THE DIASPORIC CITY


Toronto as a Tower of Babel is a valid metaphor for Canada’s most diasporic city. Its twenty-first-century high streets are filled with humanity from every corner of the globe, and its sprawling ethnocultural communities co-exist with each other as well as with the dominant Anglo-Canadian tradition. These communities are extremely diverse in their national backgrounds, in their histories, in how they have been racialized in Canada, and in the trajectory of their socioeconomic status in Toronto. Each group carries a different sense of its distinctiveness, of the importance of its cultural and religious heritage, and of its aspirations for assimilation, acceptance, and success.

The dominant African Canadian community in Toronto is a post–World War II diaspora, originating in the Caribbean, that continues to attract a steady flow of immigrants but that has been augmented by immigration from
African countries since the late twentieth century. The Caribbean community has achieved recognition as a contributor to Canadian culture because of its accomplished writers, musicians, and dramatists, many of whom are based in Toronto. These artists are the sources of counternarratives for Canadian identity that have shifted Toronto’s national identity from being an expression of Anglo-Canadianism to being highly inclusive of diversity. When iconic films about Toronto, such as *Goin’ Down the Road* (1970), were made, Toronto’s multiracial identity was only in its infancy. Several decades and more than a million immigrants later, films like *Rude* (1995) by Clement Virgo, *Masala* (1992) by Srinivas Krishna, and *Sam and Me* (1991), directed by Deepa Mehta, came to represent the non-European immigrant experience.

John Berger, in his highly influential *Ways of Seeing* (1972), argues that the visual images of contemporary society are so numerous and omnipresent that their density and concentration have created a whole new sense of visual exchange between audiences and images, especially in urban environments. The stimulation of “either memory or expectations” in the viewer has been the major factor at play. If we consider the two films discussed in this chapter, *Rude* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*, as representing the visualization of Toronto’s nonwhite cityscape, then the interaction between their imaginations and a diverse audience results in a broad range of possible reactions. For the viewer who identifies with the characters because they represent his or her community, there is both memory and expectation, while for the viewer from outside the community, there is a struggle with internalized roles and identities that may be driven by media discourse or negative forces such as racism, whether conscious or unconscious. Because the films are meant to represent the city’s postmodern identity, the viewer’s general perception of that city also comes into play. It can be negative or positive or neutral. Since neither Virgo nor Mehta are Euro-Canadian and both are immigrants to Toronto, their insights are generated by their diasporic experiences in Canada and their perceptions of the racialization of nonwhite minorities in Toronto. These experiences and perceptions include the continued socioeconomic dominance of the Eurocentric Anglo society, their perceived limits on personal and community social and economic empowerment, and a heightened gaze on themselves and the world around them through their understanding of minority dynamics. The filmmakers offer these perceptions to audiences who may comprehend
marginalization intimately or, conversely, who may only know it through the film's fictive narrative—that is, through an absence of experience.

When a filmmaker from a specific ethnic, national, or racialized group creates a cinematic narrative situated within that filmmaker's community, the usual demands of cinematic practice are mixed with the cultural mores of that specific community. The result is a text influenced by diasporic concerns and conflicts. Such films can break new ground in their representation of the community and the wider society if they feature a previously unrepresented, underrepresented, or misrepresented reality. This lack of previous representation constitutes the film's "novelty" for the audience, which can generate a confrontation with stereotypes established by earlier films that feature similar characters. Breaking with conventional imagery about Toronto by making a racialized minority central to characterization and plot allows a filmmaker the opportunity to redefine and reidentify a community. In some cases, this may go as far as "putting a face" on a minority that was formerly ill-defined or mis-identified. This is certainly the case in Rude. Mehta's Bollywood/Hollywood, however, is a later addition and builds on models from a decade earlier. Because of the pre-existence of a diasporic film tradition, Mehta had to inaugurate themes and issues to make Bollywood/Hollywood more contemporary than its precursors, Masala and Sam and Me.

The creation of a new postcolonial urban imaginary for Toronto began in the early 1990s, and its importance has continued. Sam and Me was written by Ranjit Chowdhry but directed and produced by Deepa Mehta, whose career was then in its early stages. Later, she returned to the theme of diasporic Toronto in Bollywood/Hollywood, which was an auteur work, followed in 2008 by a third film about the Indo-Canadian community in Toronto, Heaven on Earth. Since Toronto has been her home for almost three decades, her depictions of Indo-Canadian society are intimately linked to that city and constitute a significant element in her transnational filmmaking identity. Mehta's examination of the Indo-Canadian (or South Asian) community in Toronto shows how the relationship between a minority and the city it inhabits evolves over a relatively short span of time and how it is "constantly renegotiated."

The minority gaze is substantially different from the majority national gaze presented in the films by Arcand, Lauzon, and Lepage. Their films speak from the issues and attitudes of those who participate in the power of an
ethno-linguistic majority, while the films discussed in this chapter, although all in English, represent the universe of ethnic minorities whose homes were former colonies of Great Britain. Egoyan’s Toronto in *Exotica* in the mid-1990s, the same period as *Rude*, lacks the perspective of a racialized minority. Its gaze is different. Lacan has theorized that in every gaze, there is a connection between that gaze’s reading of experienced reality and the filters associated with culturally determined symbolic meanings that interpret that reality; this connection results in every image being imagined or imaginary, thereby creating a closed loop that feeds on itself. The interjection of a postcolonial consciousness and imagery into a Canadian film narrative creates a cinematic urban imaginary that frames otherness through its own diasporic experiences. The characters in the film, the unfolding of the plot, the nature of the dialogue, and the sites of conflict and drama are all dependent on the filmmaker’s relationship to the community that is being represented. In the case of the auteur filmmaker, these positions may be drawn from life experience, from personal background and family narratives, and from ideological frameworks, perceptions, and meanings cultivated within a community or communities for whom social dominance is missing.

The discourse developed by a minority informs its minority auteur filmmaker, who has to sell the project/vision/screenplay to nonminority funders and producers. Those funders and producers can have influence on the final result—that is, the final film may be informed by their perspective. Both films discussed in this chapter contribute to the deconstruction of dominant narratives about Canadian urban life through their subversive discourses grounded in a postcolonial mentality. Nonminority Canadian viewers, who are part of what Charles Acland calls the “absent audience” for Canadian cinema (that is, they lack connection to Canadian cinema in general and to minority-themed narrative film in particular), may experience a heightened sense of strangeness, otherness, and alienation when attempting to engage with these films. From the perspective of the dominant culture in English Canada, these films carry a quality of foreignness. By this, I mean that the culture-specific iconography and codes used in the films cannot be fully understood or easily read by audiences who are outsiders to the communities depicted. This outsider audience engages with the narrative differently from those who see themselves portrayed on screen. Filtering the film’s devices through an unfamiliar gaze produces tension, even conflict, for the spectator.
Virgo’s *Rude* and a Ghettoized Black Toronto

*Rude*, written and directed by Clement Virgo, is the first African Canadian feature film to be made by a Caribbean immigrant. Virgo was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in 1966. He came to Toronto at the age of eleven and was twenty-nine years old when the film was released. He went on to make four more films: *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1997), *Love Come Down* (2000), *Lie with Me* (2005), and *Poor Boy’s Game* (2007). *The Planet of Junior Brown* won the award for Best Feature Film at the Urban World Film Festival in New York, which is indicative of Virgo’s appeal to the wider black community in North America. Virgo is part of the Caribbean community in Toronto, which was the city’s dominant black community twenty years ago but has since come to share that platform with other nationalities, including immigrants from Somali and other African countries.

