Nitin Govil

"Wind(fall) from the East." *Television & New Media* 10.1 (January 2009): 63-65

Television & New Media
Volume 10 Number 1
January 2009 63-65
10.1177/1527476408325966
http://tvnm.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Wind(fall) from the East

Nitin Govil
University of California, San Diego

Mid-2008 marks a highpoint in Hollywood's recent fixation with India's powers of rejuvenation. Actors in the dawn of their careers, such as Ali Larter and Sienna Miller, as well as those in their twilight, such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, are playing up their Bollywood associations with an exuberance most effectively captured by Snoop Dogg's commitment, as he puts it, to "represent da Punjab" in his Bollywood debut, *Singh Is Kinng* (2008).

It's not just above-the-line talent that is looking to India for renewed signs of life, however. Hollywood studio DreamWorks has recently announced a series of production coventures with Indian entertainment conglomerate Reliance ADA Group. The US$600 million deal, fresh on the heels of Reliance's partnership with several independent U.S. production houses, as well as its acquisition of film-restoration firms and 250 American movie theaters, is part of a larger shift to capitalize the Indian film industry through foreign partnerships. For DreamWorks' Steven Spielberg and David Geffen, the deal provides the cash necessary for DreamWorks to dissolve its acrimonious relationship with corporate parent Viacom.

Mixing it up with foreigners is nothing new for Hollywood, of course, which has been nurtured, buoyed, and rescued through its contact with German émigrés, French waste-management companies, and Japanese electronics firms. Through its relentless internalization of the exterior, facilitated by U.S. state and market support, Hollywood has forged a narrative of universalism that serves as a convenient explanation of its worldwide success as well as a motive for maintaining it.

Reliance's planned Hollywood bailout is significant, however, because it is just a small part of a much larger set of recent Indian acquisitions of Western brands, such as Tata's takeover of Jaguar and Land Rover and Mittal's merger with the European steel company Arcelor. Nicknamed the "rise of the reverse Raj" by the British press, the availability of Indian investment represents the potential for Asian capital to bolster the sagging fortunes of beleaguered Western corporations, even as India and China are seen as the primary culprits of global environmental catastrophes, rising oil prices, and the global devaluation of labor. India and China's facilitation of the collapse of the recent World Trade Organization's Doha negotiations suggests not only that the global economic game is being played differently, or perhaps more perfectly (Arrighi 2007), but also that some players are simply walking off the field with the ball (and the trophy).

The historical relationship between national sovereignty and global economic integration is a strange one. In the 1970s and early 1980s, import-substitution industrialization and the theorization of cultural imperialism as a convincing explanation of inequality on a world scale fueled the promise of what the Egyptian economist Samir Amin (1990) famously called "*la déconnexion*," by which emergent national industries could "delink" from a world economic system that ensured only their continued dependency. The World Bank and the policy of structural adjustment laid waste to this idea as the 1980s wore on, yet it is remarkable how this rhetoric has been reconfigured to suit the recent Chinese and Indian "economic miracles." The term now in vogue in the pages of the world press is "decoupling," which attempts to explain how Asian economies like China and India are largely insulated from the woes of the U.S. economic downturn and flush with cash for American and European investment. While delinking offered a prescription for the protection of domestic resources and investment in national infrastructure, decoupling is predicated on the exploitation of domestic land and labor to capitalize on global investment opportunities. That accounts of economic sovereignty could shift from supporting third-world nationalism to serving as a warrant for rapacious neoliberalism, while sharing the analogy of separation, suggests that there is not much to be gained in rendering either the national or the global as a necessarily stable or predictable form.

And therein lies our challenge. For those of us who work at the productively cantankerous intersection of political economy and cultural studies, these historical shifts present an opportunity to reexamine existing frameworks of influence and interoperability in the global media industries today. In this way, we might ask whether "globalization" appears now as an exhausted metaphor of linkage, competing with emergent epistemologies, such as "assemblage," which more effectively capture the texture and spirit of dynamic associations created by the material, discursive, and symbolic itineraries of commodity exchange (see Collier and Ong 2004).

For much of the twentieth century, Hollywood offered either mimesis or obsolescence to many national film industries, a choice between aspirational horizon or death knell. Reliance's DreamWorks deal has neatly inverted this eschatology. As Rajesh Sawhney, the president of the Reliance division taking part in U.S. acquisition, noted, "if you have global ambitions, then Hollywood is the right starting point" (quoted in Lakshman and Grover 2008). Better still, as the whip-smart hero astutely put it in an earlier Spielberg production, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), shot in Sri Lanka but set in India, "anything can happen. It's a long way to Delhi."

References

Amin, S. 1990. *Delinking: Towards a polycentric world*. Trans. Michael Wolfors. London: Zed.

Arrighi, G. 2007. *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the twenty-first century*. New York: Verso.

Collier, S., and A. Ong, eds. 2004. *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (motion picture). 1984. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures.

Lakshman, N., and R. Grover. 2008. Why India's Reliance is going Hollywood. *BusinessWeek*, June 18. http://www.businessweek.com/print/globalbiz/content/jun2008/gb20080618_504190.htm.

Singh Is Kinng (motion picture). 2008. Directed by Anees Bazmee. Mumbai, India: Block Buster Movie Entertainers.

Nitin Govil is an assistant professor of communication at the University of California, San Diego, Department of Communications, 9500 Gilman Drive #0503, La Jolla, CA 92093–0503. Phone: 858.534.3572; fax: 858.534.7315; e-mail: ngovil@ucsd.edu.