

## **Historical disjunctures and Bollywood audiences in Trinidad: Negotiations of gender and ethnic relations in cinema going<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract:**

Hindi cinema has formed an integral part of the media landscape in Trinidad. Audiences have primarily consisted of the descendants of indentured workers from India. Recent changes in production, distribution and consumption related to the emergence of the Bollywood culture industry have led to disruptions in the local reception context, resulting in a decline in cinema-going as well as the diminishing role of Hindi film as ethnic identity marker. This paper presents results of ethnographic research conducted at the release of the blockbuster 'Jab Tak Hai Jaan'. It focuses on young women's experiences as members of a 'new' Bollywood audience, characterised by a regionally defined middle class belonging and related consumption practices. In order to understand how the disjuncture is negotiated by contemporary audiences, cinema-going as a cultural practice is historically contextualised with a focus on the dynamic interdependencies of gender and ethnicity.

**Keywords:** Hindi cinema, Caribbean, Bollywood, Indo-Trinidadian identity, Indian diaspora, female audiences, ethnicity

### **Introduction**

Since the early days of cinema, Indian film productions have circulated globally, establishing transnational and transcultural audiences. In the Caribbean, first screenings are reported from the 1930s. Due to colonial labour regimes, large Indian diasporic communities existed in the region, who embraced the films as a connection to their country of origin or ancestral homeland. Consequently, Hindi speaking films and more recently the products of the global culture industry Bollywood, have become integral parts of regional media landscapes. In Trinidad, related symbols have served as central ethnic identity markers for the descendants of indentured South Asian workers, in demarcation to other ethnic groups and in particular

to Afro-Trinidadians. Local audiences can thus only be understood in the context of displacement as historical experience.

While the foregrounding of experience by cinema goers has gained more importance in film studies, as demonstrated in *New Cinema History* (Maltby 2011; Meers and Biltereyst 2012), this has long been the focus of most research on audiences in the Caribbean. In contrast to other (small) multi-ethnic cosmopolitan societies with similar histories, such as Fiji or Mauritius, the majority of the Trinidadian population is constituted by ethnic groups that arrived in the Caribbean due to colonial labour regimes. Following the genocide against the indigenous people, descendants of enslaved Africans and later indentured South Asians became the major demographic groups. On the one hand, research on Trinidadian Bollywood audiences can be situated in the discourse on transnational audiences in Indian film studies (Dudrah and Rai 2005; Dudrah 2006; Kaur and Sinha 2005; Kavoori and Punathambekar 2008). On the other hand, it is fundamental to take the multiplicity of historical experiences of displacement into account. Therefore, my approach moves beyond diasporic narratives and contextualises them within the early, forceful integration of the Caribbean into globalisation processes as well as ethnic relations in Trinidad shaped by a colonial system that positioned various groups in competition to each other.

In this paper, cinema-going is approached as a historically generated cultural practice. Following a practice theoretical approach, the wider socio-cultural context is central for an understanding and cultural practices are regarded as accumulated history. Thus, cinema-going is discussed as a media practice which is continuously renegotiated by social actors (Ortner 2006; Hobart 2010; Bird 2010). Furthermore, the framework seeks to situate the practice in interdependencies of gender, ethnicity and class, as well as the wider context of transnational media circuits. First, the paper provides a historical overview on the development that audiences have undergone in Trinidad since the introduction of Indian films in the 1930s, in order to understand how transformations of wider cultural practices impact on the cinematic experience. Secondly, the paper highlights a recent shift experienced by Bollywood audiences in Trinidad with an in-depth analysis of how young women experience cinema-going in a contemporary context. The discussion of how gender, ethnic and class relations are thereby negotiated draws on the significant body of work by Caribbean gender scholars; relating media and their symbolic meaning to relational concepts of ethnicity (Reddock 2011b; Mohammed 2002; Hosein 2012).

As I will argue, the contemporary cinematic experience of Bollywood audiences in Trinidad is situated in a historical disjuncture that is not only caused by fundamental social changes and adaption to global technological developments but also changes in the production and transnational distribution of Hindi films. Ashish Rajadhyaksha refers to the most recent globalisation process in Hindi cinema as 'Bollywoodization' (2010). The distinction between Hindi cinema and Bollywood as a global culture industry is significant in order to understand the disjuncture experienced by audiences in the local context. While transnational circuits of Hindi cinema have included audiences located as far as Fiji, Russia and Peru from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of the Bollywood culture industry

changed how audiences outside India were addressed. Rajadhyaksha states that in contrast to earlier export of the film industry, Bollywood began to directly target diasporic and other groups with a specific segment in film production and related cultural products from the 1990s, for example, by using prestigious overseas settings, representing Western consumer culture on screen as well as applying diversified merchandising and distribution (2010: 29).<sup>2</sup> Thus, the stars, codes and practices of Bollywood and Hindi cinema have increasingly drifted apart.

Research on Indian films in the Caribbean region has identified a disruption of viewing practices for local cinema audiences in this context (Halstead 2005; Narain 2008; Ramnarine 2011). In Trinidad, the interest in other Indian cinemas such as Telegu, Malayalam or Bengali productions has historically been limited. The term 'Indian movie' commonly refers to Hindi-speaking films and they are widely perceived as representative of 'Indian' culture. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Bollywood productions were first highly popular in Trinidad, but the advance of the Bollywoodization process later led to a decline in interest.<sup>3</sup> This development reinforced the demise of cinema halls as ethnic gathering space and of cinema-going as a central practice across gender and class boundaries. Combining historical research on the reception context with ethnographic data, this approach gives insights into how disjuncture is experienced and the practice of cinema-going is renegotiated by audiences.

### **East Indian in the West Indies? Ethnic relations in Trinidad**

Hindi films have been both a marker of difference of the Indo-Trinidadian ethnic community as well as of the cultural diversity in Trinidadian society. The Trinbagonian national anthem states 'Here every creed and race find an equal place', which reflects its self-understanding as a diverse country. At the time of Independence, its society was constituted by descendants of African enslaved and freed people, formerly indentured South Asians, the few surviving indigenous people, members of the colonial elite as well as white Europeans who had come as cheap labour force, Syrian, Lebanese, Chinese and Jewish people. Each group brought their customs and cultural practices with them and transformed them in interaction with others. Indian films can be considered one of the relevant forms of cultural representations within the globalised, media-saturated society of Trinidad (Reddock 2004). However, the Indian ethnic identity they signify also seems to hold a different position. As the first Prime Minister of the independent nation, Eric Williams addressed citizens in his famous speech *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* by acknowledging differences and calling for unity. He requested Trinbagonians to solely identify with 'Mother Trinidad and Tobago' (Williams 1962: 281). This message resonates as a reference to the Hindi film *Mother India* (1957), which had been a great success with Indo-Trinidadian audiences. Rather than invigorating the movie's anti-colonial stance, Williams seems to imply that the identification of the Indian ethnic community with another motherland was particularly problematic.

