ETHNOGRAPHIC THEATER MAKING

Desiring Bollywood: Re-Staging Racism, Exploring Difference

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ABSTRACT   In this article, I engage with the insights that emerged through the making of *Desiring Bollywood*, a collaborative ethno-fiction project I produced in 2018. The project recruited academics, amateur actors, novice filmmakers, and enthusiastic university students to narrate the story of Jason, an aspiring actor and filmmaker from Nigeria who I first met in 2013, soon after his release from Tihar Prison in Delhi, India. My goals are two-fold: first, to share a few scenes from the film—embedded in this article as video clips—to broadly theorize the affordances and limits of what I call re-staging, the collaborative, performance-based multimodal method we devised and deployed to produce *Desiring Bollywood*. Second, and more central to the article, I aim to analyze these very same scenes to show how re-staging, as it offered participants involved in the project the opportunity to reflexively explore how Jason's experiences of discrimination in Delhi and the aspirations and desires that led him there in the first place, creates a rich site of analysis to engage with the nuances of anti-Black racism in India in a moment where "India–Africa" economic relationships are on the rise. [*multimodality, collaboration, racism, migration, Africa, India, Nigeria*]

RESUMEN   En este artículo examino el entendimiento que surgió a través de la producción de *Desiring Bollywood*, un proyecto colaborativo de etno-ficción que realicé en 2018. El proyecto reclutó académicos, actores amateurs, productores cinematográficos novicios y entusiastas estudiantes universitarios para narrar la historia de Jason, un aspirante a actor y productor cinematográfico, de Nigeria a quien conocí en 2013, poco después de su puesta en libertad de la Prisión Tihar en Delhi, India. Mi propósito es doble: primero, compartir algunas escenas del filme – embebidas en este artículo como video clips– para teorizar ampliamente las *affordances* y límites de lo que llamo remontaje, el colaborativo método multimodal basado en performance, que nosotros ideamos y utilizamos para producir *Desiring Bollywood*. Segundo, y más central al artículo, tengo como objetivo analizar estas mismas escenas para mostrar cómo el remontaje, en la medida que ofreció a los participantes involucrados en el proyecto la oportunidad de explorar reflexivamente cómo las experiencias de Jason de discriminación en Delhi y las aspiraciones y deseos que lo llevaron allí en primer lugar, crea un sitio profundo de análisis para abordar los matices del racismo anti-negro en India en un momento donde las relaciones económicas "India-África" están en aumento. [*multimodalidad, colaboración, racismo, migración, África, India, Nigeria*]

In 2011, Jason, a man in his early thirties from Lagos, Nigeria, traveled to Delhi, India, to study film and break into Indian cinema. By the time he made the journey, Jason had already acted in several Nollywood[1] productions. His move was an effort to take his career to the next level by formally studying film and filmmaking in India. His decision to move to Delhi, he would tell me years later, was an attempt to fulfill a fantasy no one at home believed he could make possible—to be the first Nigerian actor to break into Bollywood[2] and become a star.

When Jason went to see a visa broker in Lagos to help him obtain a student visa to pursue his dream, they recommended that he get a business visa instead and change his status to that of a student when he was admitted to a film school in Delhi. The private university he was applying to in Delhi, one of the many that have cropped up in the last ten years, wouldn't provide him the enrollment documents he needed to obtain a student visa unless he was in-country.[3] Within a few months of his arrival in the city, soon after he was admitted to a film program and was ready to legally change his business visa to a student visa, he was arrested and charged for drug distribution. A group of officers on a sting operation grabbed him while he walked from his house to a nearby private hospital to get treatment for a broken toe. They were looking for an African drug dealer, and he fit the profile. Jason ended up serving two years in Delhi's Tihar Prison without formally being tried. He finally saw a judge in 2013 and was released on bail. Once free, he moved back to the South Delhi neighborhood where he had lived before his arrest to await court proceedings. I was, at the time, doing fieldwork on emergent digitally enabled youth cultural practices among young working-class men in Delhi. This project had, by coincidence, brought me to the very same place where Jason resided.

We were introduced to each other by a Delhi-based activist-artist two weeks after his release from prison. As Jason began the slow, arduous process of getting himself back on his feet while waiting for a court date to adjudicate his case, we would meet a few times a week to share a meal or a drink and to commiserate about his situation. Sometimes Jason would call upon me to handle a pressing situation—for instance, dealing with a Hindi-speaking real estate agent who was asking for more money than what he thought they agreed upon, or an officer of the court who needed documentation of some sort or the other. I would often bring my camera along to document Jason's story as it unfolded. Conversations about his court case, his struggles in the neighborhood where he lived, his recollection of life back in Lagos, our shared passion for cinema—all found their way into the digital video archive I kept of our time together.

I left Delhi in late 2014. Jason and I kept in touch, and over Skype, WhatsApp, and Facebook started to discuss making a film together about his life in India. "It would be so amazing bro, you understand it?" Jason would repeatedly say to me as we discussed our future film over the often shaky, grainy connections that various communications platforms facilitated as we made our lives thousands of miles apart. This film, we conspired, would narrate his love for Indian cinema as a young boy coming of age in Lagos that would eventually lead him to Delhi to try his luck in the Indian film industry, only to encounter state violence and everyday discrimination.

