Bombay dreams and Bombay nightmares: Spatiality and Bollywood gangster film's urban underworld aesthetics

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The importance of the city in an articulation of Indian modernity has been central to the narratives of Indian popular cinema since the 1950s. Much of the focus has been centred on Bombay/Mumbai. Especially since the mid-1970s, in the wake of Indira Gandhi's declaration of a State of Emergency, Hindi cinema has explored the structures of power that determine Bombay's urban city space where the hero of the film encounters exponentially communal, domestic, gang, and state violence. These films put forward textured views of the cityscape and address overtly its potential for corruption and violence. In the process commercial Indian cinema challenges the city's status as a shining example of progress and modernity. Focussing on post-millennial Indian popular film, especially Milan Luthria's *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* (2010), this article explores Hindi cinema's engagement with urban violence in an age of market liberalisation, accelerated economic growth and planned expansion. The reading of the film will consider the way in which nostalgia for a lost city becomes an important lens through which the unfolding action is viewed and consumed. By exploring how individuals encounter forms of urban violence as an everyday occurrence, the article argues that in these instances violence becomes the primary determining agent in the city's urban landscape.

Keywords: Bombay; Mumbai; Bollywood; *Once Upon A Time in Mumbaai*; gangster films

The representation of city spaces has been central to the narratives of Indian popular cinema since the 1950s, especially in relation to an articulation of modernity in the context of colonial and postcolonial India. Commercial Hindi films have developed a complex representational apparatus with which to consider the process of rapid modernisation revealed

as a spatial cinematic representation, whilst also engaging with questions of tradition and modernity. The city is here stratified along lines of class, caste and wealth, which determine access to certain locations. As Altaf Tyrewala (2012) highlights, on the one hand, the city consists of "numerous villagelike communal ghettos where people of similar religious and caste backgrounds can flock together"; on the other, "the city has been by and large blind to caste, class, or creed, exalting productivity and wealth generation above all else" (14). In this respect, making money and gaining wealth as a measure of success seemingly levels differences of caste, class and religion. The quest for profit, and the supply of demand, transcends ethical or moral considerations. In this respect, the acquisition of capital too has implications for the shape of the city, where infrastructure projects and development schemes are used not just to launder money, but also dispossess people for profit. Commentators like Arjun Appadurai have explored this dimension of real estate speculation in relation to the Bombay riots of 1992-93, where he suggests areas of prime real estate occupied often by Muslim workers in the mill district could be cleared. Indeed, this works also on another level, for instance in relation to larger infrastructure projects such as the building of dams as so pertinently explored in the essay "The Greater Common Good" by Arundhati Roy, published in *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), which traces the impact of the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

Many filmic representations of Indian cities have centred on Bombay/Mumbai. Often figured as a prototype city, these iterations have a semblance to the "real" place but do not function as a form of documentary representation of its reality. Instead, as Tyrewala (2012) points out, the depictions of Bombay/Mumbai have often been exaggerated and heightened through a focus on excessive glamour and consumption of high-end consumer products, which are displayed as symbols of status and achievement. Bombay filmmakers, who highlight certain parts of the city, often do so in relation to an idea of modernity – electric

street lighting, auto-mobility, road networks and public transport, as well as prominent buildings, in the case of Bombay its Art Deco apartment and municipal statement buildings. They use these areas to denote and render legible characters' upward or downward social mobility. Some recent Hindi films engaging with Bombay's underworld, have shifted towards a mise-en-scène of the city with an air of nostalgia, by moving back in time focusing on an aesthetics of retro-chic, while at the same time attempting to make sense of Bombay's changing structures and strictures in the present. Setting their action in past decades, the city space of Bombay finds itself in a process of aesthetic reformulation and retrospective recoding.

