

8. TRANSCULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS OF MOUNTAIN AESTHETICS IN *TIGER ZINDA HAI* (2017)

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INTRODUCTION

Tiger Zinda Hai (Ali Abbas Zafar, 2017) is a controversial Bollywood action thriller banned in Pakistan by the Ministry of Information. According to CBFC's (Central Board of Film Certification) chief Mobashir Hasan, the movie has been refused the No-objection Certification, as it portrays "[Pakistan's national] security and law enforcement institutions, agencies, individuals and certain state symbols [...] in a demeaning manner on which [they] have a "no-compromise policy."¹ At first glance, the political dimension of this mass media production, however, seems limited—while ISC terrorism constitutes the frame for the heroes' action skills, the question of binational Indian and Pakistani rivalry mainly serves to spice up the relationship between the two protagonists Tiger and Zoya, known from a previous film (*Ek Tha Tiger*, Kabir Khan, 2012). Before the actual mission begins, Tiger and Zoya's love and family life are shown in an idyllic episode in the Austrian Alps, which seems entirely apolitical: To combine an action-thriller with one of the main selling points of Bollywood cinema—its hyperbolic love imageries—the filmmakers opted for this twenty-minute romantic intermezzo.

However, *Tiger Zinda Hai*'s mountain idyll points out a self-reflexive dimension, as the scenes shot in the Austrian Alps are not set in an imaginary mountain landscape but integrated into the intradiegetic reality. The decision to situate the mountain idyll within the primary diegetic world results in an

original renegotiation of mountain aesthetics in a field of tension between modernity and tradition: It contrasts typical romantic tropes with intimate insights into the everyday life of a binational family. By doing so, the movie interweaves different layers of socio-cultural challenges—the representation of Indian family life is confronted with the challenges of Indian-Pakistani biculturalism and the idea of Austria as equally idyllic and progressive. I suggest that the Alpine episode constitutes a major contribution to the negotiation of socio-political problematics within *Tiger Zinda Hai*. My study will focus on how traditional Bollywood aesthetics on the one hand and innovative tendencies in Indian Cinema on the other combine with a reinvestigation of Austrian perspectives from an external (Indian) point-of-view to address socio-political dynamics. I will first analyze the cinematographic construction of the Alps before discussing transcultural perspectives on both India and Austria in the mountain sequences. In the final part, I will examine how the cinematic construction of the Alpine microcosm addresses social transformation processes in twenty-first-century India.

As the Alpine episode is connected in many ways to the rest of the three hour-long story, it seems necessary to begin with a short summary of the main plot lines, which intertwine post-9/11 terrorism and questions of transculturality. After an ISC attack on a hospital in Ikrit, Iraq, the terrorists hold twenty-five Indian and fifteen Pakistani nurses of the hospital hostage. The fictional city “Ikrit” probably refers to Tikrit, Iraq, as the plot is vaguely based on a real-life incident in July 2014, when ISC troops attacked Tikrit, taking forty-six Indian nurses hostage. Unlike other victims, the nurses were released after negotiations between the ISC and the Indian government.² Besides the movie turning this diplomatic arrangement into a dramatic rescue mission, one of the major changes concerns the choice to divide the nurses into Indian and Pakistani groups, thus introducing a transnational dimension. The respective governments each send a secret agent to free the women—a mission for which they are only granted seven days by the American Army, which, after this delay, plans to bomb Ikrit to regain control over the city. The American authorities are thus ready to sacrifice the nurses as well as a group of American soldiers stationed in the city. At this point, Tiger, who is Indian, and Zoya, who is Pakistani, are contacted by their governments. The two secret agents, officially declared dead at the end of *Ek Tha Tiger*, are actually happily married and living in the Austrian Alps. After a short prologue, the viewer gets an insight into Tiger and Zoya’s exile in Austria. The episode is divided into three thematic sequences: (1) father and son chopping firewood in the mountains and being attacked by a pack of wolves; (2) Zoya shopping in a local grocery store and preventing a robbery; (3) the family at home with Tiger and Zoya celebrating their anniversary. The episode terminates when Tiger, visited by his former superior Shenoy, leaves for Iraq. It is only after another thirty minutes

that viewers learn Zoya has also been mobilized by her government. While the Indian and Pakistani governments insist on saving only “their” nurses, Tiger and Zoya decide to join forces and successfully rescue all nurses. In the film’s last scene, Zoya and Tiger have found a new refuge in Greece.