When Virgo made *Rude*, he was aware of the systemic racism that black Caribbean Torontonians, immigrant and native-born alike, experienced when it came to employment and the justice system. Distinguished from the mainstream by race, accent, and socioeconomic status, the black Caribbean community developed a counternarrative of resentment, anger, and rebellion. Rinaldo Walcott, a Canadian academic and writer, acknowledges the importance of *Rude*, which “opened up the space for thinking differently about Canada as a racialized space, and more specifically as Black space.” According to Walcott, the film began the process of “imagining Blackness as a constituent part of Canadianness, which had been excluded or erased from official narratives.” This imagining was particularly important because it arose from a black Canadian’s own agency. Walcott accorded the film a high status by naming his book *Rude*. The term is Caribbean slang for “hip” or “cool,” but it has an anti-establishment connotation. As a postcolonial appropriation of an English term meaning “offensive” or “confrontational,” it inverts the meaning of the term into something positive while retaining its conventional meaning for non-Caribbean audiences. The film’s title reflects how the film itself and the community it represents operate in Canadian society.

In the film, “Rude” is the name of a female announcer who works at an underground radio station. Her voice serves as an oracular device that questions, suggests, interprets, and tantalizes the characters in the film as they live...
out their fictive lives. She serves as a deity that stands in for the filmmaker’s
gaze as it engages with the drama of the community. As a radio announcer,
she remains faceless: she stands in the shadow, as befits the issue of blackness
in Canadian society. Her disembodied voice becomes a terrain of a powerful,
accented orality. Like a talk-show host, she is more provocateur than healer.
The daily vicissitudes of those with black skin living in Toronto serve as grist
for her mill. Her authorial voice with its god-like power hovers over the com-
community; people’s stories become confessions to an unseen but all-seeing and
all-knowing deity. Since she is not presented as a “real” embodied woman but
as a symbolic force, Virgo’s representation of her gender does not run into the
issues faced by Villeneuve in Maelström.

Skin-colour consciousness is represented in the film’s main male char-
acters, who congregate outside in a park, suggesting unemployment and
underemployment, potential criminality, and the conflicts inherent in male
bonding. These characters range in skin tone from black to white, but they all
identify with the Caribbean community, which accepts this range of colour as
its own in much the same way that the Aboriginal community accepts its full
range of skin tones after centuries of intermarriage. These men represent the
Caribbean diaspora in all its diversity, with the singular female voice-over unit-
ing them into a narrative whole. Their intramural and extramural conflicts,
in particular over criminality, highlight what Walcott calls “the ambivalent,
contradictory and discontinuous moments of diasporic experience.” What are
these moments? There is the dream of migration to a better life, which is then
contradicted by the reality of a ghetto-like existence; there is the exchange of
majority status in the Caribbean for minority status in Canada; and there is the
scramble for existence in an unfamiliar and hostile environment characterized
by an ever-present racism. These moments of ambivalence, contradiction, and
discontinuity are highlighted in the film for those who have never experienced
them. The fact that “Blackness . . . unsettles Canadianness” is clear in the film. And yet the prevalence of racialized minorities in Toronto makes it evident
that Canadianness now includes their identities.

Because many immigrant communities are refreshed with waves of new
immigrants, which, in the case of the Caribbean, involves almost half a cen-
tury of migration, hybridity is a significant factor in that community’s cultural
expression. The Caribbean world evolves just as the Canadian one does, and
so the migrant brings new elements to the diaspora in an ongoing cross-fertilization of identities based on the time of migration and the island nationality from which migration occurs. This means there is a “plurivocality” associated with the community. A hybrid form of speech emerges that is reconstituted with each new generation from the same part of the world. This speech carries within itself a sense of not belonging fully to Canada while at the same time no longer belonging to the former Caribbean nationality. Initially internal to the community, this hybridity eventually comes to define the city as a whole, especially when diasporic communities become numerous enough to step outside marginalization. “In a place such as this [Toronto] so full of immigrants, everyone is deeply interested in belonging,” writes Dionne Brand, a Caribbean-Canadian poet, novelist, critic, and Torontonian. When a city becomes hybridized, it creates a space for diasporic communities to become key players in cultural expression, to feel that they belong. Sheila Petty, in a detailed study of Rude, refers to Toronto Caribbean writers and intellectuals as providing a way to negotiate identity in North America. Because there are now numerous black cultures in Toronto, however, it must be noted that Rude speaks out of only one of them. Renuka Sooknanan points out that the concept of Toronto’s black community as a “homogenous, transparent identity category” is too essentialist and misleading, considering the diversity in the community, and it plays into a monolithic racial construct that supports the implications of systemic racism in which colour is front and centre. In stressing the distinctive features of the Jamaican community, Rude belies that single racialized category. Yet that element of difference does not negate commonalities—the fact that numerous diasporic communities (especially those who share the same skin colour) experience the dominant society in much the same way.

Rude exposes the artificiality that is part of any Canadian minority’s identity structure because so much of that identity reflects the attitudes and perceptions of the majority culture. It is the majority that defines the minority, and thus the minority is always assigned a subordinate status of one kind or another. It is difficult to be self-determining if the attitudes of the majority are negative or hostile. The sense of difference imposed on the minority culture becomes problematic and demoralizing for that culture. Dionne Brand describes how in Canada, “the Black body is culturally encoded as physical prowess, sexual fantasy, moral transgression, violence, magical musical
Any representation of the black community from within by its artists addresses these codes and how they impact the community, yet these artists approach these codes based on their gender, the generation that formed them, their sexual orientation, their religious upbringing, and the culture of the Caribbean nationality from which they came, to name a few factors.¹³

No response is identical to any other. So not only must we be sensitive to the specificity of the Caribbean identity portrayed in Rude, but we must also be conscious of the fact that the author is a heterosexual Jamaican-born male, and of how this affects his discussion of blackness and race and his representation of females and males. When Dionne Brand was interviewed by Beverley Daurio about her response to cultural colleagues like the poet Derek Walcott, she stated, “Walcott and I come from different generations and different genders,” alluding to the importance of these distinctions.¹⁴ Brand belongs more to Virgo’s generation, but she is from Trinidad and Tobago in the southern Caribbean, having emigrated to Toronto in 1970 at the age of seventeen. Virgo’s Jamaican culture is quite different from that of a Trinidadian, if for no other reason than the prevalence of Rastafarianism in Jamaica and the global impact of Jamaican pop music.

