

# Cinematic itineraries and identities: Studying Bollywood tourism among the Hindustanis in the Netherlands

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## Abstract

For decades, the ‘make-believe’ world of Bollywood has created elaborate imaginaries of India. A sizable part of its audience consists of diasporic communities, who not only consume Bollywood movies for entertainment but also as a way to stay connected with their Indian heritage. This study closely looks at one such diasporic community, namely the Dutch Hindustanis, investigating how Bollywood cinema affects their image of India, and how influential Bollywood cinema is in influencing their travel decisions to India. In-depth interviews indicate that Bollywood is a dominant cultural source for defining the respondents’ relationship with India. Moreover, the repeated consumption of Bollywood cinema stirs the desire to actually travel to India, seldom in search of ‘home’, but to visit sites associated with multiple Bollywood movies. Bollywood cinema being from their ‘distant homeland’ also incentivizes their travels to India thereby making it a meaningful experience. This study contributes to film (and) tourism research by introducing the concept of ‘cinematic itinerary’ to refer to these comprehensive film tourism practices.

## Keywords

Bollywood, cinematic itineraries, diasporic tourism, Dutch Hindustanis, film tourism, Indian diaspora

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## Introduction

The Dutch Hindustani community is a prominent group in the Netherlands that has its roots in various parts of North India. It is a community belonging to the Indian diaspora which is generationally away from India given its colonial history of indentured-labor migration from British India to the Dutch colony of Suriname in the late 18th and early 19th century. Consequently, after Suriname gained independence in 1975, there was a wave of migration of this community to Holland (Hira, 2008). This pattern of double migration led them to be connoted as the 'Twice-migrants' (Verstappen and Rutten, 2007). Decades of spatial detachment later, they still actively maintain a keen interest in their distant homeland-India. This connection is reflected in, for example, their voracious consumption of Indian popular culture, practicing Indian performing arts or the manner in which they celebrate Indian religious festivals at home. Today, the Netherlands has the second largest Indian diasporic community in Europe – including Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) and Non-Resident Indians (NRI) (Longkumer, 2013).

According to Basu (2004), in this global world of movement, the notion of 'home' has become a powerful part of the contemporary debate to relocate identity. Many members of the diasporic communities therefore visit their 'homelands' to re-root their identities, soothe their nostalgia and find nourishment. This temporary diasporic visitation to homeland is acknowledged in the academic circles as 'diaspora tourism' or 'roots tourism' (Timothy, 1997; Timothy and Teye, 2004). Sara Ahmed's seminal work discusses the situational feeling of 'Home' that comes with these transnational journeys. Her work dwells on the possibility of having two homes, and an individual's movement between them, drawing a distinction between a space which almost feels like home but isn't (Ahmed, 1999: 331). This adds valuable insights to how the Dutch Hindustanis may situationally feel at home in the Netherlands, India, and possibly Suriname at the same time.

This article investigates the role and significance of Bollywood cinema for developing the connection of the Hindustanis toward the materiality of the homeland. It also seeks to look at the extent to which Bollywood cinema could possibly inspire the diaspora to physically conduct a touristic visitation to places inspired by them (Bhattacharya, 2018). Diasporic film tourism can be seen as the offshoot of Film Tourism, which is defined as the phenomenon of traveling to places under the influence of cinema (Beeton, 2005). In this article, we use the term 'Bollywood Tourism' (Nanjangud, 2019) which is defined as a temporary act of tourism to destinations popularized by Bollywood cinema and its by-products, for example, *filmi* songs. This concept is further explored in this article, by analyzing the diasporic consumption of popular Hindi cinema, by the Dutch Hindustanis.

The Dutch Hindustani community is an interesting point of enquiry for two reasons. First, the community in its present form contains generations of migration from India to Suriname and onwards to the Netherlands. It is possible in this case that their understanding of 'Homeland' and 'hostland' might not be self-evident. Many Dutch Hindustanis identify themselves – to varying degrees – with these three nations and their cultures. Second, this group is known for their pronounced affinity with Bollywood cinema (Mishra, 2009; Verstappen and Rutten, 2007). According to Yashraj Productions – one of the top production houses in India – the Netherlands is the second largest national market

after the United Kingdom for Indian films in Europe (Verstappen and Rutten, 2007). These points strengthen the choice of studying the Dutch Hindustanis as a starting point to understand the global phenomenon of diasporic film tourism to India both in the actual and the mental realm. The research question that guides this study therefore is ‘What are the cinematic imaginations of India developed by the Dutch Hindustanis under the influence of Bollywood cinema, and to what extent do these imaginations influence their travel decisions to India?’

With this article, we aim to contribute to existing debates within the field of film tourism studies while also diversifying it. Existing research on film tourism has a strong Western bias and is often based on isolated, high-profile examples of box-office hits resulting in tourism. Besides a few studies (see Bandyopadhyay, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2018; Biswas and Croy, 2018; Laing and Frost, 2018), a non-Western film industry like Bollywood or a destination like India is seldom discussed in film tourism research. That is remarkable considering the fact that Indian film industry is one of the largest producers of films annually and caters to the largest diasporic audience globally. Thus, we aim to depart from the monolithic definition of ‘the’ film tourist and signal a departure from the classical *3W*s tourists – *wealthy, white and western* – by exploring the real potential of tourism across various groups by reflecting on a specialized section of film-tourists, who are in fact diasporic film audiences.