MOUNTAIN AESTHETICS BETWEEN BOLLYWOOD AND *BERGFILM*

Mountains are classical chronotopes of Bollywood cinema, filled with the traditional symbolism of Hindi culture (Pestal 2007, 53) and often found in the construction of “remote or even fantastic places” (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 58). Central to many mountain scenes in Bollywood are dance choreographies that emphasize the imaginary geography of romantic relationships, “cognitive maps” (Mikunda 1998), which are not meant to be realistic but “create a structure of feelings and looks” (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 56–57). Due to the political tensions in Kashmir, Bollywood productions started filming in other mountain areas without pointing out that the romantic love scenes are often shot in European landscapes (Pestal 2007, 54): Alpine (Swiss or Austrian) shooting locations typically “form the idyllic backdrop to what is, in fact, an Indian story” (Banerjee 2011, 83). In *Tiger Zinda Hai*, however, the relation between India and the Alpine universe is more complex. While it indeed constitutes a closed microcosm of love and family harmony, it is also integrated into the primary intradiegetic reality.

The movie starts with the terrorist attack and the Indian foreign intelligence agency (R&AW) searching for a way to free the Indian nurses.³ The R&AW chairman Shenoy finally decides to contact Tiger, whom most of the agents believe dead. A long dissolve marks the transition from a close-up of Tiger’s file on Shenoy’s computer screen to a mountainous landscape described as “somewhere in the Austrian Alps, Innsbruck.” This break is emphasized by several cinematic means. The slow dissolve showing a white surface before revealing the Alpine winter landscape, accompanied by a change in the music from an intense, dramatic theme to an epic, yet calm melody, stages a cooling down of the politically tense atmosphere in the R&AW headquarters. The audience then gets an overview of the picturesque and peaceful expanse of the mountains, which contrasts with the previous violence.

For creating landscape in Hindi cinema, the notion of *Darśana*, an act of viewing based on mutual exchange, is crucial. In the Hindi tradition, *Darśana* describes the confrontation with a spiritual or divine entity; when it comes to cinema, it refers to the idea that the camera allows an encounter between the viewer and the cinematographic landscape. It involves “frontality as a signifying act” (Deshpande & Mazaj 2018, 168), as the frontality of the depicted—and spiritually animated—landscape is in an exchange with the intra- and extradiegetic viewer. *Tiger Zinda Hai* portrays the mountains as an

animated entity, a process that shows parallels to the classic *Bergfilm*, in which the mountain regularly takes over the role of agent (Martin 2017). Examining the implication of the aesthetics of frontality, Vasudevan distinguishes two techniques of framing in Hindi cinema: the iconic and the tableau mode. The mountain sequence seems to involve both. On the one hand, there is a “mythic dimension,” characteristic of iconic framing: The first minutes of the episode not only attribute the function of a spiritual teacher to the mountains, but also stage them as an equally vital (wood chopping) and threatening (wolves) environment. On the other hand, it gives an “illustrative summary” of the situation typical of the tableau mode (2001, 105), which familiarizes the viewer with the Austrian mountains (Figure 8.1).

