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To cite this article: Mario Rutten & Sanderien Verstappen (2015) Reflections on Migration through Film: Screening of an Anthropological Documentary on Indian Youth in London, *Visual Anthropology*, 28:5, 398-421, DOI: [10.1080/08949468.2015.1085795](https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2015.1085795)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2015.1085795>



Published online: 22 Oct 2015.



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Reflections on Migration through Film: Screening of an Anthropological Documentary on Indian Youth in London

Mario Rutten and Sanderien Verstappen

Visual anthropologists have seldom discussed audience reactions, and those that have done so have tended to focus on the reactions of informants featured in their films. This article shows that collecting and examining responses from a wider range of audiences, and broadening the discussion on the subject of the audience, are useful in further exploring film as a tool in anthropological research. Research on responses elicited by the film *Living like a Common Man* [2011], which was screened to varied audiences across India and Europe, produced additional insights on the social position of the film characters and suggested new directions for further studies on ambivalent and contradictory aspects of migration.

A postman rings the bell of a house in East London. A young woman in green pyjamas opens the door. She receives a letter. Inside the house, the girl opens the envelope and finds that the UK Border Agency has rejected her partner's visa extension. Her dreams of a life with him in Britain are shattered. When the phone rings, and she breaks the news to her partner, she starts crying.

—Scene from the documentary *Living like a Common Man*

Twenty-five people watch the scene in silence. Afterwards, some admit they had difficulties keeping their eyes dry through this moment in the film.

—Persistence Resistance Film Festival, New Delhi, February 13, 2012

One hundred and twenty-six graduate students watch the scene unfolding. When the girl on screen starts to cry, students start giggling. While the crying on screen continues, the laughter amidst the audience increases. Young men at the back of the room mimic the sobbing and sniffing sounds, adding to the fun.

—NS Patel Arts College, Anand town, central Gujarat, March 6, 2012

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These two contrasting reactions to the same scene illustrate how differently films can be received by different people. While an audience at a documentary film festival in New Delhi is moved by the misfortune of the young woman as they watch the film in silence, one in a college of the rural town of Anand, Gujarat, reacts with laughter to the emotional distress displayed. The varied reactions are in line with findings in reception studies that suggest that audiences are active and that media content is open to interpretation [Hall 1973, (1980) 2005; Morley 1980, 1981; Jensen and Rosengren 1990; Moores 2000; Shively 1992; Verstappen and Rutten 2007]. Through different ways of “decoding” [Hall *ibid.*], audiences attach different meanings to media images and vary in their evaluation of them. Different reactions to media content are said to be related to the socio-cultural and socio-economic background of the audiences: audiences contribute to social meaning production “through their membership of socially specific interpretive communities” [Jensen and Rosengren *ibid.*: 222].

Within visual anthropology the notion of varied receptions of images has received ample attention. Authors emphasize that films are open to multiple interpretations and that one cannot presume a single reading of a film: “... the multivocality of visual images means they can address different audiences in quite different ways, creating a ‘problem of audiences’” [Banks 2001: 140; also Henley 2000: 215–216, 2004: 119; MacDougall 1978, 1998: 76–77;]. Reception studies of anthropological films have mainly dealt with two categories of audience, “self-seeing” audiences and “specialized” audiences [Baudry 1996]. With regard to self-seeing audiences, visual anthropologists have elicited reactions from informants by showing them footage of themselves, and by asking for verbal responses to their own (filmed) behavior [Banks 2001: 96–99; De Maaker 2000; Engelbrecht 1996: 171; Henley 2000: 221; Lewis 2004: 116–120; Nijland 1989; Pink 2006: 89; Postma and Crawford 2006; Torresan 2011; Vávrová 2014]. The purpose of this film elicitation technique is to distil additional information about the topic of the film that will give insights for further research and/or help in the editing process. In some cases the reactions of the viewers have been included in the final product itself.¹

Apart from these practices of elicitation with ethnographic films among self-seeing audiences, there have been several experiments with elicitation among specialized audiences, especially among anthropology students. These studies have focused on the way in which classical anthropological films are received in an educational setting in Western countries [Martinez 1995, 1996; Tambs-Lyche and Waage 1984; Wogan 2006]. They address the question of whether anthropological films contribute to a better understanding of and empathy with the exotic “Other,” rather than reinforcing processes of “othering.” Evidence so far points in both directions. In written responses to the film *The Ax Fight* [Asch and Chagnon 1975], students reacted in “aberrant” and stereotypical ways. Seeing the film therefore strengthened rather than challenged preconceptions of “primitive” Others [Martinez 1995: 66]. Similar conclusions were drawn in a study on the reactions of schoolchildren in Norway to *The Nuer* [Harris and Gardner 1971]. Viewers partly identified with yet also found the actions of the Nuer “disgusting” [Tambs-Lyche and Waage 1989]. Research on reactions to the film *First Contact* [Connolly and Anderson 1983] shows that

the audiences' laughter was not so much based on the viewers' sense of cultural superiority as on incongruities captured in the film, thus challenging the notion that ethnographic films mainly reinforce audiences' stereotypes [Wogan 2006].

Studies that deal with other audience reactions, beyond self-seeing audiences (main characters) and specialized audiences (students), are rarer in visual anthropology.² Some authors argue that visual anthropologists should direct their films to peers and students only, like writing anthropologists do with their written output.³ In practice however many ethnographic films have been screened on television and/or in cinema halls during (non-academic) documentary film festivals. With the increasing possibilities of sharing videos at little cost, through light-weight data carriers and online forums, anthropological films are gaining a wider audience. This evokes new questions about audience reception that have so far been overlooked in visual anthropology. Although many authors have exposed the problems with filmic representations of other cultures, few have investigated ethnographically the way such representations are actually received by specific audiences. As Jay Ruby notes, "The current state of knowledge about how viewers respond to ethnographic film... is limited" [2000: 181; also Banks 1992: 124, 1996: 121; Martinez 1992: 131; Wogan 2006: 14].

With the wider screening of anthropological films it is both possible and relevant to start studying their reception by a wider variety of audience, including self-identifying audiences: a "population of viewers [that] has strong reasons for identifying with the filmed people" [Baudry 1996: 151]. A rare example of this is a study by Jhala [1996], based on the screening of two classical anthropological films to a village audience in Gujarat: *A Man Called "Bee": Studying the Yanomamö* and *The Ax Fight*, both by Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon [1971 and 1975]. Along with an overall feeling of superiority among these Indian viewers toward the Yanomamö people in the film, the specific reflections on the film were related to the social-cultural, occupational and gender backgrounds of the audience, who recognized some aspects of Yanomamö behavior. Moreover, it turned out that there were differences between the ways viewers reacted at the screening in public and during private conversations afterwards.