Before we delve deeper into the article, it is important to briefly clarify our use of terminology. With the term ‘Bollywood’ we refer to the popular Hindi language cinema, headquartered in Mumbai, India. The term ‘Bollywood’ has been debated by some academics for being derivative or imitative (Rajadhyaksha, 2003; Prasad, 2003). However, the global appeal of the word ‘Bollywood’ is also the reason why the terminology sticks and is ubiquitously used to denote popular Hindi cinema in academic publications as well as the popular press to date. Moreover, the terminology is also inductively used by the audiences on the ground (diasporic or otherwise), who have identified with and referred to this particular type of cinema as ‘Bollywood’ for decades. Therefore, chiming with Ganti (2013: 3), we chose to stick to the term ‘Bollywood’, not only as a ‘shorthand reference’ to this specific industry, but also due to its use in everyday lives of the global audiences, that this article focuses on.

## Theoretical framework

The phenomenon of film tourism is not limited to the actual act of tourism alone but is deeply rooted in the prior processes of consumption of the media narratives, fantasizing about the locations concerned and then ending with a reflection of the finished journey (Larsen and Urry, 2011; Reijnders, 2016). This process of imagination is triggered when confronted with visual or auditory cues; Bollywood, being a combination of both robust visuals and songs, readily tends to fuel the imaginative process. Appadurai’s (1996) concept of *Mediascapes* – or ‘image-centered, narrative based accounts of strips of reality’ (p. 35) can be understood as the many media outlets – in this case cinema – that shape the ‘imagined world’ we inhabit, where indeed, narratives and images from the media have become pivotal for how people form an initial image about ‘other’ places and cultures. This is especially true for diasporic communities, like the Dutch Hindustanis, who

are generationally away from their homeland and therefore substantially rely on the imaginations of a place as propagated by cinema and other media. As Appadurai (1990) writes, 'The further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct "imagined worlds"' (p. 299). For these diasporic communities, popular culture holds significance not only for providing a tourist gaze of foreign countries, but also for guiding them construct an image of their own 'homeland' and possibly to inspire future travel plans.

'Diaspora' refers to ethnic groups of migrant origin who reside in the host-country, but maintain a strong sentimental and material connection to their country of origin or their homeland (Sheffer, 1986). The study of diasporic tourism is vast and goes beyond the mere act of the diaspora conducting temporary touristic visitations to their 'homeland'. Consequently, the motivations for diaspora to travel and the interpretations of the same are also very complex. Questions like 'are diasporic travelers locals or foreigners?' is also a point of constant debate. Cohen (1972) discussed the idea of strangerhood and the desire of people to travel to seek experiences which are different, which helps them to escape the mundane. When discussing diaspora tourism, it becomes rather tricky to indicate if the diasporic travelers seek different or familiar experiences. In similar light, Huang et al. (2013) explore the relationship between the diasporic communities' attachment to their homeland and their diasporic journey back 'Home' (p. 286). They say, 'A strong emotional bond between tourists and the destination prior to the trip is one unique characteristic of diaspora tourism'. However, the question of what sustains such an affective bond remains to be completely understood. The modern diasporic communities are able to be in touch with their homeland due to the proliferation of various media that help exchange information and cultural codes. These in turn create sustained images of their home country – in this case India. However, the role of Cinema as a medium to sustain imaginaries of India in the heads and hearts of the diaspora cannot be overstated and still remains a powerful platform of self-identification for many. It is firmly established by previous research that the Dutch Hindustanis rely on Bollywood cinema among other tools to engage with the materiality of the homeland (Gowricharn, 2009). We delve deeper into this relationship between diaspora and cinema and use it to argue how Bollywood cinema influences the Hindustani diaspora to seek travel experiences in India.

The Indian diaspora is one of the biggest around the globe, and many of its members actively seek to maintain and condition their (multicultural) 'Indianness', which has led to the formation of a global Indian diasporic identity. Bollywood films and songs are tremendously popular within these communities (Bal and Sinha-Kerkhoff, 2003). Existing research shows that the cultural (and religious) expressions associated with India grant the Dutch Hindustanis the visibility and distinctiveness among the various communities in the Netherlands, a very multicultural country in itself (Bal, 2012). As Gowricharn (2009, 2016) notes, travels to India are popular among the Hindustani community which are often a combination of pilgrimage, tourism, the quest for tracking their roots and also shopping while also helping them retain their language, fashion, identity, gender patterns and social intercourse (Verstappen and Rutten, 2007).

The present generation of Dutch Hindustanis identify themselves in conflicting cultural situations. While they hold Dutch passports and citizenship in the Netherlands, they