The following scenes, focusing on a chase between the wolves and the snowboarding Tiger, progressively abandon the frontality of *Darśana* filming. After the first panoramic overview, the camera reveals several extreme close-ups of different parts of Tiger and Junior’s bodies and their equipment. The cubist vision of father and son illustrates on a metonymic level the Alpine atmosphere the director seeks to create: The boots and the ax stand for an experienced outdoor and survival hiker; his bare hands—in contrast to the child’s gloved hands—mark virile robustness. The snowboard refers to the Alps as a stereotypical environment for winter sports, while the close-up of the child’s hand taking his father’s suggests a harmonious, well-protected family atmosphere. The viewer can also observe how Tiger and his son integrate into the surrounding environment, their bodies interacting with the winter landscape (Figure 8.2): The filmmakers thus use classic *Bergfilm* techniques to dynamize and dramatize the landscape by means of the moving body (Rapp 2003, 81). Based on Bollywood aesthetics, the producers also imitate *Bergfilm* traditions,



Figure 8.1 Austrian Alps in *Tiger Zinda Hai* (2017)



Figure 8.2 Snowboarding in *Tiger Zinda Hai* (2017)

intertwining Indian and Western landscape imageries, and combining the cultural perception of the protagonists with aesthetic traditions of Alpine landscape constructions.

Particularly interesting in this aesthetic dramatization of the mountain idyll are the many intermedial references to other typical mountain genres. As the episode is part of the intradiegetic primary reality, the romance and hyperbolic idyll of the mountain scenes cannot rely on established Bollywood strategies, where romantic landscapes are “accessed in dream sequences or without diegetic explanation” (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 58). The production, therefore, refers to other genres that emphasize the mountains as a peaceful and idyllic landscape. Beside the references to the *Bergfilm*, there are interesting correlations between *Tiger Zinda Hai* and the aesthetics and narrative structures of the *Heimatfilm*. In the traditional *Heimatfilm*, the mountainous landscape, in the sense of both a cultural and natural space, is filled with meaning. Tropes like the countryside versus the city, the importance of a closed homeland, or the interpretation of the represented action as “addition and cumulation of faith” (Rossbacher 1975, 156) create the Alpine landscape as a protected, reliable space serving the identity development of its inhabitants. As Johannes von Moltke argues, the spatial dimension in the *Heimatfilm* is defined by the relation between the represented space and people claiming this space as their home (2005, 9). He points out that the geographical place thus becomes a metaphor for an “imagined community” (2020, 10). In *Tiger Zinda Hai*, the Austrian Alps in this sense become a safe space for Tiger and Zoya’s relationship. The establishment of their home in the Alpine space is emphasized during their romantic date. While the scenes in Innsbruck (featuring a restaurant as well as the castle’s dancing hall) bring the public sphere to the forefront, the couple explores the mountains as a private space, where they position their breakfast table on a snow-covered mountain



Figure 8.3 Domesticating the exotic Alps in *Tiger Zinda Hai* (2017)

and their living room (including a home cinema) in the middle of the forest (Figure 8.3).

Tiger and Zoya can also be analyzed as original representatives of Moltke's category of "exiles" (2020, 259) or Rossbacher's category of the "Verzichtende," meaning people who renounce their old life and home for a new life in the solitude of the Alps (Rossbacher 1975, 195–98). While it was not the couple's free decision to hide in the mountains in the first place, they seem to feel comfortable in their new life. Even if the other villagers still perceive their cultural differences, they appear to be completely accepted, as the friendly conversation between Zoya and a sales assistant in the supermarket shows.

This harmonious community is typically disturbed by trouble coming from outside, in this case the visit of the R&AW agents. *Tiger Zinda Hai*, of course, is far from containing all elements of a typical *Heimatfilm*. It is, however, interesting to observe that the opposition of the violent and risky secret mission and the peaceful family life is reinforced by the *Heimatfilm* antithesis between city and countryside, as most of the upcoming action takes place in the center of Ikrit. Nevertheless, the mountain landscapes in *Tiger Zinda Hai* also contribute to deconstructing the idea of *Heimat*, as they build a somehow universal framework within the movie: The last scene shows Zoya, Tiger, and Junior on the Greek coast, surrounded by a mountainous landscape, reminding the viewer that their home is less connected to a determined geographical place than to their family union.

