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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
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Debt Sentences:
The Poetics and Politics of Credit Culture in India, Italy, and the Inland Empire,
1930-Present

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

Tanya Rawal

August 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Marguerite Waller, Co-Chairperson

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University of California, Riverside

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one place I consider to be home. I am indebted to Dr. Khan for always making sure that I come back to my roots in my everyday life and in my academic pursuits.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Debt Sentences:
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by

Tanya Rawal

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, August 2015
Dr. Marguerite Waller, Co-Chairperson, Dr. John N. Kim, Co-Chairperson

Through the cultural lens of California's Inland Empire, India, and Italy, this dissertation explores how creditor-debtor relationships translate into literature, film, media, and space. Raising key questions about the moral and monetary values that shape creditor-debtor relationships, I discuss in detail the histories and processes that shape and inform both creditors and debtors. I argue that from the emphasis on the debtor's guilt and punishment in previous scholarly investigations of the creditor-debtor relationship, debtors have taken on the burden of unethical credit schemes manufactured on behalf of the free market's health. Divided into five chapters, this project addresses different aspects of the creditor-debtor relationship. With an analysis of student debt the preface and the introduction illustrate how the creditor-debtor relationship is shaped by the sovereignty of the economy such that the health of the economy becomes more significant than the well-being of people and the environment. The introduction also

exposes the creditor's fear of the potential capitalist and the limitations that the industrial-complex imposes on the creditor-debtor relationship. 'Geographies of Debt' focuses on California's prison industrial complex in order to examine how the capitalist's debt that develops from surplus-value is negated through prison labor and the southern trope. "Dancing to Debt" investigates how Bollywood's investment in making Pakistanis the guilty and punishable subject has developed alongside various modes of accumulation by dispossession that seemingly favor a Hindu nationalist political agenda, but have, in turn, made all brown bodies vulnerable to the terrorist trope and the military industrial complex. "Protesting Moral Debt" illustrates how the farmer suicides that have plagued India's agrarian community for the last two decades are indicative of their moral debts to the land, the perennial creditor, and not, as popular media suggests, their monetary debts to various moneylenders, which debunks the authority of market fundamentalist discourse. Lastly, through an analysis of Italian neorealist cinema, "The Pleasure of Debt" reveals the effects of the pleasure creditor's take in imposing suffering on the debtor and, likewise, the pleasure poor communities take in witnessing the decadence of elite culture.

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Preface

LOVE AND DEBT: AN APHORISM

When we love someone we give them everything: our souls, our bodies, our mind. On the surface it might look like we simply give away our time and money. But only those of us that have ever endured the burden of being in love can know the value of each moment and every smile. For this reason, perhaps all love is unrequited since even if a beloved returns your love it can never be equally compensated. Only the admirer, the one in love, can know what is given and, for that matter, what is taken when they love. To love is to become both the creditor and debtor.

Is a beloved ever indebted to their admirer? What is the beloved guilty of when he or she accepts the energies of their admirer? No punishment — no amount of accrued debt — can ever force the beloved to fall in love with their admirer. The misfortune of unrequited love lends itself best to understanding the creditor-debtor relationship that drives neoliberalism. Love, in itself, might be more comparable to debt. But in the case of unrequited love, if the admirer, like the creditor, gives an excess of love to a person who can never reciprocate that affection then it is the responsibility of the admirer, not the beloved, to stop giving.

EDUCATION SHOULD NOT BE A DEBT SENTENCE

One of the major challenges that we face as educators is the rising debt of our students. A couple of years ago a student of mine came to me for advice. He was torn between pursuing his interest in the humanities and pursuing a science degree. The latter, he believed, would ensure job placement at the end of his four years. I was very direct with him. I told him that he had the analytical skills and the level of curiosity needed to go all the way in the humanities. I also asked him if he had any obligations to his family or other personal responsibilities that were compelling him to consider the sciences. As it turned out he did have a duty to fulfill the American dream for the sake of his immigrant parents. He felt obligated to make money because of the sacrifices his parents made for him and his sister to attend a university in the United States.

Gustavo, my student, did exactly what I would have done after that conversation. He double-majored in Biology and Anthropology. I spoke with him recently and he asked me a very distressing question: “Why do poor, first generation students have the burden of choosing a ‘smart’ major while rich kids get to be creative and mindful in the humanities?” After expressing my concern for this myth that the sciences do not make space for creativity, I made a joke about keeping the humanities untainted. This joke that alludes to the gravitation towards white supremacy in the humanities is common amongst colored people and minorities. And Gustavo was acutely aware of the reality of my joke. We then had a brief and serious discussion on how our socio-economic status drives so

many of our decisions. His question continues to haunt me though. Because at the core of his very honest inquiry is the fact that creditor-debtor relationships are changing the motives of learning. And so I began to wonder, are our students laden with guilt when learning about Italian cinema, southern literature, the history of feminism, or critical race studies? Is it this guilt that is causing our students' detachment from the classroom. It is easy to blame their disinterest on youth or other distractions contemporary technology offers, but what if it is some moral guilt that is at the root of their apathy?

Knowing that our students will most likely graduate with over thirty thousand dollars in student loans, I feel obliged to give them the tools to understand, confront, and cope with their impending debt. Our students will be held accountable for their debts because we are of the philosophy that if you borrow money you have to pay your debt. And in such simple terms, this makes sense. This is typically how the creditor-debtor relationship is understood. However, this simple equation overlooks one major question: why does a person, organization, or nation have to borrow in the first place? Additionally, this equation disregards the self-interest that is embedded in lending as well as the moral responsibility of a creditor in any loan that is offered. By deflecting some of the moral responsibility away from the debtor we can begin to understand how the neoliberal myth—that a deregulated, free market can be our savior—excuses the polemics of creditor-debtor relationships, which reinforce race and gender disparities, violently celebrate class distinctions, and excuse the pleasure some gain from punishing others.

In 2011 anthropologist, David Graeber published *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* and he begins this text by investigating the backlash of overlooking how debtors are forced into becoming “debtors” in the first place. To make his point, and to reinforce his efforts in achieving long-term debt amnesty for third world nations, he presents an anecdote of explaining the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to an anti-poverty legal counsel person at a garden party at Westminster Abbey. Graeber characterizes the IMF as the “world's debt enforcers” and explains how, for example, the organization transformed the Third World debt crisis (1980s-90s) into an opportunity to impose neoliberal economic policies in the non-aligned nations (2). He reminds his audience of the 1970s oil crisis that led to an overflow of investments in western banks made by the OPEC countries, which led to a surplus of cash, or stagnant capital, for banks such as Chase and Citibank; and rather than sitting on this potentially high opportunity cost these banks offered Third World politicians loans at “extremely low interest rates that almost immediately skyrocketed to 20 percent” (2). Before long Third World nations had no choice but to turn to the IMF to pay off their debts to the western banks. However, in exchange for refinancing and structural adjustment programs the IMF ensured that “poor countries would be obliged to abandon price supports on basic foodstuffs...and abandon free healthcare and free education” (Graeber 2). But rather than throwing a fist to the air in solidarity with Graeber’s efforts to achieve long-term debt amnesty, as one might expect of an anti-poverty lawyer, the councilwoman was instead taken aback with Graeber’s efforts to relieve the Third World of their debt; “they'd borrowed the money! Surely one has to pay

one's debts," she said (2). Graeber was equally surprised with the lawyer for remaining unfazed by the reasons that caused the Third World countries to take out loans in the first place. And, moreover, Graeber was shocked at how quickly the lawyer was able to completely overlook the fault of the creditor and the risk they chose to take (4).

In a classroom, far from Westminster Abbey, eighty University of California, Riverside (UCR) students had the exact opposite reaction to Graeber's garden party companion; the UCR students had a mistrust for the creditors and their ability to profit on poverty. Rather than beginning in 1970 like Graeber, however, our discussion began with an analysis of how the IMF was established at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference. The UCR students were immediately suspicious of the IMF as they learned of its original intent to offer assistance to capitalist nations in the form of short term loans during moments of crisis (like an emergency fund). The IMF loans were intended to improve or repair the infrastructure of already developed nations and increase their trading opportunities with other countries. Building infrastructure from the ground up, which is what the Third World nations often required, was never a part of its agenda. Instead, the IMF facilitated underdevelopment and actually amplified its original intent to improve developed nations. It did not take long for the students to come up with a list of disparities between the IMF's short-term lending practices to already developed nations (i.e. Belgium and France before 1980) and the newly freed nations. In agreement with Michael Manley, the former Prime Minister of Jamaica, the students believed that short-term lending could not equitably translate to Third World nations that were without well-

established leadership and still coping with the residual effects of a colonial power (*Life and Debt*).

The UCR students empathized with the eternal indebtedness of developing nations since the weight of their own future financial obligations had already begun to slow them down. Their anxieties regarding post-college prospects, which includes the likelihood of unemployment, were easy to understand in relation to Third World debt. In fact, it was too easy for them to imagine how a nation could fall deeper into ruin as the interest rates of their foreign debts continued to increase. Referring to the rules and regulations of their student loans, they understood the dilemmas of conditional lending terms that seemed to undermine the creditor's responsibility in offering the loan. A few students began to draw parallels from the logic of privatization that led to the education-industrial complex as well as the IMF's campaign against free education and healthcare in developing nations. Some students wondered what might happen if the interest rates on student loans did not increase until five years after graduation. Likewise, they reflected on the possibilities of IMF loans embedded in long-term development plans that would allow Third World nations to actually have a chance to grow, or "develop." Many alternatives were presented; we even began to meditate on the possibility of universities taking on some responsibility for their students' loans, which we thought might incentivize job placement.

Our discussion geared towards considering the creditor's responsibility as an ethico-political subject. In fact, in their reading of Graeber's anthropological-historical

analysis of debt, the students took notice of the conspicuous references to Friedrich Nietzsche's *On The Genealogy of Morality* (1886) since they had read it just a few weeks earlier. For instance, as Graeber ponders over the statement made by his garden party companion—"surely one has to pay his debts"—he comes to the conclusion that this is not a statement about the economy, but rather a "moral" statement; he, like Nietzsche frames the creditor-debtor relationship within the discourse of morality (Graeber 4). However, with Nietzsche in mind, the students were confounded by their own *ressentiment*¹ towards the IMF. They were finding out how easy it was to fall into the good/evil trap that Nietzsche criticizes in his birds of prey and little lambs metaphor. Following an instinct to live, Nietzsche states, the birds of prey eat the little lambs, which, in turn, makes the little lambs resent the birds of prey. Surprised by the little lambs hatred towards them, the birds of prey "mockingly" respond to the little lambs' ill will by saying: "we do not feel any anger towards them, these good lambs, as a matter of fact, we love them: nothing is more tasty than a tender lamb" (25). Nonetheless, the little lambs identify "good" as everyone who "does not do violence, who injures no one, who doesn't attack, who doesn't retaliate, who leaves vengeance to God...who avoids evil and in general demands very little of life." Nietzsche translates this creed as "we weak ones are simply weak; it is good if we do nothing for which we are not strong enough" (26).

¹ Ressentiment is identifying one's own weaknesses as the fault of another's wrongdoing; it is the slave mentality of morality according to Nietzsche. Moreover, as the students began to understand in this case, even characterizing another persons "evil" acts or alluding to any form of resentment puts the person that classifies evil in a position of weakness.

So when a student asked the class, “Isn’t the IMF just doing what it does, like Nietzsche’s birds of prey,” a very intense debate broke out. Many of the students did not want to construct the debtor parties as weak or in any way lacking strength. And as one student pointed out, the IMF is not working off of some natural instinct.

“40 white men made the IMF, if we compare them to the birds of prey that makes the rest of us weak” she said.

“And the birds of prey are just thinking about the present” another student said.

“YOLO!” someone from the back exclaimed.

The energy in the classroom immediately amplified from the excitement over a correlation between a nineteenth century text and the acronym for ‘you only live once.’ “The IMF is not YOLO-ing with short-term loans,” said a young woman as she pushed the brim of her hat up with a pencil. She paused for a moment and then said: “The IMF is keeping people in debt, forever.” Several of her classmates nodded in agreement and from this point forward the word “forever” kept appearing in our dialogue. Their inclination to construct a reactionary morality condemning creditors’ usurious loans, which, in turn, identified debtors, such as themselves, as inherently ‘good’ was not going to be productive enough for these eighty students. They were developing a thorough understanding of the relationship between credit and the future. Nonetheless, our conversation became increasingly abstract as we considered the relationship between debt and time. Credit, or the promise to pay a debt within a certain time frame, is for Nietzsche indicative of two problems. The first is the unnatural act of making a promise and

distancing oneself from the present. And second is the fact that it requires one to estimate that which is inestimable—future behavior and events—and to expose oneself to the uncertainty of time” (Lazzarato 45).

It was clear that the students’ goal was to identify the power of the debtor. And not the power that will either ‘let live or let die’; not out of hate for the IMF or other credit schemers and not even to achieve revenge or exact punishment on the creditor, for each of these scenarios render power as domination (*potestas*). The power these students were looking for was power as potential that has the capacity to affirm existence (*potentia*), specifically a power that could materialize sustainable creditor-debtor relationships. In effect, the students were interested in locating a power that could challenge the infinite growth that capitalism promises so that we are not left with having to excuse the daily violence that is committed against our neighbors all in the name of the economy as deity that will supposedly, eventually bring us peace and happiness.

Debt Sentences offers students the opportunity to understand the logic of market fundamentalism that creates the polemical creditor-debtor relationship. I hope that with this work students will be able to relieve some of the guilt that they develop from accruing debt for their education. Because, I find that what is most tragic about credit culture is the lost practice of being in the present, which requires a forgetting—specifically a forgetting of what we owe and what is owed to us. Before asking his reader to consider how there is no debt that can be paid by imposing a suffering on the debtor in *On The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche makes plea to forget:

“To temporarily close the doors and windows of consciousness; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle with which our underworld of subservient organs works for and against each other; a little stillness, a little tabula rasa of consciousness so that there is again space for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, foreseeing, predetermining—that is the use of this active forgetfulness, a doorkeeper as it were, an upholder of psychic order, of rest, of etiquette: from which one can immediately anticipate the degree to which there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness” (35).

And although I have not quite developed my analysis of time and debt in this dissertation, I was constantly aware of this need for forgetting, which as my final chapter will illustrate, I find to be most attainable through laughter, specifically satirical laughter, which is according to Indian aesthetic theory the type of laughter in which one throws their head back and slaps their knee.

Introduction

“If you're gonna be a thief, make sure you can retire from it.” --unknown

Debt Sentences: The Poetics and Politics of Credit Culture in India, Italy, and the Inland Empire, 1930-Present examines how creditor-debtor relationships translate into and affect our aesthetic, linguistic, and geopolitical landscapes. In context of the global lean towards market fundamentalism—the belief that free market and privatization policies can and will eventually resolve all socio-cultural disparities—creditor-debtor relationships are essential to contemporary modes of production. As I will illustrate in this dissertation, creditor-debtor relationships play a significant role in leveraging the accumulation of capital, materializing a ‘superstructure’ that privileges the market, and romanticizing credit by transforming poverty and debt into capital. Karl Marx describes this phenomenon in *Das Kapital* (1867); he states, “[public debt] endows barren money with the power of breeding and thus turns it into capital” (529) and in this Aristotelian reference to usury—classifying money as barren—Marx highlights a major contradiction propagated by debt and interest-bearing capital: for the creditor money is fertile, but in the hands of the debtor that same money is “barren.” Some of the moral implications of this dilemma are examined in this dissertation.

But what drives this dissertation is the fact that the credit system, which is intended to widen the scope for mutual growth, can also restrict the accumulation of capital for the already-capitalist by creating new competition for the “potential capitalist.” A point that is “greatly admired by apologists of the capitalist system” (Marx and Engels, 1894) is that credit offers “even a man without fortune” the opportunity to become a

“potential capitalist.” Building from this, one of Marx’s most poignant arguments regarding interest-bearing capital, *Debt Sentences* examines the already-capitalist’s fear and anxiety of the “potential capitalist.” The creditor’s fear and anxiety are camouflaged by the cultural vilification and criminalization of debtors, or potential capitalists, which contrasts with the virtuous representations of creditors. The ethics and cultural representations of creditor-debtor relationships are complicated when the criminality that is imposed on the debtor is reimagined as a manifestation of the creditor’s fear of a debtor rising up.

Moreover, it is this fear, I argue, that has prohibited the credit system from promoting stronger communities, which anthropologist, David Graeber, in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011), identifies as a possibility of credit. In Graeber’s recapitulation of Marcel Mauss’ *The Gift* (1925), a sociological study of how gift economies build relationships amongst humans, Graeber expands on Mauss’ results by illustrating how giving and taking is part of everyday life. Using the example of assisting a drowning person or saving a child that has fallen onto subway tracks, Graeber argues that the everyday courtesies of giving are not only more characteristic of human nature, but also more efficient. Whereas the fear of the potential capitalist’s success, on the other hand, is uneconomical and, as I will illustrate, reliant on, and therefore instrumental in reinforcing, race, gender, and class disparities. Additionally, it is this fear of competition that restricts the capability and sustainability of creditor-debtor relationships. Practices of borrowing and lending that could deplete poverty of its value are, instead, used to perpetuate the accumulation of capital and wealth for the already-capitalist, which is

“crucially dependent upon the perpetual accumulation and expansion of debt” of the potential capitalist (Harvey, “The Vote to End Capitalism”). And, consequently, the industrialists’ race to accumulate (and then privatize) industrial capital (i.e. roads, prisons, and telecommunications) and natural capital (i.e. land, water, and seeds) results in the non-industrialists’ growing dependence on loans and credit to meet basic needs.

Through various forms of accumulation by dispossession—ranging from usurious lending schemes to negating non-market oriented credit systems—students, prisoners, farmers, and terrorists have come to play a distinct role in the formation of current creditor-debtor relationships. This dissertation is about the untranslatability of the suffering levied on each of these figures; moreover, it considers how each of these figures—the student, prisoner, farmer, and terrorist—‘turn away’ from two of the most violent symptoms of credit culture: the manufacturing of the industrial-complex phenomena and the formation of the global south.

The moral and monetary values that shape creditor-debtor relationships are expressions of a polemical distinction between creditor and debtor; the differentiations that are made in order to give value to retribution, regulate citizenship, and manage freedom, however, become immaterial when framing creditor-debtor relationships within the discourse of market fundamentalism and the structural practices of thievery that it implies. As it stands, the more one owes expresses some degree of criminality and the possession of less freedom, or more responsibility and guilt for a debt owed, which, when unpaid, is considered to be theft. Likewise, the more one is owed corresponds to respective quantities of freedom and imperial virtue that they then possess, as is

evidenced by, for example, Cosa Nostra or the International Monetary Fund; both Cosa Nostra and the IMF use the obligations made to them as a means to extract freedom and virtue from their debtors, which both organizations have used as a means of entitlement to hyper-freedom and hyper-virtue. As both organizations accumulate debts and obligations their respective territories expand giving them the right to further exercise their power and system of morality. And, moreover, anyone outside of these considerations is quite easily susceptible to becoming suspect or criminalized as they will be forced or coerced to be obliged and obligated to these organizations.

From the Latin *credere*, to believe and trust, credit signifies good faith; with this etymology the creditor assumes positive attributes and, simultaneously, *is* trust as well as *gives* trust (or credit). Debt, from the Latin *debere*, meaning to owe, implies either a moral or legal subjectivity that is informed by an obligation, duty, or responsibility to fulfill a promise and maintain any trust or truth that has been imposed on the debtor. Consequently, debtors are always already suspect and criminal. While credit indicates debt: loss, shortage, and boundedness; it also appears to be positive as it implies growth and regulated advancement. The value of credit actually upholds the myth that the market — or the economy as deity — can and will solve all social and economic problems so long as it is showered with as many freedoms (or deregulation policies) as possible. Nonetheless, *Debt Sentences* is less interested in contrasting creditors and debtors and more invested in how the relationship between the two subjectivities reveals the oppressive and dominating nature of market fundamentalism.