are often looked at differently for their ethnic roots. At the same time, when they travel to India, they receive a foreign treatment. Thus, they describe themselves as ‘world citizens’ or ‘global citizens’, with a multicultural outlook and situational identities (Longkumer, 2013). Within this context, it is challenging to understand Popular Hindi cinema’s significant role and impact on these ‘fluid’ Indian diasporic communities across the globe. Dudrah (2012) elucidates how Bollywood not only shapes the image of the homeland among the Indian diaspora, but also creates a dialogue between this homeland and the other nations that have become second ‘homes’ for them. Dudrah (2012) engages with the topic of Indian diaspora, culture and border-crossing, but is limited to the analysis of film content itself. As indicated by a vast body of literature, the significance of studying Bollywood cinema in the domain of cultural studies globally cannot be overstated. From understanding Bollywood’s changing linguistic norms (Ahmad, 2018), to studying the representation of whiteness in films (Acciari, 2017), the scope and study of Bollywood cinema from various socio-cultural angles has been rather robust. In addition, works by Dudrah (2002), Mishra (2002), Punathambekar (2005), Mohammad (2007), Bandyopadhyay (2008), Takhar et al. (2012), Marwah (2017), among others, also illustrate an ever-growing presence of the diasporic viewpoints in the studying of popular Hindi cinema. However, what remain predominant in many of these studies are the perspectives of the Indian diasporic audiences from the United States and the United Kingdom, with even lesser emphasis on the PIO. However, with the Indian diaspora having more complexities and meanings beyond the NRIs of America and the United Kingdom, it becomes important for perspectives such as this to resurface every now and then, making the study of Indian Diaspora a well-rounded one. Apart from a few studies like Lal (1990) and Voigt-Graf (2004) that discusses the Indo-Fijians in Australia, or the work of Mattausch (2011) discussing the East-African diaspora in the United Kingdom, or for example, the very prominent contributions by Gowricharn (2009) or Gowricharn and Choenni (2006a, 2006b), twice-migrant diasporic communities find little academic attention given to their process of identity construction through cinema and especially on how it inspires their tourism behaviour to their ancestral land. However, the aspect of how these diasporic imaginaries generate film-induced tourism remains to be further investigated. This article is an attempt in that direction.

Moreover, most of the research done on diasporic Indians and their consumption of Bollywood cinema pertains to the domains of representation and identity formation. Little is known about how these feelings of belonging result in (or not) the wish to actually visit the homeland. There is still a remarkable gap between diasporic media studies and film tourism studies. This article aims to take a first step in bridging this gap, by empirically exploring the connections between Bollywood consumption, image-building and the creation of travel itineraries among the Dutch Hindustani community. Moreover, barring a few key studies such as Gowricharn and Choenni (2006a), Verstappen and Rutten (2007) or Gowricharn (2009), very less has been deliberated on Bollywood’s relationship with the second- and third-generation Hindustanis. Gowricharn (2009), for instance, discusses how Bollywood constitutes a powerful ‘source culture’ and enhances transnational ties between second-generation Hindustanis and India, supporting the idea that Bollywood is a powerful transnational force which influences cultural bonding among the Hindustani diaspora, its influence on their everyday lives and how they watch

more Bollywood movies over Western cinema while living in Europe (Gowricharn, 2009). This insight also provides an important stepping-stone to this article as to how the Dutch Hindustani community reconnects with India through cinema, by not only providing entertainment, emotional and cultural anchorage, but also by being a medium that creates both a mental and a real travel route between India and the Netherlands.

## Methods

An inquiry into the relevance of Bollywood cinema for diasporic imaginations requires a thorough understanding of both what goes on in their minds and its reflections in their everyday behavior. A methodology that was deemed fitting for the nature of this study is the face-to-face semi-structured interview, which involves conversation, discussion as well as questioning (Newton, 2010). Between June and October 2017, 17 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author across different cities in the Netherlands. The respondents were asked questions about their imagination of India, the role of Bollywood in their lives as well as its impact on their travel decisions to India. The interviews led to construction of knowledge about ideas of self-identity and related film tourism practices through the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). While the interviews were guided with a questionnaire to avoid possible digressions, attention was paid to emerging themes and topics during the interview process.

The interviews were conducted in settings familiar to the respondents, such as their homes, workplaces or public cafés. While this helped with the comfort of the respondents, it also provided the interviewer with a sense of the respondents' cultural inclinations. Potential respondents were identified through Hindustani cultural forums on Facebook and other socio-cultural events. Cooperation from platforms like *Sarnamihuis* also helped reach out to a wider, dedicated group of Dutch Hindustanis. Snowballing to a great extent proved helpful in identifying other suitable participants for the study. There was a considerable age difference maintained among the respondents to be able to understand varying degrees of associations of different generations of the Dutch Hindustanis with Bollywood cinema, and its impact on their travel behavior.

Contextualizing the film-viewing habits and practices of the interviewees may provide a better understanding of the analysis that follows this section. A large number of interviewees indicated that they have become increasingly selective in terms of what kind of Bollywood movies they watch due to the deteriorating quality of their storylines. Almost all respondents said that they do not relate to the newer Bollywood movies. Therefore, many references came from Bollywood movies in the past, and there was a higher reliance on classic Bollywood movies. For most respondents, cinema-viewing was done in a community set-up, in presence of their family or friends. This community set-up of a family gathering during movies was evident in all interviews. In terms of channels through which cinema was consumed, many respondents reminisced about going to the video store to rent Bollywood movies as a ritual while growing up.

Adopting a Narrative enquiry (Riessman, 2008) to be able to completely comprehend the interview conversations with respondents became imperative as the topics required them to mine deep into their life histories, their own position as well as shifting cultural



contexts. Therefore, the collected data were transcribed verbatim and then subjected to thematic analysis that enabled the researchers to go from a wider to more specific codes. The transcripts were first read on their own, allowing for a broader understanding of the direction the analysis was going to take, while also allowing the researchers to take note of the differences. Atlas.ti was employed to subject the transcripts to open coding. The transcripts were then compared and the various topics that emerged were coded, and categorized into themes, which were further nuanced upon further rounds of analysis. Thematic analysis provided the analysis with the required theoretical freedom and a highly flexible approach, and provided a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the collected data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) that was required from a topic such as this. The excerpts used to support the analysis are quoted verbatim, unless tweaked to improve readability and avoid repetition without hampering the intended meaning of the respondent.