Another interesting point of reference could be the genre of the *Alpenkrimi*, a variant of the *Heimatgenre* (Knaup 2014; Löffler 2017). With a wolf attack and a robbery in the supermarket, *Tiger Zinda Hai* introduces two moments of action that remind us of the *Alpenkrimi*'s dynamics, where the Alps appear as a homeland on the one hand and as a threatening natural and social space

on the other (Knaup 2014, 357). By different aesthetic and narratological means, the *Alpenkrimi* intertwines human criminal energy and the raw natural forces of the Alpine landscape (Klingenböck 2014, pp. 323–24). In the first part of *Tiger Zinda Hai*'s Alpine episode, the Alps are also depicted as a *locus horribilis*: In this sense, the pack of wolves—*homo homini lupus est*—and the gang of criminals in the supermarket are linked on a symbolic level by a mirroring effect. Nature and civilization thus appear equally threatening but luckily controlled by the two protagonists, Tiger and Zoya. In this context, it is important to underline that in both scenes, the heroes not only have to defend themselves but also act for the protection of others.

Despite the narrative break, the episode transports subtle subtexts about the main narrative and creates continuity between the two universes. When Tiger tells his son Junior to run from the wolves while he fights them, Junior asks his father whether he will kill the animals. The father first confirms this, but Junior, who pities the wolves, proposes a deal: “If you save me, without killing the wolves, then I’ll believe you, *that you are the real Tiger*.”⁴ Of course, Tiger accepts the deal, increasing the suspense of the upcoming pursuit. More important here is the implicit, proleptic subtext of Junior’s words, reminding “Tiger” that his strength does not allow him to kill without considering other solutions. “Tiger” is more than the character’s (sur)name. It describes his personality as much as his fighting prowess and strategic thinking, which are also pointed out by other characters. In this context, Juluri’s thoughts on the representation of violence in modern Indian cinema are of particular interest. Discussing narratives of violence in post-9/11 Indian films in the context of cultural difference, he argues that although the political enemies of India “are depicted in ways that are far from sensitive or politically correct,” violence is “refuted as unethical, evil, and cruel when it violates the expectations of duties and obligation” (Juluri 2008, 118 and 128). In this sense, Junior’s words set the moral bar for the subsequent mission.⁵ On an aesthetic level, too, at the end of the Alpine episode, the camera emphasizes continuity. Once again, a slow dissolve marks the transition back to the Iraqi desert: The colors are as bright as those of the snowfields, and the rolling hills in the background are reminiscent of the Alpine summits.

TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON AUSTRIA AND INDIA

While the Alpine episode contrasts the action plot with a harmonic vision of Tiger and Zoya’s successful transcultural family life, the cinematographic construction of the mountains echoes the cultural encounter of India and Austria as a central theme of the Alpine episode. As *Tiger Zinda Hai* is mainly addressed to Indian viewers, it reproduces a widely stereotypical representation of Austria that meets most of the Asian clichés of Austria or, more generally,

of the Alps. The episode is set in winter, including snow, snowboarding, a traditional wooden sled, open fireplaces, and wood-chopping. It is, however, warm enough to have breakfast outside in short pajamas, and even though it is winter, there are local fresh raspberries and strawberries. This Austrian collage reproduces and multiplies idyllic tropes of both Bollywood (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 59)⁶ and the *Heimatfilm* (Beindorf 2001).

However, there are also less expected or less conventional elements that contribute to the Indian image of Austria. First there is the opposition between civilization and wilderness. In *Tiger Zinda Hai*, the mountains are not portrayed as a perfectly romantic and peaceful dreamland. Nature is not only a picturesque décor but also a dangerous environment. The episode of the wolves probably refers to occidental ancestral anxiety, which finds its expression, for example, in the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, which is widely read in Indian primary schools (Brinker-von der Heyde 2015). Another unconventional element concerns the scene in the supermarket. Instead of buying her fresh vegetables at a local market, Zoya prefers a modern supermarket. This preference may indicate Indians' vision of Europe as a developed continent. According to Claus Tieber, Indian cinema associates European civilizations with abundance (2007, 129). In this sense, the Austrian countryside becomes some kind of dreamland, where the binary between city and village, also emphasized in Bollywood but filled with different sememes, is partly deconstructed: The "romanticized view of the village [...] as representative of a pure, unsullied" society and the conception of the city "as an icon of modernity" (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 63) intertwine in the representation of the Alpine everyday life. While Tiger, on the one hand, goes chopping firewood in nature—a common place of European idyll—the close-up of a pressure cooker reveals his preference for quick and easy cooking.