This brings up questions about how the social backgrounds of viewers influence their responses to a film. Apart from occupation, values and gender, how do other factors such as class, location and age affect audience identification? Jhala's study also raises questions about the dynamics of the screening itself. What responses are presented during discussions in a cinema hall after public screenings, and what responses are more easily expressed in private conversation or in written statements? This article tries to advance discussion on these questions through an exploration of reactions to the anthropological documentary *Living like a Common Man* given by various viewers.

SCREENING *LIVING LIKE A COMMON MAN*

Living like a Common Man [Verstappen, Rutten and Makay 2011] follows the daily life of young Indian migrants in a paying guest-house in east London, UK.

The bunker-beds in the rooms are filled with young men and women, all of them recently arrived from central Gujarat on temporary work or study visas. The film explores their dreams and migration motivations as well as their everyday experiences of survival and adaptation to a new environment. The protagonists are seven young migrants—three couples and one unmarried man—and their parents in India, who express their views on the migration of their sons and daughters. The film was shot from May 2008 to March 2009 during eight field trips to London and one to India. It builds on long-term anthropological research in central Gujarat and among migrants from the region in London [Rutten 1995; Rutten and Patel 2003].

Between 2011 and 2014, *Living like a Common Man* was shown at sixteen film festivals, twenty-seven times in educational settings, sixteen times as part of public events, and in the course of twelve private meetings in living-room settings. Most screenings were in India and Europe, more particularly in the UK and the Netherlands. The filmmakers were present at four of the sixteen film festivals,⁴ and at all other screenings. They made detailed notes of the audible reactions during the screenings and held discussions afterwards with the audiences.⁵ In most educational settings in Gujarat and the Netherlands the film was shown to graduate and postgraduate social science students either as a separate event or as a guest lecture, and viewers were asked to fill in a short questionnaire before and after the film. In this way additional written information was collected from 530 students at four screenings in central Gujarat and from 362 students at seven screenings in the Netherlands.⁶

The film was thus shown to a variety of audiences. First, the seven main characters of the film, some of whom were still in London while others had returned to Gujarat, saw the film in their living rooms, with only family members and friends present. Secondly, people of Gujarati and Indian origin in the UK and the Netherlands saw the film at public events organized by migrant associations. Thirdly, urban Indian middle-class audiences were reached during film festivals and at public and private screenings in several Indian cities: New Delhi, Bangalore (Bengaluru), Bombay (Mumbai), Ahmedabad, Surat and Baroda (Vadodara). Fourthly, Gujarati youths saw the film at four screenings in graduate and postgraduate colleges in rural towns of central Gujarat, the home region of most of the young men and women in the film. Finally, Dutch and international graduate and postgraduate students at four universities in the Netherlands saw the film in their classroom.

The screenings elicited varied reactions among these different audiences. Although various forms of “othering” were noted, we refer to these audiences as “self-identifying” audiences [Baudry 1996], as all of them could relate to the people in the film in one way or another. The main theme of the film, that young Indian migrants in London experience downward social mobility as a result of their move to the UK, was grasped by the diverse audiences. At the same time there were significant differences in the responses of audiences, who used different frames of reference while evaluating and interpreting the film. The variation in their responses was partly related to differences in cultural and socio-economic background of the viewers, and partly to differences in their individual and familial migration histories. Of the different audiences it was the

urban Indian middle class that pointed out most vocally that they felt estranged from the film characters.

In our analysis of these findings we employ concepts from audience studies within the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies have explored different ways in which audiences “read” or “decode” media content [Hall 1973; Moores 2000: 12–27], and have shown that the extent to which content is “hailed” or “heckled” [Clayman 1993: 119] by audiences is related to their social-economic position, which limits the “array of codes and discourses which are available—the interpretative ‘repertoires’ to hand” [Moores 2000: 21]. Moreover, groups broadly occupying the same class position can offer different responses [Morley 1980, 1981], making it imperative to “avoid a crude sociological reductionism which would take these factors to determine decoding practices in a mechanistic way (e.g., all working class people, as a direct result of their class position, will decode messages in manner X)” [Morley 1981: 10, cited in Moores 2000: 21–22]. In attempting to understand why different audiences respond differently, it is imperative to study the social context of viewing, both the wider structural context and the micro-locality of viewing.

Audience studies that highlighted participatory involvement of audiences in constructing cinema experiences generate additional clues for our analysis. Srinivas [2002: 166; 1998] shows how audiences in cinema halls in Bangalore are collectively constructing fiction films, through singing along with songs, talking to the characters, giving them advice and sometimes mocking them. Such audience behavior was observed at some of the screenings of *Living like a Common Man*, particularly in central Gujarat. Discussion sessions after the screenings were also collective performances, during which audience members made clear to other audience members their own position in relation to the main characters of the film. Those who did not fully agree with the dominant reading of the film voiced in public had their own way of conveying their views—sometimes in written statements in the questionnaires, sometimes in private conversation.

THIS IS US: SELF-SEEING AUDIENCES

Living like a Common Man was first screened in the house in east London where the film was made. During its making twelve young people from Gujarat had been living there, but now only two remained, a couple. Several new residents had moved in, all recent arrivals from Gujarat. The film was projected on the kitchen wall, and after the screening we had a long discussion with the couple, their co-residents and some invited friends. Separate elicitation sessions were organized with the other main characters of the film, former residents of the house. One couple had moved within east London, and the film was screened on the TV in their living room. Three other protagonists of the film had returned to Gujarat. In the city of Baroda and in two villages in central Gujarat screenings were held in the living rooms for the returned migrants and their families. These sets of screenings generated responses from the main characters of the film, and from their friends and relatives.

The film documents the struggles, hopes and despair of seven recent young Indian migrants. All had recently arrived—somewhere between a few months and two years—coming to Britain on student or temporary work permits. Having dreamed of going to the West to earn money, to study, to get some overseas experience or improve their positions at home, their lives in London turned out differently from what they had hoped. They ended up doing low-status, semi-skilled jobs to cover living expenses, living in a small cramped paying-guest accommodation that they shared with other new migrants. Their high expectations were shattered; their migration experiences were characterized by ambivalence or feelings of downward mobility.