In what follows, this study provides an analysis of interview data with 17 Dutch Hindustanis who are PIO, underscoring the role of Bollywood cinema in their cultural identity formation, their cinematic imagination of the country and its influence on their travel decisions to India.

### *Imagining India through Bollywood*

A large part of the immersive cinema-viewing experience is the feeling of being one with the narrative. In reference to various aforementioned literature, it is confirmed that Bollywood cinema, in the diasporic circles, has been a powerful source of knowledge about India and Indian cultural codes. Being a lucid yet entertaining medium, cinema bridges the past and the present and anchors the diasporic audiences to their roots. Many scholarly works as discussed previously indicate that the second- and third-generation migrants relied heavily on stories and images from popular culture to acquaint themselves with their ‘homeland’. Therefore, it is no surprise that Bollywood cinema is indeed a powerful medium that fuels and sustains imaginations of India in the minds of the diaspora and acts as important references or guidebooks for India.

Ryan (44) moved to the Netherlands at the age of 1. His grandfather was Indian, he and his parents were born in Suriname. At least two generations have spent their entire life physically detached from the Indian subcontinent. In such a family set-up, the stories and the cohesiveness of Bollywood cinema have been a big inspiration in the lives of many like Ryan to be mentally connected with India and its popular culture. It is this visuality and robustness of the medium that mirrors the Indian landscape and soothes their curiosity about what India must look like:

Yeah, it (life) is always inspired by the (Bollywood) movies, I think . . . The movies are our guide because we are living in Holland and . . . through the movies we see India . . . (Ryan, 44, Rotterdam)

While there are many new mediated ways of communication that facilitate the ‘connection’ with India, it is the ‘infotainment’ aspect of Bollywood cinema that makes it a desirable medium. For most respondents, like Ryan, Bollywood facilitates a connection with

India and is likewise used by Hindustani parents as a tool to keep their children in touch with the place they themselves originally came from. Consumption of Bollywood movies not only aids them in learning Hindi but also helps to pick up Indian cultural codes and rituals far away from their current cultural context in the Netherlands which is largely European. For Akash (23), who was born and raised in Holland and has never set foot on Indian soil, Bollywoodized narratives of India have not only increased his knowledge of the Hindi language but has also shaped his general imagination of India, adding to it a more positive connotation:

If Bollywood wouldn't have been there, I wouldn't have known a lot of things . . . It wouldn't seem so beautiful in my head, because in the news it doesn't seem as beautiful as it seems in the movies. (Akash, 23, Rotterdam)

Akash's quote shows an interesting dichotomy between what is shown in the news versus what is idealized through films. For many young Hindustanis like Akash, it is the movies which culturally connect them closer to their roots by highlighting the desirable aspects of what India looks like. He culturally identifies with India to the extent that he often sings Bollywood songs as his part-time profession with his band, and often renders his own version of them. This cultural connection returns among most of the respondents.

Merlin (40), for example, was born and raised in Holland and has never visited India. She has a strong desire to go there, but she also feels scared to actually travel to India due to her unfamiliarity with the country. However, she credits Bollywood cinema for keeping her interested and informed about her roots. She interprets these movies as replacements for actually traveling there. This supports the idea of film spectators as potential film-tourists (Corbin, 2014). Bollywood movies inform her about her distant homeland, its practices and places, and in some cases even provides her with the longing to be there herself:

I don't know if I will go, because I find it a bit scary . . . But when I see it in movies . . . there are places I think 'Oh, those are nice, that looks nice!', maybe I can go, and see how it is for myself . . . [ . . . ] I have learnt about India that the traditions there are more sacred than they are here in the Netherlands. They are more meaningful over there than they are here.

Having these cinematic imaginations of India without having been there reflects the extent of Bollywood's influence in the lives of the Hindustani respondents.

When she is asked whether she often finds herself daydreaming about India, she says,

Yes, I do . . . But I also realized that a great part of the movies are not only done in India . . . It's also abroad . . . (Merlin, 40, Rotterdam)

Many respondents share the same disappointment, arguing that the act of shooting Bollywood movies abroad not only takes away the essence of their connection with Indian locations but also an important incentive to watch these movies in the first place, making the cinema-viewing experience less meaningful for them. This shows how the



growing trend of shooting Bollywood movies outside India has a negative effect on the respondents who wish to experience 'Indianness' through cinema. The Dutch Hindustanis depend on the imaginaries propagated by Bollywood cinema, which is an important reason for their affinity for Bollywood cinema. However, many recent movies tend to be shot abroad for the most part, and therefore risk hampering the process of self-identification among the diasporic audiences. In similar light, Jaswina (38) says,

Nowadays movies are less interesting when they are playing abroad and a lot of them are playing abroad in the West. You know, like, Europe or America. I actually want to see India . . . I think [ . . . ] my motivation is to see India. And all those movies from now . . . they're only showing me (the west) . . . I want to see India. Especially after my time over there, I really feel more connected to India in different ways than before I went to India [ . . . ] A way to keep the bond with India or to see India is through the movies. (Jaswina, 38, The Hague)

In response to these recent production trends, many respondents like Jaswina actually show a renewed interest in the classics from the 80s and 90s, when popular Hindi cinema still portrayed India in relatively realistic conditions and was more 'relatable' than the current crop of contemporary movies. As Jaswina puts, a definite way of keeping the bond with India for the respondents is to rely on movies and this may hold true for Indian diaspora in general. While the shooting of Bollywood films abroad entices the domestic Indian audiences to go explore places abroad, to some extent it also affects the connection between the diasporic audiences and India.