The movie thus develops an interesting image of Austrian culture between tradition and modernity. Referring to Bianca Bosker, Gundolf Graml shows how the Chinese perception of Austria contains what the Chinese middle class considers "most 'iconic, attractive, and desirable' in the European culture" (2020, 270). While the Chinese conception of "Austrian-ness" (Graml 2020, 268) is mainly based on clichés of traditional tropes, the Indian ideal of Austria as it is revealed in *Tiger Zinda Hai* oscillates between a picturesque décor and modern development. In this sense, the movie connects to current Indian debates (Ganti 2004, 3), but also takes a self-reflexive and sometimes self-ironic look at Indian culture and Indian cinema.

The supermarket scene, for example, ironically points out the stereotypical perception of the cultural other. Sophia, the sales assistant and a friend of Zoya, greets her in Hindi with a dictionary in her hands. Zoya, in turn, praises her language skills in Hindi. Sophia then euphorically tells Zoya that she and her husband are planning a trip to India because her husband always

dreamed of visiting the Taj Mahal, the “monument of love.” This expression refers to a strategy of projecting positive feelings into a far away, nearly imaginary dreamland: While Indians dream of romance in the Alps, Austrians dream of the Taj Mahal.⁷ It is also interesting that Sophia refers to Zoya as a representative of India and an expert on Indian culture. This attitude shows the Austrian ignorance of the complexity of South Asian history. However, as Zoya does not seem to feel offended by being associated with India, it may emphasize the idea that the similarities between India and Pakistan are after all more important than the differences. Sophia continues questioning Zoya about vaccinations, listing dengue fever, malaria, yellow fever, and bird flu, though the Austrian embassy does not recommend any vaccinations.⁸ Sophia’s uninformed concerns reflect the perception many Europeans have of India as a disease-ridden country. Zoya, barely listening and already distracted by the robbers in a mirror (a subtle reference to the self-reflexivity of the scene), responds “Police.” Instead of calling the police, Sophia expresses her confusion as she has never “heard of that disease.” The miscommunication between the two characters concerning two different sources of danger ironically reveals Sophia’s fears as hypochondriacal. Zoya’s indifferent reaction reveals them as an Austrian cliché of India, while the interruption of the conversation by a robbery inverts the stereotypical relation of safe country/dangerous country in a humorous way.

Another crucial moment is the implementation of Tiger and Zoya’s date in the primary diegetic reality. As Dwyer and Patel put it, Indian couples in Bollywood movies often construct “remote and fantastic places” to gain “some sort of privacy [...], a private space in the public domain, where they are away from the surveillance of the family” (Dwyer & Patel 2002, 59). The romantic sequence in *Tiger Zinda Hai* has everything one expects from a classical Bollywood love scene, except that Tiger and Zoya are already married and therefore the fairytale-like places that they claim, such as the snow-covered high mountains, the Hofburg, and the deserted medieval center of Innsbruck, are purely accessory. The preparation process emphasizes two other aspects that break with the ideal of romantic and immaculate love. First, it was Tiger’s son, proof of the lovers’ sexual relationship, who prepared everything when he realized that his father had forgotten the couple’s wedding day. As a consequence, the hero turns from the perfect gallant lover into an overtaxed husband and family father seeking forgiveness. Second, Junior’s affirmation, “I used your [credit card] six times yesterday. You have to increase the *credit limit*,” refers to the important material dimension of romantic dates in the primary diegetic world. Where other Bollywood movies create the illusion of romance situated in a fantasy land made of love and happiness only (Kabir 2007, 55), *Tiger Zinda Hai* transgresses the separation of “real” family life and idyllic (or perhaps illusory) romance.

