

**BOLLYWOOD AND
TURKISH FILMS IN
ANTWERP (BELGIUM)**
**TWO CASE STUDIES ON
DIASPORIC DISTRIBUTION
AND EXHIBITION**

IRIS VANDEVELDE

KEVIN SMETS

PHILIPPE MEERS

ROEL VANDE WINKEL

SOFIE VAN BAUWEL

Abstract

This article, a contribution to the thriving scholarship on the engagements between homeland media and diasporic audiences, breaks new ground through a comparative, political economy inspired analysis of two case studies with transnational implications. First we describe the theatrical distribution and exhibition of homeland films towards/by their diasporas, focusing on Indian and Turkish film structures in one location, the Belgian city of Antwerp. Interviews with 45 key players, participant observation and complementary archival research allow us to reconstruct how privately organised film screenings were substituted by commercial initiatives. Further analysis exploring the relations between local exhibitors and transnational distributors evaluates these structures against the background of global media industries' developments in terms of power and transformations, such as increasing competition.

Iris Vandevelde is PhD researcher at the University of Antwerp; e-mail: iris.vandevelde@ua.ac.be.

Kevin Smets is PhD researcher at the University of Antwerp; e-mail: kevin.smets@ua.ac.be.

Philippe Meers is Associate Professor at the University of Antwerp; e-mail: philippe.meers@ua.ac.be.

Roel Vande Winkel is Assistant Professor at the University of Antwerp; e-mail: roel.vandewinkel@ua.ac.be.

Sofie Van Bauwel is Assistant Professor at Ghent University; e-mail: sofie.vanbauwel@ugent.be.

Introduction

“No holiday plans or travel prospects? Make a trip to Kinopolis and imagine yourself in France, India, Turkey or even China. All year long Kinopolis offers foreign blockbusters catapulting you straight to the country of your choice ...” (Kinopolis Group 2009, *our translation*). With this online advertisement the main Belgian multiplex exhibition group Kinopolis¹ promoted its ethnically diversified programme in the summer of 2009. The policy of regularly screening diasporic films is especially apparent at Metropolis, the Kinopolis multiplex in Antwerp, the largest Dutch language city in Belgium hosting a variety of diasporic communities. Such commercial responses to urban cultural diversity and more precisely to diasporic communities are a worldwide phenomenon in the film business, in which Antwerp is a small but nonetheless revealing case. Advertising as exemplified above is but one part of the complex pattern formed by selection, distribution, promotion and exhibition of diasporic cinema, i.e. homeland films consumed by corresponding diasporas.

In contrast to previous research on diasporic cinema, mainly oriented towards textual analysis, audiences and reception, we start from a political economy perspective on media and film, as we claim this to be an essential addition for a full understanding of diasporic film cultures. In this article we address two main questions. First, how are diasporic cinema cultures structured and organised as regards distribution and exhibition? And second, how can we evaluate these structures in terms of power and transformations, against the background of global media industries developments? In practice, we focus on two case studies in Antwerp: the Indian and Turkish film cultures², which are most prominent in the city (compared to for instance Moroccan and Jewish film cultures).³ Although being characterised by different migration histories and dissimilar homeland film industries, these two urban cinema cultures do show parallel developments and patterns, which we mainly explore in the cinema theatre sphere (including regular multiplex programmes and private screenings). Based on our detailed economic description, we argue that power is mainly concentrated in the distribution market and that private initiatives have developed into the current public programmes amidst processes of growing competition, commercialisation, and transnationalisation.

Cultural Studies and Political Economy Engaging with Diaspora

The present globalised media landscape, exemplified by an increased spread of media products as commodities and new related technologies, makes “media in diaspora” a renewed object of communication research. In the cultural studies tradition theoretical and methodological perspectives tend to focus on texts and/or audiences, concentrating on the media representation of diasporas and emphasising the role of media in identity constructions (Gillespie 1995; Karim 2003; Georgiou 2006; Tsagarousianou 2007). In this context television has received much attention, especially in relation with the social relevance assigned to diasporic media consumption, also among Turkish (in Belgium: Gezduci and D’Haenens 2007; elsewhere: Karanfil 2009) and Indian communities worldwide (Gillespie 1995; Dudrah 2005). Diasporic film consumption has been explored as well (e.g. See Kam, Feng and Marchetti 2008), often with a focus on diasporic engagements with Bollywood⁴ films (e.g. Dudrah 2002; Desai 2004; Brosius and Yazgi 2007).

