

## Road to India—A Brazilian Love Story: BRICS, Migration, and Cultural Flows in Brazil's *Caminho das Índias*

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The Brazilian telenovela *Caminho das Índias* or *India, a Love Story* garnered more than 40 million viewers in Brazil and went on to win an international Emmy for best telenovela. Set in India and Brazil, *Caminho das Índias* highlights the challenges to established traditional values such as caste, lifestyles, and norms in emerging economies because of global migration. Through a textual and discursive analysis of the novella, this article hones in on the global migrations among the emerging economies India and Brazil to study the changes migrations bring about in terms of the spatial organization of social relations and familial and cultural ties using the concepts of deterritorialization and hybridity. Framing the novella in the context of BRICS, we interrogate the political economy of the text as a notable South–South international product, one that considerably increased the awareness of one BRICS country in another.

*Keywords:* telenovela, BRICS, India, Brazil, migration, deterritorialization, global south, media, foreign policy, soft power

*Caminho das Índias* or *India, a Love Story* (2009) was an astounding success in Brazil, garnering more than 40 million television viewers. Representing a vibrant, colorful India full of song and dance with characters gushing colloquial Hindi phrases, the novella went on to win an international Emmy for best telenovela in 2009 ([http://www.iemmys.tv/awards\\_previous.aspx](http://www.iemmys.tv/awards_previous.aspx)). Produced by Rede Globo, the novella was also broadcast by TeleFutura, Univision's American Spanish-language network.<sup>2</sup> The Spanish version received stellar ratings in the United States (Villarreal, 2010). In addition, the novella was exported to 89 other countries (Bruha, 2015). Set in India and Brazil, *Caminho das Índias* highlights the challenges to

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<sup>2</sup> See Villarreal (2010) and "Two Globo TV International Licenses" (n.d.).

established traditional values such as India's caste system, lifestyles, and norms in emerging economies because of global migration. Raj, an Indian businessman educated in Britain, falls in love with a Brazilian woman. His family believes that caste is decreed by God and in marrying an outsider, Raj would be defiling his religion and family. Raj succumbs to family pressure, but another youngster in the same family marries a Brazilian girl he befriends over the Internet. Love also blossoms between Maya, a modern Indian woman who works at a call center, and Bahuan, a *Dalit*<sup>3</sup> educated in the United States. The novella constructs all of its lead characters as global. Their lives are entrenched in and created by global flows.

In this article, we use the analytical "scapes" framework offered by Arjun Appadurai that explicates the new "global economy" through flows of finance, culture, media, technology, people, and ideas (see Appadurai, 2010). His framework is apt to study a novella that centers on global flows. It helps to show the range of complex subsystems that are at work in and around the novella. The scapes framework offers a powerful lens to focus on migration, the ethnoscape, and to see how it plays across another primary landscape of globalization, television as part of the mediascape. Appadurai contends that although all scapes are part of the larger phenomenon of globalization, they remain substantially independent or disjunct. They critique the traditional view that economics or technology tends to determine other global or developmental outcomes in a way that lets us examine the power of the movement of people and media as separate levels of globalization with their own dynamics. Interviews with *Caminho das Índias* production researcher Bianca Freire-Medeiros, who worked closely with the novella's principal author, and a close textual and discourse analysis of the novella show the landscapes as closely intertwined, contextual, and shifting in relation to each other. Although finance and technology scapes clearly impact mediascapes, media flows also have their own independent dynamics.

*Caminho das Índias* is a media text produced for both national consumption (in Brazil) and global circulation.<sup>4</sup> It creates a global narrative of movement and migration at a time when Indo-Brazil trade and political relations because of their membership in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) are at the helm of international economic and political forums and debates (O'Neill, 2001). The novella was aired in Brazil the same year as the first BRICS summit. The telenovela therefore occupies a critical media space that, through its textual representation and production practices, makes visible new connections between India and Brazil on all global "landscapes." Although the author of the novella Gloria Perez has a predilection for creating novellas about international and exotic locales, the topicality of this novella in being created the same year as the first BRIC nations' summit and in consultation with the Indian embassy makes it a relevant media text in the BRICS context. Framing this telenovela as a cultural artifact for the Indo-Brazil relationship and as representative of an important node in global media production and circulation, in this article, we attempt to answer the following questions: (1) How is global migration

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<sup>3</sup> *Dalit* is a designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchable. Dalits are a mixed population, consisting of numerous social groups from all over South Asia; they speak a variety of languages and practice a multitude of religions. In this telenovela, the designation *Dalit* is used to refer to the oppressed and untouchable caste group in the Hindu religion.