As Jason and I discussed a future film project together, he continued to fight his legal case while looking for paid acting gigs and other ways to make a living while waiting for a resolution in Delhi. In 2015, Jason won his court case. He was able to get back his Nigerian passport—which the courts had held until the case was resolved—and begin the process to renew his business visa to stay in India. Soon after, he got a few bit parts in several regional-language films across the country. As Jason's career as an actor in India began to develop, I encouraged him to write a screenplay/script of his experiences in India with the thought that, even if he and I didn't get a chance to tell his story together, he certainly should find a way to do so using the networks he was developing in the Indian film industry. The screenplay (written in English) that he developed in conversation with me and another collaborator who I brought into the project, Jesse Weaver Shipley, led to our collaborative ethno-fiction film project *Desiring Bollywood*. We shot the bulk of the footage for the film in the summer of 2018 in Pune, India, at TIFA, an arts residency space located in the heart of the city.[4]

This article is structured around three scenes from the film, each of which are embedded in the article as artifacts of our process. The scenes portray Jason's experiences of encountering racialized curiosity, discrimination, and violence as an African living in the working-class enclaves of Delhi as he sought to realize his dreams of becoming an actor. I use the three scenes, first, to broadly theorize the affordances and limits of what I call *re-staging*, the performance-based method we devised and deployed to produce much of the content that makes up *Desiring Bollywood*.[5] Second, I analyze these very same scenes to show how re-staging offered participants involved in the project the opportunity, through embodied improvisation and collective witnessing, to reflexively explore their own understandings of racialized difference within the context of what Jedlowski (2018, 23) has called the "post-imperial affinities and neo-liberal convergences" between India and Nigeria (and Africa, more broadly), and the class-stratified realities of Delhi.

Re-staging as method draws from the pathbreaking work of Victor Turner (1982) and his wife and collaborator, Edith Turner, and their attempts to make fieldwork more visceral through the (re)enactment of ethnographic texts (see also Schechner 1985). It also takes inspiration from the more recent experimentations with improvisational and devised theater, such as Vidali's (2015) Re-Generation Theater and Giordano and Pierotti's (2018) Affect Theater. In each experimentation with ethnography, performance, and theater listed above, "different ways of knowing and learning together" emerge (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019, 220). These experimentations, while different in scope and focus, harness what Dwight Conquergood (1985) calls co-performative witnessing toward imagining shared pedagogical projects that have the power to creatively and collectively call into question normative assumptions about the world while "recovering past experience and creating a community that can listen and respond" (Walley 2015, 630; see also Madison 2007).

However, as vital as these modes of performance *as* ethnography are, because they are structured around theatrical process and co-presence, they tend to be ephemeral. That is, they don't act as multisensory (Vidali 2016) devices for knowing differently beyond the intimate act of making together except, perhaps, in the handful of audience-facing events that might emerge or in retrospective "think pieces" that are written by the anthropologists involved. Re-staging as method, as I develop it here, departs from these efforts to imbricate performance and ethnography insofar as it harnesses theatrical improvisation in the service of video production.[6] The implication, of course, is that video offers a different afterlife to theatrical and improvisational encounter. One such afterlife can take the form of a film. Certainly, one goal for *Desiring Bollywood* was to produce a narrative filmic account of Jason's experience in Delhi that could reach and engage multiple audiences.

Video can also offer a means for the ensemble, through playback/feedback sessions[7] of footage during and after production, to collectively think through complex content they have enacted. As we re-staged Jason's story, our ensemble of actors and production assistants were able to explore what Ginsburg (1995) calls the parallax effect: the possibility of inhabiting multiple, different angles of vision, in this case those of African nationals living in Delhi and the people they encountered. During our playback/feedback sessions, we engaged and grappled with the historical, (popular) cultural, and economic connections between India and several national contexts in Africa that emerged during our collaborative invention of Jason's visceral narrative for the camera.

Finally, as is the case with this article, *re-staging* as method offers an opportunity to curate specific audio-visual ethnographic scenes from the larger project. The three scenes that follow offer a multilayered and multimodal ethnographic site that extends the analytical possibilities for thinking through the relationship between postcolonial desire for the kinds of imaginaries that Bollywood conjures and the racism that African nationals experience as they make their lives in Delhi. It does so by putting the audio-visual content of each scene into conversation with the processes by which they came to life, in turn revealing the reflexive encounters, collective discoveries, and moments of care that re-staging makes possible.

CONTEXTUALIZING DESIRE: AFRICAN MIGRATION TO RACIALIZED DELHI

Jason was one of several African nationals I met in Khirki, South Delhi, in early 2013. Khirki is one of Delhi's many urban villages. These urban villages are unique habitations in Delhi's urban spatiality insofar as they are designated as distinct from their surrounds as a result of colonial legal precedent. They retain some of the distinct characteristics of a village even though their spatiality has been subsumed by the city (for a further elaboration on Delhi's urban villages, see Dattatreyan 2018). Khirki and other urban villages

in South and West Delhi were some of the only places in the city where Cameroonians, Somalis, Nigerians, Ivorians, and Kenyans who have less in the way of resources could access affordable housing. They join migrants from the rural peripheries of Delhi, Afghanistan, and Nepal in making these villages their home.

Over the years, I have heard numerous accounts of housing discrimination, police extortion, street violence, false imprisonment, and visa fraud from the Cameroonians, Somalis, Nigerians, Ivorians, and Kenyans living in Khirki whom I first met in 2013. They also shared stories of everyday discrimination. I would regularly hear accounts from African nationals about shopkeepers in Khirki who would ignore them when they went to purchase something or young men on the street who would laugh at them and call out racist taunts as they passed them on the street. Taken together, these instances of discrimination show us how emergent racial formations that rely on the enduring effects of colonial racial frameworks shape relations and lives (Pierre 2012; Thomas and Clarke 2013).