Since the 1960s already, transnational media have also been an issue of interest in political economy approaches to media (e.g. Mosco 1996; Golding and Murdock 1997), more precisely concerning the globalisation of US communication (e.g. Schiller 1969) and international aspects of the film industry (Guback 1969), a strand of research that continues to date (e.g. Chakravarty and Zhao 2008). Concerning film, specific attention has been paid to the notions of transnational “flows,” “contra-flows” (Thussu 2006) and “hybridised” forms of cinema (Ezra and Rowden 2006, 1-2). Homeland films reaching their diasporas are instances of such flows and part of a more general “institutional circuit of communication products” (Mosco 1996, 25). This includes commercial channels, film rentals, public or private film screenings as well as (satellite) broadcasting and streaming through the Internet. However, informal and illegal networks and downloading are of equal importance.⁵ Films are available in all these different formats, in the homeland, in its diasporas, but also increasingly circulating amongst diasporas themselves, so that they become part of broader dynamic patterns illustrating the diasporas’ economic significance.

Both fields of study have thus dealt with issues of transnational and diasporic media or film. Traditionally cultural studies (next to anthropology) have been associated with micro level studies, and political economy with macro level patterns and processes, but in recent years possibilities to join efforts are explored. For instance, political economists have reached out towards cultural studies to broaden their perspective by increasingly supporting the dynamics between micro and macro research, according with their idea of social totality (e.g. Murdock and Golding 2005). This includes the relation between the local and the transnational, the private and the public, or between small-scale daily phenomena and broader structures. As Janet Wasko (2004, 323) notes, both cultural studies and political economy “would seem to be needed for a complete critical analysis of culture and media” (for early interdisciplinary work of political economy and cultural studies see: Mosco 1996).

In line with these insights, we carry out a local study, examining structures of distribution and exhibition through historical and institutional analysis in the context of diasporic theatre screenings. Beyond this factual description, we are inspired by political economy approaches to evaluate “*power relations*, that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources” (Mosco 1996, 25, *our italics*), in this case films. Studies on the political economy of Indian cinema in general have been conducted (Pendakur and Subramanyam 1996; Pendakur 2003, Thussu 2008) and so have analyses of diasporic film production (Naficy 2001).⁶ Additionally, this gives us the opportunity to reveal processes of *social change and historical transformation* (Mosco 1996, 27) against the background of larger patterns of global developments of film industries (Sinclair 2004, 66; Wasko 1999). These processes include commercialisation, diversification, and transnationalisation (Wasko 2004). We consider this a necessary complement to previous audience and text research on diasporas.

Data Collection for Two Cases of Diasporic Film in Antwerp

This article departs from two case studies, carried out in one location, the Belgian city of Antwerp. While most previous studies have interpreted their comparative approach in a transnational or transdiasporic sense through a comparison of

similar diasporas from one “home country” over different countries or continents (e.g. Georgiou 2006), we analyse several diasporic film cultures in one locality. We detect common and cross-over patterns between the Turkish and Indian cases, allowing for the evaluation of influences of a shared urban and regional context, while at the same time acknowledging their specificity. The presence of diasporic film cultures in Antwerp is not only related to the relative flourishing of the film industries of their countries of origin, but also depends on structural patterns of transnational distribution and local exhibition. The latter two aspects constitute the focus of this article.

Our data collection mainly relies on 45 exploratory interviews (Kvale 1996, 97), conducted in the course of 2009 and 2010. These were all semi-structured, based on topic lists and intended to gather empirical information from both experts in the field and from key players in the Turkish and Indian communities or film screening business. For instance, every distributor/exhibitor (operating from Belgium or from abroad) supplying Turkish and/or Indian films in Antwerp, as well as several DVD shop owners and social workers were interviewed. The factual data gathered from these interviews was complemented with results from published scholarship, statistical information, annual company reports and (confidentially treated) box office results. Small-scale participant observations during multiplex screenings of Turkish and Indian films additionally back our story. Together these data were employed to describe in detail the structural landscape of the Indian and Turkish diasporic cinema in Antwerp and were further analysed, based on a political economy approach.

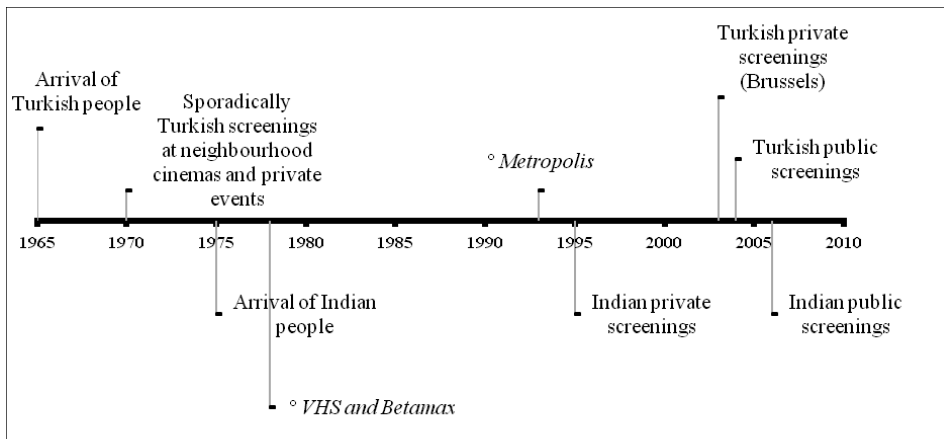
Private Screenings Prepare the Ground

As indicated above, the current Turkish and Indian diasporic cinema scenes in Antwerp are situated in Metropolis, the local multiplex of the major Belgian exhibition chain Kinopolis. However, Kinopolis’ decision to screen non-Western films did not come out of the blue. Years before this programme was initialised, the Turkish and Indian communities of Antwerp had been organising private screenings of films from their countries of origin, complemented by occasional screenings in neighbourhood cinemas.

