Bollywood's Imagination and the Middle Class – a Review of *Queen* and *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*

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Abstract: A curious contradiction is present in Bollywood cinema, as enunciated by Jyotika Virdi in *The Cinematic Imagination – Indian Popular Films as Social History*. It is a cultural apparatus very much embroiled in the process of nation-building, which it does by imagining the nation with the bourgeois hegemony in mind (Virdi 2003: 9-10). The bourgeoisie, or middle class, of India is a complex audience. Because of its disparity in income levels as well as social positions, William Mazzarella recommends defining the middle class in India not as an empirical category, but rather as a performative and discursive space. Bollywood cinema, which Mazzarella situates as a cultural device that 'brings the various middle class formations into an active – if often contested – alignment' (Mazzarella 2016: 9), thus becomes a multi-layered space that engages with and offers resolutions for the social anxieties of the middle class.

Definitions of romance, love, and the female have been part of these social anxieties. This paper will analyse the manner in which the female protagonists of *Jodi* and *Queen* manage to steer their way through these anxieties as part of their coming of age. By making a comparative analysis of two films that arguably represent two different modes of middle class formation, this paper will show that Bollywood does not represent the status quo in the shape of a monolithic ideal.

To resolve this apparent contradiction within the Bollywood industry, Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality will be put forward as a critical concept. The analysis of the movies will illustrate that Bollywood has a tendency to refer to itself, instead of strongly adhering to values outside of the industry. That does not mean that these values have disappeared from Bollywood films; it does however create a space in which certain deviations from the status quo are made possible.

When I was visiting India in March 2014 I had an encounter with a group of university students that left a notable impression. After exchanging the usual details – did I like India, which country I was from, did I have a job – they wanted to know if I saw any Bollywood films, and what did I think of them. Truth be told, the curiosity was mutual; so after responding to their questions I asked them if they had seen *Queen*, and what did they think of it? I wanted to know, because I found this film interesting in particular be-

cause of its, somewhat unorthodox, protagonist Rani, a traditional Delhi girl who decides to travel through Europe all by herself. In addition, the film contained one of the very few instances in Hindi film of an on-screen kiss. I was wondering how this film was received by the all-male group of young students I was talking to; would they be positive or negative? Would they encourage the more progressive image of woman and femininity espoused by the film, or dismiss it as a liberal fantasy?

As it turned out they were enthusiastic about Rani's free spirit, sense of adventure, and strength of character; yet, at the same time, they were deeply aware that this was a fictional representation. As Chandrahas Choudhury expressed in his 2014 Bloomberg article 'A kiss is never just a kiss in India': kissing in public is still very much a taboo in India, and associated with debauchery (Choudhury 2014: 1).

It was this notion that led me to wonder about a number of things. The display of the kiss in *Queen* is a breach of Hindi film convention; not only because it disregards the unwritten Bollywood rule of 'no kissing', but also because it connects the kiss both to the notions of desire and of national pride. Moments before it happens, Rani expresses her infatuation with the Italian chef she kisses. The kiss itself, however, is framed within the idea of a global kissing contest: Rani feels the need to prove that Indians are the best kissers in the world. At the same time, kissing in public is an issue in much of India: it is at least frowned upon, and at worst it might lead to violent arrest and time in prison.

Queen, then, takes an interesting place in the public sphere: its protagonist is almost unanimously praised in the media, yet the morals she displays are far from encouraged in Indian society at large. For example, public display of affection and/or intimacy is often considered vulgar; in 2007, actor Richard Gere kissing Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty sparked protests across the country (cf. BBC 2007). In that sense, *Queen* made me think of another fairly recent Bollywood production; namely, *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi* (in English: 'A match made in heaven'). I decided to watch this film a few years ago when I heard about the illustrious Shah Rukh Khan for the first time, and wanted to see what he was all about. I know now that it may not do the actor justice to bring up *Jodi* as an example of his acting skills. Never-

theless, the film stuck with me for other reasons; reasons similar to the ones that drove me to playfully interrogate the group of students I met.

Jodi concerns a young married couple with a problematic relationship. The wife, Taani, was set to marry someone else. Not just anybody, either; she was to have a 'love marriage', as opposed to a more traditional arranged marriage. However, on the wedding day, the groom tragically dies in a road accident. Taani's father suffers a heart attack after hearing the news, and moments later Taani finds herself in the hospital with her dying father. He has only one last wish: to see his daughter married. He proposes that she marry his favourite student, Surinder. She agrees, and the couple lives unhappily (thankfully not forever) after.

A somewhat curious start for a romantic comedy. Once the film is underway, however, it takes the form of a more traditional Bollywood romcom. Surinder tries to win his wife's heart by creating an alter-ego that he uses to anonymously take dancing classes with Taani. This entire situation raises some questions about the film's relation to public morality. Surinder's alter-ego, Raj Kapoor is a womaniser and plays the part of someone seducing a married woman; at the same time, because he is the same person as Surinder – who is married to Taani – Raj's womanising is confined within the limits of the social contract of the marriage. The extra layer added here is that Raj Kapoor is also the name of one of Bollywood's biggest stars – as such, Bollywood inserts itself into the film.