<sup>4</sup> TV Globo International exports and distributes TV programs to more than 130 countries around the world, and the global audience for the Brazilian telenovelas is more than 2 billion viewers. For more, see Bellos (2007) and TV Globo (2015).

represented in the novella? (2) As a global narrative, how is the global presence of India reflected in *Caminho das Índias*? (3) How is globalization shown as bringing Indian and Brazilian people together? (4) Is there a sense of the BRICS narrative of the countries' mutual prominence as emerging economic powers? These questions are pertinent because they examine relatively underresearched aspects of how the BRICS countries as a bloc are interacting. Migration and media flows between BRICS countries are important elements of this exchange, factors that have not been addressed by scholars so far.

### **Brief History of the Brazilian Telenovela and the Representation of Migration in the Genre**

Telenovelas' antecedents hark back to French serial literature and U.S. radio soap operas. The genre is strongly rooted in the tradition of oral story-telling. According to Martín-Barbero (1995), the telenovela "expanded the reading public and inaugurated a new relationship between popular readers and writing: that was established by a story written in episodes and series" (p. 277). The telenovela genre developed originally in Cuba in the 1950s, under the sponsorship of Colgate-Palmolive, which wanted to adapt the U.S. soap opera to Latin America, and spread throughout the Latin American region in the 1950s and 1960s (Rivero, 2007, 2010). It is a part of the everyday and often acts as a forum for public debates. The genre is immersive: It is broadcast daily, weeknights, and Saturday, and lasts six to eight months, thereby generating a loyal, almost captive audience.

The definitive rise in the importance and quality of the telenovela in Brazil took place as Brazilian telenovelas shifted away from their Cuban origins. TV Tupi broadcast *Beto Rockefeller*, a 1968 novella about a Rio rounder or player climbing into high society, that first used distinctly Brazilian archetypes (Fadul, 1993). TV Globo accelerated this shift during 1968–1970 by replacing Cuban émigré writers with Brazilian writers from theater and cinema, often leftist playwrights with strong political and social agendas, despite the censorship of the military regime that took over in 1964.

TV Globo started in 1964 in a joint venture with Time-Life, Inc., that brought in financial support, access to technology, and a vastly improved network administration system, giving TV Globo the financial wherewithal to hire the best writers, directors, producers, and program managers. That was visible in the improved writing and production quality of TV Globo's telenovelas. Less obvious but crucial were a genuine national simulcast network, the vastly improved advertising sales that resulted, acute financial management, and strong reinvestment of profits into improved production (Wallach, 2011).

TV Globo benefitted from increased military government advertising, a rapidly expanded government telecom infrastructure, and government incentives for the public to acquire television sets, which radically expanded the viewing public and advertising sales. Part of the military's willingness to tolerate TV Globo's new leftist writers was a shared vision of a modern, rapidly growing, more inclusive but capitalist Brazil, which was the military's ultimate goal, arguably more important than censoring political comments in novellas (Ribke, 2011). For TV Globo management, it was part of a vision of high-quality production ("*o padrão global de qualidade*"), more modern and realistic, relying more on scripted drama, which would also produce higher advertising revenue (Wallach, 2011). The resulting narration of

the nation (Bhabha, 1990) was compelling and powerful in shaping national identity (Porto, 2011). Peak moments often drew an audience share over 80%.

One of the shifts in themes of telenovelas in the 1970s was a focus on migration patterns to Brazil and in Brazil. Some of these new narratives' stereotypes, reflected through Brazilian cultural frames, focused on both internal and foreign migrants and their sufferings. One of the next major novellas, *Irmãos Coragem* (1970) created by Janete Clair for TV Globo, was about internal migrants to the big city and their trials and problems (Alencar, 2002). Several telenovelas have looked at Italian immigrants to Brazil (*Os Imigrantes* [1981], *Terra Nostra* [1999]); others have looked at Arab immigrants (*Gabriela* [1975], *O Clone* [2001]; La Pastina & Straubhaar, 2005). Costas (2011) argues that the telenovela and the encompassing mediascape have appropriated the migrant and his or her routes.

The telenovela, as several scholars have pointed out, is very critical to national identity formation, which can be attributed to the social functions performed by the novella (Porto, 2011). The novellas present "social merchandising' that brings to the forefront a certain conduct, position and behavioural response to such societal questions" (Thomas, 2011, p. 1). They also perform a collective memory function by reconstructing and recalling important historical moments and patterns in the narrative. The third and most important function that the novella performs is collective identity formation. The telenovela works to create a Brazilian identity as a collective based on "its representation of an imaginary being [often stereotyped] relative to a collective Brazilian identity" (Thomas, 2011, p. 1).