Thinking beyond the creditor-debtor dialectic in favor of understanding the sovereignty of the economy — or the economy as deity that will always potentially have mercy and relieve the globe of all its economic and social misfortunes — situates both creditor and debtor in a relation of domination with the economy as deity. In other words, *Debt Sentences* subverts the belief or credibility of credit as a life-affirming method of exchange and affirms the possibility that credit systems are actually prone to promoting underdevelopment with relations more akin to slavery and serfdom. Both cases—owing excess debt or being owed in excess—indicate a form of social death; it is the boundedness to the creditor-debtor relationship itself, I argue, that generates powerlessness.¹ It is common practice to consider the debtor guilty and also dominated by a system of oppression that requires the debtor to borrow in the first place. It is also the case, I argue, that the creditor, especially one that is owed so much that the repayment is impossible, becomes entirely dependent on punishing the debtor and, for that matter, gaining pleasure from imposing that punishment. And yet, the creditor, this addict figure, manages to evade any responsibility or guilt for its own lending practices.

Debt Sentences began as a modest research project to contextualize India's farmer suicide epidemic within a global discourse of debt. While communicating with a group of farmers in Bhiki, Punjab, a small village in North India, I learned of several common subversive banking practices performed by the farmers. On a narrow path between a mustard field and a cotton field, Mr. Singh, a ten-acre farmer, explained how he chose to take out a loan specifically designed to accommodate agrarian workers, and, rather than

¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982).

investing in farm-related materials, he chose to finance his daughter's wedding with the funds. The loan, like any cash advance, was intended to boost long-term profit; and Mr. Singh realized that it would be more advantageous for his family if he married his daughter to a well-to-do man from a middle class family than if he were to purchase more pesticides for his land. In his account of this event, Mr. Singh was quick to point out that the pesticides, herbicides (Roundup), and suicide seeds caused irreparable damage to the soil and crops. "Why should we be responsible for ruining the earth?" he said.

As several similar stories surfaced during my time in Bhiki, I took note of the fact that while each farmer was weighed down with monetary debts, the farmers also had moral debts, or a sense of guilt, to the land. And it became quite clear that the suicides, which global media framed as reactionary responses to the farmers' monetary debt, had a much more complicated relationship to debt and credit. Moreover, after my time in Bhiki, it seemed that the limited media coverage of the farmer suicides had the tendency to actually reinscribe the validity of the farmers' monetary debts and, therefore, the lending practices and credit culture that the debts intimate. Calling attention to the moral debts that the farmers alluded to challenged the simplicity of creditor-debtor relationships within the discourse of neoliberalism.

Accordingly, as I investigated further into the privatization of agriculture, or, more specifically, the agriculture industrial complex, I began to take note of the tendency for a scapegoat to form from any industrial-complex. Just as the farmers had been coerced to take the fall for the environmental backlashes of agribusiness, students, for example, had been pressured into bearing the financial responsibility for the education

industrial complex. Every industrial complex has a trope; and *Debt Sentences* explains what it is that each industrial complex is turning away from and why. For the agriculture industrial complex it is the farmer. For the prison industrial complex it is the prisoner. For the military industrial complex it is the terrorist. And, as I stated, for the educational industrial complex it is the student. In each of these cases, the trope—the student, the farmer, the terrorist, and the prisoner—that is produced from their respective industrial complex is used as a scapegoat that is forced to shoulder the burdens created by the false virtue of the creditor; a virtuous or “good” subject must have its “evil” counterpart.

In *The New Media Monopoly* (2004), media scholar Ben Bagdikian notes that the neocolonial implementation of deregulation and privatization throughout the globe has resulted in the “big five” phenomenon; the example Bagdikian offers is of the media industrial complex, which is controlled by Walt Disney, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom, and Bertelsmann. Similarly, Cargill, Monsanto, Dupont, Archer Daniels Midland, and ConAgra have a chokehold on Agribusiness. Bagdikian explains that the “big five” develops over time with a steady accumulation of power, but he does not explore the flipside of this accumulation, which is, I argue, the steady dispossession of power from each industrial-complex’s trope.

Bagdikian was not the first to identify the power embedded in an ‘industrial-complex’; its very nature is to hide power by appearing to make the nuances of its respective ‘industry’ common sense. To understand the effects of the industrial complex’s power it is best to turn back to United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s 1961 farewell speech. In his final speech as President of the United States,

Eisenhower warned people about the “unwarranted influence” of an industrial complex, believing that within it “the potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist.” Eisenhower was referring specifically to the “total influence, whether sought or unsought” of the military industrial complex (MIC). He believed its influence would be felt in our economic, political, and spiritual lives. But, as I argue, the “grave implications” of the MIC that Eisenhower recognized can apply to any industrial complex, because in each one “our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.” Eisenhower warned the entire world that we should not let the misplaced power of an industrial complex “endanger our liberties or democratic processes.”

Nonetheless, half a century later the effects of neoliberal economics have made an impact that can be detected transnationally with the multiple industrial complexes that invade the everyday lives of several different communities. Eisenhower might say that the people have failed to overcome the “misplaced power” of an industrial complex:

“Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals so that security and liberty may prosper together.”

However, because the power that develops from the industrial complex model has been given a proper place through policies that support the privatization of the prisons, education, agriculture, as well as the military, it is no longer a question of misplaced power, but rather a question of power itself.

POOR LITTLE RICH CREDITOR: THE POWER AND PLEASURE OF SUFFERING

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the creditor-debtor relationship is structured such that the creditor expects some sort of pleasure from the debtor, in the form either of repayment/“material compensation” or the right to inflict “indignity and pain on the body of the debtor” (196). The latter pleasure, Nietzsche claims, derives from the pleasure of war and rape; it arouses the pleasure of power in the creditor:

“[t]hat pleasure will be increased in proportion to the lowliness of the creditor’s own station; it will appear to him as a delicious morsel, a foretaste of higher rank. In ‘punishing’ the debtor, the creditor shares a signorial right. For once he is given a chance to bask in the glorious feeling of treating another human being as lower than himself--or, in case the actual punitive power has passed on to a legal ‘authority,’ of seeing him despised and mistreated” (196-7).

Like the gods that were offered acts of cruelty by the Greeks or like the royals who could not complete a celebration without public acts of punishment, as Nietzsche recalls, the creditors are given the illusion of being godlike or royal by having control over the debtor’s body and accepting the debtor’s suffering as payment. To cause suffering, specifically the debtor’s suffering, Nietzsche argues, characterizes and constitutes “higher culture” (198). For Nietzsche ‘higher culture’ is a “striving for distinction” that is calculated by the ability to “witness” the affect and impression a person can have “on the soul of the other,” which is most easily attainable by imposing suffering (*Daybreak* 68). Even in equating material compensation with inflicting pain on the debtor’s body, Nietzsche suggests that the creditor finds the pleasure of power in accepting the agreed upon ‘material compensation.’ If the repayment can be considered a punishment then it is

the obligation and duty that the debtor has to the creditor that stimulates pleasure. One of the major characteristics of debt is that it must be remembered, and here it is clear that the creditor gains pleasure in remembering and knowing that some form of the debtor's suffering is guaranteed to be offered to the creditor at some point.

While it is the case that creditor-debtor relationships have a history of being organized in in such a way that ensures the creditor's pleasure, it is also the case that Nietzsche could never have imagined our current credit culture and the relationships it has created. Moreover, while Nietzsche argues that the ability to cause suffering "constitutes" higher culture, he also makes note of the fact that the highest culture and noble morality could never be so bothered as to need to impose suffering or require compensation for anything given. Nietzsche finds that the creditor with absolute strength is also able to become "more humane to the degree that he has become richer" such that he cannot be "injured" or made to suffer from any amount of lending. "What concern are my parasites to me?" it might then say. "Let them live and prosper: I am strong enough for that!" (47). Therefore, Nietzsche would identify any lender who is owed in excess to be acting from a non-noble morality. In fact, the pleasure that is derived from imposing suffering would be more akin to a form of *ressentiment*, or the slave mentality of morality (47). Thus, I argue, if an excess is owed to a person, it is likely that their lending habits are either poor or usurious: it is the sign of a poor creditor. And I maintain the validity of Nietzsche's analysis by taking note of the fact that in contemporary credit culture, *On The Genealogy of Morality* (1886) points its finger to the insecurities of the creditor. In *On The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche asks: "to what extent can suffering be a

compensation for debt?”² This question is the result of his examination of the relationship between debt and guilt; specifically, Nietzsche describes how the concept of guilt (*schuld*) derives from the concept of debt (*schulden*) and then criticizes how debt is moralized into guilt. In effect, identifying the indebted subject as “guilty” justifies any punishment the debtor receives and any pleasures the creditor receives from imposing suffering and cruelty on another person. Additionally, this question implies that imposing or causing suffering is done in an attempt to justify the creditor's loss, or to “compensate” for the opportunity cost of a loan. Taking into account the elements of guilt and compensation, it is the creditor’s pleasure, I argue, that is of great significance. *Debt Sentences* elaborates the nuances of this question and investigates how creditors gain and receive pleasure from a debtor’s suffering. This dissertation considers how both the creditor and the debtor are actualized through multiple forms of suffering. Specifically, the creditor’s pleasure, which is to say the debtor’s suffering, is manufactured through three distinct and structural practices of accumulation by dispossession, which are the foundations of neoliberalism: 1) the negation of surplus value; 2) the formation of pillageable subjectivities and geographies; 3) the disregard for environment-based and indigenous credit systems.

The polemical relationship between the virtuous creditor and guilty/bad debtor that Nietzsche sets up has actually limited the scholarship regarding the creditor’s criminality as it relates to a good/evil moral framework (e.g. Lazzarato, Deleuze, Derrida). Burdened by representations of guilt and bad conscience that signify the debtor

² Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Francis Golffing. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. 1887. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956.

and speculations of the creditor's pleasure, Nietzsche, and for example, Lazzarato, avert focus from the creditor's accountability, or, rather, the creditor's weakness. The creditor, I argue, is too easily seduced by the pleasure of having the opportunity to impose suffering and is never held accountable for this fault. In fact, Jean Baudrillard might even associate the creditor's weakness—yielding to seduction—with gambling: a desire to “become rich without exerting one's self” and a game in which the “truth is to be found in the tricks it plays on value” (139). The seductive qualities of the pleasure that the creditor receives, just as Baudrillard identifies in regards to gambling, is

“not just the power one experiences when momentarily carried away, but the power to transmute values that comes with the rule. In gambling money is seduced, deflected from its truth. Having been cut off from the law of equivalences (it “burns”) and the law of representation, money is no longer a sign or representation once transformed into a stake. And a stake is not something one invests. As an investment money takes the form of capital, but as a stake it appears in the form of a challenge. Placing a bet has as little to do with placing an investment, as libidinal investment with the stakes of seduction.” (139).

So “the game's power of seduction,” the game being either Russian roulette or market fundamentalism's industrial complex, is to deflect from money's truth, or as I argue in this dissertation, to produce a trope.

Nonetheless, if, as Lazaretto argues, “everyone is a debtor” and capital is the “universal creditor” such that debt is the driving force as well as the logic of neoliberalism (7-25) then it is clear that for Lazzarato the distinction between creditor and debtor is becoming blurred. But Lazzarato's emphasis on the “logic of debt” and his “extreme polarization of creditors and debtors” contradicts even his own understanding of how a market economy—or the economy as deity—in effect, puts both creditor and

debtor on the same side of the equation. For this reason, I argue that it is imperative to examine how even the creditor is fundamentally unable to gain from the logic of market fundamentalism; specifically, because the creditor-debtor relationship is inefficient, which I explain further in the third chapter, “Dancing to Debt.”

Giving and lending somehow become exempt from a system of morality whereas taking or borrowing shape the very production of morality. Even though the terms of the creditor-debtor relationship in *On The Genealogy of Morality* developed from Nietzsche’s study of pre-moral punishment, scholars attempt to apply the Nietzschean structure that distinguishes between creditor and debtor to contemporary analyses of debt. According to this structure, if the debtor breaks the promise to return payment, the promise becomes an obligation for the debtor to suffer (unless, of course, the creditor opts to void the debt), and, therefore, made guilty. In this process, however, and even in cases of reckless lending, the creditor is never held accountable.

Increasingly since the late nineteenth century, scholars from a range of disciplines, including comparative literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and economics, have investigated, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the creditor-debtor relationship and how the contractual, and simultaneously polemical, relationship unfolds from a series of moral and monetary exchanges. Yet, scholars continue to examine debtors as “bad” subjects; even in their attempts to relieve debtors of their burden, scholars tend to take for granted the guilt of the indebted subject and, consequently, in their analyses creditors tend to evade the good/evil paradigm altogether or assume virtue even though both creditor and debtor consent to borrowing against the

future and give the credit system absolute authority (e.g. Nietzsche, Lazzarato, Derrida). However, as I have suggested, imposing punishment on the debtor is, according to Nietzsche, characteristic of a non-noble function; in fact, imposing punishment is for Nietzsche *ressentiment*, or an example of the slave revolt in morality (noble morality would be to practice mercy rather than to punish) (19-46). So long as the creditor reacts to the debtor and is imagined in opposition to the debtor, then the creditor cannot maintain the “virtue” of the noble morality. In other words, both creditor and debtor are born from *ressentiment*. This is yet another example of how creditors and debtors occupy a similar space and should not be forced into a polemical relationship with one another. The only polemical relationship that can logically develop here is, I argue, the creditor and debtor in opposition to the ‘economy as deity,’ which subjects both creditor and debtor to the myth of the market as savior.

CREDIT CULTURE

Each chapter of *Debt Sentences* examines the infrastructure of debt and the methods of resistance that a market-driven hegemony incites. Moreover, this dissertation aims to achieve four main goals: one, to challenge the assumption that the postcolonial condition is bounded either geographically or corporeally since, I argue, limiting postcolonial discourse to particular spaces and bodies reaffirms colonial practices; two, to debunk the validity of aid and development discourse; three, to denounce the motives of creditors; and four, to improve infrastructure and address policy in order to utilize credit-debtor relationships as a tool for community building.

The first chapter, “Geographies of Debt: The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global South,” identifies the shared rhetoric of aid and rehabilitation used to establish both the global south and California’s prison industrial complex (PIC), two seemingly disparate places. Following Ruth Gilmore’s disavowal of the global south as a fixed entity, that geographical term is here identified with a method of conserving poverty management organizations designed to capitalize on poorness. Although the rehabilitation of prisoners creates a somewhat different creditor-debtor relationship than the aid-based systems that link the nations of global north and south, the southern trope links both phenomena to the production of a sovereign’s moral legitimacy and virtue. So long as a geography is discursively constructed to be surplus, poor, or “southern,” the labor of the subjects that occupy that space can be rearticulated in such a way that the moral debt accrued by the extraction of surplus-value is misrecognized as the laborer’s obligation to the sovereign. Identifying the capitalist as being always already indebted to the worker reveals the capitalist’s interest in obfuscating that debt. This chapter’s major intervention is its recognition of how the discourse of aid and rehabilitation produces an indebted laborer who cannot, in theory, be seen as exploited. The exploitation of the prisoner is misrecognized as payment for the debt owed, and the beneficiaries of prison labor therefore free themselves of any guilt, or moral debt, that might accumulate from the surplus-value that said labor creates. Consequently, the expansion of the PIC and poorer places proves to be more of a solution to the dilemma of surplus-value that haunts the capitalist than an effect of criminality and malfeasance.

The second chapter, “Dancing to Debt with Bollywood’s Paki: A Technoculture War and the Terrorist Trope” explains how accumulation by dispossession relies on the formation of the “bad” subject, or in this case the terrorist trope. This chapter developed from a series of YouTube videos illustrating Bollywood’s expropriation of Pakistani music. Bollywood’s thievery in conjunction with its representation of the Pakistani as the terrorist in over twenty years of cinema highlights one of the most pertinent facts of accumulation by dispossession, that is the making of a pillageable and dispossessable geography and community, or the practice of ‘indirect murder’ (Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended” 256). In an effort to contextualize these videos within animosities between India and Pakistan, it is clear that a common culture between the neighboring nations is still intact. The desire to negate the commons is, I argue, characteristic of the general trend to dismiss a ‘commons’ in the era of neoliberalism, which relies on the rhetoric of privatization. Nonetheless, it is more than just a common culture that binds India and Pakistan; the very fact that both Indians and Pakistanis appear to be the same ‘brown’ on the global stage suggests that Bollywood’s divisive attempt to “Other” Pakistan has resulted in a negative backlash for Indians as well as other ‘brown’ skin communities across the globe. In other words, the indirect war waged on Pakistan in Indian nationalist cinema has, in turn, imposed direct murder and war on the brown—always already terrorist—body.

The third chapter, “Indian Farmers Protest Moral Debt,” explores how agrarian culture conflicts with credit culture. The creditor-debtor relationship that develops between farmers and the earth has been compromised by credit culture and the

agriculture industrial complex. And the Indian farmer suicide phenomenon that is a direct result of the agriculture industrial complex is a response to the consequent degradations of the land. In this chapter, I consider how current practices of protest in agrarian communities of India, such as suicide, are forms of parrhesiatic speech, or speaking truth to power, that must be managed, if not obscured, by neocolonial Indian state apparatuses and their corporate interests. One of my immediate interventions, then, is to understand how Indian mass media have portrayed the farmer suicides as other than protest. I trace this management through Indian cinema's references to, and reiterations of Hori Mahato, the farmer of Munshi Premchand's famous protest novel *Godaan* (1936). These films decontextualize and exploit Hori's loyalty to moneylenders and landowners, portraying farmers as nobles willing to fulfill the responsibilities of financial debt, even if that obligation requires them to die. This trope of the loyal farmer, I argue, is constructed to manage and obscure the epistemic significance of daily farmer protests in India. This trope misleadingly foregrounds the farmer's relation to debt-producing institutions such as the IMF and the Indian government rather than to the land.

The fourth chapter "The Pleasure of Debt: Encoding/Decoding Italian Neorealist Cinema from Social Critique to Poverty Porn" contextualizes the history of neorealist cinema in the development of a neoliberal economy. In doing so, this chapter traces the changing reception and audience of neorealist cinema from the proletariat gaze to the elite audience. What was once a cinema 'for the people' has become a cinema that offers elite audiences to take pleasure in visualizing debt. And, likewise, lower-income audiences take equal pleasure in escaping the hardships of everyday life in their reception

of decadent popular cinema. “The Pleasure of Debt” concludes with an analysis of how satirical neorealist cinema—Pink Neorealism—actually creates a space for the subaltern to laugh and, in doing so, creates a new form of punishment; specifically, a form of punishment that subjects oppressors and colonizers to the subaltern’s laughter and dismissal of hegemonic power.

Chapter 1: Geographies of Debt: The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global South

This chapter aligns seemingly disparate locations—California’s prison industrial complex and the global south—through the lens of “the southern trope,” a recurrent discursive formation for economically “underdeveloped spaces.” Together, these geographies, though rarely considered in combination, illustrate the correlation between tropes of uneven development and debt culture—and, consequently, obligatory gratitude. California’s prison-fix scheme is one of many examples of the global south in the global north; it is also a key example of how debt rests at the heart of the southern trope and of deregulatory economic policies. Focusing on the shared rhetoric of aid, development, rehabilitation, assistance, and corrections—in a phrase, debt culture, which plays a key role in the formation of both the global south and the American prison industrial complex—I unveil one of the key elements of colonial economics: the supposedly righteous and ethical or pure-hearted colonizer. In a comparative analysis of the global south and the prison-fix counties of California, I illustrate how the administration of aid and rehabilitation produces and distributes power among marginalized communities and dominant groups.