Jodi and *Queen* thus appear to have something in common. Both films construct a certain space for their characters in which they can perform a morality that is markedly distinct from what is acceptable in India at large – both as defined by unwritten rules of Hindi film (no kissing, limited physical intimacy [Ganti 2004: 81]) as well as according to what happens in Indian society (moral policing concerning kissing in public, for example [cf. Ganguli 2015]). This is an interesting thing to note, most importantly because arguably, as M. Madhava Prasad writes, the middle class in Indian film – to which the protagonists of both films clearly belong – 'carries the burden of national identity on its shoulders' (1998: 163).

As such, a curious contradiction is present in Bollywood cinema, as enunciated by Jyotika Virdi in *The Cinematic Imagination – Indian Popular Films as Social History*. It is a cultural apparatus very much embroiled in the

process of nation-building, which it does by imagining the nation with the bourgeois hegemony in mind (Virdi 2003: 9-10). The bourgeoisie, or middle class, of India is a complex audience. Because of its disparity in income levels as well as social positions, William Mazzarella recommends defining the middle class in India not as an empirical category, but rather as a performative and discursive space. Doing so 'enables a certain set of 'imagined Indias' – both utopian and dystopian – to be articulated' (Mazzarella 2016: 3). This means that the middle class contains a variety of interests that at times are at conflict with each other. Mazzarella identifies the 'projection of the social anxieties that beset liberalization' (Ibid.: 6) as an important part of the discourse on the middle class. Bollywood cinema, which Mazzarella situates as a cultural device that 'brings the various middle class formations into an active – if often contested – alignment' (Ibid.: 9), thus becomes a multi-layered space that engages with and offers resolutions for the social anxieties mentioned earlier.

Definitions of romance, love, and the female have been part of these social anxieties. This paper will analyse the manner in which the female protagonists of *Jodi* and *Queen* manage to steer their way through these anxieties as part of their coming of age. Doing so will shed light on the manner in which Bollywood attempts to 'rehabilitate the family on terms of the individual will' (Virdi 2003: 208). By making a comparative analysis of two films that arguably represent different sides of the equilibrium, this paper will show that Bollywood does not represent the status quo in the shape of a monolithic ideal. As such, this paper will continue on Virdi's premise that Bollywood does not possess a 'monological voice' (Ibid.: 212), and add to this statement by exploring how two very different manifestations of subjectivity arise from two very different coming-of-age stories in *Jodi* and *Queen*.

To resolve this apparent contradiction within the Bollywood industry, Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality will be put forward as a critical concept. The analysis of the movies will illustrate that Bollywood has a tendency to refer to itself, instead of strongly adhering to values outside of the industry. That does not mean that these values have disappeared from Bollywood films; it does however create a space in which certain deviations from the status quo are made possible.

The line along which the argument will be developed is the notion of the bourgeois subject. In order to do so productively, the definition that will be used is one proposed by Rachel Dwyer. Dwyer (2001) posits Bourdieu as an important voice concerning Indian middle class identity. Instead of cultural production, Bourdieu identifies cultural consumption, or taste, as the leading factor contributing to status (Dwyer 2001: 186). The bourgeoisie, or middle class, defines taste; according to Dwyer (Ibid.), this means that the middle class aesthetic becomes cultural capital. In this context, Bollywood appears to function as a prism, taking in bourgeois definitions of taste on one end while disseminating these notions through film screens all over India. The industry thus maintains a tense relation to the middle class: though Bollywood regulates taste by distributing cultural products ready for consumption, it is also dependent on its consumer base for financial support. As such, Bollywood's relation to the middle class takes the somewhat problematic appearance of a closed loop in which the middle class has found a way to reinforce its own values, leading to an ideological equilibrium.

This essay will analyse the way in which *Queen* and *Jodi* function as cultural products within this loop. As stated before, *Queen* appears to challenge a number of conservative notions at the heart of Indian society. As such, it appears the ideological equilibrium is not as stable as it appears; the popularity of *Queen* demonstrating that, in fact, many Indians long to identify with arguably progressive characters.[1] At the centre of the analysis will be the concept of a 'class space' that serves as 'a condition for the emergence of bourgeois subjectivity', as defined by Prasad in *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (Prasad 1998: 181). The notion of bourgeois subjectivity is in this case understood as a progressive ideal. As mentioned before, Indian cinema has a role in the (re)production of the state; the imagination of a middle class forms an important part of this endeavour. By analysing *Queen* and *Jodi*, both recent films, new insights may be gained in the way Bollywood imagines the middle class. The fact that both films construct a certain space

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[1] According to data found in IMDB.com and Wikipedia, *Queen* earned around Rs. 97 crore (USD 14 million) at the global box-office and earned several awards: lead actress Kangana Ranout was awarded Best Actress in both the National Film Awards (2015) and the International Indian Film Academy Awards (2015). As such, the film can be considered both a commercial and a critical hit.

for their protagonists in which to enact their idealised middle class subjectivities, serves to illustrate how India – under the influence of the opening market and the subsequent influx of consumer culture – imagines itself within the global capitalist system. *Queen* and *Jodi* illustrate the departure from a realist national cinema towards a globalised, bourgeoisie-oriented mode of production that idealises a Western-style progressive subject within an Indian cultural frame.