A particularly interesting fact is that many of the respondents consider Bollywood cinema to be the *first* source for fueling their imagination, thereby making cinema akin to guidebooks, educating them about various rituals and festivities of Indian culture. These popularized versions of ancient festivals make it relatable, understandable and fashionable for the diasporic Indians to remember and celebrate.

For example, Chan (54) says,

Diaspora are congested to a small part. Like *Pooja*, *aarti* . . . they know about the *Navraatan*. But in the past they didn't do that. Because of the movies, because of all the serials and having the information, a lot of people do the *Navraatan*. Even the *Rakshabandhan* . . . Everything is learned now [ . . . ] (through the movies). (Chan, 54, Arnhem)

For diasporic Indians like Chan, who visited India for the first time at a later age of 35, the first connections with India arose through cinema. This also imparts a strange sense of familiarity when they finally visit India, with expectations largely guided by the cinema:

I have grown up with movies since I was little . . . I watched every weekend only Bollywood movies, I went with my dad to the video store and got all the movies that I wanted, 6 or 7 and watched them really the whole weekend . . . And it appealed to me because it had singing, dancing, laughter . . . And I could identify myself with those actors, in the sense of 'Oh, I am also a part from India', my great-grandparents are from India, and when I saw the movies I was like 'Oh, there's a part of me!' and the language is also a part of me . . . And growing up I learnt the language also from Bollywood movies, not only from my parents but also from the movies . . . (Chan, 54, Arnhem)

Other respondents, like Jaswina, share these feelings:

. . . when I went to Bombay . . . I did not know what to see in Mumbai. And then we decided, because we were just there for two days, to walk on the boulevard (Marine Drive) . . . And that is the place which is very recognizable of the movies somehow. It's like, we were walking over there and [. . .] like we know the place. But that's because Marine drive is [. . .] often shot in movies. (Jaswina, 38, The Hague)

This is confirmed by Huang et al. (2013), who say that an emotional bond between tourists and home country prior to the trip is one of the unique characteristics of diasporic journeys back 'home' and it gives a feeling of already being there.

As these quotes show, Bollywood not only creates a idealized cinematic imaginaries of the Indian 'homeland' among the respondents, but in some cases also incite a wish to visit the 'real' India, in particular, those places in India that are recognizable from popular Bollywood movies shot there on-location. Before zooming in on these diasporic film tourism activities in the wake of Bollywood, it is first essential to get a better idea of what actually constitutes 'homeland'. Does India indeed constitute the 'homeland' for these respondents or do they prefer to identify with Suriname or the Netherlands for that matter? And what is the role of cinema in these different identity processes?

### *Cinematic identities: homeland, hostland and the land in-between*

Verstappen and Rutten (2007) note that the Dutch Hindustanis identify with India and the Netherlands and consider both countries to be their home. Gowricharn (2009) also indicates the growing absence of Suriname in the self-perception of Hindustanis. Even after some many years and miles of distance from India, the Dutch Hindustanis interviewed for this study still relate themselves first with India and, second, with Holland. The relation to Suriname was rarely acknowledged during the interviews and often this relationship with the 'intermediary country' was dismissed completely. For example, Ryan (44) shared the following sentiments:

I was born in Suriname, but I was almost 1, and then I came to Holland . . . so I don't know how Suriname looks like . . . I went for vacation there, but it's only vacation you know . . . My roots are in India . . . so . . . I am more related to India than Suriname. (Ryan, 44, Rotterdam)

Ryan only lived in Suriname for 1 year, so his lack of identification with this country could be explained due to his short experience there. But this line of reasoning does not explain his overt identification with India – a country where he locates his 'roots'. It is not only fascinating that he acknowledges his Indian roots, but also intriguing why Suriname doesn't feel like home to many like Ryan. As Gowricharn (2009) points out, there has been a constant process of 'ethnification' of Indian culture among the Suriname Hindustanis which he defines as 'the modified reproduction of the ethnic community, taking the form of institutionalization and the establishment of cultural identity' (Gowricharn, 2009: 10). This has consequently resulted in an unequal representation of

India, and the Netherlands in the media consumption of the Hindustanis, with consequences for the underlying identification processes.

After moving to the Netherlands at the age of 1 and living there ever since, Ryan currently feels more ‘Indian’ than ‘European’:

I don’t balance it (my identity), because I’m feeling more Indian than European. And that’s why I always mention it, you know, and I don’t act like a European also. I love my roti, you know, and I love my masala . . . I’m more Indian than European. (Ryan, 44, Rotterdam)

Similarly, this feeling of situational identities is experienced at all age groups. Asha who left Suriname at the age of 10 feels similarly:

. . . when I’m at work . . . I am a Dutch one. But when I introduce myself or they ask me where I come from, then I always say, my roots lie in India. I was born in Suriname but my grand ancestors came from India. Uh, but at festivals, I feel Indian. You know, I’m a Hindustani. Not an Indian, but a *Hindustani*. (Asha, 57, Rotterdam)