In *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007), Ruth Gilmore incites her reader to remap the territories of the ‘global south’ to include California’s prison industrial complex (PIC).³ She does so by

³ The prison industrial complex is, according to Dylan Rodriguez’s *Forced Passages*, the “emergence of the mass incarceration form” in the United States, which exemplifies the “proliferation of the state’s racialized domestic warfare techniques” (6). Like Angela Y. Davis, Alex Lichtenstein, David Oshinsky, and others, Rodriguez finds the prison industrial complex indicative of a white-supremacist regime, which he identifies by the “material continuities between US racial chattel plantation slavery and the emergence of the modern American penal system” (38).

identifying the global south as all “poorer places,” including those within the global north: “[t]he poorer places, or global south, are also here in the global north, in both urban and rural areas, ‘unfixed’ by capital flight and state restructuring” (Gilmore 179). In other words, as much as the global south has been mapped and constructed as separate from a global north, Gilmore argues that the presence of “southern spaces” in what has been termed the “global north,” such as the PIC in the United States, challenges the notion of the global south as a fixed, separate, and distinct entity. Gilmore’s disavowal of the global south as a fixed place is immensely productive because it unsettles affective work that terms such as “north” and “south” perform as they circulate in development discourse. More importantly for this chapter, Gilmore’s work demands a different approach to geography, one that presents the “global south” not as an ontological entity but as spaces and laboring subjects constructed as *southern* in their relations to neoliberal economic regimes.

Building on Gilmore’s argument, my analysis of a geography of debt links the global south as imagined by development discourse and California’s PIC to a discourse of aid, development, rehabilitation, assistance, and corrections. One of my critical interventions is to consider, through the lens of comparative literature, how the global south functions not only as a signifier for a place or places but also as a trope for places that are poor and indebted to poverty management institutions. While scholars and activists such as Gilmore have deployed the trope of the global south to identify and foster intersectional forms of solidarity, my analysis suggests that as long as such tropes posit a geography of debt, they conserve the rhetoric of aid and rehabilitation.

In the particular case of California's PIC, prison-fix schemes, in which counties suffering from dire economic situations request the state to intervene by building prisons in those areas, have allowed corporations to formalize the hyper-exploitation of prisoners within the tropological terrain of the global south. Prison-fix schemes were established in order to revive counties in a state of economic crisis. These schemes often include creating short-term and long-term benefits for private corporations, such as prison construction contracts and the promise of access to cheap labor costs supplied by the new populations of prisoners. In order to gain a new competitive edge in the US, corporations were now able to transfer labor from developing nations to these new "Souths" with the very same rhetoric of aid and market fundamentalism that made access to low-wage labor in the global south possible.

Just as citizens of the global south were made vulnerable to the maquiladoras in Mexico and the sweatshops in Indonesia, residents of California were made vulnerable to the increasing number of prisons. As crime rates decreased in the state of California after 1980, the California prison system and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation⁴ nevertheless witnessed a nearly 500 percent rise in prison population between 1982 and 2000 and, consequently, in prison construction (Gilmore 6-7). The prison-fix system, in other words, has less to do with protecting civilians from criminals or rehabilitating prisoners and more to do with producing prisoners. Arguably, civilians are now more at risk (in relation to the police) of becoming convicts than of being targets of crime with the newfound demand for prisoners to populate the new prisons.

⁴ California's Department of Corrections was established in 1951. In 2004 it became the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

If, in Henri Lefebvre's analysis of how space is produced, manors, monasteries, and cathedrals set the stage for the "feudal mode of production" and served as the "take-off point for Western European capital accumulation" (Lefebvre 53) from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, then the industries that produce California's jails, prisons, and detention centers (also schools and shopping centers), could be seen as the "take-off point" for the market fundamentalism of corporate capitalism in the United States. That is, like Lefebvre's project, the correlation between the PIC and the global south is a practice in understanding how real space is a reflection of mental space and vice versa. The southern trope functions to legitimate such exploitation through the language of rehabilitation and the formalization of certain relations of debt. Debt and the globality of the southern trope go hand-in-hand. Both the global south and the PIC were legitimated by the southern trope. They are strategically planned poor places, figured as in need of assistance and aid money. Such spaces produce obligated or indebted subjects who inherit what Karl Marx would call a "working-life," such that their very existence, even when eating and sleeping, allows for the capitalist to consume the labor-power "purchased" from the laborer (Marx, "Capital: Volume One"). PICs, I argue, also have the particular value—of great interest in the age of corporate power and privatization—of producing an indebted laborer who cannot, in theory, be seen as exploited.

A GEOGRAPHY OF DEBT IN THE PROMISE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Willy Brandt, the former Chancellor of Germany (1969-1974) and head of the World Bank's sponsored Brandt Commission (1980-1987), began to remap world politics with

the “Brandt Line” in an effort to allay the prospect of “crisis” and “disaster” in a “rapidly” deteriorating world economy defined by uneven economic development between industrial and nonindustrial nations. Specifically, the Brandt Commission feared that any further economic decline would likely cause “the disintegration of societies and create conditions of anarchy in many parts of the world” (1). The global south, as understood in development discourse, is a result of the Brandt Line, which partitions the globe into north and south economic blocs divided by the latitude of 30 ° North. Mapped in the interests of the World Bank (as well as the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT], which has since been replaced by the World Trade Organization) and its logic of developmentalist fundamentalism, Brandt’s global south is easily identifiable as the aggregate of “developing” nations in the southern hemisphere within Latin America, Africa, and South Asia. What defined the global south for the Brandt Commission was its collective foreign indebtedness, “some \$630 billion by the end of 1981 of which two-thirds was a long-term debt owed mainly to international institutions” (45). The Brandt Line ultimately narrated a necessary economic cooperation, which would protect the globe from social disintegration and anarchy, between the creditor north and an indebted south. For Brandt, the global north’s gift, aid, and financial management schemes would resolve the global south’s economic woes.

The Brandt Line provided a means for World Bank and IMF funded development schemes to identify nation-states interested in or vulnerable to free trade and deregulation policies. These nation-states were deemed ideal targets for drastic financial management because of their considerable foreign debt. However, allowing nations to assist other nations in establishing economic autonomy results in the emergence of aid and assistance-based organizations that institutionalize and materialize a geography of debt.

It is important to recognize the sense of virtue and purpose that suffused Brandt's project of identifying and developing the global south. Even as such development projects created geographies of debt exploited by capitalist competition, the distinctions that Brandt and the World Bank were striving for between the developed and underdeveloped nations were framed in terms of aid, rehabilitation, and the economic autonomy of the global south. As Marguerite Waller has suggested in her investigation of Western philosophy's "infatuation" with goodness and virtue, aid and rehabilitation discourse merges a set of languages and practices that legitimize creditors as honorable, charitable, or even virtuous (Waller 580). By appealing to the affect of 'imperial virtue,' as Waller describes it, the rhetoric of aid and rehabilitation that characterizes developmental fundamentalism ought to be understood as part of a western "addiction" to maintaining "superiority, expertise, and mastery" through the veil of "goodness" (581).

As the World Bank and International Monetary Fund gain financial and moral capital from constructing an indebted subject or space, it is in their best interest to ensure their sovereignty over an increasing surplus of "southern" spaces and laborers by means of strategically planned projects that exhibit said "superiority, expertise, and mastery."

Gilmore identifies development, and, therefore, the competence required to execute it properly, as a bureaucratic strategy. Specifically, Gilmore focuses on how development planning shifted from government agendas to being a “central” and “fundamental activity” for corporate and banking forces that profit from underdevelopment and a culture of antidevelopment:

A rich literature critical of developmentalist assumptions in the planet’s poorer countries highlights the ways that particular forms and relations of developmentalism serve deliberately or unwittingly (it really makes little difference in the end) to further the underdevelopment of regions (179).

Developmentalism, then, as a private enterprise has to uphold the monetary interests of shareholders rather than the citizens of poorer countries, or as prison planning proposes, the promise of public safety. Moreover, as Gilmore argues, the “relations of development” are indicative of an “antidevelopment problem,” which she identifies as an “industrial residue” that accumulates “devalued labor, land made toxic, shuttered retail businesses” and “by extension, entire ways of life that, having been made surplus, unfix people: women, men, and ‘the kids’” (179). Not unlike Jean Baudrillard’s critique of the map preceding the territory in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Gilmore’s critique suggests that one of the central problems in mapping “underdeveloped spaces” in the interests of corporations is that such logic renders these spaces even more vulnerable to debt-producing programs. For the sake of maintaining corporate power’s sovereignty, entire geographies have been constructed around the creditor-debtor relationship in order to perpetuate debt. The pleasure and legitimacy of that moral capital provided by the indebted subject becomes a strategic promissory to ensure the creditor’s sovereign power.

NAVIGATING THE GEOGRAPHY OF DEBT

A deeper look into geographies of debt suggests that the recipient of aid and rehabilitation is coerced into becoming the indebted subject that is imagined to be always already “bad” and “guilty,” since within a neoliberal economic regime poorness is criminal but potentially absolvable. In the case of the prisoner and the ‘global south’ laborer, then, the obligation to reciprocate *ought* to be become null (Mauss 5). That is, if aid or help is given with the intention of instituting power or control over the recipient of said aid, then the supposed aid no longer can be understood as help. Instead aid is best understood as supporting systemic exploitation and as an essential component of performing sovereign power. Recognizing how aid legitimizes the extraction of surplus value can contest relations of debt and even reverse how they are understood. For instance, Vijay Prashad’s *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (2012) uses a Marxist lens to pay tribute to the global south’s grassroots efforts to counter the neocolonial schemes of the liberal economic regime. Prashad notes that post-independence leaders from the “darker nations”⁵ demanded that the United Nations promote programs that offered fair treatment including better return rates for the Third World’s labor power and a formal recognition of Third World contributions to science,

⁵ In the “African Roots of War” W.E.B. Du Bois states: “Whence comes this new wealth and on what does its accumulation depend? It comes primarily from the darker nations of the world—Asia and Africa, South and Central America, the West Indies and the Islands of the South Seas” (DuBois 707). DuBois goes on suggest that there are still methods of exploitation in “white countries,” but such forms of exploitation can never be compared to the “economic subjection” “white folks” have levied on “Chinese, East Indians, Negroes, and South American Indians” (709). DuBois specifically describes Africa as a space that is repeatedly pillaged and it is this process of pillaging that leads to war. Ninety years later, Vijay Prashad uses DuBois’s idea of “darker nations” in his historiography of the Third World and takes this common subjection to “white folks” as a point of reference to describe the global south as being intrinsically connected. While Prashad’s position does not necessarily challenge DuBois it does stray from the fact that the spaces that these economically subjected peoples occupy are resource rich and, correspondingly, “white folks” tend to occupy barren space.

technology, and culture (Prashad 12). In this case, the demand for fair treatment and human rights was framed as a debt owed by the global north for the resources and intellectual capital that the global south provided.

However, such appeals can have very different effects if governments and funding agencies respond by enforcing developmentalist policies. Such was the case with the Third World demands for fair treatment and human rights as these appeals led directly to the kinds of policies and planning that enabled international institutions such as the IMF and World Bank to “help,” “aid,” “assist,” and “fix the problem,” which only intensified the distinctions between developed and underdeveloped spaces. In fact, the aid and rehabilitation solutions create the illusion that the lack of human rights is inherent to certain places and communities. Aid and rehabilitation are associated with communities that need to be restored to some form of “normalcy.” Aid and rehabilitation projects, moreover, have embedded in them a sense of saving the other from harsh and savage circumstances. For instance, the demands made by the non-aligned nations⁶ for equality and fair treatment on the global stage led to programs such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. The result of the demand for equality and fair treatment—UNCTAD—is a program that collects data in order to offer transnational conglomerates the necessary information for ideal investment opportunities. Under the guise of development planning, UNCTAD “examines global economic trends and the outlook for developing countries,” “undertakes studies on

⁶ The non-aligned nations refers to the nations that were not affiliated with any major power bloc. The non-aligned movement (NAM) was founded in Belgrade in 1961 and is often associated with developing countries including India, Burma, Ghana, and Indonesia.

development strategies,” “analyzes debt issues,” and “promotes development through international trade” (UNCTAD). Although “born by the efforts of the third world,” UNCTAD forces developing nations to “increase their exports within a structure that pays too little for them (terms of trade) or does not value their inputs (labor)” (Prashad 241). UNCTAD imposed an economic transition to a free and deregulated market by advocating trade liberalization, deregulation policies, and structural adjustment programs. Proselytizing transformation and development, UNCTAD paved the way for IMF loans, decades of unconquerable debt, and a rapidly increasing pool of hyper-exploited labor (Prashad 241). And, consequently, Third World citizens became even more implicated in the developed/underdeveloped divide as their foreign debt to international organizations increased.

This phenomenon of equating the general discourse of freedom and liberty with the freedom of the market and the freedom of the corporate person contributes to the proliferation of liberal economic policy; and I argue that both Brandt’s “global south” and California’s PIC were constructed on the back of the development fundamentalism that grew out of the emphasis on liberal economic policies. In the late 1970s, prior to the institutionalization of the prison-fix system, “prisoners had successfully used the federal bench, under the 1876 Habeas Corpus Act, to demand that California treat prisoners equitably, relieve overcrowding, and respect constitutional rights” (Gilmore 89). And the PIC, as it stands today, is the result of a perceived fulfillment of the prisoners’ demands.

The PIC emphasizes rehabilitation⁷, rather than punishment, by training prisoners as a skilled labor force; it has relieved overcrowding by expanding prisons and by new prison construction; and it has presented itself and acts as an economic stimulus for cities in economic distress. In each of these cases the PIC functions as a *deus ex machina* for social and economic problems and, in turn, reifies the prisoners' debt.

Lobbying to make places and people better, safer, and more refined has led directly to the expansion of the PIC and the authentication of the 'global south.' As Gilmore notes, Governor Jerry Brown could have "used his power as the state's chief executive to relieve overcrowding by ordering parole for indeterminate-sentence prisoners who had served time equal to the new sentencing requirements" (92). Instead, with the 1980 Facilities Requirement Plan, Brown created more prisons, framing them as necessary to address prisoners' rights and revive local economies. His success as governor was measured by this move, as is evidenced by his recent re-election to the governor's office in 2011 and the positive feedback to his current Realignment plan, which shifts prisoners from state prisons to county jails in order to save the state money and relieve overcrowding. In fact, because prison planning and construction implies more jobs (mostly short-term construction jobs) and an influx of revenue for the state, Brown is more celebrated than ever. Nonetheless, Brown's expansion of the PIC is an instance of what Gilmore calls the "antidevelopment problem," in which the planning of underdevelopment and the proliferation of poorer places has become an industry that allows governments and financial elites to capitalize on poverty (Gilmore 179).

⁷ The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation changed its name from California Department of Corrections in 2004.

Moreover, the antidevelopment problem spreads beyond the prison walls; as Gilmore notes, people, including the residents in towns with high unemployment rates, did not want to live near prisons, nor did they want to send their kids to school near prisons. In 1999 the residents of Farmersville, California, rallied together at city council meetings to argue that the prison would not only “endanger water supply and quality” but also—by the mere presence of the prison and all that it symbolizes—aggravate local race and class inequalities. People had no interest in living near prisons, and communities were not inclined to open up to include prison employees for fear of a rise in domestic violence, a common characteristic of police and prison guard families (177). It is quite difficult to legitimize the expansion of prisons, even as a socioeconomic necessity.

Yet Jerry Brown was still able to rally support for further expansion of the PIC through the Facilities Requirement Plan by deploying the rhetoric of aid and development such that his emphasis on the well-being and rehabilitation of prisoners occluded how his administration benefited at the expense of the people who were made to live in and near the increasing number of prisons. The key to his success was, and continues to be, his recasting the state as the sovereign—or the paternal figure that acts on behalf of its subjects’ welfare; just as the discourse of aid provides the need to create a ‘needy’ person, the paternal figure provides the need to create an unsophisticated and naive character in need of leadership and knowledge. Brown creates this subject, and with the veil of goodness and the “tireless performance of imperial virtue” (Waller 581-7) the prisoners are denied not only the right to have their sentences re-evaluated according to the changes made in the law, but also their very ontology. Their demands are co-opted,

either to justify the building of more prisons or the relocation of prisoners from one jail to another. In Brown's second term as the Governor of California, his "Realignment" plan, which is intended to address the current overcrowding issue by relocating prisoners from state prisons to county jails, still allows for the California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) to acquire land for prisons and to construct an industry of "care" for prisoners in accordance with the Public Safety and Offender Rehabilitation Act of 2007 (St. John). Consequently, "poorer spaces" such as prisons are on the rise. Riverside and San Diego County, for example, requested that the state intervene and boost the economy by building prisons in "economically depressed" localities (Gilmore 93). County officials and the CDCR, in other words, have turned to a debt economy institution ostensibly in order to pull particular spaces out of debt. The southern trope works by positioning the sovereign—in this case, California's state government—as the guarantor of these spaces' wellbeing and development. And while in each of the cases cited above the quest for amelioration involves appeals to institutions that were the guarantors of both oppression and seeming salvation, the more pressing problem is that in order to secure human rights, already marginalized communities have little recourse other than appealing to forms of sovereign power such as the federal bench and the leaders of the United Nations.

EVADING MORAL DEBT: DEVELOPING THE PIC ALTERNATIVE

For Karl Marx, the shaping of the laboring subject who is able to produce surplus-value (the essence of capitalist production) is a "long process of development" and the

productiveness of that labor “is a gift, not of nature, but of a history embracing thousands of centuries” (Marx). In short, the production of surplus-value is planned and strategic. Marx’s description of the added-value provided by labor as a “gift” is a reminder of the moral dilemma, specifically the capitalists’ debt to the laborer, of surplus-value that will always haunt the capitalist that relies on the discourse of freedom and liberty to sustain a free market. In the appropriation of surplus-value “gifted” from the laborer, the capitalist already owes the laborer more than the wages paid.

And because the capitalist is always already indebted to the worker, it is in the interest of the capitalist to obfuscate that debt. The PIC accomplishes that by means of the prisoner’s punishment, which voids exploitation—rendering it not only justifiable but also the only method of ensuring that the prisoner pays his/her debt to society. The capitalist, in other words, does not have to be concerned with appropriating the surplus value of the prisoner’s labor. The exploitation of the prisoner is misrecognized as payment for the debt owed. Consequently, the moral dilemma of surplus value is deferred if not overcome. In this sense, from the perspective of the capitalist, the PIC presents an ideal alternative to third world labor because of the prison system’s ability to exploit the laborer without accruing the moral debt of exploitation, the timeless blemish that haunts capitalism. It is the fact of surplus-value and the exploitation it manifests that besmirch the virtue of capitalism.

Moreover, geographies of debt produce carceral spaces where the working day becomes immeasurable; it becomes the working-life. As entire geographies, and therefore communities, become subjected to the discourse of development and aid, spaces of

everyday life can be mapped as zones for generating surplus-value for a third party. For example, even when eating and sleeping, the prisoners generate profit by consuming products made for them. The same can be said for the laborer in the global south. Living and being within the territory of the global south creates surplus value for creditors in the global north.

However, since prisons have to find a place in the backyards of American suburbs, many factors have to fall in place in order to present the PIC as a viable alternative to global south labor factories. Laws and regulations have to be set up in order to control the use of prison labor. People must be incarcerated, and land needs to be allocated for the prisons. The paradoxical logic of antidevelopment has to become normalized and incentivized.