Turkish films appeared before Indian ones on the local Antwerp cinema market. The number of people of Turkish origin in Antwerp is estimated at about 8.000 to 12.000 (on a total population of about 470.000 people (Nationaal Instituut voor de Statistiek 2009), of which 28 percent is of foreign origin (Stad Antwerpen 2008, 38)) depending on how broad the area of Antwerp is defined and which criteria are applied. The first groups of Turkish immigrants arrived in Belgium as labour forces after the mid-1960s (Bayar 1992; Khoojinian 2006), followed by family reunification from the 1970s onwards. A smaller number of people migrated for political reasons during the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1970s, three different theatres in Antwerp occasionally screened Turkish films (interviews with two second-generation Turkish respondents, 15 April 2009 and 25 May 2009). Two of these theatres, Modern and Monty, were small neighbourhood cinemas, prompted by decreasing ticket sales to reach out to immigrants with films from their homeland. The third venue, Splendid, was a theatre behind a Turkish-owned restaurant. Besides these screenings, Turkish businessmen sporadically organised private film screenings at different *ad hoc* locations, at once to serve and earn from their own ethnic community.

The further transformation of the local Turkish screening scene was mainly determined by global developments in the film industry. In Western Europe the cinema-going culture declined between the 1960s and 1980s. Hence, most neighbourhood cinemas closed their doors, including – towards the end of this period – those which occasionally had programmed Turkish films in Antwerp. Two main causes accounted for the overall decline in cinema “routine” (Willems 2007, 251). The first was the changing demography in cities in the after war period, brought about by a city-flight of young families and the entrance of more immigrants in the cities. The second was the rapid spread of home recording technologies VHS and Betamax in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, which created unprecedented potential for home entertainment (Klinger 2006). Diasporic communities eagerly appropriated these technological developments (for Belgium: Devroe and Driesen 2005, 38). In this context, the occasional cinema programming of Turkish films in Antwerp came to an end around 1980.

Figure 1: Indian and Turkish Films in Antwerp: Historical Perspective



In the 1980s and 1990s, multiplex theatres arose worldwide and became the new hotspots for filmgoers. In Antwerp a whole new urban cinema landscape developed in 1993, when the Metropolis multiplex was built on the outskirts of the city (Willems 2007, 253-5), a classic example of “the splendid American venture on the ring road” (Jancovich, Faire and Stubblings 2003, 197) albeit not an American one.⁷ In no time, the multiplex succeeded in controlling most of the local exhibition. At that time Turkey’s film industry struggled with political and economic problems (Dönmez-Colin 2008, 44), witnessing a “period of mere extinction of popular Turkish cinema” (Dorsay 1996, 154-5). Meantime, transnational satellite broadcasting became a substitute for (outdoor) film consumption among Turkish diasporas in Europe (Aksoy and Robins 2000, 345-51). These two developments resulted in an absence of Turkish films in the programmes of the brand new Kinopolis venture.

The second half of the 1990s also witnessed the introduction and growth of privately organised screenings of Indian films in Antwerp. Such films had not been screened before, as the first considerable Indian migration to the city, mostly by diamond traders and their personnel, only started around 1975 (Henn 2009), about

10 years after the first members of the Turkish community had arrived. Other sectors harbour quite a different and more recently migrated Indian community in the city: the IT-sector and several small businesses such as taxi services and grocery or telephone/Internet shops. Their numbers are estimated at about 2.500 persons (Stad Antwerpen 2008, 37). In contrast to Turkey's, the Indian film industry experienced a revival in the 1990s. This entailed the potential for expansion after the deregulation in the film sector (Thussu 2008, 100) and the production of spectacle films with – among other subjects – typical diasporic themes such as migration from India to the West (Dudrah 2002, 24-5). Parallel to new overseas box office successes in the US and UK, screenings of these films began in Antwerp in 1995 in a rented cinema hall of the Metropolis theatre. These private events were single screenings, bringing a new film every three or four months. They were charity inspired initiatives of two diamond traders from the Indian Antwerp community who maintained personal contacts with Yash Raj, one of the main Indian distribution companies. The latter thus became the exclusive supplier of the films. The screenings were reserved for the specific community of the diamond business and their families or friends. Hence, only they were informed, through e-mail and fax, although once in a while posters were brought to the Bollywood DVD shops in the city as well. These were organised for over a decade, but eventually disappeared in 2007 when the multiplex serving as their venue, absorbed Indian commercial films in its regular programme (interview with organiser of private screenings, 5 November 2009).