Ribke and Costas point to a new shift in this genre, the new emergence of "transnational social spaces" that can threaten to orientalize and exoticize other nations and locales (Ribke, 2015), but also offer the "potential for making social ties and relationships, which can be even stronger than those occurring in the space of one's geographical origins" (Costas, 2011, p. 30). Costas (2011) links this to the notion of transmigration, which "refers to people who move and live in new social spaces" (p. 30) and who maintain their networks in both home and host societies. *Transmigration* then becomes a term to describe people who vacillate between "leaving and coming back": Ribke (2015) looks at this phenomenon as a somewhat orientalist tendency in novellas, particularly those by Gloria Perez, to exoticize other countries in her novellas.

According to Costas, the telenovela *Patria Minha* (1994) was the first attempt at depicting the new migration patterns of Brazilians leaving the country. The attempt to represent migration in novellas was renewed by Gloria Perez. Her novella *America* (2005) placed Brazilian migrants and their rites and (routes) of passage into the United States at the core of the narrative (Drugg, 2006). The lead protagonist Sol is an illegal immigrant in the United States working at menial jobs from babysitting to being a go-go girl in a nightclub. The liminal spaces occupied by the migrants in the U.S. land of dreams were made visible. The novella also resonated with the regional or hemispheric debates on Latin American immigration to the United States (Drugg, 2006).

Gloria Perez followed up the story of migration to America and its travails with another narrative (*O Clone*) set partially in the exotic, oriental space of Morocco. The migratory movement of the main protagonist Jade happens because of existing family ties. After her mother's demise, she moves to

Morocco to live with her uncle, her only surviving relative. The other lead characters, the Ferraz family, visit Morocco on vacation; their travel is representative of Brazil's new socioeconomic reality that includes a wealthy middle class with high disposable incomes (Pezzini, 2012).<sup>5</sup> Another telenovela narrative by the same writer/director that focuses on an Islamic exotic nation is *Salve Jorge* (2012). Set in Turkey, the novella depicts the migration of the lead character Morena from Rio de Janeiro to Turkey because of human trafficking.

### **Representation of Globalization and the Global Indian in *Caminho das Índias***

Gloria Perez as an author has a predilection for representing exotic "other" spaces as evidenced in her previous novellas (Ribke, 2015). Her depiction of the exotic Hindu India in *Caminho das Índias* (Perez, 2009a) followed the same subgenre of an exotic story wrapped in melodrama that her audience expects. However, the key point to be assessed here is whether India was just another randomly chosen exotic location. Although the location's exoticness fits the author/producer's oeuvre, she also is inclined to pick topical stories that are in the news. *O Clone*, for instance, debuted shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on October 1, 2001. Islamic spaces and terrorism were part of the global imaginary and news. However, Perez's depiction was rather exotic and based on a fascination with a distant Moorish/Iberian past (Shohat & Alsultany, 2013). Similarly for *Caminho das Índias*, the historic topicality was created by the BRIC coalition and the success of Danny Boyle's Bollywoodized feature *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The first BRIC summit that was held the same year as the telenovela aired and a year after *Slumdog Millionaire* was released made Bollywood part of the global lexicon (Rai, 2009). Hence, this novella in Perez's signature style televisually created the emergent Bollywoodized landscape that brought together BRICs and Bollywood. India and Indians are very much at the helm of this story. The author also found a resemblance in the novella plot and the Bollywood film *Omkara* (2006). Interestingly, the novella used a popular song from *Omkara* as its title song. Freire-Medeiros did agree to binge watching several Bollywood films as part of the research for *Caminho das Índias*; however, she did not explicitly admit to being inspired by any one film in particular. Apart from the market-oriented strategy of creating a story about the exotic India that was globally in vogue, Perez's choice was possibly also driven by industry synergies. TV Globo signed a deal with Indian Media and Entertainment Group Sahara One in 2008 to provide content for its channel *Firangi*. *Firangi* means "foreign" in Hindi language, and the channel aimed to provide dubbed entertainment programming for Indian viewers across the globe. In its first-year run, Perez's novella *America* was aired by the channel ("Sahara One Launches," 2008).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to a decrease in poverty from almost 40% of the population in 2001 to around 25% in 2009, 31 million people joined the middle class in Brazil. Today, 52% of Brazil's population is middle class.

<sup>6</sup> The synergy between TV Globo and Indian Media and Entertainment Group Sahara One came to an abrupt halt. Sahara One stopped its seemingly successful venture *Firangi* TV, and the group's future in general is in jeopardy following the arrest of the group's founder and chairman Subrata Roy for financial fraud. The Indian Supreme Court verdict against him was issued in 2012. He was finally imprisoned in 2014 (Jagannathan, 2014). As a result, the Sahara One global strategy did not manifest as it should have.