Indian ethnicity has often been constructed as 'Other' and opposed to the Creole norm in public discourses. Underlying this discourse are the tensions and inequalities between the two largest ethnic communities, Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. Their historical root lies in colonial labour regimes and racial hierarchies in the Caribbean. The region's incorporation into early globalisation coincides with the emergence of modern racism, which became the structuring principle of society. After the genocide against indigenous people, the colonial powers used the transatlantic slave trade for a new workforce.<sup>4</sup> After the emancipation of enslaved Africans, their demands for wages and better working conditions were met by the British with the introduction of indentured workers. In 1845, the first contracted Indians, mainly from impoverished areas such as Uttar Pradesh, arrived in Trinidad. In this way wages were depressed and control over the Afro-Caribbean free labour force was re-asserted (Mohammed 1995: 34; Reddock 2011a: 574). Indian labourers lived in the barracks formerly inhabited by enslaved workers and were exploited in the continuing plantation system. However, they entered the racialised social hierarchy in a different position and their bonded legal status was limited, varying between one year in the early phase of indentureship to up to five by the 1870s.<sup>5</sup>

While the incorporation of Indian indentured labourers into the local social structures destabilised identities, the challenges they faced also had a unifying effect on the heterogenous group. The migrant work force included people from different parts of India, mainly from Bhojpuri-speaking regions of what is today Uttar Pradesh and Bihar (Manuel 1997), who belonged to Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities. In post-indentureship society the number of Christians grew fast due to the colonial system and its missionary forces in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, Hindus constitute the third largest group after Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches.<sup>6</sup> Religious differences have maintained their significance in the local context, but the end of indentureship led to a (re-)construction of an Indian ethnic identity across group boundaries based on their shared interest in independence from the plantations and social mobility (Mohammed 1995b). Bhojpuri cultural forms and language were often marginalised in this process. Primarily upper-caste Hindu values served as central signifiers of cultural identity (Reddock 2011b). As Peter Manuel points out, Hindi cinema played a dominant part in the marginalisation of folk traditions (1997). Caste and social status had been fundamentally disrupted by the passage to the Caribbean, the so called 'kala pani' (Mohammed 1995). Rhoda Reddock thus argues that caste endogamy could not be maintained during indentureship. However, related values were incorporated into nationalist discourses of the diasporic community and markers of caste such as skin colour presumably played a role in racial demarcation (2011a).<sup>7</sup> The construction of an ethnic Indo-Trinidadian community across regional, religious and class differences is situated in nationalist politics and the Independence movement. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tensions between the two ethnic communities increasingly played out in the political sphere. While Indo-Trinidadians only gradually claimed visibility and voice in the public sphere (Mohammed 1995: 35), political organising by Afro-Trinidadians was strongly developed and culminated in the Creole nationalist movement leading to Independence

(Reddock 2011b: 684). In contrast, various movements at the beginning of the century were based on class interests beyond ethnic boundaries, which was evident in events such as the 1919 general strike and 1934 uprising. The labour leader and key figure in the trade union movement, Tubal Uriah Butler, promoted Afro-Indian unity. Interestingly, the Indian businessman Ranjit Kumar, who allegedly brought the first Indian film, *Bala Joban* (1934) to Trinidad, also joined his party in the belief that it could protect Indo-Trinidadians' rights as a minority – he opposed independence from the British for the same reason (Brereton and Gooptar 2013: 102). However, the party that would finally lead the country into Independence in 1962, the People's National Movement (PNM) founded and led by Eric Williams, promoted a Creole nationalism drawing on Afro-Trinidadian folk heritage.

On the one hand, the invisibility of Indo-Trinidadians in the public sphere was also reflected in the marginalisation of their cultural practices, including Hindi films and cinema-going. On the other hand, they served the ethnic community to establish a counter narrative in response to the Creole nationalist discourse. Aisha Khan suggests films together with other cultural products from India as well as the building of Hindu temples, Muslim mosques and schools in this period assumed an important role in affirming Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identity. It can be argued that the middle-class representatives of both ethnic groups 'relied on notions of traditional, authentic (noncolonial) culture to establish affinities with grassroots (poor and working-class) sectors of their own communities' (Khan 2004: 10). Similarly, the Black Power movement led to a responding trend in the Indo-Trinidadian community in the 1970s. Due to the dissatisfaction caused by high unemployment and the continuation of racial discrimination, young people took to the streets inspired by events and activism in North America (Henry 1993: 68). Although the initial protests were also characterised by Black Indian solidarity, the cultural implications of the movement seeking to construct society based on Blackness was countered with a 'cultural revival' in the Indo-Trinidadian community. Peter Manuel argues that Black Power in combination with the perceived threat of progressing creolisation led to a reinforcement of ethnic identity drawing on music, films and other cultural forms from the Indian subcontinent. Thus, the socio-economic improvement large parts of the community had experienced in their lives was complemented with 'a heightened sense of Indianness and some sort of affective relationship with India itself' (Manuel 1997: 22). This was reinforced by new opportunities for cultural expression and political participation emerging in the 1980s. The decade-long predominance of the PNM was interrupted resulting, for example, in new broadcasting licenses for radio stations granted by the new government of Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson. Many new stations were dedicated to promoting Indian culture, including Hindi film songs, leading to a feeling of more egalitarian participation in the public sphere (Balliger 2005: 189).

With the election of the first Indo-Trinidadian prime minister Basdeo Panday in 1995 and the rise of the United National Congress as a second major party, politics became strongly based on ethnic affiliations. While it seemed then that party politics might be capable of containing ethnic tensions, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has shown that most public

discourses are still characterised by divisions along ethnic demarcation lines. Racist stereotypes drawing on colonial discourses are used and, confronted with growing social inequality and destabilisation of the entire region, ethnic differences are exploited in times of unrest and economic pressure.<sup>8</sup> Despite a shared history of exploitation and displacement, relations between the two major ethnic communities continue to be tense and the competitive division created by the colonial labour market continues. In contrast to such discourses of ethnic identity, however, people of African and Indian descent also have interacted, mixed and built shared cultural spaces. Moreover, there is a substantial mixed population, also referred to as 'douglá'. This growing part of the Trinidadian population symbolises its diversity, at the same time challenging discourses of cultural purity, colourism and racism with regard to interracial relationships (Reddock 2011a: 583; Mohammed 1995: 35).