With rapid urban expansion in India and fast changing city landscapes, cinema has become, as Ranjani Mazumdar (2007) has argued, a retrospective "archive" of the city (xxix). Filmic representation opens a way of documenting the transformation of the city over the decades, with many urban location shoots focusing on quarters that have now disappeared as Bombay grows ever taller and heritage buildings are lost to high rise developments. More recent films capture a retrospective nostalgic perspective of the city, which requires the recreation of an older version of Bombay in movie studios or carefully calibrated location shoots. Produced in the contemporary moment, this cinematic recuperation is in some recent releases tempered by a revaluation of Bombay city life predating the communal riots and bomb blasts in 1992/93 in the wake of the destruction of the Babri *masjid* (mosque) in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalists, the consequences of which were felt most markedly in the city and were a watershed for the way in which communal life was organised and structured (see Patel and Masselos 2003). In revenge for this act and Hindu-Muslim violence that was spiralling out of control, the city's Muslim don, Dawood Ibrahim is alleged to have orchestrated a series of 13 bomb blasts, which targeted several high-profile buildings in the heart of the city, including the Bombay Stock Exchange and the Air India building.

Much of the narrative of these films needs to be viewed in the context of Bombay/Mumbai's economy and how the possibility of wealth acquisition impacts on the ways in which individuals navigate the city. Arjun Appadurai (2000) has explored this productively in his article, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai". Bombay was a city known for its cosmopolitanism that has been much celebrated by a range of writers in relation to the 1950s and 1960s, notably Salman Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* (1981) and the accompanying *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). For Appadurai, writing at the beginning of the new millennium and in the aftermath of the 1992/93 riots and bomb blasts, Bombay/Mumbai has joined a range of other global cities, such as Bangkok, Hong Kong, Saõ Paulo, London or Singapore, which have been especially exposed to a form of "predatory global capital" (627). In these cities social and societal pressures are therefore more acutely felt as manufacturing industries are increasingly replaced by service industries in the finance and tourism sectors. As a consequence, as Appadurai (2000) points out,

> they usually attract more poor people than they can handle and more capital than they can absorb. They offer the magic of wealth, celebrity, glamour and power through their mass media. But they often contain shadow economies that are difficult to measure in traditional terms. (628)

This element of city life is brutally put into relief in the case study of this article, the film *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* by Milan Luthria (2010). He complicates some of these narratives, while also engaging with the crisis of identity that these cities engender. Indeed, one might ask, to what extent do they exist as a space apart from the nation and what happens to them when they are violently reclaimed in articulations of a narrow form of national identity, as happened in the wake of the destruction of the Babri *masjid*? This of course does not belie the fact that the violence that erupted at that moment is also rooted in the economic

decline of the Bombay Central district, which housed declining manufacturing industries, especially textiles. As Appadurai points out, even into the 1970s, in spite of increased pressure on the city's infrastructure due to the increasing inflow of people from rural areas, "Bombay remained a civic model for India", a "Fordist city, dominated by commerce, trade, and manufacture, especially in the realm of textiles" (2000, 628). But as the influx of migrant labour accelerated in the 1970s, its ethos too started to morph into what Appadurai calls "the malignant city" (629), marked by the rise of a new form of regional religio-ethno-nationalism, exemplified by the Shiv Sena which led to the communalization of Bombay. Appadurai sees a correlation between the "steady dematerialization of Bombay's economy and the relentless hypermaterialization of its citizens through ethnic mobilization and public violence" (630). He deems this toxic mix responsible for the steady destruction of Bombay's cosmopolitanism that was tied into the city's business culture.

Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai engages directly with these questions. Setting its action in the 1970s and narrated in flashback from the temporal moment of the 1992/93 riots and blasts, this action drama considers on the one hand what led to the demise of the city's cosmopolitan culture, while, on the other, feeding a nostalgia for a lost glamour associated with the hedonistic era of the 1970s. In these flashback depictions of the city its cosmopolitan modernity is its prime aesthetic marker, which is codified in the case of Bombay especially by the Art Deco world of Marine Drive, or the high-rise views from Malabar Hill onto the Queen's Necklace. These shots are tempered by the exposure of a hidden world of the city that brings to the fore its predatory and unscrupulous side, revealing a space determined by underworld dons, gang lords, and extortionists. While Hindi cinema's crime melodramas of the 1950s highlighted the movement from rural village, with its strictures of caste and poverty, to the city, they also presented the dangers of the city space. The exploration of the darker aspects of city life are routed through the melodramatic questioning of morality