In 1995 Oregon State Representative Kevin Mannix asked Nike to consider using inmate labor in Oregon rather than going to Indonesia for labor; such a change, he argued, would allow Nike to save on their current transportation and labor costs (Erich; Websdale 210). In fact, Nike—which accepted Mannix’s offer—was actually behind the times: by the mid-1990s hundreds of other companies (including Revlon, IBM, Texas Instruments, Microsoft, Pfizer, Cargill, and United Airlines) had taken advantage of the prison labor deal. The meager wages paid to prisoners (sometimes less than a dollar a day) allowed companies to reap a surplus value upwards of 400%. In addition, corporations received up to 40% of the wages back in taxpayer refunds since the corporations were regarded as providing a service—or a gift—to the prisoners.

Private companies have been motivated to use prison labor since 1979 when Congress established the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification Program (PIECP). PIECP deregulated the sales of inmate-made goods in order to “enable” inmates to acquire marketable skills to “increase their potential for successful rehabilitation” (US Dept. of Justice). With the deregulation of prison industries, these goods have been available for open market sales since 1979. Simultaneously, the rhetoric of rehabilitation and the number of prisoners in the United States has increased. Prison industry is one of four categories that provide work opportunities for inmates. The other categories—farming, public service, and institutional maintenance—are geared more towards making the prison system self-sufficient. Needless to say, in realizing the potential opportunities that the PIC made available, the private sector had little trouble forgetting about their pre-1930s anxieties over the unfair competition from foreign convict labor that was masked with a forged concern regarding the ethics of indentured labor (US Senate).

The effort to compete with foreign labor projects (either convict labor or other exploitative schemes) by way of US prison labor was set in motion by Congress in the 1930s (Sexton 3). With the increasing power of corporate persons⁸ and regard for preserving the interests of the private sector, the United States alleviated the threat of foreign competition with Section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930, which prohibited the

⁸ Corporations achieved legal personhood in America with the 1886 case *County of Santa Clara V. Southern Pacific Railroad Corporation* by extending the definition of the word “person” in the fourteenth amendment to include corporations. The increasing power of the corporate person is a direct result of neoliberalism, an economic regime that asserts privatization and free trade. It is through neoliberal economic policies that corporate persons are able to attain economic autonomy. Although most scholars situate the neoliberal era in the aftermath of September 11, 1973, Antonio Gramsci, in the 1920s, identified the rising trend of an inorganic political program, “introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means,” that he identified as “laissez-faire liberalism,” which, like our current phase of neoliberalism, favored privatization and relied on deregulation policies (210).

importation of goods, wares, articles, and merchandise mined in any foreign country by convict or indentured labor. With this act, US legislators conserved the position of the US as “virtuous” by frowning upon the use of penal labor. The provisions, however, were applicable only to goods, wares, articles and merchandise that were also mined, produced, or manufactured in the United States. The US was very much open to the use of penal labor for goods that were not already produced within the nation. Congress was not interested in deterring consumer habits. Such consuming habits, in fact, were necessary since at this time Congress was also in the process of making space for penal labor within the United States (US Senate).

The appeal to rehabilitation and aid discourse can also be traced to the early twentieth century; in 1933, just as the United States was recovering from a master-slave narrative indicative of an Old South and revising its maps to make space for a global south that includes the power of the corporate person and the rise of privatization, the 73rd Congress created the Federal Prison Industries (FPI), better known as Unicor. This government-owned corporation produces office furniture, military uniforms, and other products that are sold exclusively to federal agencies. Pushed through Congress as a method of rehabilitation, Unicor also embodies the ideals that back the “virtuous policy maker.” It is, according to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, a “correctional program that focuses on helping offenders acquire the work skills necessary to successfully make the transition from prison to law-abiding, contributing members of society” (Unicor). In 1937, the profits from penal labor within the United States became quite evident: “FPI realized nearly \$570,000 in profits on gross sales of over \$3.7 million” (Unicor).

Regardless of its propaganda of effective rehabilitation, Unicolor continues to amass a considerable sum—\$500 million from 2001-2004.

Tracing prison industries from the 1930s to the present situates the PIC within the logic of a neoliberal economy that relies on state intervention to ensure ideal conditions for the entrepreneur, a trend that followed the establishment of the corporate person. And from the perspective of the entrepreneur, such an ideal environment relies on access to cheap labor. As the PIC continues to grow and surplus-value (sans guilt) increases accordingly, corporations, such as Nike, have the incentives to move towards the prison labor model. The PIC's ability to justify the ethical dilemma of surplus-value is also significant for the entrepreneur. Corrections Corporation of America, for example, has gone global and set up ventures in Australia as well as the United Kingdom (Mason 11). Evading the dilemma of moral debt that is inherent to surplus-value, and circumventing the improved quality of life, which results in demands for higher wages, that capitalist industry is intended to introduce, are just two reasons that explain the growth of the prison industrial complex.

RESISTING THE SOUTHERN TROPE

The project of understanding the southern trope and its considerable affective work in legitimizing state intervention and nation building was initiated in the early twentieth century by Antonio Gramsci's *The Southern Question* (1932). According to Gramsci, southern spaces are produced by intellectual and statistical discourse. Specifically, he argues, bourgeois propagandists have a tendency to construct the south as "the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in civil development" (20). While

Gramsci refers to the case of Italian propagandists, he notes the applicability of this propaganda, which discursively weakens the south to the global stage (32). The United States's exploitation of the southern trope to characterize the states "south" of the Mason-Dixon line as lacking in law and order, anachronistic, and generally inferior was mirrored in the construction of the 'global south.'⁹ In each of these cases, with Italy, the United States, and the global stage, south becomes a trope and takes on more than the simple meaning of cartographical direction; south is misused to suggest being "below" or subaltern. In fact, imagining places and people as "southern" such that they are made to be "semi-barbarians or total barbarians," or sometimes even "biologically inferior," is what creates and maintains surplus-value markets and extends the working-day to working-life (Gramsci 20).

Deploying the southern trope is common to both the PIC and the global south, and it is generally used to refer to the discursive acts of "antidevelopment"; however, critics of poverty management organizations and underdevelopment conservation projects, like Ruth Gilmore and Vijay Prashad, also make use of the southern trope to identify sites of resistance and opposition as well as exploitation. While it is their intention to use the southern trope to hold the bourgeois propagandists and the southern planners accountable

⁹ Aboul-Ela argues that the dividing line between North and South began to fade when labor and production moved from the South to the Global South: "After the colonial economy took hold in the Southern states, similar practices spread to the Global South. First, the United States built on its expanded influence in Latin America" (10). He adds that with this expansion of the South, American power, "rooted in political economy and culture," began to replace "Old World colonialisms, with their heavy administrative and policing elements overlaying colonial ideology" (11). Aboul-Ela goes on to suggest that the correlation between the construction of the U.S. South and the Global South can be recognized as an amplification of American colonial economy. Thus, the Global North is an expansion of the U.S. North, developed from the relationship between "northern entrepreneurs and their southern commercial agents" (70) and can be recognized as American capitalism.

for their strategic capitalization on poverty, its use in any form occludes the breadth of the problematics from which the southern trope “turns away.” Debt, in both its moral and monetary values, is obscured by the southern trope. And using the southern trope either to expose the production of poorer places or to perpetuate them reinscribes the debt that maps such places in the first place.

By contextualizing the global south within its World Bank origins and its tropological terrain, I see that the southern trope is often misused to the point that even scholars with the intention of breaking away from discursive practices that contribute to orientalizing and negating often fall into the trap of the north-south or credit-debt binary. This potentiality is exacerbated by the deployment of development and aid rhetoric, which is characteristic of the “virtuous policy maker,” as deregulation and privatization policies effectively maintain and facilitate the management of “poorer spaces” and discursively unify the south—as a region and a population—within the rhetoric of underdevelopment. Even the consolidation of the “south” in terms of activism, which on the surface appears to relieve the global south of its chains by giving examples of its political agency, contributes to the illusion that the nations situated as the global south naturally belong to one another. Vijay Prashad, for instance, overlooks histories of activism against the many colonial projects in the global north, including the PIC. In developing a “possible history of a global south” Prashad identifies the global south nations within South Asia, Africa, and Latin America as being intrinsically distinct from the global north nations on account of the various forms of activism that have surfaced from the global south nations (2013). However, the activist groups in the global north

nations, such as Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC), which aims to develop communities and networks for women to ensure justice for their children in prison, were excluded from Prashad's categorization of global south activism. By collating global south activism from the nations within South Asia, Africa, and Latin America Prashad adheres to the language of the World Bank and the IMF. And, in doing so, Prashad inadvertently reinforces the underdevelopment or antidevelopment projects that both institutions rely on in order to continue their aid-based transactions.

Gilmore, unlike Prashad, challenges the global south as a fixed space, but still ascribes to a global south that is poor and, therefore, fails to address the global north spaces within the global south and the dilemma of a global elite that perpetuates southern spaces in the backyards of Abuja and Mumbai. Nonetheless, Gilmore's inclination to identify the places impacted by the prison-fix scheme as part of the "global south" aligns with the IMF and World Bank-generated belief that the global south is in need of aid and rehabilitation, but overlooks the influence of the southern elite in maintaining the southern trope. The general use of "global south" or *south* as a allusion to poorness only highlights the essential function of the south as a trope, which is to "deviate towards" its reference to a space that is below, subordinate, and inferior. It is to deviate towards giving shape to an idea that another space can be superior and of higher standing (White 7). The southern trope, therefore, substantiates the moral relationship between the creditor and debtor as relative to the truth of the sovereign. The continued use of the 'global south'—even when opening its borders to include poor places in the global north—affirms the World Bank's global south project that was designed to ensure profit

for poverty management institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

It is the very trend of making the south an ontological entity that gives way to the management of poverty as virtuous and, consequently, allows for poverty to become capital (Roy 5). To navigate such geographies of debt through the southern trope is to maintain a sovereign power. And every sovereign power has its territory, which is why it is imperative to understand how ‘geographies of debt’ are constructed and the types of debt that these spaces support. Just as the master had his plantation in the Old South, today’s master has the prisons and detention centers. But, as I have argued in this chapter, while prison spaces create a somewhat different creditor-debtor relationship than the geography of the global south, the southern trope links both spaces to the production of the sovereign’s moral legitimacy and virtue. So long as a geography is discursively constructed to be “southern,” the labor of the poor subjects that occupy that space can be rearticulated in such a way that the moral debt accrued by the extraction of surplus-value can be misrecognized as the laborer’s obligation to the sovereign.

Are prisoners, poor communities, and low-wage laborers expected to be grateful for the arrival of development projects that economic models such as the PIC and neoliberalism can offer? It is certainly polite to say “thank you” when someone offers a helping hand; there is no doubt about that cultural norm. And the relationship between helper and helped is seemingly “natural.” It is often instinctual to help someone or some creature in need. The problems, however, arise when aid is organized with the sole purpose of achieving financial gains and securing paybacks as well as obligations. When

these are embedded in the mystification of an indebted subject's exploitation such that the indebted subject is perceived to be outside of the exploiter/exploited relationship, it is the creditor's participation in the construction of such debt that must be put under the microscope.

Dancing to Debt with Bollywood's Paki: A Technoculture War and the Terrorist Trope

“[T]he ‘other’ is born accused: she is made lacking what the subject has and yet is threatening to the stable world of the subject by her radical difference.”

—Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998)

“Consciousness of the bad is an essential prerequisite to the promotion of the good.”

—Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (1956)

“The corporatization and privatization of hitherto public assets (like universities) to say nothing of the wave of privatization of water and other public utilities that has swept the world, constitute a new wave of ‘enclosing the commons.’ As in the past, the power of the state is frequently used to force such processes through even against the popular will. As also happened in the past, these processes of dispossession are provoking widespread resistance and this now forms the core of what the anti-globalization movement is about.”

—David Harvey, “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession” (2004)

WHAT NATION-STATE IS BOLLYWOOD SINGING?

One aspect of Bollywood cinema that appears to have largely escaped previous media and academic attention is the fact that while its infamous song and dance sequences—which happen to be the industry’s primary source of revenue—are generally assumed to be “Indian,” many of its high grossing hits are expropriated from Pakistan. Bollywood regularly “borrows,” or plagiarizes, storylines from Kollywood (the Tamil film industry) and even Hollywood¹⁰; however, its appropriation of Pakistani folk, classical, and popular music when paired with its representation of Pakistanis as terrorists is more akin to what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession.” And because the neoliberal logic of privatization relies on growth by theft, or the process of

¹⁰ By means of praise and agreement, rather than opposition or re-orientation, India’s national film industry establishes an alliance with the United States in its copying of Hollywood. Nonetheless, Bollywood intentionally illustrates some moral high ground in relation to the United States. Bollywood gently balances Hindu asceticism with a devotion to neoliberalism by creating the ‘super-Hindu’ that consumes out of an allegiance to the Hindu state.

redistributing wealth and income, as opposed to generating wealth and income, 'accumulation by dispossession' not only ensures uneven geographical development as Harvey argues, but it also establishes discriminatory practices in forging political subjects that are made to be dispossessable or pillageable (Harvey 155-9). In addition to dispossessing Pakistan of its cultural value and disenfranchising Pakistani artistic expressions for economic gain, specifically, Bollywood directors also cast Indian actors as militant extremist Pakistanis who are angry, trigger-happy, greedy, hawkish, and corrupt.¹¹ However, by imposing representations of the terrorist figure, and the vices and corruption it implies, onto Pakistan, Bollywood profits monetarily and India as a Hindu nation acquires virtue and purity. And with India's accumulation of "imperial virtue," which is within a neoliberal economic regime more significant than wealth and capital itself because it is the vehicle (i.e. the discourse of aid, credit, and development) by which debt is implemented and wealth is accrued,¹² Pakistan is dispossessed of property and agency. Undoubtedly, one could argue that "dispossessing" Pakistan of its cultural values is not so much intentional, but, rather, the very nature of Bollywood. And it is true. This film industry can devour any culture, transform it through its Bollywood aesthetic, and then sell it for global consumption. However, the practice of stealing,

¹¹ Harry Baweja's *Diljale* (1996), for example, is one of the most malicious representations of Pakistanis in Bollywood. Set in Kashmir and with villains played by Shakti Kapoor and Amrish Puri (playing a role eerily similar to Mola Ram in Steven Spielberg's 1984 film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*), the film portrays the necessity of Indian leadership in Kashmir. The need for Indian leadership is constructed by conflating the corruption of local dictators demanding to take land from villagers with India's conflict with Pakistani militants. Ajay Devgen's character, once a nice young man who sang songs of praise in the name of his country, turns to evil after his father is killed by Raja Saab.

¹² Waller 580

singing, and then selling the cultural anthems of Pakistan, in particular, intersects with the film industry's production of the terrorist trope.

The terrorist trope functions as a recurrent discursive formation for almost any subversive subjectivity that challenges Hindu nationalism. And the film industry's countless imaginings of Pakistanis as the embodiment of *the* terrorist trope is, I argue, that which makes the Pakistani dispossessable or pillageable. Although the practice of expropriation and the construction of the terrorist trope in Bollywood cinema transpired separately¹³ and amongst varying producers, the two phenomena not only contribute equally to the almost seventy-year feud between India and Pakistan, but also directly result in the cultural othering of Pakistanis. In this sense, the development of Indian nationalism, by way of Bollywood, broadened from imagining Pakistan and Pakistanis as being "bad" and "other" to being sempiternally indebted to India and, therefore, owing its guilt to and punishable by India. Ultimately, Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani music is entirely contingent on representing Pakistan as the bad Other. That is, India's cultural debt to Pakistan entwines with Bollywood's construction of the Pakistani as an indebted subject who is always already bad, other, and terrorist. Therefore, by investigating the relationship between debt and the 'bad' subject, in this case the terrorist trope, I will be able to elaborate how neoliberalism, and its confluence with Hindu nationalist discourse, uses punishment and guilt to manage the dispossessed.

¹³ The practice of expropriating Pakistani music followed the construction of the terrorist trope in Bollywood cinema. The terrorist trope developed in the 1970s. And the practice of expropriating Pakistani music became commonplace in the early 1990s.

As a result of Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani music, India's major film industry has certainly accrued a cultural debt to its religiopolitical opponent and, yet, it is Pakistan that has inherited the role of the debtor. By imposing what Friedrich Nietzsche might identify as a "bad conscience"¹⁴ on Pakistan, India, by way of Bollywood, both depicts Pakistanis as the bad other and constructs a cultural stage on which viewers can imagine Pakistan as criminal, guilty, and, therefore, deserving of punishment. Specifically, Pakistan is imagined as pillageable and seizable such that it is open to the dispossession of its cultural properties. And it is this example of thievery, which is above reproach, that is, I argue, a result of Bollywood's representation of Pakistan and Pakistanis as "bad" or "terrorist" and, therefore, "guilty," or worthy of punishment and suffering. India and Bollywood imagine, in other words, Pakistan's debt just as they imagine its guilt. Likewise, Bollywood imagines Pakistan's obligations to India and is able to justify its thievery by imagining Pakistan as an indebted, or guilty subject. However, according to Nietzsche's *On The Genealogy of Morality* (1886), it is this attribute of debt, in which a 'material concept' (debt) can translate into a 'moral concept' (guilt), that brings to the surface the "something else" that the debtor "possesses" and that the creditor "is granted"; the "something else" is "the feeling of satisfaction that comes from being permitted to vent [the creditor's] power without a second thought on one who is powerless" (40-41). In other words, the practice of converting material debts into punishment and suffering (and therefore, creating the guilty subject) is, according to Nietzsche, indicative of the creditor's "enjoyment of doing violence" and "do[ing] evil

¹⁴ Bad conscience for Nietzsche develops from a sense of indebtedness.

for the pleasure of doing it” (41). Therefore, while “goodness or virtue is one of the most seductive affects made available by the Western episteme,” as Waller argues, the pleasure, or, as Nietzsche describes it, the “carnal delight ‘*de faire le mal pour le plaisir de le faire,*’ that is “to do evil for the pleasure of doing it” is what follows (Waller 580, Nietzsche 41).

The pleasures of the creditor manifest themselves in a very real violence against the debtor. As evidenced by the creditor-debtor relationship between India and Pakistan, and as I will illustrate in this chapter, it is apparent that Pakistanis have been made vulnerable to suffering and torture by means of terrorist representations in Bollywood cinema. A major backlash created by this creditor-debtor relationship is, however, the conflation of Indians and Pakistanis on the global stage: the dilemma of the brown body as it relates to the terrorist trope. In effect, within this theater of obligation and debt, imposing a “bad conscience” (that of the terrorist) not only satisfies the pleasure of “doing violence,” but also commits what Michel Foucault describes as “indirect murder.” In his 1975-76 lectures “Society Must Be Defended” at the Collège de France, Foucault describes indirect murder as the act of “exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (256). However, in this case it is also “indirect” suicide as Bollywood's construction of the Pakistani as “bad” and “guilty” also “exposes” Indians, and all brown bodies for that matter, to death and political death. One of the most haunting realizations of this dilemma, for which Bollywood, or even Hollywood¹⁵, have not been made even mildly

¹⁵ Jut Sully's “Reel Bad Arabs” illustrates the history of the terrorist trope in Hollywood cinema.

accountable, is the 2012 Sikh Temple shootings in Wisconsin¹⁶. So while the pleasure¹⁷ of the creditor might be a symptom of war and follows the “seductive” qualities of “virtue” and “purity,”¹⁸ the result for India and Bollywood is an act of self-destruction.