According to Bal (2012), the affinity toward Suriname, the intermediary country, is greatly dependent on the generation one belongs to. She notes that many from the first generation of migrants from Suriname in the Netherlands identify as Surinamese, but many from the younger generation of Hindustanis born in the Netherlands do not share the same feelings about Suriname. For example, Chietra (37) explains that she finds it easier to connect with ‘her Indian self’ over ‘her Dutch self’:

My first time in India was [. . .] five years ago. I feel so connected with everyone. I love my Saree, and, and my bangles and ‘payals’. And there it’s so normal . . . I feel more connected to India than with Suriname and that’s so strange because my grandparents and my mummy and daddy are all from Suriname. (Chietra, 37, Almere)

Compare the following quote from Sandya (32), a banker by profession, who was born and raised in the city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Her parents, however, were born in Suriname. She had similar feelings as Chietra about where she really belonged:

. . . It’s funny to see how I actually now really want to get back to India every time. So it’s like a circle . . . But actually [. . .] in my mind, I’m really Indian. (Sandya, 32, Rotterdam)

It is duly noted that the connection that many respondents felt with India was more of a cultural connection – something they felt proud to associate themselves with. How can this lack of identification with Suriname be explained? It may perhaps be attributed to the smaller size and impact Suriname has and its multiplicity of cultures with no particular culture gaining global prominence. While India also enjoys cultural diversity, it might come across as more homogeneous because of its mediatized presence in global popular culture. Chiming with the previous interviewee’s thoughts on home and belonging, Chan says,

The moment [. . .] I put my feet in India, I felt I am more Indian than my family. And [when] I came back from the first [trip] . . . I was depressed. I don’t know why. I was just missing India

. . . And I told [my mom] maybe I want to go back [to India] and do business . . . She said ‘you crazy. You are born and brought up here in Suriname. And what brings you to India?’ Later on I found a connection that my heart is, how do you say it, *phir bhi dil hai hindustani*. (I will always be an Indian at heart). (Chan, 54, Arnhem)

Likewise, Lisa (24) points out the strong presence of Indian movies in global popular culture and how this provides her with something of her own in an overly European society in which it is sometimes hard to belong:

You know, Bollywood kind of became my saving, like, this was mine and nobody really knows what’s going on with that [. . .] I grew up with a lot of people of colour, so you know, there’s always this everything and this was just mine . . . And also, to have a language in a Dutch speaking bubble it’s very nice . . . (Lisa, 24, Rotterdam)

This quote from Lisa shows how the clear presence of Bollywood in global popular culture provides diasporic audiences with a crucial tool for identity work: one can identify as Indian because there are global references to ‘Indianness’.

For people like Lisa and many others, growing up and trying to find one’s own voice in a multicultural, Western world can be quite challenging. Bollywood seems to provide a welcome ‘tool’ in this process. Lisa pointed out how she tried hip-hop multiple times but failed at it, because it wasn’t hers. Her personality and interests always resonated with Bollywood; her cultural identity was Indian. Imagining India through Bollywood, relating to it and building one’s own identity through it, it becomes important to know if these cinematic associations result in any concrete travel interests in Indian destinations.

### *Cinematic itineraries: traveling in India ‘As-Seen-on-Screen’*

Bollywood cinema has led to some iconic associations with places in the past. From Mumbai, Delhi, Goa to Kashmir or Jaipur, these places, for example, were often mentioned when the respondents spoke of India. Incidentally, these are also the places where popular Bollywood productions have been set. After having seen many Bollywood movies, and identifying with the country and culture as depicted in these storylines, many respondents experience a growing desire to actually visit this ‘homeland’. It becomes all the more interesting when Diasporic audiences are involved, as a part of their family history is embedded in India. For example, Chan proclaims to be a vivid fan of Bollywood movies and explains that these cinema-viewing experiences eventually drove him to book his first trip to India at the age of 35:

When I started watching Bollywood movies, I was becoming a part of India . . . And I think it was 1999, when I decided, okay let’s go, I am so curious about India, and I have seen a lot of movies and places, Juhu beach . . . Goa . . . So the first step I put in Delhi, I somehow felt emotions in my body and I started crying . . . And since then [. . .] I go almost every year to India. (Chan, 54, Arnhem)

Similar to Chan, Joy (41) was also inspired by cinema to conduct not only his first travels but also the subsequent trips to India:

The movies and the interest in India itself really took me. I went four times to India. Just because of Bollywood. Because otherwise I didn't know about India. I saw India through the movies. And yeah, it took my interest and I thought okay, I need to see this. I need to experience this . . . so I think in '98 or '99, I went for the first time and . . . It felt like home or something. (Joy, 41, Rijswijk)

However, one must remember that the 'Bollywood lens' provides only a sanitized and idealized version of India that does not necessarily meet the expectations of diasporic tourists who have developed and sustained Bollywood-inspired imaginaries of India.

Asha, for example, shares her experience of being in India for the first time:

When you live here in the West and you go there to India, it is first really a shocker. I was really shocked. Because I saw so much poverty. I was really scared . . . because I saw so many people. And many poor people that you didn't see in the movie. But what I saw there was such a big contrast. (Asha, 57, Rotterdam)

Such experiences are common among the Dutch Hindustanis as their affiliation to India is often limited to the cultural codes transmitted through the Bollywood cinema, while being away from the ground realities of what India has to offer. Seema, who visited India for the first time at a young age of 9, shares,

I already had images that what I saw in the movies, that's India. And I was very excited, like, 'yay! Everything what I see in the movies that will become true. So beautiful, so nice'. So I was really happy. It was just a dream come true for me. And when I came there, I was feeling 'oh gosh. It's so dirty'. And when you're walking, 'oh my god. I just walk into the *gobar* (Cow excreta). And everywhere you got the cows and everything and it smells dirty. (I felt) What am I doing here?

