

The Diasporic Family in Cinema – Abstracts

Macho Italiano: Hollywood's Italian-American fathers. Why Are they so Awful?

Stella Bruzzi, University of Warwick

Stereotypes abound when it comes to cinema's portrayal of Italians and in this paper I will focus on one particular archetype: the immigrant Italian-American father of Hollywood cinema, selecting examples from across the decades to illustrate how American cinema has remained, in this respect, as unreconstructed as the stereotype it constructed and promoted. Gino Monetti in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's 1949 film *House of Strangers* is an opera-loving self-made, self-styled banker, whose naive generosity lands him in jail from where he enters into a vengeful feud with his two younger sons; Tommy de Coco in Robert Mulligan's *Bloodbrothers* (1979) is an ignorant, adulterous, inarticulate construction worker who beats his wife and is finally abandoned by his sons Stony (played by a young Richard Gere) and Albert; two fathers in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991) - Angie's and Paulie's - offer particularly unsettling portraits of working-class Italian-American fathers as controlling and macho that raise rather than solve the issue of inverted racism. And then, of course, there is Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*. With references to these and a variety of other films in which the Italian-American male and father is more or less brutish, simple or misguided (*Saturday Night Fever*, *Moonstruck*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Mambo Italiano*) this paper will explore the stereotyping of the Italian-American immigrant father. Vito Corleone might tell his son Michael 'I never wanted this for you', but Italian manhood, like the organised crime it perfected, is virtually impossible to escape from.

Innocents abroad: The diaspora in the shaping of the imagined Indian family

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Many recent Hindi films are set partially or wholly in an imaginary diaspora, usually in the UK or the USA, yet the characters, their lifestyles and their language are always marked as Indian rather than as diasporic. This paper examines the depiction of the Indian family in these films to question the meaning of the diasporic setting. For example, are there particular issues concerning the Indian family that can be raised only outside India? Do these films tell us more about the metropolitan Indian family than about the diasporic family? What is the relationship between the two? The paper concentrates on two major forms of the diasporic family film that developed after the path-breaking *DDLJ* (1995) and are some of the biggest box office successes in Hindi cinema. One is the big budget diasporic family romance closely associated with Yash Raj/Karan Johar, starring Shah Rukh Khan. These range from family melodramas (*Kal ho na ho*, 2001; *Kabhi alvida na kehna*, 2006) to the issues of post 9/11 America (*My name is Khan*, 2010). The other is the comedy film, where Akshay Kumar plays the diasporic Indian hero, whose 'innocent abroad' act wreaks havoc (*Singh in Kinng*, 2008; *Housefull*, 2010) contextualising them in the wider history of the diasporic Hindi film.

Diasporic families and the rehabilitation of the father figure in recent French cinema

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French cinematic representations of the Diasporic family, most often of Maghrebi, more specifically Algerian descent, have, since the 1980s, with few significant exceptions, centred on the problematic place and identity of second generation youths at odds with their first generation migrant parents. Indeed the narrative role of such parents has typically been absent or marginalized, or, in the case of the Arab-Muslim father figure in particular, represented as a negative influence on the children's ability to integrate into French society. However, in the last few years, films about second generation banlieue youths have given way to films which explore with more attention and complexity the relationships between different generations within the Diasporic family, and which, notably, foreground and seek to some extent to rehabilitate the role of the father. This paper compares and contrasts the representation of the father figure in four French films featuring settled, often mixed-race Diasporic families of Maghrebi-French and French Caribbean descent: *La Graine et le mulet/Couscous* (Abdellatif Kechiche, 2007), *35 Rhums/35 Shots of Rum* (Claire Denis, 2009), *La Première étoile/Meet the Elizabeths* (Lucien Jean-Baptiste, 2009) and *Adieu Gary/Goodbye Gary Cooper* (Nassim Amaouche, 2009), and assesses the extent to which the foregrounding and rehabilitation of the father confirms the settlement of the younger generation in France.

Sequelising (the) difference: Transethnicity and the family in *West is West* (UK 2010)

Claudia Sternberg (University of Leeds)

This contribution offers a first reading of the recently released feature film *West is West* (UK 2010), discussing it as the narrative complement to its predecessor *East is East* (UK 1999) and as a response to the latter's popular and critical reception. Starting with a reflection on the functions and attributes of remakes, pre- and sequels, the investigation then centres on *West is West*'s 'sequelising' shifts in time, location and character constellations as well as on the on-screen integration of Pakistan and George Khan's pre-migratory cultural and social ties. The analytical focus is on the shaken up, reassembled and extended Khan family in *West is West* and more specifically on the transethnic commonalities between individual characters – East and West – that result from the transnational travels of the interethnic family. Particular attention is paid to the theme of marriage and that of 'the two wives', also with reference to other diasporic narratives in which 'the Muslim wife' constitutes a structural absence. Finally, the paper will address the expectation that *West is West* can (or should) be a commentary on early 21st century issues and debates; it will close with a brief review of the film's place within British (Asian) comedy and/or the mini-genre of diasporic period fiction.

My big fat diasporic wedding: Negotiating tradition and modernity
Daniela Berghahn, Royal Holloway, University of London

Weddings ritualise the family unit and perpetuate structures of kinship through a continuous creation of family feeling. For diasporic families such 'rites of institution' (Bourdieu) are particularly important since they reinforce and sustain affective obligations across long distances, thereby counteracting the destabilising forces of transnational migration and diasporic existence. The proliferation of wedding films in diasporic cinema can be explained by their crossover appeal. They satisfy diasporic audiences' nostalgia and provide the comforting reassurance that cultural traditions and family values of the homeland can and do live on and that kinship networks remain intact despite the family's dispersal across several continents and cultures. To western majority audiences wedding films crystallize the Otherness of diasporic cultures, especially when linked to arranged marriage, a practice considered irreconcilable with western notions of romantic love and individual self-determination. This paper examines how in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), a film about an Indian wedding which reunites a transnationally dispersed family in New Delhi, the conflicting demands of tradition and modernity are reconciled in a modern 'arranged love marriage'. Similarly, the romantic comedy *Evet, I Do!* (Sinan Akkus, 2009) celebrates the convergence of tradition and modernity, Turkish and German (family) values through an inter-ethnic romance that culminates in a big Turkish wedding.

Round Table Discussion

Negotiating between Artistic Ambitions, Funding and the Market Place

Feo Aladag, writer-director of *When We Leave*

Gareth Jones, writer and director of *Desire* and founder of BABYLON

Sandhya Suri, writer-director of *I for India*

Leslee Udwin, producer of *East is East and West is West*

Chairs: Daniela Berghahn and Sarita Malik

The round table discussion aims to explore how media practitioners negotiate between their artistic ambitions, the demands of the public funding bodies and the market in their construction of diasporic family life on screen and how these films intervene with ongoing media debates about hegemonic and minority cultures in Western societies.