At this juncture, I would propose a ‘culture of the commons’ that seeks cooperation between India and Pakistan, as well as other marginalized and divided communities, cultures, and geographies. A culture of the commons challenges privatization, the logic of neoliberalism. While neoliberalism advocates ‘accumulation by dispossession,’ which requires developing a community that can be dispossessed, or pillaged of its resources (cultural or natural), a culture of the commons aims for mutual sustainability. And if encouraged by their respective film and media industries, India and Pakistan, as an economic alliance within South Asia, I argue, can undo the practices of “indirect murder” that lead to the processes of accumulation by dispossession and, consequently, direct murder and war. Evidence of this can be found in the four wars that have taken place between Indian and Pakistan since 1947 and the several acts of war that have been committed against “terrorist looking” persons throughout the globe. With a culture of the commons—which seeks cooperation amongst marginalized communities, cultures, and geographies in order to, with a discourse of social and environmental justice, counter privatization efforts—Bollywood could assist in reversing the longstanding prejudices against the terrorist trope, which includes the Indian person as

¹⁶ On August 5, 2012 six people were killed at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. Wade Michael Page, a white supremacist, was responsible for the shootings. He committed suicide in response. The event had little media coverage in the United States. And there has never been any discussion regarding this event and its relationship to the portrayal of brown bodies in Hollywood cinema.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, Foucault

¹⁸ Waller

well. If not, another seventy years of violence that is, perhaps, more economically motivated than “god-sanctioned,” as I will discuss further in the following sections, will continue to fragment South Asia (Brown). Due to its extensive circulation, Bollywood cinema is ripe for fostering a politics of the common, or a mutually sustainable system of political relations that foster the South Asian region by advocating shared Indian and Pakistani cultural values.

Bollywood’s global appeal, as well as its high-grossing box office hits, multi-million dollar productions, and high annual output are what have attracted so many scholars to studying Bollywood Cinema. Ironically, Pakistan has become one of Bollywood’s major consumers. And the impact of the world’s most active film industry on Pakistan has been of special interest to both media and film scholars (Naqvi 2010).¹⁹ Over the past two decades, for example, many scholars have analyzed the impact of Bollywood cinema on Pakistani youth, gender interactions, violence, linguistics, fashion, as well as history (e.g., Khan et al 2014 and Aslam 2012). Although Bollywood cinema is often ridiculed for its story lines and melodramatic tales of unrequited or illicit love affairs, it is also celebrated for its political leanings toward the Bhartiya Jhanata Party (BJP). Film scholars like Kiran Pervez and Qaisar Khan have also investigated Bollywood’s portrayal of Pakistan as the bad Other; and it is these representations that not only uphold the “two nation theory” introduced by Pakistan’s founder Muhammad

¹⁹ A direct response to the series of media deregulation policies introduced during the reign of General Pervez Musharraf’s military government from 1999-2008.

Ali Jinnah,²⁰ but also recapitulate the BJP's anti-Muslim and pro-liberalization political platform. In fact, a distinguishing feature of Indian neoliberalism from the early 1990s onwards was the rise of the BJP, a party that began in 1980, but developed out of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which formed in 1925 as part of an effort to define Indian culture in the face of the British Raj. According to Geeta Chowdhry's "Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Hindu right in India" (2003), the BJP, as part of the Hindu right "family" Sangh Parivaar²¹, altered India's social landscape in two ways: first, by actively victimizing the Hindu identity in relation to the "villainous, Muslim identity"; and second, by "rewriting" history to uphold the victimization of Hindus by "villainous" Muslims (98). And it is through the medium of Bollywood cinema that the BJP made these alterations. The BJP, like the RSS, its predecessor, made a concerted effort to demarcate India; however, rather than creating an Indian identity in response to the British Raj like the RSS, the BJP forged distinctions in relation to India's border with Pakistan. Consequently, the religious-based, Hindu/Muslim divide became central to the BJP's political platform. Chowdhry's victim/villain distinction is representative of how this divide was adapted by Bollywood. The notorious melodrama formula of anti-Pakistan films invariably represents the Pakistani as villain and the Indian as victim. What Chowdhry does not address, however, is the BJP's association between victim and virtue. Not unlike Nietzsche's birds of prey and little lambs analogy,²² which criticizes

²⁰ Jinnah began as the leader of the All-India Muslim League (1913-1947) and after the development of Pakistan he served as the Governor-General for one year. Jinnah is often depicted in opposition to Gandhi for his refusal to contribute to the anti-violence campaign, satyagraha.

²¹ Sangh Parivaar represents the family of the Hindu nationalist movement.

²² "And when the little lambs say among themselves "these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is as little as possible a bird of prey but rather its opposite, a lamb, —isn't he good?" (25).

the construction of a moral system—making the distinction between good and bad—that the little lambs develop in response to the villainous birds of prey, the BJP assumes the role of the victimized Indian in order to classify anyone that is not Indian as “bad.”

These discussions, however, do not take into account the question of what is at stake when Bollywood is actually singing Pakistani songs. As the films cross boundaries, they perform borders, affect national cultures, portray Pakistanis as Other and, more often than not, construct the Pakistani as the always already ‘Islamic terrorist.’ Bollywood is able to circumvent any negative consequences for assuming ownership of its adversary’s Islamic heritage and converting it into Indian nationalism or “Hinduized” cultural capital because of the Hindu hegemony that the film industry supports.²³ The idea of the BJP’s “India” —that Pakistan breeds hate and terrorists—is then disseminated across the globe through Bollywood films. This contrived reality and the general anti-Islam sentiment that permeates Hindu nationalist discourse cohere with other dominant nationalist discourses, namely those of the United States and the EU countries, which in turn contribute to the trope of the terrorist who is almost always evoked when this discourse makes claims in the name of national security. Somehow, what many take for granted as a Hindu nationalist form of expression, has taken on a much more dangerous message: that all brown people are villainous and are representative of the terrorist trope.

In this chapter, I situate Bollywood’s complicated relationships to the terrorist trope within the discourse of neoliberalism. Central to my discussion of this trope are examinations of this film industry’s own terrorist-like actions, how it re-imagines

²³ For example, Mishra 2002 and Raju 2008.

terrorists, and its filmic copings with actual acts of terrorism. In doing so, I unpack the relationship between the terrorist trope and the current intimidation techniques used to impose a neoliberal economic regime.²⁴ Because the terrorist trope *turns away* from the multiple expressions of the military industrial complex, an industry that relies on the terrorist trope just as much as it relies on free-market discourse, my analysis illustrates the war-like and militant consequences of market fundamentalism. Arguably, from the perspective of Eric Hobsbawm the terrorist trope, or “minority activism,” developed out of the general “atrophy of the established tradition of revolution” in the late twentieth century (456), but with it came a thriving market-oriented discourse. And, as I find in this chapter, market fundamentalism, like any fundamentalist discourse, is aggressive and combative even beyond the abstract realm of economics. Furthermore, key to my examination is how the contradictory nature of using Bollywood to represent the Pakistani as the Other and re-present—or, reimagine—Pakistani culture as something Indian identifies the partition between India and Pakistan as contrived and labored.

Choreographing Theft

As I noted earlier, the terrorist trope has in many ways sanctioned Bollywood’s expropriation of Pakistani music. It is an example of accumulation by dispossession, or, growth by theft. In “The New Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession” (2004), David Harvey briefly notes that “wholly new mechanisms of accumulation by dispossession have also opened up” what he articulates as the following:

²⁴ Simply put, the freedoms that the ever-present terrorist is willing and able to take from a nation’s subjects is remedied with free market discourse, which assumes that a *laissez faire* economy will regulate any and all social and economic problems or imbalances.

the commodification of cultural forms, histories and intellectual creativity entails wholesale dispossessions – the music industry is notorious for the appropriation and exploitation of grassroots culture and creativity. (75)

Harvey's explanation of how cultural commodification and dispossession function offers a useful backdrop for examining how Pakistani music in Bollywood is not simply "appropriation" or exploitation. Rather, this music's presence is a kind of expropriation. Appropriation is to make something one's own, which implies that the appropriated culture still maintains some use-value in the object. Expropriation, on the other hand, is theft such that the expropriated party no longer has any rights to the object. Expropriation assumes that what is being stolen always has within it the value of being someone else's property and the suffering caused by the burglary is embedded in the value of the stolen object itself. In this way, Bollywood contributes to an economy of theft, or as Rosa Luxemburg might call it in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), "the realm of capital's blustering violence" (432).

Critical of Marx's limited definition of primitive accumulation in which the means of production become divorced from laborers, Luxemburg emphasizes the "other aspect" of capital accumulation (431). Luxemburg suggests that this aspect unfolds from "colonial policy, an international loan system—a policy of spheres of interest—and war" in which "[f]orce, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment" (432). The unmasked "force, fraud, oppression, and looting," which David Harvey identifies as "accumulation by dispossession," is possible only after the *accumulators*—Bollywood, in this case—attempt to ontologize the Other. And, in doing so, the accumulators construct an epistemological framework around themselves by

demarcating its boundaries and forming a constitutive other. However, because this demarcation around India is made by the expropriation of Pakistani music, the boundary is not only blurred, but in some ways erased, since Pakistani music is so easily adaptable to the Indian and Bollywood aesthetic.

Epistemological constructions and their imagined communities rely on ontological entities. In this sense, the expropriation of Pakistani music is entirely contingent on ontologizing Pakistanis as “bad other,” or *making real* the Pakistani as terrorist that allows India to imagine itself as pure or virtuous. Through this ontological representation, a so-called bad conscience is imposed on Pakistan, making it guilty and, therefore, indebted in ways that justify its cultural dispossession. This process of representation suggests that Pakistan is somehow neither worthy nor capable of intellectual property and cultural ownership of any kind. Bollywood, in other words, makes Pakistanis responsible for “supporting” this economy of theft—or, what I suggest is a kind of Foucauldian indirect murder. Bollywood’s expropriation of Pakistani music is, then, also an expression of what Foucault might articulate as the industry’s indirect power and ability to commit this kind of murder.

The simultaneous negation (i.e., the expropriation of Pakistani music) and negative representation (i.e., Pakistanis as terrorists) of Pakistan in Bollywood cinema call attention to the loss of a common culture between Indian and Pakistan, as well as the division between two communities that such a negation involves. This negation and negative representation also underscore the politics of the common lost by the formation of Pakistan and the subsequent expressions of war and conflict in popular media, or what

I refer to as technoculture wars and digital militarism. Before I further situate Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani music within an analysis of Foucault's reading of indirect power and indirect murder, however, I want to first explore what is at stake in Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani music. The disavowal of a common culture shared by India and Pakistan, ironically, explains why Pakistan's music translates so well to Bollywood. Specifically, prior to 1947, this music was, in fact, Indian. Pakistan's musical roots are, put differently, Indian. And for that matter, what is now classified as "Indian" is also Pakistani.

The overwhelming presence of Pakistani music in Bollywood could inspire alliances and elements of collaboration between the two nations. But, because Bollywood's thievery is compounded with a long practice of Othering, the historical expropriation of Pakistani music contributes to a technoculture war played out between India and Pakistan, as evidenced by a series of anti-Bollywood YouTube videos uploaded by user TicTac82, the general anti-Pakistan sentiment of Bollywood, and the use of Bollywood music at India-Pakistan border celebrations. In each of these occurrences, a combination of aesthetics, purity, and power are used to reinforce violence and conflict.

In peeling back the layers of this particular technoculture war, I want to illustrate the significance of the terrorist trope in a neoliberal economic regime. I also want to demonstrate how cinema is just as much a tool of war as anything that might have been used, for example, by the assailants in the Mumbai Attacks.

20 YOUTUBE VIDEOS AND BOLLYWOOD THIEVERY

A month before the anniversary of the 2008 Mumbai Attacks, an anonymous YouTube user, TicTac82, uploaded the first of a twenty-part series of home-edited videos demonstrating Bollywood's "plagiarism" of Pakistani music. These video's also underscore Bollywood's decades-old representation of Pakistanis as terrorists and evil Others. These videos circulated alongside popular media mugshots of four Pakistani men (the accused assailants of the Mumbai Attacks). The videos made clear the cultural debt of India's film industry to their supposed congenital enemy, Pakistan, as well as India's construction of the Pakistani as terrorist. They made clear that Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani culture could no longer be justified as a matter of artistic license. And, as suggested by user comments such as "fuck!! this is a crime!" and "why don't Pakistanis sue Indian moviemakers," or by referring to Bollywood as "Copywood," the creator of the twenty-part video series successfully conveyed to the YouTube audience that Bollywood's use of Pakistani music is, in fact, an active dispossession of Pakistani agency and yet another component of the India-Pakistan controversy.²⁵

Importantly, each of TicTac82's videos was published on YouTube with the following statement:

India's Bollywood and India's Music Industry have stolen many Pakistani songs and they gave no credit, no acknowledgement, and no money to the original Pakistani singer or songwriter. Here are some examples, there are many more Pakistani songs India has stolen.
(YouTube)

²⁵ This example of participatory media (where audiences play a key role in producing, circulating, and consuming media) offers new avenues for people to perform citizenship and national identities, which can potentially reshape democracy.

With this accusation and the twenty montage videos contrasting Bollywood's "plagiarism" with their Pakistani "originals," TicTac82 creates a virtual space in which to investigate how Bollywood²⁶ thievery exists in a broader discourse of national sovereignty and the formation of two non-secular nations. For example, TicTac82's first YouTube video presents a 10-second clip of "Tu Meri Zindagi Hai" from Mahesh Bhatt's *Aashiqui* (1990) with the statement "Indian Thieves in 1990" typed on a saffron-orange banner flying across the bottom of the screen. TicTac82 then cuts to a 40-second clip of a Pakistani artist singing the same song in 1970, this time with "The Original Pakistani Song Sang by Tassawar Khanum" running across the bottom of the screen on a green banner. TicTac82 goes back and forth between Bollywood "thievery" clips and the Pakistani "originals" for the remaining ten minutes of the first video. In this example of Bollywood thievery, TicTac 82 weaves together, with symbolic colors, the religious differences that encouraged the construction of Pakistan in the first place. TicTac82 also evinces a resentment towards Bollywood's success on the back of Pakistani music by giving more time for the Pakistani music to be heard by his viewers. For TicTac82 it seems that his national identity is challenged by Bollywood's erasure of Pakistan; and so for this user and the commentators willing to join in on TicTac82's critique, the question of citizenship is at stake, which is reiterated in their very use of YouTube as a place to perform their citizenship. Participatory media platforms like YouTube offer citizens a place to perform their religious and national identities. Citizens can, for example, win back their citizenship by denouncing the other on this global and public medium. It is in

²⁶ Tictac82's tendency to conflate India and Bollywood speaks to the influence of the film industry; it, in many ways, functions as a spokesperson for the nation.

many ways characteristic of a technoculture war, which I will explain further in the following sections.

From 2009 to 2011, TicTac82 posted twenty 11-minute videos using a similar style of montage editing that contrasts Bollywood hits with their respective Pakistani “originals.”²⁷ The contrasting application of saffron-orange (the color of Hindu monastic robes and other religious symbols) and green (the color of Islam) banner colors to differentiate between India and Pakistan is just one allusion to the religious conflict that frames the national disunity asserted in the videos. Importantly, by contrasting versions of the Pakistani “originals” with provocative scenes from Bollywood’s “plagiarisms,” TicTac82 also appeals to the ongoing purity-focused contest between Pakistani Muslim and Indian Hindu communities that is almost always brought to the foreground in discourses marking distinctions between India and Pakistan.²⁸

As the YouTube video series unintentionally reveals, neither nation is able to purify or separate itself from the other, as the two are joined by a shared culture, language, and aesthetic tradition. Specifically, TicTac82’s videos disclose how India’s economic progress serves as a point of tension for Pakistan and how, in turn, Pakistan

²⁷ Tassawar Khunam’s hit song “Tu Meri Zindagi Hai” is one of a long list of Pakistani songs that contributed to Bollywood’s cultural-political economic influence. Other Pakistani artists and songs that TicTac82 include are Musarat Nazeer’s “Mere Long Gawacha” (1985), Masood Rana’s “Tum Hi Ho Mehboob” (1966), Madam Noor Jehan’s “Chandni Raatein” (1952), Faakhir Mehmood’s “Marjaawan,” and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s “Mere Piya Ghar Aaya,” and Master Ashiq Hussain’s “Tu Cheez Badi Hai.” The legacy of Master Ashiq Hussain can be traced here: <http://www.dawn.com/news/1100498>; Dawn is Pakistan’s oldest newspaper. It was founded by Jinnah in 1941, prior to partition. It was first published weekly in New Delhi.

²⁸ Pakistan literally translates to the land of purity. In its formation it was, arguably, cleansed of India and Hindu nationalism. And, likewise, India was to be free from its Islamic history. However, these two

makes claims to virtue when compared to India. Both of these tensions highlight how the commonalities between India and Pakistan are overlooked.

Worth mentioning here are the many discursive disconnects TicTac82's video series illuminate. For instance, TicTac82's emphasis on Bollywood glamor—a glamor that includes close-ups of bare midriffs, hips, and derrieres, as well as long shots of speeding motorcycles down Delhi's National Highway 1, all of which Bollywood celebrates as statements of freedom and fortune—is undercut by the pious images of Pakistani artists performing the “original” versions. The most telling example of Pakistan's piety and purity is captured in the first video of the thievery series with a forty-second clip of Pakistan's Tassawar Khunam elegantly sitting in a canary yellow *salwar kameez*²⁹ with a *dupatta*³⁰ covering her head in the center of a music hall singing “Agar Tum Mil Jao.” TicTac82's focus draws attention to the visual juxtaposition of what the user sees as expressions of Bollywood's overindulgent culture and Pakistan's “pure” culture. It is not surprising, then, that TicTac82 chooses *not* to contrast Bollywood's 2005 plagiarism of “Agar Tum Mil Jao” in Mohit Zuri's *Zehar* with the original Pakistani film performance of this song in Syed Tayyab Zaidi's *Imandar* (1974). Specifically, TicTac82 overlooks how the libidinous lip locking between the characters Udita Goswami and Sameer Kochhar in Bollywood's *Zehar* is actually not too far off from the seduction scenes between Nisho and Munuwar Zarif in the original Pakistani film.

A more critical comparison between *Zehar* and *Imandar* would have revealed a shared history and aesthetic between India and Pakistan, undermining the separate

²⁹ Salwar refers to pants and kameez refers to a long tunic top.

³⁰ scarf

national narratives that India and Pakistan have told since 1947. Celebrating a shared culture between Indian and Pakistan could have three major effects that TicTac82 opts to avoid: 1. Challenge the authority of the narratives that prompted the partition in the first place, 2. Diminish the honor of the soldiers and citizens who lost their lives in the multiple wars played out between India and Pakistan, and 3. Undermine the tropes that guide both nations such that the figure of Pakistani as the “terrorist” and/or “evil other” would become less comprehensible and, by extension, the figure of the Hindustani as impure and gluttonous would lose meaning. In avoiding these three possible outcomes—on either YouTube or in the global arena— not only would any potential wars between India and Pakistan continue to be justified, but the circuitous trading schemes that are a result of the tense borders between India and Pakistan would be threatened. Recognizing the shared culture and history between India and Pakistan would disrupt the strategic trading schemes that make space for free trading zones³¹, which only lightly tax companies. In other words, a common culture between India and Pakistan would challenge corporate interests.

