulis 2010].

Two other prominent themes emerge in these reviews—allochronism [Fabian 2002] and derivativeness—that serve to position *Kites* in a quasi-developmentalist narrative, as reminiscent of Hollywood's past and constantly aspiring to mimic its present. Stating that it is ''shamelessly derivative'' and ''owes more to Hollywood than Bollywood,'' *Variety*'s review goes on to list the various Hollywood influences; while the *Philadelphia Inquirer* asserts, ''Basu strictly observes the B-movie convention of giving the audience an embrace, explosion, or chase sequence at regular intervals. If you don't like the genre, wait three minutes'' [Rickey 2010].

While also alluding to its derivativeness, the *Los Angeles Times* went further in its othering of the film by likening it to silent cinema. Stating that Roshan ''has the dashing, chiseled looks of a silent movie matinee idol,'' the review then pronounces, ''Indeed *Kites* is so heady and naïve a brew, it would have been perfect for the silent screen'' [Thomas 2010].

In terms of its commercial fate, though the film's opening weekend box-office gross placed it as the tenth-highest grossing film in the United States for the weekend of May 21–23, 2010, at less than a million dollars it did not break the record set by *My Name Is Khan,* which had earned $1.9 million during its opening weekend in February 2010, and that too from a fewer number of theaters.[22] By its second week *Kites'* earnings had dropped sharply and it was relegated to the list of films that had flopped in the overseas market in 2010. If the original *Kites* was a commercial disappointment, *Kites: The Remix* was an unmitigated disaster to be discontinued from cinemas after only a week.[23] Since box-office outcome serves as the primary mechanism for ascertaining audience demand and taste, the films' disappointing business in the United States was interpreted as a sign by the trade that Hindi cinema was still too alien and foreign for mainstream American audiences, a sentiment that had been expressed in some of the reviews [e.g., Tsering 2010].

Ironically the film's disastrous commercial performance in India was interpreted by trade journalists and industry commentators as a consequence of the film's not being Indian enough. Its lack of lip-synch songs was not cited as the problem but rather the fact that the film barely contained any Hindi and was primarily in English and Spanish, with only the Spanish dialogue being subtitled in Hindi. Trade magazines such as *Film Information* carried stories about how exhibitors in smaller towns were perplexed as to why they received the ''English print'' (version) of the film, and said some exhibitors and distributors were contemplating legal action against Reliance BIG Pictures for misleading them into acquiring the rights to an English–Spanish film rather than a Hindi one.[24]

Not only was *Kites* deemed literally unintelligible to the vast majority of Indian viewers, but many reviews also questioned the filmmakers' judgment in ignoring domestic audiences for the chimera of global acclaim. One of the reviewers for *Screen* criticized what he felt to be a growing trend among Hindi filmmakers:

This is yet another example after *My Name Is Khan* of filmmakers trying to ''evolve'' [*sic*] ''internationally'' by making films that are targeted at illusionary international audiences, and regardless of what the home viewers think, rooting for a few critical glories. But all we ask as we leave the theatre is: Has the Indian audience become so unimportant for such talented filmmakers, whose core strength not so far back was good storytelling with an emotional connect, a strong entertainment quotient, good music used well and star appeal? [Vijayakar 2010b]

In the reviewer's list of criteria used to evaluate mainstream Hindi films, it is apparent that *Kites* falls short—the general tenor of the film's critical reception in India. Indian reviewers criticized the very elements that were praised or regarded as exceptional by American reviewers, starkly illustrating how aesthetic judgment and evaluation can never exist outside the cultural codes, systems of

classification and values comprising a particular socio-historical context [Bourdieu 1993]. For example, while most American reviewers described *Kites* as having a surfeit of genres and narrative, Indian reviewers criticized the film for lacking a narrative. Much was said in American reviews about the passion and chemistry between the lead actors, while the Indian reviews pointed out how that was one of the weakest points of the film. For example, the review in *Outlook* magazine asserts, ''A love story works if it can make the audience feel for the lovers. In *Kites* there is not an ounce of romance or passion'' [Joshi 2010].