The film's characters come from lower middle-class families in villages and towns of central Gujarat: middle-level farmers, small industrialists, small businessmen and traders, low-ranking bureaucrats, and people in supervisory and administrative jobs in private companies [Rutten and Verstappen 2014: 1228].⁷ Their parents saw considerable economic and social upward mobility and realized that, given the changing circumstances in a globalizing India, it would be very difficult, perhaps impossible, for their own children to experience a similar type of mobility if they remained dependent on family resources at home. The parents therefore felt that it was necessary for them to push their children out, for their own long-term benefit, to have a life disconnected from the Indian household as its economic base. This is out of uncertainty about the family's future prospects in India, and with the hope that their children's move abroad will allow the family to maintain its middle-class position in India and improve the children's future prospects. For these families migration is a precautionary strategy [Shah 2010: 174] to consolidate their middle-class status. This strategy comes at the cost of a (perhaps temporary) downward mobility, "...which is the dislocation resulting from the simultaneous experience of an increase in financial status from overseas work, and decline in social status..." [Kofman 2004: 651].

The responses to the film confirmed that the central theme of downward mobility was recognized by the young migrants and their peers. Darshan commented: "Money is good in UK, but the living conditions are very bad. That was clearly shown in the film." They insisted that the film be shown to youth in India, "so that they know that life is not so easy in London." Vishal commented: "I collaborated in this film because I wanted to show to youth in India that there is no money growing on trees in the West. Life is very difficult there; we have to struggle to survive in London." It was also interesting to see the responses of other new migrants during the screening in the same house where the film was made. Although they had not participated in the making of the film, having arrived only very recently, they could relate to it and began reflecting on their decision of coming to London. One girl, who had come a few months before, told us after seeing the film she felt a little sad: "If I had seen this film in India, I would have probably decided not to come to London. Or, perhaps I would have come anyway, but if I had seen all of this, I would not have been so disappointed."

For the protagonists whose visas had expired and who had returned to Gujarat, watching a film about their past lives in London was a nostalgic experience.

They felt their present lives in India were totally different. One of the young couples shown in the film had moved in with the husband's joint family in the village, together with their newborn baby. When we watched the film with them, they were very silent and afterwards reflective. Komal responded: "I want to return to England! I can't get used to living here again. Yes, we had a small room there in London, and it was not always easy. Yes, we have a big house here. But here, we have to share the space with many family members, and it's hard to adjust..."

The relatives of the protagonists also watched the film with great interest. The parents already knew that the living circumstances of their sons and daughters in London were not very good; but they had not seen visuals of the actual housing conditions. Most photos seen previously were of the touristy-type: smiling groups of friends posing in front of famous British monuments or in recreation areas. As a result some asked many questions about the house and the people they saw on screen. A cousin of one of the migrants, having previously perhaps been under the impression that life abroad was somewhat shiny, suddenly realized that it might not be so bad living in India: "All of them [my male cousin and the other youth in the film] are wasting the best years of their lives. They all have graduated and still do low jobs and live in poor circumstances. I did not graduate and see how I live here in India; I do not have to work so hard!"

One erudite father smiled after seeing the film: "You made a very good film; you portrayed the life of our son well. But the only thing that you got wrong is the title of the film. It should not have been 'Living *like* a common man,' but 'Living *as* a common man!'"

Apart from viewing the film in the private space of their homes some of the young men and women accompanied the makers to screenings at public events in London, Delhi, and in Gujarat, interacting with the audiences during discussion sessions. During one such session at the East End Film Festival in London one of them used the occasion to tell the audience that he was no longer in the same position as portrayed in the film, but had moved on: from being a temporary migrant living in a paying-guest accommodation he had become a potential immigrant with a master's degree, a long-term post-study work visa and rented accommodation.

In summary the protagonists felt that the theme of downward mobility suitably described their situation and that their lives had been realistically portrayed—although some tried to distance themselves somewhat from the visuals during public screenings by indicating the film had shown their past lives, and that they had now moved on. Aware of high migration aspirations in their home region, they suggested that the film should be shown to youth in India so that they could make better-informed choices when contemplating going abroad. Parents showed curiosity to learn more about the living circumstances of their sons and daughters in London, but were not entirely surprised by the poor living conditions.

THIS WAS US: INDIAN MIGRANTS IN EUROPE

Since *Living like a Common Man* is a film about migrants in Europe, a Gujarati migrant association in London and a Hindu religious association in the Netherlands⁸ were

interested in showing the film to their members and organized public screenings with discussions. In addition, three elicitation sessions were organized in living rooms in the Netherlands, one with a Gujarati family and two with groups of professionals from various parts of India.⁹ Among such Indian migrants the film brought back memories of the initial phase of their own migration process. In some cases it had taken place over forty years before; in other cases, more recently.

These migrants recognized the experience of downward mobility, which most had themselves also experienced in the early phase of their migration process. It was for example the case for a family of Gujarati migrants in the Netherlands. The grandfather said that the film reminded him of the time he went from India to Uganda in 1956, when he had also faced difficulties in adjusting to that new environment. His granddaughter, from the youngest generation of this Gujarati family, who had grown up in the Netherlands, said the film made it possible for her to “see” the past experiences of her grandfather as a new migrant: “My grandfather told us about how he felt when he first came to Uganda from India, how difficult it was for him to adjust. We therefore knew about it, but by watching the film we could actually see it for the first time. Living in such a bad house cramped into a room with four people... My grandfather went through the same situation when he went to Uganda.”

A middle-aged woman explained how the film reminded her of the time her family had to flee from Uganda to London in 1972, before moving on to Holland: “I was 12 years old and I lived with my mother, brother and sister in the living room of a relative for three months. We had a nice house in Kampala and I felt that we had moved down the social ladder by moving to Europe. The film reminded me of that feeling of disappointment I had as a young girl in the UK: ‘Is this Europe, will this be our future?’ At the time we of course did not know for how long that situation would last. So I could very well imagine that these youngsters felt that way.”

Gujarati migrant audiences in particular identified with the film due to a commonality of language, but across linguistic groups the film provoked similar memories of their own migration. After a discussion with a group of twenty professionals from several parts of India working in Amsterdam and Amstelveen, a young man said: “‘They’ are ‘us,’ it is ‘we,’ all of us. Especially the emotions they show, the crying, the dancing, the listening to music. Most of us had the same problems when we came over here. Here, you have to do everything on your own. That is very difficult.”