The meaning of Hindi films and the practice of cinema-going in the local context is embedded in this historical context. Diasporic narratives focus on a harmonic past and intra-ethnic unity amongst Indo-Trinidadians. In my field research, it was perpetuated especially by authoritative members of the community, emphasising family relations and group activities related to excursions to the cinema, homemade food, songs and laughter. In contrast, marginalised members of the audience disrupted the narrative by highlighting the manifestations of ethnic tensions in the cinema halls. At an event presenting research on *Bala Joban* (1934), an elderly visitor of African descent shared his memory of discomfort when watching a Hindi film in a local cinema in the 1950s: he had been deeply immersed in the dramatic events unfolding on screen, when he was told by another movie-goer 'Why you crying? This is not your people!' (Fieldnotes 19.5.2010, Port of Spain). Likewise there are reports of Afro-Trinidadian Hindi film aficionados who were discriminated in their own ethnic community (Gooptar 2014: 262).

From this period of early cinema audiences to the contemporary era of the multiplex, one of my interview partners<sup>9</sup> describes a similar experience of discomfort as she sought out one of the last remaining stand-alone cinemas in the country to enjoy a Bollywood movie:

I went with my sister ... I mentioned that we are douglas, right? Half Indian, half negro mix. When she flattens her hair, she kind of ... she looks Indian. So I went with her, and my hair was like this [pointing at her curly hairstyle]. And people just like ... it was an Indian film, first of all it was not that many people. So if it had let's say about forty people in the cinema, it was plenty. Of the forty people it only had about two non-Indians! Me and my sister. So you know, of course people (...) so I don't want to break it down to a race thing, but it's just ... Sometimes I feel, I just felt more comfortable in India, like, more accepted in India than I do in Trinidad. (Interview Port of Spain, 10.11.2012).



Comparing her experiences of cinema going in India and Trinidad, this young woman expresses her feeling of exclusion based on appearance, racialised categorisation and ethnic demarcation in local cinema halls. Such negotiations of belonging offer insights into how historical relations and ethnicity in the contemporary context are inscribed in audiencing.

### **From ‘Rajas, Ranis and pandits’<sup>10</sup> to muscular superheroes – Historical overview**

Based on reports in local newspapers, cinema historians agree that the first public screenings of film in Trinidad took place in 1900 (Macedo 2002; Goptar 2014: 2). In the following years, cultural centres such as the Princes Building in the capital Port of Spain were used for regular screenings until the London Electric Theatre in the neighbourhood of Woodbrook opened its doors as the first cinema in Trinidad (Ibid.). These early cinematic experiences were reserved for a small urban and wealthy group, which was constituted by the white and coloured elite based on the racialised social hierarchy and limited mobility at the time. Although more affordable admission prices and the establishment of cinemas mainly in the capital made the experience accessible to the wider population, large parts especially in rural areas were excluded. In this context, tent cinemas played an integral role to target new audiences in the 1930s, which was particularly significant for the Indo-Trinidadian community predominantly living in the countryside and working in the agricultural sector at the time. Thus many Indo-Trinidadians might have experienced their first Hindi film in this setting. As Primnath Goptar points out, mobile or tent cinemas offered one of the few sources of entertainment and were embraced enthusiastically by rural Indo-Trinidadians. In the oral history interviews he conducted, the experience was described as ‘something of a mini-festival’ (2014: 14) with vendors gathered around, and narrated memories also refer to the journey to screening sites, often walking home together after the show (Ibid.). Goptar estimates that the tent cinema continued to be a regularity in rural areas until the 1960s.

The screening of the first Hindi-speaking film, *Bala Joban* (1934) marked a decisive moment in the history of cinema in Trinidad. It was introduced by Ranjit Kumar, a businessman who had recently migrated from Lahore. The dominant narrative of how Indian films were introduced largely focuses on his life, success and failure. The perception of him as a ‘true Indian’ reinforced the films’ role as a connection to the homeland for the diaspora. Moreover, the tale of his struggles as a business-man signifies another aspect of the cinema for the ethnic community: the import of Indian films soon became part of a lucrative industry. From the 1940s, the majority of cinemas operated outside Port of Spain were owned by Indo-Trinidadians (Goptar 2014: 34). In the 1940s and 50s, the number of cinemas generally increased, including a new trend of drive-ins. According to Lynne Macedo’s research, this was partly due to the presence of US military in the country. She also points out that the majority of new cinemas outside Port of Spain almost exclusively

showed Hindi films. This culminated in over twenty cinemas showing different choices of Indian films in the late 1960s (Macedo 2002).

Hindi cinema quickly became a central source of ethnic identity and a symbolic repertoire to signify Indianness. As can be seen in the advertisement published by local newspapers, the Indian origin of *Bala Joban* was strongly emphasised. In the Trinidad Guardian audiences were invited to see 'India's most glorious all talking singing and dancing musical extravaganza *Bala Joban* with its most majestic Rannies and Rajas and pandits' (1935: 17). A positive evaluation of Indian culture and heritage resonates in the reference to kings and queens of the subcontinent, offering a powerful counter-narrative to colonial discourses and stereotypes in the local context. Gooptar points out that interview partners remembered wearing saris in the style of the film or recollected their '*Bala Joban* orhni' (veil) and '*Bala Joban* earrings' (2014: 179).

In order to understand the enormous impact of early Hindi films on Indo-Trinidadians it is important to consider the larger historical context. Patricia Mohammed describes this period as the reconstruction of ethnic community based on kinship and social rules that were inhibited on the plantation during indenture (Mohammed 2011: 603). With Hindi as the lingua franca used by the heterogeneous group of Indian workers, the films served to consolidate inter-ethnic unity. Iconic images became signifiers of ethnic and cultural purity. For example, Mohammed highlights the role of the submissive, chaste bride on screen in the negotiations of gender relations whereby patriarchal control in the family and community was reasserted (Mohammed 1999: 83). She concludes that the movies served to legitimise cultural practices in the local context and the cinematic experience became 'almost a spiritual experience like a pilgrimage' (Ibid.: 79).

Consequently, the cinema hall can be considered as an ethnicised space and cinema-going as an ethnic ritual. However, the centrality of Hindi films in this period was grounded in more than cultural values represented on screen. Firstly, it coincided with what Indian film scholars have called the golden age of Hindi cinema (Dwyer and Patel 2002: 21). Landmark films such as Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* (1951), Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* (1957) and Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957) were released. Their aesthetic value and appeal are reflected in the critical acclaim they gained worldwide as well as their popularity far beyond the established Hindi cinema circuits. Secondly, cinema-going was intrinsically connected to a variety of new media practices that emerged at the time and were distinctively Trinidadian. The most prominent examples were the so called 'mike men', who announced movies in villages and played film songs and forming an integral part of community life, as well as orchestras devoted to Hindi film music, later on amateur shows such as *Mastana Bahar* and camps for favourite playback singers (Gooptar 2014: 31ff; Manuel 1997: 23; Niranjana 2006: 170ff). Thirdly, the experiences of cinema-goers were deeply embedded in the social interactions at the cinema hall. Based on the accounts of cinema-goers of the period, Mohammed states:



What is important are the actions of both male and female protagonists which are interpreted by the audience as the 'moral' point of film, a reinforcement of the traditional roles expected of women in relation to men. This diet of Indian films, enthusiastically digested by the Indian population [of Trinidad], was of course contradictory in its effect. (...) [I]t provided a new opportunity for women to legitimately go out of their homes, and in fact a new area for mixing between Indian boys and girls' (Mohammed 1999: 81).

