

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE APPROPRIATION AND USE OF
BOLLYWOOD MOVIES BY ETHIOPIAN YOUTH
FROM A POOR FAMILY BACKGROUND
IN ADDIS ABABA**

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July, 2008

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia, as part of the world-wide trend of influence brought about by globalization, is subject to a situation marked by the increased flow into the country and consumption by the local audience of foreign-produced media and cultural products. While American movies take the lead in terms of consumption rates, we also see Indian films supplementing the local audience's consumption of foreign media materials. This study, in particular, under the title of "*An Investigation into the Appropriation and use of Bollywood Movies by Ethiopian Youth from a Poor Family Background in Addis Ababa*" is interested in examining the web of meanings that arise from the viewing of Bollywood amongst Ethiopian youth. With this end in view, the study employed observation, focus group interviews, and individual in-depth interviews to gather the data needed to make sense of the youth's viewing practice.

The findings of the study show that local audiences in their interaction with media messages produced in settings far removed from theirs, actively interpret them in light of the subjective values, aspirations and concerns within their lives. What the youth's own responses reveal is that the plurality of meanings they make when viewing Bollywood movies represent a challenge to the premises of the media imperialism thesis, which posits the homogenizing role of the Western media in terms of propagating Western values and interests at the expense of the weaker 'Third World' nations such as Ethiopia. The notion of homogenization fails to accurately describe the consumption of foreign media messages by local audiences. The study also shows that the coming into the picture of such regional media images as produced by nations like India raises the question whether media/cultural imperialism thesis is adequate in terms of explaining the overwhelmingly complicated global exchange and transfer of cultural materials.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The centrality of communications media in affecting our everyday life has never been felt more in the history of humankind. The ever-increasing attention given to researching both the production and consumption of the media speaks of the symbolic significance of the communications media in our time. Deacon et al. spell out the reason for the scholarly effort on the part of communications researchers that goes into studying the media, saying:

The modern communications media have become a major focus for research for the simple reason that they are central to organizing every aspect of contemporary life, from the broad patterning of social institutions and cultural systems to intimate everyday encounters and people's personal understandings of the world and their sense of themselves. We can not fully understand the way we live now without understanding communications. (1999: 1)

This paper looks into the popularity of Bollywood movies among the youth from poor family background in Addis Ababa. It will hopefully show that the consumption of these films impact on the audiences' understandings of the world and of themselves.

1.1 Background of the Study

The engagement of many scholars in the discourse of globalization has got them into a debate on the nature and direction of the flow of cultural products (Noh, 2007). Leaving the debate aside, we will now have a look at two of the definitions of globalization conceptualized by Tomlinson (1999) and Waters (1995). Tomlinson, in his attempt to define globalization, talks about the concept of "de-territorialization" which countries experience as

the cultural outcome of globalization and which, he says, “helps us understand broad transformations in the place-culture relationship in the context of global modernity” (1999: 106-107). Quoting Canclini (1995: 229), he further notes that de-territorialization as a process depicts “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories, where there is no longer necessarily any connection between identity and locality” (Tomlinson, 1999: 107). Similarly, Waters defines globalization as a “social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (1995: 3). To put it in another way, globalization refers to the socio-cultural process of influence which is bringing people in the contemporary world closer and closer despite geo-linguistic barriers, which are even being undermined continuously by the process itself.

Ethiopia, as part of this world-wide trend of influence, is subject to this situation, which I think can be exemplified by the increased flow into the country and consumption by the local audience of foreign-produced cultural materials of the media. Following the collapse of the socialist regime of the Derge in 1991, and the country’s subsequent adoption of the free market economy, there came an unprecedented flow of western media products, especially American cultural products. With American movies taking the lead in terms of consumption rates in the country, we also see Indian films supplementing the local audience’s consumption of foreign media materials. It is becoming more common than ever to see one little video shop after another in every little town in the country, not to mention the major urban centers, displaying Bollywood movies.

The overwhelming popularity of foreign media products in Ethiopia requires us to understand this cultural trend within the context of mass communication theories dealing with media influence. According to White (2001), the scholarly endeavor of critical theorists to define the notion of cultural imperialism has ended up in their coining of various phrases to refer to it, such as “media imperialism”, (Boyd-Barrett, 1977); “structural imperialism” (Galtung, 1979); “cultural dependency and domination” (Link, 1984; Mohammadi, 1995); “cultural synchronization” (Hamelink, 1983); “electronic colonialism” (McPhail, 1978); “communication imperialism” (Sue-Nam Lee, 1988); “ideological imperialism”, and

“economic imperialism” (Matterlart, 1994). The British scholar Boyd-Barrett who coined the phrase “media imperialism” defines it as “the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any country or countries, without proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected” (1977: 117). Many other scholars in the field, of whom Schiller is one, proposed the use of the term “cultural imperialism”, arguing that Boyd-Barrett’s conception was too narrow. According to them, it lacks comprehensiveness in taking into account the “multiplicity of forms taken by power relations among various cultures” (White, 2001). In other words, media imperialism represents only one facet of cultural dominance of one nation over the other, and the term cultural imperialism seems to be better suited to capturing the complexity and diversity of power relations that we witness among nations of the world.

Whether we take the broader perspective of cultural imperialism or its most important and pervasive manifestation, media imperialism, the essence of the theory remains that Western nations dominate the media around the world. Consequently, Third World cultures become victims as western cultural discourses and views created and mediated through the mass media (Noh: 1) impose themselves on them (Third World cultures) – hence the unfortunate destruction of local cultures. In other words, the theory posits a one-way pattern of communication, with the West as the sender of cultural forms and the Third World recipient of those cultural forms through the mediation of the mass media.

In line with one of the major weaknesses identified by various critics of the cultural imperialism thesis, I’m of the particular view that the thesis should be challenged from two angles. The first is that the thesis seems to give a lot more emphasis than it deserves to Western media’s influence on local audience so much that it ignores the multi-directional flow of cultures in the contemporary world. Accordingly, this study examines the use and interpretation of Bollywood movies by the young viewers in Addis Ababa in order to reconsider the media imperialism thesis in the context of the increasingly complex global flows of media and culture.

My questioning of the thesis of media imperialism does not mean that I overlook cultural power relations between nations on the global scene. Noh's definition of globalization, which she puts forward as "an ideological rope mirroring hierarchical structure on the globe and revealing political, economic and cultural power relations between nations" (2007: 2) seems to capture the essence of the global hierarchy of influence. In our contemporary world, which is moving forward with globalization faster than ever, we see trends of subtle reinforcement for maintaining the postcolonial power relations which appear to be the continuation of colonial power relations. Keisky's statement about this issue strongly emphasizes the significance in the modern global world of what she prefers to call "the post colonial optic":

The postcolonial optic is one that permits us to attend to the continuing adjustments and permutations of colonial power relations in the contemporary era; it requires us to analyze the ways that the power differentials embedded in older colonial projects still exert their effects even when the formal colonial relationships[are]gone. (2001: 25)

In the above definitions of globalization, the enormously central role of the media in the process of globalization seems to be ignored. In her conceptualization of globalization, Rantanen (2005) brings the role of the media into the process of globalization by explicitly referring to them. She conceives of globalization as "a process in which world-wide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space" (Rantanen, 2005: 8). Within this framework, we could clearly see where cultural imperialism theorists are getting at when they talk of the dominant position taken by Western nations in dominating poor nations with their ever strong media.

When this argument is applied to the flow of cultural products between nations and to their perceived effect, there should be a point derivable from the argument: that is, acknowledging this kind of power relation between nations should not rob the local audience of their ability to actively engage with cultural products of the powerful nations. This brings us to the second angle from which I wish to challenge the media imperialism thesis, which is that it takes the native audience as the passive receiver giving in to "the omnipotent influence of the media" (Noh, 2007: 5). The theory doesn't seem to account for the ability of audiences to

interpret media products on the basis of both the context they are using them within and their individual experiences. Consistent with this conviction, this paper is theoretically grounded in the proposition of active audience paradigm (Silverstone, 1990: 177). It, however, tries to take into account the debate going on among scholars with regard to questions such as: To what extent is the audience active and how do we account for the rather complicated and nuanced nature of audience interaction with media?

1.2 Statement of the Problem

When I look back over my childhood experience of exposure to Indian films, I remember having watched more than a dozen of them. My initial encounter with a particular Bollywood movie, whose title I don't recall now, was full of me having a mixed feeling. My world of experience with movies back then was restricted to watching American films and so I found that particular Indian movie strikingly odd and interesting at the same time.

In many of the Indian movies I watched then and afterwards, I noticed that there is a melodramatic tendency when it comes to constructing the plots. Besides, almost in all the movies I've watched and heard other people talking about, I've seen that catchy music accompanied by dance moves of actors dressed up in colorful costumes seems to be one of the essential elements. These encounters that I've had with Indian movies back in those days gradually led me to be fascinated with them on a personal level. It was, however, after I took a course on research methodology during the first year of my master's study that I started to think in a new light about the phenomenon of how people make sense out of Bollywood movies. This shift in my desire to endeavor to research into the phenomenon from a personal to scholarly interest reminds me of what Lindlof says about the starting point qualitative researchers choose to consider. He notes that "The qualitative researcher usually begins a study out of personal and scholarly fascination with a phenomenon" (Lindlof, 1995: 22).

As a qualitative researcher, I understand perfectly well how important it is to explore, describe and understand the viewing experiences of the youth of Addis within their context. Academic scholars such as Babbie and Mouton (2001: 272) stress the significance in

qualitative researches of studying events and actions in their natural context in order to describe and understand them as fully as one can, which can be hard to achieve if events and actions are analyzed in isolation from their context as is sometimes the case in quantitative researches.

I have already indicated that the socio-economic background of the young viewers who are the subjects of this study is typical of the low income generating class by the Ethiopian standard. I strongly believe that people who fall into this class category vary from country to country. To imagine such households having television sets is very difficult in Ethiopia, where TV is still a luxury item. So, informal video-viewing houses which are found all over the city constitute the viewing spaces for these youth. These are the contexts in which these youth interact with different kinds of movies. Having been there myself a couple of times – this was something I used to do when I was a teenager without my parents knowing about it and against their wishes for they were against the very idea of their children (me and my siblings) going to such places – I still remember how meaning was produced from the viewing experience through the collaborative discussion which, for outsiders, often appears to be distracting. The trans-cultural nature of the youths' viewing experience, coupled with the incomprehensibility of the Hindi language, was gotten around through the dynamics of their interaction during the viewing process.

The central question is: “what is it about Bollywood movies that is resonant with the lives of youth from poor family background in Addis Ababa?” In other words, attempt is made to investigate what meaning those kids derive from viewing Bollywood movies and how they make sense of them as part of their lived experience. More specifically, the questions that this study attempts to probe into are:

- ◆ Why do youth from poor family background in Addis watch Bollywood movies?
- ◆ How do they make sense of Bollywood movies in particular and of their viewing experience in general?
- ◆ What role does the social context play in the viewing and sense-making of Bollywood movies?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to examine what meanings youth from poor families in Addis Ababa take from their viewing of Bollywood movies and how this meaning-making is influenced by their lived conditions of existence.

Even though I found out, during my literature search, that the theory of cultural imperialism and its criticism could be used to inform my study, the aim of this paper is neither to prove nor to disprove the theory's proposition conclusively. However, cultural imperialism and its criticism are two of the theoretical concepts that I thought would constitute an interesting frame-work for my study. An attempt will be made to see if there is a need for reconsidering the nature and direction of influence conceptualized in the thesis. By taking into account the active audience paradigm, the research also explores the various ways in which members of the audience decode the texts in the face of the complex trans-cultural flow of media products in the contemporary world.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is perhaps necessary to mention two of the MA theses which greatly inspired me in getting me to consider researching the Bollywood movies consumption of the Ethiopian poor youth. One of these works of interest is written by Tewodros Workalemahu as part of the requirements for completing his MA project, and it is entitled "Disney Kids: A Study on the Reception of a Global Media Giant by Ethiopian Children in Addis Ababa" (Workalemahu, 2007). This work deals with how Ethiopian upper-middle class children make meaning out of the animation and cartoon films produced by Walt Disney Company. The other MA thesis is entitled "An Investigation into the Popularity of American Action Movies Shown in Informal Video Houses in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia" (Assefa, 2005), and it is written by an Ethiopian student, Emrakeb Assefa, who studied at Rhodes University, South Africa. Her study was aimed at investigating how Ethiopian youth make sense of American action movies, and my

study particularly draws on her study for I believe that the ethnographic approach that her study adopted is appropriate for my research.

My motivation for wanting to conduct this research seems to translate itself into the significance that I think the research will have in the end. Let alone qualitative audience studies of the sort I have undertaken, which started to gain a momentous recognition in the 1980s, communication and media studies, in general, are just a recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. There has, therefore, been little work done in the field in the country. Besides, little attention seems to be paid to studying youth from poor family backgrounds in general and their media consumption behavior in particular by the academic community. This is if it is even possible to claim that there is such a thing as academic community in the country dealing with media studies.

The research trend among the academic community from the various disciplines seems to arise from the convenience of focusing either on students who are readily available on campuses and in schools or on institutionalized organizations where getting access is easier. This, it seems to me, is a legitimate concern that gave me a reason to develop interest in taking up this study and seeing what meaning these youth produce and how. One aspect of the significance of the study can be seen in terms of its potential to offer insight into the cross-cultural media products reception of this marginalized section of the society, not to mention its contribution in adding to the already existing works in media studies in the nation.

1.5 Methodology

It's been set out earlier in this paper that the major aim of the study is to explore the meanings Ethiopian youth from a poor-family background derive from viewing Bollywood movies and the ways they make sense of this viewing experience. My intensive reading of the literature in the area tells me that the methodology that seems to be best suited to communication inquiry of this sort is qualitative in nature. While attempting to spell out the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods, Griffin (2006) touches upon the

purposes of communication inquiry using the two approaches. What he asserts here is that quantitative methodology is employed in order to build “a universal law that makes prediction possible” whereas qualitative approach is used to direct social researches through the process of “interpretation that helps make sense of equivocal communication” (2006: 14-15).

Part of the ongoing debate in communications research is over the appropriateness of certain methods (Deacon et al, 1999: 3). According to Bryman, the debate is between those scholars who think of the preference for qualitative over quantitative research or vice versa as a technical matter and those who assume that the two research approaches constitute competing ways “in which social reality ought to be studied” (1988: 5). The former set of writers are of the opinion that the two approaches point to the notion that they are ways of conducting social inquiry which, Bryman writes, may even be “capable of being integrated” (Bryman, 1988: 5). On the other hand, the latter group of writers view qualitative and quantitative approaches as being derived from divergent epistemological assumptions; that is, ways of knowing, as the former is influenced by the rationale of phenomenological/interpretivist tradition of social and cultural investigation whereas the latter by the rationale of positivistic tradition (see Deacon et al, 1999: 3; Bryman, 1988: 5).

Working within this framework of qualitative research design, this study depends on focus group interview, individual interview and to some extent observation as the particular methods of gathering qualitative data. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001: 279), one of the features that typical qualitative research designs share is that they are multi-method in approach. The view that is pretty much taken in this paper is that this openness to various data gathering tools helps to collect data that will lead to in-depth descriptions and understanding of the consumption and hence interpretation of Bollywood movies of the youth. And the insider perspective which anthropologists use to refer to the attempt of seeing the world through the eyes of the subjects of the study and which is deemed to be crucial to qualitative research can best be achieved through those methods I specified above. Although it's hard to claim that full-fledged ethnographic strategies that anthropologists tend to employ

have been used in this research endeavor, it is only fair to acknowledge only certain elements were adopted in this research.

As far as sampling in this study is concerned, a snowball sample was deemed to be the most appropriate method. Through this sampling method, I was able to get young viewers from poor family backgrounds who happen to watch Bollywood movies and who I could get to recommend other youth with similar experience. Part of my duty in this research was conducting observation in the video-viewing house. Most of these places are located in areas where the poor reside in. I selected three video-viewing houses of this sort and observed the viewers there as they watch Bollywood movies. As far as the focus group discussions are concerned, four kids from each video-viewing house were picked. For the individual interviews, I made a selection of individuals whom I thought were articulate and enthusiastic on the basis of their participation during the focus group discussions. Questions may arise as to how much representative the sample drawn by using this particular method would be. However, what Deacon et al. write about the distinction between qualitative sampling seems to suggest that this need not be a concern for qualitative research. Within qualitative tradition, whose aim is a thick description rather than generalization, samples are used “as *illustrative* of broader social and cultural processes, rather than strictly and generally *representative*” (Deacon et al., 1999: 43; emphasis in the original). And that is precisely in line with what this paper intends to achieve.

1.6 Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of six chapters. This introductory chapter concerns itself with showing the form that the paper takes, and it is categorized into subsections such as background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, methodology and significance of the study.

Chapter Two, the literature review, deals with some of the literature available on globalization and the role of media in the process of globalization. This chapter also looks at

the main propositions of media/cultural imperialism thesis and its critiques, which represent the theoretical framework of the study.