Indian characters are the main protagonists in *Caminho das Índias*, and it borrows heavily from Bollywood, including its characteristic use of song and dance. This aspect is covered in more detail in another essay (Rai, 2015). It is primarily the story of Indian migration and (trans)migration to Brazil. In *Caminho das Índias*, Brazilian global movement is not the main focus. Instead, the story seems to try to place Brazil as an actor in the global economy that participates in flows between emerging economies, including India. The main protagonists Raj and Bahuan in *Caminho das Índias* are "(trans)migrants" who easily move within both Brazilian and Indian societies. Transmigrants' lives are constituted through constant and multiple interconnections across international borders (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995). The transmigrant also constitutes and is constituted by the disjunct scapes that Appadurai articulates. They are at the helm of the scapes of technology, ideas, capital, and media.

Bahuan fares well in Brazil where he uses his intellectual and cultural capital and skill acquired in the West to start an entrepreneurial Indo-Brazilian venture in the latter half of the novella. He also ends up on the board of Cadore, a Brazilian multinational. As transmigrants, both Raj and Bahuan become firmly rooted in the adopted country; they are assimilated enough to build lasting ties on personal and professional fronts. Raj's relationship with Duda and its acceptance by her close friends exemplifies Raj's acculturation in "Brazilian" society. They are both equally connected to India as well and exercise influence in the home country. Bahuan falls in love with the daughter of an Indian millionaire while she is on vacation in Brazil. Thus, he becomes influential in India by virtue of this association, despite his *Dalit* status. Transmigration and global flows are therefore at the core of this novella; it is a representation of transmigrants or global Indians who are at ease in both the adopted country and the homeland and maintain multiple linkages to both. Lie (1995) discusses "the idea of diaspora as an unending sojourn across different lands" as a better articulation of the "emerging reality of transnational networks and communities than the language of immigration and assimilation" (p. 304). Homeland networks, cultures, and capital remain salient for the transnational migrant. The migratory movement is multidirectional and never final. "Multiple, circular and return migrations, rather than a singular great journey from one sedentary space to another, occur across transnational spaces. People's movements, in other words, follow multifarious trajectories and sustain diverse networks" (Lie, 1995, p. 304). Appadurai and Breckenridge's (1988) articulation of diaspora as transmigrants similarly addresses the way in which the Indian global migration is evoked in the Indian political discourse.

Global Indians or *Pravasi Bhartiya* (nonresident Indians) have been cynosure of Indian media (primarily Bollywood) as well as the government discourse since the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s. The economic potential of this global diaspora as investors for the Indian economy has been at the forefront of the government policy. Raj and Bahuan thus are exemplary figures in the novella's narrative who are engaged in business investments in both India and Brazil. According to Freire-Medeiros, the Indian consul general in Brazil was an advisor for the novella. The ambassador himself has written articles in the Indian press about being involved with this novella. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the framing of the characters and narrative is conducive to the ideal *Pravasi Bhartiya*. Perez's narrative, however, also characterizes this class of global Indians as IT migrants. Bahuan holds a PhD in computer science from the United States and Raj incorporates IT into his family's traditional textile business to expand it globally. Indian migration across the globe has had a very diverse and complex history. However, in the recent past, the migration of IT-related skilled labor to the developed world,

predominantly the United States, has dominated the discourse on Indian migration. This movement has been variously termed "the globalization of human capital," "brain drain," and in the current global lexicon, the skilled IT migrants are referred to as "knowledge workers." The novella's male protagonists possess a "transnational hypermobility" and can clearly be classified as India's knowledge workers, a term that epitomizes the new generation of Indian skilled IT labor.

In the novella, Bahuan's and Raj's migrations to the developed world, namely, the United States and United Kingdom, have been through the academic gate as "semifinished human capital" from India. In the first episode of the novella, Bahuan, on his return from the United States, explains to his adoptive father Shanker that he has been offered an academic position in the United States. The exchange between Shanker and Bahuan brings up several issues related to migration. Shanker tries to persuade Bahuan to stay in India, exhorting Bahuan's national values and affiliation. "Going to college in the U.S. does not make you American," he says. Bahuan points to his inferior caste status as a *Dalit* as detrimental to his success and social status in the homeland; in the United States, he will "not be a *Dalit*." Bahuan conceptualizes migration as an act that would render invisible his caste status, reinforcing the idea of migration as an act of elimination of the past and leaving behind one's social and legal identity. However, promise of greater opportunity and responsibility at home makes Bahuan forego the idea. He eventually travels to Brazil to seek new opportunities and establish himself as an entrepreneur. This shift in the narrative represents and is represented by mediascapes and ideoscapes that articulate Brazil as the new focus for Indian IT and business in general.