The discrimination (and sometimes outright violence) Africans in Delhi face begins with the kind of colonial corporal schema, to borrow from Fanon (1967), that locates "Brown over Black" in a persistent racial hierarchy (Burton 2016; Gupta 1970). This ordering of racial groups dates back to the nineteenth century, when emergent pseudo-scientific racial taxonomies that placed Europeans as superior to all other demarcated "races" also compared other spatially located racial groups in graded relation to one another (Streets 2014). These understandings of racial demarcation and hierarchy have persisted within and between postcolonial contexts. Africans who migrate to India in the contemporary moment are located in these colonial racial hierarchies in ways that reproduce discourses of primitive nativism attached to Africa and Africans. This, at least in part, is due to the reinforcement of a colonial narrative of Indian (Hindu) superiority and "African" racial inferiority that was articulated during the anticolonial struggle and in the early postcolonial period.[8]

For instance, M. K. Gandhi, long considered a key figure in India's anticolonial struggle, has been shown to be a promulgator of anti-Black discourse as a means to advocate for and justify Indian sovereignty, civilizational distinction, and racial supremacy (Desai and Vahed 2015).[9] Gandhi's rhetoric is just one example of how "Africa has long been conscripted as an invisible boundary to Indian Nationalism, the 'uncivilized' foil to Indic civilization" (Hofmeyr in Burton 2016, 2). Anti-Black media representations that circulate in Delhi, when coupled with local rumor chains about Africans and their propensity toward criminality, loose morals, and even cannibalism, work hand in hand to keep these sorts of racist discourses alive (Dattatreyan 2019). The stories of discrimination that Jason and others have shared with me over the years reflect how these historically constituted discourses locate the aspiring working-class and lower-middle-class African nationals living in Delhi in a subordinate

position in what is already a caste, ethnically, and religiously stratified sociality.

However, Jason's narrative, in addition to shedding light on the historically rooted racism that African nationals experience, offers a way to think about the desires that make urban India a destination for contemporary African migration in the first place. In the last decade, there has been an increase in African migration to India and China (Cissé 2013; Modi 2017), in part because of China's and India's growing power on the global stage and growing economic interests in Africa (Dattatreyan 2018). These migratory journeys, of course, have historical precedent that can't simply be reduced to contemporary economic interests. During the precolonial period, Mughal rulers in what is now India had long-standing connections with West and North African kingdoms that facilitated trade, migratory settlement, and cultural exchange (Lodhi 1992).[10] In the colonial period, the historical links and solidarities between India and parts of Africa developed in the precolonial era were, in some cases, amplified (Larkin 2003). These cultural and political connections were sustained during the anticolonial struggle and postcolonial period, and in some cases were even strengthened (Kura 2009).

These enduring cultural, historical, political, and economic ties position India as a potential location to migrate for those looking to leave the African continent, especially as Europe and North America have fortified their borders. This has become increasingly the case as India has stepped up efforts to foster "India–Africa relations" (Davis 2018). Strengthening economic ties, of course, are at the core of these efforts. With regards to India and Nigeria, for instance, in 2015 India became the largest purchaser of crude oil from Nigeria (Mawdsley and McCann 2011). Migration, however, also factors into this sort of economic logic of relations. The Indian government, for instance, has promoted medical tourism to its private hospitals (Solomon 2010) and education migration to its private universities in Africa. In a recent statement, the Indian secretary for economic relations, T. S. Tirumurthi, stated that the Indian government will make it easier for Africans interested in studying in India to obtain visas and unveiled a new scholarship plan to fund up to 15,000 promising African students to pursue their higher education interests in India (Waruru 2019).

Jason's story draws attention to how contemporary migration, in addition to being shaped by the historical, economic, and political links between India and Africa as they are mobilized by the Indian state, is influenced by popular cultural circulations. His aspirations to move to India, learn filmmaking, and break into the film industry, he stated on many occasions, were cultivated as a result of his exposure to Hindi cinema in Lagos in the 1970s and 1980s. Much has been written about the viewership of Hindi cinema and television in Nigeria, and across Africa more broadly, in the postcolonial period (see Fair 2010; Larkin 2003, 2008). Larkin (1997, 2003), for instance, describes how the circulation of Hindi cinema in Northern Nigeria from the 1960s onward undergirds what he calls a parallel modernity: an investment in relationships between postcolonial nation-states that bypassed the hegemonic culture industries of the Global North and shaped different conceptions of personhood, relations, and the good life.

Jason's unquenchable desire to participate in Indian cinema worlds exemplify this sort of South–South hopefulness and parallel modernity that has been evinced in previous historical moments, such as during the anticolonial struggle when solidarities were forged that, at least for a time, short-circuited colonial racial hierarchies (Kura 2009). This hopefulness was something I found echoed by other African nationals living in Khirki, and representing multiple national contexts, as they narrated why they came to India in the first place. Indian popular culture, in each telling, was a key ingredient in producing these sorts of hopeful affinities between India and Africa that they embodied in their migratory journeys. In my conversations with Jason and others, "Bollywood" emerged as a key signifier that linked their desire to migrate to India with the popular culture they consumed back home, even as it obscured the heterogeneity of Indian popular culture they were exposed to.

Jason, however, unlike other African nationals I met in Delhi, also had an ambition to materialize collaborations between Indian and Nigerian film industries. His determined zeal reflects the kind of entrepreneurial spirit that Jedlowski (2018) argues is being promoted between India and Nigeria in the current moment, as new opportunities emerge in the wake of big trade deals and intensified economic ties between the two countries. Popular culture production, particularly in the age of social and new media, emerges as a key site where opportunities for collaborations, what Jason called "collabos," surface in an increasingly globalized media industry (Rai 2009). However, as Jedlowski (2018) notes, this potential for collaboration hasn't been realized except in a few individual cases.[11] Jason's story is precisely one of those individual cases where the sort of hopeful desire of a parallel modernity linked to popular cultural circulations between postcolonial contexts are being realized, one movie role at a time.

Yet Jason's stories of discrimination and racialized violence as he has tried to make his life in India demonstrate how the promise of Southern solidarity and a parallel modernity are fractured by obdurate colonial racial hierarchies (for a discussion of postcolonial solidarity and race, see Davis 2018). Indeed, the persistence of the racial logics linked to the colonial era, as it shapes Jason's (and other African nationals') experiences in India, reveal how Southern relations that seemingly run parallel to Euro-Western modernity in one location are deeply entangled. In this sense, Jason's story of struggle and (relative) success in Delhi offers us a way to see how aspirational desire and racialized difference come together in ways that reveal the entanglements between enduring coloniality and hopeful Southern relations in the present.

FIGURE 1. *Shot in Pune's main market, this devised scene explores how a request for "one photo" produces a complex negotiation of difference (https://vimeo.com/345449655). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]*

It is Jason, ultimately, who offers a method for how we might explore these entanglements in ways that are productive.