Along with the aspect of downward mobility, they also remembered migration aspirations of youth in India: “We were told [while growing up]: ‘Look at so and so, he graduated in engineering and because of that he could go abroad and is now in the USA.’ Those were our role models. Nobody ever told us to study hard so that we could make a career in India—that was never mentioned. We had to study hard to get a degree that would give us the opportunity to go abroad.” This respondent belonged to a group of relatively young I.T. workers who had been in the Netherlands for less than three years. Another group of highly skilled professionals, who saw the film in Hoofddorp, had been in the Netherlands for longer and were somewhat older (thirty to forty), many of them already raising children in the country. They stressed the difference between their own settled lives and

the migrants in the film who had arrived only recently. They were nevertheless touched by the character of Sohang, who openly explained the difficulties of the initial migration process. During one particular scene when Sohang narrated how he cried when he had to clean the bathroom for the first time, a woman exclaimed that she too cried the first time she had to clean the toilet. After the screening she went on to explain how she is still finding life hard as a housewife, without relatives or servants to help clean the house and receive guests. She continued that she is “used to it now,” although it is still not easy.

This difficulty in doing the manual jobs and doing everything on your own, pointed out by migrant audiences as a point of recognition in the film, indicates that these audiences came from higher- or middle-caste backgrounds. Like the young men and women in the film, they had never done manual or paid low-skilled work before coming to Europe, and their experience with household work was limited as their mothers had servants to help with daily chores. They could therefore relate to the character of Sohang, who felt he became “smaller” by doing the work normally associated with lower classes and lower castes [Rutten 1995: 247–299; Rutten and Verstappen 2014: 1221–1224].

Finally, a screening with elderly migrants in the UK, many of whom had arrived over forty years before, commented that their own “starting phase” had been even more difficult. This was because there were few Indians around to lend support: “We did not get any help, because there were not any Indians here at that time. So these youngsters are also lucky in some way. We missed our community but they don’t have that problem, they have each other and also so many members of the settled community they can rely on to some extent. In the film, you can see that they are working for other Indians, and they are renting their houses from other Indians.”¹⁰

In the view of Indian audiences in Europe the film captures “the starting phase of migration,” but not the further process of settlement after some years, which is why settling and settled Indian migrants in Europe could not completely identify with the film. It reminded them of their past rather than their present. For these audiences the film seemed to have a similar function to a home movie or a *film souvenir*, evoking memories of a past that took place in their own lives, and inviting discussions of histories beyond the film frame [Sobchack 1999: 247–249].

THIS IS NOT US: MIDDLE-CLASS AUDIENCES IN URBAN INDIA

Living like a Common Man was screened at three public events in India: at the Persistence Resistance Film Festival in New Delhi, at the Smriti Nandan Cultural Centre in Bangalore, and at the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore. It was also screened informally in urban living rooms with families or groups of friends in Mumbai, in Baroda, and twice in Ahmedabad. During these screenings audiences argued strongly that the film did not represent “Indians” or Indian migrants.

This response was expressed with particular force during a screening in Bangalore when two men stood up and asked the filmmakers why they had given such a negative image of India in the film? When asked to explain

themselves, it turned out that they were reacting to the background visual in the film when Sohang, one of the main characters, returns to his home city, Baroda. Riding around the city with the Hindi lyrics "There is nothing like India" in the soundtrack, the scene shows a man sleeping on a pushcart alongside the street, and behind Sohang a pile of garbage is seen, while some animals are wandering around on a dusty road. That scene was picked out as misrepresenting India and rejected, although the scene also included shots of new glass high-rise buildings and city traffic, which the filmmakers had used to try to convey the impression of "modern city life" in India.

Moreover urban audiences in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad indicated that the lifestyle portrayed in the film is not at all representative of Indians who have moved to Europe for work or study. Those in the audience who had temporarily been abroad stood up and stated that they themselves and their family members were different from the migrants in the film. They were struck by the fact that the migrants in the film led such isolated lives, staying in a house only with Gujaratis, in a mostly South Asian neighborhood, eating Gujarati food, working for Indians and having only Indian friends. Audiences were disturbed by the absence of engagement with the culture of the host society. For example, a young woman in Bangalore called the film characters "parochial." Her own experience, studying at a university in the United Kingdom, had been different: she had taken an interest in the local culture and had made international friends, an openness she found lacking among the film's characters. Similarly, someone whose children were in the UK for education commented: "What you portrayed [about their isolated lives] does not apply to all Indians. My children have a lot of contacts in Britain and are not isolated at all. They have many British friends." After some prodding, several audience members admitted, and often in private, that they and their families were facing similar problems when living abroad, staying mostly in an Indian environment and isolated from mainstream Western society: "Yes, you are right. Just like these young people, I felt the same when I came to England as a student. I mostly had Asian friends and hardly knew any white British people." Again, "We don't like to admit it but many Indians in England live in isolation, in their own neighborhoods and only interact with each other, going to Indian weddings and parties during the weekends, or taking tours organized by Indian travel agencies."

Such reactions provided the filmmakers with a sharper insight into the specificity of the social backgrounds of the filmed migrants.¹¹ In contrast to the audiences in major Indian cities the filmed migrants had not been ashamed to admit that they hardly had any contacts with wider London society beyond their own community, and had openly expressed their doubts and disappointments on camera. Screenings of the film in Indian cities, where this provoked uneasiness and a need to distance oneself, made it clear that the Indians shown in the film originate from a different section of the middle class—a "lower" and more rural type of middle class, with a specific regional background.

This Indian "lower" middle class commonly have the financial backing to obtain education but lack the high-level social contacts and upper-middle-class skills to succeed within fiercely competitive markets for jobs in the newly liberalized Indian economy [Jeffrey 2010: 466–467]. In central Gujarat, despite

substantial improvements in educational attainment over recent decades, the lower middle class is educated in institutions that cater to the masses whereas access to internationally acclaimed educational institutions remains out of reach [van Wessel 2001: 67, 91]. As a result, “English, the language of the powerful, is not mastered by many in the middle class. Their sense of security and status in their social world is attacked through their feeling of inadequacy” [*ibid.*: 91]. They have property and diplomas yet lack the cultural and social capital to participate in upper-middle-class life.

This lower middle class of the film’s characters was recognized by audiences in Indian cities such as Delhi and Bangalore when people described the film’s characters as behaving “differently” and as “not highly educated.” The observed lack of education was commented on audibly during screenings, when audiences laughed about the English of the main characters—broken, with imperfect grammar. A few non-Gujaratis remarked that the film is not about Indians but about Gujaratis. According to them Gujaratis are “money-minded” and “very conservative,” which explained their isolated lifestyle. These commentators found it remarkable that Gujarati youths do not go abroad for further studies to develop themselves, discover the world and have a bright future, but “just to make money.”