The negative reviews and poor box-office response in India were not taken lightly by the film's star, Hrithik Roshan, who spoke of his disappointment with his countrymen to the press. Positioning the film within a politics of national pride and seeing criticism of it as anti-national and somewhat sinister, Roshan said in an article appearing in *The Times of India*:

Our country should be proud that, finally, one Indian film has made it to the U.S. Top 10 list, that . . . 37 countries have shown an Indian film for the very first time. No other Indian film has entered these markets ever before . . . . Thirty-seven new countries! *Kites* has done it for the first time—but it's sad that our people instead of nurturing this new passion that has conquered so many new markets, are putting us down. *LA Times, New York Times, Hollywood Reporter*, everyone has said good things about the film, and God, our country is putting it down. For what agenda? [Prabhakar 2010]

Once again, like the case of *Lagaan*, we see how the circulation and positive reception of cinema in certain sites is thought to accrue prestige to the nation as a whole. However, in the case of *Kites*, Roshan's comments establish a hierarchy of evaluation whereby the ''positive'' reviews by American critics should dictate or guide their Indian counterparts' evaluations and judgments about the film, making them reconsider their adverse reactions.

The production and reception of *Kites* highlight the road-bumps involved in the global circulation of media forms, and that issues of national prestige continue to remain important in an era of globalization. Hindi filmmakers' desires to be global are criss-crossed by very nationalist concerns, as is apparent from filmmakers' statements about ''putting Indian cinema on the map,'' or expressing pride that an Indian film made it to the top-10 list in the United States. In a globalized world cinema is still coded as national and regarded as having the capacity of representing a national subjectivity. Thus Hindi filmmakers want to inhabit the national category—be known as Indian filmmakers—though emptied of any cultural essence that could signify exoticism, alterity and difference. They want to be unmarked in terms of form but marked in terms of national origin, akin to the IT industry or large conglomerates such as Reliance Industries or the Tata Group, which bring prestige for the nation by virtue of being Indian *and* global. Though their films have circulated internationally for decades, the mere fact of circulation across a wide variety of national and cultural spaces is not sufficient to become ''global.'' What Hindi filmmakers aspire for in the global media landscape is distinction without alterity. Yet, as the example of *Kites* illustrates, the path to an unmarked ''global'' cinema is rife with obstacles, paradoxes and contradictions.

CONCLUSIONS

Within the world of Hindi film production, debates over song sequences are not simply contestations over the form, idioms or aesthetics of Hindi cinema but shed light on dominant ideologies about artistic autonomy, cinematic quality, audience taste, cultural identity and expressions of modernity operating within the industry. Though elaborately choreographed and lavishly produced song sequences have become the marker of Bollywood's distinctiveness in the global media landscape, I have shown how Hindi filmmakers are ambivalent about this sort of distinction—regarding their cinema's cultural distinctiveness as alienating and limiting rather than as an asset in their drive to tap into new markets. The case of Hindi filmmakers and their ambivalence about film music also sheds light on the complexities and ironies of the global circulation of cultural commodities such as film.

While neoliberalism is most commonly associated with the primacy of market logics, this article reveals how the production of commercially driven, box-office-oriented cinema is not only concerned with profit but also critically shaped by concerns about prestige, symbolic capital and global distinction. Ironically, Hindi filmmakers are better able to realize these concerns with the advent of neoliberal polices and ideals in India, as compared to earlier moments in the industry's history when it had to seek wide audiences for its financial survival. The Indian state's revised attitudes and policies toward filmmaking—exemplified by its granting of industry status—have allowed for greater and more reliable inflows of capital into the industry, enabling filmmakers to contravene mainstream conventions such as lip-synch songs. Films like *Kites* and *My Name Is Khan* can be made because of the restructured political economy of filmmaking precipitated by state policies; which enables Hindi filmmakers to resolve their ambivalence about songs and act upon their longstanding desires and aspirations for certain forms of respect and critical acclaim. Thus, in order to understand the complexities of commercial media production, it is necessary to examine producers' sentiments and subjectivities in conjunction with questions of political economy.