What has struck me about him over the years that I have known him is his remarkable ability to narrate everything that happens to him as a necessary set of experiences that will inevitably create a successful future self. For Jason, the racialized encounters he had in Delhi were scenes he could share with others he met in India to fashion a narrative that obviates his inevitable rise to stardom. *Desiring Bollywood* takes Jason's predilection for extemporaneously re-staging scenes from his life—particularly the difficult ones—as an impetus to collaboratively explore and improvise around the putatively racialized encounters he experienced in his time in Delhi with a sense of optimism, care, and openness.

The scenes I have chosen for this article showcase how actors involved in the project improvised (racialized) difference in Delhi, India, and the kinds of collective learning that emerges when, to paraphrase Trinh Minh Ha (1998, 21), "Otherness is not given but re-created as an empowering critical difference." Re-staging scenes of encounter that are rooted in Jason's experience allowed us to unpack the various felt affinities, unconscious biases, embodied desires, and historically shaped mediatized imaginaries that emerge when urban India becomes a destination to realize dreams that are shaped by Indian popular cultural circulations and framed within current aspirational economic discourses between nations and continents. This article, then, offers a way to think about how Jason's desire for (Bollywood) stardom opens the door for collective exploration of contemporary and hopeful postcolonial relations in relationship to anti-Black racism in India.

SCENE 1: THE PHOTO

In the years I got to know Jason, he would constantly repeat his surprise at just how many times, while in the public spaces of Delhi, he would get asked by passersby to take a photo with them (Figure 1). If he said "yes," they would pull out their smartphone and take a selfie with him. If he said "no," they would insist, only to slink away after several in-

sistent refusals. Jason narrated these instances to me with a sense of humor. In some of the accounts he casually shared with me over the years, he would become friends with the person asking him for the photo after narrating his desire to become a film star in India. Jason's take on being propositioned for a photo in the streets of Delhi stood in stark contrast to the ways other African nationals I met experienced this request. For the Nigerian, Cameroonian, South African, and Kenyan men and women I met in Khirki, the request for a photo was one more bit of evidence that they were being marked as radically Other and that the solicitations, inevitably, were a result of malicious intent. *"Why are they asking me for one photo? Why do they touch me when they ask me?"*

One could argue that this was a Global South version of a kind of North American racial paranoia (Jackson 2008) that was playing out in these instances, a sense that any engagement that began with a recognition of Otherness was necessarily racist when the solicitation and encounter perhaps evinced more of a curiosity and a desire to know. Yet, in my conversations with African nationals residing in Khirki, they expressed that these seemingly benign encounters felt invasive and hostile precisely because of their experiences of exclusion, discrimination, and violence in Delhi. Re-staging this encounter became a way to explore the dynamics that put desire, curiosity, and experiences of (racialized) difference, mediated through the request for a photo, in conversation with each other. What became evident was the marked difference in which the way the scene was experienced by the ensemble when re-staged and played back on its own in contrast to when it was shown in sequence with other scenes in the film. Re-staging this scene became an exercise in repetition, juxtaposition, and return to think through the relationship between a recognition and curiosity around difference, on the one hand, and power-laden forms of discrimination and racism, on the other.

As we developed the script for *Desiring Bollywood*, I wrote in a scene where Jason is solicited by a male passerby for a photo. The scene was, at first, meant to introduce a new key character into the narrative—a man Jason met and became friends with as a result of his photo elicitation. As the scene developed through improvisation, it became clear that its inclusion didn't need to be instrumental to the narrative but, rather, could offer something more nuanced: an exploration of the kind of everyday encounter African nationals living in Khirki face. Participation in a scene like this offered, as Friedman (2013, 392) writes regarding improvisational, shared cinema, "a space within which the film's subjects (both on-screen and off) can negotiate the manner of their own cultural representation." In this case, the film's subjects were, with the exception of Jason, not present. Rather, it was a cast of Mozambican, Nigerian, and Indian amateur actors based in Pune who were negotiating the cultural representations of others, based on their own understandings of the encounter and its context.

We acted out this scene with different actors several times inside the artist residency before I went with Chidu,

the actor who played Jason, and Raj, the man who played the man on the street asking for a photo—to find a suitable location for the shoot. Raj is a mechanical engineer from a small town two hours from Pune and traveled in for the shoot. For this shoot, he took sick days off so that he could be with us for the duration. As we rode through the main arteries of the city, he told me that he had never met anybody from Africa before. Before we traveled to shoot the scene, he asked me shyly, "If I have questions for them about their culture or their lives, can I ask them directly? Is it ok? I feel very much like someone who would ask them for a selfie on the street because I am so curious." For Raj, the scene itself provided an opportunity to pose questions that he otherwise wouldn't get an opportunity to ask, under the guise of being someone else.

Chidu is a middle-class Nigerian entrepreneur from a prominent family in Abuja who has lived in Pune for ten years, first as a student and now as a party promoter and DJ. His path to India, like the Mozambican, Burundian, and Kenyan actors involved in the project, was markedly different from Jason's. Chidu and the others who were studying or had studied in Pune had come through scholarship programs for African students that have existed since Independence, offering them seats in the public universities of India.[12] These students had quite a different experience of urban India, which can be chalked up to their route into the country and their class positions, which afforded them the opportunity to live in middle-class enclaves in Pune.

We cast Chidu as Jason on the final day of auditions, with Jason's approval. Chidu expressed, during the audition, that he wanted to make sure he did right by Jason's story. He had heard many stories about how Nigerians struggled in India, and while he hadn't experienced it himself, some of his friends had. Chidu's admission sheds light on how Nigerians from different class positions, when they are in India, are put into contact with each other because of their national affinity in ways that offer them an opportunity to explore difference. Through Chidu's reflections on Jason's experience, it becomes evident that Pune is a very different context from Delhi with regards to African life, at least in part because it has had a longer history of hosting students from across Africa—most from middle-class families—and perhaps because it is a smaller and more contained city.