characteristic of the Bombay film, a major determining factor of the aesthetics of the movie, featuring grandiloquent dialogue, glamorous sets, décor and costuming, song-and-dance sequences, and highly stylised and choreographed action sequences. As subaltern historian, Gyan Prakash (2011) puts it, in this representation "the dark city is also the shining city, a place of glamour and fortune, of opportunity and freedom, of cosmopolitan culture and bourgeois self-fashioning" (157). Here, we see perhaps in action, in the confines of the city space of Bombay, that emblem of colonial and postcolonial Indian modernity, what the Warwick Research Collective (2015) has termed "combined and uneven development" (10-15). While they explore through world-system analysis a conceptual stance "devised to describe a situation in which capitalist forms and relations exist alongside 'archaic forms of economic life' and pre-existing social and class relations" (11), what Prakash points out here is a more pressing interrelation between a logic of capitalist consumption that is tied to an idea of urban development presented as progress and a flip side of those people who are materially disenfranchised and unable to participate in this progress. There is, then, here a difference between causes of inequality in the city and a co-relation of capitalist forms and consequent organizing structures alongside pre-capitalist elements that co-exist within the city space. Crime and subterfuge, then, become ways of gaining access to the glamourized consumerist world, which is presented as the measure of success. This theme has changed and shifted in more recent iterations, though the notion of "self-fashioning" Prakash highlights still remains an important hallmark.

In the aftermath of the 1992 riots and pogroms that engulfed Bombay, the city's filmmakers have significantly reformulated the narratives of upward social mobility set in the city's criminal underworld. Instead, filmmakers are focusing on larger questions of how the city accommodates diverse communities and questions more pressingly the role of state and municipal authorities in how the city is managed. *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* is a case in

point here. Narrated in flashback by the police officer, Agnel Wilson, who unsuccessfully tries to commit suicide for not having apprehended Shoaib Khan, a veiled version of Ibrahim, the film focuses on the 1970s and 1980s, the period of Ibrahim's rise to prominence and establishment of power over the city and the decline of Sultan Mirza. Sultan is modelled on Haji Mastan, a smuggler and crime overlord who dominated the city from the 1960s into the 1970s and who was an early mentor of Ibrahim. Ibrahim would later usurp Mastan's position. The film features thinly disguised versions of these individuals and the parallels are immediately obvious to anyone familiar with the events of 1992/93 and the history and mythology surrounding the Bombay underworld.

Organised crime has been a longstanding part of Bombay's city life. It manifested itself largely in the 1960s through gang activity, which concentrated on smuggling, prostitution, extortion, contract killing, land grabbing and commercial fraud. The preeminent leaders of these gangs in the 1960s and 70s were Vardharajan Mudaliar and Haji Mastan, both natives of Tamil Nadu, and Yusuf Patel and Karim Lala. They recruited their gangs mainly from the slums and poorer neighbourhoods of the city and actively corrupted officials and policemen to guarantee their operations. Lala's Pathan gangs were largely associated with violent crime and would be in direct conflict with the ascending Dawood Ibrahim in the 1970s.

The film exposes the city's networks of organised crime and the powerful hold it has over the administration of the city and its citizens. At the centre of the narrative lies the dualism between Shoaib and Sultan. The plot draws on how they have transcended into myth in the popular imagination, but the director does little to question that myth in his own aestheticization of the figure of the don as an object of desire – his wealth and power is exercised through ruthless acts of violence and are presented as the measures of success. The film peddles a certain form of gangster cool further enhanced by its period setting and

obvious nostalgia for the 1970s. This myth is fed by a long tradition in the film industry in its representations of the gangster. The Ram Gopal Varma film *Company* (2002) previously dramatised the rise of Dawood Ibrahim and depicts his legendary feuds in the 1980s. In his representation Varma exposes the city as a conspiratorial space where what is normally perceived to be covert or only visible to the trained eye is brought into the open, namely that the law enforcers and those breaking the law, the politicians and the capitalists, are scheming for their own gain behind everyone's back, turning the city into a hot bed of crime and murder where the ordinary citizen is caught in the cross fire.