This aspect of the cinema experience can be compared to audiences in other parts of the world in the same period. As Jacqueline Maingard argues with regard to audiences in Cape Town's District Six, the significance of the cinema is related to its experience 'as a place where teenage boys and girls could meet and court' (2017: 22). Although this aspect of cinema-going forms part of ethnic identity discourses for Indo-Trinidadians, the meaning of the cinema hall goes beyond the local context as it is a shared trait of cinema-going by audiences in different parts of the world at the time.

In fact, it is this period of Hindi cinema that is usually referred to in the nostalgic accounts by Indo-Trinidadians. Even young cinema-goers compare their own experiences to the golden age. For example, adolescent interview partners between 15 and 30 years old admirably talked about the days of crowded 'Indian' cinemas or the active participation of the audiences during screenings. Others lamented that due to the current crime situation and restrictions of the public space they could not take a stroll after a show and have an ice cream as their parents did on dates, reproducing the narrative of the cinema as a place of courting. Thus, the period has become representative of the Hindi cinema experience and, similarly to the homeland in diasporic longing, it serves as a reference point for ethnic identity formations.

However, the decline of Hindi cinema's significance as social and ethnic space began much earlier than the present-day perspectives of young audiences suggest. The numbers of cinemas already diminished in the 1970s and popularity of Hindi films sank drastically. With the exception of thrillers such as *Deewar* (1975) and *Sholay* (1975) starring the highly popular actor Amitabh Bachchan, attendance in cinema halls was low (Macedo 2002). Moreover, the increasing access and advanced technology for home viewing resulted in a shift towards film consumption in the private sphere, which complied with a global trend (Ang 1996; Klinger 2006).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the diasporic and nostalgic longing was revived for a short period of time. Bollywood as an emerging global culture industry targeted new middle classes in India and the lucrative market of overseas audiences, mainly focusing on non-residential Indians who formed younger diasporas in North America and Europe (Dudrah 2006; Rajadhyaksha 2010). However, the representation of 'Indian' culture relying on the binary opposition of tradition and modernity also appealed to Indo-Trinidadians. Films such as *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (1998) or *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (2001) feature romantic love stories situated between a nostalgic and largely imagined notion of family and an expression

of Western individualism that was entangled with economic and consumerist desire (Dwyer 2000: 14, 49f). In a continuation of earlier cultural revivals, signifiers of tradition such as the sari or puja on screen were appropriated in ethnic identity formations. Thereby values of consumerism and social mobility became intertwined with the diasporic narrative of ethnic community and harmony. It is not surprising that interview partners mention consumer goods and styles when remembering their cinematic experience during this period. For example, a thirty-five-year-old woman emphasised that the 'modern' films meant a radical change at the time, suddenly 'Indian movies' were fashionable for young people. Her first association was the pleasure in the cinema hall when Bollywood star Salman Khan appeared on screen wearing his sexy, tight jeans (Interview Chaguanas, 4.5.2010). Younger interview partners mentioned the impact of films and their stars on popular Indian wear such as saris, shalwar kameez or kurtas as well as hairstyles inspired by actors like Shah Rukh Khan or Kajol. Romantic family films of this period continue to be highly popular, also among young audiences. Based on my results of participant observation in DVD shops as well as watching films with interview partners in private, they make up the majority of films viewed at home.

In contrast, more recent Bollywood productions have ceased to cater to these audience expectations. Toned muscular bodies of action heroes and western appearance of heroines who join fighting scenes and car races,<sup>11</sup> have become typical features and characteristic of the advancing Bollywoodization process. Although the films might hold other pleasures, they are unsuitable to signify Indianness and to support ethnic demarcation in the local context. Therefore, the consumption of Bollywood films of the last decade has been limited, in cinema halls as well as at home. This is evident in low attendance at film screenings as well as in statements by interview partners. In addition to the changes in text and representation, the impact of Bollywoodization can also be seen in fragmented viewing practices. Thus, for example, song and dance sequences are more detached from other film elements than previously and are often accessed on social media platforms such as YouTube. Independent of this development the Trinidadian media landscape has also undergone fundamental changes. Whereas the cinema hall once used to be one of the few spaces for Indo-Trinidadian cultural expression, participation in the public sphere has considerably increased and a diversification of media practices related to Indian ethnic identity, such as classical dancing or Chutney Soca, has developed (cf. Manuel 1997). On the other hand, viewing practices outside the cinema have opened Bollywood to audiences that were marginalised in the ethnicised space. In contrast to Goptar's findings (2014: 258ff), my research results indicate that contact zones with Hindi films, such as the regular Sunday film programmed by state television in the 1980s, international cable stations and, more recently, streaming sites as well as popular music – have resulted in small but persistent non-Indian audiences.

How can the contemporary Bollywood audience in Trinidad be defined in the context of these diverse viewing practices? As discussed extensively in film and media studies, the technological developments since the 1990s and related media practices have made it increasingly difficult to delineate audiences according to medium or local context, especially

with the advance of digital media (Ang 1996; Livingstone 2003; Webster 2005; Athique 2016). In the following, I will focus on young Trinidadian women who regularly attend Bollywood screening at local cinemas and display a self-understanding as being part of the audience.<sup>12</sup> Based on an ethnographic approach, fieldnotes of participant observation in and around the cinema hall are used to understand what cinema-going means to this particular group, how they negotiate the practice in the context of recent changes and thereby navigate multiple notions of gender, class and ethnic belonging in the context of a historical disjuncture. Thus, the last section seeks to give insights into how cinema-going as a media practice has been transformed and how the discourses and structures that have historically shaped it are reflected in contemporary audiencing.

### **Cinematic experiences of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* – an ending and a new beginning**

By the time this research was conducted between 2010 and 2013, most inner-city and single screen cinemas had closed down in Trinidad. The few remaining ones did not show any Hindi films, except for the National in San Fernando. New Bollywood productions were irregularly shown in Movietowne, a shopping mall with several outlets in the country. The screenings of Bollywood blockbusters such as *My Name is Khan* (2010) or *Bodyguard* (2011) were sparsely attended. Informal conversation partners in the field and former film aficionados complained about new films that failed to represent ‘Indian’ culture and values. In contrast, academic colleagues were mostly convinced that the active audiences cheering at beloved stars and vividly commenting on the plot unfolding on screens from the past persisted - even if they themselves did not attend such shows. Sitting in the air-conditioned, plush atmosphere of the multiplex in the first weeks of field research and listening to the restrained laughs and patron’s hushed conversations as only perceivable sign of participation, I began to wonder if I had come to conduct research on the final days of Hindi cinema in Trinidad.