In 2003 Turkish events of the same kind appeared in Brussels. These successful film galas (*Brüksel gala gecesi*) were prompted by the slow recovery of Turkey's film industry, which began in the late 1990s and brought about a clear revival in the new millennium (Dönmez-Colin 2008, 211-23). Again, the local viability of a diasporic film culture depended on more global developments. A Belgian entrepreneur of Turkish origin started renting films for private screenings from Maxximum,⁸ a Turkish-German distributor of Turkish films. Films ran several times a day in a cultural event hall in the Belgian capital, usually for two successive days. As the potential audience was familiar with the new films through satellite television and the Internet, only local posters and flyers were used to promote the screenings. The organiser sometimes flew in members of the cast or the film crew, creating large enthusiasm within the Turkish community. Distributor Maxximum then seized the opportunity by hiring the Turkish-Belgian entrepreneur (whose role quickly faded) as its representative and had him start negotiations with Kinopolis. This resulted in a major shift in control, as Kinopolis introduced Turkish films in its multiplexes in Brussels in 2004, but also in other Belgian cities with Turkish communities. The Turkish private events in Brussels thus came to an end only one year after their inception, but gave way to multiplex screenings of Turkish films in various Belgian cities, including Antwerp, where Turkish film screenings had disappeared around 1980 (see above).

The Multiplex Goes "Ethnic": Public Turkish and Indian Film Screenings

Kinopolis had mainly been programming Western films until it was approached by transnational distributors of non-Western produced films. In 2004, two such distributors offered Kinopolis a first selection of Turkish films: Maxximum, the abovementioned Turkish-German company, and MultiTone Films, a Dutch com-

pany. MultiTone, which would cease its activities in 2007, exported only a limited number of Turkish films outside the Netherlands and played a minor role in Belgium and the rest of Europe. Maximum, however, quickly pioneered distribution markets outside Germany, such as Austria, Denmark, and Belgium, where it soon became the principal partner for Turkish screenings in Kinopolis. In 2006, the Dutch distributor Bharat Entertainment International (BEI)⁹ succeeded to get the Kinopolis group interested in Indian films (interview with CEO of BEI, 29 April 2009). Thus, the Antwerp Kinopolis branch competed and ultimately replaced the privately organised Indian screenings for which Metropolis had sometimes served as a venue. Yash Raj, for over 10 years the sole supplier of prints for those private screenings, was not involved in the Kinopolis screenings. One could argue that the distributor missed an opportunity by not trying to close a deal with Kinopolis as Maximum had done for Turkish movies.

Clearly, these new developments had consequences for power constellations at both the exhibition and distribution level. Except for the early neighbourhood cinemas (Monty and Modern) private film screenings had only come about when initiated by entrepreneurial members of the diasporic communities themselves. Eventually these initiatives were taken over by the local department of a non-diasporic Belgian multiplex company that operated internationally. Moreover, since the 1990s, each entrepreneur had cooperated with only one distributor, which had captured a kind of monopoly over these small-scale businesses, changing quickly from 2004 onwards. The role of old and new distributors was crucial at this stage, and it remains to be so till today, as distributors still determine the promotion and more surprisingly, the selection of the films (see below).

From the exhibitor's point of view, this structural shift from private venture to commercial enterprise can be seen as the absorption of private initiatives, prompting a commercialisation, although the initiatives within the diasporas had already gained substantial profits. Continuity as well as change was entailed: Turkish and Indian films remained available, but social and power structures changed substantially. Switching to a more regular supply had several advantages: covering a general audience instead of the previous narrow and specific target group, further diversifying the target audiences of the multiplex, next to bringing more order, regularity and control (interview with manager of Metropolis, 18 May 2009). The broadening of the potential viewers, however, was a rather theoretical than material reality. While the opportunity for a more diversified group of consumers is created, the corresponding communities still make the majority of the audience (for a detailed analysis of the Turkish case, see Smets et al. 2011). Neither Indian nor Turkish screenings have succeeded (yet) in attracting a broad Western audience and therefore remain separate entities within the wider multiplex programme. From the perspective of the audience, the end of the private screenings brought more democratised entertainment, as tickets turned cheaper, the exclusivity within (a part of) the community was no longer maintained, and films became available for several days at several times, entailing an increased flexibility compared to the private screenings which were held only once or twice per film. Furthermore, Turkish films can now be viewed in other cities than Brussels, including Antwerp. As Kinopolis had witnessed the success of the private initiatives for years, it was eager to accept the offer to list Turkish and Indian films in its regular programmes

(interview with programming manager of Kinopolis, 7 April 2009). Ever since, these films are available about eight to ten times a year. Nevertheless, it remains an irregular supply. How the distribution, selection and promotion of these films are established within the context of the transnational film industry will be discussed in the following sections.