The third chapter is where the social context of the study is discussed. This chapter sheds some light on such contextual issues as a brief background to the socio-political history and people of Ethiopia; a brief history of Indian cinema and its consumption in Ethiopia; and the advent of the informal video-viewing houses and their role in terms of bringing the local audience in contact with Bollywood movies.

The methodology of the study is presented in the fourth chapter. This chapter focuses on the following subtopics: the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; the epistemological foundations of ethnographic research; the data collection methods, namely small-scale observation, focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews; sampling procedure; and data analysis procedures.

Chapter Five deals with the data presentation and interpretation, and analyzes how Ethiopian poor youth negotiate the meanings carried by Bollywood movies. This chapter discusses how these youth, who are far removed from the society producing the movies as cultural products, make sense of the Bollywood movies they regularly watch.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes the thesis, highlighting key findings and offering recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

We can be quite clear that, in recent decades, there has been a phenomenal growth in the global circulation - in terms of both distance and volume - *of cultural goods*. This will probably come as no surprise to you if you think about what you watch on television and at the cinema. It exemplifies the notion of globalization being characterized by the *intensification* of flows that transcend national boundaries. (Mackay, 2004: 49: my emphasis)

The cultural imperialism model argued that ... the international flows of technology transfer and media 'hardware' coupled with the 'software' flows of cultural products actually strengthened the one-way dependency between developed and developing countries and prevented true development. Again, media and communications were seen as powerful, possibly even more powerful than in the previous paradigm since they would threaten the cultural independence of these nations. (Rantanen, 2005: 74)

So how is imported television used, what sense is made of it, and how does this process of consumption shape, or interact with, every day lives and routines? (Mackay, 2004: 75)

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I outlined the major aim of this study, which is an attempt to investigate and tease out the complex and subjective sense-making experience of viewing Bollywood movies by young, poor Ethiopians. Coming from such an impoverished background with little knowledge of the outside world and its culture, they find themselves lost in the face of wider global cultural forces. So, the big question is how do they go about interacting with texts originating from cultures that are literally foreign to them? Whether

they actively engage with them to construct their own meanings from them or they simply give in to the determining power of texts has been a debatable issue for so long. Referring to Morley's study on the Nationwide audience, Turner, however, stresses "the importance of context in which texts are consumed and of the social content brought to them by specific audiences" (2003: 39). He writes:

Audiences are not passive consumers of the television message, but their reading positions are at least *partially_socially_determined*. This point of balance between autonomy and determination is still the orthodox one, and this may largely be due to Morley's effective demonstration of its validity [in the Nationwide audience]. (2003: 89; my emphasis)

In the quotation above, Turner's interpretation of Morley's work seems that the text was stripped off its previously much celebrated power of determining the messages to be extracted from it as the active role or agency of the audience and the social context in which the text is consumed started to be given the credit they deserve (2003: 91). In attempting to argue how the text, which refers to anything to be read, listened to, viewed and above all made sense of, started to lose its authority over audiences, Turner metaphorically writes, "The text was 'dethroned'; it lost its determining authority, its ability to determine how it would be understood by its readers" (2003: 91).

This recognition of the audiences' power to actively engage with global cultural products points to the fact that the "unpacking of the audience" which happened to come about with the emergence of media and cultural studies "has shown a variety of ways in which people receive and interpret messages" (Rantanen, 2005: 95). According to Rantanen, the existence of a homogeneous audience is under a big question mark for she believes that there is "only a fragmented audience with distinctive tastes" (2005: 95). This claim seems to refute the argument made by cultural imperialism theorists whose dominant theory posits the notion of powerful media at the global level, which is "often saturated with American" ways of living, destroying peoples' culture at the local level (see Branston, 2000: 61-66).

As I have indicated in the introduction to this thesis, while acknowledging the political economy of the global media, my examination of the relationship between the local audience and global cultural forms is grounded in the ‘new audience research’ paradigm. According to Boyd-Barrett, the origin of this paradigm can be “traced back to David Morley’s 1980 book, *The Nationwide Audience*”, and the key insight that it has helped illuminate “is that different readers read texts differently” (1995: 498-499). So, in my attempt to show how the youth in Addis appropriate foreign produced Bollywood movies and make sense of them in light of their lived cultures, I will start from the assumption that “the active and creative role of audiences and the ways in which different social and discourse positions encourage different reading” (Boyd-Barrett, 1995: 499-500).

In this chapter, I first review some of the literature dealing with the role of media in the process of globalization. I then look into the media/cultural imperialism thesis which conceptualizes the notion of Western media as being all powerful and affecting the cultures of Third World countries. Finally, I consider some of the theoretical critiques put forward by various scholars in response to the media imperialism thesis. As I have already tried to show in the paragraph above, part of these critiques is what constitutes the frame work for my inquiry into the research questions posed in the previous chapter.

2.2 Globalization and the Role of Media

Before we risk falling into the trap of thinking that globalization has a precise definition, it looks pretty reasonable to acknowledge the variety of ways in which people have tried, and keep trying, to conceptualize its meaning. The term globalization is such a catchword that everybody wants to utter it, and Matterlart argues about the difficult nature of its usage by referring to it as:

...one of these tricky words, one of those instrumental notions that, under the effect of market logics and without citizens being aware of it, have been naturalized to the point of becoming indispensable for establishing communication between people of different cultures. (2000: 97)

I have already made a passing remark, however, that the engagement of many scholars in the discourse of globalization has got them into a debate over the nature and direction of flow of cultural products. According to Schirato and Webb, different writers take different positions as to when this phenomenon of globalization started to be felt, with some of them seeing it “as dating from the empires of the ancient world, while for others globalization is coterminous with the modern era and the process of modernization, or even of post modernization” (2003: 2). Directing our attention away from the time of its origin, it seems plausible to start our understanding of globalization from “a broad consensus among those that accept the notion of globalization” as having four most distinctive features, which are stretched social relations, intensification of flows, increasing interpenetration and global infrastructure (Cochrane and Pain, 2004: 15-17). But for our purpose, here, we will focus on the first three for they seem to adequately capture the major essence of globalization in relation to my study.

According to Cochrane and Pain, what stretched social relations entail is that there are widespread networks of interconnection across the world culturally, economically and politically (2004: 15). Intensification of flows, which Cochrane and Pain describe as another feature of globalization, is also associated with the stretching of social relations in that it implies “the increased density of interaction across the globe which implies that the impact of events are felt more strongly than before” (2004: 16). Similarly, increasing interpenetration, as the term itself indicates, refers to the intensity and extent “to which apparently distant cultures and society come face to face with each other at local level, creating increased diversity” (Cochrane and Pain, 2004: 16). Writers who agree with the last feature of globalization seem to be optimistic about the possibility that the process of globalization leads to cultural hybridity, which further allows for more diversification of culture (Kraidy, 2002; Luke, 2003; Young, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999).

In an article “The globalizing of modernity”, Giddens defines globalization “as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (1997: 19). In this definition, Giddens does not seem to emphasize the different ways in which

social relations are fostered, let alone making an explicit reference to the media's role in the process of globalization. Similarly, Waters defines globalization "as a process which the constraints of geography on local and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding" (1995: 3). From this definition, one could easily see that Waters is referring to the effect of spacio-temporal closeness that is brought into people's lives by globalization. However, the problem with this definition, it seems to me, is that one is made to assume that Waters is talking more about the transnational movement of people, which is just one of the ways through which globalization gets its reflection. It appears to me that he hasn't been explicit enough in terms of conceptualizing the pervasiveness of the global media in spite of geographical constraints, which are being undermined by the rapid advancement of technology.

In the above definitions of globalization, the immensely central role of the media in the process of globalization seems to not be emphasized as much as it should. However, according to writers such as Castells (quoted in Flew and McElhinney, 2003: 3), communications media assume a central role in the process of globalization. According to Castells, the rapid development in information and communications technology is responsible for the "discontinuous historical and structural change in the economy, society and culture" (cited in Flew and McElhinney, 2003: 3). The outcome of such a process called globalization has been that with the establishment of new forms of relationships "between economy, state and society in a system of variable geometry" (Castells, 1996: 1) the global economic interdependence starts to be felt more than ever through entire society. Working on the basis of this argument makes it easy to see how the scholars conceive of the media as playing a pivotal role in the changes that are driving globalization as a historical development that the world is witnessing today.

Certain scholars, however, go for the argument that those forces driving globalization now are only the intensification of similar trend witnessed back in time. That is why it is difficult to claim that the role of communications media in terms of overcoming the spacio-temporal barriers is historically unprecedented, but it sounds reasonable to argue that "the scale, pace and pervasiveness of change are historically unique" (Flew and McElhinney, 2001: 4). In her

conceptualization of globalization, Rantanen (2005) brings the role of the media into the process by explicitly referring to them. She conceives of globalization as “a process in which world-wide economic, political, cultural and social relations have become increasingly mediated across time and space” (2005: 3). The analytical elements of this definition - economy, politics and culture - are the points that she draws on for the purpose of showing how globalization is highly mediated in all those spheres of life. However, unlike Rantanen’s definition of globalization, I chose to focus on the media’s role in the flow of foreign cultural products into Ethiopia in this thesis.

2.3 Media/Cultural Imperialism Thesis

The 1970s and early 1980s marked the time when the term cultural imperialism was on the mouths of various scholars, which implies the peak of its popularity (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 174). Hesmondhalgh writes that its popularity as a theory was due to the sudden attention given to it “when concern about such development found expression in a series of UNESCO reports, seminars and declaration (most notably MacBride Report -UNESCO, 1980)” (2002:174). As Noh puts it, cultural imperialism representing a form of critical approach “inherits the tradition of political economy of the Frankfurt school” dealing with issues of “the unequal power distribution among countries of the world” (2007: 3). Charging the theory with claims of inadequacy in terms of precisely describing the constructs it tries to explain, White gleans out the assumption of the thesis which categorizes the countries of the world affected by the unequal power distribution into center and periphery.

Another assumption of the theory is that it presumes a centralized approach to the development and distribution of media products. The thinking here is that all media products originate from only center nations that have devious ulterior motives of deliberately wanting to dominate the media of periphery nations. This belief is based partly on the view that no periphery country will even be able to produce media products of its own. (White, 2000: 3)

Similarly, Rantanen, in her book *The Media and Globalization*, strongly argues that “cultural imperialism theories were mainly associated with the USA” (2005: 76). She contends that

this may have to do with the fact that “many of the early proponents of cultural imperialism were in Latin America where US influence was probably more visible than anywhere” in the world (2005: 76). So, it is not surprising if some writers think of the notion of cultural imperialism as the process of Americanization in which the dominating role is taken up by the US whereas developing nations are left with no option but to subordinate to the dominant values systems emanating from the cultural codes of the US.

According to Strelitz (2005: 51), Schiller, one of the proponents of cultural imperialism, takes a firm stand on the process of globalization being a reflection of American cultural imperialism. Citing Schiller (1991), Strelitz writes, “... the context for the development of ‘media-cultural imperialism’ ... is the *world system* – the modern world capitalist economy – with its single market organized by the global market imperatives of the American and the West European – controlled multinational corporations” (2005: 51). The market is dominated by the production and distribution of goods and services, including “communications-cultural” products by multinational corporations, most of which are either situated in the US or owned by American moguls (Schiller, 1976: 6). It is the perceived domination of such corporations on poor nations of the periphery economically and culturally that media-cultural imperialism is concerned with.

The communication-cultural products, which are part of the overall goods and services produced by multinational corporations, are mainly uni-directional in their flow, and their role, according to Strelitz, “is not only informational, but also ideological, in that they promote and develop popular support for the values and artifacts of the capitalist system” (2005: 52). In relation to this idea, Schiller argues that the economic and cultural spheres are inseparable from each other in the sense that the former is increasingly dependent on the latter.

Media-cultural imperialism is a subset of the *general* system of imperialism. It is not freestanding; the media-cultural component in a developed corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e. the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible. Cultural, no less than automobile, production has its

political economy. Consequently, what is regarded as cultural output also is ideological and profit-serving to the system at large. Finally, in its latest mode of operation, in the late twentieth century, the corporate economy is increasingly dependent on the media-cultural sector. (Schiller, 1991: 14)

Trying to make a distinction between scholars who think of media imperialism as a narrower interpretation of cultural domination and scholars who like to see the term media imperialism as interchangeable with cultural imperialism, Williams defines the thesis in what seems to be a summary of the essence of various definitions of the concept (Williams, 2003: 218). He states:

If imperialism is the dominance of one nation by another, media imperialism is the dominance of one nation's media system by another, and cultural imperialism the dominance of one nation's culture by another. The problem is that the media are the main vehicle for the transport of cultural values from one nation or society to another. The term 'culture' or 'way of life' is also fraught with definitional problems. Some scholars choose to use media imperialism in a narrow way, examining only the transfer of media products and media practices, while other see the term as synonymous with cultural imperialism. (2003: 218)

Media imperialism, one of the various mass communication theories dealing with media influence, Boyd-Barrett argues, "refers to a much more specific range of phenomena than the term 'cultural imperialism' ... It is also possibly the single most important component of cultural imperialism outside formal educational institutions, from the viewpoint of those who are actively engaged in extending or containing given cultural influences" (1977: 119). By explicitly pointing out that media imperialism represents the most central element of cultural imperialism in terms of its specificity with which it demonstrates the precise phenomena of influence, Boyd-Barrett notes that media imperialism is a process in which a given country's media, be it their content, ownership, distribution or structure, are subjected to "substantial external pressure from the media interests of any country or countries" (1977: 117). He further adds that this form of domination is often "without proportionate reciprocation ... by the country so affected" (1977: 117).

This British media scholar, Boyd-Barrett, who is credited for coining the term ‘media imperialism’ defines it saying that the process is said to happen to a country when

...the country which originates an international media influence either exports this influence as a deliberate political strategy, or simply *disseminates* this influence unintentionally or without deliberation in a more general process of political, social or economic influence. The country which is affected by media influence either adopts this influence as a deliberate commercial or political strategy, or simply *absorbs* this influence unreflectively as a result of the contact. (1977: 119; emphasis in the original)

For Boyd-Barrett, a country represents a unit of analysis, and the international media influence is conceived of as something which is exported from one country it originates to another one. The centrality of western media in the proposition of the thesis is captured by Watson and Hill when they attempted to define media imperialism as a term used to describe “the role western media play in dominating ‘Third World’ developing countries through communication systems” (1984: 173). These two writers further state that media imperialism thesis has another dimension to it saying:

...crucial to the notion of media or cultural imperialism is the understanding of the relationship between economic, territorial, cultural and informational factors. In the age of western economic colonialism in the nineteenth century the flow of information is a vital process of growth and reinforcement where the trade went, so followed developing media practice and technology reflecting the values and assumptions of those who owned and manned the service. (1984: 173)

The last statement of the above quote suggests that the kind of influence proposed by the proponents of media imperialism is something of an extension that came out of the information flow associated with trade back in the colonial era.

Schiller, whose name is often associated with the concept of cultural imperialism, made a remark in his 1989 work saying that research findings which are said to be opposed to the media imperialism thesis, of which Liebes’ work can be cited as an example, are encouraging

to the media imperialists and that they are such simplistic explanations they cannot account for the presence or absence of cultural domination. His argument goes:

Assuredly, this was a finding most agreeable to the producers [of American media content] and one that sharply rebuffed the worriers who championed a new international information order. How heartening to the cultural message makers to learn that cultural imperialism does not exist! Each audience receives and makes its own message. Liebes concluded: The idea of a simple 'American' message imposing itself in the same way on views all over the world is simply not valid."

But who would have made such a claim in the first place? The transfer of cultural values is a complex matter. It is not a one-shot hypodermic inoculation of individual plots and character representations. It involves a much more difficult to measure acceptance of deep-structured meanings that may not even be explicitly stated. Can the transfer, for example, of acquisitive or consumerist perspectives be simply quantified? (Schiller, 1989: 149)

A point derivable from all the arguments forwarded by the scholars cited above is that the West as an imperial center imposes its culture on the periphery. Because Western civilizations have the money, as well as the means, to produce the majority of the media (film, news, etc...), the rest of the world has been left to take the subordinating position when they purchase and watch those productions. Thus, Third World countries are caught up in the predicament of consuming media filled with the Western World's way of life, which will culturally swamp their own culture. In short, the media imperialism thesis proposes that the whole process of production and distribution of Western media products and their subsequent consumption by different people all over the world results in cultural homogenization (McQuail, 1983; Rantanen, 2005). In the next sections, I will discuss some of the critiques of and counter arguments to the claims of media imperialism thesis for this is where may study turns to for theoretical support.