The exploration of crime and corruption, then, depicted by a particular genre of Hindi film, has generated a useful narrative trope with which to represent a corrupting and corruptly accelerated process of urban development. As Mazumdar (2007) highlights, the core configuration of the gangster genre is "an urban backdrop, the play of criminality within a community of men, a performative masculinity, the impossibility of romance, the crisis of the family, and the experience of everyday fear and terror" (152). Especially since the mid-1970s, in the wake of Indira Gandhi's declaration of a state of internal emergency in 1975, Hindi cinema has sought to question the structures of power that determine Bombay's urban city space where the hero of the film encounters exponentially communal, domestic, gang, and state violence.

These films put forward textured views of the cityscape and address overtly its potential for corruption and violence. Exponents of these tropes are films such as the Amitabh Bachchan movie *Deewaar* (1975), which challenges the city's status as a shining example of progress and modernity. *Deewaar* offers a useful comparison with *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* as both are loosely based on and dramatize aspects of the life of Haji Mastan. Through flashbacks to the 1970s, *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* highlights the production of criminal networks and the forces of gang violence and corruption and gestures

towards how these may further expand in an age of market liberalisation, accelerated economic growth and planned urban expansion that lead to further explosions of violence. Clearly in its final scenes, Luthria lays the blame for the communalisation of Bombay and the growth of violence in the city in the wake of 1993 firmly on Shoaib/Dawood Ibrahim. Yet he also implicates the police and politicians for not confronting and apprehending him sooner. Instead, they allowed him to flee abroad and continue to exercise control over the city. This is powerfully portrayed in the final scenes of the film. As the camera pans out from a close up of Shoaib's face, with the voice over of the police officer, Agnel Wilson, through whose point of view the film is narrated, fading away, the grid of Bombay's streets is revealed. Superimposed in red lettering, we read, "Beyond the myth… lies Mumbai's greatest betrayal". In this sense, the framing of the narrative provides the moral commentary on the idiosyncratically glamourised figure of the gangster. What the film confronts, then, are the flipsides of a notion of "India Shining", despite being promoted through the slickly produced glamorous all-round entertainment product of the Bollywood film. Luthria gestures towards retro chic and uses the age of disco as part of the film's attractions. In that sense, the viewer encounters urban violence in a highly mediated and choreographed form that also complicates the way in which the city is navigated.

Shoaib and Sultan mostly frequent parts of the city that can only be accessed by the wealthy, whereas they conduct their dealings in the warehouses at the docks, off-shore on boats or the side streets and alleyways of Bombay Central, the former cotton mill district. By contrast, their life of excess takes place in Colaba, Marine Drive, Churchgate and Malabar Hills. These different areas of the city collide as they are intercut in some of the dance numbers in the film. Violence becomes a determining factor in the film and part of its representational apparatus. The slickly choreographed fight scenes become part of an assertion of power on the one hand and, on the other, are staged to mark the usurpation of

another gangster's position. In that sense, Luthria's film can be viewed as an example of how individuals encounter forms of urban violence as an everyday occurrence, whereby violence becomes the primary determining agent in the city's urban landscape, enabling an enlarging circulation.