Diasporic Distribution: A Dynamic and Competitive Marketplace. The marketplace of distributors, providing diasporas with their homeland films, appears to be changeable and dynamic. In contrast to Yash Raj, Maxximum succeeded in maintaining its position after the shift from private diasporic to public multiplex screenings. However, from that moment onwards the Turkish-German company had to share its profits with MultiToneFilms for a while. After the latter had disappeared in 2008 it eventually met competition from yet another German distributor, Kinostar.¹⁰ In contrast to the Turkish case, supplies for Indian films shifted from the original distributor (Yash Raj) to two new companies. BEI had only started doing business with Kinopolis for one year, when in 2007 the older UK branch of the Indian company Eros Entertainment¹¹ appeared as a competitor onto the Antwerp Bollywood scene. Compared to BEI or the distributors of Turkish films, which all concentrate on Europe, Eros is by far the biggest player and the most orientated towards the global market. Moreover, the company engages in business beyond distribution by exploiting films on various platforms, including theatres, digital new media, home entertainment and television syndication (Eros International Plc 2009). It (co-)produces Indian films and has its own music label (interview with sales manager Eros, 23 June 2009). Thus Eros interferes in the film business at different levels between the production and final screening stage. In this way, Eros is a classic example of a diversified firm, active on a variety of fields dealing with media products (Wasko 2004, 315), blurring the boundaries between producers and distributors. Similarly, the Turkish production company Pana Film (known from the controversial *Valley of the Wolves* franchise) is recently emerging as a player in the distribution of Turkish films in Europe.

Reliance Big Entertainment, a company comparable to Eros in its diversification and reach, is increasingly entering overseas Bollywood markets, as witnesses the fact that it recently bought a majority stake in Hollywood's IM Global. In 2010 the company provided a film to Belgium (Kinopolis) for the first time, but it remains unsure whether this deal will be repeated. Significantly, the diasporic film market is not yet touched by the oligopolic US companies, in contrast to for instance the distribution market for European film. However, recent developments in Antwerp hint at a possible future shift: the American 20th Century Fox distributed the Bollywood film *My Name is Khan* to Belgium (also in 2010). The appearance of these new players, from Kinostar to Fox, changed the rules of the game: negotiation and competition became more manifest. At the distributors' level a shift occurred from exclusive supplier based on personal relations towards a competitive marketplace, which included the danger of disappearance for the initial distributor (as happened with Yash Raj). Large transnational and diversified companies, which are serving diasporas worldwide, and thus are characterised by an increased transnationalisation, explore the local market in Antwerp, while there is a recent interest from Hollywood as well.

Quick Release Strategy and the DVD Market. Releases of Turkish and Indian films in Belgium preferably coincide with those in Turkey and India, a strategy ahead of Hollywood distribution where releases are only beginning to be launched simultaneously worldwide. This is especially important as informal and illegal networks (for the distinction between the two, see Portes 1994, 428) in Belgium and elsewhere, offer DVD and online versions of new films within days after their release.¹² However, the quality may be so bad that audiences are still eager to have the good quality theatre experience (interview with Indian woman in Antwerp, 3 May 2010). Such circuits are especially crucial in the worldwide distribution of diasporic media (Lobato 2007, 117). In Antwerp Turkish and Indian DVDs are available through different channels: formal markets, informal markets and illegal ones. Several DVD shops sell Bollywood films, while one central shop used to provide legal Turkish video rentals and sales (closed down in 2011). Other stores have a limited selection on offer next to their common grocery products or telephone/Internet services. While vendors of Indian DVDs have become quite visible in some Antwerp neighbourhoods, Turkish DVDs are harder to spot. These DVDs are partly obtained through piracy (for further reading on Indian media piracy, see Athique 2008), sold at giveaway prices and of varying quality. Next to shopping in Antwerp, some people bring DVDs from their homeland as they travel back and forth, or from other countries such as Canada and the UK, where especially Indian people travel for business. Hence, this market is highly transnational in several ways (interview with Turkish video shop owner, 12 May 2009). To reduce piracy to a minimum, distributors too increasingly offer their own films online by selling DVDs, or rather video on demand (VOD) (interview with sales manager of Eros; Miller et al. 2001, 149). Thus, they digitalise the global Bollywood market. Nowadays DVD shops indeed suffer from increasing online availability and piracy.

Selecting Diasporic Films for Exhibition. Not only were the distributors crucial at the inception of commercial exhibition of Indian and Turkish films, they also have considerable power in the selection process, much more than average distribution companies of Hollywood blockbusters. The diasporic film distribution market can – at least in Belgium – profit from its experience with Indian and Turkish films to assess their potential among the diasporas, and from the absence of such expertise in the exhibition field (interview with programming manager of Kinopolis). Hence, Kinopolis' central booking and programming unit hardly has a hand in the selection process of diasporic films. It merely decides on the acceptance of a film on the basis of space limits in its multiplexes, not of quality control. It is up to the distributor to convince Kinopolis of the commercial potential of the Turkish or Indian films they offer.