2.4 Critiques of the Media Imperialism Thesis

The issue of cultural imperialism which Tomlinson describes as “the idea that global culture is in one way or another liable to be a hegemonic culture” (1999: 79) has been around since 1960s, attaining its most popularity during the 1970s and early 1980s. Hesmondhalgh, however, writes that the impetus with which cultural imperialism was acknowledged started to drift away from the early 1980s onwards when some radical writers began to question the way they once saw international mass communication (2002: 174). He further notes that the 1990s marked the critical time when a paradigm shift occurred for some writers started to go for the term ‘globalization’ instead of ‘cultural imperialism’ (2002: 174). Hesmondhalgh goes on to say that globalization, originated from that of cultural imperialism, “spread quickly to become the most widely discussed social science concept of the 1990s” for it referred to a wide variety of economic, political and cultural practices (2002: 174).

2.4 The Ethnographic Critique

Focusing on the cultural practices dimension of globalization, we have seen in the previous section of this chapter that cultural imperialism posits a pessimistic construction of cultural influence as it assumes that the process leads to homogenization of culture. It is reasonable to argue that critical theorists who are in favor of this thesis seem to think that texts, no matter where they are consumed or by whom they are consumed, will have more or less uniform meanings. This view of cultural domination and homogenization, however, has come under attack from ethnographic media researchers who acknowledge the complexities of both audience and texts. Watson writes: “Ethnography seeks to understand the particular meaning-making process of those it studies and it is characterized by its acknowledgement of the complexities of these processes” (2003: 77). To put it in another way, ethnographic studies take a particularistic stance to investigating communication phenomenon, and it is this recognition of the diversity and complexity of cultural practices which distinguish them from the cultural homogeneity position adopted by cultural imperialism.

This tradition of audience studies not only investigates the subjective use of media by consumers but also what this use means to consumers and the social context in which consumers go about using media products as part of their everyday activities. Watson strongly makes this point when he attempts to define ethnography as "...an approach to the exploration of audience use of media that has had a considerable impact up on the way we decipher response" (2003: 77). One of the points picked up and was given prominence by ethnographic researchers is the need to view the reception of cultural materials as a complex and interactive process, which is part of the varied day-to-day activities that individuals find themselves engrossed in. Thompson, one of the critics of the media imperialism thesis, gleans out the thesis' failure to acknowledge this concern of ethnographic researchers, saying that the thesis:

...fails to take the account of the fact that the reception and appropriation of cultural phenomena are fundamentally hermeneutical processes in which individuals draw on material and symbolic resources available to them, as well as on the interpretive assistance offered by those with whom they interact in their day-to-day lives, in order to make sense of the messages they receive and to find some way of relating to them. (1995: 172)

Fiske is known for conducting a series of researches on media consumption. Although this study is about film viewing practice, Fiske's assertions about the values and objects of ethnographic study with regard to television viewing seem to capture one of the reasons why my study takes ethnographic turn to investigating the consumption and interpretation of Indian movies by Ethiopian poor youth. He writes:

The object of ethnographic study is the way that people live their culture. Its value for us lies in its shift of emphasis away from the textual and ideological construction of the subject to socially and historically situated people. It reminds us that actual people in actual situations watch and enjoy actual television programmes. It acknowledges the differences between people despite their social construction, and pluralizes the meanings and pleasures that they find in television. It thus contradicts theories that stress the singularity of television's meanings and its reading subjects. It enables us to account

for diversity both within the social formation and within the processes of culture. (1987: 63)

According to the above quotation, media ethnography introduces the need to redirect the emphasis away from cultural texts to people and thus studies the diversity of meanings that people derive from texts as part of their lived culture which is highly characterized by *subjectivity*.

A point that relates to the plurality of meanings is the plurality of the audience itself, and that is why Fiske stresses the ethnographic contradiction to theories such as media imperialism which posit the notion of a singular textual meaning and “its reading subjects” (1987: 63). According to Silverstone, when we theorize the plurality of the audience, we should look beyond the familiar sociological differentiation such as gender, class, subculture, etc. which “have all been the object of study as mediatory factors in reception and negotiation with ... content [of the media]” (Silverstone, 1990: 175). He further writes that the plurality of the audience “also consists in the plurality of the social and individual, a plurality which in turn involves both a sociology and a psychology, and in their interrelationship, an understanding of the dynamics of the process of mediation” (1990: 175). This notion of the audience plurality seems to call for the need to view the complexity of the audience both at the social and individual level. Not conforming to doing this in social research endeavors of this sort “distorts the complex realities of an audience’s identity and culture” (Silverstone, 1990: 175).

As I have noted in the introductory chapter, my study is grounded in the active audience paradigm which ethnographic studies of the audience help gain a growing recognition. The notion of audience passivity is a major theme in the effects studies, which have concerned itself with depicting the possible role of television in terms of influencing “pro-social or unsocial behavior” of the audience; in the Marxist tradition of media studies, “which insists ... on the audience’s dependence on, and vulnerability to, the play of ideological forces; and “in the predominantly text-based analysis advanced in the 1970s where the audience was assumed to be inscribed in the text of film and television and to have no significant empirical reality beyond those texts” (Silverstone, 1990: 177). In all of these three versions of media

research, the audience, far from being active, was thought of as an entity whose interpretation of the text is determined by the text alone and which has no choice but be vulnerable to the influence of the media in one way or another.

The move away from the notion of the passivity of the audience to the idea of active audience started back in the 1950s and 1960s with uses and gratifications research (Silverstone, 1990: 177), and this move towards recognition of the audience as active is often perceived as a response to the first version of media research mentioned above. “The move away from the second and third strands” referred to earlier, writes Silverstone, “is still in train” (1990: 177), and various ethnographic studies conducted in the field have contributed to a growing perception of the audience as active.

Among the various scholars whose works introduced a breakthrough in terms of lifting up the plausibility of active audience theory are Tamar Liebes and Ien Ang. These two theorists, among others, conducted research in an attempt to illustrate the various ways in which domestic audiences respond to Western media (White, 2001: 2). Their work is geared towards proving that cultural imperialism does not seem to exist and that textual meanings are polysemic. Liebes’ study in particular focused on the impact of the popular TV program ‘Dallas’ in Israel.

2.4 The concept of Indigenization

Implicit in the proposition of cultural imperialism is a communication model characterized by a one-way flow of information and influence as well. This is at the heart of the idea which came to be referred to as global homogenization, and it strongly contradicts with the idea of heterogenization (Appadurai, 1998: 32). Appadurai argues:

Most often the homogenization argument subspecies into either an argument about Americanization or an argument about commoditization, and very often the two arguments are closely linked. What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from the various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one or another way: this is true of

music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles and constitutions. (1996: 32)

According to Rantanen, “the idea of indigenization”, which Lull refers to as the concept of transculturation, “helps to explain how hetrogenization occurs” (2005: 99). Citing Lull (2000: 242-3), Rantanen refers to the idea of transculturation as “a process whereby cultural forms literally move through time and space where they interact with other cultural forms and settings, influence each other, produce new forms, change cultural settings and produce cultural hybrids - the fusing of cultural forms” (2005: 99). This definition of indigenization or transculturation seems to suggest that the notion of cultural purity is contestable for the process of globalization as we know it today has made that almost impossible. It’s important to remember that globalization challenges the time and space concept for it calls for a re-definition of these entities through the increased interconnectedness that globalization allows people to form in the modern era.

Implicit in the understanding of indigenization are the concepts of de-territorialization and re-territorialization. Citing writers such as Morley and Robins (1995: 87), Rantanen sees ‘de-territorialization’ as a process depicting “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories, where there is no longer necessarily any connection between identify and locality” (2005: 96). Conceiving the two ideas as being dialectical and happening across the world simultaneously, Tomlinson defines the concept of re-territorialization as a process driven by people attempting to re-establish a new cultural ‘home’ (1999: 148). The understanding of the movement and fusing of cultural texts calls for a whole new insight into how we should look at the complexity of cultural identities. “It probably never was wise,” Hesmondhalgh writes, “to think of culture as being linked to territory in a simple, one-to-one way but more and more the culture of a particular place is comprised of inputs from many other places” (2002: 178). What we can infer from this is that cultural hybridity is the order of the day and domestic audiences find themselves caught up in the need to negotiate with texts which are based “not on their interests, concerns and culture of particular nations, but on those of a variety of nations, or of sections of people who share a trans-cultural culture” (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 178).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set myself the task of (1) showing the link between communication media and the forces driving globalization forward and (2) explicating some of the theoretical assumptions of cultural imperialism and the critiques of the thesis itself. The most commonly shared conceptualization of globalization being the intensification of connectedness in a scale unprecedented before, I attempted to demonstrate the strategic role played by the media in the process of globalization. Central to my description of this role of the media has been Rantanen's definition of globalization in which she recognizes the process of mediation in economic, political and cultural relations.

I deliberately focused my description more on the cultural aspect of globalization, and my argument for doing so is because I feel the pervasiveness and impact of the global media is much greater in that dimension in our context. In my attempt to explicate cultural globalization, I have also discussed the cultural imperialism thesis and some of its critiques, putting the homogenizing versus heterogenizing arguments as to the effects of globalization against each other and focusing on the active role of the audience in terms of how meanings and identities are socially negotiated. This study is tuned to answering questions of this sort with respect to the consumption of foreign media products by a section of Ethiopian youth.

Chapter Three

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

3.1 Introduction

The major purpose of this chapter is to establish the general background of the social context in which the objects of this study – young people from poor family backgrounds in Addis – interact with Indian media products, particularly Bollywood movies. Before attempting to map out that context where the consumption of Bollywood movies by the youth meshes with their everyday lives, I think it sounds reasonable to relate the importance of context to qualitative researches. Many writers would argue that the significance of context qualitative researchers attach to social inquiry embodies their preoccupation with a set of “epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge” (Bryman, 2004: 279). Referring to this preoccupation, Babbie and Mouton state, “...it is not surprising that the qualitative research has a preference for understanding events, actions and processes in their context” (2001: 272). Similarly, Bryman maintains that one way of looking at the importance of investigating the context can be seen from the perspective of qualitative researches’ potential to offer a rich description of events (2004: 280). He writes:

Many qualitative studies provided a detailed account of what goes on in the setting being investigated. Very often qualitative studies seem to be full of apparently trivial details. However, these details are frequently important for the qualitative researcher, because of their significance for their subjects and also because the details provide an account of the context within which people’s behavior takes place. (Bryman, 2004: 280)

This contextual interest, which is at the heart of most qualitative studies, is reorganized as “the contextualist or holistic research strategy of qualitative research” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 272). The argument by many qualitative researchers is that for one to be able to truly claim to have a deeper “understanding of the events under investigation, one ought to understand events “against the background of the whole context and how such a context confers meaning to the events concerned” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 272). On the basis of such relevance of the context to qualitative studies, this chapter first and foremost attempts to present a brief background to the socio-political history and people of Ethiopia. It then considers looking at a brief history of Indian cinema and its consumption in Ethiopia. Finally, attempt will be made to discuss the advent of the informal video-viewing houses and their role in terms of bringing the local audience in contact with Bollywood movies.

In the next section, I will discuss points which are thought to be pertinent in terms of giving to the study a historical and geographical context about Ethiopia. The significance of the section, thus, should be seen from the perspective of making the point that Ethiopia’s long history is characterized by uneven and varied levels of contact with the outside world, and hence suggesting the unevenness of the cultural influence felt by the nation at different times of its history.

3.2 Ethiopia: A Historical and Geographical context

Covering a total area of 1,127,127square kilometers, Ethiopia is recognized as one of the largest countries in Africa (CIA Factbook, 2008). According to the estimates of CIA Factbook (2008), the current population of Ethiopia is thought to be close to 78,254,090, which is a figure that is likely to place the country in the third position next to Nigeria and Egypt.

Geographically, Ethiopia is situated in what is commonly known as the Horn of Africa. This location where the country lies also represents the crossroads between Sub Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Maria and Genamow, in an article entitled ‘Media Status Report: Ethiopia’ write that “Forty percent of the population [of Ethiopia] are of a Semitic stock with

racial, linguistic, cultural and historical ties with the Middle East.” (2000: 1). They further note that “the remaining 60% of the population are mainly racially, linguistically, culturally, and historically unique to the Horn (2000: 1). This fact points to the idea that the country represents a diversity of culture, race, language, history, etc, which is commonly regarded as the result of the country’s history as the melting pot of different people and cultures.

Tradition has it that though it has been identified by other names, one of which is Abyssinia, Ethiopia as a country has three thousand years of solid history. Alluding to the popular legend of the Queen of Sheba, Assefa writes the origin of the Ethiopian kingdom can be traced back to the 10th century BC, which is marked by the Birth of Menelik I, a son of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba (2005: 28). According to this legend, the reign of Menelik I is what commonly accepted as the beginning of the line of kings that ruled the country until recently under the name of Solomonic Dynasty¹.

However, quite a few modern day nations such as India and Yemen claim the legend of Queen of Sheba as representing an important part of their history. Although the legend is surrounded by a lot of controversy, the civilization of Axum, on the other hand, represents one of the flowering periods of the country’s long history. Though it is hard to trace the emergence of the early Axumite kingdom, Roman and Greek sources indicate that this kingdom was thriving in the first century AD, and that makes Ethiopia one of the oldest civilizations both in Africa and in the world with a concrete record of evidence (Hooker, 1996).

Christianity as one of the major religions of the nation was first introduced in the fourth century A.D. with king Ezana being the first person to convert to Christianity. Many historians would agree that the introduction of Christianity can be thought of as a top-down move, with the ordinary people embracing it much later than the aristocrats (Zewde, 1998: 35). Owing to the political might of the Christian rulers, the country is commonly referred to as a Christian nation although “almost half of the people are Muslim, while over a third

¹ The **Solomonic dynasty** is the traditional [royal house](#) of [Ethiopia](#), claiming descent from [King Solomon](#) and the [Queen of Sheba](#), who is said to have given birth to the traditional first king [Menelik I](#) after her Biblically-described visit to Solomon in Jerusalem. [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomonic_dynasty]

belongs to the Ethiopian Orthodox church; about 15 percent practice traditional religions” (Assefa, 2005: 30).

It may be argued that the importance of the nation’s adoption of Christianity, in addition to the trade relations with other great civilizations of the time, shows how the country was culturally influenced, which in turn seems to support the argument of some scholars who claim that globalization is as old as the history of humanity itself (Schirato and Webb, 2003: 2). However, the initial contact of the country with the outside world which reached its maximum during the Axumite civilization started to fall down with the decline of the civilization isolating the nation for centuries to come. Citing authors such as Zewde (1991), Alvarez (1961), Abir (1968), etc., Assefa writes that much of the nation’s history is characterized by its limited contact with and isolation from the outside world, and that can be traced back as early as the 7th century with the decline of the Axum Empire and its subsequent cutting off from the outside world for many centuries to come (2005: 28).

The long history of Ethiopia that I have been referring to so far is characterized by a feudal socio-economic system. The end of that chapter of the country’s history is marked by the coming into power in 1974 of a group of military officers which ousted Emperor Haile Selassie I, the last king of the Solomonic Dynasty that ruled the nation for almost two thousand years. Trying to map out this trend of power succession, Maria and Genamow note:

Ethiopia was, for a very long time, one of the most deeply entrenched feudal entities in Africa. A break with the feudal order came about in the early 1970s when a popular revolution toppled the regime of the Emperor Haile Silassie. In 1991, the now ruling party, EPRDF, came to power promising democracy after seventeen years insurgency against a brutal Marxist regime that took over from the Emperor. (2000: 1)

Contributing to the take over of power by the Derge, “the proto-Marxist military government”, from the Emperor was “Haile Selassie’s failure to deal adequately with the

long-term drought in North Ethiopia in 1973-74” (Assefa, 2005: 29). The shift can be perceived as a transformation of the socio-economic order from a feudo-capitalist society to a socialist one. As a result, the once privately owned property including land was nationalized and redistributed for those who were dispossessed (Cohen, 1973: 72). Another change occurring back then was the country’s resort to forming close ties with the former Soviet Union (USSR) and the People’s Republic of China, as opposed to the friendly relationship of Ethiopia with the West, especially with the US and Great Britain.

This state of affairs resulted in the restriction of Western influence including the cultural influence of the media originating from the West. The relative democracy promised, after the coming to power of EPDRF in 1991, however, lifted the ban imposed against Western materials, including media products. What basically initiated the influx of global media messages, and of the West in particular for that matter, is rightly conceived of as the transition of Ethiopia from a socialist social order to a relatively free market economy of a capitalist society. It is this changing media landscape which allowed a relatively free access of people to foreign media that this study is tuned to as it relates to Ethiopian youth consumption habit of Bollywood movies. Having portrayed a brief history of Ethiopia as part of the background to the socio-political context of this study, I will now discuss the profile of Ethiopian youth.

3.3 The Ethiopian Youth

The lack of precision in most definitions of youth makes it hard to come up with a clear-cut age range where the Ethiopian ‘youth’ fall in. Recognizing it “as a hypothetically constructed period rather than as a precise age range” (Kuper and Kuer, 1996: 4), some writers indicate that the years of adolescence/youth range from about 9 to 25 years. It is, however, important to note that the writers vary slightly in their specification of this age (Kuper and Kuer, 1996). This study follows this particular definition of the youth as its guiding framework in the sense that precaution was taken to make sure that only informants within the specified age range will be incorporated into the study.