Such comments can be understood as efforts of the urban middle-class audiences to distance themselves from the more rural and specifically regional background of the youths in the film. Urban professionals working in international companies in Indian cities have been noted to represent themselves as having a wider “exposure” to the outside world, as more tolerant and confident. This self-assertion as being more “open-minded” and more cosmopolitan than other members of the middle class has been described as a characteristic of the “New Middle Class” in the “New India” [Upadhyaya 2011: 175], and may explain why they were so disturbed by the “parochialism” of the Gujarati migrants.

A sense of social distance of urban middle-class audiences toward the film’s characters was also noticeable among urban middle-class Indians in Europe. A screening with a group of middle-aged highly skilled professionals in Hoofddorp (introduced in the previous section) revealed a strong need in them to distance themselves as a different class of people from those shown in the film: “This [the group shown in the film] is a very small section [of the Indian society]; it does not cover Indian youth who are going abroad.” Again, “None of us here belong to that section. Nobody is working in a café.” “The bigger picture needs to be seen as well. These are just a few people; this is only part of it.” “There are people who are doing good jobs and who are successful.” “They are unable to speak good English. We work for Indian or Western companies, good companies. We earn much better. We do not live with twelve people in a house.” “I can relate to those guys because some of my friends are like them. But we, these guys here [in the room], are different.” One man had his own theory sustaining this idea of class differences within India: “Do you understand Indian society? India consists of 1.4 billion people. 100 million people are served by 400 million people. These 400 million people are served by 900 million people. The 900 million want to be the 400 million, the 400 million want

to be the 100 million. Now, in this room, we are [part of] the 100 million people. And this film is about the 400 million."

Class differences were audibly highlighted during the screening with these urban professionals in the Netherlands: critical comments on the ignorance and even "stupidity" of the young men and women in the film were expressed by "talking" to the film's characters [Srinivas 2002: 170]. During a scene when Sohanga's friends talk about loose morality and drugs in the USA and claim that Indian youth are never taking cocaine, a man exclaimed: "Dude, did you think you cannot get cocaine in India?! *You* didn't get to experience it—doesn't mean it doesn't exist!" During a scene when a character talks about his dream to eventually start a coffee shop in Gujarat after having worked in a coffee shop in London, explaining that "This is a completely new idea for the Indian people here," a woman commented: "Coffee shop? *New idea?*," referring to the proliferation of several chains of coffee shops across the cities of India. There was laughter about the imperfect English of the characters, and at some point a man even exclaimed, "His English is amazing!" provoking laughter among the others.

While their sense of social distance was probably enhanced because of the non-Gujarati background of the majority of them these professionals reacted so critically also because they felt the film negatively portrayed "Indians" to a European audience. As the filmed Indians were doing unskilled work, spoke grammatically incorrect English, came from the lower middle class in rural India, this presented an image of Indian migrants that was not in line with their own self-image as highly educated and modern Indian migrants in Europe. Their *disaffiliative* responses [Clayman 1993] were also encouraged by the dynamics of the screening, with a group of friends in the private sphere in the living room of one of them, with snacks and wine being served, in a festive atmosphere. Some individuals were silent during the screening and general discussion, and expressed their own (somewhat different) views to the researchers afterwards in private conversations.¹²

THIS COULD BE US: YOUTH IN RURAL GUJARAT

The young men and women whose lives had been reflected in the film suggested that it should be screened in their home region, central Gujarat, to show young people there "what life in London is really like." Being aware of the strong migration aspirations of their peers, they hoped the film would make them understand that "money is not falling from the trees in London," so that they could make better-informed choices. Hence the film was shown in four colleges in and around the towns of Anand and Nadiad in central Gujarat. These colleges have a local student population, receiving graduate and postgraduate students from the surrounding region. Approximately 530 students in central Gujarat saw the film. Screenings took place in a central hall. Before and directly afterwards, students filled in questionnaires. Thereafter teachers gave a brief speech and asked the students to come forward to express publicly their views on the film. Students came up in turns, giving short speeches, after which they received applause. Discussions were mainly in the local language of Gujarati. There were

a Gujarati and an English version of the questionnaire, and students could choose which one to fill in.

In them students were asked about their migration aspirations, and what they expected London to be like. Before seeing the film many students expressed a strong desire to go abroad for work or study. They described London as a corruption-free, beautiful and clean city that could offer them a chance to earn and save large sums of money. Going to London was described as “an exciting prospect for anyone,” and people in London were expected to live a “grand kingly life.” After seeing the film the views were more nuanced. While positive points about London were still mentioned, a substantial number of the respondents now indicated that they had changed their mind and expressed disappointment. They had been surprised to see that life in London looked worse than life in India for young Gujarati migrants. They would still like to visit Europe if they got the chance, but would prefer to stay and live in India rather than migrate abroad.

Positive points about life in London, mentioned after seeing the film, were “friendship” and “independence.” Students mentioned that they were happy to find that the young migrants “live together” and have “many friends.” In contrast to the urban middle-class audiences, who had talked about “isolation” in an Indian environment, these rural young men and women felt that living in a house with other Gujarati youth prevents migrants from feeling isolated in a strange environment: “they are not alone” and “they support each other.” Being able to eat Gujarati food was also considered a positive aspect of the young migrants’ life as shown. Many remarked that it was good to see their peers remaining in touch with India, frequently remembering their families and continuing to practise their religion.

Apart from appreciating these social aspects of London, positive remarks were made about the independence of the protagonists. For these young people one of the attractions of going to the West is to be able to get away from family pressure and tight social control [Rutten and Verstappen 2014: 1226–1228]. The possibility of escaping social pressure by moving to London was regularly brought up in the questionnaire responses. They hinted at existing social problems within their families, appreciated the lack of family interference in London, and used terms such as “independence,” “privacy” and “freedom” to describe the attractiveness of life in Europe: “Living in London, there is no gossip. Here in the village, you can’t do anything; everyone knows about it and interferes. They might be without family in London, but at least they are not bothered [by people].” “I like their independence, the freedom they have. Here I can’t move around.”