In order to demonstrate how this is the case this paper will use three key concepts in Indian cinema, and subsequently analyse the ways in which they surface in both films. The first chapter will concern itself with characterisation; the second chapter concerns the notion of physical locations; and the third chapter will explore Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality as an analytical tool in an effort to bring the observations made in the former chapters together. All quotations used from both films are taken from the English subtitles.

CHARACTERISATION – LOOKS ARE DECEPTIVE

This paper strives to argue that the idealised bourgeois character as portrayed in Bollywood film is no longer merely concerned with a contribution to nation; instead, it is defined by an expression of individuality that reaches its highest point when partaking of a global culture. It is important to note that while this mode is often expressed through channels of capitalism and consumerism, it also has an ideological side that is too often conflated with an omnipresent late-capitalist system. *Queen* and *Jodi* contain notions of consumerism as an expression of class; yet, at the same time, the way in which their subjectivity is defined is ideological. In *Queen*, the development of Rani illustrates the importance of self-worth and assertiveness. *Jodi* shows the importance of love and mutual communication in a marriage; in other words, the film supplants the definition of marriage as a social contract between families with that of the romantic couple. At the same time, the protagonists in both films are strongly tied to their own cultural heritage.

This leads to different results. In *Queen*, Rani discovers that being Indian does not necessarily mean being a traditional Indian wife. In this sense, *Queen* reinvents the Indian woman as an independent cosmopolite. *Jodi*, on the other

hand, subjects the characters to the constraints of Indian tradition. Subjectivity, in this film, is reinvented as a trope rather than an ideal: the invocation of subjectivity serves to underline the validity of traditional cultural mores, such as the arranged marriage in its most conservative form.

This chapter seeks to illustrate how the main characters in both films negotiate themselves through Indian tradition and capitalist modernity to arrive at an ideal example of the Indian middle class by analysing characterisation and character development. Instances from both films will be analysed and compared to illustrate how, when it concerns the project of the state, consensus is relative: tradition and modernity continually mix and merge to create new forms of subjectivity.

A suitable point of departure would be the notions of love, marriage, and couple. Both films start off with a wedding that has to be cancelled, though for different reasons. It could even be said that what happens in *Queen* is entirely opposite of what takes place in *Jodi*. *Queen* starts off *in medias res*: through the camera, the viewer is transported to Rani's hectic family home, in the middle of the preparations for her wedding. Her character is introduced on screen; the viewer witnesses a short interaction and dialogue between Rani and her grandmother. Following this instance, the viewer is granted access to Rani's inner world for a moment. Time slows down, ambient noise fades, and using voice-over, Rani expresses her hopes and dreams concerning the marriage. A number of things are mentioned: she worries about the practical issues of the wedding preparation; she is concerned about what her parents, little brother, and friends are doing. This signifies Rani's somewhat traditional way of imagining her wedding: she recognises the part it plays in the community. She mentions that her father decorated his shop 'like a bride' (*Queen* 2014: 00:04:55). The wedding as such becomes something bigger than an affair between Rani and Vijay; in addition to the joining of two individuals, it serves as a way to (re)organise relationships within the community, and also as a rite of passage for Rani, who by getting married ascends to a similar state as her friend Sonal. Rani's wish to upload the pictures of the wedding preparations to Facebook (Ibid.: 00:05:10) further illustrates the way in which she imagines her wedding as an issue of status. In short, Rani is characterised as possessing a fairly traditional outlook on marriage, as defined by her belief that

getting married will, apart from it being the next step in her relationship, also allow her to attain a new mode of middle class subjectivity – or at least reinforce her position as an upstanding member of the urban middle class.

The characters in *Jodi* are introduced as slightly different. Taani, as a bride-to-be, can be considered as Rani's counterpart. The first part of *Jodi* coincidentally also includes a wedding preparation; and this event also serves as an introduction of Taani's character. Interestingly, contrary to Rani, Taani is not allowed to introduce herself; instead, it is a voice over by Surinder who introduces her to the viewer. She is instantly revealed to be his love interest. Taani, as such, is immediately characterised as desirable – something that sets the scene for a conception of a husband-wife relationship that is characterised by a traditional disposition; namely, the desire by the male to possess the female. Modernity enters the scene immediately afterwards however, because Taani is not set to marry Surinder just yet. She is about to engage in a love marriage, which appears to be done to give her a progressive, bourgeois character: she is the girl that goes her own way.