Rather than recognizing a shared history between India and Pakistan, hegemonic discourses of nationalism in both India and Pakistan make extensive efforts to separate both nations on account of a utopic claim to purity. Mahatma Gandhi, who made consistent appeals to the shared culture between India and Pakistan in his opposition to partition, was very much aware of how any denial of this culture would, inevitably, lead

³¹ Free trading zones are specific places throughout the globe that are free from customs authorities. Removing trade barriers has made free trade zones vulnerable to poor and exploitative. It is imperative to consider how these zones are essential to a global neoliberal project remains unanswered.

to extensive violence. Specifically, in 1942, he suggested that this denial regarding shared culture required both India and Pakistan to cling to imagined narratives that celebrate “superstitions”:

In actual life, it is impossible to separate us into two nations. We are not two nations . . . When communal riots take place, they are always provoked by incidents over cows and by religious processions. That means that it is our superstitions that create the trouble and not our separate nationalities. (*A Week with Gandhi*, 40-45)

Regardless of “actual life,” Gandhi’s was ignored when a British-drawn division of India and what became Pakistan on August 15, 1947. An irony: the separation created a different kind of common culture between India and Pakistan in that the myth of an immanent distinction, which I argue is circulated through an ongoing creditor-debtor relationship between India and Pakistan and their equally illusory claims of “purity,” is shared by both nations. This myth continues to justify violence and, as Gandhi predicted in his denunciation of a partition, “create the trouble.”

As TicTac82’s video series illustrates in its critique of plagiarism, the myth of immanent distinction between Indian and Pakistan that creates such trouble is propelled by Bollywood’s dismissal of Pakistani agency, as Pakistani culture is regarded as something pillageable. Moreover, the invalidation of Pakistan is compounded through Bollywood’s feverish desire to produce India through the lens of Hindu nationalism, which results in, for example, the Bhartiya Jhanata Party’s use of Bollywood to gain votes.³² In other words, Bollywood produces yet another myth: India as *Hindustan*. And, it does so by repurposing, for example, songs like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan’s “O Lal Meri

³² http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3583255.stm

Pat” or “Kinna Sohna Tenu” for romantic love scenes that were, in their original form, written as expressions of devotion to either Allah or the Sufi saints. Bollywood also narrates outbursts of affection—affection embedded within patriarchal discourses of feminine respectability, devotion, and loyalty that produce a dutiful citizenry—with commandeered Pakistani political songs celebrating national loyalty. As TicTac82 reveals, “Dilan Teer Bijan” (1988), a mixed-language song (including Balochi, Sindhi, Punjabi, and Urdu) used by the Pakistan People’s Party in praise of Benazir Bhutto, was “plagiarized” by R.D. Burman for the song “Main Na Jhoot Bolun” (‘I will not lie’) in the 1991 film *Indrajeet*.^{33 34} Expropriating religious hymns and political anthems for the song and dance spectacles that finance Bollywood cinema not only strips Pakistan of national agency, but also devalues Pakistan’s autonomy suggesting that Pakistan’s autonomy is not even possible as it is entirely dependent on India for its national identity. In these films, then, the deceit is not simply that Bollywood aims to sell an idea of a “pure” Hindu nation that, it is important to note, undermines India’s secular platform and glosses over the nation’s religious diversity. Rather, the deceit is that the “pure” Hindu nation actually exists beyond the imagination of Indian film, which is heavily dependent on Pakistani culture. TicTac82’s videos, therefore, are not only successful in calling attention to Bollywood’s infamous plagiarism; they also, by making reference to the cycles of “god-sanctioned” violence and punishment enacted on behalf of fabricating either a pure

³³ DILAN TEER BIJAN (Balochi): an arrow to your heart/BHUTTO SHAHEED DI NISHANI (Punjabi) you are a symbol of martyr Bhutto (Ref: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto)/TU HAI BHUTTO KI NISHANI (same)/JIYE JIYE JIYE BHUTTO BENAZIR (Urdu) long live Benazir Bhutto/HAM NAACHEN GE HAM GAYEN GE (Urdu) we will dance and we will sing/YEH SADA HAM LAGAYEN GE (Urdu) we will raise this voice.

³⁴ “Food, Clothes, Shelter,” the PPP’s slogan developed by Benazir Bhutto’s father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Hindustan or a pure Islamic nation such as Pakistan, reveal a common culture between the two nations.

Bollywood's cultural debt to Pakistan and the film industry's incessant erasure of Pakistani culture and agency encourage religious violence between India and Pakistan, perpetuating a cycle of debt between the two nations. Moreover, the aesthetic of exclusion and Othering encourages a warring mentality. Bollywood, however, takes the construction of the Pakistani figure as the always already Muslim Other too far, which compounds the effects of its thievery practices, as will illustrate later in this chapter. Imposing the terrorist trope on Pakistan carries out the same functions as racism, which are, according to Foucault, to fragment groups of people and justify murder for the greater good (256). However, as I have mentioned, fragmenting Pakistanis and Indians according to appearances is often fruitless, so while the terrorist trope and the Hindu-nationalist agenda have a racist bent to them, it is only measurable by class markers. In anti-Pakistan films, for example, Hindus in designer suits are juxtaposed with Muslims in sweaty unpressed and unfitted street clothes.

In the same way that racism develops from "transcribing a political discourse into biological terms" (Foucault, 256) to fragment and justify murder for the greater good the terrorist trope develops from transcribing a political discourse into protection and security to produce a similar effect. Within the realm of "biology," or of having to do with the body, the discourse of terrorism is intended to save the Indian nationals from physical harm, imposing a perpetual state of fear and paranoia and calling upon a discourse of protection. For example, identifying Pakistanis as the always already terrorist, which I

will expand on in the following sections, justifies the fragmentation of South Asia.

Examining this fragmentation can offer some framework to understand, or at least begin to understand, how thousands of lives were lost during partition.

Within the context of Bollywood issues of temporality and its relationship to the fragmentation of India and Pakistan inevitably arise when considering how Pakistan did not exist prior to 1947. For this reason, it is not enough to simply construct the Pakistani as the terrorist. Once the expropriated songs become “Indian” Bollywood also assures Indian viewers that they are cleansed, purified, and non-terrorist.

Moreover, the songs come to identify the neoliberal consumer subject such that the bare midriffs, derrieres, and fancy cars no longer stand in opposition to a religious discourse embedded in asceticism. Rather, they are now situated within the discourse of neoliberalism, which, in turn, “purifies” Bollywood and India of its socialist past. In other words, the songs made Indians into virtuous consumers within the discourse of market fundamentalism and, in turn, let Pakistanis “die” as terrorists, threats, or the Other. And, therefore, as I have mentioned, Pakistanis as embodiments of the terrorist trope are also signifiers of anti-freedom (or persons that will take away individual rights as well as market freedoms). In fact, it is the production of terrorism that can prohibit the state from having to wane in a neoliberal economic regime that is solely focused on the sovereignty of the corporation (Brown 96). Producing the terrorist authorizes the state to function as a protector of the people and of their freedoms to participate in a free market making them what Puar and Rai describe as “docile subjects” (131).

Yet, it is also the case that India and Pakistan are in debt to each other. As stated earlier, TicTac82's videos not only illustrate Bollywood thievery, but also suggest that Pakistan is worthy of a moral high ground in relation to India. And, it is this moral high ground that played into the initial formation of Pakistan, a country whose name literally means "the land of the pure." The country was founded on the basis of an Islamic utopia that produces itself and its system of morality in opposition to India and Hinduism. Translating a morality into power has, however, done nothing for Pakistan economically. And, in comparison to the profits Bollywood has incurred from its expropriation of Pakistani music and culture, Pakistan has little to show. In fact, the problem of Bollywood's thievery only arises when taking into account the very different economic turns both nations have made since their formations as separate nations in 1947.

If Bollywood never earned a dime for its expropriation of Pakistani music, it is likely that TicTac82 would have never made the twenty videos. For this reason, then, I also find it productive to consider why for every close up of a woman's midriff or derriere in the Bollywood performances TicTac82 provides a more "virtuous" or "righteous" contrasting shot of a Pakistani performance. In other words, it is not enough to accuse Bollywood of thievery and expose its economic and cultural debts to Pakistan. Pakistan's claim to virtue also feeds into a cycle of debt between the two nations. By debunking any claims to purity and exposing the varied effects of Bollywood's cultural debt to Pakistan, I highlight how the productive potentials of embracing a common Indian and Pakistani cultural heritage and, moreover, recognizing that an alliance would, in fact, challenge the British colonial strategies of divide-and-conquer that amplified an already

tense relationship between Muslims and Hindus preceding the British Raj. Yet, as it were, the erasure of Pakistani from Indian culture that TicTac82 identifies in his videos is not the only example of Bollywood's practice of "indirect murder," which is, in this case, characterized by "expulsion" and "rejection." As I will illustrate in my analysis of various films throughout this paper, indirect murder causing various forms of political death has been practiced repeatedly since the 1970s. Bollywood also *produces* the Pakistani as the Other only to destroy it through the terrorist trope and punish it, through dispossession, for being said terrorist.

NEOLIBERAL TECHNOCULTURE WARS: BOLLYWOOD'S PRODUCTION OF THE TERRORIST TROPE

The Mumbai Attacks

As I stated, the emergence of TicTac82's videos in 2009 coincided with the increasing tensions between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai Attacks, a four day assault imputed to the Pakistani-based Islamic group, Lakshar-e-Taiba. This event resulted in 164 deaths and mass panic throughout India.^{35 36} The Mumbai Attacks quickly sparked a debate on how information technology and new media contribute to war, since it was the attackers' use of online media over the four days that allowed them to stay ahead of police response and maintain control of the city (e.g. Caplan, Kahn, Sassen, and Shankar).

³⁵ The attacks were mostly in South Mumbai at well-populated and distinguished locations such as the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Leopold Cafe, the Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, and the Nariman House.

³⁶ The Pakistani-based Islamic group, Lakshar-e-Taiba (LeT; soldiers of the pure) was held responsible for the Mumbai Attacks (LeT was also held responsible to the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi); LeT is a Sunni orthodox group that was founded to reinforce Pakistan's claim of Kashmir and Jammu.

However, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, and as India began to steadily lose any hope for vindication due to the Pakistani authorities' "lack of effective action" toward the suspects, the mass panic began to manifest itself in the "security and defense industrial complex."³⁷ ³⁸ In establishing a permanent state of defense in the name of protection and security (the sovereign's duty), India produced a state-sanctioned and privately operated security industry. Everything from body scanners and metal detectors to fingerprinting devices and other advanced imaging technologies in airports, railway stations, metro stations, hotel entrances, and religious establishments became commonplace.

Yet, rather than situating information technologies within a long history of technology and war, which includes cinema, it was the assailants' use of subscriber identity module (SIM) cards purchased within India's borders, voice over internet protocol phone services, and applications like Google Earth (and not the various checkpoints that mushroomed across the subcontinent) that the media and scholars used to frame the events of the Mumbai Attacks and guide the debates regarding the relationship between national security, democracy, and digital information technology. That is, as the Mumbai Attacks made space for an entire industry of technology defense to expand within the region, discussions regarding the event centered on the link between terrorism and individualized applications of new media. Headlines such as "Mumbai Attackers Made Sophisticated Use of Technology" and "How Gadgets Helped Mumbai

³⁷ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/12/29/373784913/pakistan-court-orders-conditional-release-for-suspect-in-mumbai-attack>

³⁸ I introduce the idea of a security and defense industrial complex in order to focus attention to the role of terrorism in the present MIC.

Attackers” by *The Washington Post* and *Wired*, respectively, are just two examples of how the attacks became a matter of technology. For precisely this reason, Bollywood films, including J.P. Dutta’s *LOC Kargil* (2003) and A.R. Murgadoss’ *Holiday: A Soldier is Never Off Duty* (2012), which I will discuss further in the following sections, began to integrate how terrorism relies on new media and how, in response, India and its citizens can (and should) use new media to counter³⁹ terrorism. Somehow, the new media and war debate never shifted from the handheld technologies we keep in our individual pockets to the state-issued body scanners that promote the “security and defense industrial complex,” as well as other private industries, including Bollywood, that “manufacture consent.”⁴⁰ In other words, Bollywood’s long-established war against Pakistan has bypassed accountability for any of the attacks within India. And, consequently, media and scholars have neglected to acknowledge how creating, establishing, and maintaining the fear of the Pakistani terrorist with checkpoints and scanners exposes all Pakistanis to a political death and a violent public expulsion that is implied by India’s supply of nuclear weapons including a nuclear attack submarine and its INS Vikramaditya Aircraft Carrier, AH-64D Apache Longbow Block III attack helicopter, and SU-30MKI Fighter. It is not, then, sufficient to focus on the individualized use of technology when trying to understand an event like the Mumbai attacks; it is rather necessary to contextualize how these tools are used to compensate for the presence of nuclear war devices that results in a constant state of fear for those on the opposing side.

³⁹ counter-terrorism..

⁴⁰ Noam Chomsky

Total Siyapaa/Chaos

The security and defense industrial complex, which, I argue, includes Bollywood cinema as well as various explosive devices, contributes more to the indirect and direct murder of Pakistanis than it protects and defends Indian citizens. Eeshwar Niwas' romantic-comedy (that is in all respects a Bollywood adaptation of Jay Roach's 2000 Hollywood film *Meet the Parents*), *Total Siyapaa* (2014) draws attention to the effects of this phenomenon on the global stage.⁴¹ In the film's first scene, Aman, a Pakistani, is captured by a London police officer while he is on the phone with his girlfriend, Asha, an Indian from a Sikh family. Because a police officer overhears the word "bomb" coming from a brown man, Aman is immediately hunted down. Ten guards surround him in the middle of the street, kick him in the back and arrest him while he is on his knees. Niwas then cuts to a shot of Aman stripped down to his underclothes in custody at the police station. The London police officer finds Aman guilty of nothing other than being Pakistani. And it is clear that his nationality is very much a crime, which, in turn, makes Asha just as guilty even though she is from India. Nonetheless, the chief of police finds the charges unwarranted and demands that Aman be released with an apology. While Niwas makes light of the situation with the chief's witty dismissal of the officer's arrest, the influence of terrorist trope cannot be overlooked, especially when the officer is reluctant to apologize. The officer's response to Aman's language is a direct result of the security and defense industrial complex, as the officer believes he is protecting the city of London by calling in backup to arrest a brown man for using the word "bomb" while

⁴¹ Produced by Reliance Entertainment, a subsidiary of the Reliance Group (Ambani).

walking down a public sidewalk. However, rather than defending and protecting anyone, the officer, who is just following protocol, exposes Aman to death and rejection, or indirect murder and is willing to throw Asha into the same pool as well.

The imaging technologies used by the security and defense industrial complex to classify and then scan our bodies eventually come to rely on what I have described as the terrorist trope, or the forever looming brown body embodying the threat of anti-freedom. I say this because, without the terrorist trope, there would be no need to raise our hands and spread our legs as machines examine our bodies. In other words, the black and white scanned images eventually need to be filled in with some meaning—color, national identity, fashion (Kim 385). And, for that matter, without the terrorist trope, Aman’s nonchalant use of “bomb” in an endearing conversation with his girlfriend would have gone unnoticed. Niwas flips the script of the Pakistani embodying the terrorist trope as it is Aman who is terrorized by everyone in the film. In effect, the technology invested in the anti-Pakistan sentiment throughout the globe and the dissemination of the terrorist trope through Bollywood and other national cinemas, namely Hollywood, ‘turns away’ from the terrorization of the Pakistani and/or Muslim body.

In the film’s second scene, Aman strolls through London, finding himself taken aback and terrified by a toy gun that is pointed at him by a street performer acting as a soldier. Aman’s unease with firearms is a recurring theme in Niwas’ film. For example, at Asha’s parents’ house, Aman becomes distressed when his girlfriend’s blind grandfather aims a Lee Enfield Mark 4, a British infantry rifle from the 1971 India-Pakistan war, at Aman’s face while simultaneously bragging about killing four

Pakistanis. Even Anjali, Asha's four-year old niece, torments Aman by throwing an orange at his face when the two first meet. Manav, Asha's brother, unintentionally bullies Aman when he threatens to "kill that Pakistani." In response to this threat, Aman gently raises his fists and keeps his clenched hands close to his chest, as if to protect his heart more than his body, until he realizes that "that Pakistani" is in reference to the family's neighbor. Jia, Asha's older sister, also victimizes Aman with unwanted sexual advances at the dinner table. After Aman figures out that Jia has managed to untie his shoes with her toes, he finds himself hiding under the table and, in this moment, discovers blood on his shoes. While the blood is part of a parallel storyline that involves the accidental injury of Asha's father, it is also symptomatic of the various abuses he endures, the final one being the encounter with Jia.

Niwas juxtaposes the dilemma brought on by the terrorist trope as it is actualized and reiterated throughout Bollywood cinema with an infamous Bollywood storyline of star-crossed lovers. The remediation of Yash Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) throughout the film makes use of the love story of Raj and Simran, two Indians who fall in love in London and are eventually pulled apart by one of the families due to patriarchal pride and preordained marriage arrangements. It is not until the final scene of Chopra's film that the two lovers are promised a happy ending together. This is also the case with Asha and Aman.

In his own comparison of two star-crossed lovers, Niwas discredits the India-Pakistan dispute by likening it to the superfluous cinematic plot that creates some obstacle for two lovers to overcome. In fact, because the only person interested in

Chopra's film is *Anjali*, the four-year old, Niwas also seems to be poking fun at any audience that becomes so captivated with the same plot time and time again. Niwas's film concludes with Asha jumping into the arms of Aman in the final shot and the soundtrack cuts to the lyrics: "Why fight over such small things?" The satirical film, then, ends with Niwas not only mocking Bollywood, but his own film as well. In effect, Niwas illustrates the common culture that will always be imposed on Indians and Pakistanis beyond the borders of South Asia; Bollywood's terrorist trope and the globalization of Bollywood have exposed all brown bodies to the indirect murder that it intended for Pakistanis. In many ways, Niwas actually flattens brownness to poke fun at the tendency of white people to do so, but also to call for an alliance amongst brown persons. Moreover, Niwas' films calls attention to how technoculture—Bollywood—had *already*, prior to the Mumbai Attacks, a well-established practice in place to wage war against Pakistan and expose Pakistanis to political death. Any command that one of Aman's terrorizers might have had at first glance is eventually debunked, just as the pride of the persons keeping Chopra's Raj and Simran apart is ultimately deflated in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ)*.

Another dilemma that the terrorist trope introduces is the indiscernibility between brown bodies. As I have stated, the use of digital technologies and new media—specifically, film—as a tool for "war" was in play long before the Mumbai Attacks, and not just in India. The security and defense industrial complex extends across the globe. And, by adhering to the anti-Islam sentiment of Hollywood and "the West," for example, Bollywood cinema endorses the practice of *direct* murder of Pakistanis. However, as

Niwas suggests, this practice is self-defeating. For example, in a neighborly dispute over loud noise, three Pakistani men and four Indian men (a mixed group of Sikhs and Hindus) chase each other through the London streets after Manav taunted his Pakistani neighbor with prank calls and other childish threats. As the seven men run down a public street with a surveyor's rod, a bat, and a tennis racket (each "weapon" representing the India-Pakistan feuds that are rooted in land disputes, military combats, and sports rivalries) a white British man runs after them and demands the "terrorists" stop in their tracks. The Pakistanis and Indians come to a halt, but not because they want to obey the British man; they cannot determine who he is referring to as "terrorist." The Pakistanis assume the Indians are the terrorists and vice versa. After watching the two groups go back and forth over the language of terrorism, the British man decides to separate the two groups. He puts the Indians on one side and the Pakistanis on the other. The group of men quickly realize that this moment is eerily similar to the 1947 divide and conquer project authorized by the British. The seven men, while collectively speaking Punjabi, then decide to strike back against the British. But, the men still cannot agree upon which of the two groups get to hit the British man first. The Indians claim they have a more dominant power, while the Pakistanis claim that they should strike first because they were technically an independent nation before India. The two groups agree to toss for it. Then, Niwas cuts to a shot of the British man immobilized in a dumpster as the seven men come together and celebrate their violent victory.