The fact that young men and women were doing manual jobs and household chores to survive was not only interpreted as a sign of downward mobility. Students also spoke about it as a chance to develop one’s ability to assume “responsibility,” “stand on their own legs” and “deal with difficult situations on their own.” In this respect, students showed admiration for the “discipline” of the filmed migrants, a comment that was sometimes sustained with anecdotes of other young migrants they knew personally, some of whom had returned to central Gujarat with improved characters after having lived abroad for a few years. Some spoke about the fact that these same boys were not willing to do

manual and household work when living in India. Female students were content about the fact that boys become more “responsible” and “independent” abroad and learn to do household chores. Students from lower castes or a Christian background in particular expressed contentment about the fact that the higher castes experience abroad what it is to be in a lower position and to do manual work.¹³

While the questionnaires conveyed many positive aspects of this acquired self-reliance the flipside of freedom was also mentioned: loose morality. This became very clear during the screenings of the film. Recall the description from the beginning of the article of how the students responded to the scene where a girl receives a letter from the UK Border Agency, informing her about the rejection of the visa extension of her boyfriend. In that scene the girl starts crying because she knows that they will not be able to be together in India, since her father is not likely to accept their relationship. The boy and girl belong to different castes, which the parents would not approve of. Although the story reaches a happy ending when the parents eventually agree to a marriage, this specific visa scene was marked as particularly touching by audiences in Europe and in Indian cities, who sometimes had difficulty keeping their eyes dry. Eighty percent of the questionnaires filled out in Dutch classrooms mentioned the visa scene as a “sad event” in the film.¹⁴ Students in central Gujarat, on the other hand, started laughing out loud during the visa scene, and some boys even imitated the sobbing of the girl, adding to more fun and hilarious laughter.

In India an interactive style of viewing is more common than in Europe: this includes repeating dialogue, talking to the characters, giving them advice or mocking them. It is particularly during dramatic scenes, when film characters and/or some members of the audience become tearful, that ridiculing or mocking of film characters is likely to occur. Ridiculing a scene “allows a viewer to transform the emotions a scene intends to generate, not only for himself but potentially for the larger collectivity. In transforming the emotions of fellow audience members, viewers are in effect transforming the film text and contesting its encoded meanings” [Srinivas 2010: 340]. In this way viewers are able to “transform tragic or melodramatic scenes into humor.”¹⁵

When the filmmakers told the students afterwards that they responded very differently than earlier audiences had done, and asked why, a student came forward with an explanation:

In Europe, people don't understand love. In Indian culture, it is different. If you cheat on your parents, who have raised you up to your 19th birthday, who love you, how can you then love someone else? What is the meaning of love, if you cheat them? In India nobody will cry about this scene. In Europe people may cry, but they don't know the value of love. In Europe they look at the relation between the boy and the girl. In India, we look at the relation between children and their parents. India is the best!

Other students similarly expressed their dismay about the behavior of the girl. They said that it was unheard of in India for a daughter to lie to her parents. “We laughed because she was playing *natak* [drama, theater], game of real life. She was cheating on her parents, how can she then have attachment for others? What is the use of crying if you cheat on your parents?” Again, “The young woman did

something unforgivable to her parents and ended up in trouble; that's why we laughed, because it was her own fault. As you sow, so shall you reap."

The cultural dichotomy between India and the West that these students evoked to explain their emotional response—that people in the West are more concerned with the relation between the boy and the girl, while people in India have greater concern for the relation between the girl and her parents—does not reflect empirical reality. Audiences in Bangalore, Delhi and other Indian cities had responded differently from these students in rural Gujarat. Urban Indian audiences experienced this scene more like European audiences. In their comments and questions it was clear that they felt for the girl. In Indian cities we had long discussions about this sensitive subject, in particular at private, more informal screenings in living-room settings. In these settings audiences mentioned similar examples of love-couples they knew personally, who got married by first going abroad for a few years and then coming back to India together. They nevertheless commented on the great risk the girl took in following the boy abroad, not knowing him well enough to assess if he was really trustworthy. This shows that even though they are familiar with and share many cultural norms, metropolitan Indian viewers did respond very differently from the rural youth.

An opposed view came out in the questionnaires, for example from a student who wrote that it was a "good thing" that "one couple, in a love marriage, live in a relationship." They probably would have had difficulties advancing this view in the public setting of the college.¹⁶ Once during the discussions a girl gave an oppositional speech, saying that "it was a good thing that the girl went abroad, because intercaste marriage would not have been allowed by her parents." But she was immediately corrected by her peers, who retaliated: "To say that intercaste marriage is not allowed in India is a wrong statement! Things have changed and now parents allow intercaste marriages."

It is possible that the context of the screenings in Gujarat, a public event in a "socializing" educational institution and in the presence of teachers (who may pass judgments) is what made the students express such clear moral verdicts. The fact that the discussion took place in a classroom setting with peers also influenced the form and direction of the discussion. In one of the quotes above, a student ended her speech with the statement, "India is the best!" This happened at several screenings, as a result of which part of the public discussions in the colleges acquired a nationalistic dimension, in which students expressed views on "Indian society" and "Indian culture." In one of the colleges the discussions took on an excited and highly patriotic tone, as student after student ended their speech by exclaiming "India is the best!" after which they received a big applause from the audience. In other colleges discussions extended to a comparison between "Indian" and "Western" culture. "There they work for twelve hours a day, but they should work here for twelve hours a day and contribute to their country!" "Whatever we do, we should never forget our parents. More and more migrants leave behind their parents in old-age homes in India. What's the use of money, if such developments take place?"

The bold statements made in this public context are in strong contrast with the questionnaires, which show more nuanced views. As outlined above, students in the Gujarat colleges pointed out their disappointment with London, but also

emphasized many positive points about life abroad. Positive points that struck them were the “friendship” among the migrants, their “self-reliance” and “independence.” Their interpretation contrasted sharply with the interpretation of audiences in cities like Delhi, Ahmedabad and Bangalore, who stressed isolation. While urban middle classes felt that the film presented a negative image of India and/or was only representative of a specific regional section of Indian society, the film made rural youth feel good about “Indian society” and prompted them to reflect on “Indian values.”

THIS IS A BIT LIKE US: YOUTH IN THE NETHERLANDS

On twelve occasions *Living like a Common Man* was screened to students in graduate and postgraduate programs in social sciences at Dutch universities. In most instances the screenings took place in a classroom, organized as a guest lecture on migration and mobility for anthropology students or students in migration and ethnic studies. In other instances the screening was organized as a separate event. Students in the Netherlands were generally unfamiliar with the setting of central Gujarat or indeed India, and had no idea about the class background of the filmed migrants. While such students noted many cultural differences between themselves and the film’s characters they could still relate to the struggles and anxieties these Indian youths faced.

What students in the Netherlands recognized was the experience of living on your own for the first time. Being without the everyday support of parents and siblings in handling household chores like cleaning and cooking seems to be something universal that all youth could relate to regardless of their cultural background. This was most strongly expressed by students with experiences of traveling and/or moving out of the home to pursue study in a new city. An international student at the University of Amsterdam said that she could relate to a lot in the film. The moment she found most revealing was the scene where a young man tries to use the washing machine but doesn’t know how to turn it on: “I had exactly the same experience when I came to Amsterdam!”