Going to India due to being inspired by Bollywood cinema is understood, but where exactly do they go? Joy explained how he created a travel itinerary through India based on his knowledge of Bollywood movies, traveling from place to place. More respondents use Bollywood associations in a similar direct way to create a travel plan for themselves which they followed through the trip. It not only includes film studios or film tours, for example, but also locations that felt familiar through the movies:

. . . there are a lot of movies that have good places to show what India is. And it keeps you like, 'oh I want to go there' So, I think a lot of people from the diaspora, who go see India is eighty percent because of the movies . . . I saw the movies and I took it [straight] with me, added Chan. (Chan, 54, Arnhem)

Chietra who agrees to the idea that Bollywood is very instrumental in influencing people's travel decisions toward India says,

Bollywood movies have an influence. The beautiful places which we can see in the movies and then you can imagine, 'hey when I'm going to travel, I want to see this. I want to see the Taj Mahal. Because you see it on your screen, but then you can see it in real life'. (Chietra, 37, Almere)

Chietra eventually did follow up on her desire to see the Taj Mahal by taking a trip there, along with different popular Bollywood locations.

Jaswina also recalled how cinema was a strong factor when planning her recent short trip to Mumbai. Her travel decisions were to a large extent driven by her interest in popular Bollywood actors:

Because we are just here for one day (we thought) okay, let's go to the place where Bollywood actors are living'. Not like, let's see a fort or something or go to a museum. So the only thing I have seen in Mumbai is Marine drive. And the area where the stars are living. (Jaswina, 38, The Hague)

These findings are interesting as they seem to point at practices that go beyond the standard itinerary of the film tourist. These respondents are not in search of one specific movie or one particular scene, as is commonly the case, but they use a collection of Bollywood movies and celebrity hotspots to develop a multi-sided tour through India, traveling from one movie to another and experiencing India through the lenses of Bollywood as a cohesive whole. In this article, we would like to refer to these practices by coining the concept of 'cinematic itineraries': travel itineraries that are composed of several sites associated with multiple movies or associated film stars.

What makes these cinematic itineraries through India so exciting? For some, going to see the spots which mark their fandom for Bollywood often equals a dream-like situation:

. . . I think the one thing that really stood out to me was when we went to Marine Drive and I had just seen *Wake Up Sid*, and I was like 'Yes!' you know, amazing . . . That was my fake Bollywood moment, and then also the fact that we went along *Mannat*, you know, and then the guide was just like 'Yeah, this is *Mannat*, this is where Shahrukh Khan lives'. (Lisa, 24, Rotterdam)

It is interesting to know how much influence films have on the manner in which the diaspora connects with and discovers locations beyond the usual Indian cities. Rajnie says,

I saw *Lootera* a few months ago, and I think it was shot in Dalhousie, so ever since I saw *Lootera* I wanted to go to Dalhousie . . . In *Raaz*, they went to Shimla, and I still want to go to Shimla . . . I saw, some movies were shot in Agra, you know, and that's why I always wanted to go there, and now I've been there . . . So yeah, Shimla and Dalhousie are still the, my to-go places I haven't visited . . . (Rajnie, 35, Rotterdam)

Lisa expresses her desire to go back to India, and Mumbai in particular, to re-live her Bollywood moments:

I want to go back to Mumbai again, just to have that quintessential Bollywood experience . . . I really want to be like that uber tourist, you know, and (see) everything that you've seen in movies so far, I would like to see that for real and have these experiences. (Lisa, 24, Rotterdam)



Chietra (37) speaks about why she loves Bollywood movies and how they influence her association and experience of India:

. . . In movies you see a lot of places where I went to. Let's say Mumbai. Then you see the central station and you see Juhu beach. And in one of my vlogs I said, 'look! I am here just as in the Bollywood movies you see the Juhu beach, this is the Juhu beach!' (Chietra, 37, Almere)

For these respondents, going to India rarely meant going in search of their roots or their ancestral home, or finding long lost relatives and friends. The visit to India does elicit a strong emotional response, but the primary motivation has largely been to visit a generic India as imagined in Bollywood movies. This can be also corroborated by previous research that for the second-generation Dutch Hindustanis, the affective ties to India function as 'source cultures' rather than as 'Home' (Gowricharn, 2009). There are no specific spots in India called Bollywood, unlike its American counterpart. There are, however, a growing amount of locations that are identified as being quintessentially 'Bollywood' locations based on the indelible association film-tourists draw between locations and Bollywood films. These 'places of the imagination' (Reijnders, 2011) have become a standard part of the diaspora's Bollywood tourism experience.

## Conclusion

This article aimed to investigate how the various cinematic imaginations of India are developed by the Dutch Hindustanis under the influence of Bollywood cinema and how that motivates their travel decisions to and experiences in India. Based on 17 in-depth interviews, a number of interesting findings have emerged.