Rude is very much focused on the relationship of males with other males and with females. These relationships are forged within the concrete jungle rather than the “water, sea, sand, earth, trees, rain and sun” of a Caribbean island.¹⁵ The very core of the diasporic narrative is urban life and the diaspora’s experiences in the city. Toronto writer Silvera Makeda, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1955 and immigrated to Canada at the age of twelve, says, “I live in Canada but I feel that I live in a Third World section of Canada.”¹⁶ In other words, economic dislocation and disadvantage mean that Caribbean Canadians, especially those who are black, have more in common with First Nations people living on reserves than with a privileged white enclave like Toronto’s Rosedale neighbourhood.

Cecil Foster, a Toronto writer and radio talk-show host, published a book that came out about the same time as Rude in which he describes the sense of criminalization he felt by simply being a black man. He called the condition DWBB (Driving While Being Black).¹⁷ If he drove a jalopy, he would be stopped because of the poverty-induced criminality it implied to the police, and if he drove an expensive car, he would be associated, as a black man, with
the spoils of criminal activity. Either way, he was a target of police harassment because black means criminal. That Virgo has one of his Caribbean characters be a female cop is part of the irony of the film. Foster notes that, in Caribbean countries, males hold positions of power, while, in Canada, women from these countries tend to have better positions than their male counterparts. This reversal has devastating results in Rude.

Film scholar John McCullough summarizes Rude as an “exciting hybridization of commercial entertainment forms, intentional urban style, and postcolonial sensibility.” The commercial aspect of the film refers to its intended general audience; the urban style, to the hip hop and rap music scene that originated in African American urban ghettos in the 1980s and coincided with the rise of postmodernism; and the postcolonialism sensibility, to the film’s black subjectivity and how that subjectivity writes its own narrative. A crucial factor in this subjectivity is the issue of class and how it relates to race and gender. Socioeconomic determinants of the Caribbean community’s historical experience in Canada flow into a broader African American experience. The genre on which Rude draws is the “hood film” (with “hood” meaning neighbourhood but also being a play on hoodlum) of the 1990s, pioneered in the United States. This genre deals specifically with issues of racialized masculinity and its criminalization through drug dealing and prostitution. At one point, American pop music culture even had a bout of “gangsta rap” that flowed from the hood film. The genre promoted the underclass nonwhite hero.

Paula Massood’s seminal 1996 article on the subject of the hood film focuses on two films: Boyz N the Hood (1991) and Menace II Society (1993), the first set in south-central Los Angeles and the second in Watts, an area that had experienced an urban uprising in the mid-1980s. According to Massood, in these coming-of-age narratives about young African American men in the inner city, urban space is characterized as beset with extreme poverty, massive unemployment, and violence generated by the ghetto’s main economic enterprise—drugs. This urban space is a mindscape of utopian hopes and dystopian reality where power relations are brutal and self-destructive.

Rude represents a different urban space, a different historical context and community, and the film operates outside the parameters of American filmmaking and its tropes. It remains true to a Torontonian milieu that is not sociologically associated with firearms to the extent that American culture is.
Nevertheless, *Rude*’s significance in film history is framed first by the popularity of the hood film and then by its deviation from it.

In *Weird Sex and Snowshoes: And Other Canadian Film Phenomena*, Katherine Monk describes how Canadian and American cultures intersected in Virgo’s experience, noting that while watching the film *She’s Gotta Have It* (1986) by notable black filmmaker Spike Lee, “Virgo experienced something of an epiphany. . . . If a young black man in the United States could make movies, then why not him?” Of course, the Canadian hood has its own distinct features, which Virgo expresses so well. For him, Toronto is a city defined through Jamaican diasporic culture. But the images that represent that reality, however distinct they may be, have their origins in earlier practices, such as Spike Lee’s films and the whole American Blaxploitation film tradition beginning in the 1970s, which Virgo filtered through a Canadian consciousness. “I knew that to get this film made in Canada,” Virgo said, “it would have to have elements that were easily recognizable. . . . That meant the ’hood, guns, a little bit of drugs. I consciously drew on those things, but . . . I knew I couldn’t imitate *Menace II Society* or *Boyz N the Hood*; I don’t know anything about that world.” In portraying ghetto life in areas such as Toronto’s Regent Park, Virgo approaches masculinity through the emasculation engendered by racism and poverty, but he does so in a dramatically different way than do his American colleagues, whose world he hasn’t experienced or known. One difference revolves around the issue of diaspora itself. African Americans—whose roots in the United States go back hundreds of years and who did not, after the abolition of slavery, receive fresh waves of immigration—express a cultural reality that is not immigrant sensitive. For Jamaican Canadians, whose roots are in the recent Caribbean, diasporic identity remains a crucial factor. When Virgo uses a reggae song like Jimmy Cliff’s “Many Rivers to Cross” in his film, its Jamaican association defines the film, even though it is set in Toronto. *Rude* bespeaks a cultural connectivity that is fresh and strong. It is not nostalgia, nor does it address the demographics of an American ghetto scene.

John McCullough claims that Virgo’s film reproduces “a [Canadian] cultural bias against understanding women, money, and class relations.” This is painting with a rather broad brush, but it reflects McCullough’s view that the negativity of life in the hood is subsumed in *Rude* under the filmmaker’s artistic interests and storytelling technique. This critique is echoed by Christopher
Gittings, who calls the film “highly aestheticized.” As a contrast to Virgo’s fictional treatment, Gittings provides a list of documentaries about the African Canadian experience.\textsuperscript{24} When the sometimes disembodied narrator, Rude, characterizes the stories she is hearing/seeing as “Zulu Nation meets Mohawk Nation,” she mixes postcolonial references with street humour.\textsuperscript{25} Since the stories do not contain any Zulus or Mohawks (although there are murals in the film of North American colonization), the terms are signifiers of the diasporic universe of Caribbean culture in Canada, a universe of loss and of not belonging. In that world, the Caribbean community is viewed as “Zulu” or African, and “Mohawk” or poor—disenfranchised and threatening, all at the same time.

Jamaica is associated with the Rastafarian religio-political movement (famous for the dreadlock hair style) and is reproduced in the film with the theatrical appearance of a “Conquering Lion of Judah” figure, who represents the emperor of Ethiopia, the ruler of the country that is the Rastafarian “homeland.” The figure is presented as Rude’s alter ego and as a symbol of the community as a whole.\textsuperscript{26} This symbolized, aesthetic gloss to the film does not mean that the film is depoliticized. It simply means that the political is allegorized in an artistic manner. The use of the Easter Sunday Resurrection theme in the film is another religious component, this time reflecting the community’s Christian roots. When Rude’s face and body is finally revealed as a single whole rather than a series of shadowy, partial images, the scene is coded as a “resurrection.” Rude is reassembled into a wholeness that represents the community’s coming together. The scene also balances out what Gittings calls the “surreal and abstract visual landscape of the film” that has prevailed throughout.\textsuperscript{27} The resurrection theme involves the body, and in \textit{Rude}, the black Canadian body, although presented as crushed and entombed by racism, does rise in the end, overcoming the barriers that have kept it in place. It triumphs over the Babylon of its exile.