Chidu's performance of Jason in this scene captures quite well the way Jason would talk about his desires and ambitions to act in Indian cinema quite quickly when he met new people. It is this infectious desire that I observed on numerous occasions that allowed Jason, over time, to create the network in Delhi and Mumbai that has afforded him opportunities in Indian film, television, and advertising. Raj's incredulous response to Jason's claim that he will one day become an actor in Indian cinema, however, demonstrates the kinds of barriers Jason faced in realizing his dream. Raj, for instance, argues that Chidu (as Jason) couldn't possibly become an actor in Indian cinema because he doesn't speak

Hindi or any of the regional languages he would need to break into that world. Raj deploys Jason's inability to speak any Indian languages as a marker for why he won't have success in the industry despite many examples of actors—for instance, the British actor Katrina Kaif—getting star roles (such as in the Telegu film *Malliswari* [2004]) despite not being able to speak the language.

Raj's suggestion that Jason's lack of linguistic ability might impede his success reveals the limits of Jason's dreams precisely because of how race functions in the industry, such that African actors are typecast into specific parts. For instance, in the recent Netflix show *Sacred Games* (2019), a series based on Vikram Chandra's novel about criminal gangs and terrorist plots in Mumbai, the majority of the African characters are regulated to nonspeaking roles and all happen to be gangsters or drug dealers, even if some of the actors might speak impeccable Hindi. Yet, over the years, Jason has managed to get roles in various regional cinemas that are not as strikingly typecast, even if they are secondary parts.

His big breakthrough was in *Dangal* (2016), Amit Khan's film on women's wrestling, where he plays the Nigerian coach. Several other films have followed, most recently the Tamil film *Accidental Prime Minister* (2019), where Jason plays a bodyguard, and the Gujarati film *Carry on Kesar* (2017), where he plays a French fashion designer. In each role, he had to learn a few lines of the regional language but, by and large, got by with English. Jason also got a role in *Sacred Games* season two, where instead of a gangster he plays a bit part as one of the meditators in an ashram. Jason's success in obtaining these roles is exceptional, yet it also signals a changing industry, ready to experiment with casting to appeal to a broader, transnational audience and to audiences in India who, perhaps, have an appetite for representations of cross-cultural encounter and exchange.

As importantly, this scene offers a snapshot of how restaging pushes both actors to find connections, commonalities, and differences through dialogic improvisation that has its roots in Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett's (2009) methods of engagement, where each actor is given a "goal" and a "status" to shape the scene. In this scene, Chidu's goal was simple: to resist Raj's request for one photo. Raj's goal, of course, was to persist with his request. Both actors had to commit to the dialogic negotiation of each of their respective goals while recognizing their status as local and outsider. There is one moment in the scene when Chidu and Raj speak about football and cricket, locating them as significant markers of difference between the national contexts of India and Nigeria. By evoking the British colonial legacies of two sports—football and cricket—Chidu and Raj were able to arrive at a resolution about the photo while sharing something of how gendered, national, and racialized difference in the present is imagined and enacted. In these exchanges, Chidu posits football as a world sport, suggesting cricket is far more provincial. He dismisses Raj's attempt at finding common ground with him by mentioning that he visited Namibia, arguing for the exceptionality of Nigeria.

Nigeria is the "giant" of Africa, he says. Chidu's responses are clearly meant to educate Raj about Africa while firmly claiming his legitimate right to be in India.

The scene incited plenty of conversation in our rehearsal and "playback" space. Several Indian participants in the project commented that they had never been stopped by anyone for "one photo." The Mozambican students involved in the project said they had been asked but only when they left Pune for vacation to other parts of India. One Indian actor told a story about getting asked for one photo by a Chinese family when he visited the Great Wall of China. They then related the kinds of interactions that took place when these requests were made. When I, echoing the kind of irritation I heard from most African nationals in Delhi, who told me their stories of image solicitation, suggested that these requests might form the grounds for other kinds of capture, bodily intrusion, and discrimination, my thoughts were dismissed by the cast. They felt, in the spirit of the re-staging they had witnessed, that the request for a photo could only be read as an act of curiosity and a potential space for interaction across difference.

It was only when we showed a very rough cut of the film toward the end of our time together, and they saw this scene in juxtaposition to other scenes in the film, that a few of the participants articulated that they recognized a relationship between various forms of difference making. Our juxtaposition of scenes in postproduction created the context for participants to read the scenes differently from their initial re-staging or even from when they saw the scene on video by itself. "Oh," exclaimed Mona, "If they can take your picture then they think they can take your money, cheat you, or beat you." As Mona reveals, this iterative model, where re-staging took place in several instances with discussion in between, allowed participants to begin to appreciate how context—in this case, African life in the material and social context of a working-class urban village in Delhi—frames experience.

This scene, as with many of the several included in the final cut of the film, draws from a Nollywood aesthetic that foregrounds witty dialogue, gendered performativity, and, as Brian Larkin (2008) notes, a sense that the audibility and transparency of the dialogue itself is not what matters but, rather, the collective witnessing of it. This witnessing, one would imagine, normally takes place in the cinema hall. However, because we shot the scene multiple times in a public space, we attracted onlookers. One set of onlookers was a young boy and his father, who appear at the end of the scene because they eventually requested one photo with Chidu. Chidu told me after this encounter that this was the first time he had ever been asked for a photo in Pune. Here, the camera's presence generated the very phenomenon we were exploring in the first place. Chidu looked chagrined and a bit flattered after the encounter with the boy and his father. When I asked him how he felt about being asked for a photo afterwards, he said, "It was cool bro, but why didn't they ask Raj or you?" Laughingly, he then said, "I guess I look like a star." Chidu's move to position himself as star, a seemingly

FIGURE 2. *Shot at TIFA Studios, Pune, this scene is a restaging of a violent street altercation in South Delhi, set to a beat (https://vimeo.com/345449673). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]*

throwaway comment after he draws attention to the fact he was asked for a photo while we weren't, offers a glimpse at the way the camera and Jason's looming presence shape the encounter. Chidu, in his playful comment, commits to fully inhabiting Jason as a character destined for fame, even after the camera was switched off. In so doing, one could surmise, he is able to read the solicitation for "one photo" as flattery rather than aggression.