First, the findings reveal that Bollywood cinema has a considerable influence on the imaginations of India as conceived by the respondents. For respondents who were born in Suriname and migrated to the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards, or who were born in the Netherlands itself, Bollywood cinema is a major reference point to Indian landscape and culture. For the older respondents who did not visit India during their youth and only started going there in their middle age, for a long time, the images of India as propagated by Bollywood cinema have been a rather dominant source for defining the respondents' relationship and imaginations toward India, which ensured a sense of familiarity when they arrived in India. This also holds true for the younger respondents who have never been there but rely on the mediatized imaginaries created by Bollywood. This at times led to a dissonance between the imaginaries of India idealized by Bollywood and their real-life experiences in India. The younger respondents not only relied on cinema for comfort, but also appropriated it to their present context by utilizing Bollywoodized elements in their current cultural expression. Many respondents greatly adopt cultural codes concerning the 'Indianness' from cinema and practice rituals, clothing and religious festivals (Verstappen and Rutten, 2007).

Second, the interviews showed that many respondents did not feel deeply connected to Suriname, culturally nor identity wise. They related much more to India and the Netherlands. Probing deeper into these sensitive issues of identification, it turned out that

most of the respondents proclaimed to be 'culturally Indian', with their hearts aching for 'Indianness', but at the same time they acknowledged their youth and upbringing in the Netherlands and considered that country to be their 'home'. While trying to find a balance between their affiliations with both the Netherlands and India, Suriname was seldom acknowledged. These findings again also hold true from previous research (Gowricharn, 2009; Verstappen and Rutten, 2007). In addition, we concluded that the constant lack of acknowledgment of the presence of Suriname in the respondents' life can be attributed to the lack of presence of Suriname in the global cultural landscape. The mediated presence of Bollywood culture often seems to weigh heavier in comparison with Suriname, thus making Indian identity more relatable, approachable and 'workable' as a tool for identity work. This also meant that Bollywood cinema was a source of cultural education, but also provided a 'pull' factor to make the respondents travel to India to soothe their cultural affiliations and not really in search of 'Home'. However, the recent trend among Bollywood producers to shoot movies outside India slightly hindered the process of self-identification through cinema for the respondents. These developments might partly explain the decreasing interest of the respondents in contemporary Bollywood cinema, which often shows European or American settings, and less of the values India was known for. This results in them falling back on the classic Bollywood films from 70s, 80s or 90s, to keep them engaged with the materiality and authenticity of the homeland. Rao (2007) says with respect to current filmmaking tropes and its audiences that 'Bollywood recognizes its audiences as the upper middle class diasporic and urban communities whose tastes, values, desires, and consumptions are reflected and re-energized by these films' (p. 74). However, this finding does not suit the context of the Dutch Hindustanis as it appears to be the case that this diasporic community prefers films from the past.

Yet another important finding is that going to India rarely indicated going in search of your roots or your ancestral home or finding relatives and friends. For many respondents, the visit to India has largely been due to the influence of the Bollywood movies. This is confirmed by the fact that most respondents mention places like Delhi, Mumbai, Goa or Kashmir and rarely Bihar, Kolkata or Agra; the latter if mentioned was often for the Taj Mahal. As Singh (2003) notes, it is true that diasporic Indians are neither looking for a 'home' nor do they wish to return for good (p. 4); Hannam (2004) also points to the ambivalence of Indian diaspora in returning to India. However, we do confirm the existence of a strong desire for temporary visitation and tourism driven by Bollywood cinema, and seeking difference, yet familiarity. This finding contrasts with that of Macionis and Sparks (2009), who claim that for a vast majority of travelers, film-induced tourism tends to be only incidental. This might be true for the general travelers, but based on our findings, we conclude that film tourism is all but incidental for this specific group of diasporic Bollywood audiences.

Finally, it became clear that through the repeated consumption of Bollywood cinema, the respondents also became acquainted with different places and landscapes, stirring the desire to actually visit India. Many respondents had a clear list of specific places they desired to visit. Particularly, Bollywood cinema turned out to be a predominant source of travel inspiration for most of the respondents, as they designed their India trips based on associations with famous scenes from the rich history of Bollywood. These trips were not based on one movie or one particular scene, but on a string of movies that together

formed a ‘Bollywood filter’ of India. In addition to film locations, these visitations also included homes of famous Bollywood celebrities such as Shahrukh Khan or Amitabh Bachchan as well as film-studio tours. In order to refer to these multi-sided and comprehensive film tourist practices based on itineraries designed under the influence of Bollywood cinema, we introduced the concept of ‘cinematic itineraries’.

In terms of how Bollywood cinema aids identity construction, it was understood that for the first- and the second-generation Dutch Hindustanis, the key takeaway points from cinema may differ to some extent as compared to the third-generation audiences. While the former engage with the notions of nostalgia, roots and longing slightly more than the latter; the interest in Bollywood music, Bollywood-inspired fashion and interest in celebrity cultures was felt among younger and older respondents alike. However, across generations, the urge and excitement to conduct tourism to Indian locations inspired by various Bollywood productions was a common factor, and they do realize their wishes based on their affordability and opportunity.

This article has led to original findings about the diasporic audiences’ cinematic imaginations and their resultant travel experiences in India. With the introduction of the concept of ‘cinematic itineraries’, we also strived to make a meaningful theoretical contribution. That said, we acknowledge that this research was exploratory in nature and more large-scale research is needed to substantiate these conclusions. In the current times of evolving media ecologies, researching the supporting role of new media and the role of online and offline travel guides in reinforcing these cinematic ties for inducing tourism among the diasporic audiences will be a fruitful arena for further research.

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