When, however, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* was released in local cinemas in November 2012, its outstanding popularity and the public attention it received turned the cinema hall into a dynamic site of audience negotiations. At the time, I was working with an established sample of regular cinema-goers who belonged to what may be called a ‘new Bollywood audience’. Overall, I attended thirteen screenings of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* in various cinemas, many of them accompanied by young women, conducting participant observation and interviews. The film had a highly successful eight week run with long queues forming outside cinemas. On weekends the shows had to be rescheduled and the film was shown on two screens simultaneously in multiplexes, usually only necessary for Hollywood blockbusters. Passers-by turned and shook their heads in astonishment over the excited crowds of cinema-goers waiting for a film they had never heard of. The large numbers were constituted by those who regularly attended shows and those who were driven by a nostalgic longing for the bygone days of Hindi cinema, or curiosity about the experience of new Bollywood. Thus, the cinematic experience of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* allowed insights into the ongoing negotiations of the historical disjuncture that Hindi film audiences have undergone.

Most of the screenings took place in multiplex cinemas, namely Movietowne Chaguanas, Movietowne Port of Spain and Cinemas 8 in Trincity mall. The exception as stand-alone and inner-city cinema was the National in San Fernando, the only cinema showing Indian films in South Trinidad's urban centre at the time.<sup>13</sup> Multiplex cinemas have only reluctantly begun to cater for Hindi film audiences in Trinidad. Indeed, a steady increase of Bollywood screenings can be observed from 2010, a trend that continued until recently with rare occasions of two blockbusters shown in the same week. The global trend in the new millennium towards the 'malltplex' has thus also taken hold in Bollywood audiences.

*We agreed to meet outside Woodford Café at the parking lot of Movietowne Chaguanas. She climbs down from the passenger seat of her SUV, apparently her partner has been driving. I remember she mentioned before that she was still trying to get used to the new car. It is unusual for a 26-year-old woman of middle-class background to own such an expensive car, but a relative gave it to her as a gift rewarding her academic success. With her stiletto high heels she looks taller than usual. When I compliment her, she laughs and responds jokingly that she can only wear these shoes for occasions such as this one – where she would only have to walk from the car to the café and then to the cinema, all within a 150 yard radius.<sup>14</sup>*

Drawing on the embodied knowledge of the field researcher, the observations in this extract focus on mobility. My first impression upon meeting at Movietowne for a screening of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* refers to the meaning of owning a car in terms of the cinematic experience but also for class relations and consumption practices. Although I had my own vehicle by then, using the public transport system frequently and travelling by 'maxi-taxi' or collective taxis, to the multiplex cinemas in the first months of my field research had demonstrated how circuitous, exhausting and often unsafe these journeys were. Reinforced by the growing social inequality as well as safety issues due to the crime situation in the country<sup>15</sup>, access to this form of entertainment has become more limited and cinema audiences in general have turned exclusionary. This development follows a global trend that has been discussed in terms of the 'malltplex'. As Adrian Athique points out in the Indian context, the socially exclusionary nature of malltplexes is grounded in access to the locations at margins of the city or near main arterial through-fares, expensive ticket prices and linkage to the consumption of goods (2013: 406f). Furthermore, Amit Rai emphasises that the merging of multiplex and mall results in the association of the cinematic experience with specific restaurant chains and shops through visual, spatial and sensorial cues. Film viewing is turned into a part of a larger consumerist experience in the malltplex (2009: 141f). Similarly, the cinematic experience with my interview partner was intrinsically tied to consumption, reflected in her comment on moving around the premises with all amenities close by. Other interview partners commented on visiting shops and restaurants as part of their trips to

Movietowne, 'It's like a must, it's something you have to do, when you go to a movie you must go for dinner after' (Interview St. Augustine, 18.10.2013) or '[Watch a movie and] Häagen-Dazs ... that's the routine' (Interview St. Augustine, 9.10.2013).

For Hindi film audiences, this development has also led to an intra-ethnic stratification, as a large part of the Indo-Trinidadian community is excluded due to their socio-economic position.

*We buy our tickets more than an hour before the show starts, in order to avoid the crowds I have experienced on previous visits to see the film. Then we walk back to Woodford Café to have our long-promised beer together. Inside the air-conditioned lounge, she updates me on the wedding preparations that keep her busy although they have not gone into full gear as yet, with the event more than a year ahead. Therefore, she has not had time for the movies, but she tells me how Heroine and the acting skills of Kareena Kapoor in the film impressed her.*

As noted in the field notes, tickets were around 35 to 45 TTD (approximately 4,50 GBP in 2013), depending on the length of the film and specials such as 3D screenings. It is important to note that for members of the new Bollywood audiences Indian films are usually not the only shows they attend at the mallplex. Especially young interview partners pointed out that their first preference were Hollywood productions, which implied that the Bollywood choice is an additional if affordable second choice. In the extract above, this is not explicitly mentioned nor does the young woman refer to watching Hindi films or song and dance sequences at home. Instead, wedding preparations and Bollywood movies are represented as competing activities. My interview partner had always been keen to give me insights into what ethnic belonging meant to her. Her self-representation as well as my recording of this exchange are consequently focusing on activities related to a public staging of 'Indianness' and prioritising between them rather than between various media practices.

*Jab Tak Hai Jaan* was often described by interview partners as a must-see for several reasons. On the one hand, it was the last film directed by one of Hindi cinema's most well-known directors, Yash Chopra, who died shortly before the release. Its romantic story and the male lead star Shah Rukh Khan also promised a revival of the popular romantic family film. On the other hand, rumours about the scandalous nature of erotic scenes on screen also promised a break with its conventions and the norms associated with Hindi cinema. Therefore, the crowd at all the screening locations was very heterogeneous. Many of the patrons I talked to had not seen a Hindi film in the cinema for over twenty years, others were regulars who nevertheless considered the show a special occasion. Interestingly, some visitors at the National cinema in San Fernando did not know anything about the movie beforehand, such as teenage couples seeking the darkness of the cinema hall or a group of Afro-Trinidadian workers who enjoyed the air-conditioned atmosphere after a long day. This can be explained by the National's location close to the city centre, the

relatively cheap prices for tickets and snacks, as well as the limited choices of the only stand-alone cinema that screened *Jab Tak Hai Jaan*. However, the largest numbers were drawn to Movietowne Chaguanas in Central Trinidad, complying with reports of interview partners from South and North that it was the main location to enjoy Bollywood cinema. The premiere was set for a Wednesday and the queues at the entrance blocked the car park – by-passers, shoppers and Movietowne personnel showed great bewilderment. On the weekend the rush had increased to the point that the management had to reschedule and open a second screen during prime-times in the afternoon and evening.