Still, even within distribution companies the knowledge of the market remains limited (Miller et al. 2001, 150), as many decisions are based on intuition and trial-and-error. Especially for companies such as Eros, which often decide to support a film in the pre-production stage, few clues are available. However, some factors remain indicative of potential success. The track record of a film's director, the production company and its cast are criteria for both Turkish and Indian films. While "the importance of a star's earning capacity is recognised" in the American film industry too (Kerrigan 2004, 34), for Bollywood films in particular the cast is an important aspect: both BEI and Eros recognise specific "export actors," who often guarantee good results at the Antwerp box office.

Interestingly, the success of diasporic films has indicators in ancillary industries, with which they are vertically integrated. Turkish commercial television and popular film culture are intensely intertwined, so that distributors keep an eye on the popularity of casts or concepts in Turkish television soaps (e.g. the mixture of entertainment and issues of Turkish identity and politics) and closely follow the plans of (television) producers (interview with manager Maxximum, 10 September 2009). For Indian films then, music rather than television is a crucial indicator for potential success, even more decisively than the star cast. Film songs are released six to eight weeks before the film's premiere. If these songs become hits in India and its diaspora, through radio or TV, distributors are more inclined to release the film (interview with CEO of BEI and sales manager of Eros).

“Spreading the Word” and Other Marketing Strategies. However unappealing a film might turn out after its selection, good distribution and advertising can compensate much for an initial selection blunder (Miller et al. 2001, 148). It is common practice that distributors are largely responsible for the promotion of their own films, even if exhibitors such as Kinopolis have their share in local advertising. This contrasts with the previous private events, where the organisers were solely responsible for promotion. Marketing strategies of the multiplex for homeland films towards their diasporas appear both at the global and the local level. In the Turkish as well as the Indian case global marketing has become the present focus, as it provides a way to reach audiences in a range of different locations simultaneously and hence reduces marketing costs (Miller et al. 2001, 150). Most Turkish films are now promoted on satellite television and in Turkish newspapers through clips and banners that announce the upcoming releases throughout Europe circa two weeks in advance. Belgium is a mere additional market in the corporate strategy of this global marketing system, often functioning without any local middlemen. Additionally, all distributors at play and exhibitor Kinopolis have their own websites, another approved medium to inform people of news and upcoming releases and part of the increasing digitalisation (interviews with managers of distributors BEI, Eros and Maxximum). This global advertising is a development that accords with the transnationalisation of the distribution business and hence is interesting from a political economy perspective. At this level associated products can be part of the marketing of a film (Miller et al. 2001, 156 and 166), but Belgium is too small a market and not worth the effort. For instance, Eros will release Bollywood music of upcoming films in the UK, but not in Belgium (interview with sales manager Eros).

Local advertising is applied as well. When commercial Turkish screenings started at Kinopolis, Maxximum put the abovementioned organiser of private gala evenings in charge of local promotion. Through his network, promotional material was spread to Turkish tea houses, groceries and associations. Recently, local marketing has been picked up by Metropolis again by initiating a strategic partnership with the Unie van Turkse Verenigen (UTV), a federation of Turkish associations with its headquarters in Antwerp. It was agreed that future releases of Turkish films would be promoted by UTV, in exchange for free tickets (interviews with manager Metropolis, and coordinator of UTV, 18 June 2009). Similarly, Bollywood distributor BEI focuses on the local Indian market by employing a local advertising company, which spreads prints of posters and flyers in those districts of Antwerp where Indians are working or living and sporadically in shops where

Bollywood DVDs are sold. This marketing strategy was consciously prepared by exploring the market in Antwerp neighbourhoods (interview with CEO of BEI, and manager advertising company, 20 August 2009). Nevertheless, and this is remarkable, none of our Indian respondents was familiar with these flyers.¹³ Another kind of local advertising occurs in the multiplex, where promotion of films depends on local theatre managers, who decide which vinyl banners and posters will be spread in their cinema complex. When available, trailers for new Turkish or Indian releases are only shown before similar films and aim exclusively at the corresponding audience.

Promotion is predominantly directed towards the Turkish and Indian communities, a partial continuation of the private screenings. Hence, the main promotional strategy is ethnic marketing (Marich 2005, 265-8). This is part of a more general strategy of targeting specific audience groups, whose identification is considered “key to the success of the film” in cinema marketing (Kerrigan 2004, 31 and 36). Such target audiences are of course not always identified by their ethnic background: age, gender or other factors are also of importance. Although a broad audience is welcomed – indicated by the fact that Kinopolis prefers film prints with Dutch subtitles – only Bollywood films succeed in striking a chord with broader South-Asian (and sporadically other non-Indian) audiences.