SCENE 2: THE FIGHT

This scene, what we called the fight video during production, works with stories I heard from Jason and other African men about the dangers of trying to date Indian women and restages them as a fabulated music-video depiction of an attack on Jason (Chidu) as he walks with his friends and an Indian woman on his arm through the streets of Khirki (Figure 2). Re-staging, in this scene, was less about goals, status, and dialogic encounter (as in the previous scene) and more an attempt to creatively interrupt and interrogate the racialized trope of the hypersexualized African man and the seductive dangers of transgression attached to his body in national and transnational media (see Campt 2004; hooks 1992).

The 2008 Hindi film *Fashion* offers a good example of the ways racialized and sexualized tropes linked to Black male bodies become embedded in an Indian national imaginary. In the film, Priyanka Chopra plays Meghna Mathur, a small-town girl who travels to Mumbai with the dream of becoming a high-fashion model only to find the city a corrupting force. In a pivotal scene in the film, she finds herself in a nightclub and, after drinking and dancing as a way to escape from her struggles, meets an African man. The film cuts to the next morning, where she wakes up to find herself next to the African man and, as she jumps out of bed in horror, the audience is led to feel she has truly hit the bottom. In the film, the African man has only one function: to demonstrate how far Meghna Mathur has fallen as a result of her move to the city.

These ideas of transgressive and dangerous interracial romance also emerge in the context of the working-class village of Khirki. Here, as elsewhere in India, the fear of

interracial relationships, one that is laminated onto the fear of interreligious (recall the recent panic created by the right-wing Hindutva around love jihads)[13] and intercaste relationships, make public interactions between sexes and across difference fraught with danger. Back in 2013, a prominent imam I knew in Khirki, making a case for driving out all of the Africans residing there, said to me, "these people walk around naked [*yeh logon nanga gumthe*] and want to have sex all the time." In 2013, gangs of working-class men from the village attacked African men who they perceived were fraternizing with Indian women, to purportedly defend the women's honor. They had been organized by the local *panchayat*,[14] I learned later, to solve the African issue in the village. In 2014, local government officials, bypassing the police, organized a village gang to chase African men and women out of the village—on the grounds that they would corrupt the youth if they weren't driven away. All of these incidents reveal how, as Veena Das (2007) argues, women's bodies become the site where communities police their boundaries and African males, in particular, become the subject of fear and violent exclusion.

Our choreographed music interlude—almost a music video in its own right—offered all the actors the opportunity to embody this sort of perceived transgression and collectively ruminate on its classed, gendered, sexualized, and spatialized specificities. Shooting the scene, however, felt jarring. The pantomimed violence of encounter, when set to music and choreographed movement, generated laughter and amusement among the cast and crew. Yet the scene depicted the deadly seriousness of racialized sexuality. Several actors remarked on this contrast after our shoot. Some felt that we resolved the scene too quickly. "What would have happened next with the girl and Jason?" Raj asked. Jason, who was present for the shoot, then told us, over tea, about a relationship he had with a Punjabi Sikh woman in Khirki. Ultimately, the woman's family, when they found out about it, sent her "back" to Punjab to live with relatives. It could have been much worse, Jason said. They could have killed her.

Others in the ensemble began to tell stories about caste and class barriers to relationships they had faced in their lives. Re-staging this scene, as a result, created opportunities for participants to explore, from their personal perspectives, the challenges of romance across difference and a chance to reflect on the analogs between race, caste, and ethnic difference. Thinking about the scene in the context of the film we were making also pushed them to think about the various popular cultural representations of interracial relationship, from the film *Fashion* (2008) to the classic historical-fiction film *Razia Sultan* (1983), where Dharmendra[15] plays the thirteenth-century African general Yakut in blackface, who falls in love with the first and only female sultan of Delhi only to subsequently be murdered by members of the royal court along with his beloved.

FIGURE 3. *This scene, also shot at TIFA Studios, explores Jason's arrest in Delhi (circa 2011) through restaging/reenactment and voiceover narration (https://vimeo.com/345449687). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]*

SCENE 3 THE ARREST

This scene re-stages Jason's violent arrest in front of a private hospital in South Delhi by three police officers (Figure 3). This scene was different from the previous scenes I have engaged in this article in that it attempted to very specifically recall and depict a moment from Jason's life rather than create a composite moment. As such, its re-staging required a more careful attention to the specific details of the encounter that Jason related to our ensemble and to each actor in the scene. Moreover, re-staging racialized state violence, as I discuss in a moment, created the context for our collective to enact care and offer solidarity to Jason and for him to elaborate on the relationships he continues to have with working-class African nationals enmeshed in legal trouble in India, despite his change in social and economic status.

Chidu talked with Jason on set to get a better understanding of what the violent and racialized encounter felt like in order to embody them in front of the camera when we ran the scene. The actors who played the police also had to do the work of embodying an Other and an elsewhere. They enacted what state violence in the capital city of India should look like, feel like, and sound like from the perspective of law enforcement—based on our stage direction and their brief interactions with the script we produced. It also pushed them to draw on what they knew from mass-mediated accounts of anti-Black violence in contemporary urban India and beyond.

In the scene, the actor playing the chief police inspector improvises what the actual police inspector would have said to Jason: "You don't lie to me. We know that you're a drug dealer. You don't talk back to me. You should never have left your stinking country to come and contaminate our city with your filth and immoral habits." When I asked the actor who played the chief inspector after the shoot where the inspiration for his lines came from, he said, without hesitation, "TV." "Isn't that how Africans are depicted across the world?" he asked. The actor's comments offer a way for us to

see how re-staging pushes actors to draw on what they know from television media popular culture. The actor's ease in his improvisation that linked Jason to drug dealing and immoral habits was striking and attests to how mediatized anti-Black discourses in the United States and Europe, as they meet news reports in India, shape perceptions as they travel. For the actor, based on what they had seen on TV, Black male bodies were always associated with criminality. Re-staging makes evident how circulations of popular culture and news media become a resource from which people make sense of race and racism across national contexts.