While this encounter with the white man on the street could have been avoided had the terrorist trope not come to represent any brown male, Niwas illustrates how the

trope is projected onto them within the colonial context. That is, Bollywood's celebration and affirmation of India's role in the four wars between India and Pakistan, the multiple border conflicts, and the ongoing disputes⁴² between the two South Asian nations is, for Niwas, irrational on the global stage as it does nothing to preserve India beyond South Asia. In fact, Niwas' critique reveals the dilemma of the globalization of a national cinema. Thus, and as Niwas hints within the film's narrative, there is no space for nostalgically celebrating, for example, Asha's blind grandfather and his role in the war. In fact, Asha's four-year-old niece, Anjali, who runs around the house acting as if she is pregnant with twins named Raj and Simran (characters from *DDLJ*), also ignores her great-grandfather as though he has passed away. In this illustration of life and death, Anjali's character very clearly suggests that we, as she puts it, "make love, not war." Asha's blind grandfather, who lives in the past and has displaced his anger towards all Pakistanis, and unlike the young men who collectively fought the armed British man on the street to protect themselves, does not recognize the British influence that led directly to an almost seventy-year-old conflict between India and Pakistan, even though his one material memento from the war is a British weapon.

Here, it is worth revisiting TicTac82's video series, which illustrates how Pakistan, Pakistanis, and Pakistani culture are forcefully ejected from Bollywood cinema. The rejection of Pakistan is contingent upon the punishability of Pakistan. So, while the result of negating the intellectual properties of Pakistan is a form of cultural death, the

⁴² India and Pakistan have had four major wars in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999.

othering and villainization of Pakistanis—or “rakshasization”⁴³—culminates in a social death (Mishra 207). Excluding Pakistan from reaping benefits from a profitable cultural economy, Bollywood and, by extension, India as a whole, engage the global film industry through song and dance sequences that recalibrate the global soundscape.

Through these song and dance sequences, Bollywood also re-imagines a relationship based on domination between India and Pakistan, which depicts Pakistan as powerless in its claims to intellectual property. However, as I have suggested, Niwas’ critique of Bollywood is that its imagined celluloid history has little meaning outside of South Asia. Moreover, the often-denied common culture shared by India and Pakistan is more readily accepted outside of South Asia than within, but only in moments of defense. For example, just as the seven brown men fighting each other were seen as a collective because they were each indiscernible to an “outsider,” the same was the case when Asha had to bail Aman out of jail. The arresting officer at the jail, in this case, accused the couple of potentially participating in an India-Pakistan terrorist alliance against London. This unlikely alliance would be Britain’s worst nightmare coming true. And, as this scene makes clear, “east is east”⁴⁴ in London. Until Bollywood cinema realizes that the terrorist trope also stunts Indians (including Hindu nationals) on the global stage and exposes Indians to indirect murder and political death, India will continue to be transfixed with the trauma of severing its own land at the hand of British Raj’s divisive schemes. Focusing the violence of the 1947 partition on an Hindu/Muslim or India/Pakistan

⁴³ Puar and Rai might correlate this to Foucault’s ‘monster’ (118).

⁴⁴ Damien O’Donnell’s *East is East* (1999) is British comedy that clearly illustrates how the brown body is unable to escape the East or become “white.” Indians and Pakistanis and Muslims and Hindus are equivalent outside of South Asia.

polemic dismisses and excuses the role of the British Raj in the deaths of anywhere from 200,000 to over a million South Asians and the rape of approximately 75,000 South Asian women (Bhutalia 85).

The Non-Moral Sense of 'Technology' and 'Freedom'

Bollywood cinema reinforces a cultural desire for national security and, by extension, sells the terrorist trope to consumers. Take, for example, the parallel plot line of A.R. Murugadoss's *Holiday: A Soldier is Never Off Duty* (2014), in which a soldier on holiday spends his days saving Mumbai from terrorist attacks and his evenings chasing after a smart and sporty young woman. Virat, the heroic off-duty officer, takes the safety of Mumbai entirely into his own hands when he single-handedly dismantles a Pakistani terrorist plot organized by persons from the "northwest border region of India." In the mean time, his bride-to-be, who is completely unaware of her future husband's heroic hobbies, is depicted as being the type of woman who can both fight a terrorist and make the perfect cup of tea; although only the latter of her two abilities are ever put into effect. As Virat is driving (literally) between the two plot lines, from a date to his "duty," and finds himself in his car with his younger sister, he announces to her and the film's audience that every Indian—military, police, and civilians—is responsible for national security. With this logic Virat justifies putting his sister in harm's way in an effort to catch the terrorist. Although reluctant to accept his reasoning at first, the younger sister eventually takes pride in her brush with death as she comes to realize that it is her "duty" as an Indian person to protect the freedoms of her nation. A major facet of upholding national security, specifically through the lens of the BJP, is preserving family values. In

his pursuit to take down the sleeper cells and their intricate bombing plots planned to take down the city of Mumbai and then marry Saiba, Virat finds himself hiding an unconscious “terrorist” and his future wife in separate units of a wall-to-wall closet. Storing both characters in the same place from which he pulls out his expensive suit jackets and fancy watches highlights how the bodies of both the terrorist and the future wife are consumable products. Like his suit jackets that display his sophistication and swag, the bound and drugged terrorist in his closet exhibits his power and dominance. Similarly, Saiba — who is introduced to the audience as a ‘modern’ woman that can hold her own — is made silent and obedient as she willingly jumps into the closet at Virat’s request. The closet becomes a space that gives consumerism moral value as well as a material value. Even the suit that he pulls out of his closet is worn to create an army of Hindu men in suits that are juxtaposed with twelve “terrorist” men in grungy attire. Therefore, whatever is put into the closet by the *patron*, whether it be name brand clothing, terrorists, or women, is done for the greater good: to protect and defend the nation and the corporation. Moreover, by controlling both the terrorist and Saiba, Virat not only protects the nation from harm by capturing the terrorist figure, but also ensures the longevity of the nation and the reproduction of the nation itself by conquering and protecting the perfect Indian woman.

A major component of propagating the nation for Virat is his constant engagement with various policing and communication technologies, illustrating the multiple ways accessible and easily consumable technologies can be used to protect the nation—not simply terrorize it, which became a popular belief after the Mumbai Attacks.

In fact, in an analysis of the attacks, feminist scholar Caren Kaplan identified how various technologies can, on the one hand, “threaten” national security when used as weapons and, on the other hand, “enhance” it when used by “individuals and non-state groups within the nation to better practice democracy and to identify as citizen-consumer subjects” (“The Biopolitics of Technoculture in the Mumbai Attacks,” 307). Working within a Foucauldian critical framework, Kaplan resists analyzing the moral consequences of technology, suggesting that, specifically in the case of the Mumbai attacks, it is neither an “objective good that ensure[s] the pleasures of consumer culture” nor is it “evil in the hands of a constituted enemy ‘other’” (307). Instead, Kaplan advocates an analysis of how “neoliberal biopolitics masks social relations that do not support the ‘story’ of [the] ‘terrorist’” and encourages investigations of how “nation and democracy, among other issues, operate in a biopolitical discursive framework of knowledge that glorifies and fears technoculture, while always already waging war” (307-10). Virat’s savvy use of technology, which assists him in catching the terrorists, suggests, for example, that the more armored a person is with technology the more capable they are not only as a consumer-subject, but as a person able to protect their nation that is “always already waging war” for the protection of “freedom.” In fact, freedom is one of neoliberalism’s most coveted ideologies since personal freedoms and market freedoms can be easily conflated. Technology, then, is not only an expression of the free market, but of freedom as well; and, for that matter, a tool to protect freedoms and the free market.

The terrorist trope reinforces the ideology of freedom that guides the discourse of neoliberalism. Neoliberal biopolitics and democracy exert power in the interest of a free market, but through the promise of individual freedoms. Specifically, because the terrorist trope reinforces the need for the ‘security and defense industrial complex,’ it is implicated in the power dynamics of privatization, reduced government participation, and the free market. The terrorist trope is one of Bollywood and the BJP’s most valuable products that permits neoliberal economics to piggyback on a Hindu nationalist platform—and vice versa. Arguably, the “economy” that neoliberalism is always honoring and protecting, and even sacrificing life for, becomes indistinguishable from a “god” such that Hindu nationalism, Christian nationalism, or Islamic nationalism can take on the economy as its deity.⁴⁵

The terrorist trope facilitates a neoliberal economic regime, or a political economic regime that creates the mirage of less government, increases the rights of corporate persons, and advocates privatization, deregulation, and free trade. As an economic system that aims to “liberate” capital from “social and political constraints and a regulatory environment,” neoliberalism appeals to the qualities of economic freedom (Harvey 10). These qualities are often conflated with the ideals of social and political freedom, since they are offered as compulsory for a free market economy to actualize. The base/superstructure argument⁴⁶ I offer here identifies the illusions of “freedom” as being essential to institutionalizing—or, regulating via deregulation—free market

⁴⁵ It is no coincidence that Islamic fundamentalism and market fundamentalism developed simultaneously.

⁴⁶ The base is the relations of production and the superstructure is the reflection of those relations. For example, if an employer exploits their employees it is likely that the superstructure of that society will rely on oppressive cultural realities.

discourse. The terrorist trope facilitates these illusions of freedom by framing a narrative of freedom itself. The terrorist trope is powerful, then, because it is the terrorist, rather than the state, that circulates as an agent both capable of and willing to take away all freedoms. Therefore, the terrorist trope marks all the characteristics of anti-freedom or non-freedom. And, any action used to capture the terrorist, which necessarily includes marking and identifying the terrorist, is, in turn, represented as a part of the process of protecting freedom.

The terrorist trope within Bollywood cinema dates back to the early 1970s with films like *Border* (1971) and *Hindustani Ki Kasam* (1973). In many ways, these films are extensions of the 1960s trend toward constructing Chinese as India's enemies, a trend that started as a direct result of the 1962 Sino-India Border Conflict. For example, films like *Farz* (1967), *Humsaya* (1968), and *Shatranj* (1969) depict Chinese characters as enemies of the Indian nation state. Unlike the anti-Chinese discourse that quickly disintegrated in Bollywood cinema, the anti-Islam, and specifically anti-Pakistan, sentiment intensified over time. The introduction of the terrorist trope took place between the first two attempts to liberalize India, which highlights the correlation between a neoliberal economic regime and the burgeoning anti-Islam, anti-Pakistan discourse. After Manmohan Singh's successful liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, Bollywood steadily released anti-Pakistan films that imagined the terrorist again and again. Films like *Henna* (1991), *Sarfarosh* (1999), *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001), *Hey Ram* (2001), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Pinjaar* (2003), *Zameen* (2003), *Agent Vinod* (2012) make the Pakistani terrorist central to their respective plots. The latest film, *Baby* (2015)

did not pass the approval of Pakistan's censorship boards due to the negative portrayal of Muslims in the film. And Pakistan's Lollywood has even attempted to retaliate against Bollywood with films like *Border* (date unknown), *Moosa Khan* (2001), and *Waar* (2013). In each of these films Lollywood represents India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) as vengeful and violent, but due to Lollywood's poor circulation, the retaliation went unnoticed and was unable to diminish the cultural potency of the terrorist trope in Indian nationalist cinema.

Alongside the rise of the terrorist trope, it became commonplace to expropriate Pakistani music and practice other forms of dispossession against Pakistan and Muslims.⁴⁷ The introduction of the Pakistani as the embodiment of the terrorist trope, when paired with Bollywood's expropriation of Pakistani music, makes clear how the intensified anti-Islam sentiment coincides with the introduction of a neoliberal economic regime to India. The early 1990s, in particular, in India was also a time of media deregulation, which led directly to a growth in television, advertising, and, in turn, Bollywood, such that India went from two television stations to a multitude of channels including MTV, StarTV, StarPlus, and the BBC. And, with all of these new channels and the introduction of social media, the advertising industry also skyrocketed, as it had new

⁴⁷ The dispossession of Pakistani music was mirrored by other events such as the 1992 "demolition" of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India (an anti-Islam assault orchestrated by Hindu nationalist political parties including the BJP and RSS) and the 1999 Kargil War. And since the early 1990s Bollywood has been stealing music from Pakistan. While it is clear that exposure to Pakistani culture would have increased during this time due to the several conflicts taking place, it is also the case, as I have been arguing in this chapter, that Pakistan was becoming pillage able during this time as well. Moreover, while Indian media described the Pakistanis as illegally occupying Kargil and terrorizing Indian soldiers, it is also the case that India's stock market was on a steady incline for more than a year after the war ended and the nation increased its budget for military spending. In other words, India was profiting from the war with Pakistan on several different levels.

spaces in which to interpolate corporate interests. Bollywood directly gained from each of these effects, as did multiple other industries. Product placement, the use of television to market films, and social networking as a space to boost celebrity popularity, for example, generated new opportunities for Bollywood and Hindu nationalist political parties, specifically the BJP (Dwyer 2014). For these reasons, the terrorist trope became one of these new well-placed products that not only sold the idea of what freedom does *not* look like, but also kept the moral structure of Hindu nationalism intact. Moreover, because the Hindu nationalist agenda has become so widely disseminated, and Pakistanis have become such a significant audience for Bollywood, the industry has, ironically, been able to afford a few positive representations of Pakistani individuals in films such as *Main Hoon Na* (2004), *London Dreams* (2009), *Total Siyapaa* (2014), *PK* (2014). This complex trend that is a consequence of globalization, specifically the growing Pakistani market, may even be a solution to the dilemma Niwas identifies in *Total Siyapaa*. It might also actualize the common culture that Gandhi advocated in the mid-twentieth century. However, this solution is embedded in neoliberalism and, therefore, debt. This means that while it might be the case that ‘nations that consume together will stay together,’ it is also the case that both India and Pakistan have a fading middle class.

**YASH CHOPRA’S *VEER-ZAARA* (2004):
PRODUCING PAKISTAN & THE BAD CONSCIENCE IN BOLLYWOOD**

In this section, through the lens of Yash Chopra’s *Veer-Zaara*, I illustrate the complicated nature of producing the terrorist trope in Bollywood cinema. For instance, in this film and in favor of Hindu nationalism, Pakistan as a geography is rejected and Islam as a religion is abandoned. Moreover, Pakistan’s leaders, past and present, are vilified

through decontextualized reenactments of the two nations' violent past and, moreover, are regarded as impediments to true love. So, while no Pakistanis are shot, maimed, or killed, the nation and its citizens are openly rejected for the Hindu-Indian alternative.

As I have argued, dispossessing Pakistan of its cultural capital is contingent on producing it as the “bad Other”; however, imposing the terrorist trope onto Pakistanis is not a simple task for Bollywood. The delicate and sometimes subtle distinction of the Pakistani as terrorist, as in Yash Chopra's *Veer-Zaara*, is testament to the entrenchment of anti-Pakistan discourse in India, but it is also indicative of the tendency to hide punishment (Foucault 9). Following a graphic description of an eighteenth century punishment, the introduction of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), argues that the spectacle of punishment disappeared because the punishments often exceeded the savagery of the crime itself such that “executioners resembled a criminal, judges murderers” and, consequently, the criminal became an “object of pity or admiration” (9). Keeping Foucault's argument in mind, the direct murder of the Pakistani, played by an Indian actor, in Bollywood film would draw attention to the similarities in appearance between Indians and Pakistanis, which would undermine the entire anti-Pakistan project. As I have suggested, the dilemma Bollywood faces in marking the Pakistani body as ‘other’ or as the ‘terrorist’ is the fact that the Pakistani body looks, walks, and, in some cases, also speaks like an Indian. And, imposing a “bad conscience” onto Pakistan still situates Indian nationals, as well as their diasporic community, in a precarious position on the global stage as brown bodies are always exposed to indirect murder, or death/political

death. Even within India's borders, differentiating one brown body from another is virtually impossible, unless markers of nationality are made visible.

Consequently, every brown body, whether citizen or not, is potentially Other or terrorist, which poses problems for the security and defense industrial complex in India. While India's use of the security and defense industrial complex simply echoes the representation of brown bodies in the United States and throughout Europe, where we all pass as terrorist, it is clear that the United States' military industrial complex cannot translate to South Asia. Seeing the brown body as Other and something to be feared is just the American way according to Jack Shaheen and Sut Jhally's *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Villifies a People* (2006). In this documentary Shaheen and Jhally comb through a century of Hollywood cinema, identify the vilification of the Arab identity as a constant theme in the United States. Shaheen and Jhally offer multiple examples of brown skinned actors performing the role of the Arab man who is characterized as "bad," lecherous, pompous, ignorant, and even foolish and the Arab woman who is usually scantily dressed or involved in some terrorist mission.

Hollywood, unlike Bollywood, just needed to throw a brown body holding a Lee-Enfield SMLE or an M19 into a desert scene and the anti-Arab tales of "barbarism" would immediately leap off the American celluloid. Bollywood, on the other hand, needed to be more subtle in illustrating the Pakistani as 'bad,' 'other' or 'terrorist'. For obvious reasons, arming any brown body with a semi-automatic would never work for Bollywood. And, therefore, while both Hollywood and Bollywood had plenty of assistance from their respective Departments of Defense in constructing the image of the

terrorist, Bollywood does not use military equipment to execute the 'Other' like

Hollywood:

More than fourteen feature films, all of which show Americans killing Arabs, credit the DOD for providing needed equipment, personnel, and technical assistance. Sadly, the Pentagon seems to condone these Arab-bashing ventures, as evidenced in *True Lies* (1994), *Executive Decision* (1996), and *Freedom Strike* (1998). (178)

By contrast *Veer-Zaara* (2004), a Bollywood film that offers its gratitude to the Indian military for their assistance, uses military equipment to save the Other. In other words, rather than using military equipment to directly kill the Other, Bollywood uses Indian military equipment to rescue the Other, and it uses the law to protect both Indians and Pakistanis from the religious and national intolerance that is, according to the film, perpetuated by Pakistan.

Veer-Zaara, a love story about Veer, a Sikh man from India, and Zaara, a Muslim girl from Pakistan, unfolds in a series of Veer's flashbacks from his prison cell in Lahore, Pakistan. In one of his earliest flashbacks, the audience witnesses his saving Zaara from a bus accident in Punjab, India. She is on her way to spread the ashes of her Indian-born caregiver in India. Zaara is not only saved by Veer, but the two also fall in love

Veer's expression of his affections are, within the film, preceded by depictions of the open arms his family offers Zaara. In their small village, Zaara is made to feel at home, like a daughter. The grand welcome offered to Zaara contrasts with Veer's encounter with her family in Pakistan. When Veer arrives in Pakistan on the night of Zaara's undesired arranged marriage to Raza Sharazi, a political ally that her father needs

to secure his career, Zaara's father immediately falls unconscious. Soon, Raza uses his political connections and apparently corrupt platform to falsely imprison Veer to exact revenge. Raza then tells Zaara that Veer has passed away when, in fact, Raza has forced Veer to confess to being an Indian spy working with India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Veer agrees to do so to ensure Zaara's safety and happiness. However, while Veer spends twenty-two years in a Pakistani prison to protect the love of his life, Zaara escapes her life in Pakistan and moves to India to uphold Veer's dreams of giving back to his village. Once Veer's case finally makes it to court and he is released, the two lovers reunite and return to India.