The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, Britain, is credited for introducing a tradition of work in the 1970 & early 1980s which deconstructed notions that the category ‘youth’ is unitary and universal and argued that young people are different by race and social class, but that in themselves, young people also constitute a class fraction” (Kuper and Kuper, 1996: 5). When we apply the insight of this tradition of work to the Ethiopian context, we see these young people as a separate class fraction which is somehow unique to Ethiopia as it is differentiated from other youth systems by factors such as race, social class, historical background, etc. who constitute the majority of the population. Citing Scholl et al. (2002: 8), Assefa writers, “Ethiopia is a nation of young people – over 65 percent of its population is under 25 years of age” (2005: 30).

According to ‘*The 1994 Population & Housing census of Ethiopia*’, the projected total urban population is estimated at about 11,675,000, which is out of the 73,224,000 projected total population size of the country for the year 2005. Out of the estimated total urban population, the number of young people who are 24 years of age and under is around 6,733,556 for the same year (The 1994 population and housing census, 1994). This figure indicates the fact that young people living in urban areas comprise slightly higher than half of the total urban population.

It’s been set out in the introductory chapter that this study is concerned with exploring the interaction of and hence sense-making process of the youth audience with the cultural products of Indian media. The youth who are the focus of the study belong to the portion of the society with a poor socio-economic background. From the preliminary observations I conducted and casual interviews I had with a few of the audience at the video houses, I came to learn that most of the youth are either unemployed with occasional job opportunities as day-laborers or students with inconsistent school attendance. In fact, the problem of unemployment among the urban youth of Ethiopia has been a major concern lately, and according to the Report on the 2006 Urban Employment Unemployment Survey: “Unemployment by age group is found to be higher for the younger groups” (2006: 37). Hence, this study attempts to look into how the youth incorporate the Bollywood movies into their particular lived culture and derive meaning out of them in light of their lived reality.

3.4 The History of Indian Cinema and its Consumption in Ethiopia

India has a long history of cinematography competing with that of American film industry. Hesmondhalgh states, “the Indian film industry is often cited as an example of a challenge to cultural imperialism, and the international dominance of Hollywood” (2002: 189). In accordance with this statement, one of the concerns of this study is the need for redefining cultural imperialism in the light of the challenge Indian cinema poses to the global influence of Hollywood. So, it seems reasonable to briefly discuss and put the history of Indian cinema in the context of the study.

Dadasaheb Phalke is known for making India’s first feature film *Raja Harishchandra*² in 1913, and that got him the chance of being remembered in history as the Father of Indian Cinema. According to the website Indianfo.com, although there were efforts made to produce soundless short films as early as in the 1880s, it was “by 1920 that there was a regular industry bringing out films starting with 27 per year and reaching 207 films in 1931” (see <http://www.movies.indinfo.com/tales/history.html>, page 1). The year 1931 marked the beginning of the sound film in India, and the most remarkable feature about the birth of such films in India is that they were immediately popular and quickly replaced the silent movies which preceded them.

The 1940s is significant in Indian history for two reasons. First, it signals the time when the Second World War was fought and second, it is towards the end of this decade that India won independence from British colonial rule. One of the remarkable things about this decade is that it represents a momentous time for cinematography all over India. Historically, it was

² *Raja Harishchandra* was the first full-length Indian feature film. It is a 1913 silent Indian film directed by Dadasaheb Phalke, based on the legend of Harishchandra, recounted in Ramayana and Mahabharata. Phalke was greatly influenced by the style of painter Raja Ravi Verma in the making of this film. [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomonic_dynasty]

the post independence period which saw the golden era of Indian cinema with melodious socials and melodramas. Ever since that period, India has been producing popular films in great abundance, and regarding the increased magnitude of film production in India, Hesmondhalgh states, “India still produces more films per year than any other country in the world, averaging 787 productions per year in the period 1987 to 1988, compared with the US average of 591 productions during the same period” (2002: 190).

Robinson seems to be of the opinion that India’s vast film productions appear to match the ever-growing audience for the likely reasons such as the fantasy world they often allow people to escape into and the long hours of running time which makes longer entertainment possible:

India’s vast output was largely based on the two great commercial film centers of Bombay, producing films in the Hindi language, and Madras, producing in Tamil. The large and ever-growing audience – whether in the cities or in the country side, where the arrival of the touring cinema was a major event in any region – were content with films made to fairly rigid formulas, with well-fed popular stars, many songs, fantasy stories of worlds either mythical or modern, and plenty of running time in which to escape into the dream world offered by the cinema. (Robinson, 1981: 340)

Bollywood as a term referring to the major hub of Indian film Industry is often used as an Indian parallel to the Hollywood of America. The ‘B’ in Bollywood, writes Hesmondhalgh, “comes from Bombay (now Mumbai), where the best known, Hindi-language, ‘all-India’ films are made, many of which are distributed internationally” (2002: 190). However, citing Pendakur (1990), Hesmondhalgh (2002: 190) writes that it is only 20 percent of Indian films that are produced in Bombay. According to the website “Manas: Culture, Indian Cinema”, the market that mainstream commercial film releases continue to dominate is not limited to India only, rather their reach has extended to “wherever Indian cinema has a large following, whether in much of the British Caribbean, Fiji, East and South Africa, the U.K., United States, Canada, or the Middle East” (see <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Culture/Cinema/cinema.html>, page 2).

East Africa being one of the destinations of Indian cinema, let's now focus on when and how people in Ethiopia started to appreciate Indian films. Shah, an importer of motion pictures to Ethiopia, wrote in an article entitled 'The Advent of Indian Cinema in Ethiopia' that "Indian movies have been famous in Ethiopia [for] almost the last fifty years" (2007: 1). He remembers that during the visit of the Indian naval ships in Massawa, a port city (now part of Eritrea), the Indian community and the Ethiopian public were lucky enough to have been shown the first 16 m/m. black and white movies from India. In the 1960s and 1970s, black and white movies became very popular with their continued screening. According to Shah, movies such *Mother India* and *Disco Dancer* were so prominent among the elderly and the young respectively that there were instances where the audience coming out of the cinema houses were often seen with tears in their eyes. In fact, there have been times when the cinema administration had called the security forces to contain the audience when they went wild trying to break into the cinemas (Shah, 2007: 1).

The Derge era brought a trend of strict censorship which limited both the number and type of Indian movies imported to the country, along with the complete ban of Western media products. The former attachment of Ethiopia during the reign of Haile Sellasie I to the US and countries of the West was also brought to an end when the Derge established coalition with the then Leninist-Marxist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and later with the People's Republic of China. Owing to such changes, "the national television and the local cinemas which were by then nationalized showed media contents that reflected Marxist-Leninist propaganda" (Workalemahu, 2007: 87).

In the late 1980s, many communist governments in various Eastern European Nations collapsed, which was marked by the break down of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This was soon followed by the socialist Derge regime being overthrown after the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took control of the whole country in 1991. According to Deane et al. (2004), this development is part of the complex political and social changes happening in various other parts of Africa.

Recent developments in Eastern Africa reflect the complex and contradictory character of political and social trends that have affected many other parts of the continent. Since 1990, most countries in the sub region have undergone a far-reaching political transformation, mostly by replacing former one-party regimes with nominal multi-party democracies. Freedom of expression, press freedom and media diversity have become critical indicators of the health or other wise of democratic transition in the sub-region. (Deane et al., 2004: 90)

Following such political transformations of this sort, Ethiopia witnessed a relaxed atmosphere in terms of people's access to diversified media messages, including foreign produced ones. This trend, in general, allowed both Hollywood and Bollywood movies to make their way abundantly to the Ethiopian audience. Thus, it is against such background that this study takes interest in investigating how Ethiopian youth from a poor section of Addis society meet with Bollywood movies in informal video-viewing houses. The next section, hence, gives a brief background to how these video houses have evolved and how they operate as cultural space for the youth.

3.5 The Video-Viewing Houses in Addis

A point worth making here is that movie-lovers in Addis have three options as to where and how they could enjoy watching films. They can go to the cinemas in the city, watch them at their own houses by buying or renting them or visit informal video houses. Going to the cinema as an alternative to pass leisure time may not be affordable for the urban poor for two reasons. For one thing, the entrance fee, which ranges from three Ethiopian birr to twenty birr per head, is considered to be too expensive for the poor to afford. Besides, the ten cinema theatres or so scattered around the city are not enough by any standard for more than 2.3 million people living in Addis Ababa (This is a figure obtained from the 1994 census). Buying and/or renting films in VHS, DVD or VCD formats and watching them in the privacy of homes is also a luxury that only a few people with the economic means are blessed to enjoy. Therefore, the poor youth in the city are left with the only option of visiting video houses where they interact with foreign media for a price of one birr per head, using them as a window through which they can experience the outside world.

The video houses are usually frequented by the predominantly poor, male, urban youth who are thought to not be able to afford going to cinemas or watching movies in their own homes owing to the impossibility of possessing electronic devices such as TV sets, VHS players, DVD and VCD players and so on. These houses also function as a unique, shared cultural space for the poor youth in the city. The fact that male viewers are exceptionally seen in such places has something to do with a norm of the society being such that it is socially wrong for females to leave their homes and mingle with males in spaces culturally recognized as males'. In addition to being venues for passing their free time watching movies, these places also serve them as spaces where they can share socially frowned upon habits such as chewing chat³, a local mild stimulating substance and smoking cigarettes

Assefa (2005: 36) notes that these video houses represent a new trend and are run by a few young males who somehow found a way of getting the capital to open up such places as part of brisk business. It is very hard to find empirical data that suggest the exact number of video houses operating in Addis Ababa. According to Assefa (2005: 36), however, the Addis Ababa Trade and Tourism Bureau, which is a government body in charge of granting licenses to video houses, estimates that the number of video houses currently in existence in Addis is around 98. According to this estimate, the figure indicates a marked decline in the number of video houses from 243 in the early 1990s. Some of the reasons for their closure and confiscation of their resource materials put forward by security forces were that many of them are places harboring illegal acts by the youth and that they do not pay taxes. Seeing one little video house after another in places such as Merkato⁴ where this study paid a closer attention to, I would, however, argue that the figure released by the city's Trade and Tourism Bureau seems to stand far from capturing the actual number of the video houses operating in Addis Ababa.

³ Chat is a local mild stimulating substance grown in different parts of the country. The way it is taken is that by cutting of the leaves you just put it in your mouth and chew on it for quite some time. Far from being instantaneous, its effect is thought to be felt as one goes along chewing it

⁴ Merkato is the largest open air market in Africa, which is located in the Addis Ketema subcity of Addis Abba, Ethiopia. Merkato serves as a name not only to the market place, but also to the neighborhood in which it is located.

In terms of how these video houses operate, the observations I have conducted indicated that they usually screen various types of movies in the afternoons and evenings. What I learned during the observations was that the owners of the video houses usually get the movies from video rental stores which are found nearby. I was also told that there are quite a few video house owners who also run video rental stores as a double business venture. The inside of such video houses is usually arranged in such a way that the rooms can serve more people than they can actually accommodate. From what I have seen, the houses cannot hold more than 40 to 50 people, but the actual number of viewers is most often a lot more than that number. Contributing to this is the way benches are arranged in the video houses; i.e. the space between the benches is so narrow that one can barely move ones legs.

Movies screened are usually either American action movies or Indian movies. Some of the owners of the video houses who can afford to prepare two rooms host two shows on a daily basis. In one of the rooms, American movies are screened whereas the other room is reserved for viewers who prefer watching Indian movies. The entrance fee in such places is often one Ethiopian birr. I myself as a participant observer paid the charge every time I entered the video houses I observed, although I had quite a few hard times trying to convince the owners that the ethical strength of my work would be tampered with if I didn't do that.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made an attempt to highlight the general background of the context in which the Ethiopian youth from the poor section of the society consume and interact with cultural products of the media originating from India. Accordingly, I have briefly discussed some geographical and historical facts about Ethiopia. In addition, I have considered what the Ethiopian youth profile looks like. I have also paid due attention to a brief history of Indian cinema before discussing when and how Indian cinema started to catch a sizeable audience in Ethiopia. Finally, on the basis of my observations, I have tried to explain how the video houses have evolved and operate. In the next chapter, I discuss the research methodology employed in gathering empirical data and analyzing them.

Chapter Four

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I attempt to explore how a section of the youth from poor family background in Addis Ababa makes sense of Bollywood movies. In my attempt to tease out the meanings they make of these movies, I have chosen to employ a qualitative research methodology for I believe that humans' infusion of their own actions and worlds with meanings can best be discovered through the use of such a research approach. Accordingly, what I set out to accomplish in this chapter is to try to describe and discuss the research design and procedure adopted in the study as part of the attempt to generate empirical data. In doing so, I particularly focus on the following subtopics: the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; the epistemological foundations of ethnographic research; the data collection methods, namely small-scale observation, focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews; sampling procedure; and data analysis procedures.

4.2 Research Design and Procedure

4.2.1 Qualitative Research: Philosophical Underpinnings

Questions as to the appropriateness of certain methodologies more than others to the study of communication phenomena have always been circulating in communications and media studies. Audience research, which Jensen recognizes as “one of the few branches of communication research that has a relatively long history of identifiable phases with characteristic concerns” (1987: 21), has been subjected to such debates. According to Jensen,

“much of this debate involves an attempt to arrive at a new definition of *impact* and to devise methodologies for its study” (1987: 21; my emphasis). The understanding that this notion of impact of the mass media and the need to reconceptualize media’s impact have made many researchers seek to use other methods to uncover the result of the meeting between a medium and its audience (Deacon et al., 1999: 248). According to these scholars, the methods that various researchers have lately turned their attention to are qualitative methods (1999: 248).

Qualitative research paradigm as a methodological approach is what principally constitutes this study. Acknowledging that the term ‘qualitative methodology’ encompasses a whole set of methods and techniques having in common a certain set of principles or logic, Babbie and Mouton define this research paradigm as a social inquiry in which “researchers attempt always to study human action from the perspective of the *social actors themselves*” (2001, 270; my emphasis). They further note that in this methodological approach it is the notion of the insider perspective on social action that research takes as its point of departure in such social investigation (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 270). What is basically at the heart of qualitative researcher’s attempt to study human attitudes and behaviors within their natural setting is their desire “to preserve the form and content of human behavior and to analyze its qualities, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formula transformations” (Lindlof, 1995: 21). This is exactly where qualitative research approach breaks with that of quantitative research with regard to its philosophical foundations.

I have indicated above that qualitative research is such an umbrella term that it signifies a variety of methods and “styles of social research” which share a certain set of philosophical principles (Denscombe, 2003: 267). Quoting Tesch, Denscombe writes that two of the most common elements derivable from this variety of styles of social research dealing with this approach are (1) meanings and their construction by people, and (2) patterns of behavior:

A concern with meanings and the way people understand things. Human activity is seen as a product of symbols and meanings that are used by members of the social group to make sense of things. Such symbols and meanings need to be analyzed as ‘text’ – to be interpreted rather like a literary critic interprets a book.

A concern with patterns of behavior. Here the focus is on the activities of a social group, such as in rituals, traditions and relationships, and the way these are expressed as patterns of behavior, cultural norms and types of language used. (Denscombe, 2003: 267)

There is a debate going on between writers who think of the quantitative/qualitative divide as representing “divergent clusters of epistemological assumptions” and others who tend to see the choice for one approach over the other at a technical level only (Bryman, 1988: 5). However, I tend to be inclined to the need of holding on to the epistemological basis for choosing to use qualitative approach in this study. I have already made the point that the kind of social reality I am studying is the process of making sense, and the appropriate way in which this reality ought to be investigated and empirical data generated is qualitative approach. The issue of epistemology makes it hard for me to consider combining qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single research design of the sort I am conducting.

The epistemological foundations that underpin qualitative researches on communications and media stem from the philosophical tradition which came to be known as interpretive/phenomenological tradition. In discussing the major concern of this tradition, Deacon et al. (1999: 6) implicitly contrasts it with the other major intellectual tradition – positivism. They note:

The central concern here is not with establishing relations of cause and effect but with exploring the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings th[r]ough language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals. (Deacon et al., 1999: 6)

If we accept the phenomenological assumption that the aim of social inquiry is the stress “on the understanding of the social world through an examination of participants” (Bryman, 2003: 266), then we ought to emphasize the need to view the world through the eyes of the participants themselves. For this to happen, Babbie and Mouton (2001: 271) write that the role adopted by the qualitative researcher should be more than just being a participant observer. They further note that by deliberately putting themselves in the shoes of the actors they are investigating in the social world, the qualitative researcher should “try and

understand their actions, decisions, behaviors, practices, rituals and so on, from their perspective” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 271). I am well aware of the relevance close yet critical involvement of the sort suggested by Babbie and Mouton will have to my study. My academic background, which will have a definite impact on my worldview, is likely to be divergent from the world of experience of those youth I am investigating, and that makes it very important that I pay extra attention to the need of taking the insider perspective to understanding them better.