While students at Dutch universities recognized the problems of living on one’s own for the first time, many felt that they deal with these experiences differently than do the Indian youth in the film. This social distance was expressed through laughter. During a scene where a young man (Sohang) complains about the household work he has to do on his own now that his mother is not there, they laughed. During a later scene when he says that he had felt bad when asked to clean the garden at his workplace and literally cried for a few minutes, the student audiences in the Netherlands again laughed, sometimes very loudly. When asked afterwards what provoked their laughter, some said that they found his complaints “cute” or that they were surprised and thought it funny how these young migrants did not know how to do household chores. Others showed they did not understand what their problem was and urged them instead to “grow up.” They emphasized that in Europe all youths hold jobs to earn money and make their own beds and clean their own rooms from a young age. Some reacted in judgmental ways and said that these boys were “mommy’s children,” still

completely dependent on their parents. The following statements were made in response to the questionnaire: "They do not know how to take care of things themselves, really. We are proud that we do not depend on others. They think it is below their dignity to do laundry on your own." And "I laughed when that boy told that he did not know how to wash his clothes, and that at the age of twenty-three!" "They are mummy's boys; they behave as if they are still attached to the umbilical cord. What's the problem with making your own bed, doing your laundry, or having to clean the garden? What's the big deal?" "They are spoiled children who can't live without their parents."

While young people in the Netherlands were puzzled and looked down upon the problems the main characters in the film experienced with household chores, they also sympathized with them. They were surprised about the well-to-do background of the young migrants in the film. They said they had not realized that their living conditions in India might be better than their circumstances after moving to London, and expressed admiration for the way in which these young people dealt with this situation, accepting it without many complaints. "I never knew that they lived in a bigger house in India than in London. I always thought their lives would improve by moving abroad. Why would they otherwise go?" "They seem cheerful, happier than I expected under such crappy circumstances."

Students in the Netherlands also made remarks about the Indian environment in which the migrants lived: staying in a house with only Indians, working for Indians, eating Indian food and socializing only among Indians. Their comments to some extent resembled those of the urban middle-class Indian audiences. The difference is that youths in the Netherlands placed their evaluation within the context of the highly politicized debate on "integration" of migrants and the increasing support for anti-immigration policies in Western Europe. A number of students accused the youths in the film of making no attempt to "integrate" into the host society. Some were even "shocked" that the migrants seemed so happy that London was "just like India." On the other hand, youths in the Netherlands were positively impressed by the strong ties with and affection for their family and friends back in India. This was shown in the following statements in their questionnaires: "They don't put much effort into integrating." "They have barely any contact with Europeans, even though they live in the UK. I expected some segregation but not so much." "It was really nice to see how much they loved India and how much they wanted to return to India. How that one boy showed all the presents he had bought for his father, mother and his sister."

CONCLUSION

Film... has the possibility of reaching a far vaster audience than most academic writers could ever imagine... [F]ilms can be seen and evaluated by all sorts of communities to which [the anthropologist would] otherwise have no access. And this can be a two-way learning experience. [Barbash and Taylor 1997: 2]

Filmmaking offers the anthropologist opportunities to reach a wider audience than is possible with academic writing. With the availability and the speed of media circulation across the world today it is likely that anthropological films will be viewed increasingly beyond the immediate circle of peers and students. How do these varied audiences “decode” or “read” [Hall 1973] anthropological film? What strikes different groups as significant and meaningful in a film, what kind of opinions and feelings do they draw from it? How are interpretations and experiences constructed in interaction with other viewers in collective viewing contexts? And how can audience studies further our understanding of social realities represented in the film?

Insofar as these questions have been addressed within visual anthropology two groups of audience have been studied, “self-seeing audiences” (informants) and “specialized” audiences (anthropology students) [Baudry 1996]. This article explored responses of “self-seeing audiences” who recognized themselves in the main theme of the film, downward mobility, and of “specialized audiences” (students in Europe) who despite mentioning cultural differences could relate to the anxieties and struggles of the film’s characters. In addition this article has broadened the perspective by analyzing “self-identifying” audiences: Indian migrants in Europe, the urban middle class in major Indian cities, and youth in the region of central Gujarat, the origin of the film’s characters.

Processes of self-identification with media products have been related to the cultural background [Shiveley 1992] and socio-economic background [Morley 1980, 1981] of the audiences, which limit available interpretative “repertoires” [Moore 2000: 20–21]. Nevertheless groups broadly occupying the same social background or class position can offer quite different responses, making it imperative to study audiences in relation to their social contexts. Below we assess first the structural factors and secondly the localized group dynamics that have affected audience responses to *Living like a Common Man*.

The processes of affiliation and disaffiliation [Clayman 1993] are related to socio-economic position in important ways. The Indian audiences we studied can all be considered middle class yet responded in different ways to the middle-class film characters, some recognizing and others disassociating themselves. Middle-class youths in the rural region of central Gujarat identified strongly with the film’s characters, who could have been their classmates or cousins. Middle-class audiences in the bigger cities of Delhi and Bangalore, however, and those from metropolitan contexts living in Europe felt a need to distance themselves. They criticized the film for misrepresenting “India,” felt it was a story of a different class of people (the “400 million”), or pointed to its specific regional (i.e., Gujarati) character. Understanding the different interpretations requires a nuanced understanding of class dynamics in India, in the context of the rural-urban divide [Hnatkowska and Lahiri 2013], of qualitative differences in educational background [van Wessel 2001], and of differential access to high-level social contacts and skills [Jeffrey 2010: 466–467], which creates a class distinction between an upper middle class of urban professionals and a lower or rural middle class.

For the filmmakers-anthropologists involved, audience responses provoked new research questions in relation to the specific class background of recent migrants from central Gujarat, and how these relate to migration aspirations. Viewers in Europe and India had taken note of the big houses of the migrants in their home region, and wondered why these families sent their children abroad to live in such poor circumstances in London when they were obviously doing well economically in India? That question was brought up across audiences, although in different ways, which guided the filmmakers in follow-up discussions with the families of the filmed young men and women and with families in central Gujarat in comparable situations of having children abroad. In this way audience responses resulted in a strengthening of the mutual relationship between anthropological research and filmmaking [Rutten and Verstappen 2014: 1228–1230].