Unfortunately, as her father articulates with his last breath, God has other things in mind. Her father's impending death forces Taani to abandon the dream of middle class subjectivity, in this case defined as a freedom to marry whom one chooses. The subsequent part of the film, in which Surinder's friends visit his house to see his new wife, the viewer sees Taani reluctantly accepting the role of a traditional Indian wife. After initial hesitation, she takes on the responsibility of serving drinks at the party – a symbolic act, illustrating her acceptance of her marriage as the social contract Indian marriages are traditionally conceived to be. This is further illustrated by her apology for her behaviour and subsequent promise to be a 'good wife to [Surinder]' (*Jodi* 2008: 00:25:01). She even goes as far as to state that she 'has to kill the old Taani that I was, and become a new Taani' (Ibid.: 00:25:13). She is forced to abandon her ideal of marrying the man she loves; this necessitates her to reinvent herself as a 'good wife' rather than the female half of a loving couple.

The 'new' Taani, who conforms to the more traditional position of the wife in a marriage, is strikingly similar to Rani in the beginning of *Queen*. After the blissful introduction, Rani slips away from the wedding preparations for a moment to see Vijay, her husband-to-be. They meet up in a café,

even though it is considered bad luck to do so the day before the wedding. Vijay then tells Rani that he cannot marry her; his time in London changed him, he says, and Rani stayed the same. In his words: 'For me, it's all about travel, business, meetings. It'll be tough on you' (*Queen* 2014: 00:10:45). It appears that Rani, the traditional girl, does not fit into Vijay's all-new jet set cosmopolitan life.

In both films, then, the first dramatic act that sets the scene for the rest of the film revolves around the (in)compatibilities of traditional and modern definitions of love and marriage. Surinder and Taani are stuck with one another, which causes Taani to face the challenge of giving up her ideals about love; Rani, on the other hand, sees her world fall apart when Vijay announces incompatibility – which means he prioritises, by proxy, his own bourgeois lifestyle – as a reason to call off the wedding. As such, the main characters in both films become polar opposites: Rani is rejected because she 'stayed the same', which is, her traditional self, while Taani suffers because she chooses to abandon her ideal of love and instead conform to her father's expectations.

Both films follow a similar narratological structure. In both cases, the exposition provides the main characters with a challenge to surmount; the remainder of the film serves to illustrate the building of character, which includes the acquisition of the necessary skills and/or attributes, that allows the eventual resolution in the end.

For these reasons it can be argued that in the cases of *Queen* and *Jodi*, the notion of *Bildung* (education) surfaces quite visibly as both motive and key to the protagonists' narratives. An obvious and important difference between both films is the fact that in *Jodi*, Taani is not the only protagonist; as such, the notion of *Bildung* applies both to Surinder and Taani. The fact that it does is fitting, as the analysis will show, for *Jodi* strives to demonstrate that the ultimate resolution is for both subjects to dissolve into a couple. It would be imprudent to import a concept from the German literary tradition and apply it wholesale to Indian cinema; however, in this case, the concept proves helpful to illustrate what is at play in both films. *Bildung*, as it surfaced in 19th century *Bildungsromane*, concerns the notion of self-development within a liberal society. The protagonist in such a novel is free to determine his or her own path; yet, at the same time, the protago-

nist learns that the road to happiness also entails a level of conformation to society. The process of *Bildung* is complete when the protagonist's desires and society's expectations are harmonised, usually through a mutual negotiation in which society accepts and to a degree adapts itself to the protagonist's realised potential.[2]

This diagnosis lines up with the notion of ascendancy into the bourgeoisie, as the bourgeoisie in this context is equated with the hegemony in society that the protagonist of the *Bildungsnarrative* becomes part of. This also means that the way in which the character develops him- or herself during the narrative illustrates the way society imagines itself. In that sense, the development of the characters in *Queen* and *Jodi* illustrate the manner in which the subject reaches its ideal form; or, in other words, the individual his and/or her full potential.

Jodi contains a peculiar way of framing the notion of personal development. In order to make a useful analysis, it is most practical to consider the two main characters, Surinder and Taani, as a couple. First of all, because they eventually manage to fully realise themselves as a couple instead of as individuals; but also because the couple takes an important place in Indian cinema, where it is reproduced as a way to maintain the parental patriarchal family structure (Prasad 1998: 95). *Jodi* indeed shows that this is the case. The couple remains sharply defined, thanks to Surinder's double life as Raj. It is the convoluted relationship between Raj and Taani that allows the latter to realise her potential. Interestingly, the notion of potential is closely linked to cinema itself. Taani is a fervent cinema-goer, and the films she watches infuse her with the Bollywood ideal, which makes her choose to attend dance classes. Taani's dancing can be seen as an attempt to become incorporated into the bourgeoisie ideal presented by Bollywood. Interestingly, she cannot do so alone: only couples can register for the dance contest. Her partner Raj, who is also her husband, completes the couple. All in all, the dancing couple in *Jodi* then strikingly illustrates how the ascendancy into a modern bourgeois subject is only possible within the confines of the traditional patriarchy, as reinforced by the couple.