This approach in the film is commensurate with a postcolonial aesthetic that seeks to create a fictive counternarrative to the lacunas of the colonizers’ narrative that seek to erase the presence of the Other. Virgo’s postcolonialism embraces the history of African slavery in the Caribbean, the cultural manifestations that flow from that history, and the ways in which Canadian society is implicated in that past through its current stance toward Caribbean Canadians living in what Gittings calls “the white Canadian state . . . whose immigration
policies continue a colonial practice of privileging white immigration above Black immigration.28 The main figure representing the white state is the disembodied anti-voice of Officer Milliard, who is trying to close down the illegal radio station and so suppress the free expression of the Caribbean voice that Rude represents. The presence of a black female police officer with an ex-con former husband is framed as a partial counterpoint in which expression (the Caribbean) and repression (Canada) meet in a symbolic hybridity. Milliard’s name and other names in the film are indicative of their symbolic roles. A white drug dealer from the United States who represents the white power structure is named “Yankee,” while black characters like Luke and Reece become his tools and internalize his racist construction of them. Because of their lack of power in the society, they are forced to listen to and eventually internalize this derogatory construction. The male power vacuum in the repressed community is filled by women, who are shown to hold jobs while the men drift and fall prey to the traps of criminalization.

*Rude* is subtitled *Cock the Hammer*, a reference to the firing of a handgun. A phallic construct used by various characters, both men and women, in the film, a gun is a statement of immediate power and a symbol of death. As the film proceeds, it becomes a figurative element that signals liberation from various oppressive situations. In contrast to the handgun, there is the Lion of Judah, a real lion (Bongo) who appears in cameo throughout the film whenever Rude informs the audience that the lion (the black community) is on the loose. The lion signifies the power of the community that has been caged but on this Easter weekend is free. The film makes reference to the stereotypical roles assigned to black males in white-speak—the athlete, represented by Jordan, the gay amateur boxer; the rapist, represented by Reece, who is the Cain figure in the film; and the drug dealer, represented by Reece’s brother Luke, also known as “the General.” In contrast, the three black female characters are free of stereotypes. Rude is the radio DJ, Jessica is a cop, and Maxine is a window dresser who lives in a room filled with mannequins. These women have positions in society outside of the identity prisons constructed for their male brothers.

Three powerful aspects of *Rude* distinguish its cinematic expression as belonging to the black community. The first is its directed use of music, especially song, to establish the cultural blackness of the film; much of that blackness
is intoned by female voices singing either American black spirituals or reggae. As a signifier of a creative identity, the film’s music crosses the normal boundary between dialogic and diegetic exegesis, creating an integrative environment that makes parts of the film seem like a musical. The second is the language of the film, which is filled with the oral vulgarity of street-talk: fuck you, motherfucker, cocksucker, and so on. It is a language of the underclass, a form of English that is used only by the marginalized and that suggests their powerlessness. Rude calls it the “disenfranchised diasporic voice,” and its joual nature indicates how language expresses class identity. The black women in this film—who have valid social and economic roles—do not speak in this self-denigrating manner: their language approximates “standard” English, the language of the dominant culture. The third distinctive characteristic of Rude is Virgo’s specific cinematographic method—the signature panning shot that he uses frequently to move from scene to scene as he changes from one of the three stories to another, reminiscent of Lepage’s track shots in Le Confessionnal. A less obvious element in Virgo’s directorial repertoire is the deliberately staged quality of certain scenes, such as that of the four naked men in the shower. Such scenes are purposefully theatrical. No attempt is made to mask their constructed positioning for the audience. They are not meant to be “natural.”

But these artistic techniques, while a sign of creativity and thoughtfulness, are not the main thrust of the film. Instead, it is the symbolic role of each character that is the driver. First, there is Luke (Maurice Dean Wint), the hero of the film and Virgo’s alter ego. An artist who has just been released from prison for a drug-related crime, Luke is penniless but talented: on a basketball court in the ghetto, he has created a massive wall mural filled with figures crushed by violence, pain, and suffering. But his art cannot earn him a living, so he is tempted by his former criminal profession. Second, there is his brother Reece (Clark Johnson), a street-level drug dealer working for Yankee (Stephen Shelley), a white drug boss. Reece is envious of his brother’s stature and has a bad habit of pulling out a pistol to intimidate. He is the Cain figure, ruled by emotion rather than reason, and he is under the aegis of white society, having internalized its racist attitudes through the tactics of Yankee: this has made him a dysfunctional and conflicted character. He is the exploited and oppressed one. Third, there is Yankee, who is the white gaze personified. This gaze is the ruling power that defines the black community and creates it in the
Rude (Clement Virgo, 1994). Courtesy of The Feature Film Project.
image that serves white interests. Yankee is the target of the black community’s resentment. Fourth, we have Jordan (Richard Chevolleau), the amateur boxer who is struggling with his gay identity and who represents the diversity as well as the homophobia of the mainstream black community. As a boxer, he symbolizes the powerful black athlete, but that identity is subverted by his gay identity. Virgo is clear that the identities with which black males must live are constructed outside the community, which then internalizes its oppression through stereotyping. Jordan has to face the homophobic taunts of other black men, who use their putdowns as a way of enhancing their own already wounded masculinity.

The female characters are not as well developed. Jessica (Melanie Nicholls-King)—a police officer as well as Luke’s partner and the mother of his son, Johnny (Ashley Brown)—represents a working-class level of success. She is an authority figure and the person from the community who is integrated into society, but as a junior partner. For example, when she is in the squad car, she is not in the driver’s seat—a white male officer is—much like Luke’s situation in Yankee’s car, with Yankee in the driver’s seat. Maxine (Rachael Crawford), a window dresser who lives in a shabby room filled with mostly white mannequins, is exploited by her videotaping boyfriend. Eventually, both she and Luke free themselves from their tormentors. The commentary by Rude (Sharon M. Lewis) on these various struggles is the glue that provides an interpretive gloss to the film. Her verbal jabs to Milliard, the “we’ll get you and close you down” police officer, symbolize the struggle between the community and the criminalizing power of the dominant society. If the fate of African Canadian masculinity in Rude is one of hopelessness and criminality, Virgo’s representation of the Rude character suggests her deity-like status lifts her to the realm of the all-knowing, watchful mother. That the Caribbean female voice is given such authority in the film implies that the diasporic Caribbean masculinity in the context of Toronto and Canada requires a female equivalent to overcome servitude.