In addition to socio-economic factors, group dynamics in the micro-locality of viewing affected audience responses to a considerable extent. This was particularly noticeable during screenings in colleges in Gujarat, when audible responses of students informed what one should think and even feel about the actions of the film's characters. While interactive behavior during dramatic film scenes is not uncommon among "participatory audiences" in India [Srinivas 2010], in this particular context of the classroom the laughter and mocking constituted a moral verdict. Some individuals had oppositional opinions but these were submerged in the public discussion, and a contrast emerged between bold public statements and more nuanced remarks from the filled questionnaires. Similar discrepancies between public and private responses were visible among the Indian urban middle class, who in public at first denied identification with the main characters in the film but were more nuanced during follow-up discussions.

Our analysis indicates the need to rethink the discussion on the question of whether anthropological films contribute to more understanding of the Other, or to reinforcing processes of "othering" [Martinez 1995; Tambs-Lyche and Waage 1989; Wogan 2006]. The question has been addressed so far mainly by confronting students in the West with films of "tribals" in the "Non-West," but our findings defy the usefulness of the East-West dichotomy. Studying a wider range of audiences, taking into account the socio-economic factors that constitute groups and the specific localized dynamics of each screening, will help to develop more refined frameworks for studies of ethnographic film reception.

In sum this article shows that processes of "othering" and identification with film characters are affected by socio-economic position and age, and by the micro-context of viewing and discussing the film. Visual anthropology has much to gain from taking audiences seriously, not only as students that may learn something through our films, but also as teachers, who may have something important to say. Audience responses can provoke new questions on and insights in filmed realities, and thereby strengthen the potential of filmmaking as a source of learning in anthropological research. Through audience research we can learn to interpret films "in terms that go well beyond those imagined by the original filmmaker" [Henley 2013: 383].

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was written as part of the research program, Provincial Globalisation: The Impact of Reverse Transnational Flows on India's Regional Towns, a collaboration between the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), University of Amsterdam, and the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for valuable suggestions, and Anju Christine Lingham and the participants of the Moving Matters seminar of the AISSR, especially Vincent de Rooij and Willem van Schendel, for their comments and feedback on an earlier draft.

FUNDING

The research program, Provincial Globalisation: The Impact of Reverse Transnational Flows on India's Regional Towns, is funded by the WOTRO Science for Global Development program of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

NOTES

1. A classic example of this method is the film *Jero on Jero: A Balinese Trance Seance Observed* by Linda Connor, Patsy Asch and Timothy Asch [1980–81], in which the informant Jero Tapakan responds to the film *A Balinese Trance Seance* (on Jero's work as a spiritual medium). Other examples are the work of Dirk Nijland [1989] and De Maaker [2000].
2. For an overview of anthropological studies on audiences, cf. Crawford and Hafsteinson [1996].
3. This is related to the notion of an anthropological film as being "... produced ... by professional anthropologists, who use the medium to convey the results of their ethnographic studies and ethnological knowledge. [They are] not documentaries about "anthropological" subjects but films designed by anthropologists to communicate anthropological insights" [Ruby 2005: 167]. For a discussion on several approaches to visual anthropology, cf. Hockings [2003].
4. The filmmakers were present at the East End Film Festival (2011, London), Persistence Resistance Film Festival (2012, New Delhi), Beeld voor Beeld Festival (2011, Amsterdam), and the International Festival of Ethnological Film (2011, Belgrade). Due to lack of time and funds they were not present at festival screenings in Canada, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Ethiopia, Argentina, Poland, Nepal and Brazil. For an overview of the screenings, see <https://sites.google.com/site/livinglikeacommonman/festivals-screenings>.
5. During discussion sessions audiences could raise any questions or comments. If there was time, questions were asked of the audience, about observed audience responses, such as, "We observed that you laughed during this scene; why was that?".
6. The questionnaire was given to Dutch and Gujarati students before the film screening, without explaining the content of the film, but with the clarification that the filmmakers were doing research on audience responses to the film. Questions tested expectations of migrant life in London: "What do you think Indian youngsters are doing in the UK, what is their life like?" "How do you think they feel about being abroad?" Directly after the screening and before the discussion additional questions were filled in, such as: "After seeing the film, how do you now think Indian youngsters live in the UK?" "What did you find most remarkable in the film?" For Dutch and Gujarati students the questions were formulated the same, although the word *Indian* was changed to *Gujarati* for students in Gujarat.
7. See Fernandes and Heller [2006] and Ganguli-Scrase and Scrase [2009] for an overview of discussions on the middle class in India. The film's characters fit Fernandes

- and Heller's description of the lower middle class: *petit bourgeoisie*, and the lower-ranking bureaucrats. For a brief description of Gujarati, see Shah [1992].
8. This Hindu association was mainly visited by immigrants from Suriname and their offspring, who are descendants of indentured laborers that migrated from British India to Suriname in the colonial period [Verstappen and Rutten 2007].
 9. Two of these informal screenings were organized by Ellen Bal, Kate Kirk and Sarah Janssen as part of their research project *Migration, Citizenship and Development: Notions of belonging and civic engagement among Indian (knowledge) migrants in the Netherlands and return migrants in India*, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
 10. In the film one gets the impression that the new arrivals are exploited by their Indian employers and landlords rather than supported by them. Some Indian migrants commented on this, feeling that positive contributions of the settled Indian community in London did not come out well in the film.
 11. These reactions might have been partly related to our position as non-Indians making a film about and screening it in a postcolonial society.
 12. We thank the researcher Kate Kirk for discussing her views on these audience responses with us.
 13. Fifty percent of the film's characters were from the Patel caste, the dominant caste in this region of central Gujarat. Patels and other high- and middle-caste families in central Gujarat rarely permit their children to do manual or service jobs in India; it would be below their dignity there but is accepted when living in London.
 14. During later screenings in Europe two additional questions were posed to test emotions: "What did you find funny in the film, and why?" and "At what point did you feel sad during the film, and why?"
 15. While Lakshmi Srinivas presents participatory viewing as Indian behavior, she also notes a contrast between different classes within Indian audiences, observing that an interactive style of viewing is gradually linked to class: middle-class audiences expect the working-class viewers sitting in the cheaper seats close to the screen "to be loud and boisterous and to adopt overly participatory viewing practices" [Srinivas 2002: 163; see too her forthcoming book on cinemas in Bangalore, from University of Chicago Press, 2016]. An interactive style of viewing may also be linked to the type of venue and the genre of film. Participatory viewing did not occur in screenings of *Living like a Common Man* during documentary film festivals and in small art-house or university theaters in Indian cities.
 16. Teachers were roaming around the classroom while students filled in the form. The questionnaires were not anonymous, in order to get an indication of the social or caste background of the students on the basis of their surnames. This may have limited the number of oppositional responses.

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