In addition to the feature of qualitative research discussed so far, idiographic research strategy (versus nomothetic) is another crucial point distinguishing qualitative research from quantitative research. Idiographic research strategy is often associated with qualitative research in the sense that it posits the notion of examining “a single event or case and its structural coherence within a larger context” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 272). Nomothetic research strategy, on the other hand, which is closely linked to quantitative research, is aimed at searching “for empirical regularities of laws of human behavior” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 272). In other words, what this distinction means is that instead of aiming at the generalizability of research outcomes to a wider population, as is the case in quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on understanding the particular paying due attention to the context (Maxwell, 1992: 296).

Closely linked to the idea of examining the particular in qualitative research is the overwhelming desire of qualitative researchers to describe and understand human behavior. According to Babbie and Mouton, the thinking underlying this distinctive feature of qualitative research is that ‘thick description’ – a phrase coined by Clifford Geertz – is called for “instead of focusing on counting and quantifying patterns in behavior” (2001: 272).

4.2.2 Research Design: Ethnographic Study of the Audience – Epistemological Foundations

While attempting to briefly elucidate the philosophical foundations which distinguish qualitative research from quantitative one in the first chapter, I made a point that audience

ethnography constitutes one facet of the approach to this study. Taking the particular research methods and their theoretical background into account, which will soon be discussed in this chapter, it would be reasonable to go a little deeper and clarify the theoretical assumptions of audience ethnography. Ethnography as a technique of research grew out of the field of anthropology, where it has been made use of as “a means of understanding non-Western people’s rites, culture and means of survival” (Hartley, 2002: 84). However, ethnography, in communications research, is interested in examining and hence understanding media audiences, and the ethnographer is expected to bring themselves into a closer contact with a particular group of interest “in an attempt to gain insight into their choices and behavior” (Hartley, 2002: 85).

Understandably enough, audiences’ interaction with cultural materials such as movies can be perceived as being embedded within the practices of their daily lives. Qualitative audience ethnography is crucially concerned with exploring such uses and consumption of media products by audiences as part of their lived reality. Associated with this central concern of audience ethnography is ethnographers’ “task of providing straightforward descriptions of things witnessed first hand in the field” (Denscombe, 2003: 86). Morley in his chapter entitled ‘Towards an ethnography of the television audience’ notes that ethnography as an empirical method is an essential tool for understanding the dynamic nature of cultural practices, which is made possible through thick description audience ethnography allows.

If we are to make some sense of the significance of these [cultural] activities which after all are the primary ones for any understanding of the dynamics of the pervasiveness and power of contemporary culture, then we have to take seriously the varied and detailed ways in which they are undertaken. This is the basis for a commitment to ethnography as an empirical method. (Morley, 1992: 182-183)

According to Watson, various research methods are recognized in ethnographic studies, *participant observation* being the major one (2003: 77; emphasis in the original). This appears to be the reason why there is a blur in the conceptualization of ethnography and participant observation and in them being used interchangeably by some writers. It was sometime in the 1970s, writes Bryman, that the term “ethnography began to become the

preferred” one (2004: 292). Bryman further notes that the reason for this preference is that ‘participant observation’ is thought of as implying just observation whereas ‘ethnography’ “simultaneously refers to both a method of research ... and the written product of that research” (2004: 292).

One of the charges against ethnographic researches is the claim that they lack objectivity. Hartley raises the question critics of ethnographic research pose as to “whether it is possible to gain an objective view of a culture simply by observing it” (Hartley, 2002: 85). This questioning is particularly directed at the possibility of informants being influenced by the presence of the observer, “thereby affecting the outcomes of the research” (Hartley, 2002: 85).

Accordingly, Hartley argues that this should point to the need of “recognizing the researcher’s own subjectivity and what it is that they bring to the research” (2002: 85). In other words, “the conceptual tools” that they bring with them for exploring and understanding the cultures they are investigating are far from being neutral (Denscombe, 2003: 88). Such reflection on the implications of the ethnographer’s cultural background to the way they make sense of what is observed is what came to be referred to as the issue of reflexivity.

To sum up, the issue of reflexivity takes us to another point having to do with representation. Morley stresses the plausible idea that let alone ethnographic accounts of people’s encounter with the media, “any kind of empirical research is always, necessarily, caught up in representation ...” and “interpretation” (1992: 179).

In the midst of all the theoretical explications about audience ethnography, it would be important to recall that in the first chapter I listed three research methods constituting this study, which are observation, focus group interview and individual in-depth interview. The next section discusses and describes the specific research methods and sampling procedures employed in the study.

4.3 Research Procedure and Sampling

As can be recalled from the previous section, the three particular research methods have been outlined. The research design adopted in this study is a three-stage design which proved to be advantageous in terms of enabling me to corroborate data gathered through one technique with that of the other. The three stages of the research process and the sampling procedures are discussed below in the order they materialize in the study:

- i. Observation
- ii. Focus group interviews
- iii. Individual in-depth interviews

4.3.1 Observation

As I have already made the point earlier, ethnographic research uses observations to gain empirical data about how people make sense of media products. Writing about observation, Alasuutari argues that “Everything we know and everything we believe about the world is based on observations and inference drawn from those observations” (1998: 25). Alasuutari further argues that no matter how tempting it is to make a distinction between observations aimed at collecting “material for empirical research” and “everyday observations”, there seems to be no ground for such a classification for what really matters is “the research problem” and “the point of view from which the observations are examined” (1998: 25).

It has been noted in the previous section that audience ethnography as a qualitative research design is associated with participant observation, which according to Bryman (2004: 292) entails a method used to uncover the culture of a group by first gaining access to the group and then taking field notes which will finally result in the fruitful account of the culture investigated. Arguably, studies conducted through participant observation are often said to take a considerable amount of time. Unlike in social anthropology, ethnographers in communications and media studies do not seem to enjoy such a luxury of time. Owing to such pressures from time and the fact that this research is a semester’s project, I was forced

to limit myself to observing the dynamics of the context where the youth of Addis consume Indian movies to a duration of time not more than two weeks.

Consistent with what Deacon et al. (1999: 54) describe as the ‘strong’ version of convenience sampling, I selected three video-viewing houses to observe out of the many situated in Merkato area. The focus of this research was the Bollywood movies viewing experience of the youth from a poor family background in Addis, and such youth with cultural practice of this sort are abundantly available in this part of the city. It is this realization that initiated the research process as convenient sampling procedure “focuses around natural clusters of social groups and individuals, who seem to present unexpected but potentially interesting opportunities” (Deacon et al., 1999: 54).

After securing access to the video houses, I managed to observe and take notes on how the youth consume the Bollywood movies they watch. This was made possible by the fact that I approached the owners of the video houses and established a positive rapport by explaining to them the purpose of my study and what I intended to achieve from the observations. Consequently, in each of the three houses I went to, I tried to spend nearly three hours per day. Though this at times turned out to be exhausting for me, it nonetheless allowed me to actually witness the dynamics of the viewing process, hence enabling me to gain a first-hand insight into the process being investigated (Deacon et al., 1999: 259).

The role that I adopted in my observations is what Denscombe (2003: 203) categorizes as ‘participation in the normal setting’. The basis for choosing to adopt this role in this type of observation is because it deliberately permits

...observation without affecting the naturalness of the setting, but it also allows the researcher to keep a distance from the key group under study. This distance might be warranted on the grounds of propriety, or the researcher lacks credentials to take on the role in question. (Denscombe, 2003: 203)

Being aware of it as a variant form of participant observation, which involves the total immersion of the researcher, I chose this method for I thought it appropriate to only let my

role be known to the owners of the video houses. The advantage of adopting such a role was that those researched would be in their natural behavior. It is in this light that I decided to keep my being there “hidden from most of those in the setting” (Denscombe, 2003: 203).

Generally, the insight generated from the observations I conducted helped me to understand the social context where the youth’s interaction with Bollywood movies takes place and to see how the setting operates as a cultural space for the youth. This method, however, constitutes only the first phase of the research process, and to probe more deeply into the media consumption practice and sense-making process of the youth under study, I also incorporated into the research design both focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews. These two data collection methods are discussed in turn below.

4.3.2 Focus Group Interviews

The points made so far reinforces the insight that qualitative audience analysis helps offer into what recipients do with media materials. In such research endeavors, focus group discussions have been extensively used for the purpose of analyzing media audiences since the early 1980s (Deacon et al., 1999: 55). According to Deacon et al., focus group research is closely linked to the necessity of “bringing small groups of people together to discuss issues identified by researcher” (1999: 54), and it is commonly agreed that the group interaction is the most salient feature of it as a method. Referring to a distinction made by some authors between focus group and group interviews, Bryman (2004: 346) puts forward three reasons which are likely to depict the validity of such a distinction. Two of the reasons worth noting are (1) focus groups are concerned with exploring in depth a specific theme, and (2) the emphasis in focus groups is on “how people respond to each other’s views and build up a view out of the interaction that takes place within the group” (Bryman, 2004: 346).

Despite the momentous popularity of the focus group method for the past few decades, Bryman argues that its implementation goes back in time earlier than the 1980s, being used in market research for “advertising initiatives” and “testing responses to new products” (2004: 346). According to Fontana and Frey (1994: 364), the writers who should take credit

for coining the term ‘focus group’ are Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956), and they used the term to apply to a research situation where informants in the group are asked specific questions about a certain topic, which is done later during the research process. As early as 1969, Blumer recognized the significance of interviewing a select group saying the process involves

...seeking participants...who are acute observers and who are well informed.... A small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample. (1969: 41)

As noted in the first chapter and elsewhere in this chapter, representativeness of a sample need not be a concern in qualitative researches such as mine. As suggested by Deacon et al. (1999: 55), qualitative research sampling strategies used for selecting focus groups are characterized by the lack of straightforward sampling guidelines, and I took advantage of such flexibility and my own judgment for choosing group members. In this light, I purposefully selected participants using convenience and snowball sampling. The choice of the participants was based on non-probability sampling for the aim of this research is “to delve in depth into a particular situation with a view to exploring” (Denscombe, 2003: 172) their viewing experience of Bollywood movies and their likely habit of visiting the video-viewing houses.

Following the observations I conducted in the video houses, I managed to get in contact with two viewers from each of the video houses. My selection of these six informants resulted from my discussion with the owners of the houses, whose assistance was invaluable in terms of suggesting people who frequent these places. Six more informants were included into the research process through snowball sampling as a result of the suggestion from the previously selected members. This strategy proved to be essential for it allowed access to researching into “informal social groupings, where the social knowledge and personal recommendations of the initial contacts are invaluable in opening up and mapping tight social networks’ (Deacon et al., 1999: 53). Consequently, the total number of people made part of the focus group discussions were twelve in number.

Taking into account the usual minimum number of interviewees in a group suggested by Bryman (2004: 346), I deliberately categorized the twelve informants in to three groups, each of them constituting four members. Although Hansen et al. (1998: 268) argue that there should be at least six focus groups in a research, until comments begin to repeat themselves and little new material is generated, I only held three focus group discussions for this research. The only justification for doing that is nothing more than the constraints from time and resources available and the number of interviewees willing to take part in the focus group interview sessions.

As far as arranging the venue for the interviews is concerned, I made an attempt to select a setting which I thought was private, quiet and comfortable to the participants. The interview room was located in a private house of a friend, and as most of the interviewees are from a lower socio-economic status, every precaution was taken to make sure that they were not overwhelmed and distracted by what is in the room. Thus, other than facilities such as chairs, a TV set and some refreshment, attempts were made to remove stuff from the room which would have had a distracting effect on them.

In line with the suggestions forwarded by Bryman (2004: 256), I began all the discussions with an introduction which included “thanking people for coming” and letting them introduce themselves to each other. The advantage of doing that was that participants seemed to feel at ease with the whole situation, which in turn got them to speak freely. Once I noticed that they were relaxing, I explained to them briefly the research goals and the procedures as to how the session is supposed to proceed (see Bryman, 2004: 356).

As a moderator, one of my roles was to “allow quite a lot of latitude to participants” by asking them fairly general questions and letting them speak at length about what they saw as important and interesting (Bryman, 2004: 356). As I am perfectly aware of the fact that some of the participants were reluctant to speak out, I made a deliberate attempt to encourage them to participate by asking them specific questions having to do with the interview guide. This is, however, far from implying that silence shouldn’t be tolerated at times for the silence can

sometimes turn out to be a wonderful resource (see Denscombe, 2003: 178). So, part of my role was to try to make sure that the dynamics of the interaction in the interview contributed to the progress of revelation that the research process requires.

All the discussions were made in Amharic, a language that everyone in the groups spoke and understood. The interview guide that I worked from consists of a list of broad points, each one of them having under them a few specific questions. All the thematic questions used in the focus groups revolve around the research questions outlined in the first chapter, and they were drawn out on the basis of what was included in the second chapter. All the discussions made were tape-recorded so that they can be used later as the narrative data to be made sense of. To further corroborate and complement these data, it was deemed necessary to use individual in-depth interviews, which will be discussed in the next section

4.3.3 Individual In-depth Interviews

Speaking of the distinction between structured interview and qualitative research interviews, Bryman contends, “the emphasis [in qualitative research interviews] must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events – that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behavior” (2004: 321). Having chosen focus group interview to gather qualitative data from the youth as a community of movie-goers, I thought it is very important to follow up the results of the focus group discussions with individual interviews. The reason to use in-depth interview arose out of the need to corroborate the data gathered through focus group discussions and to further elicit in-depth responses from the informants. Hence, it is in light of this potential of in-depth interview that individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study.

The one-to-one variety of semi-structured interviews is a form of qualitative research interview in which the interviewer is expected to come up with a clear list of questions or specific topics to be addressed, which are commonly referred to as an *interview guide* (Bryman, 2004: 321; emphasis in the original). Denscombe (2003: 167) stresses the

flexibility it allows the interviewer in terms of using the interview guide and the open-ended nature of the responses required from the informants.

...with the semi-structured interview the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest. (Denscombe, 2003: 167)

In terms of drawing sample, I purposefully selected candidates for the in-depth individual interviews from the three focus group discussions I conducted early on. On the basis of their reactions to my questions and their articulation of such responses, I deliberately selected one participant from each focus group, making three in total. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the owners of the three video houses I observed and the two translators of Indian films screened at the video houses. In each of the interviews conducted, interviewees were encouraged to speak freely. This was done to deliberately take advantage of the point made by Bryman about one of the salient features of semi-structured interviewing, which is that it opens up “considerable latitude for interviewees to express themselves freely” (1988: 46).

4.4 Data Analysis Procedure

After having transcribed all the interviews and focus group discussions, I translated them from Amharic into English. All the interviews were conducted in Amharic, and doing that helped me get round “the difficult task of asking questions cross-culturally” (Fontana and Frey, 1994: 366). The task of translating the materials into English was a challenge though, and I thus made every effort to be sensitive to the need of capturing the same sense of the meaning of the respondents’ discourse in the translation. Then, I was faced with the task of interpreting and analyzing the materials.

The mode of analysis that was made use of in this study is thematic coding. According to Jensen, this approach represents “[a] loosely inductive categorization of interview or

observational extracts with reference to various concepts, headings, or themes” (1982: 247). My task, therefore, was to categorize and report those extracts from the transcripts which I thought would illuminate the research questions put forward in the introductory chapter. In terms of the use of interview extracts in research reports, Denscombe cautions us about two of the disadvantages of extracts: (1) “they are, to some extent, presented out of context” and (2) “the process of selecting them involves a level of judgment...on the part of the researcher” (Denscombe, 2003: 188). However, he writes that extracts can be used to good effects for two salient reasons, saying:

For one thing, they can be interesting in their own right, giving the reader a flavor of the data and letting the reader ‘hear’ *the points as stated by the informants*. For another, they can be used as a *piece of evidence* supporting the argument that is being constructed in the report by the researcher. (Denscombe, 2003: 188; emphasis in the original)

The presentation of the data was then structured in a narrative form with pertinent quotations used to illustrate and serve as supporting evidence for the major findings of the study.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to discuss the research design and procedure employed in the study. Pointing out that qualitative approach to the study was chosen as the principal methodology, I paid particular attention to the need of explicating the theoretical and epistemological assumptions that qualitative research in general and ethnographic research in particular are grounded in. The chapter also highlighted the sampling procedure in the study along with specifying the three-stage approach adopted to gathering empirical data through observation, focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews. The data thus gathered were thematically analyzed and presented accordingly. In the next chapter, I will present the analysis and discussion of the findings of the research.

Chapter Five

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

How Ethiopian Youth Negotiate the Meanings of Bollywood Movies

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the presentation and interpretation of findings of the study by analyzing how Ethiopian poor youth negotiate the meanings of Bollywood movies. Grounding itself in active audience theory and much of the criticisms of media imperialism thesis, this chapter looks at the appropriation and use of contents of Bollywood movies by Ethiopian youth with impoverished living conditions. The findings of the study are classified into four major sections, namely *Video-viewing Houses and the Youth in Addis*; *Cultural Identification Generated from the Viewing of Bollywood Movies*; *Bollywood Movies as Enablers of Symbolic Distancing and Escapism*; and *The Notion of Cultural Domination reconsidered*.