The spatiality of the film creates a sense of enclosure, of imprisonment within the brick walls of a ghetto, where almost everyone is from the black minority. This sense of entrapment is further highlighted by the visuality of the film. Most of the external public spaces in the film are shot at night, with artificial street lighting, suggestive of the “white” light that illuminates the night
of the males. This makes even open spaces like parks seem threatening, with the street lighting being similar to a prison's probing search lights. Sheila Petty concludes that the cityscapes in the film are coded as “the collective powers of white Eurocentric oppression.”\textsuperscript{29} This suggests that the spaces inhabited by its characters are all ghettoized and that they are entrapped. The theme of attempted escape from the ghetto is foregrounded. That Luke is released from prison only to enter the prison of the ghetto and its restrictions is a statement about the nature of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto. The orality of the film reflects the class division in the Caribbean community between those who speak in street slang (and are associated with criminal activity) and those who speak reasonably standard English (and are relatively well-integrated, law-abiding citizens). And then there is Rude, who speaks from what she calls “my brown voice,” in a manner reminiscent of dub poetry, or what \textit{New York Times} reviewer Stephen Holden calls “quasi-poetic rapping.”\textsuperscript{30} This oral form, which Rude has adopted as a cryptic “speaking in tongues,” is filled with prophecy of revolt and justice. At one point, Rude— as a Cassandra-like oracle—declares that “Armageddon has begun.”

Perhaps the most provocative feature of \textit{Rude} is its use of religious imagery and associations. First, the film turns Toronto into Babylon, reflecting the Rastafarian claim that life in Jamaica is akin to the Jewish biblical exile. Africa is the New Jerusalem, and exile and enslavement are central themes of Rastafarianism. Implicit in the film’s characterization of Toronto as Mohawk territory (its precolonial identity) is a critique of settler society that also carries religious connotations. The whole history of European religious conversion as part of the settlement process is suggested by this reminder that the urban space of Toronto was once land that belonged to the Other. The film’s deployment of religion is also highly hybridized: Christian imagery (the equation of black suffering with martyrdom in the film’s wall art), African American religious music and song, and Rude’s references to Easter, the Passion, and the Resurrection are blended with Jamaican Rastafarianism and the figure of the Lion of Judah and its African connotation.

Class divisions exist not only between the community and the dominant society but also within the community itself. These divisions are manifested through gender and the leadership role of women in the community. In \textit{Rude}, Virgo has created a diasporic Toronto in which a minority feels imprisoned,
subverting the dominant discourse of the city as a metropolis of economic opportunity and cultural achievement. At the same time, the film makes Toronto a city-state unto itself. Toronto is what Canada is: it exists for itself and not in relationship to some other “hegemonic centre.”31 Jenny Burman reports that when Virgo attended the launch of Rude at Cannes, he claimed that he did not recognize himself as a “Canadian” filmmaker but more as a Torontonian.32 For him, Canadian identity was an ideological construct that had no relevance to his urbancentric art.

The response of another community to Toronto life is explored in Deepa Mehta's Bollywood/Hollywood. That community’s Toronto stands in sharp contrast to the Toronto of the Caribbean diaspora. Mehta describes diaspora as a multigenerational entity in which tradition and assimilation are constantly at odds—an entity that is always looking both ways, thereby creating its own specific hybridity that is quite distinct from the one represented in Rude. That Bollywood/Hollywood is a comedy rather than a drama only heightens the difference.

**DEEPA MEHTA’S PLAY ON IDENTITY IN **Bollywood/Hollywood 

By the time Bollywood/Hollywood appeared in 2001, the era of “identity politics” in Canada’s cultural communities had abated significantly, and along with it, the earlier reactive passion that had infused Rude. Diasporic creativity could now move on toward a sense of ambiguity and self-deprecation. For instance, Sam and Me, Deepa Mehta’s 1991 film about South Asian immigrants struggling to survive in Toronto, mixed light-heartedness with poignancy—the film might be classified as tragi-comedy. But a decade later, her Bollywood/Hollywood espoused the comedic impulse. In the language of the new film, Mehta eschewed the references to racism and prejudice that had defined relations between the dominant white society and the nonwhite minorities in the early 1990s, instead concentrating on conflicts internal to the community.

Bollywood/Hollywood’s roots are closer to the comic spirit of Torontonian Srivinas Krishna’s Masala (1992) than to Mehta’s Sam and Me. The term masala refers to a mixture, a potpourri of elements, that is, to hybridity. Lysandra Woods describes the film Masala as a “concoction of postmodern
pastiche—high camp, musical numbers, otherworldly communication, historical incidents and caricature.” There is certainly an element of masala in Bollywood/Hollywood.

Bollywood/Hollywood is set in Toronto and tells the story of a wealthy Indo-Canadian family via Bollywood filmmaking clichés. The film opened in Canada on mainstream film screens. Although it enjoyed commercial success and international sales, it was met with a general lack of attention from academic critics, who were much more interested in Mehta's dramatic Indian trilogy. The film was viewed as lacking in gravitas. This could be a matter of its genre, but it could also be a matter of an unconscious orientalism that finds films set in India more appealing than those set at home. But most likely, it is simply an issue of feminist interest in films that portray female subjectivity in a provocative and affirming manner. While this is present to a degree in Bollywood/Hollywood, it is subsumed by culture clash, heterosexual marriage, and farcical elements associated with Bollywood codes. Marrying Indian popular culture—as expressed by Bollywood film's formulaic song-and-dance, lovesick narratives—to a North American production suggested to academic critics a lack of substantive material for serious analysis. An exception is Amy Fung, who took a serious look at hybridity in the film. She argues that because Bollywood films had become “a generator of 'Indianness’” or an essentialized national identity for both Indians and non-Indians, they simply perpetuated “a fictional and idealized world of India”; Mehta, says Fung, was playing with this in order to make other points. Regarding the matter of urbanity, the film has a great deal to offer: it is certainly on par with Rude because it exposes another community’s approach to its metropolitan diasporic experience. But Fung argues that Toronto is nothing but a “backdrop” to identity issues. I’m not so sure.

Deepa Mehta was twenty-three when she arrived in Toronto in 1973, after having married a Canadian. By the time Bollywood/Hollywood was released, in 2001, she had spent almost as much of her life in Toronto as she had growing up in India. The film represents this duality, but more importantly, it expresses the hybridity that her art assumed in Canada. The clash of generations whose respective experiences are so different, the struggle between tradition and new ways of being, the vagaries of inter- and intra-ethnic relations, and the issues of integrating a diasporic identity into the mainstream are framed by conflicted gender roles, different languages, and class divides. The imperatives of Indian
culture—in particular, the Bollywood formula result in the representation of quite distinct Torontos in *Rude* and *Bollywood/Hollywood*. Mehta’s Toronto is a satirized urban universe in which misunderstanding, linguistic hybridity, and familial traumas are played to full comedic effect. The Indo-Canadian community continues to entertain itself with Bollywood products, so it can read this film in a way that a non-Indo-Canadian audience cannot.