*When we walk back to the entrance of the cinema, a long queue has formed and there is a lot of discontent among waiting patrons. A group standing next to us in the hot evening sun mentions the rumours that too many tickets have been sold. Other people murmur about the mismanagement, how can two new blockbusters be shown so close to each other? The new part of the Twilight saga is also scheduled for this evening and there is a lot of confusion about where we are supposed to wait. Finally, the ushers announce that another screen has been opened for Jab Tak Hai Jaan – what a relief! We manage to get hold of three seats in the middle of the second cinema hall, congratulating ourselves on the outcome after much pushing and shoving. Although this was a stressful start for our movie night, she seems pleased about the amount of people who have come out to see the film. She states that hopefully it will teach the Movietowne management a lesson, so they stop underestimating the Bollywood audiences.*

In general, young women who regularly attended Bollywood shows perceived the large numbers drawn to cinemas and the film's success as a positive development. The comment on the Movietowne management shows that, on the one hand, this is rooted in the continuing struggle for respect and acceptance of Indo-Trinidadian cultural expressions. The malltiplax chain is neither owned by Indo-Trinidadians nor does it have any close ties to the ethnic community. On the other hand, the attendance of 'old audiences' in the new surroundings of the malltiplax also seemed to contribute to the satisfaction of 'new audience' members such as my interview partner. This indicates the important role of intra-ethnic differences in the negotiation of contemporary cinema-going.

As discussed above, the malltiplax excludes parts of former audiences based on economic means and social standing. My research results indicate that ethnic and class boundaries intersect with gendered and regional differences. Significantly, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* was released during the Diwali season, in which Chaguanas turns into a hub of religious activities with the Divali Nagar festival site as a central attraction for Hindus from all over the island. Thus, the malltiplax was (re)claimed as an ethnicised space with Chaguanas as the regional focal point.<sup>16</sup> During the year, Movietowne Chaguanas also screens by far the highest number of Bollywood movies. In contrast to the urban North that is often perceived



as cosmopolitan, it seems that for the rising middle and upper-middle class Indo-Trinidadians in Central Trinidad the legacy of Hindi cinema as ethnic marker of difference has become part of their story of economic success and social mobility.

Comparing the data collected at the different sites, the composition of audiences in mallmultiplexes complied with my results from previous research: audiences were constituted almost exclusively by Indo-Trinidadians of which about seventy percent were women over the age of thirty. Intergenerational groups of women were also common, occasionally accompanied by one or two adult men. The conspicuous absence of young men was explained by young female members of the audience alluding to the romance: 'Indian films tend to be more female, and for female sensibilities. That is why you would have mothers and daughter, grandmothers, because they identify with it, they like the romance' (Interview Port of Spain, 24.11.2012). In other accounts more emphasis is put on the viewing practices rather than content: 'Because, one: they find it real long, they say it too long. And then, I think, most of us would cry for the movie, because you know ... you would get so into the movie that you lost in it, and they just find that silly' (Interview Chaguanas, 14.6.2010). Interestingly, my observations in cinema halls could not confirm any substantial increase in numbers of young men when Bollywood action movies were screened. The predominating influence of the romantic family film of the 1990s and 2000s seems to have resulted in a feminisation or gendered audiencing in the local context.

*When we are seated, her fiancé offers to get popcorn and drinks for us outside. We gladly accept. As soon as he has left, her mood seems to change slightly. In the dim and cosy atmosphere of the cinema hall, she confides in me that she is worried about her independence after getting married. I share my feelings and experiences about how difficult it can be to assert independence in a relationship as a woman. Cheerful visions of the future take turns with regrets, she reflects on her decision to get married at this point in life and uncertainty about a shared life including financial and family issues. The cinema hall provides an intimate space with most other patrons immersed in personal conversations. Shortly before the lights go out, her partner arrives with a big bucket of popcorn and other snacks, all of us lean back to enjoy the film.*

The cinema as a feminised space offers the opportunity to share feelings with other women. Similar to other popular cultural forms such as romantic novels or soap operas, Hindi films have served female audiences to create shared spaces. In the local context, this tendency has been reinforced by the feminisation of audiencing in the era of the romantic family film. This is not only evident in the cinema hall but also in the organisation of private home screenings and social media sites such as dedicated Facebook groups.<sup>17</sup> During my field research, the intimacy to share such experiences was a common aspect of cinema-going especially with groups of women who met regularly to watch Bollywood movies together. In the situation described above the reflections on marriage and long-term relationships were

confined to the cinema hall due to the partner's presence. Very often interview partners would also spend substantial time before and after the screenings discussing gendered experiences. Typically, this part of the cinematic experience was connected to consumerist practices, such as having a meal, cocktails or ice cream in one of the restaurant franchises. Thus, women reacted to the elimination of the active audience in contemporary cinema halls, the incorporation of consumerist practices in the cinematic experience of the mallmultiplex and the gendered demotion of Bollywood based on the notion of 'romance' by carving out a shared space.<sup>18</sup>

*Throughout the film I hear her laughing out loud in reaction to jokes and from time to time she points out references in the film to all time favourites of the 1990s and 2000s romantic family film – the orange dress reminds of Kajol's costumes in a famous song and dance sequences of Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham, Shah Rukh Khan's longing gaze is as convincing as ever. When the film closes with the lovers' reunion as happy end and the credits appear on screen, she looks around in the cinema hall and comments with great satisfaction on the majority of patrons remaining seated to savour the last minutes of the experience: 'Wow, how quiet everyone is!'. I ask her how she personally liked the film, her answer is the ultimate proof that it lived up to her expectations of the Bollywood experience – she will definitely have to come back and watch it again.*

In many ways, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* draws on the romantic family film of the 1990s and 2000s. Yash Chopra's style of film-making strongly influenced the period and his last film displays many familiar features of Bollywood such as opulent song and dance sequences, melodramatic scenes related to the love-triangle as well as a romantic happy ending. Furthermore, Shah Rukh Khan plays the romantic hero as he did in some of the most popular romantic family films amongst local audiences. Accordingly, expectations were high and often based on a nostalgic feeling about the 'old films'. The comments of my interview partner highlight features of the romantic family film and intertextual references to 'old' favourites. They not only serve to emphasise her expert status but also to legitimize the cinematic pleasure of new audiences despite the impact of the Bollywoodization process, which has led to the loss of the film's function to signify Indianness in the local context.