5.2 Video-viewing Houses and the Youth in Addis

It is to be remembered that in Chapter Three of this paper I highlighted the very important issue surrounding the social context of the study. There I made an attempt to map out the social context where the Bollywood movies watching experience of the youth under investigation meshes with their everyday lives. Accordingly, it has been noted that what constitutes this context where the youth come in contact with the Bollywood movies they

watch are the video-viewing houses scattered around the city. This study concentrated on three of the video houses found in Merkato⁵ area for reasons highlighted in the previous chapter. Taking into account the complexities and dynamics of the viewing practice within the video houses and of the discourses through which the youth negotiate their interaction with the movies, I intend to begin this section with a description of the video houses emphasizing two subtopics: (1) their operation as cultural space for the youth, and (2) youth identity creation in relation to these houses.

5.2.1 The Operation of the Video Houses as Cultural Space for the Youth

As discussed in the research methodology chapter, I chose three video houses for my study. Before conducting focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, I gathered data through a series of small scale observations in each of the three video houses owned by Ermias, Fanuel and Mekonnen. What became clear during the observations was that these houses are small in size, usually packed with more young people than they could accommodate. During one of my visits to Ermias' video house I noticed that viewers were literally on top of each other, which points to the fact that the number of Indian movie-viewers is growing faster than the number of video houses available to serve this audience.

When I asked Fanuel, one of the owners of the video houses, how many people on average visit his video house per day, he answered: "Well, I would say 70-80 people come here daily. However, there are times when we would have to receive more than 90 viewers. But if the number of people becomes more than that, we will say sorry, and they go some where else." I was also able to observe that because of the crowdedness of the houses, it is usually extremely hot, and I found myself feeling dizzy at times. I could also see sweat dripping down everyone's face. In all the three houses I went to, there was no ventilation except for a tiny window at one of the walls, which is absolutely not sufficient for the amount of fresh air needed in the rooms.

⁵ Merkato is the largest open air market in Africa, which is located in the Addis Ketema subcity of Addis Abba, Ethiopia. Merkato serves as a name not only to the market place, but also to the neighborhood in which it is located.

As outlined at various points in this study, my principal concern is the subjective experience of watching Bollywood movies by Ethiopian poor youth residing in Addis Ababa. Fiske, whose name is often associated with the popularization of the shift from viewing media as carriers of dominant ideology to proposing ethnographic accounts which celebrate audiences as active (Teer-Tomaselli, 1997: v-vi), conceives of this media viewing practice as a process of making meanings and pleasures (Tager, 1997: 97). Citing Fiske (1994), Tager further notes that the viewer has a lot of freedom in the sense that they have a considerable latitude “to make socially pertinent meanings and pleasures” out of their viewing practice (Tager, 1997: 97).

Informed by much of the critique of media imperialism thesis, this study has attempted to look at how the youth negotiate with Indian movies. Part of answering this question involves paying a closer attention to the social context where much of the youth’s negotiation with such foreign media products occurs, and that is examining the social dynamics of viewing practices within the video houses.

In line with the finding of Assefa’s work (2005: 58), the video houses constitute a shared male cultural space. In all the three video houses I observed, the viewers are almost exclusively males. I asked Ermias, the owner of one of the video houses, if they have rules as to who is allowed in his place, and here is what he had to say:

No, not really. There is no such a thing as rules like that. We may probably restrict viewers from entering our house if they are very young...like 5 or 6 years old. As to me, one of the reasons why women are not seen in such places is because it is socially unacceptable for them to spend time with males of their age. Even the very act of going to places like this is thought to be something that boys should do – boys with less parental control.

During one of my observations, I noticed a girl among the crowd, and as I saw her sit there and watch the movie in the midst of all the male viewers around her, I felt curiosity growing within me to know what she felt as she did that. This was what she had to say to me at the

end of the show when I asked her what she thought of herself as a girl in a male viewing area.

There are people who come up to me and say, "... what the hell are you doing here? This is supposed to be male's only." But I don't give a damn about that because I believe that there shouldn't be such division between male and female. For example, I am training Marshall Arts and I am good at it. There are a lot of male trainees that I scare the shit out of. So, if I can do that, why should I be prevented from coming here? It's just non sense.

The discourse with which she expressed her disgust for the stereotype that women should not be allowed to enter such places seems to imply the idea that she is resisting the patriarchal norm of the Ethiopian society. What is derivable from her discourse is the idea that her action, which is training in Marshall Arts, usually perceived to be mastered by males, legitimizes her entry into such places as the video houses. Thus with the exception of girls such as her, these video houses seem to constitute a shared male cultural space.

Part of the effect of cultural sharedness that the video houses offer for the youth lies in their potential to allow viewers to escape parental control and authority. One of the informants named Facil, who is a 17-year-old student and an avid customer of the video houses, had the following to say about the above theme: "If I stay at home in the afternoon, I am going to put up with my parents and elder siblings telling me to do this and that. So, I purposefully sneak out of our house and come here." Asked about the same thing, the majority of the informants were of the view that coming to the video houses definitely represents some sort of escape from all sorts of household control, including performing chores. Many of them even said that the poor living condition that they have to put up with necessitates the fact that they do everything they can to support their families and the pressure sometimes is unbearable for them. Thus, going to the video houses provides them with the opportunity to escape and forget their impoverished living conditions for a little while at least.

As far as the age profile of the customers is concerned, it became evident from the interviews I conducted with the owners that the viewers who frequent these places range from 12 years to 25 years of age. The viewers usually have a choice as to what kind of movies to watch on a particular day. In some of the video houses, different movies are screened at different times during the day and in others, there will be two rooms where different films are screened at the same time.

I discovered during the observations that all the Indian movies that viewers watch in these houses are translated from Hindi into Amharic. The translations are often done in two different ways. What is strikingly odd about the first way of translation is that it is done by one man only without the slightest consideration to the various male and female characters in the movies, and this translation is on the movie sound track. The other way in which the translation is done is through a translator physically present in the house. Crouching down under the TV set, he continuously translates listening to the dialogues and everything in the movies, except the songs. From the interviews that I had with Mekuanint and Getachew, the two translators I met in two of the video houses, it became clear to me that such translations are usually done by people who grow up watching Indian movies and as a result develop a little knowledge of the Hindi language making them capable of translating many Indian movies. When I asked Mekuanint why the translation is so important, he had the following to say:

Well, I have to admit that there are people who hate the very idea of watching translated versions of Indian movies, but their number is insignificant compared to the number of people who prefer the translated versions. So, to answer your question, the reason why translating the movies is necessary is because people want to understand the movies better, and that happens when they watch movies with translation. Many viewers tell us that instead of watching Indian movies which are not translated and try to make sense of them from the actions and all that, watching the translated versions makes a world of difference to their better understanding of the movies.

It is to be recalled that one of the points made in Chapter Three was why the video houses are visited by the predominantly poor, male, urban youth. One of the reasons behind the attraction of the houses to the youth has to do with the economic factor in the sense that the video houses are way cheaper (not more than one Ethiopian Birr per head) than the cinemas. Thus it makes sense to see these houses functioning as a unique, shared cultural space for the impoverished youth in the city.

One of the themes emerged from the observations was that in addition to being venues for passing their free time watching movies, these places also serve as symbolic spaces where the poor youth form a marginalized social interaction and solidarity by the virtue of the fact that they share socially frowned upon habits such as chewing chat, a local mild stimulating substance, and smoking cigarettes. Concerning such practices observed in the video houses, the explanation made by Yordanos, 19, seems to be self-evident.

I have been chewing chat and smoking cigarettes for quite some time now. Of all the places, it is here that I feel more comfortable doing those things. You know, here no one judges you or bothers to look at you. We even become close buddies with many of those people who do the same thing. You might even have seen some of us sharing a single cigarette among ourselves.

Yordanos's last statement suggests that there exists solidarity among the viewers facilitated by the cultural space of the video viewing houses.

5.2.2 Youth Identity Creation in Relation to the Video Houses

Before we look at how the youth view themselves in relation to their consumption of Bollywood movies, which they are engaged in more or less on a daily basis, it sounds pertinent to take a closer look at how Hall (1997: 11) challenges the notion of identity as closed and static taken for granted by some. He writes:

If we conceive of *identity* as something which is given to us from birth, a little seed which is the *real* us, has grown into an acorn, and which hasn't been changed by time, by history by anything, then we

can think of culture and identity as something that stands still. [In the same manner,] we can think of identity as something that is always unified and homogenous. But actually, none of us think identity is like that. We are the sum of the positions that we've ascended to. We are the sum of the ways in which we've been willing to be recognized. . . . We are the sum of where we hope we are going. What we are hoping to become. We are the sum of the subjects that we dream ourselves into. (Hall, 1997: 11-13; emphasis in the original)

Hall's conception of identity seems to suggest how fluid and delicate the very notion of identity is. It is important to recognize the impossibility of maintaining a certain kind of identity forever. It is inevitable that our conditions in life and histories, both individual and collective, are always in the process of change, and those changes in events affecting our lives are bound to keep modifying, if not transforming, our identity. By specifically referring to culture, Teer-Tomaselli summarizes cultural identity as something that "remains largely about the recognition of whom we are, with whom we associate ourselves or our aspirations, with whom we empathize, to whom we say 'yes'" (1997: x).

During the course of the interviews, one of the questions posed to the informants was how they perceive their identity and view the world around them in relation to their interaction with Bollywood movies in the video houses. It became evident from the interviews that many of them agree on the idea that their negotiation with Indian films provides them with a discursive tool using which they reflect on where they stand and what they can accomplish. This theme was articulated in the focus group discussions with the youth and is presented as follows:

Yordanos: I watch Indian movies a lot. When I relate myself to the movies I regularly watch, I kind of feel that I am left behind in terms of different things. You know what? It's not only me that I see this way; it's also my country. In those movies I watch, I see where the Indian society stands, and this helps me look for the things which I think makes us better than the Indians and the things which I believe are a great lesson for us.

Elias: Well, for me, my experience with Indian movies has shaped me in two ways. One is that it helped me to ask myself the question, "What can I do to improve myself in relation to personal development,

both mentally and economically?” And the other is that it has significantly changed my perception of love.

Tamiru: I also go to video houses a lot to watch Indian movies. After watching a movie, I sometimes ask myself where I stand as a person and blame myself if I feel that my reflection turn out to be negative. At times, I even ask myself whether I can behave or act like some of the characters that I see and sympathize with. Sometimes, I find myself trying to be like them. For example, when I watch romantic movies, I often ask myself, “Can I really sacrifice myself for love like those heroes in the movies?” I mean that is how I often times struggle with myself internally.

One of the most important things about the content of these movies that allows such questions to be asked by the viewers is the highly romanticized love stories depicting actors putting their lives on the line for their loved ones. The other point about the content of the movies they watch, which emerged from the interviews, is the battle that certain characters that viewers are likely to sympathize with have to go through to succeed in life or to prove to their opponents that they too can do it.

This sort of identity building as can be seen from the informants’ own discourse above, which is embedded within the whole process of their engagement with Bollywood movies, results from an active negotiation with the materials. One might ask the question, What if it is the Indian value system that is being communicated to these viewers resulting in the obliteration of their own cultural value systems. However, if we take a look at how Yordanos reflects on the Indian movies that he watches we see that he is critically looking for what he thinks represent the strengths and weaknesses in the cultural value systems of both his country and India. He understands that nothing is to be taken for granted for he believes that as there are things from the Indian value system that one covets, there are also things from the Ethiopian value system that one takes pride in. This sort of active engagement with the movies is in acute contradiction with the determining authority of the movies as texts put forward by proponents of cultural imperialism thesis (Turner, 2003: 91).

As far as the video houses are concerned, one might suggest that one of the issues emerged during the interviews is the notion of belonging, a sense of desire to form relationship with

people that they feel have a lot in common with themselves. When I asked Facil whether his regular visit to the video houses affects how he views the world, he had the following to say:

Like I said, I don't think a day goes by without me going to one of the video houses nearby. Even if I decide for myself not to watch a movie on a particular day, I feel like I have to go there just to meet some of my friends. You see, I believe that the time that I usually spend in the video houses is worth it for it has enabled me to meet a lot of people like me, and I even established friendship with some of them. Let's say that me and my friends spend this afternoon or evening watching a movie together. To your amazement, before we depart afterwards, we set a time and meet the next day. Then the next day, we meet earlier than the opening of the day's show and discuss the movie we saw the previous day and engage in heated arguments with one another.

In Chapter Three, I made the point that the viewers who visit the video houses are either unemployed with occasional job opportunities as day-laborers or students with inconsistent school attendance. One of the things that all the youth seem to share is the impoverished living condition that they are subjected to. When Facil said, "...the time that I usually spend in the video houses is worth it for it has enabled me to meet a lot of people like me", he is referring to the strong possibility of there being a solidarity formed because most of the youth also share the same social circumstances like poverty, unemployment, etc.

The discussion that viewers are engaged in during and after the screening of movies, referred to above by Facil, is conformed in the observations I conducted. In the three video houses I attended, I noticed that towards the beginning of the shows, the viewing was marked by a complete silence on the part of the audience, which is comparable to a total attention and absorption, except for occasional noise created as when latecomers were ushered into the houses halfway after the show had started. When I saw these latecomers talking to someone sitting next to them, I asked a person beside me what they were doing. I was told that they are probably trying to catch up with what they have already missed from the show.

As the actions in the movies rise, pair conversations or group discussions start to take hold. These are usually done in lower or whispering tones. Often the discussions take the form of casual talk about the major actors in the movies and about the other films they star in. When

tension gets high in the movies they watch, some of the viewers are seen engaged in the very act of sharing with their fellow viewers what they predict will happen next. When one of them succeeds in his prediction, he makes sure that he gets a whole round of applause, and this appears to be part of the pleasure derived from the viewing experience. Actions in the movies which one might recognize as extremely out of reality are marveled at in the video houses as something signifying the actors' "competence" in the viewers' own word. The exclamation by some of the viewers goes: "Oh my God, look at his competence here!"

Applauding when they see anything funny or courageous on the part of the actors is part of the ritual in the video houses. Often times, the applauding is accompanied with peels of laughter as the viewers laugh uncontrollably at scenes which they think are funny. Villans are also applauded for when they exhibit courageous acts or ferocious cruelty in their fight against the major characters that viewers normally sympathize with. So, in line with one of the findings of Tager's study on 'The Bold and the Beautiful and the Urban Black Viewer in KwaZulu-Natal' (1997: 110), I discovered during the course of the observations and interviews that collaborative discussions during and after the viewing of Bollywood movies have a lot to do with the interpretive process that viewers are engaged in. In other words, the meaning of the text is 'fixed' during the discussion process.

5.3 Cultural Identification Generated from the Viewing of Bollywood Movies

According to Appadurai (1996: 13), the temptation to try to conceive of culture as something representing actual social groups is to be resisted. Appadurai suggests that *cultural* the adjective, as opposed to culture the noun, points to the idea of culture signifying difference, and it sounds to be a better term for it adequately carries the conceptual baggage which has in it all the various elements essential for the better understanding of culture (1996: 12-13). Appadurai writes:

... I have also resisted the noun form *culture* and suggested an adjectival approach to culture, which stresses its contextual, heuristic,

and comparative dimensions and orients us to the idea of culture as difference, especially difference in the realm of group identity. I have therefore suggested that culture is a pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group identity. (1996: 13; emphasis in the original)

In *Intercultural Communication: Pragmatics, Genealogy, Deconstruction*, a book reviewed by Dr R. K. Singh, Young defines the term ‘culture’ as something that “inheres in all area of human activity and creation of ideas” (1997: 177). In other words, everything we do and experience, along with the ideology surrounding such human experiences, is inherent in the concept of culture. Thinking of culture and cultural practices within this broad framework of reference, this study attempted to tap into the various meanings pertaining to cultural similarities that Indian cinemas have for the local audiences under investigation.

One of the questions that I brought up to the participants in the focus group discussions was whether they identify themselves and their culture with what they watch in the Bollywood movies. The presence of similarity in terms of certain aspects of the two cultures – the Indian culture and the indigenous culture of the viewers – is a significant theme reiterated in the statements made by many of the informants. What is so surprising about the informants’ discourse about how they attempt to relate aspects of the movies that they watch to aspects of their own culture is that they make a deliberate comparison to show how the two cultures contrast with the European way of living.

Mesay: I personally feel that there are certain things that I find similar as far as Indian culture and ours are concerned. If we take a look at the European way of living, we see that people there are extremely busy. I don’t think that social life there is as we know it here and as strong as in India or Ethiopia. Two of the things that I find interestingly similar between Indians and Ethiopians are the closeness that people have to one another and the thoughtfulness that they show to one another. You see.... Even the way their houses are lined up against each other is very similar to that of ours. In addition, their living condition is not up there.....I mean they are not as rich and very sophisticated as the Europeans are. I am not comparing them with us in terms of economic affluence. I am well aware that they are richer. But the enormous amount of poverty we see depicted in their movies makes me feel that we have that in common in this regard.