By the end, after Shoaib has usurped Sultan's position, he controls the whole city, powerfully evoked in the final images of the film as the camera zooms out and reveals a night time shot where Mumbai's silhouette is outlined by electrical lights amidst the darkness. One question the film raises is how Shoaib, Sultan, their networks and the politicians are part of a process that identifies who belongs and who does not belong to the wider Indian polity. Such considerations link to a narrative of progress and modernization aligned with building the nation. As Preben Kaarsholm (2004) points out,

> films have contributed significantly to such debates, formulating visual agendas for a new coherent, modern and secular national life as well as criticizing and undermining such agendas by giving visual representation and soundtrack voice to notions of cultural and communal autonomy. (2)

Ashis Nandy's (2001) work on the city and the metaphoric valance of the journey offer further instructive ways of engaging with individuality and the transformative power of the city, especially in relation to connections between village and city. Nandy questions how the city, with its colonial legacy, has become a "pivotal fantasy and counterpoint to the village" (12). For him, the city achieves a "virtual reality" and mythic status, which, I would argue, is embodied in its representation in Hindi cinema. The city space becomes on celluloid a locale where community is atomized and the individual is afforded some form of anonymity. The individual blending into the city offers freedom, which we very much see in the opening sequence of the film. As Nandy puts it,

> the village symbolises control over self; the city reeks of self-indulgence and the absence of self-restraint. Beyond the temptations and glitter of the city lies the utopia of an idyllic, integrated, defragmented self, not tyrannized by the demands of atomized individualism. (13)

Yet the imagined space of the city does not correspond to the lived, experienced space of the city. Within the confines of the city and the way it is imagined by filmmakers and writers, in their representation of a cultural logic, we find the essence of the city. Nandy claims: "As a result, the slum is left forever trying to re-invoke a remembered village under different guises". This invocation can come as the "slum as community" or "through the way it mobilizes collective passions to configure its community life in an atomizing, steam-rolling metropolis" (20). The question of community from within the city, then, has a textured and complex quality that is taken up in narratives of the relationship between individuals living in the metropolis.

Hindi cinema has used this trope ever since Indian independence – 1950s Hindi cinema has generated such a prototype city and replicated the living space of the underclass as village within the city. We find it further articulated in the community of men, the homosocial space of gangland Bombay. The narrative movement of *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai*, gestures towards a fragmented form of storytelling that looks towards a simultaneity and temporal parallelism that effectively dramatizes the power struggles between men. This is exemplified for example by a fast-paced disco dance number, where the action in the nightclub with vampish female dancers gyrating to a 70s style number is intercut with the criminal activities of the gang. It shows both of these elements as part of the everyday activity of gang members. While celebrating the notion of community these crime dramas, however, also highlight how people within these spaces are exploited by ruthless politicians, capitalist businessmen and criminals. The city, then, is reformulated not just as

the space of liberation, but also a space where a sense of rootedness and an idea of home and belonging are constantly threatened. As Nandy (2001) suggests,

> the Indian city has re-emerged in public consciousness not as a new home, from within the boundaries of which one has the privilege of surveying the ruins of one's other abandoned homes. It has re-emerged as the location of homelessness forever trying to reconcile non-communitarian individualism and associated forms of freedom with communitarian responsibilities. (25)

This point is important for an understanding of the contemporary Indian city, its structures as urban environment, but also its power structures and relations.

Nandy's observations stand as a direct riposte to the clichéd representation of Bombay/Mumbai as an exemplar of openness and plurality, characterised as a dynamic place of industry, fashionable and oriented to the future, rather than, its sister cities, Delhi and Calcutta often perceived and represented as wedded to an imperial past. In Bombay's case, its notion of cosmopolitanism has been reformulated and reconfigured with the ascent of the regionalist-Hindu-nationalist party Shiv Sena and its role in the politics of Maharashtra which led to the renaming of the city in 1995 as Mumbai. Furthermore, these concerns have come to a head with increased violence which erupted on a grand scale in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the Babri masjid, the subsequent riots and bomb blasts in Bombay in 1992/3 and the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. The city's logic of capital looks increasingly towards the exploitation of an underclass of people, either as cheap labour or as pawns, in the city's increasingly divisive politics. Hindi cinema has increasingly thematised this nexus in a series of Gangster films reconfiguring an image of the city against the backdrop of urban violence, of which *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai* is only one example. Yet what effect does the presentation of Bombay/Mumbai as gangland have? Premised on a range of character types such as gangsters, corrupt politicians, rioters and a hero/anti-hero figured often as "the