Apart from hypermobile transmigrants, the novella's narrative does provide space for other categories of migrants as well. Ashima is an Indian widow who runs a bakery in the Rio neighborhood of Lapa. Radesh lives in Lapa as well; he is an "Indian trickster" who sells "a number of services offered on the streets of India like baths and miraculous incense" (Caminho das Índias Globo.com, 2009, para. 1.) Ashima represents the diasporic migrant who is more settled in the host culture and demonstrates a constant preoccupation with preserving her Indian culture and values and passing them on to her children who are being raised in a "foreign land." Radesh and his migration can be seen as lower-class labor migration. However, his characterization as a trickster may bring into question his passage to Brazil. He may have "tricked" the system to gain entry into "the land of opportunity." Tricksters are an old trope in Brazilian novellas, however, going back at least to *Beto Rockefeller* in 1968, so he is both a familiar and foreign element. The migrations of Bahuan, Raj, and Ashima are closely tied to business and trade, again evoking the business and trade relationship. The novella's representation of transnational migration/mobility with men at the helm replicates the dominant gendered understanding of transnational migration. Yeoh and Pratt (2003) explicate the common perception and depiction of movement through transnational space:

In traversing transnational space, men often feature as entrepreneurs, career-builders, adventurers and breadwinners who navigate transnational circuits with fluidity and ease, while women are alternatively taken to be truants from globalised economic webs, stereotyped as exotic, subservient or victimised, or relegated to playing supporting roles, usually in the domestic sphere. (p. 159)

This exclusionist tendency can be recognized in media representations as well because popular depictions are inflected and informed by the dominant discourse. In the case of *Caminho das Índias*, the men possess a “deterritorialized mobility” that is romanticized. Women, on the other hand, move within the patriarchal realm; their movement across national borders is tied to domestic, familial, or personal relationship issues. Maya, the lead female character, visits Brazil as an accompanying spouse; she travels to Dubai when pregnant because her husband’s family wants to know the sex of her unborn baby, a procedure illegal in India because of prevalent female feticide. Duda, who is from Brazil, visits India to resolve personal issues; her transnational travel is to inform Raj (Maya’s husband) that she is pregnant with Raj’s child. Similarly, Camilla, another Brazilian character, travels to India because she falls in love with an Indian man over the Internet. For the female characters, traversing transnational space is dictated by personal or familial circumstances; their mobility is circumscribed within the realm of the domestic, which is a stark contrast to the male characters who travel overseas to generate “value,” their movement characterized by their entrepreneurial spirit. The only woman entrepreneur in the novella is Ashima, but she is a settled diasporic migrant and hence an exception.

The author also plays to the popular perception of India as a business outsourcing destination and a country full of international call centers. Maya works at a call center. Perez, known for her blatant use of stereotypes, evokes the typical call center employee in the first episode of the novella in which Maya discusses her job with Bahuan: “I work for the New York Investment Bank, I must speak with a New York accent,” to which Bahuan responds,

India has changed a lot. Women are getting out, even spending the night out. I wonder if you ever answered me at the call center [Bahuan used to live in the United States]. When you talk I hear your voice, it’s like I have known it for a long time. (Perez, 2009a)

The contemporary Indian reality and the stereotypical call center experience of young college graduates with feigned foreign accents are encapsulated in this exchange. The most common tropes about globalization in India are referenced, whether it is call centers or IT-related migration from India, with Brazil as a participant in those global processes. At the call center where she works, Maya receives a call from Brazil from Raul Cadore, a partner at the Brazilian multinational firm. Maya gossips about the Brazilian customer making a secret deposit in his personal account. The novella thus creates a narrative in which Brazil is a main participant in global flows and a sense of a South–South global partnership is evoked.

### **A BRICS Scape: A Brief History of Indo-Brazil Relationship and Its Culmination as BRICS**

Indira Gandhi, India’s first woman prime minister, on her visit to Brazil in 1968 began her address with the following anecdote: “468 years ago, Alvares Cabral set out to find India, but found you,” implying that Cabral’s voyage created a common cultural bond between India and Brazil as postcolonial nations (Stuenkel, 2010, p. 2). The anecdote evokes former cultural ties, however. The India and Brazil partnership suffered from a historical rift over their diametrically opposed stance on the decolonization of Goa (an Indian state that was a Portuguese colony until 1961). When it was evident that the Portuguese leadership was feeble and could not possibly regain control over Goa, the Brazilian foreign policy toward



India softened (Stuenkel, 2010). As a result of this hostility, there were no migratory flows between India and Brazil until the 1960s. No more than 20 Brazilian visas were issued to Indians, and most of those travelers were diplomats (Furtado, 2008). The political, cultural, and economic exchange between the two countries was limited.