What Mesay, 20, is saying is that he critically looks at the social make-up of the two societies by contrasting it with that of the European society. In other words, he is unconsciously referring to individualism versus collectivism which Jandt recognizes as one of the dimensions of culture (2004: 184). Jandt notes that this cultural dimension “refers to how people define themselves and their relationship with others” (2004: 184). According to him, in a culture characterized by individualism, “ties between individuals are loose” (2004: 184), and that is what Mesay meant by social life in the West not being that strong. Collectivism, on the other hand, is the characteristic of cultures in which “people are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups that continue throughout a life time to protect in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1997 cited in Jandt, 2004: 184). Thus Messay rightly associates the social cohesion that he experiences in his culture to that of the Indians’ in light of his viewing experience of Bollywood movies.

Such examples of reflection on the similarity between certain aspects of the two cultures can be found in the following two extracts taken from the focus group interviews.

Tamiru: In our culture, for example, exhibiting sexual behavior in public is strictly prohibited. Similarly, let alone indulging in sex, characters in Indian films are not featured kissing each other on the lips. Perhaps, this might not be the case in films which are being released recently.

Henok: From what I have seen in many of the Bollywood movies I’ve watched, there are surprisingly many things that I relate to our own culture. Marriage there is conducted through parents... I mean parents choose the bride or the bridegroom for their children. Honestly speaking, this traditional practice is still present in Ethiopia, though it’s more prevalent in the rural parts of the country.

From the various cultural similarities between India and Ethiopia that Tamiru, 16, and Henok, 20, believe are existent, they singled out the traditional norm in relation to sexual conduct and marriage. Out of his viewing experience of Indian movies, Tamiru reflects upon how explicit sexual indulgence, including intimate touches such as kissing on the lips, is a taboo in the Indian society. Thus, in the process of making this particular sense, Tamiru is

actively engaged with the movies, which can be justified by the fact that he deliberately and critically attempts to relate this aspect of the Indian culture to that of ours. The same goes for Henok when he points out the societal codes for marriage between the two cultures as having a lot in common. Such examples signify the idea that cultural identification represents one of the chief sources of pleasure for the majority of the interviewees who enjoy Indian movies.

Two of the interviewees, however, take a more critical view in the sense that they stress the extraordinary ability and dedication of Indians to retain and keep their particular cultural identity intact in the face of many modernizing factors. This, they say, essentially distinguishes Ethiopian society from that of Indian society.

Birook: What I personally believe is that we Ethiopians have lost, and keep losing, a lot of traditional and cultural assets of ours for various reasons. We have let go of cultural practices that we once considered to be our own, and hence, we lost a complete sight of them. Indians, on the other hand, are very much still holding onto their cultural assets, and I admire them for that.

An interesting point derivable from the extracts above and worthy of appreciating is that despite the disparity among viewers in particular meanings they take from the Indian movies, they all seem to actively interpret the messages from the movies by reflecting on them in light of their lived realities.

As stated in the introductory chapter, the primary question asked in this study was, what is it about Bollywood movies that is resonant with the lives of Ethiopian youth from a poor family background in Addis Ababa? Quoting Spence (1995), Tager writes: “watching Soap operas is experiencing a fantasy which we believe to be true enough to warrant drawing moral conclusions, forming opinions, and comparing to what we know of the real world” (1997: 102). From what came out of the interviews and focus group discussions, the case turned out to be that the same holds true to watching Bollywood movies. I discovered that the majority of the informants emphasized “drawing moral conclusions, forming opinions”, and comparing what they see to what they know of the real world. They did all that in response to why they enjoy watching Indian movies

One of the commonest opinions expressed by almost all the interviewees was that Indian action films all have stories which have instances of exaggeration in them, and that they are not as exiting as American action films. This, according to them, makes them unworthy of watching; i.e. they find them less realistic. But all the interviewees enjoy Indian movies which are constructed along the lines of romantic fantasy. The crucial part of the pleasure taken from such romantic Indian films lies in their perceived ability to make viewers emotionally involved with characters. A 22-year-old Taye, who began watching Indian films when he was a little child, had the following to say when he was asked why he is drawn to Indian films dealing with a romantic story:

Taye: ...Well, the type of Indian film that I am interested in watching is a romantic one. Indian romantic films bring out the lover in you, and they make you a better lover. What I am saying is that such films are likely to make you have love and respect not only for the opposite sex but also for your family and for all humanity alike...no matter who he or she is. From Indian actors, I am a great fan of Aishwariya⁶. I love her very much. If I hear that there is a film released in which she acted, I will go hunting for it and watching it. I am sure that I watch Indian films not just for the sake of passing time. I watch them because I want to. I am such a great fan...

Taye's narration in explaining why he likes watching Indian movies, romantic ones in particular, shows how much emotionally involved he is with stories narrated along the line of romantic fantasy and with his all time best actress Aishwarya. Reflecting on one of the great lessons he takes form Indian romantic films, which is unconditional love for all, he says that although Asishwarya is female, she, both in real life and in the movies she acted in, represents all the qualities that a human being needs to possess, and for that reason and that only he loves her and looks up to her.

⁶**Aishwarya Bachchan** is an internationally renowned Indian actress. Before starting her acting career, she worked as a model, and gained fame after winning the [Miss World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss_World) contest in 1994. [see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aishwarya_Rai].

A 20-year-old Biroom has a similar yet a little complicated observation in the sense that this observation takes him a little further which can be translated in to the fact that he aspires to have been born in India.

Biroom: What I basically see in Indian cinema – perhaps this has something to do with my watching romantic films frequently -- are such things as love, patience, forgiveness, etc. I don't think I am exaggerating it if I say that I sometimes see my going to the video houses and watching such films there as going to a church to attend mass sermon. After watching such Indian movies, I find myself being extremely decent. Because there are so many things about them that make me happy, I wish I was born there.

In essence, one important point that this study revealed is that Indian films provide themes which have a perceived cultural resemblance to their lived experiences. Interestingly, the interviewees' accounts of how they make sense of such similarities are structured by related binary oppositions such as tradition versus modernity; communality versus individualism; morally acceptable codes versus taboos, etc. This discursive pattern that I noticed from the interviewees' accounts are unconsciously used by the viewers to make sense of films, and they do that by comparing the first elements of the pattern as being depicted in Indian movies to their lived reality and by contrasting the second elements of the same pattern as embodiments of European way of life to the lived experiences of both ours and Indians'. Such is the importance of cultural identification in the reception of foreign media materials. This implies that instead of taking in such media products unquestioningly, local audiences derive their own subjective meanings on the basis of their lived culture and relating them to the values which are deeply entrenched in their culture.

5.2 Bollywood Movies as Enablers of 'Symbolic Distancing' and 'Escapism'

Symbolic distancing as a theory is put forward by ethnographic theorists in response to media imperialism theorists to show them how invalid their thesis is. Symbolic distancing represents one of the ways in which we can understand how local audiences actively

appropriate global media products in light of their lived culture. According to Thompson, one of the critics of the cultural imperialism thesis, the significance of such active appropriation of global media by local audiences can be seen from the point of view of its potential to provide meanings which enable "...the accentuation of symbolic distancing from the spatio – temporal contexts of everyday life" (1995: 175). In other words, part of the attraction of global media products for local audiences lies in the ability of the audience to make meaning out of them within the context of their lived social conditions.

Such experiences of symbolic distancing, Thompson further argues, enables individuals "...to take some distance from the conditions of their day-to-day lives – not literally but symbolically, imaginatively, vicariously" (1995: 175). Thompson notes that this process provides the local audiences with the opportunity to be "... able to gain some conception; however partial, of ways of life and life conditions which differ significantly from their own" (1995: 175). The partial conception of ways of life which are different from their own and which they come to gain as a result of their experience of symbolic distancing is likely to bring out in the individuals the ability to critically look at and reflect on their lived culture.

A particular example of symbolic distancing worth raising here is one that Strelitz (2005: 116) provided relating it to themes emerged in a number of interviews he conducted with African students. He writes:

A South African example of symbolic distancing is the appropriation of American gangster styles evident in Hollywood movies by the *tsotsi* gangsters of the 1940s and 1950s. The American gangsters' opposition to the dominant normative values reflected, and gave meaning to, the *tsotsis*' own attempt to create a cultural space uncontaminated by both dominant apartheid discourse and the social and political conservatism of their parent culture. (Strelitz, 2005: 116)

What became clear in my study was that part of the pleasure derived from watching Bollywood films lies in the active role played by the viewers to evaluate aspects of what they see in the films on the basis of their subjective life experiences. An example of such reflection on one's lived culture in light of one's viewing experience with foreign media can

be found in the following excerpt taken from an interview with Facil. Here Facil compares our attachment to Ethiopian traditional values to that of the Indians', and finds that we are different in that regard.

Facil: As to me, what I have gathered from Indian films is that Indians love and respect their traditional values and culture. However, we Ethiopians are very much influenced by Europeans from the ordinary things such as ways of dressing to others. Indians, for example, instead of burying the dead, still practice burning it. Actually, this traditional practice is associated with their religion, Hinduism. ...So, it is probably this religious difference that has brought about varying funeral practices between the two societies. However, from the dresses that we wear during grieving to our funeral practice, I would say that we are influenced by, hence resemble, Europeans. Indians, on the other hand, have kept their traditions and cultural values intact.

This excerpt reminds us of what Thompson writes about how global media images can provide a resource for individuals to think critically about their own lives and life conditions (1995: 175). The fact that we are usually dressed up and bury our dead in the European style constitutes an aspect of Facil's lived reality. What he is actually doing here is that he is evaluating his lived culture in the context of Bollywood films from which he singles out the idea that Indians retain and cherish their traditional values and culture more than we actually could.

Another interesting point emerged during the course of the interviews was that Bollywood movies often times help viewers distance themselves from their everyday lived reality, which can be reflected by how they sometimes wish to imaginatively and symbolically find themselves in certain aspects of the culture they see in the movies. The following three excerpts seem to illustrate this particular theme.

Mesay: For example, what I wish we could have here is their color holiday⁷. It gives me a great pleasure to think of this graphic holiday

⁷ This festival of colors is called HOLI, and it is a popular Hindu spring festival observed in India, Guyana, and Nepal. On the first day, burning of the demoness Holika, Hiranyakashipu's sister, in a huge bonfires at night. It is called as *Kama dahanam* in Andhra Pradesh. On the second day, known as

where everybody is literally covered up with powder of varying colors. It looks nice when everyone celebrates the day, throwing powder at each other and singing and dancing and all that.... Sometimes I even wish that I could find myself in their midst, getting crazy for few hours. You see, this holiday sometimes reminds me of ‘Timket’⁸. Our ‘Timket’ has a religious touch, and because of that I don’t think people can be as free and crazy as they are allowed to be while celebrating the color holiday of India.

Facil: From what I have seen in many Indian movies, there is this fasting⁹ that wives are supposed to engage themselves with for the sake and respect of their husbands. I like that, and I sometimes wish we could have that here in Ethiopia.

Elias: You see, there is this one emotion that I feel whenever I watch Indian movies. You know what that is? ...I sometimes feel this sudden desire growing inside of me to act like the actors in the movies I am watching. What I mean is that in my imagination I feel like I am in the world of the film I am watching, and I wish to myself, if I were him or her, I would do this or that. When I look back on those occasions, I am sometimes embarrassed and I say to myself, come-on, it’s just a film.

What we can see from these examples is how viewers symbolically and imaginatively distance themselves from their lived reality by wishing to either find themselves in certain aspects of the culture they experience through viewing films or alter certain aspects of their lived reality. The subjective nature of this experience and its recognition by the viewers as being just a wish “show that the ‘essentialist approach to the globalization of the media is not an accurate description of consumers’ experience (Morley cited in Strelitz, 2005: 118).

Dhulhendi, people spend the day throwing colored powder and water at each other. The spring season, during which the weather changes, is believed to cause viral fever and cold. Thus, the playful throwing of the colored powders has a medicinal significance: the colors are traditionally made of Neem, Kumkum, Haldi, Bilva, and other medicinal herbs prescribed by Āyurvedic doctors. [see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holi>].

⁸ Timket is the greatest festival of the Ethiopian year, falling just 2 weeks after Ethiopian Christmas. It is actually a 3-day affair preceded by the eve of Timket when the dramatic processions take place through a night of fasting, to the great day itself and the commemoration of Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. [see <http://www.ethiopianriftvalleysafaris.com/timket.htm>].

⁹ Karwa Chawth is an annual fast observed by married Hindu women in North India for the long life and well-being of their husbands. The women break their fast only after the moon is sighted/worshipped. The husbands feed the first morsel of food to their wives. Men and children excitedly run in and out of the house racing to announce the first sighting of the moon. [see <http://pr3rna.wordpress.com/2007/10/31/karva-chauth-trends/>].

The notion of escape, writes Assefa, represents an idea which is closely related to the argument of symbolic distancing (2005: 21). Quoting Walkerdine (1989; 1990), she further goes on to say that it is advanced "...to explain how global media texts are appropriated by people in differentiated contexts and in differentiated manner than explained by the cultural homogenizations feared by the media imperialism thesis" (Assefa: 2005: 21). An example worth citing here is the escapist role played by Hollywood musicals during the American depression of the 1930s. According to an article entitled 'Hollywood in the depression', "Hollywood's fast moving innovations" shown in Comedies, gangster films and musicals proved to be of great help in contributing "an escape and a sense of control" to the American audience stricken by unemployment and poverty during the great depression of the 1930s (see <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/FILM/hollywooddepression.html>, page 1). In the same article, Dixton Wector, a historian, is quoted saying: "The content of the motion picture still was designed for escape, the majority reflecting the tastes of tired or jaded adults a never-never land of luxury and melodramas, sex and sentiment" (see <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/FILM/hollywooddepression.html>, page 1).

In a similar manner, the overall consensus discovered in the study among the majority of the informants, who are poor youth, was that watching Indian films was valuable in providing escape from their everyday lives. Their poverty obviously presents them with particular difficulties in their day-to-day lives, and the readings that they make of Indian movies show how much these movies allow them to escape these particular poverty-related difficulties. This particular use of the movies seems to resonate with these youth coming from their particular class background. Anwar, 19, who has completed high school when he was 18 but has been idle ever since, says:

Well, my parents are poor and I haven't been good at school. And as a result, I wasn't able to secure high scores in my school leaving exams that would enable me to join universities. Since I got nowhere else to go, I spend my time watching Indian movies in these video houses. You know what is surprising to me when I watch certain movies there? I completely forget all my problems and I feel like I am part of that world of the Indians. And that makes me happy a lot. I see the major

actors wearing clothes and living in houses that are so wonderful and fascinating to me that I sometimes even forget that I don't have any of that.

For Anwar, the affluence that he sees characters living in and the very colorful and fashionable clothes - both traditional and modern - that they wear in many of their songs provide him with an escape from the poverty-stricken life of his. In a similar manner, here is what Facil and Tamiru, 16, had to say when I asked them whether the movies they watch provide any way out from their lived reality:

Tamiru: Watching Indian films enables me to forget my problems for some time. When the film is over, it's inevitable that you go back to your problems. But the potential of the films in allowing you to forget your difficulties for a while is something that has to be taken seriously. However, after three or four hours, you are bound to return to where you were initially. For example, if I fail in my exams, I can't help it but worry about it. So, to pull myself together and forget about what happened I go to the video houses nearby and watch Bollywood movies.

Facil: Sometimes, you might get emotionally disturbed for various reasons. I personally resort to watching Indian films whenever I get mad at somebody or I get sad about something. For example, I sometimes ask my mom for some money when I am extremely broke, and she usually turns me down saying that she doesn't have any money and that I should go get a job. That kind of remark really makes me mad. When I watch a film, I completely forget my problem for the time being. Fully immersed in the film, I later find myself in a situation where I say to myself, "What if this or that happens?" That really takes a lot off my mind.

One important point made by them is that the get-away watching Indian movies allow them to have is only temporary in the sense that their problems and worries resurface themselves right after the screening of the movies is over. For both Facil and Tamiru, however, part of the attraction of Bollywood movies lies in the potential of the movies to allow them to escape from their own problems for a while.

In relation to the points discussed so far, a positive attitude towards songs featured at various intervals in a movie constitutes part of the reason for what it is about watching Bollywood

movies that the youth are particularly drawn to. Daniel, 20, says that if it were not for the songs, he would not have bothered that much to watch Indian films. He feels that the songs are so appealing and essential in Indian films that they tell part of the story in them.

Daniel: It is basically their songs that have made me love Indian films. The songs themselves tell stories in relation to the main storyline of the film. I see them as extensions of what is in the film. Therefore, I guess the songs are spices for the films.

So, part of the lure of watching Bollywood movies lies in them allowing the youth to relax with songs and dances which systematically break up the narrative structure of the films, rendering them the effect of not being boring to the youth.