NOTES

1. See http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=111129218899178andv=wallandref=ts (accessed August 26, 2010).
2. Recent examples of such films include *Rang De Basanti* (Color Me Springtime, 2006), *Cheeni Kum* (Lacking Sugar, 2007), *Jannat* (Heaven, 2008), *New York* (2009), *Wake Up Sid* (2009), *Kurbaan* (Sacrifice, 2009), *Paa* (2009), *Kites* (2010), *Raajneeti* (Politics, 2010), *My Name Is Khan* (2010), *Aisha* (2010), *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* (2010), *Zindagi*

Na Milegi Dobara (You Only Live Once, 2011), *Delhi Belly* (2011), and *The Dirty Picture* (2011).

3. Gopal and Moorti note in the introduction to *Global Bollywood*, ''Frequently remarked upon by insiders and always remarkable to outsiders, song-dance occupies the constitutive limit of Bollywood cinema'' [2008: 1].

4. For example, Amol Palekar submitted a song-less version of his film *Dayraa* (The Square Circle) to the London Film Festival in 1996. The song-less version of Prakash Jha's *Mrityudand* (Death Sentence) was screened during the Human Rights Film Festival (June 1998, New York); the producer-director Yash Chopra removed most of the songs from *Lamhe* (Moments) when he released a dubbed English version on video for the United Kingdom. Perhaps the most ironic instance was the song-less version of Ram Gopal Varma's *Satya* (1998) being screened at New York University's ''Dancing in the Rain''—a symposium about Indian and Egyptian musicals, held in 1999.

5. Unlike the U.S. government, which from early in the 20th century treated filmmaking as a business and helped Hollywood distribute its films globally, the Indian state did not accord filmmaking very much economic significance—even though shortly after Independence India became the second largest film-producing country in the world.

6. ''Audience imaginary'' is my way of marking the distinction between filmmakers' discursive constructions of the vast film-going public and socially and historically located viewers who are infinitely more complex than filmmakers' characterizations. Scholars have long argued that producers generate ''audience fictions'' to manage the inherent unpredictability of audience response, and these fictions are an integral part of the media production process [Allor 1996; Anderson 1996; Ang 1991; Bennett 1996; Blumler 1996; Ohmann 1996b; Traube 1996]. Not only has scholarship on media production amply demonstrated that audiences are always prefigured in the production process [Ang 1991; Cantor 1988; Crawford and Hafsteinsson 1993; Davila 2001; Dornfeld 1998; Espinosa 1982; Gans 1957; Kapsis 1986; Mazzarella 2003; Ohmann 1996a; Zafirau 2009a, 2009b]; a strand of mass communications research has focused on ''audience-making,'' which refers to how media industries actually produce their audiences through a variety of institutional mechanisms (measurement, segmentation and regulation) so as to reconstitute actual viewers into collectivities that carry economic or social value within a particular media system [Ettema and Whitney 1994]. For a detailed examination of the Hindi film industry's audience-making practices, which are based on the measurement of theatrical commercial outcome interpreted according to the geographic and spatial logics of film distribution and exhibition, see Ganti [2000, 2012]. For an account of how Hindi filmmakers imagine their audiences in the context of specific production practices such as remaking Hollywood films see Ganti [2002]. Other scholars who have discussed Indian filmmakers' audience imaginaries include Grimaud [2006], Thomas [1995], and L. Srinivas [2005].

7. Examples include *Bhoot* (Ghost, 2003), *Chak De India* (2007), *Bheja Fry* (2007), *A Wednesday* (2008), *Love Sex aur Dhokha* (2009).

8. *Nautanki* is a form of traditional musical theater originating and performed in northern India, in the present states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

9. When Hindi filmmakers term a film a ''musical,'' they are referring to one that is explicitly about music/musicians/performers in some way. The mere existence of songs does not automatically make a film a ''musical'' within the genre distinctions of popular Hindi cinema.

10. By this time, HMV was no longer a subsidiary of the multinational company but part of the Goenka group of companies, an Indian industrialist/business family. Everyone still referred to the music company as HMV, and the cassettes and CDs would still have the HMV logo along with the RPG logo of the Goenka group.