Beyond the abovementioned strategies an often extremely successful word-of-mouth advertising is trusted to do the rest, as the Turkish and Indian communities in Antwerp are rather tight (interviews with managers of the distribution companies). This kind of marketing is also known as “buzz,” the principle of people recommending products in their social networks. It is an instance of free publicity but one with quite a few risks attached to it when a film is not well received. Such advertising potential is often underestimated (Kerrigan 2004, 37), but apparently well understood by promoters of popular non-Western films. Although the distributors are aware of this potential, they do not intentionally create buzzes in the sense of a conscious marketing tool (Salzman, Matathia and O’Reilly 2003, viii).

Table 1: Comparison of the Turkish and Indian Cases in Antwerp

	Turkish case (migration starts around 1965)	Indian case (migration starts around 1975)
Private screenings	- 1970s in three local theatres in Antwerp	
	- From 2003 till 2004 in Brussels	- From 1995 till 2007 in Antwerp
	- Organised by businessmen of the respective communities	
Multiplex	- Dutch and German distributors - Since 2004: ca. 10 films a year	- Dutch and UK distributors - Since 2006: ca. 12 films a year
	- Selection: production house, cast and ancillary industries - Promotion: both local and global ethnic marketing	

Discussion: Diasporic Film Cultures, Political Economy and Audiences

The comparative approach of our research has first uncovered the particularities and commonalities of each case, showing how diasporic cinema distribution and

exhibition are structured and organised. Turkish and Indian immigrants began to settle in the city, respectively about 45 and 35 years ago. At the same time the urban cinema landscape changed drastically when most small neighbourhood theatres disappeared, a process that paved the way for – and was eventually accelerated by – the arrival of the multiplex theatre. Table 1 illustrates the parallel developments of the two diasporic film cultures under study in this context: both found their way to the big screen of the largest city multiplex Metropolis. In both cases, this was preceded by private exhibitions of popular films, organised by local members of the communities. The same urban space witnessed the development and commercialisation of two ethnic film cultures and in a sense imposed its available cinema structures on them. Second, the general patterns behind the development and institutional organisation of these cultures address (1) power relations, (2) historical transformations and (3) the embedment in global contexts. This demonstrates the importance of a political economy inspired approach to fully analyse the diasporic cinema phenomenon.

First, the major and most *powerful* players for homeland films in diaspora are present at two levels: locally, the exhibitor and transnationally, the distributors. The latter seem to be the most decisive for the development and endurance of diasporic cinema cultures, as non-Western films entered the Antwerp public cinema market on their initiative. Moreover, not only the common promotion, but also the selection of the films, and of the theatres where the film will be screened, is their full responsibility. Within this distribution market, previously characterised by small-scale companies, a recent trend has emerged towards more competition and bigger enterprises, even an American one (while at the outset they were all diaspora-run), which confirms more global developments. These companies are typically involved in a range of industries and activities, making them vertically integrated (e.g. link with film production) and diversified (e.g. link with television and music industry). In contrast to the earlier initiatives where one distributor had a monopoly, the current situation is one of competition.

This links immediately to the second political economy issue: *historical transformations and social change*. The most crucial shift was the transition from private community-specific initiatives to public multiplex programmes. In this context power relations as described above appeared subject to change as well and hence were restructured over time in several ways. For instance, a tension was generated between diasporic and non-diasporic ownership and power, as the early initiatives were organised exclusively by and for the communities, which changed drastically when the multiplex took over. While one exclusive distributor for each case suddenly found itself on a competitive marketplace, on the side of the exhibitor, it meant an increase of control. Next to power shifts, the new situation further entailed a commercialisation (e.g. no longer charity-inspired) and diversification, for both distribution (as multifaceted companies increasingly dominate the market) and exhibition (as the multiplex expanded its reach and a change occurred from single to multiple screenings). Apart from the restructuring from private to public screening, relocation took place from local places and cinemas towards the multiplex as central theatrical venture for non-Western film, as part of the overall changing cinema culture in the city. Finally a generally growing transnationalisation occurred: global marketing increases, distributors add new markets worldwide, satellite TV networks expand, and so on.

The historical process of transnationalisation brings us to the third aspect of interest, *global contexts and the transnational*. Although our study was conducted on a local level, several global developments and networks appeared to be of importance. This is where the micro and macro levels meet. Productivity and export flexibility of the film industries in the respective countries of origin and positive trends in the worldwide popularity of cinema-going are necessary conditions for the existence of diasporic cinema culture, but transnational flows, especially in the context of distribution and promotion, are equally significant. None of the distributors for Indian or Turkish film is located in Belgium and none of them exclusively operates in the Belgian market. Naturally, all films are initially supplied by local distributors or by film houses in India and Turkey. The same goes for DVD and television: transnational circuits are essential for supplying DVD shops as well as personal import, while diasporic television channels are part of worldwide broadcasting networks and become increasingly important in marketing strategies of distributors. In sum, diasporic cinema structures are characterised by unsteady balances between the private and the public, between the local and the global and between diasporic and non-diasporic ownership.