However, a phenomenon representative of a disjunct ideoscape was the Afro-centric Carnival group the Sons of Gandhi. The first Sons of Gandhi (*Filhos de Gandhi*) were Black, working-class “dockworkers on strike in Salvador who were inspired by Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of equality and nonviolent resistance to oppression. When they heard of his assassination, they decided to march at Carnival in his name” (Mundra, 2009, p. 1). That dockworkers in Brazil were familiar with Gandhi's ideas reflects a remarkably strong set of South–South cultural and ideological flows already in the 1940s. Since 1949, their Carnival tradition has continued. Brazilian anthropologist Guerreiro says,

cultural hybridization is what gives the *Filhos de Gandhi* their appeal. They're able to move between diverse cultural universes . . . they unite international elements and transform them into something local, something profoundly Brazilian. And they can do that because of the universal vision they have. (As cited in Mundra, 2009, para. 17)

The Sons of Gandhi, through their cultural location and historic temporality, exemplify a disjuncture in politically constructed ideoscapes and ethnoscapas. As Appadurai (2010) explicates, the scapes are “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic)” (p. 285). Although marked and defined by disjunctures, the scapes change, evolve, and get redefined with changes of political and institutional ideologies and alignments. Although the Sons of Gandhi, starting in 1949, may be a remarkably early marker of globalization in their time, with changes in institutional/national perspectives and foreign and trade policies, all five scapes with respect to Indo-Brazil global flows are getting redefined.

Although Brazil did not enter some of India's international initiatives such as the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1960s, both have explored South–South economic and cultural ties as part of their foreign policies. Both have been active in South-oriented initiatives, such as the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, from the 1970s. Brazil and India came together as part of IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) in 2003, whose focus was more on collaboration as large emerging democracies on international issues. More recently, India and Brazil came together as part of a political–economic bloc under BRICs in 2009. The *BRIC* term was coined by Goldman Sachs Consultant Jim O'Neil to highlight those nations as emergent economies that would possess significant clout on the world economic and political scene by 2050. As a bloc, BRICS (including South Africa) has an economic as well as political focus. These social, cultural, political, and economic flows have framed the media and cultural discourse surrounding the telenovela *Caminho das Índias* both inside and outside the narrative. According to Freire-Medeiros, the BRICS coalition was an important factor for the telenovela's author, who became initially intrigued with the idea through news about Brazil's new tie to India through BRICs. The Indian consul was a key informant for the novella, and the story and script went through official channels that advised on cultural

factors to “improve the awareness of India in Brazil” (B. Freire-Medeiros, personal communication, November 14, 2014). Medeiros points out that the BRICs idea, highlighted by the visibility of its annual meetings, was an important aspect of the telenovela. Perez had a clear awareness that there is a global south that Brazil wants to have a relation with. Perez had planned her next novella after *Caminho das Índias* to be set in China. However, her idea did not materialize because of the intensive regulatory mechanism of the Chinese government, and shooting in China turned out to be an expensive proposition. Perez then decided on Turkey as the setting for her next telenovela (B. Freire-Medeiros, personal communication, November 14, 2014). Although Turkey is not a BRICS country, it is a major emerging nation very similar in key aspects, still reflecting a South–South focus in Brazil.

### **India: An “Exotic” BRICS or a Comparable Power?**

Some of the early articles about the novella came from diasporic South Asians and global Indians. In one of the early writings about the novella, Indian Ambassador to Brazil B. S. Prakash articulated the novella as media soft power and stressed the strategic temporality of the novella (Almeida, 2009). Global Brazilians writing for Indian newspapers have stressed the similarities between the two countries as emergent democratic economic powers:

Brazil and India are both emerging giants, part of the building BRICS in the forefront of the recovery from the global crisis. I find it exhilarating that Brazil is discovering more about India [through *Caminho das Índias*], and I hope that exchanges get to flow the other way too. These two giants will undeniably help shape many perceptions of the world in coming years; being a denizen of one, and a constant visitor to the other, I see many things that they have in common; and the one I most want to shout about today is this: the future is brown. (Gonzaga de Sa, 2010, para. 4)

Despite the triumphant discourse in textual and metatextual representation of India in the series, we should recognize the limits of cultural translations in the novella.