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[2] Post-colonial narratives and *Bildung* share a number of similarities; an extensive analysis and criticism of *Bildung* and the post-colonial can be found in Slaughter's *Human Rights, Inc.*

Queen, on the other hand, leaves slightly more room for the subject, Rani, to grow into her potential. In fact, her subjectivity arises from a rejection of the paternalistic couple. While in the beginning Rani is heartbroken and still attached to Vijay, she has several encounters that show her that, while her feelings about the rejection are legitimate, being single does not entail that she cannot reach her full potential. Rani takes an important step towards realising her potential through her friendship with Vijaylakshmi, a girl of part-Indian descent she meets in Paris. Vijaylakshmi calls herself Vijay for short, making her a remarkable replacement for Rani's now ex-fiancée. Vijaylakshmi is a single mother; someone who, from a traditional Indian perspective, has a rather unfortunate social position. Despite that being the case, Vijaylakshmi is depicted a wholesome person: assertive, independent, and joyful, or as Rani calls her, a 'jolly person' (*Queen* 2014: 01:02:20). In a defining moment, Rani and Vijaylakshmi sit together under the Eiffel Tower at night, exchanging glances in the way lovers might (Ibid.: 01:13:40). In this instance, true friendship supplants the romantic couple, and sets Rani on the road through self-realisation.

The fact that Rani leaves Vijaylakshmi behind and continues on her own further emphasises that alone really is enough. This is further demonstrated as the story continues: Rani discovers her potential as a cook, which establishes her as possessing her own economic means – a prominent feature of an independent subject. The cherry on this figurative pie of self-realisation is the moment she kisses the Italian chef. It is not a very romantic moment; instead, it functions as a climactic moment in which Rani's assertiveness is fully realised. In addition, the fact that she kisses the man to prove that 'India is the best at everything' (Ibid.: 02:01:39) illustrates another issue; namely, the fact that the abandonment of the traditional patriarchal state, in this analysis symbolised by the couple, does not mean a rejection of India's culture.

Jodi and *Queen* as such find themselves at odds with each other. Where *Jodi* incorporates the bourgeois ideal into the couple in order to make it work in India, *Queen* has the couple crash and burn in order to demonstrate its limitations, or even its restrictions, by having Rani attain her full potential only once she is outside of the couple. At the same time, it appears that both films demonstrate – though in very different ways – that the ideal of

liberal bourgeois subjectivity can only manifest itself within certain confines: Taani and Surinder only realise their potential within a couple, and Rani requires a trip through Europe to enter into a new mode of subjectivity. To understand whether this is truly the case or not requires an analysis of the role of physical space in the two films.

PHYSICAL LOCATIONS – INHABITING CLASS

When it comes to the creation of a middle class, the imagination of what the lives of the members of said class would be like is indispensible. It is from this perspective that Indian cinema aids in the construction of the middle class. It appears that the connection between Bollywood and its audience takes the shape of a continuing feedback loop: the screen shows the viewer what to be, and simultaneously, the screen can only show so much – there are expectations as well as demands to be met. From this feedback loop (among others) arises the state: a level of consensus mixed with an idealised subjectivity and a culture of its own.

What makes Indian cinema interesting, however, is that in many cases the ideal subjectivity as it is presented in Bollywood film cannot be expressed in public. Many popular forms of self-expression are, often because of their Western origins, associated with taboo. Examples are Western dress, public expressions of love, and notions of gender equality. This has led Prasad to define within film the aforementioned class space, in which the characters of the film are free to enact their subjectivity without being under the scrutiny of the communal public. Prasad goes as far as to state that this space is 'necessary'; in other words, the attainment of a bourgeois subjectivity is not possible outside of this space (Prasad 1998: 181).

Queen and *Jodi* display a certain level of necessity of such a space as well. In these films, however, matters are slightly more complicated. First of all, in the case of *Queen*, the space required lies outside of India. Ultimately, it is Rani's journey through Europe that allows her to attain a mode of agency that she lacked previously, and that also conforms to the idealised form of subjectivity as illustrated by the overly positive reception of her character. In *Jodi*, the dancing school – and later on, a number of other places – facilitate the space required for Taani and Surinder/Raj to develop

their growth into modern subjects, by allowing them room in which they are able to evolve into a couple.

For accurate analysis then, the notion of setting has to be considered. The overall setting of a film, or *mise-en-scène*, contributes largely to the sense in which space finds its cinematographic expression. While *mise-en-scène* traditionally includes, among other things, the characters' dress, this paper will focus on the use of locations and sets to construct the bourgeois space. *Jodi* and *Queen* will be analysed by comparing first of all the setting, and secondly, the presence of the exotic.