5.3 The Notion of Cultural Domination Reconsidered

It's been discussed in both Chapter One and Chapter Two that media imperialism is premised on the idea that 'Third World' developing countries are being culturally dominated by powerful nations of the West, especially the United States of America, through their communications system (Watson and Hill, 1984: 173). This theory proposes that being caught up in the predicament of consuming media filled with the Western way of life, Third world countries' cultures will eventually turn out to be nothing but swept away. In other words, the outcome of this form of cultural influence is likely to be one of cultural homogenization (McQuail, 1983; Rantanen, 2005).

A problem often associated with cultural imperialism thesis is the notion that texts, no matter where they are consumed or by whom they are consumed, will have more or less uniform meanings. This seems to be what is meant by cultural homogenization, which refers to the weaker nations' culture getting swamped by the more dominant culture of the powerful nations. One of the ethnographic critiques, however, which forms the basic theoretical ground for this study, suggests that individuals experience with foreign media is characterized by subjectivity and that meanings derived from such media are polysemic in nature. According to Thompson, what is at the heart of this subjective experience of

interacting with the media is individuals' ability to "...draw on material and symbolic resources available to them, as well as on the interpretive assistance offered by those with whom they interact in their day-to-day lives" (1995: 172).

All the examples that we have seen so far point to the fact that individuals' sense-making experience of media messages is marked by their active role in relation to their lived reality. This makes it hard for us to imagine such an experience in terms other than one of subjectivity. This recognition of the active role of the audience and of the plural meanings of texts makes the media imperialism thesis too simplistic an explanation for how consumers experience media images.

The following example is taken from one of the in-depth interviews conducted with Yared, 20, and it is illustrative of how critical and inquisitive, rather than simply accepting, viewers can be in their negotiation with the media.

Yared: I would say that my love for Indian films has really made me reflect on and like my culture rather than make me feel ashamed of it. In my opinion, the reason why Indians have managed to produce such beautiful movies is because they make sure that they incorporate certain aspects of their culture into their films. If you ask a lot of Ethiopians who enjoy Indian films, what they can first and foremost tell you about Bollywood movies is that Indians are dedicated to their culture. Thus, as far as this is concerned, you are likely to ask yourself, with regard to this, where are we at? This is because our traditions and culture are definitely fading unless we take pride in saying to ourselves that except in the cities, our traditional values and cultural assets are still there in the rural parts of the nation.

Yared's statement above shows how watching Bollywood movies served him as a reflecting tool by using which he critically thinks about his culture and thus starts to give more respect to it. When he said, "my love for Indian films has really made me reflect on and like my culture more, rather than making me ashamed of it", he is unconsciously contradicting the idea that local audiences let go of their cherished traditional values and culture as a result of their exposure to a more dominant cultural forms coming from some where else in the world. This was not unlike what was reiterated by many of the informants who were of the view that

their experience of watching Indian films reinforced their identification with the Ethiopian culture, hence enabling them to get in touch with and retain their Ethiopian identity.

I have noted earlier that the notion of cultural domination is at the heart of cultural imperialism thesis. I have also indicated that one way to understand this notion is to look at how cultural imperialism theorists imply the passivity of the audience in the sense that audiences uncritically incorporate media images. All the examples that we have been considering so far, however, seem to suggest that that might not be the case. To further substantiate this claim, I asked the informants if there is anything they dislike about Indian movies in an attempt to see whether or not they are unquestioning of the movies they watch. Here is what Daniel and Tamiru had to say:

Daniel: What I sometimes find awfully disgusting is the presence of scenes which show events highly exaggerated. This really ruins the things which I feel are good from the particular movie I am watching.

Tamiru: Like I told you, I have a great liking for Indian films. However, if I somehow guess and come to know how a certain film is going to end, I personally don't have the desire to continue watching that film...What I really hate about many of the Indian films I've seen so far is that their end is usually similar. It's not pleasant to watch movies which have a happy ending all the time.

Tamiru is commenting on the narrative structure of many Bollywood movies. From watching several Indian films, he came to know that they are usually characterized by a happy ending, and this, he says, diminishes the amount of pleasure that he could derive from the movies. The same effect holds true for Daniel who comments on the sense of exaggeration that he witnesses in certain scenes of movies characterized by depicting events which are action-oriented.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, one of the objectives of this study was seeing if there is a need for reconsidering the nature and direction of influence conceptualized in media imperialism thesis. It has also been noted in Chapter Two that some writers think of cultural imperialism as being comparable to the process of Americanization in which the

dominating role is taken up by the US whereas developing nations are left with no option but to subordinate to the dominant value systems emanating from the cultural codes of the US. This form of cultural influence is perceived to follow a uni-directional flow, which is from the West to the ‘Third World’ nations of the world (Watson and Hill, 1984: 173).

In this regard, it may be argued that the coming into the picture of such regional media images as produced by nations like India raises the question whether media/cultural imperialism thesis is adequate in terms of explaining the overwhelmingly complicated global exchange and transfer of cultural materials. This can partly be explained by the rapid expansion of Indian cinema which has been referred to, in Chapter Three, as attaining a considerable market reach in places such as the British Caribbean, Fiji, East and South Africa, the U.K., United States, Canada, and the Middle East. This fact makes one wonder if there is a need to reconsider the nature and direction of cultural influence perceived to be existent in media/cultural imperialism thesis, and it appears to be safe to suggest that the findings of this study point in that direction.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present and interpret the appropriation and use of Bollywood movies by Ethiopian poor youth based on the active audience theory and some of the basic ethnographic critiques of the media imperialism thesis. The findings of the study showed that the fundamental proposition of the thesis, which posits the homogenizing role of the Western media in terms of propagating Western values and interests at the expense of the weaker ‘Third World’ nations such as Ethiopia, is to be challenged. It became evident in the study that the meanings participants make of the movies are characterized by subjectivity and that in their negotiation with the movies they actively make sense of them by relating and contrasting them to their lived reality and even by rejecting some of the messages which they think are inconsistent with values that they highly cherish. In short, it can be argued that the youths’ obsession with consuming Bollywood movies is not comparable to the loss of their cultural identity as Ethiopians with their own cultural values.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I attempt to recapitulate on some of the findings that came out of the study. There are two things that I basically attempt to accomplish in this chapter: (1) summarizing what the research has been all about, how it was undertaken and the major findings that I discovered, and (2) winding up the thesis with suggestions for further research.

6.2 Summary

This study under the title of “**An Investigation into the Reception of Bollywood Movies by Ethiopian Youth from a Poor Family Background in Addis Ababa**”, has been aimed at exploring how and why the Ethiopian poor youth in Addis Abba negotiate with and make sense of the regional media messages that they are attracted to as represented by Bollywood movies produced in India as part of their everyday lived reality. My investigation into the phenomenon of Bollywood movies-viewing experience of the youth reveals that the video houses that the youth visit on a regular basis constitute a shared male cultural space. The video houses being a shared cultural space for the males have something to do with the stereotypical roles prescribed to males and females by the patriarchal society of Ethiopia. What this means is that it is socially unacceptable for females to enter such places. This is, however, far from implying that all females have no desire to watch movies in such places because one may see few female viewers in some of the video houses by chance. One can also see that such female viewers are strongly against the patriarchal norm of the Ethiopian society. In the same manner, the video houses, in addition to being venues for passing their

free time, also function as symbolic space where the poor youth form a marginalized social interaction and solidarity by the virtue of the fact that they share certain socially frowned upon habits such as chewing chat and smoking cigarettes.

In my attempt to examine how and why Ethiopian youth from a poor family background make meaning out of Bollywood movies in the context of their day-to-day lives, I employed observation, focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews. The observations I conducted in the video houses were small scale, and they proved to be helpful in that they enabled me to gain some firsthand insight into how the youth consume Bollywood movies in the video houses as part of their daily lived reality. The interviews, on the other hand, were of great value to the research in the sense that they helped me see the appropriation of the media messages from the perspectives of the youth themselves. From their own reiterations about their film viewing experiences, I was able to understand what meanings they make of the movies they watch and how.

My attempt to make sense of the quite considerable amount of the data gathered was based on the media /cultural imperialism thesis and its critiques. Particularly, the active audience theory, along with the other major ethnographic critiques, put forward in response to media imperialism thesis constitutes the theoretical framework of the study. Grounded on the assumptions of such critiques, the findings of the study about the attraction of the youth to, and their fascination with, Indian films have been presented, and they are categorized into four major sections including the video-viewing houses and the youth in Addis; cultural identification generated from the viewing of Bollywood movies; the potential of Bollywood movies as enablers of ‘symbolic distancing’ and ‘escapism’; and the notion of cultural domination reconsidered.

One of the findings of the study which challenges the idea that audiences passively and uncritically incorporate media messages is that all the youth actively interpret the messages from the Bollywood movies they watch by reflecting on them in light of their lived culture. In this manner, it was found out in the study that cultural identification represents one of the chief sources of pleasure for the viewers of Indian films. This outcome of the study is further

strengthened by the finding that the youth distance themselves symbolically from their everyday lived reality, which can be reflected by their recognition of it as being just a wish that they are incapable of turning it into a reality. The significance of this can be seen in the potential of the movies to enable these viewers to forget their poverty-related problems at least for a while.

The subjectivity of the viewing experience exemplified by the plurality of the meanings made of the Bollywood movies by the youth is a challenge to the premises of the media imperialism thesis. It thus follows from this that the notion of homogenization as proposed by proponents of the thesis is a distorted assumption in the sense that it fails to accurately describe the consumption of foreign media messages by local audiences. Consequently, it might be argued that local audiences in their interaction with media messages produced in settings far removed from theirs actively interpret them in light of the subjective values, aspirations and concerns within their lives.

Finally, to understand how the impact of globalization can be felt in Ethiopia, I would say that it is very important to acknowledge the existence of homogenization and heterogenization as possible consequences of globalization. Rather than giving for a dichotomous either-or proposition, I would agree with Rantanen in the possibility for the two processes happening at the same time, “depending on specific circumstances” (2005:74). Ethiopia, as part of the world-wide trend of influence, is subject to globalization, which I think can be exemplified by the increased flow into the country and consumptions by the local audience of foreign produced cultural material of the global media. At face value this seems to point to the homogenizing outcome of mediated globalization as far as cultural relations are concerned, and that needs to be understood as an outcome of globalization depicting the vast reach of media products produced in a certain region to the rest of the world.

The scene with Hollywood and Bollywood movies, coupled with our local media’s dependence on global news agencies and global media companies for international news, seems to be indicative of the homogenizing outcome of globalization through the global media to a certain extent. However, it is important to recognize that “media penetration

cannot be equal to cultural domination” (Noh, 2007: 5). The homogenizing effect of the global media that cultural imperialism theorists are against is not exclusive for I believe that there are other variables for us to consider which bring about heterogenizing effect on the local audience. The two points that feedback into my argument for the heterogenizing role of the media in the globalization process are (1) the complex nature of cultural flow and (2) the individual’s experience of consuming cultural materials. Boyd-Barrett, quoting Tomlinson, mentions the “complexity” and “...the patterns of difference and variety across and within nations and cultures” while at the same time cautioning as about the bigger picture of political economy which is attuned to ownership of the media and to the disparity and unevenness in people’s access to global media (1997: 148). The local audience in Ethiopia, for instance, does not watch American movies only and hence their lack of exclusive influence on the audience. Many people consume Indian movies, and the number of people who watch locally produced films is also significant. Therefore, it might be argued that media/cultural imperialism thesis should be reconsidered for there seems to be a need to give some room for explaining the coming into the picture of certain regional media such as Indian media in the complex cultural exchange witnessed in the world today.

Watson seems to be of the opinion that individuals are active in their interaction with the media, which in turn points to the notion of “the complexity of the audience” (2003: 80). A lot of audiences in Ethiopia consume global media products, but the way they make sense of them may not necessarily be similar to the way they were encoded initially. To assume that people let go of highly cherished values embedded in their culture just because they have much exposure to the global media is comparable to disempowering them and robbing them of their capacity of resistance to contents that they don’t want to be influenced by otherwise. My argument here is that the strategic role of the media in the process of globalization should be seen in terms of both their homogenizing and heterogenizing impact.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

I feel obliged to acknowledge at this point that Assefa’s work on the interpretation of American Action movies by Ethiopian youth has been of great assistance in enabling me to

take notice of her recommendation for conducting research on the local appropriation of the products of regional film industries such as Bollywood. This research partly owes it to her work in that her study served mine a great deal as a precedent example that I could draw on.

Similarly, I take the liberty of suggesting that further research should be undertaken at a micro level. What I mean by this is that the four major themes discovered in the study should be taken one at a time in a single research endeavor, which will make it easier for researchers to probe more deeply into the phenomenon, hence enabling them to come up with a thicker and deeper account of viewers' experience with media messages along the lines of the themes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Thematic questions

I. Little video-viewing houses and their operation as cultural space for the youth.

1. How do these little video- viewing houses operate?
2. What is the composition of the visitors like? Are they exclusively male or a combination of both genders?
3. Why do they come to these houses? Just to watch the movies or are there other reasons as well?
4. Why do the youth prefer frequenting these informal cultural spaces to visiting cinema or watching moves at home?
5. Are these houses a cultural space? What is actually going on within these houses?

II. A Particular Kind of Youth Identity Creation

1. How do the youth view themselves in relation to their consumption of Bollywood movies more or less on a daily basis?
2. Why and how do they come to a particular perception of their identity in the construction and confirmation of their identity?
3. Would there be any reason to think that these video houses impose cultural influence on the youth in terms of how they view the world?

III. Cultural Identification

1. Has the watching of Bollywood movies reinforced the way the youth perceive their indigenous culture and lived reality?

2. Are there any aspects of the movies/characters they attempt to relate to aspects of their culture?
3. How do they identify themselves and their culture with what they watch in the movies?
4. How do they view their own culture after watching Bollywood movies?
5. Do the characters they are in favor of have anything to do with their perception of their own identity?
6. Why do the youth like watching Bollywood movies?
7. Which kinds of movies do they like the most and why?

IV. Symbolic Distancing and Escape

1. Do the movies get the youth to reflect on their lived reality and compare it to that of the movies they watch?
2. Would there be any temptation on the part of the youth to sometimes wish to be and act like the characters they are in favor of?
3. Do the movies provide any way out from the youth's lived reality?
4. What is it about watching Bollywood movies that these youth are particularly drawn to?
5. Does it have anything to do with their lived reality?
6. Is it the melodramatic nature of the movies or the songs or violence in them that the youth give special attention to?

V. Cultural Domination

1. Has watching Bollywood movies changed the youth's attitude to Indian culture and Ethiopian culture?
2. Is there anything that the youth dislike about Indian movies?
3. Do the youth believe that their obsession with consuming Bollywood movies is comparable to the loss of their cultural identity as Ethiopian youth with their own cultural values?

Appendix II

Interview Guides

I. Interview Guide for the Owners of Video-Viewing Houses

1. Can you kindly tell me your name and your daily responsibilities at this video-viewing house?
2. Do you remember when this house was established?
3. Would you tell me who your regular customers are? (In terms of age, gender and professional status)
4. On average, how many people visit your video house per day?
5. On average, how many movies do you screen per day?
6. What facilities do you provide for your regular customers?
7. What are the most popular Bollywood movies that are shown in your establishment?
8. Would you say that watching Bollywood produced movies have influenced the youth's perception of the world and their own locality in any way possible?
9. Are there any behavioral changes you noticed in the youth after they have watched Bollywood movies in your video house?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your customers' experience of watching (viewing) Indian films?

Thank you very much for your time!

II. Interview Guide for individual in-depth interviews

1. Would you kindly tell me your name and how old you are and why you start watching Bollywood movies and visiting video houses which screen them if you do that at all?
3. If you go to the video houses, how often do you visit them?
4. Do you like watching Indian movies? Why?
5. Which Bollywood movie(s) have you liked the most? Why?
6. From the movie(s) you remember liking the most, which part do you like and remember the most?
7. Who is (are) your favorite actor(s) character(s)? What is it about them you like?
8. Now that there are translated versions of many of the movies, which one do you prefer, the translated version or the original? Why?
9. What do these movies mean to you in terms of how you view the world?
10. How do you relate the story line in the movies to your own lived reality? It is similar or different? In what way?
11. What is your perception of India?
12. After watching the movies, what do you think of the culture you live in?
13. Apart from Bollywood movies, what other movies do you watch (Chinese, American, British, Japanese . . .)? How often?
14. Would there be anything else you would like to tell me about the Bollywood movies you have ever watched that we have not discussed so far?

Thank you very much for you time!

III. Interview Guide for Translators

1. Can you please tell me your name and what you do for a living?
2. When and how did you start translating Bollywood movies into Amharic?
3. What is your knowledge of the Hindi language like and how did you develop it?
4. How is the demand for translated versions of Indian movies?
5. How do you think are people taking the translation? Are they happy about it?
6. What do you personally feel about translations being done by a single voice in a movie?
7. What do you think contributed to your ending up becoming a translator? Do you like Indian movies your self? Why?

Thank you very much for your time!