In *Caminho das Índias*, an exotic oriental lens exists alongside the modern framing of global India. Perez maintained a blog to explain the “exotic” Hindu practices and customs and the Indian imaginary constructed in the novella was of a Hindu India. There are several instances in which India is constructed as the exotic “other” and exaggerated oriental and colonial tropes are used. For instance, Raj’s father Opash feeds a cow, and *Dalits* are discriminated against. In addition, Indians in the novella are in a general mood of revelry and dance to Bollywood songs at the first opportunity.

However, we contend that the portrayal of Indian culture is more complex than a simplistic “orientalization.” The narrative represents a Bollywoodized depiction of Indian culture evident in the way the novella’s title was translated and marketed to other English-speaking countries. Bollywood films were key to the research done by the telenovela team. “While in India we binge watched hundreds of Bollywood films” (B. Freire-Medeiros, personal communication, November 14, 2014 ). The narrative tropes including songs, dance, and plot, including the *Dalit* theme, were inspired by Bollywood. How these tropes are used is covered in another essay (Rai, 2015). The Rede Globo website and Perez’s blog made constant

references to Bollywood celebrity practices to explain why certain characters underwent specific rituals. In the novella, Maya marries a tree to break the *Manglik* curse and Perez follows it with the explanation that there are thousands of marriages in India with animals and vegetables to break the curse. Indian actress Aishwarya is a *Manglik* and to break the curse she married a tree (Perez, 2009b). Some of the contextual background about India, such as the caste system, resonated with the audience and acquired a life of its own. "*Dalits* or untouchables in India wasn't a major theme at first . . . but people picked up on it. If someone was in a bad position they would say that they are being treated like a *Dalit*, instead of *intocável*, which is the Portuguese word for untouchable" (B. Freire-Medeiros, personal communication, November 14, 2014). Given the cultural resonances of the idea of untouchability in Brazil, the *Dalit* theme became more prolonged and pronounced in the telenovela.

Swarnakar (2009), in her essay on culture, tradition, and religion in *Caminho das Índias*, points to the complexity with which the novella represents traditional values and relationships between the older and younger generation. Even though the novella presents the Hindu joint family structure, it disrupts

the possibility of a homogeneous familial identity and the idea of home, thus *Caminho das Índias* creates a destabilized space from which the younger generation begins to reconstruct their own history and identity, distant from the old generation, also distant from its religious traditions as one might expect in [traditional] Indian context. (p. 7)

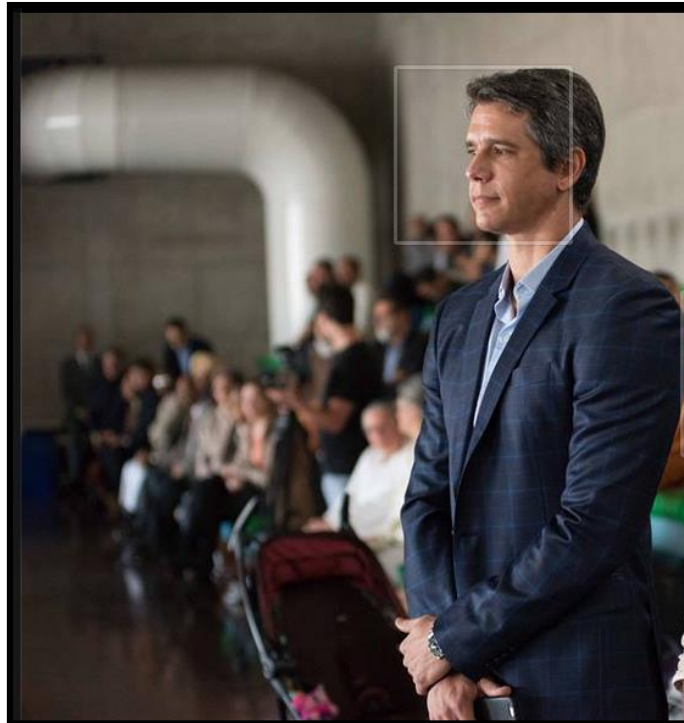
This schism in traditional religious understanding of the relationship between two generations and the actual representation in the novella are reflective of India as a modern "globalizing" society in which traditional structures are evolving and being challenged by the younger generation. There are two ways that the novella's orientalist vocabulary and imagery can be complicated: (1) through identifying the disjunctures brought about by the global in the traditional and oriental construction in the narrative of the novella, and (2) by recognizing the stereotypes as more than oriental and acknowledging the role of Indian popular culture (Bollywood and Indian soap operas) in valorizing traditional practices that share space with oriental discourse.