THE ALPINE MICROCOSM IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL-POLITICAL DEBATES

The Alpine episode not only reevaluates the stereotypical perspectives of India and Austria; it articulates transcultural negotiations of gender relations and family structures within the framework of international political cooperation and thereby addresses innovative tendencies within Indian society. The scenes in and around the family home are dominated by an intimate atmosphere of harmony and unity, including even the moments of gentle arguments, which turns the Alps into what Nasreen Munni Kabir ironically describes as a “Disneyland of love” (Kabir 2007, 55). This comment points out Bollywood’s capitalist dimension as a mass media phenomenon that contrasts with the intradiegetic ideal of pure and unique love, and the formulation suggests a comparison between Bollywood love stories and Disney’s fairytales. In this sense, the harmonious relationship of Tiger and Zoya living in the Austrian Alps represents a counterpoint to their cultural rivalry as Indian and Pakistani. As a consequence, the episode is more than a romantic dreamworld, but implies thoughts on transcultural understanding, which will be crucial for the rescue mission where the two nations have to cooperate to succeed. Junior’s comment about his bilingualism and bicultural identity is interesting in this context. When his father reminds him to speak Hindi instead of English, as native language reflects nationality, Junior cleverly responds to his father’s patriotic speech with a bicultural statement: “[I’m] Indian on your side, Pakistani on mother’s side.” His father’s answer, “as long as you are with me, you are entirely Indian,” points out the challenges of a binational family. The relationship between India and Pakistan is crucial for the movie and responsible for its controversial reception. Both decisively patriotic, Tiger and Zoya, as well as their respective teams, rethink the rivalry between their countries and emphasize the commonalities of the two nations. On a symbolic level, this evolution is staged by the motive of the two national flags, taking its starting point within the Alpine episode: When the R&AW arrives at Tiger’s home, Karan, one of the R&AW agents, separates a small Indian flag from a Pakistani flag, the two flags having originally stood side by side on a bookshelf. During the entire film, the two flags are a recurrent motif to thematize the relation of the two nations. After the successful end of their mission, the team hoists both flags on the top of the bus they escape in. A camera shot focused on the rearview mirror of the car in front shows the two flags side by side again—a strong visual statement of their transnational cooperation.

The movie not only emphasizes this binational understanding; it implicitly transports the ideal of cultural cosmopolitanism, as Zoya and Tiger are not the only “internationals.” The Indian and Pakistani nurses work and live together in mutual respect, sharing even their religious practices. In a silent sequence at the hospital, a contemplative pause before the upcoming action, Tiger observes

the nurse Poorna worshipping: A close-up of the shrine emphasizes the unity of Hindi, Christian, and Muslim symbols. Minutes before, another female ISC victim told Zoya that she had moved from her village on the Pakistani and Afghan border to Ikrit to study medicine. Even the ISC leader Abu Usman grew up in Delhi, studied in Oxford, and then taught “the poetry of the world” in New York. After 9/11, his cosmopolitical ideal is shattered when he is arrested “only because of [his] name” and sent to Guantanamo. This ambiguous representation of the terrorist leader can be surprising in an action-thriller based on a clear opposition of good and evil. Several scenes, like the preceding one, destabilize the image of the Islamic terrorist as an incarnation of pure evil. The movie also draws a derogatory image of the ISC’s opponent, America. Not only is America revealed as the true culprit for the situation in Iraq; the CIA is portrayed as devoid of empathy, accepting the killing of the nurses and incapable of protecting their compatriots. In the end, it is Tiger and Zoya’s team, in other words an Indian-Pakistani alliance, that also frees a group of American hostages before leaving the zone. Although the Iraqi terrorists are portrayed as cruel fanatics and serve the function of the main antagonist, the movie’s moral-political message diverges from occidental, postcolonial perspectives and deals with issues of the Indo-Pakistani present in the context of international political tensions.