*Bollywood/Hollywood* owes a great deal to its predecessor, *Masala*. The fantastical song-and-dance routines that are the bedrock of Bollywood filmmaking, themes of generational and gender conflict, linguistic hybridity in diasporic communities, and the blend of humour and tragedy that governs the inner workings of minority communities were introduced by *Masala* a decade earlier. The Indian deity Krishna appears in *Masala* wearing a Toronto Maple Leafs hockey sweater and intervenes provocatively in the life of the community. He is presented as a campy, egomaniacal trickster figure. The film makes direct references to the Air India tragedy of the mid-1980s, when an airliner flying from Toronto to India was blown up by Sikh extremists. At one point, the film has a Bollywood dance number in which the dancers are dressed in country-and-western costumes, emphasizing the blending of Indian and North American cultures. But a 1990s edge enters the film when some white punks kill the Indo-Canadian anti-hero in a racist incident, providing a sombre narrative closure. The death symbolizes the inevitable death of the old culture in that the anti-hero’s name is also Krishna. *Masala*’s auteur filmmaker, Srinivas Krishna, takes great pleasure in contrasting the South Asian community, both Hindu and Sikh, with its foil, the Mounties, in their dress-parade red tunics. The ethnoracial divide is similar to that of the Caribbean community and its engagement with Euro-Canadian-dominated police power, but the story is told in a comic, slapstick way, which takes the edge off the issue.

At the same time that Krishna was making *Masala*, Mehta was producing and directing *Sam and Me*, working with a script written by Ranjit Chowdhry, a recent Indo-Canadian immigrant to Canada who stars in the film as Nikhil, the just-off-the-plane newcomer who has yet to learn the ropes. He is “helped” by his Uncle Chetan (Om Puri), who seeks to benefit economically from his quick integration into Canadian society. Chowdhry’s script frequently plays with naming. Nikhil becomes “Nick” in Canada, suggesting transformation, while his elderly charge, Zeyda, becomes Sam. Both of these involve naming
that belongs within family and community and naming that functions only in the external society. The immigrant experience is presented as one of exploitation and denigration by both earlier immigrants from the community and outsiders, and the film contains references to instances of racism that fit the early 1990s sense of alienation. Journalist Cathy Dunphy, writing in the *Toronto Star*, quotes Mehta as making the following assessment in the early 1990s of minority-themed films: “In the United States there’s overt anger and you get Spike Lee’s movies; in England there’s anger and *Sammy and Rose Get Laid* gets made. In Toronto there is a passivity and very little interconnection between the white mainstream and the so-called visible minorities.”

In *Sam and Me*, Mehta tried to overcome that void of interconnection by having Nikhil and his uncle work for a Jewish family business. When Nikhil rebels against his uncle’s scheming and embraces old Sam, he exhibits the ability to “straddle both worlds and not be intimidated.” Mehta claims the same attitude for herself, making her a consciously constructed transnational filmmaker whose art is a cultural hybrid. Jacqueline Levitin argues that a transnational filmmaker’s narrative source is “memory filtered through nostalgia.” In her Indo-Canadian films, Mehta is filtering the present through direct experience. The emphasis on standing in two worlds and not being afraid of either may be a subjective stance for her as a filmmaker, but it also represents a complicated objective reality. *Sam and Me* did not receive Telefilm Canada funding, because it didn’t get enough points to be considered a Canadian film. Mehta was happy to use Indian actors, including Chowdhry, who plays Nikhil and had only arrived in Canada a few years earlier. “There is a lot of me in Nikhil,” Mehta confessed, indicating that the immigrant experience is fundamental to her identity and was critical to her understanding of the constraints of Canadian society at the time *Sam and Me* was made. The result is “a bleak picture of Canadian-style pluralism,” according to one film reviewer. The film, however, became a calling card for Mehta, who won an honourable mention for *Sam and Me* in the Cannes Caméra d’Or competition (Best First Film).

The urban setting in *Sam and Me* includes a men’s rooming house, where the new immigrants carry on a convivial camaraderie while toiling separately at menial jobs and the posh digs of the owners of the businesses. The class divisions are a clear focus of the film, as they were in *Masala*, except that in *Masala*, the class divisions were within the community itself, between the

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sari merchant and the postal employee, both Indo-Canadians. Exploitation occurs within the community’s own class structure rather than in relationship to the external mainstream as in *Sam and Me*. In his article “Am I a Canadian Writer?” M. G. Vassanji, a prominent Canadian novelist of Indian descent, raises important issues of hybridity and identity that apply to the work of Deepa Mehta. He contends that the characters that an immigrant writer invents can only resonate with the audience if those characters are “rooted deep in something, in a history, a culture, a psychological makeup.” In other words, they require both a sociological authenticity and a mythological dimension that gives them certain universal human characteristics. Out of this mix, Vassanji sees his work and that of others like him as belonging to a category that could be called “Canadian Postcolonial.” In film, Mehta is the prime practitioner of the Canadian Postcolonial.

Mehta’s *Bollywood/Hollywood* continued her postcolonial sensibility because it highlights the diasporic reality in conflict with the mainstream and also within its own porous boundaries. Just as *Sam and Me* contains a microcosm of multiracial and multicultural Toronto (Asian, African, South Asian) in the various nationalities inhabiting the crowded rooming house, so too *Bollywood/Hollywood* plays on the diversity and interchangeability of non-white identities in highlighting hybridity as the urban norm. Vassanji believes that the new urbanity that characterizes Toronto, Vancouver, and, to a lesser extent, Montréal needs artistic and political recognition. “If ten percent of a nation resides in one city,” he writes, presumably referring to Toronto, “then a cityscape deserves to be recognized as being essential, as essential as the Rockies, as the Prairies, the Atlantic.” Creating equivalence between the pluralistic urban world and its hybrid cultures, on the one hand, and the typical geographic determinants of identity found in an older sense of Canada, on the other, is what the postcolonial narrative is all about. This deconstruction of national identity promoted by Vassanji is precisely what Mehta achieves in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. The syncretism implied in her work is meant to construct an urban imaginary that erases national boundaries in favour of a transnationality and an integrative urbanity. The remnants of national identity are precisely that—remnants. They are the ashes or traces of a world that is only vaguely reconstructed in the new environment. While Mehta’s Indian-themed films like *Fire* and *Water* unflinchingly tackle social issues
within Indian society and history, *Sam and Me* and *Bollywood/Hollywood* face Canadian issues in the context of a conflicted, diasporic Toronto.

There are certain issues of cultural politics at work in films like *Bollywood/Hollywood* that are addressed to diverse theatrical audiences: Indo-Canadians seeking a cinematic self-image, diasporic Indians in countries outside of Canada who can relate to the narrative and characters, and non-Indo-Canadians with their own ideas of the South Asian community. A final audience is the industry itself, which in the late 1990s witnessed a growing interest in what might be called “crossover films” in which diasporic South Asians interacted with their home culture at some level and in various locales, but did so with clearly Westernized contexts and subcultures. The term *crossover* suggests the transnationality that lies at the heart of diasporic identity, but it also refers to the interaction between Indian themes and Hollywood subjects. The key film in this genre is Mira Nair’s comedy *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), which received the Golden Lion (Il Leone d’Oro) award at the 2001 Venice Film Festival and had a wide release in North America. The culmination of the crossover genre’s legitimacy came when *Slumdog Millionaire* received the Oscar for Best Picture in 2009. Here was a film and story set in contemporary India, directed and co-written by a British filmmaker using primarily English as the language of the film, and based on a novel written by an Indian living in the UK diaspora. *Bollywood/Hollywood* fit seamlessly into this global cultural phenomenon, but its Canadian roots gave it an extra dimension and a certain burden. For example, a review of the film in the Hollywood-based industry journal *Variety* described it as being “constructed in the vein of a corny Bollywood movie.” For the reviewer, the reference point for the film was India rather than Canada, and the use of the term *corny* implies a certain lack of understanding of this foreign genre. But these references are only part of the narrative structure and dialogue. The film bespeaks Toronto, and its Canadian references are evident to Canadian audiences.