Finally, as we consider a political economy analysis as a complementary approach to diasporic film cultures next to audience studies, we want to wind up our discussion by reconnecting to the audience(s). First of all, the audience composition is clearly influenced by structural patterns. Different formats, for instance, appear to attract different people: art house cinemas have so far mainly served Western audiences, failing to appeal to the diasporas with their film programme. The historical transformations we identified also have their consequences: the shift from private diasporic to public multiplex screening entailed a social rift, when exclusive guests came to share their niche with a more diversified audience. For those who had had no access to the private screenings, this meant a democratisation. At the same time the audience for these films remained quite specific, that is to say, hardly any “Westerners” attend the screenings. Moreover, the audience is partly created through marketing practices. As most of the distributors limit their advertisements to diasporic audiences, the existence of Turkish and Indian screenings at the multiplex are a little known phenomenon among other cinema-goers. Second, structural aspects limit the agency of the audience: at the theatre Turkish and Indian diasporas can only choose from a very small selection of homeland films, determined by the selection processes of both distributors and exhibitors. Some respondents brought to notice that due to this limited supply, they watch anything available, however unappealing. On the other hand, box office results diverge quite much. Most research on diasporic cinema cultures focuses on audiences and reception/consumption, while we have argued that a structural analysis is called for in order to present a full overview of diasporic cinema. Such a comparative perspective allowed us to expose broader phenomena and structures in the organisation of diasporic cinema cultures.

Notes:

1. Kinopolis Group NV was born in 1997 out of a merger of two major exhibition groups Bert and Claeys, who had four years earlier built the Metropolis multiplex in Antwerp. The company has established itself as Belgium's market leader in cinema screenings and entertainment. Kinopolis

currently operates 23 cinema multiplexes in Belgium, France, Spain, Poland and Switzerland (Kinopolis Group 2008, 3).

2. For an in-depth analysis of the Indian case, see Vandeveldt et al. 2009, and of the Turkish case, see Smets et al. 2011.

3. Jewish and Moroccan diasporic film cultures in Antwerp are also included in our broader research project, *Cinema and Diaspora. A Comparative Study into Ethnic Film Cultures in Antwerp: Indian, Northern African, Turkish and Jewish Cinema* (University of Antwerp/Ghent University, FWO-BOF UA, 2008–2012. Promoters: Philippe Meers, Roel Vande Winkel and Sofie Van Bauwel. Researchers: Iris Vandeveldt and Kevin Smets). For more information, visit the *Cinema&Diaspora* website <http://www.ua.ac.be/cinemaendiaspora>.

4. Throughout the article we use both terms “Indian cinema” and Bollywood (i.e. commercial Hindi films from Bombay). While we do not exclude films from other Indian film industries than Bollywood, the latter is by far the dominant industry available in Antwerp.

5. Turkish or Indian films downloaded from the Internet are no part of this article, but will be picked up in our future research.

6. There is hardly any film production among either the Turkish or the Indian diaspora in Antwerp. This contrasts to other cities and countries, repeatedly described in research on both Turkish film (e.g. Berghahn 2007) and Bollywood worldwide (e.g. Desai 2004).

7. The other multiplex cinema, currently a local branch of the French UGC film theatre group, was established in Antwerp only in 2000 by the Gaumont group. This cineplex has no specific ethnic programme and therefore is not of interest here.

8. The German company Maxximum has distributed more than 30 Turkish films since 2001 in several European countries.

9. Established in 2005 by Soeniel Sewnarain, BEI has distributed “Bollywood Cinema” in the Netherlands for Pathé since 2005 and in Belgium for Kinopolis (covering Antwerp and Brussels) since 2006. Sewnarain is at the same time entrepreneur of EtnoLife, a company coaching ethnic entrepreneurs.

10. Kinostar Theatre has emerged since 1996 as a leading exhibitor and distributor, with a focus on German, American and Turkish films, operating in most EU countries.

11. Eros distributes films in 50 countries and has local branches in India, the UK, the Isle of Man, the US, Dubai, Australia, Fiji, and Singapore. Although it is an Indian company, it manages the European, African, (in part) Middle Eastern and UK markets from its London branch.

12. These can be copies of legal DVDs as well as (lower quality) films recorded in the cinema hall. Interviews with manager of BEI, Maxximum (10 September 2009) and Kinostar (e-mail correspondence).

13. These include two random Antwerp Indians (interviews 27 August 2009 and 2 September 2009) and the Indian co-organiser of Durga (15 May 2009), but even the Bollywood DVD shop owner (3 September 2009) had seen them only once.

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