The telenovela genre, which is closely intertwined with consumerism since its origin selling soap in Cuba, commoditized India in different ways, creating commercial flows and thus impacting the global economic connections anticipated in Appadurai's finanscapes even further. In the wake of the novella, Brazilian restaurants started offering Indian menus and designer shops sold Indian jewelry and home furnishings. Tours to India featuring the shooting locations of the novella were popular (Mathur, 2009). Although the immense popularity of the telenovela genre in Brazil ensures a similar response to foreign customs and cultures depicted in any novella, in the case of *Caminho das Índias*, it was for a BRICS nation, and the popular mass frenzy about India was seen as an effort to bolster soft power and diplomatic ties. Former Ambassador Prakash (2009) mentions in an article that the novella "has made India so popular, that no ambassador can ask for a better platform or a more propitious climate for projecting the real India" (p. 6). He also points to his deliberate involvement in the novella. Although the project may have been Perez's personal choice, Prakash made some inquiries and got involved because "[he] knew how important mass media is in creating or altering the image of a country and its culture, especially when it is relatively unknown as India is in Brazil" (p. 4). *Caminho das Índias* was, as Prakash

insists, a case of another “developing country . . . with its own problems of poverty, disparity, slums, class differences etc. but with an altogether different culture, taking a look at India, with an extravagant curiosity” (p. 4).

### **Conclusion: The Logic of Production and Future Capital Flows**

The sociopolitical and cultural logic of the production of *Caminho das Índias* is important. The shared history of colonial experience, strong emerging economies as identified in the original definition of BRICs, its positions as regional powers in both economy and politics, its new-found political alignment in the annual BRICS meeting to determine common interests, and an intriguing set of social comparisons in an Indian caste system comparable to racial stratification in Brazil may have prompted the producers to write and explore a story about India, according to Freire-Medeiros. Then, too, this novella offers a certain kind of consistency. Brazilian telenovela writers, especially Gloria Perez, have consistently liked putting international locales of interest into telenovela plots.



**Figure 1. Marcio Garcia was a speaker at International Yoga Day Celebration at the Indian Embassy in Sao Paulo, June 2015.  
Source: Consulate General of India, Sao Paulo.**

The novella also reflects a conjuncture of Brazilian and Indian economic interests in the financial or economic scape. At an economic level, the economic correspondences between the two countries, with growing middle classes and consequently a high demand for domestic entertainment, point to potential

industry collaborations and opportunities partially unfolded by the novella's mediascapes. Bollywood films found a distributor in Brazil after the novella broadcast (Salem, 2012), and a leading Bollywood director Anurag Kashyap is coproducing a film with Brazilian director Beatriz Seigner (Sreeharsha, 2012). Both Brazil and India have participated as exporters in the global mediascape, so they have put national images and genres, such as Bollywood song and dance, into circulation in a way that perhaps invites appropriation and interaction. The novella shows that the BRICS countries are taking more interest in each other politically, economically, and culturally, especially in the case of Brazil, India, and China, which are already major media producers on the home front. The BRICS countries are not unique in this. Other novellas by the same author increased interest, even tourism, by Brazilians to other developing countries, such as Turkey and Morocco, as well. However, in this case, the effect was to increase contact between the countries.

It also shows that cultural power often parallels political and economic flows. It shows that cultural flows, like the flow of Indian content into the Brazilian-made script and images of the telenovela *Caminho das Índias*, can then accelerate economic and political interactions, for example, Indian films finding distributors in Brazil and forthcoming Bollywood Brazil coproductions, as well as the projection of Indian soft power into Brazil. This Bollywoodized novella also epitomizes an interesting instance of soap opera diplomacy. It married a depiction of Bollywoodized India to Latin America's most popular genre and the end product was leveraged for diplomacy. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brazil for the sixth BRICS summit in 2014 was not devoid of reference to *Caminho das Índias*. "The telecasting of telenovela called 'Caminho das Índias' (Paths to India) made a great impact in enhancing the consciousness of India in the Brazilian public mind" (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2014, p. 1). Most recently, Marcio Garcia, the actor who played Bahuan, was a notable presence at the International Yoga Day celebrated at the Indian embassy in Sao Paulo in June 2015 (see Figure 1). This novella brings together political, economic, and cultural flows that make it an important media text. Whether Perez originally intended it to be so may be unclear, but as Anthony Fung points out, "aside from soft power," soap operas are primarily about making money (quoted in Shyong, 2015), and Perez definitely chose a subject that became globally popular and won her an international Emmy.

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