Jodi is set in the city of Amritsar – something that becomes quite clear at the very start of the film. The film opens with a shot of the Golden Temple, with the title of the film superimposed in neon letters. A fitting shot, considering the film title's referral to God (*Rab)*. Subsequently, while the intro credits roll, more shots of Amritsar follow, depicting daily life in the early morning in the city. The beginning of the film as such creates a realist atmosphere: it is set in a real city, and through its depiction of the hustle and bustle of ordinary life, it seems to emphasise that indeed, this film is about common people and the struggle of day-to-day life. In doing so, the film situates itself within a realist aesthetic, which is a mode often employed throughout the history of Indian cinema (Ibid.: 21). Realism is generally employed to a political end; in the history of Indian cinema, it is connected to the Nehruvian theme of the 'discovery of India' (Ibid.: 160).

As such, *Jodi* contains an apparent contradiction. Realist cinema and middle class cinema are considered opposites. Further instances in the film seem to illustrate this contradiction further. While Amritsar is generally known to be a highly crowded, densely populated urban centre, *Jodi* generally takes place in spaces that seem remarkably removed from the Amritsar shown in the beginning of the film. For example, the dancing school and the cinema are depicted as glamorous environments, populated with nothing but well-off middle class individuals. By positioning these glamorous sets within the greater setting of a realist Amritsar, the film continues the project of (re)invention that was observed in the former chapter: the unlikely combination of tradition and bourgeois modernity that was noted in the couple of Taani and Surinder is also present when the film allows a realist Amritsar to contain the glamorous narrative of a Bollywood couple.

Queen takes a slightly different approach in its setting and the depiction thereof. The majority of the film is set in the foreign cities of Paris and Amsterdam. This is not a very surprising notion in an Indian film. Rachel Dwyer notes in *Cinema India* that foreign destinations often provide 'some sort of privacy for the romantic couple' (Dwyer 2002: 59), in addition to representing 'Utopias of consumption for a range of lifestyle opportunities and consumerist behaviour' (Ibid.: 59). At a glance, then, foreign locations appear to provide for the need of a middle class space. In *Queen*, however, the foreign location takes on a different appearance. First of all, as has been established in the first chapter, Rani's character deconstructs the necessity of the couple; as such, this notion does not play a role when assessing the function of the foreign in *Queen*. Interestingly, neither does the concept of Utopia. Paris, as Rani experiences it at first, is far from Utopian. For example, the camera registers from a distance how she fails to perform something as simple as crossing a street; the raw, voyeuristic perspective from which it is filmed further adding to the feeling that the viewer is witnessing something painfully embarrassing (*Queen* 2014: 00:45:30). Another example is the food served at the hotel. The seafood dish she is served does not appeal to Rani at all, illustrating that she feels – quite aptly – like a fish out of the water.

Queen, as such, does something unexpected: it takes the concept of the middle class space, but uses it to introduce an Other instead of a Utopia. The encounter and cultural exchange that follows is not a very familiar trope in Indian film, where usually the foreign serves as a backdrop for middle class fantasies. *Queen* turns these conventions upside down. This becomes most clear when Rani visits Amsterdam. She goes to meet Rukshar, a friend of Vijaylakshmi's, who turns out to work as a prostitute in the red light district. The presence of such an area in an Indian film is not directly surprising – as Dwyer notes, many films contain shady nightclubs as 'transgressive spaces' (Dwyer 2002: 68). She writes about them: 'The[se] sequence[s] allows the viewer to enjoy forbidden pleasures that are subsequently often disavowed by the film's narratives' (Ibid.). Interestingly, quite the opposite happens in *Queen*. First of all, the pleasures to be enjoyed by the viewer are limited. Rani does not visit Amsterdam's red light district to revel in extramarital sexual pleasure; instead, the brothel is shown to be a

woman's place, where for the most part the girls (admittedly, while dressed rather scantily) dance and party and appear very much in control of their own bodies. The second thing to note is that the 'pleasures' are not disa-vowed by the narrative at all. Rani compliments Rukshar on her dancing, and Rukshar's work is honest – she pays for her little sister to go to school, and, as Rukshar says herself: 'This is a legit job here' (*Queen* 2014: 01:46:46). Amsterdam's red light district, then, clearly does not qualify as a place of transgression; instead, it serves as a place of exotic Otherness, where Rani has another enlightening encounter, contributing to her devel-opment as a person.

Even though *Jodi* takes place in Amritsar, it also contains notions of exot-icism. However, these notions fall into the expected pattern of the middle class space. Surinder gains two passes to a trade fair from his work, which he attends with Taani. It is announced as Bhangra's 'Japan Fun Fair', which is proudly displayed on a sign held up by a plastic-looking statue of a giant sumo wrestler. At the centre of the fair is a sumo wrestling ring, including a wrestler, who is announced to the fair attendees as follows: 'We have for you, imported specially from Japan, Mr Sumo' (*Jodi* 2008: 02:00:20). This announcement effectively reduces the cultural artefact of the sumo wres-tler to a commodity; an item to be imported at the leisure of those that can afford to. The trade fair, despite the lavish presence of exotic items, does not manage to truly represent the Other; instead, it functions as a capitalist and consumerist space, because of the way culture is commodified and its limited accessibility.