The Canadian aspects of the film weave a common thread of diasporic South Indian culture from *Masala* and *Sam and Me* in the early 1990s right through to *Cooking with Stella* (2009), which is set in New Delhi, stars Canadian actor and filmmaker Don McKellar, and is directed and co-written by Deepa Mehta’s brother, Dilip Mehta. The Canadian media’s response to *Bollywood/Hollywood* was celebratory because of the comedic genre and the
use of light-hearted satire to represent life in the Canadian diaspora. While scholar Jigna Desai claims that “diaspora functions as a postnational critique,” film journalists eschewed this focus in favour of a promotional, noncritical approach that celebrated the stars from India who appear in the film. They include Canadian-born Lisa Ray, who was a high-profile model in India at the time. Film critic Geoff Pevere points to “the particular urban reality” found in the film, “where cultures . . . collide and converge in a manner that gives the city its very particular polyglot flavour.” The concept of conflict and convergence suggests the tension that exists in any multiethic environment, while the concept of the polyglot city is a direct reference to the new multiracial urbanity of Toronto. How Mehta translates that diversity into a Bollywood-style Canadian film is of particular interest in this study.

As a transnational film, Bollywood/Hollywood is highly Torontocentric. The film is about neither Mumbai nor Los Angeles, which are the two cities referenced in the title; rather, it is about an interstitial space that is particular to diasporic urban communities who are in North America but not of it. Trapped between nostalgia and integration, their evolving identities are framed by a tension between fantasy and reality. The diaspora is not so much hyphenated in a dualistic way as it is sliced diagonally into an uneasy unity, as the title suggests. That the identity of a community can be conveyed through a campy romantic comedy that is, as non-Indian Torontonian Geoff Pevere calls it, an “accurate portrayal of Toronto’s distinctive cultural circumstances” is indicative of the circumscription implied in comedy. The film includes a cross-dressing chauffeur named Rocky (Ranjit Chowdhry) and a Shakespeare-spouting grandma-ji (Dina Pathak), as well as the trope of the successful and handsome young South Asian businessman (Rahul Khanna) and the wily beauty of Sue Singh (Lisa Ray). Mehta herself called her film “my love song to Toronto.” Described by the Indian star of the film, Rahul Khanna, as a film “about displaced Indians who are torn between the culture they are in and the culture they’ve left behind,” Bollywood/Hollywood aims for and achieves a high state of hybridity.

The urban culture represented in the film is one that deconstructs Toronto’s formerly staid Euro-Canadian identity. When Mehta locates a Bollywood-style dance number with a multiracial cast against Toronto’s greyish-white downtown skyline, she is playing with urban iconography, making
the dance number symbolize multiple worlds and identities that now define Toronto. The film gathers its energy from the tension between an exclusive universe of ethnic monoculturalism, represented by the Indo-Canadian family, and an inclusive, pluralistic world, symbolized by Rahul’s outsider friends. While hybridity is evident from the title of the film, there is a richer vein at work here as well—what Fung calls the film’s “web of cross-cultural intertexts.” By this, she means the richness of cultural identifiers playing off against each other, indicative of how little or how much an immigrant community and its individual members have been assimilated.

*Bollywood/Hollywood* has several significant markers that code it as a parody of Bollywood films. First, its visuality is dominated with the rich hues of ochre and blue in the familial home and with the white Nehru jackets worn by the male lead; all these colours carry cultural significance. Second, after the death of Rahul’s white girlfriend early in the narrative, the film pointedly lacks any prominent non-Indian characters. They are simply irrelevant to the plot. The only white characters in the film appear in a private school scene (as extras), the Hollywood-style opening dance sequence, and the aforementioned dance scene at Rahul’s apartment. Otherwise, the whole film is occupied by South Asians. The filmmaker therefore conveys a sense of interiority that essentially excludes other nationalities. The only “racial” conflict in the film is between Rahul’s younger brother and an Asian who bullies him at their private school. This ethnocentric ethos brings the film close to the Bollywood model. Third, the film’s orality is hybrid. Whether it is the grandmother who specializes in well-known quotes from Shakespeare and switches to Hindi when it suits her, or the dance sequences sung in English to imitate Hollywood musicals and in Hindi to imitate Bollywood, or the occasional use of subtitles, the film is a fluid mix of languages typical of diasporic cultures, where both the home language and the acquired language are fully at play. Finally, the class content of the film imitates the upper-class orientation of Bollywood films, in which wealth, status, and caste play significant roles.

After Rahul acquires a beautiful companion (Sue Singh, played by Lisa Ray), whom he has hired to act as an Indian substitute for his late girlfriend, the film moves toward a more positive outlook with more daytime scenes and shiny street scenes. Sue is articulate and offers a feminist reading of her persona. She also adds certain Canadian-film allusions by going to the Club...
Exotica and having a poster from Atom Egoyan’s *Exotica* on the wall in her room, along with a *Hiroshima Mon Amour* poster, suggesting that she is an intellectual with an art-house rather than a Bollywood sensibility. In this way, Mehta references her film in relation to Egoyan’s *Exotica*, thereby suggesting a connection with his Toronto. Sue’s cosmopolitanism contrasts with her father’s fascination with Bollywood films, which he names and from which he performs songs. Clearly, Sue Singh is the Mehta figure. The use of Ranjit Chowdhry, the writer of *Sam and Me*, as a campy, cross-dressing chauffeur for the family limo is a reference to her own cinematic oeuvre. Since the film is a romantic comedy, it contains various stereotypical roles for males and females that follow the melodramatic, soap-opera tone of the film. The emphasis on the physical attractiveness of the two leads is simply part of the package. But with our focus on Mehta’s transnational construction of Toronto and the cultural elements that dominate this particular film, we can see two major poles: one is the interiority of Indian life, described in the film by Rahul as the “time-wrap” of traditional practices, and the other is the streetscapes and urbanity of a familiar Toronto core of skyscrapers, identifiable to the film’s Canadian audience. These exterior shots establish Toronto as a place of intense urban structure, of high-rise downtown lifestyles contrasting with suburban wealth and opulence. Obviously, the latter is viewed negatively because it rejects hybridity in favour of monoculture. The urban imaginary in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is torn between the concrete freeways, expensive cars, and penthouse pleasures of the son and the staid, protected home of his matriarchal mother. While the film contains class and religious elements, these are presented as issues internal to the community that do not distract from the mythological engagement with Indian film stereotypes. Every Bollywood film is a ritualized performance of fantasy so unreal as to create a universe of its own with reference only to itself.