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11. In comparison, the most successful non-film pop album, *Made in India,* by the Hindi pop star Alisha Chinoy had sold 2.2 million units [Chaya 1996: 39]. For a film album to be considered profitable it had to sell at least 1 million units.

12. The screenwriter relayed his experience but asked me to keep the details of the film in confidence, as he did not want the director to learn of his feelings; so the name of the film, director and writer are pseudonyms.

13. Foreign governments aim for the ''Bollywood Effect''—a reference to the dramatic increases in tourist arrivals from India that are registered after several Hindi films have been shot in a particular region. It is a term that is used in official tourist promotion policy documents in Britain, Australia and other countries that are trying to court Hindi filmmakers to shoot in their countries.

14. Members of the industry define the masses vaguely in terms of occupation—such as domestic workers, manual laborers, motor rickshaw drivers, taxi-drivers, factory workers—and implicitly gender them as exclusively male, and characterize them as either illiterate or having had very little formal education. For years, in media, state and scholarly discourses, the masses were posited as the root cause of Hindi cinema's narrative, thematic and aesthetic deficiencies, and I discovered that the majority of filmmakers I met professed similar views. For more about Hindi filmmakers' and their understandings of the ''masses,'' see Ganti [2000, 2009, 2012].

15. The first Oscar nomination that India had ever received was for the 1957 Hindi film, *Mother India,* which like *Lagaan* was also a product of the mainstream Hindi film industry. The other Indian film that had been nominated was Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay* (1988), which was not a product of the Hindi film industry at all.

16. *Lagaan* contained six songs, a 222-minute running-time, clear-cut heroes and villains, and starred Aamir Khan, one of the most popular actors of the Hindi film industry.

17. However, these non-lip-synch songs are by no means ''background'' or unobtrusive in the manner that Beeman [1988] discusses the use of music in American cinema. Non-lip-synch songs in contemporary Hindi films continue to be prominent in the soundscape of a film, often expressing the psychological state of a character or the emotional tenor of a particular situation.

18. For more on the masses-classes binary in Hindi filmmakers' understandings of their audiences, see Ganti [2000, 2012].

19. Neither film contained a lip-synch song sequence characteristic of mainstream Hindi cinema. In *Monsoon Wedding* the sequence takes place at one of the pre-wedding celebrations and involves a young couple dancing and periodically lip-synching to a song that is from the Hindi film, *Biwi No. 1*. The song was not created for *Monsoon Wedding* and because the sequence takes place during the *sangeet* function of a Punjabi wedding—an occasion normally marked by a great deal of singing and dancing (often to popular film songs)—the song sequence does not represent a sharp departure from the film's overall realist codes. In the case of *Slumdog Millionaire*, the ''Jai-Ho'' song appears at the very end of the film right before the closing credits and the dance sequence there operates as a sort of clichéd reference to the stereotype of Bollywood cinema, where large groups of people suddenly appear and start dancing, in this example in a railroad station.

20. Reliance Big Pictures, the film's co-producer and worldwide distributor, had a prior relationship with Ratner as part of its major injection of capital into Hollywood filmmaking.

21. This motivation probably stems from the fact that Hrithik Roshan possesses considerable dancing skills and is regarded as one of the best dancers in the Hindi film industry.

22. The film grossed $959,329 from 207 screens for the weekend of 21–23 May 2010. The website Box Office Mojo mentions that *Kites* reached its 10th place position because the top four films that weekend were dominating the box-office, while *My Name Is Khan*

which grossed more money its opening weekend came in at 13th. http://boxofficemojo. com/ weekend/chart/?yr = 2010andwknd = 21andp.htm (accessed May 31, 2011.).

23. The film earned $31,191 from 40 screens during its opening weekend for an abysmally low per-screen average of $780, debuting at number 53 in the May 28–31, 2010, weekend's box-office collections. http://boxofficemojo.com/weekend/chart/?yr=2010and wknd=22aandp=.htm (accessed May 31, 2011).

24. *Film Information* (Mumbai): May 22, 2010: 7; May 29, 2010: 13.

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