Nonetheless, this space is of interest. Dwyer makes a connection be-tween these exclusive exotic spaces and the notion of romance. In the case of Surinder and Taani, however, the Japanese trade fair becomes a place of tragedy rather than romance. In an effort to impress Taani as himself, ra-ther than his alter ego Raj, Surinder opts to fight Mr. Sumo. Taani, still bothered by Raj confessing his love to her the night before, is annoyed to see Surinder display this macho-like behaviour. Somehow, though, Surinder manages to defeat the wrestler and win a vacation to Japan. Taani is not at all happy about the ordeal however. After it is over, she comments: 'What is this drama? Aren't you aware that you are an average working class man?' (Ibid.: 02:07:37). Surinder explains that with just his salary he would

never be able to afford a trip to Japan, so he wanted to take this chance to make Taani happy. The exotic, as such, becomes a symbol for affluence, and Surinder imagines Japan to be a space in which their middle class-ness can be performed in such a way that it will lead to mutual happiness.

And, in the end, exotic Japan turns out to be just that: when the credits roll, the viewer is informed that after winning the dancing contest, Surinder and Taani went to Japan to have a great time together. The difference it makes is that by this time, Surinder and Taani have become a couple, instead of just husband and wife. The merger of Raj and Surinder into the same person infuses the marriage with the energy of a love affair. It is at this point that Taani and Surinder are ready to perform their roles as a middle class couple. *Jodi*, then, appears to make the point that the middle class does not only require a certain space; the middle class space also makes demands of those willing to partake in it.

Queen and *Jodi* differ radically on this point. *Queen*'s depiction of the foreign is much more complicated than it being a middle class space. Instead, Rani discovers that it is quite different and not Utopian at all; however, she learns a number of important life lessons by engaging with the Otherness that the foreign is shown to be. *Jodi* on the other hand takes the foreign exotic, as symbolised by Japan, as a fairly cheap Bollywood trope: it exists as a place in which the middle class can perform their ritual-consumerist modern form of love (Dwyer 2002: 53). By restricting access to the exotic, however, *Jodi* moulds the concept of the middle class into a specific, Indian kind of consumer: the consumerist ritual can only be performed along the lines of tradition. Just as Japan only becomes a synonym for happiness when Taani and Surinder become the perfect couple, the middle class couple needs to develop along the lines of the patriarchal tradition in order to access their space of desire. *Jodi*, then, continues along the lines established in the first chapter by imagining a middle class that is shaped by the space it inhabits.

THE HYPERREALITY OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

So far, this paper has illustrated how *Queen* and *Jodi* imagine the middle class, and the importance of the middle class space in these two films. In the case of *Queen*, it has been shown that the film imagines the attainment of a middle class subjectivity to arise from an encounter with Otherness. The film does this by having its protagonist Rani travel through Paris and Amsterdam, where several encounters with people from other backgrounds help her attain self-realisation. The importance of space in *Queen*, then, is that it facilitates a departure from the familiar into the unknown. Space is therefore portrayed as necessary; though not in the traditional way, because it does not serve as a background for a ritual consumerist romance.

Jodi, however, does precisely that: it portrays exotic, glamorous spaces as the place where the middle class can manifest its desire for a consumerist love affair, which echoes Dwyer's comment on the necessity of the ritual-consumerist in modern love (Dwyer 2002: 53). At the same time, the film goes a little further by adding an additional constraint to the notion of middle class. *Jodi* shows, by employing the couple as a narratological device, that the Indian middle class is only sanctioned by Indian society as long as it adheres to its traditional demands. This is illustrated by the exotic, symbolised by the foreign country of Japan, which loses its redeeming values when it is not accessed from the mode of the married couple.

As has been established in Prasad's writing, the middle class film has a long history in India. Such a history allows Bollywood to become, to a large degree, self-referential. The (d)evolution of narratological device into a trope is a sign of this happening; the faux-realist atmosphere at the beginning of *Jodi* is an example of such a device. The middle class in popular Indian cinema has become a construction that legitimates itself by creating its own space – the film screen – and multiplying itself endlessly. *Jodi* illustrates this point quite clearly by its incorporation of the cinema into the film itself.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Taani is an avid movie-goer, and it is her love for film that drives her to take dancing lessons in the first place. In other words, her middle class life is to a large degree defined by her reenactment of a Bollywood lifestyle. This is the only thing that defines her –

as far as the viewer is concerned, she does not have any hopes and dreams of a career, children, family, her future, or otherwise. The only things that define her as a person are her dancing classes and her marriage. At one point in the film, Taani and Raj have a falling out during the dancing lesson. Raj's dancing is not good enough to win the contest; as such, Raj decides to quit the dancing lessons for good to allow Taani to win the contest with another partner. After this happens, Taani falls asleep in the cinema, and dreams about Raj appearing on the screen. He comments on how the love story in the film she was watching is boring; he then states: 'But never fear, Raj is here! I'll show you how to romance and dance in Hindi film style' (*Jodi* 2008: 01:04:50). This highly metaphorical self-referential sequence illustrates the closed loop of the Bollywood middle class. A song-and-dance sequence with the song 'Phir Milenge Chalte Chalte' follows; in appearance an innocent song about the timelessness of love, but from the perspective of self-referral it takes on different meanings.