Another controversial social topic discussed within the movie, and more precisely in the Alpine episode, concerns gender roles. The negotiation of female emancipation in this episode is crucial for the construction of the female protagonist Zoya, but also, by a mirroring effect, for the hero Tiger. The discussion of femininity and masculinity between tradition and modernization is one of the structuring elements of Bollywood cinema (Anujan, Schaefer, & Karan 2012), especially since Bollywood pays more attention to its non-resident-Indian (NRI) viewers living in the United States and Europe, who are constantly exposed to the tensions of Indian and Western gender conceptions (Tieber 2007, 127).

It is therefore worth taking a closer look at the negotiation of gender roles in *Tiger Zinda Hai*, and particularly within the Alpine episode, the only moment where we see the characters’ daily routines. Directly after Tiger fights the wolves, the movie presents Zoya defeating three armed men in the supermarket; the parallelism being not insignificant. Zoya and Sophia are then shown in a close-up low-angle shot that imitates the men’s view looking up at the two women. Sophia is holding the gun Zoya gave her and declares in a partly humorous, partly challenging tone: “*That’s what we call women’s empowerment.*” The affirmation has a bitter aftertaste in the next scene when we see Zoya in an apron in the kitchen complaining that Tiger is never satisfied with her cooking skills and never helps in the kitchen. In this scene, Zoya seems to be transported back to a traditional gender role (including typical household

tasks and the complaints about it) much more in line with Bollywood and *Heimatfilm* stereotypes (Binz 2012, 67). Just like in the *Heimatfilm*, where housewives' complaints are generally not taken seriously and even add to the genre's comic register, Tiger shows himself amused. When we learn in the next scene that Zoya's outrage is not actually about equal distribution of the housekeeping tasks, but about the forgotten wedding anniversary, there does not seem to be much left of the emancipated secret agent. Even if Zoya at different points shows her dissatisfaction, she and Tiger seem to stick to a traditional family model, in which he goes chopping firewood in the mountains and she does the cooking, and where romance still means he has to make her feel special⁹—at least once a year.

However, at the end of the Alpine episode, one scene questions the traditional gender role in view of the upcoming mission. After bringing his son to bed, Tiger tells his wife that he is unsure about leaving his family to go on his mission. Zoya responds: "Everyone believes that you love me more than everything in the world. But I know that the one thing you love even more is India. *And that's the thing I respect about you the most.*" With her advice, Zoya encourages Tiger to leave and, more critically, implicitly justifies her participation in the same mission, as she argues that patriotism trumps family love. What is interesting in this context is that while Tiger feels guilty about leaving his family behind, Zoya's involvement does not need explicit moral approval in the cinematic narration. Her contribution to the rescue mission is emphasized as essential in the following: During her first appearance in Ikrit, she saves her husband's life, just as he will save her life at the end of the film. When it comes to their profession, the two lovers appear to be entirely equal and complementary partners. From this perspective, the stereotypical representation of their married life in the framework of a clichéd mountain idyll gains an ironic undertone.

More generally speaking, Sophia's humorous affirmation concerning "women's empowerment" is picked up in a much more serious register in the rescue mission. After joining forces with Tiger, Zoya leaves for a single mission to find a floor plan of the hospital. Hidden within a group of foreign female prisoners, Zoya manages to enter the city hall. The preceding scene shows the emotional report of one of the victims forced into a violent daily ritual where the women have to scrub the floor of the city hall before being raped by the ISC men. After finding the plan, Zoya frees the women. The scene confronts collective dynamics and moments of individual action. Accompanied by a Hindi song, the group of women scrub the floor with synchronized movements reminiscent of choreography before beating a steady rhythm with the bucket handles to warn Zoya: The Pakistani agent, fighting the terrorists one by one, stands out against the group. However, two hostages also get the opportunity to affirm their individuality and fulfill an act of personal liberation