The scene itself is broken into two parts. The first part is a re-staging of Jason's arrest. It is meant to show something of the disorienting and disturbing nature of the event. Its affect is produced through embodied improvisation and choreographed camerawork but also relies on manipulation of shots and a play between sound and image in the editing studio. In the second part of the scene, there is a visual re-staging of the arrest with a voiceover of Jason's recollection of the event. Rather than the surveillance-like shots in the first part of the scene, where the camera shows the action from above, all the footage in this second re-staging are close-ups and mid-shots that are cut in repetition.

This second instance of re-staging is meant to offer the viewer something of what it feels like for someone to recall trauma. The fits and starts of memory are visualized and accompanied by Jason's audio retelling of the event. When the two takes of Jason's arrest are juxtaposed, they strategically blur our interpretive re-staging with Jason's recollection of events by foregrounding the "real" Jason's voice in ways we hoped would de-center the spectacular violence the scene represented and, rather, offer a more nuanced engagement with memory, trauma, and state-sanctioned violence. By putting these two takes together, we wanted to show the overlap and distance between re-staging as a kind of collective invention of Jason's experience and re-staging as a process of remembering. In this sense, rather than an ethnographic "real" account of the arrest, re-staging offered something different. Through re-staging, our ensemble became attuned to the interiority of Jason's experiences of racialized state violence and, in turn, created representations that explored these affective dimensions rather than attempting to render a thick description of the institutional mechanisms of anti-Black racism in India.

Jesse Weaver Shipley and I recorded Jason recounting his arrest in the back of a parked sedan before shooting the arrest scene with the group. In his recollection, Jason emphatically points us, as listeners, to what he deems to be a few important details concerning his arrest. First, Jason intimates that when he first saw the group of thirteen men approaching him, he thought they were kidnappers. For Jason, in the flurried panic of the arrest, a kidnapping was the most plausible explanation. In a sense, he was right. The police officers, as agents of the state, snatched Jason from the street that day and kept him in captivity, without trial, for two long years. Second, Jason points us to the logic of quantification

and objectification that the chief police officer uses to arrest him. He recalls that the policeman states to him, when he protests his capture, that he is not interested in catching the right man and that he has to catch someone.

As Beatrice Jauregui (2016) argues in her work on police and policing in postcolonial India, the officer knows the limit of his provisional authority rests in the temporal immediacy of the now. Their charge is to make an arrest in the moment and let the courts retrospectively determine innocence or guilt. Jason also recalls how the police officer justifies arresting him by arguing that he, as a representative of Africa, is guilty of extracting wealth from India. It doesn't matter, in this case, if he is the suspect named Prince or not. The immediacy of his guilt as someone who supposedly extracts from India to take to Africa is enough for the police officer to exercise their state-sanctioned power over him.

I saw Jason watching silently as we shot multiple takes of the arrest scene. After the shoot, he described the uncanniness of the experience. He said, "Watching myself get arrested over and again, I didn't expect so many feelings. We wrote the script and the scene, but still, it's different to see it, you understand." A group of actors and the crew gathered around us as we talked, and Jason, seeing them gather, began to tell us stories I hadn't heard before—about the smell of the police car, the chaos of the police station, and the first few days in prison. The group, at first, quietly listened to him, then began to ask questions. Someone brought Jason a cup of chai. After he finished talking about his experiences in prison, Jason began to talk about the many African nationals who are still in Tihar, awaiting sentencing from charges ranging from illegal stay in India to drug possession and sale.[16] He then said that he, whenever he is able, visits those who are still behind bars to give them comfort and bring them small provisions.

Re-staging, particularly in the making of this scene, reveals how embodied engagements with ethnographic material can at once open up difficult memories even as they create social contexts of care. Jason's regular visits to Tihar offer us a way to understand how his desires to succeed, which have propelled him to relative success in India's booming culture industry, are entangled with his commitment to support Africans who continue to struggle in India. As he puts it, "I feel very blessed I have been able to do well, you understand it? I feel it's my responsibility to help others and to educate about what is going on." For Jason, his future in India and his success in the culture industry are linked to his responsibility to tell his story while taking care of other African nationals.

Our time in Pune together offered all participants a collective space to play, think, and feel together about the kinds of complicated entanglements between postcolonial desire and racialized discrimination that Jason's stories offer us to consider in relation to African migration to India. It also offered the participants in the project a chance to extend care to each other and, in particular, to Jason. For Jason, seeing

his arrest re-staged and then having the space and time to process the intensity of this witnessing with others who were attempting to embody his experiences while listening carefully to his story was cathartic—a therapeutic by-product of his ambition to see his story told that manifested itself in our collective endeavor.

CONCLUSION: RE-STAGING AND MULTIMODAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This article has engaged with the insights that emerge when ethnographic material is collectively re-staged to embody and explore the aspirations and discrimination that shape African life in Delhi. In this conclusion, I briefly consider how re-staging as method pushes us to think through how iterative, embodied, affective, and multimodal modes of engagement can offer ways to collapse the distance between the field, our learning, and our teaching anthropology. This collapse, I argue, pushes us to reconsider where, how, and with whom anthropological insights emerge.

The common assumption we work with is that the anthropologist endeavors, through iterative, long-term fieldwork, to arrive at insights about the worlds they have sensuously and relationally inhabited. We then share these insights, distilled into theoretically driven stories, in textual or even visual forms. In some cases, drawing from the lessons learned during the writing culture moment, we inscribe our positionality as authors in the texts we create as a way to account for the power/privilege our witnessing is buttressed on and our representations reproduce. As Vidali (2015) notes, one outcome of this logocentric approach is that it, perhaps necessarily, creates artificial boundaries between fieldwork, analysis, and representation. Moreover, it suggests that teaching anthropology is something that happens far away from where we learn about the world.