The sequence spans a number of sets and locations, as Bollywood song-and-dance sequences tend to do. However, the interesting thing to note is that Raj – played by Sharukh Khan – is dancing with a different girl every time. All of them are played by famous Bollywood actresses, like Preity Zinta and Kajol Mukherjee. The chorus of the song is translated as follows: 'In every life we change our form / On dream's curtains are we reborn / We are traveling the love lane / down the road we will meet again' (Ibid.: 01:05:40). The first two lines of this chorus are fairly self-explanatory: The dream's curtains are a clear reference to the screen on which the film is projected, which makes the film screen a space in which a particular reality is grounded. This is the reality of the Bollywood couple: it changes its form, its appearance, but in its essence remains the same. The changing scenes during the sequence serve to further emphasise the notion of Bollywood continuity: the first scene, for instance, features Raj wearing a tramp-like outfit, which recalls the Bollywood classic *Shree 420*. The sequence then follows Bollywood history, referring and alluding to a number of classic films.

It is at this point that Raj's name appears not to be innocently chosen at all. Raj Kapoor is also the name of a famous Bollywood actor, and one of his famous roles was his character in *Shree 420*. It appears, then, that the char-

acter of Raj is not a mere alter-ego; he is the Bollywood hero incarnate – in a Bollywood film. This is further illustrated by the catchphrase he always uses when he says goodbye: 'We are traveling the love lane, down the road we'll meet again', the same words as the chorus of the song.

Jodi, as such, serves as an example that illustrates the hyperreality of the notion of the middle class in Bollywood film. Where characters such as Kapoor's in *Shree 420* referred to reality, infusing the film with a sense of realism, *Jodi*'s palimpsest as it is portrayed in the song 'Phir Milenge Chalte Chalte' creates a closed loop of signs referring to other signs. Jean Baudrillard argues that this process eliminates the possibility of representation: 'Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum' (Baudrillard 1998: 4). The Bollywood couple, which is a stand-in for the middle class in *Jodi*, becomes an empty sign; its signifier is lost somewhere under a thick layer of Bollywood tropes. In relation to the notion of space, which has been the focal point of this paper, *Jodi* posits the cinema as the centre of the middle class lifestyle. It takes on a prescriptive mode: the couple that is (re)produced by Bollywood comes to represent the sanctioned mode of middle class subjectivity. By employing such a tactic of cultural reproduction, *Jodi* illustrates the properties of Bollywood that turn it into a culture industry in the sense Adorno and Horkheimer defined it. More precisely, *Jodi* embodies the incorporative mode of Indian cinema that creates false psychological needs that can only be satisfied through capitalism – which echoes Adorno and Horkheimer's criticism of cinema (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002: 22). The spaces that appear in *Jodi* fit this description: the exotic was observed to possess the qualities that satisfy the ritual-consumerist needs of the couple. Even though it presents itself as a realist-infused piece of work, *Jodi*'s entanglement in Bollywood's middle class hyperreality makes it unable to represent anything but itself.

It is with this analysis of *Jodi* in mind that *Queen* really begins to shine. There are moments in which *Queen* reproduces a number of Indian cultural artefacts, such as Rani's cooking skill; on the other hand, Rani does end up earning her own money, which grants her considerable independence considering the larger, capitalist-infused framework the film is part of. What is more important is the way in which the film takes the same Bollywood

tropes that *Jodi* builds on, and instead switches them around. The use of the foreign space as a symbol for Otherness is a good example. *Queen*'s refusal to turn Rani's narrative into a cheap romance makes it stand out, in particular against a film like *Jodi*. As such, *Queen* demonstrates that Bollywood has the means to interrogate itself.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out to explore the plurality of Bollywood films in a response to Virdi's statement that though it represents the status quo, Bollywood is not ideologically monolithic (Virdi 2002: 212). It has done so by analysing the coming of age of the two female protagonists of *Jodi* and *Queen*. The application of Baudrillard's notion of the hyperreal appears to shed new light on the issue: because Bollywood reproduces variation on itself to satisfy consumer needs, it lacks a clear ideological direction. Instead, Bollywood has created a reality for itself, one that borders indistinguishably with the everyday, and reproduces the middle class space as an exotic backdrop for a ritual-consumerist romance. At the same time, things are never as simple as they seem; especially when it comes to a medium as multi-faceted as India's film industry. As illustrated by *Queen*, Bollywood itself has the tools necessary to deconstruct and interrogate its tropes, and successfully propose alternatives by reinstating space as room for improvement. This brings me back to the boys I talked to in Nasik and their enthusiasm about the film and its protagonist. If *Jodi* shows that reality and fiction are not so far away from each other, then perhaps *Queen* will help imagine a reality in which being middle class means more than being a consumer. It might not be a cultural revolution, but the way Rani has made her way into the hearts of many shows that Bollywood does not entail the end of civilisation, either.

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