Nostalgia for bygone days of the cinema is also expressed in the attitude towards viewing practices. Repeat viewing of favourite films is very common in global Hindi film audiences.<sup>19</sup> The young woman refers to this practice in order to valorize the cinematic experience of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* within the Hindi cinema cosmos. Although it has become increasingly difficult to watch films repeatedly due to the expenses related to the cinematic experience, many interview partners stated that they come back to the cinema for their favourite blockbusters. Implicitly, they thereby reassert their socio-economic status as part of an affluent middle class. Moreover, the comment about the quietness in the cinema hall

after the screening indicates the expectation of viewers being 'drawn in' by the film. Many interview partners introduced me to their ritualistic practices to prepare for a screening as a fundamental part of the cinematic experience. They were often framed as 'entering the Bollywood world' and leaving everything else behind by switching off notifications or blanking out thoughts about family and work. Rather than referring to actual viewing practices of the past such as loud commentary and interacting with the screen typical of active audiences, the nostalgic longing seems to be directed to an age before the smartphone and constant connectivity. The immersion into the Bollywood world through rituals also expresses the longing for an imagined past, supposedly without the social pressures associated with digitalisation.

Thus, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* seemed to be a last tribute to cinematic Bollywood experiences of the past. At the same time, it transgressed many boundaries of the romantic genre as well as of Indianness constructed in the local context. Public discussion centred around the scandalous fact that Khan would finally kiss the heroine on screen as well as engage in explicit sex scenes, which was previously unheard of. Comments of cinema-goers ranged from disappointment about the lack of explicitness to shock and repudiation. One of the main attractions for young members of the audience was the character of Akira, who addresses the hero in the following self-confident way: 'Make me your girlfriend. Why? I'm young ... I'm entertaining ... I'm sexy, you've already checked my body out, actually I'm like a jackpot for you, it's a limited offer' (2012). In the cinema hall, this was met with indignation by some, but mostly with laughter. In contrast, transgressions relating to ethnicity on screen were not brought up in public discourse nor discussed by most of my interview partners. The prelude to the song 'Ishq Shava' re-enacts the Bollywood version of a harmonious multi-cultural space marked not only by the music, but also by the dancers of Asian, European and African descent. Meera, the female main character is approached by three different men of which one represents an African or Black British background performs a dance style reminding of 'wining' in the Caribbean. Due to heated public debates related to Trinidadian popular culture, I expected that the scene would become a central topic – however, only an interview partner with mixed background pointed out that this symbolised a major step for her in Bollywood to represent diversity (Port of Spain, 24.11.2012).

*After a second round of drinks, we listen to her comments on the film based on her fandom and expertise as an avid Bollywood cinema-goer. Unexpectedly, she is impressed by the female actors, even by Katrina Kaif, who she has previously regarded as rather untalented – although she still missed the beat in the dance scenes! But her fascination and joy are reserved for the character Akira. She likes that the young woman is individualistic, neither over-emphasising sexiness nor depicting the 'nice Indian girl'. Nevertheless, she states that she would not have accepted her as the love interest of the romantic hero: 'At some point I thought that is what they are trying to do, that he would take [Akira] ... we would not buy that!' This confirms my impression in the cinema hall that she*

*enjoyed the explicit and provocative statements of Akira as part of the entertainment. I ask her about the erotic scenes on screen. She considers the scenes showing kissing and pre-marital sexual intimacy as progressive, most importantly it is integrated convincingly into the love story. However, she recalls that she felt the tension in the room and her thoughts that 'people would not like it'. Her fiancé has remained silent until now but adds to this: 'There were children in the audience...'. In his comment the idea that Bollywood should be 'clean family entertainment' resonates, but his partner immediately rebuffs it. She states that there was nothing too explicit or indecent in the scenes. Then she emphasises that she particularly enjoyed the kissing scene,<sup>20</sup> further advocating changes in film making practices. It seems like she is actively demonstrating to herself as well as to me as an outsider, fan from foreign and researcher, how (female) audiences of contemporary Bollywood in Trinidad have accepted representations of erotic intimacy and that in fact they have become an expected element of the cinematic experience. Her fiancé appears to be both a representative of 'old' audiences who have not been part of this shift and patriarchal authorities who nevertheless try to uphold this image of Indian films.*

Based on her expertise in Hindi cinema and status as a member of new Bollywood audiences, the young woman asserted herself as representing Indo-Trinidadian women vis-à-vis her partner as an Indo-Trinidadian man and myself as western researcher. Her statement that the erotic scenes in the film were progressive and her rejection of the notion that they were indecent shows that she assumes the interpretative authority in this situation. This is significant because at the heart of debates on the representation of erotic intimacy in Bollywood lies the control over women, their bodies and female sexuality. Rather than drawing on Creole or western notions of femininity, she grounds progressive notions of femininity in the Bollywood realm signifying ethnic belonging.

Clearly, gender representations lie at the core of negotiating Bollywood cinema and Indianness in the local context. Costumes such as short skirts and female sexuality, in particular the depiction of pre-marital sex, were frequently mentioned as markers of 'new' films. The 'Indian' woman is constructed in this discourse as Other and serves as an idealised version of femininity, which is detached from Indo-Trinidadian womanhood but holds symbolic power in ethnic identity formations. My experience of watching *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* with a family who otherwise rarely watched Bollywood films in the cinema included mixed and contradicting responses: during the screening the daughter commented on the sex scene 'What stupidity ... Indian movies not supposed to have this!'. By sharing her impression not only with us but also with contacts and followers on her social media channels, this young woman joined the (public) debate surrounding new Bollywood and its audiences in Trinidad as well as the renegotiations of Indianness and 'Indian' femininity. Interestingly, in the conversation afterwards, mother and daughter concluded that the film

was hyped for no reason, since the intimate scenes were not really explicit (Port of Spain, 29.11.2012).

Intergenerational relationships can also serve to legitimise pleasures that were previously not accepted as part of the cinematic Bollywood experience. Based on the majority of adult women in the cinema hall, the interpretative collectives do not only make it possible to redraw boundaries such as accepting pre-marital sex as part of the romantic narrative, but also allow younger women to enjoy representations of female agency and sexuality on screen. Despite often scandalised reactions to film content, the presence of older women legitimises the younger ones' viewing pleasure. As such, *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* can also be seen as the beginning of a new era of Hindi cinema in Trinidad. It provided a public stage for contemporary Bollywood audiences and their viewing practices.

## **Conclusion**

In order to examine the historical disjuncture that Bollywood audiences in Trinidad have recently undergone, the approach in this article discusses cinema-going as media practice. Caribbean gender studies are used to situate experiences in the complex interdependencies of gender, ethnicity, class and regional belonging in the local context. I have argued that the marginalisation of Indo-Trinidadians due to their competitive positioning in society by colonial labour regimes, the Othering of their religious and cultural customs as well as living predominantly in rural communities has played an integral role in the significance of the cinema for diasporic identity formations. Consequently, the cinema hall screening Hindi films has been constituted as an ethnicised space, which continues to be the case despite the closure of many stand-alone cinemas and a decline of interest in Bollywood after the 1990s and 2000s romantic family film era. While Afro-Trinidadians and other ethnic groups form another if substantially smaller audience for Hindi films and Bollywood, their forms of audiencing are bound to television, record carriers and, more recently, streaming sites.