angry young man", a one main vigilante fighting for justice and recognition in a world dominated by greed, corruption, exploitation fed by a climate of fear, threats of violence and orchestrated riots, these films present these conditions not as a form of exceptionalism. Instead filmmakers route these narratives through the melodramatic structuring of the commercial Hindi film, making them appear as mythic morality tales. The wider issue is what they reveal about the city as space to be navigated. It is here where the camera angle with its tracking shots and crane shots interpolates these characters into a hostile environment and infrastructure. Yet there are wider diegetic considerations of how the audience engages and interprets the imagescape and its resultant ideoscape. This raises the question of how directors, through the assemblage of shots and mise-en-scène, make these worlds readable and how the audience diegetically consumes the violence visually and aurally on display. As Ranjani Mazumdar (2007) points out,

> if the drama of global consumption unfolds in a city where the majority continues to live in very difficult conditions, gangster cinema provides a counter narrative to the designed interior city by drawing on the mythology of the underworld. (149)

Consequently, these films are set within a labyrinthine urban world through which the hero moves and maps a journey that takes on mythological and allegorical undertones. In these instances, as Mazumdar underlines, "the city of *ruin* emerges to express catastrophe, despair, and permanent crisis" (150). Mazumdar attributes the rise of the gangster film genre from the late 1980s to increased activity of the Bombay underworld. Many links between the gang lords of Bombay and Hindi cinema have been suggested, where the industry has been implicated in money laundering activities. Estimates of underworld funding in the film industry range from between 10-30 per cent of money financing films. Especially in the late 1980s and 1990s, when the Bombay film industry had not been accorded official industry status, it was a hotbed for mafia activity. As underworld money poured in plot lines too

changed, whereby the figure of the angry young man who takes the law into his own hands gains primacy as the hero figure; the possibility of the villain becoming the hero, oversexualised song-and-dance sequences and implied rape scenes became part of the unsavoury spectacle of the 1980s Bombay film. This suggested proximity has led perhaps to an odd reciprocal styling whereby gang lords would take on the imagined personas of their representation in film and filmmakers would draw on the mythologised version of the "real-life" counterpart. Arguably, film has the capacity to capture the language and cultural tropes and how identity is performed according to set behavioural codes (see Mazumdar 2007, 150).

Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai engages with the changing face of the city. While its narrative follows the upward social mobility and decline of its main protagonists, it places this story into a wider representation of what the ideal modern city should look like. This relates especially to a commodity culture and the desirability of consumer goods. This in turn is tied in to notions of modernity as well as a code of conduct based on honour and tradition. Indeed, this comes through in the film in relation to who governs urban space and who has access to the ultra-modern and fashionable parts of the city. While the outdoors and the street are the primary site where the action unfolds, where the gangster conducts his "business", the place of desire remains the indoor club. Masculinity is expressed in the form of violence or through the romantic courtship of beautiful women. Ultimately though power is asserted by control of space and the ability to fluidly navigate and traverse specified and codified spatial boundaries and social hierarchies. The film spectator, thus, is invited to empathize with the figure of the hero and is offered a glimpse into a world of ostentatious glamour to which he has gained privileged right of access.

Commercial Indian film as much as the South Asian novel in English has been attracted to this world as an immediate generator of suspense, as exemplified in thriller and crime cinema. This cinema showcases the unglamorous, gritty side of city life as well as

offering a psychological exploration of masculinity. In this process a notion of community in an urban environment is reconfigured. Here, most clearly we can see a reformulation of Nandy's assertions of the relationship between city space and rural community and its replication in the metropolis. The film brings to the fore an area of city life that is otherwise invisible to the uninitiated observer. In that sense we could bring the meditations of Jack Shadoian (2003) on Hollywood gangster films to bear on such movies. He argues: "The Gangster/crime film is […] a way of gaining perspective on society by creating worlds and figures that are outside it" (5). This then raises some questions about the positioning of the audience and its affective response to the movie. Is there something sensationalist in the representation of the gangster and crime or do the opening and final sequence of the film offer enough by way of a didactic framing that overtly highlights how the underworld and its collusion with the city's authorities has ruined the city of Bombay/Mumbai?