Besides the comic gender roles highlighted in the film, the clash of acculturated youth with their traditional parents and grandparents is one that resonates in every diasporic community. The dominance of female personas in numerous scenes and in all the dance sequences is indicative of female authorship. Seeking to make both Indian and Western audiences comfortable with the milieu that the film represents, Mehta skilfully blended a Hollywood Cinderella story of a poor, beautiful girl marrying a rich and handsome Prince
Charming with a Bollywood story of wealth and caste, of Indian cultural values in conflict with Western values. Although Western audiences may not be familiar with the conventions of Bollywood films and the roots of its stock personae and plots in traditional Indian mythology, Mehta’s comfort with both Hollywood and Bollywood codes means that she is able to adopt both formulas, while establishing a gentle postcolonial critique using the film’s general silliness as a form of satire and parody.

One example of Bollywood/Hollywood’s hybridity is the use of romantic kissing between the two leads in a way favoured by Hollywood in expressing a love story juxtaposed with the avoidance of kissing in public in the Indian family sequences in harmony with Bollywood standards. This blend is easy to achieve in a comedy that emphasizes the kitschy and the playful. The urban imaginary in Mehta’s film creates a sense of the diaspora as an island in an ocean of concrete urbanity, where life is formulated as true escapism, as it is in both Hollywood and Bollywood musicals. While this escapism has a distinct cultural value compared to the unrelenting magic realism of Rude, it also reflects both the historical evolution of minority discourse during one decade in the life of Toronto and Canada and the self-image of hybridity held by one diasporic community.

Jigna Desai, in her important 2004 study of South Asian diasporic film, offers insight into the industry context in which Mehta made the film. She considers Hollywood cinema as “hegemonic” in relationship to Canadian cinema and so views “migrant filmmakers” like Mehta as crucial to the development of Canadian cinema through their connections with other cinematic traditions. She links Mehta with Atom Egoyan, the Egyptian-born, Armenian Canadian film director, whose signature film Exotica is referenced in Mehta’s film. While Egoyan’s film represents an ethnicity framed as alien, Mehta’s transnationality shows a diasporic community that seems integrated and economically secure.

When a film has a diverse spectatorship, the author seeks to navigate a body of disparate cultural knowledge that may be in conflict internally. While Rude clearly represents an oppositional mode to all of its audiences, Bollywood/Hollywood does not. Rude’s territorality is a localized Toronto reality circumscribed by racism, poverty, criminality, and oppression, while Bollywood/Hollywood’s territorality is highly mobile as the film transitions.
from wealthy suburbs to downtown penthouse apartments through streets filled with South Asian retailers. For the South Asian community, Toronto becomes a landscape of success. Stuart Hall’s explanation of this stance as a “negotiated mode” that does not challenge the dominant culture’s texts fits *Bollywood/Hollywood*.54 In fact, the equation between the genres of Hollywood and Bollywood that the film espouses is one that seeks to blur racial, class, and gender lines in favour of a globalized universality. The national gaze embodied in the Bollywood film meets the national gaze embodied in the Hollywood film to create a transnational sensibility that Mehta’s film celebrates. *Bollywood/Hollywood* satirically identifies a universe of material success, which validates the South Asian diasporic experience. The lack of class or racial oppression in the world of wealthy South Asian Canadians fits the idea of a Bollywood casting, and it stands in stark contrast to the gritty universe of the African Canadian diaspora in the same city.

The overall ideological slant of the film focuses on the hetero-normativity crucial to the South Asian diasporic community. Whereas the theme of homosexuality is visualized in *Rude*, it is made comic in the character of the ever-watchful drag queen Rocky in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. While Mehta provides “an anti-colonial and postcolonial critique of . . . masculinity and male sexuality” in her Indian films such as *Fire*, this critique is renegotiated in *Bollywood/Hollywood* toward the power of the *mater familias* figures who rule the family as all-powerful widows.55 In their role of maintaining social status and traditional values in the domestic sphere, they are overseen by the patriarchal portrait of the late father figure, whose contribution to the film is primarily a series of Canadian sports-related metaphors by which he tries to guide his son’s life. The feminism of the film comes up against the requirements of the Bollywood genre, which makes the film a real blending. Desai argues that Mehta, as a transnational filmmaker, is always working in a Westernized cultural mode, whether in her Indian trilogy or her Indo-Canadian films. In both cases, there is a “contested field of the nation,” whether that nation is Canada or India.56 Yet there is little contestation between the Indo-Canadian community and the rest of Canada in this particular film. The national identity question and the negative consequences for women who are oppressed by traditional beliefs and roles is played out more fully in the Indian trilogy, where Mehta’s feminist critique is more evident.
What she is contesting in *Bollywood/Hollywood* is the nationalist-realist tradition in Canadian identity, which she aims to subvert with her South Asian Canadian urbanity. It is a tradition that makes no sense and carries no meaning for the immigrant community who cannot identify with it. Canada's diasporic communities are situated in the urban world. Her rejection of the nationalist-realist geographic narrative makes the urban imaginary representative of diversity both as a demographic reality and as a culturally integrative fantasy. The Bollywood musical form is well adapted to conveying this sense of multicultural and transnational identity because it appeals to a universal entertainment factor in its song and dance. It does not seek to challenge in the way that a drama like *Rude* challenges. In painting the South Asian diaspora in a comic mode, she has removed intergroup tensions from her film. Canadian urbanity as a site of liberation from traditional communalism and as a wondrous melting pot of races and cultures is something that is only alluded to. While *Rude* brings its critique of an oppressive urban environment to the forefront through the film’s authorial voice-over, *Bollywood/Hollywood* is much more subtle in its message. The source of that comedic discourse is a postcolonial Torontonian space that differs from that of Caribbean Canadians. The differing urbanities in the two films are signifiers of Toronto's diverse realities and the differing postcolonial discourses from which they originate. The issue of racialized power relations that is highlighted in *Rude* is missing in Mehta's film, although it was present in *Sam and Me*. *Rude* radiates a powerful spirit of uprising and resistance, while *Bollywood/Hollywood* contains no suggestion of an oppressive power other than tradition. Even though both films deal with nonwhite diasporic communities, their discourses are radically different. This suggests that the diversity of Toronto society is sufficiently powerful to generate a diverse cultural expression in film.

While Toronto is a fully multicultural and multiracial society, other Canadian cities are less so and thus represent a different kind of urbanity. This is especially true of Prairie cities such as Winnipeg. Winnipeg retains a strong mythology of Euro-Canadian ethnicity going back to its agrarian past, when the region was settled over a century ago. Winnipeg’s Guy Maddin, who comes from Icelandic immigrant roots, has created a series of anachronistic, black-and-white tributes to an earlier filmmaking that reflect the city’s orientation to the past. While Toronto is the major destination for all immigrants to Canada,
Winnipeg is a minor one. This has allowed an indigenous cinematic expression to evolve that is far from the media-hyped atmosphere of Toronto. Whereas Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver have viable film industries located in their cores, Winnipeg is a marginalized film world. This void contributes to representations of archaic film forms by Maddin, a maker of idiosyncratic films. The result is a city like no other.