Taking as inspiration the multimodal turn, which has been framed as an invitation to find more inventive ways to generate anthropological encounters with others (Collins, Durington, and Gill 2017; Dattatreyan and Guillamón 2019), my experimentations with re-staging were an attempt to unsettle and reimagine anthropological knowledge production by putting ideas of the field, analysis, and representation into generative flux. The starting point for *Desiring Bollywood* hinged on Jason's narrative of arrival, struggle, and eventual success in Delhi, a story I have been invested in thinking through in the years we have been in relationship with each other as a result of a more conventional fieldwork meeting. However, its development relied on a collective exploration and witnessing of what Abu-Lughod (1991) once referred to as the ethnographic particulars of life. Our cast and crew stumbled upon unexpected insights as a result of our improvised play with small moments gleaned from Jason's life that summer in Pune. Some of these moments cleaved closely to Jason's lived experiences. Others were composite and fashioned. These theatrical explorations taught those involved something about what it means to desire and aspire in relation to being othered, excluded, de-

nied, and incarcerated. Moreover, it took cinema as a central vehicle and a site to explore the relationship between desire and difference across India and Africa. In this article, I have taken instances of our experimentation together in Pune and, taking up what Walley (2015, 624) has described as a transmedial approach to anthropology that extends the "ethnographic narrative and analysis across media forms," offer a visceral glimpse of our process.

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NOTES

1. Nollywood is the derivative term (referencing Hollywood) used to describe the Southern Nigerian film industry, which is distinct from the Northern Nigerian film industry, dubbed Kanywood. See Jedlowski (2011) for a discussion on how these terms came into being and the ways they operate in the context of Nigeria.

2. Bollywood is also a derivative term used to refer to the Hindi film industry based in Mumbai, India. In recent years, many regional cinemas in India have coined their own take on the term: Tollywood (Bengali), Kollywood (Tamil), and so on. See Rajadhyaksha (2003) for an account of the emergence and use of the term(s).

3. The astonishing growth of private universities and colleges in India since economic liberalization in the 1990s has been well documented. As Kumar (2014) states, there are, at the time of his writing, over 33,000 new private colleges and universities spread across India. African students make up a small but growing target market for these colleges. This article only touches upon their significance in the migration pathways of African nationals who aspire to journey to India to fulfil their ambitions.

4. Pune is a booming second-tier city located in Maharashtra, about three hours by road from Mumbai. In the last ten years, the information technology, private hospital, and real estate sectors

have grown exponentially in the city. Pune has also long had a reputation of being a city of universities. I chose Pune and TIFA as the site to undertake *Desiring Bollywood* because of its large African student population and because of the city's national film archives. Many of the African students I met in Pune, unlike in Delhi, attend public universities and colleges and often have scholarships provided through the Indian government or their own governments. TIFA provided a space where I could bring students from across Africa and Pune's amateur theater community together to re-stage Jason's story.

5. I draw from the important work of Alessandro Cavadini and Carolyn Strachan, whose film *Two Laws* offer a deeply ethical way to think about and theorize reenactment and restaging in documentary cinema (see Kahana 2009).

6. Karrabing was also an inspiration for the kind of inventive sensibility that emerged to tell Jason's story on camera. Karrabing is a self-described cooperative based in Northern Australia that uses improvisational theater and video to "analyze contemporary settler colonialism and, through these depictions, challenge its grip" (Lea and Povinelli, 2018, 37). Their work draws from Boalian improvisational techniques and other theatrical staging traditions to fashion a method and mode of production that Lea and Povinelli (2018) call improvisational realism. For Karrabing, this mode of participatory narration recognizes the experience of time space is already always multiple and that improvised enactments should be taken as here and there and then and now, in the service of critique, humor, and mutual becoming.

7. Jean Rouch (2003) used the term playback/feedback to describe the method he used to make his films. He would shoot footage with his participants and then show them the footage to get their input/critique.

8. When we zoom in on African migration to India and think and engage with what Robert Stam and Ella Shohat (1994) suggest are Southern relations that are not under Western domination, we would do well to remember the kinds of colonial racial structures that continue to shape and influence relations between them.

9. There has been considerable backlash concerning Gandhi's public sentiments regarding Africans and their position in the British imperial racial hierarchy and Indian's supposed superiority to them. A statue of Gandhi in South Africa and, more recently, in Ghana have been taken down as a result. See https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-46552614.

10. The Siddi community, for instance, an African diasporic group scattered across what is now Pakistan and India, are living descendants of precolonial migration.

11. While government bodies in India have promoted the idea of India–Africa partnerships in various industries, very little formal collaboration has taken place, to date. For exceptions, see Jedlowski's (2018) discussion of attempts at formal collaboration between Indian and Nigerian film industries.

12. After independence, India set up several pathways to provide higher education scholarships to students from across the Global South and the former Soviet Bloc. These pathways remain. See https://archive.india.gov.in/overseas/study_india/studyinindia.php?id=10.

13. "Love jihad" is a term that is circulating in Indian public discourse to suggest that Muslim men are seducing Hindu women as a form of conversion. In the current political climate that is dominated by the right-wing Hindu BJP, "love jihad" is used to foment moral panic and justify violence.

14. Paanchayats are local governance structures in India that existed prior to the colonial period and continue to have provisional authority in the post-colonial Indian state.

15. Dharmendra is an iconic actor who starred in several blockbuster Hindi films in the 1970s and 1980s.

16. African nationals waiting in Tihar for a trial, by and large, faced charges of visa fraud. In many cases, those charged with fraud were actually victims of fraud. When their initial visas they entered India with were due to expire, they hired a visa broker in Delhi to get renewals. The visa renewals they obtained through these brokers were often not legitimate, landing them into trouble.

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