However, technological developments combined with the Bollywoodization process in Hindi film production and the diversification of media practices in the Indo-Trinidadian community have resulted in the decline of the significance of Hindi films in the local context. My research results show that the global trend towards the mallplex as well as local changes such as intra-ethnic stratification have facilitated the emergence of 'new' Bollywood audiences marked by upwards mobility in Indo-Trinidadian middle-classes and regional belonging to Central Trinidad. Furthermore, new Bollywood audiencing is gendered as the legacy of the highly popular 1990s and 2000s family film is a feminisation of reception. Indo-Trinidadian women have responded to the elimination of the active audience in the mallplex setting and the gendered denomination of Bollywood based on the notion of 'romance' by claiming the cinema hall as a shared space. Thus, the exceptional success of *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (2012) in the local context can be understood as both the expression of nostalgic longing for a bygone era of Hindi films and public staging of a 'new' Bollywood audience and their viewing practices. Although the comparison of the results to audiences who share a history of displacement or historical rupture such as South Africa is

possible, a comparative approach between countries with Indian diasporic groups who have undergone indenture such as Guyana, Fiji and Mauritius would be particularly important.

### **Biographical note:**

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## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Based on research funded by the University of Vienna in 2010 and Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2012-13.

<sup>2</sup> Examples would be the increasing use of digital platforms for promotion or the production of song and dance sequences in music video format, which also reinforces fragmented viewing practices and removal from the cinema as site of consumption.

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere I discussed how the loss of Bollywood's function to demarcate from other ethnic groups has contributed to the decline of interest. The dominant representation of western life-styles and consumption on screen as well as the adaptation of western representational practices play a

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significant role in this development (Klien check). Rather than on textual features, this paper focuses on the changes in cinema-going as media practice in the local context.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that ‘race’ as a structuring principle worked in interplay with other socially constructed categories. Gender played a crucial role. As Hilary Beckles has shown, the law constructed women as vehicles in the context of slavery. Status was inherited independently of the father, subsuming the productive and reproductive capabilities of black women as economic factors in the market economy: ‘The linking of white womanhood and black womanhood to freedom and slavery respectively meant that the entire ideological fabric of the slave system was conceived in terms of race, sex and gender’ 1995: 130f).

<sup>5</sup> Main differences between the two work forces were between enslaved and bonded status, the right to return of indentured labourers and their relative freedom to practice religion and customs. For example, the colonial state conceded certain jurisdiction of the village panchayat and gradual adjustment to Indian customs, such as marriage (Shepherd 2002: 126). Planters were initially not interested in their social life, because after an industrial residence of ten years in the foreign country they were promised a passage back to India. Due to economic considerations, in particular the question of state sponsored repatriation, issues such as the imbalance of female-male ratio were addressed and family migration was encouraged in later stages (Ibid.: 112; 117). In terms of gender relations, Patricia Mohammed argues that the low numbers of women among indentured workers and their access to wage labour resulted in possibilities to transgress traditional patriarchal boundaries as well as often violent attempts of men to reassert their dominance (1995: 39f). As a result they could negotiate their role in the post-indentureship community and family life in a powerful position, which was very different from the situation of Afro-Trinidadian women after Emancipation.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the 2011 Population and Housing Census Demographic Report. ([http://www.tt.undp.org/content/trinidad\\_tobago/en/home/library/crisis\\_prevention\\_and\\_recovery/publication\\_1.html](http://www.tt.undp.org/content/trinidad_tobago/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/publication_1.html))

<sup>7</sup> Reddock suggests that in the course of the construction of an ethnic identity in the local context, it is possible that a village endogamy developed and former caste-like lines of division were drawn in demarcation to groups such as the Muslim population, Afro-Trinidadians or Whites (2011a: 581).

<sup>8</sup> Amongst the most notable recent developments are the crises in the neighbouring country of Venezuela and resulting migration movements. Furthermore, it remains unclear what the implications of interventions by data-mining firms have been. The revelations concerning SCL and Cambridge Analytica’s activities in US elections and the Brexit referendum included reports on their project of micro-targeting of Trinbagonians in 2010. (<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/07/the-great-british-brexite-robbery-hijacked-democracy>).

<sup>9</sup> I have chosen the term, partner, over the usual terms, such as informant, because it emphasises the collaborative process of field research, as collaborative meaning making between researcher and participants. I am aware that it is not commonly used.

<sup>10</sup> Advertisement of Bala Joban in the *Trinidad Guardian*, 1 December 1935.

<sup>11</sup> See Klein 2019, Bollywood heroine

<sup>12</sup> In an overview on the changing nature of audiences, Sonia Livingstone proposes to keep in focus “both audiences as consumers of media goods and audiences as interpreters of symbolic mediations” (online, 2003). Drawing on Alasuutari, she points out the importance of a reflexive

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approach recognizing that audiences are to a large extent constructed by the researcher herself for analysis but should also take into account how people identify themselves as audiences (Ibid.).

<sup>13</sup> The second inner-city cinema in San Fernando, The Empire, was closed due to renovations when *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* was released.

<sup>14</sup> All italicized extracts are taken from fieldnotes taken during participant observation at Movietowne Chaguanas on 25.11.2012.

<sup>15</sup> The “Caribbean Human Development Report 2012 – Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security” states that Trinbagonian’s sense of security is weakest in the region and statistics show a sharp increase in robbery as well as homicides from 2000.

([http://www.bb.undp.org/content/barbados/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/caribbean-human-development-report-2012.html](http://www.bb.undp.org/content/barbados/en/home/library/democratic_governance/caribbean-human-development-report-2012.html)).

<sup>16</sup> The release of Bollywood blockbusters is often coordinated according to the Hindu festival calendar.

<sup>17</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere, there is a crucial difference between online sites with limited access such as groups and those perceived as public, such as walls and online fan communities (Klien, forthcoming). Young Indo-Trinidadian women tend to comply with an ethnicised gender identity in specific public sites marked as ‘Indian’ including family events, religious events and cultural functions. Hindi cinema in the local context has been intrinsically connected to this ethnicised gender identity, which has been discussed by Hosein in terms of a symbolic womanhood (2012). This also limits the space to express contradicting experiences online.

<sup>18</sup> I also encountered groups of Afro-Trinidadians and women of other ethnic backgrounds with similar practices, however, most of them met in private homes to watch Bollywood films together.

<sup>19</sup> The most famous and often cited example is *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) which is still being shown at the Maratha Mandir cinema in Mumbai.

<sup>20</sup> Following colonial censorship rules, the so-called kissing ban was upheld as a convention in Hindi cinema, resulting in a repertoire of codes representing intimacy on screen. At the same time it has served as a marker of difference to Western films (for a detailed discussion see Prasad, M. (1998) *Ideology of the Hindi film: A historical construction*. Oxford University Press, Delhi).