by killing their aggressors. While Zoya fights her enemies with choreographic martial arts, one of the women kills an ISC soldier by brutally sticking a knife into his body several times, emphasizing a realistic register. Another woman kills her abuser in his bathroom. This act of revenge could be read as a cinematographic hypotyposis, a reinterpretation of Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat* (1793) showing the Jacobin's assassination in his bathtub: The song line "Long live the Revolution" as well as the city hall's neo-baroque architecture underpin this highly symbolical interpretation. In summary, the negotiation of gender roles is anything but one-dimensional and the mountain episode in particular helps to explore Zoya and Tiger's relationship between traditional family image and women's empowerment.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, I would like to emphasize once more that the creative decision to situate the Alpine episode within the primary diegetic reality of the plot appears to be crucial for the conception of the film. I argue that this difference forms the foundation for a complex network of transcultural dynamics and mirroring effects. The Alpine episode introduces a narrative break, which allows a humorous reflection on Austrian and Indian stereotypes. More importantly, Zoya and Tiger's romantic date, as much as their harmonious family life within the hyperbolically idyllic environment, creates a closed microcosm, a fairytale bubble which is reminiscent of Bollywood's romantic dreamlands. In this sense, the Alpine episode constitutes an independent micro-narrative where the binational relationship between Tiger and Zoya and their transcultural family model become possible, partly because the Austrian population is not aware of the difference between Pakistan and India. The episode also provides a highly effective counterpoint to the main plot in *Ikrit*, articulating multiple subtexts concerning processes of cultural hybridity, transgression, and transformation in Indian Society. Via different aesthetic means and discursive mirroring effects, the filmmakers succeed in closely connecting the Alpine episode to the rest of the story. Referring to different cinematic genres like the *Heimatfilm* or the *Alpenkrimi* and combining them with aesthetics of Indian filmmaking, the Alpine episode explores classical Bollywood themes like family boundaries, home, identity, and gender models in an original way. It also plays an essential role in negotiating the complex political and cultural relations between Pakistan and India. The cooperation of both cultures, which constitutes one of the movie's central messages, finds its origin in the Alpine landscape.

NOTES

1. https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/pakistan-bans-tiger-zinda-hai-over-demeaning-content-117121400821_1.html (Accessed February 28, 2023).
2. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-28173993> (Accessed February 28, 2023).
3. For further information on the representation of Islamic terrorism in Bollywood, see Chadha, Kavoori 2008; Juluri 2008; Banerjee 2011.
4. In the following quotations of the movie's dialogues, those printed in italics mark the sentences spoken in English in the original version, while the rest are in Hindi.
5. It also demonstrates the moral inferiority of the ISC terrorists' leader, who describes himself as a wolf in the opening scene of the film: "Once, Uncle Sam came to our land, said the Middle East needs a new world order, and the real reason behind it was business and Imperialism. For that, he hired a pack of local wolves and made them hunt their own countrymen. And when his job was done, he betrayed the pack leader of all his promises and fled with the money. I'm that pack leader, and now I will hunt and take control of my land."
6. The sequence culminates in Tiger drawing a colorful portrait of Zoya by throwing paint onto the snow, a perfect union of Austrian winter and Indian color traditions. The next scene shows the couple enjoying a home movie in the woods, suggesting a meta-reflective dimension, as the movie figures Zoya's actress, Katrina Kaif, as the main character.
7. We can find in this passage another reference to the *Heimatgenre*, as the Bollywood imagery satisfying the audiences seeking a virtual *dreamscape* and the protagonists' (Tiger and Zoya) idyllic sensation of a natural and secure homeland intertwine (Klose 2013, 398–99; Kordecki 2020).
8. And there is no vaccine for malaria. Most travel platforms recommend vaccination against dengue fever. See <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/reise-services/reiseinformation/land/indien> (Accessed February 28, 2023).
9. Tiger's son Junior reminds his father, "And make sure you make her feel special tomorrow."

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