With the rise of Dawood Ibrahim in the 1980s, gangland activity intensified. In particular the extortion racket expanded, encompassing not just the street stall owner but also high ranking businessmen, film stars and producers. Ibrahim moved to Dubai in the mid-1980s after a police crackdown following a series of highly publicised killings, but having asserted his control over a number of gangs, he continued to operate in the city through D Company. His elaborate network meant that D Company became the dominant force in the Bombay underworld by the early 1990s. Matters came to a head in 1993, after the destruction of the Babri *masjid* in Ayodhya provoked Hindu–Muslim riots in the city. Ibrahim was alleged to have orchestrated the bomb blasts that rocked the city in March 1993. The impact here was especially on Central Bombay, a district formerly shaped by the textile mills. These experienced a steady decline, which led to high unemployment. The mill worker strikes of the 1980s and the loss of the industry shifted the city's economy further away from manufacturing towards service industries. Yet the decline of an industry has also turned the

district from a working class area to one blighted by crime, prostitution and gang violence (See Blom Hansen 2001). Indeed, this area became one the prime battle grounds and one where the city's corruption became most exposed as developers, former mill owners and gang lords sought control over lucrative development opportunities. Added to this is the rise of the Hindu-Marathi political organisation, the Shiv Sena, which draws on a powerbase of young unemployed, industrial workers, and low-level office employees. It has also links with some petty gangsters. The Sena is known to have been linked to extortion rackets and has clearly organised structures with which it controls and influences neighbourhoods. The organisation was instrumental in the ways in which the pogroms of 1992 were conducted in the city. The economic decline of the mills, large-scale unemployment it brought with it, the growing lawlessness as well as the complicity of the city's municipal administration, by then in the hands of the Shiv Sena, fuelled the communal riots of 1992-3 and the bomb blasts. The explosion of violence put into question the now almost hollow sounding assertions of Bombay's cosmopolitanism, often associated with its immediate postcolonial decades. This cosmopolitanism was embodied by the architecture of Bombay and its screen representation, especially the modern Art Deco apartment blocks that line Marine Drive or the high-rise developments at Nariman Point. The non-descript urban landscape of the gangster film sits as a direct riposte to such representations, through a depiction of the city as a space of violence and claustrophobia, a world governed by its own codes and figuration of narratives of the outlaw and crime. *Once Upon a Time in Mumbaai*, then, highlights the flip side of a logic of consumption that leads to greed and an unstoppable cycle of violence and results in the destruction of the city's cosmopolitan ethos. Ironically, the film highlights precisely the desirability of gaining wealth, affluence and influence as the primary measures of success. In this sense the urban landscape depicted in gangster films is presented as deliberately disruptive by focusing on the one hand on a glamourised world of consumption and on the

other on a world of desolation, degradation, despair and violence. Fluid and dangerous, it is an environment where men act out what Mazumdar has called "the 'death drive' of a community of men", a signifier thus of Bombay's everyday and a moment of crisis of its day-to-day working (Mazumdar, 2007, 196).

Gyan Prakash (2011) observes that "Mumbai's everyday practice rejects history written as a linear story and presents it instead as a tapestry of different, overlapping, and contradictory experiences, imaginations, and desires" (348). Indeed, Hindi cinema with its multi-genre approach to storytelling can best encapsulate these contradictions in a melancholic nostalgic evocation of a form of city life that has robbed the city of its initial post-independence optimism. Yet, through the narrative structuring that makes use of flashbacks a recuperative desire can be discerned that provokes a melancholic nostalgia for Bombay/Mumbai, a utopia with dystopic undertones, both dream and nightmarish spectre.

Notes on Contributor

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