The star-crossed love story of *Veer-Zaara* is certainly common to Bollywood, but by framing it within the narrative of the India-Pakistan dispute, Bollywood makes this an opportunity to subtly defer any intolerance or unnurturing behaviors that have developed toward Pakistan. In the film, it is in India that the entire love story plays out; it is also the final destination for each of the main characters. Once in Pakistan, Veer and Zaara are faced with resentment and turmoil. At first glance, though, and through the neoliberal lens of post-1991 Bollywood, it may seem as if Bollywood is tipping its hat to Pakistani wealth since the shots of Lahore exhibit decadence and luxury. But, when the camera comes onto Indian soil and the shots of the simple life are celebrated with almost endless song and dance sequences—men in the city centers performing bhangra, women in the fields twirling in the shade, and kids smiling on the ferris wheel—it is clear that Bollywood is critical of Pakistan. The heavily embroidered silk fabrics and marble palaces in Lahore come off as indulgent and extravagant when compared to the

beautifully dyed cottons, endless green fields of wheat and mustard seeds, and brick homes of India. Zaara also comes off as uppity and indulgent in the beginning of the film when she identifies as Pakistani. For instance, upon her arrival to India, Zaara asks a bus station officer for the closest hotel and he laughs in her face before he directs her to the open haveli where she can rent a cot and blanket for less than a dollar. The bus station officer's reaction, like the long shots of marble palaces and close ups of expensive fabrics, are all hints to the audience suggesting Pakistan is a place of greed and excess. And when Zaara willingly takes a cot and finds herself enjoying the lower-class experience in India, she is more and more inclined to let go of her Pakistani identity. It does not take long for Zaara to assimilate to India. Yet, as easy as it is for Zaara to be 'Hindustani,' it is equally impossible for Veer to be Pakistani.

Nonetheless, for the first half of the film, and before Veer confesses his love to her, Zaara is very proud to be from Pakistan. In fact, when Zaara makes a promise to Veer, she makes the promise as a Pakistani: "A Pakistani has made a promise to a Hindustani," she says. "Now my country's honor is at stake. So, even if I wanted to, I can't back down now. So, please, tell me what I can do for you." She keeps her word to Veer by agreeing to spend a day with him. And her debt to the Hindustani is paid. Later in the film, Veer uses these similar words and, in turn, upholds his promise as a Hindustani. This exchange of promises I have just described is more than just a little playful since in each case their respective nations' honor is at stake. But because the act of making promises is a theme for the film—as these are not the only promises made—

the role of the person permitting the promiser to promise takes on the role of the creditor whereas the promiser is taking on the role of the debtor.

Understanding promises is essential to understanding how Nietzsche defines debt: if you make a promise to someone, you are not only in debt to her or him, but because they have “permitted” you to promise, they have, according to Nietzsche, denied you the present by imposing memory on you. The person you are indebted to has taken from you the ability

to temporarily close the doors and windows of consciousness; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle with which our underworld of subservient organs works for and against each other; a little stillness, a little tabula rasa of consciousness so that there is again space for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for ruling, foreseeing, predetermining (for our organism is set up oligarchically)-that is the use of this active forgetfulness, a doorkeeper as it were, an upholder of psychic order, of rest, of etiquette: from which one can immediately anticipate the degree to which there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness. (Nietzsche 35).

The promise *is* the obligation and it contradicts, for Nietzsche, the human nature and power/*potentia* of forgetfulness, of being in the present (35). The promise, or debt, is to claim some faculty over the future, which Nietzsche mocks as he suggests that it is the illusion of having the ability to promise and, therefore, some command over the future, that reduces human beings to their conscience. While it is from here that Nietzsche develops his analysis of ‘bad conscience,’ or the guilty conscience, it is also clear that being “reduced” to any conscience (good or bad), or any construction of memory, is in itself an illness that plagues man. The first promise made in the film is from Bebe, Zaara’s Sikh nanny; on her deathbed, Bebe exacts a promise from Zaara to go to India to

spread her ashes. She makes this request because, as she states, for thirty-five years, since partition, she had longed to return to India. For Nietzsche, Bebe's inability to forget India is paralleled by her ill health. In fact, each of the promises made throughout the film are mirrored with some form of impending ailment. Zaara's mother, out of desperation and anxiety, makes Veer promise that he will leave Zaara alone and return to India. Veer's lawyer and Veer make an exchange of promises before they go to trial, and both parties are stricken with guilt and agony over the past. The film's director, Yash Chopra, also makes a promise, but his is to the audience: "*Veer-Zaara* promises to make your Diwali⁴⁸ a happy one." Each of these promises leads the person making the promise back to India. With each of these promises the honor and integrity of India is "burned" into the memory of the audience. The power of promise making, as is evident in this film, reveals a certain moral code that makes each of these promises believable. Because all the promises are made back to India, it is India that somehow remains in the position of the creditor.

Veer-Zaara's narrative spans the years 1982 to 2004. The film echoes the politics of 1982 Pakistan under the rule of Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and India under Indira Gandhi, as well as the 2004 activities of President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India. Importantly, while India is illustrated as a welcoming place throughout this time, Pakistan is framed as politically aggressive, materialistic, and accountable for the decades of religious intolerance between India and Pakistan. For this reason, the love story unfolds on Indian soil, while the turmoil and confusion play out in Pakistan. Considering the narrative's time frame, which, as I stated,

⁴⁸ Diwali is a Hindu holiday celebrating the return of Rama to the town of Ayodhya.

begins with Pakistan under the rule of Zia-ul-Haq, who was responsible for amplifying Pakistan's religious identity and introducing deregulation policies, India's role as savior in the film not only reinforces its military relationship with Pakistan, but also justifies the Hindu nationalist undertone of the film. Because Zia-ul-Haq was responsible for accepting 40 F-16 fighter planes from the Reagan Administration in 1981 and for warning Rajiv Gandhi, in response to Operation Brasstacks⁴⁹, that any war between India and Pakistan that might lead to the destruction of India would also result in the demise of Hinduism, any performance of Hindu nationalism was vindicated:

Mr. Rajiv, you want to attack Pakistan, go ahead and do it. But keep in mind that after this the World would forget Hulagu Khan & Gengis Khan & will only remember Zia-ul-Haq & Rajiv Gandhi. Because this will not be a Conventional War but a Nuclear War. In this situation, Pakistan might be completely destroyed, but Muslims will still be there in the World, but however with the destruction of India, Hinduism will vanish from the face of this earth.⁵⁰

Although India claimed that Operation Brasstacks was nothing more than a military exercise, Pakistan remained on high alert. These increased military tensions between India and Pakistan not only instigated a social attack on Pakistan as Other, but also made India a defender—and protector—of Hinduism.

As the film comes to an end, and Veer and Zaara are finally reunited after the long court case, the aged couple walks across the Wagah border from Pakistan to India. At this point the audience and Veer learn that after he had been imprisoned, Zaara gave

⁴⁹ Operation Brasstacks was an Indian military exercise that the Pakistani military thought to be more of a threat than an exercise, which resulted in heightened tension between India and Pakistan as well as a series of verbal disagreements between national leaders.

⁵⁰ <https://pakspeaks.wordpress.com/2013/08/27/gen-zias-famous-threat-to-indian-pm-rajiv-gandhi-in-1987/>

up her life and Pakistan and moved to Veer's village to help his parents develop a girl's school. The rejection of Pakistan by one of its own citizens is yet another example of Othering and imposing a bad conscience on Pakistan. And it is these forms of Othering that Bollywood has had to resort to since, as I have stated, it cannot easily develop the terrorist trope the way Hollywood does.

BOLLYWOOD AT THE WAGAH BORDER

In November 2011, I travelled to the Wagah Border in Amritsar, Punjab for the third time in my life. I went once as a child in 1997 and then again after college in 2006. Unlike my first two trips to the border, which were solemn, dignified, and ceremonious, my experience in 2011 was chaotic and unnerving. Thankfully, though, I had the two calmest people I know with me, my mother and my grandfather. We were all together until the long line to get to the stadium segregated. After sometime of waiting in the heat, my mom and I had to separate from my grandfather. And, before we knew it, he was lost in a sea of men. At this point, I was unaware of how Bollywood cinema was about to seep into my border experience, but in this moment my memory recalled every image of the holocaust that I knew from film. Various shots from Alain Renais's *Night and Fog* (1955), Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1975), and Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997) streamed through my mind. While my body was slowly moving forward in the line of women and children, my imagination pulled me away from that border space. Instead, I found myself cutting back and forth from color to black and white film images of horrific violence in concentration camps. As the montage of wide angle shots capturing single file lines and closeups of worried faces got the best of me, my mother—

distressed by the chaos—had to pull me back to the present since, as they say, misery loves company.

We waited in line to be searched and we were surrounded by barbed wire. I felt drained, and not just because of the sun beating down on me. I knew that I was not going to have the catharsis I walked away with last time. In 2006, I had the chance to mourn the loss that the border implied. This time, with all the pomp and circumstance, I felt as though I was somehow expected to celebrate the border. As people were buying little Indian flags to wave at the ceremony, I was wishing I had not left my United States passport at my cousin's house. All the non-Indians, specifically Europeans, Australians, and North Americans, were cordially escorted to separate section of the stadium. As always, India treats its fair-skinned guests — since they are quite obviously *not* terrorists — better than it treats its own. So, while the *phirangis* (foreigners) sat in a clean area with mobile fans to protect them from the heat rising out of the earth, I was stuck with the patriotic mass. We were all sweating and everyone was obviously annoyed at the special treatment given to the non-Indians. At that moment, I truly had no allegiance to either identity of mine. I could have cared less if I was Indian or American. I just wanted to be in front of the fan. But, in any case, it did not matter what I wanted to be; the guards did not believe I was anything other than a *desi*⁵¹ girl. After my brief chat with the guards, it was clear that, had I presented my passport to them, they would still have made me sit with the Indian citizens, *my people*.

⁵¹ Indian

My mom was slightly annoyed with me halfway through the line. It was her first time at the border and she could not understand what I found so fascinating about it. The India-Pakistan border did not haunt her the way it did to me. Even as child, before I had been to India, I wondered what was on the other side. Like most lines that were put in front of me, I wanted to cross it just because I couldn't. In fact, I loved Pakistan just because everyone I knew from India hated it. And, of course, I thought there was something waiting for me in *Rawalpindi*—perhaps some lost piece to my story. But, the closest I ever got to Pakistan was to this border.

Once we made it inside the stadium, we entered another level of chaos. We stepped out of a Holocaust film and into a Bollywood box-office hit. A long, tall man in a white jump suit grabbed a microphone as master of ceremonies. He got the audience riled up pretty quickly. I overheard someone say he was a retired cricket player, but I couldn't tell you either way. If in fact he was some famous cricket player, I could offer a tangential analysis of sports and nationalism, but thankfully for you, my reader, I don't have the proper knowledge. And such a tangent would distract me from the problem of being huddled together to celebrate what I thought to be a horrific reminder of the pain India and Pakistan endured. The Grand Trunk Road that Indians and Pakistanis have been meeting at everyday since 1959 at sunset was not a happy place. I could not understand why the tall man in the white jogging suit wanted me and the hundreds of people around me to feel differently. I cringed when the crowd got excited. I felt as if a riot could break out at any moment. The excited energy at the border was misplaced and confused.

Before the flag ceremony, and before the military men goose-stepped up to the gate, the master of ceremonies took a back seat to the women in uniform. I had not seen an Indian woman in a military uniform until that day. It was not until April 2015 that India even had a female bus driver. So, in general, the sight of a woman in uniform in India is strange. That is, it was strange until the music came on. Once the women in uniform started to dance, everything made more sense to me. The goal was to bring Bollywood and all of its implications to the border. The unsightly speakers across from the stadium seats began to blare “Hindustani,” a song from Mukul S. Anand’s *Dus* (1997), an unfinished film. In rhythm with Udit Narayan’s voice, the uniformed women slowly started to dance; their job as part of the Indian military was to get the audience to dance to a Bollywood song from a film about Pakistani terrorists. As a dancer, I found this to be one of the few times in my life that I did not feel compelled to get up and move along with the beats. When the audience continued to dance along with “Jai Ho,” the hit song from Danny Boyle’s *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), I could feel my heart drop to my stomach. I remember my mom looking over at me and saying, “I do not understand what is going on here.” In agreement, I bowed my head and I shook it in disappointment. As if it wasn’t enough to coerce the audience to dance to an anti-Pakistan Bollywood song, now we were asked to shake our hips to a British film celebrating Dharavi, India’s largest slum.

But, then my mom and I both just started laughing. The changes made to the Wagah border ceremony were bizarre, but not surprising. The formation of an Indian identity was, at every turn, somewhat disorienting. Men in kurti-pajamas with western

blazers, the aesthetics of the British Raj in restaurants that overlook slums, or a new generation of Indian 30-somethings hoping to replicate every moment of the American television series *Friends*. This was just another one of those moments. So, we waited patiently for the ceremony to end, reconnected with my grandfather, and got out of Amritsar. I know I will go back to Amritsar because the one place that will never change in India is the Golden Temple. The Indian government might launch a festival next door at the Jallianwala Bagh in an effort to forget the British-organized massacre that killed 370 Indians on April 13, 1919. But, the Kirtan music will still gently drift out of the Golden Temple, and the volunteers will still offer free halwa to anyone that cares to listen. Instead of going to the Wagah border next time, I will likely just stay at the Golden Temple for a few extra hours.

When the three of us got back in the car to leave, our driver asked if we enjoyed the show. We all looked at each other, unsure if we could properly translate our collective distaste for the ceremony. Before any of us could say anything, he spoke for us. On our way back to Chandigarh, we learned that the first song was from *Dus*, an unfinished film about a terrorist that made specific reference to an actual Pakistani military leader, Mast Gul. The role of Mast Gul was supposed to be Rahul Dev's debut into Bollywood alongside Salman Khan and Sanjay Dutt. With such a strong cast the film would have certainly been a box-office hit, and it might have even brought the actual Mast Gul out of hiding much earlier. As leader of the Mujahideen freedom fighters and the poster boy for Muslim Kashmiris in the mid-1990s, Mast Gul was considered to be a hero by many civilians, but he disappeared shortly after the 14th century shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Noor-

ud-Din Wali (a Kashmiri/Sufi Saint) was destroyed on April 11, 1995. Mast Gul did not resurface until 2014 and the man who was once a hero in the Muslim community is now associated with the Tehrik-i-Taliban and responsible for several attacks in Peshawar. The driver informed me of Mast Gul's legacy, and he shared the story as though he were telling me the plotline of a 1980s action film, but with the Hinglish of a 2010s film.

The use of Bollywood music and the soundtrack of a British film at the Wagah border further implicates the role of film in the conflicts between India and Pakistan. While in the theater, or at home with your extended family, anti-Pakistan films create a sense of either anger or resentment just as easily as the pro-India sentiments wash over you. The decontextualized songs at the border, however, give a different effect in simulating patriotism by encouraging a capitalist nation. The border lies along the Grand Trunk Road, sometimes referred to as either "The Grand Road" or Uttarāpatha, which runs from Kabul to Chittagong. Uttarāpatha is more than just a home to the best roadside eateries in the world. This road that overcomes deep ravines and other treacherous landscape is a major thoroughfare for moving capital across South Asia.

The daily ceremony at the Wagah border, which on the one hand celebrates the differences between India and Pakistan with national anthems to encourage the festivities, is also an example of "sovereignty migrating from the nation-state to the unrelieved domination of capital and god-sanctioned political violence" (Brown 23). The new consumer-subjects dancing to Bollywood and British songs at the border no longer need to hate Pakistan as much as they need to shop. In fact, now it might be best just to forget Pakistan. Whether or not Bollywood directors are inserting the terrorist trope or

illustrating the anomalous friendly Pakistani, it is too easy to fold both representations into a larger discourse about either an imagined Hindu nation or a modern and neoliberal India.

In any case, Pakistan, even at the Wagah border, is still only an imagined space. Aside from the large painting of Jinnah that rests opposite India's homage to Gandhi and the rich green of the Pakistani flag that sporadically catches your eye like green grass in the desert, whatever remains on the other side of the iron gate is familiar only to the truck drivers who pass through every day. On the India side you can hear a few faint cheers coming from Pakistan.

*Subjectivities of Debt: Protesting Market Discourse
and Reframing the Indian Farmer Suicides as Acts of Protest*

Anusha Rizvi's satirical comedy *Peepli Live* (2010) is the first feature film to give an account of the Indian farmer suicides, "the largest wave of suicides in history" (Sainath, 2009). Although the film spans geographically fictionalized spaces, it is temporally set during the height of farmer suicides. In the late 1980's, suicide rates in Indian agrarian communities soared and, synchronously, the failure of agribusiness, or the Green Revolution, became glaringly obvious. The Green Revolution (1963-1987)—the introduction of pesticides, irrigation wells, chemical-based fertilizers, and genetically modified seeds—brought about severe environmental risks and required Indian farmers to disregard indigenous agrarian practices. Refusing to carry on as agents of agribusiness, Indian farmers have turned to suicide as a method of protest. The farmers recognize that they are bound to die either from starvation and exploitation, or from the consumption of genetically modified organisms (G.M.O.s). For this reason, Indian farmers are choosing suicide so as to die not in vain, and to incite a revolution against environmental injustices.

Yet, mainstream media and political pundits of the current neoliberal regime portray the suicides as responses to individual monetary debts, demonstrating their unwillingness to imagine beyond the logic of the market. Moreover, in identifying the farmer suicides as reactionary, these popular narratives also suppress the farmers' recognition of a global accumulation of moral debt to the land, and one of the largest and longest *protests* in history. In this chapter, I investigate how media suppress the meaning of agrarian protests, specifically the farmer suicides, by representing farmers as noble and

loyal Indian subjects. From the late 1980's to the present, Indian media have either avoided the farmer suicides entirely, or narrated farmer suicides in a way that affirms agribusiness interests. These narratives, as I will show, suppress the significance of indigenous agrarian cultural practices that prioritize environmental health over profits. *Peepli Live* is no exception to this trend, as Rizvi does not examine how farmer suicides are a form of protest against environmental injustices. Instead of framing the suicides within a discourse of moral debt to the land, Rizvi presents the suicides within a discourse of monetary debt. In doing so, Rizvi reaffirms the farmer as an indebted subject to financial institutions, and, in turn, gives a justification and purpose to those financial institutions. Moreover, Rizvi fails to recognize the land as farmers do, as a kind of creditor that posits all persons as indebted subjects to the land.

At first glance, however, *Peepli Live* seems to be subversive, using satire and irony to show how mainstream media would portray farmer suicides as a spectacle. The film is effective in this regard, intertwining the tragically incalculable rate of farmer suicides with the political economy of media into a mocking account of neoliberalism and its effects. In illustrating the effects of transnational agribusiness and India's current agricultural crisis, *Peepli Live* draws a sharp contrast in its tone and content from other agrarian-related media produced in post-Green Revolution⁵² and post-liberal India⁵³.

Ashutosh Gowariker's Bollywood box office hit *Lagaan/Land Tax: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001) and the public-service broadcast of Gulzar's television series

"Tahreer...Munshi Premchand Ki" (2004), for example, limit India's agrarian issues to

⁵² 1986

⁵³ 1991

the period of British colonialism. *Peepli Live*, instead, centers on the stark effects on agrarian communities caused by corporate colonialism. Corporate colonialism is a contemporary colonialism that is implemented by a discourse of freedom and democracy, propagated by sensationalist media, and motivated by shareholder profits.

Nonetheless, *Peepli Live* finds itself contained by the logic of neoliberalism in its obliviousness to the agrarian epistemologies that favor biodiversity and sustainability over the needs of the free market. Like neoliberalism, which assumes that the free market can solve all problems, Rizvi, when assigning blame for the farmer suicides, only thinks within a market-oriented discourse. For this reason, Rizvi identifies the farmers' monetary debts as the cause of the suicides.

Rizvi is not alone in this trend that explains farmer suicides through the discourse of the market and monetary debt. Vandana Shiva, an activist acutely aware of G.M.O.'s and their impact on agrarian communities, still does not identify the farmer suicides as a method of protest against corporations like Bt Cotton. Instead, she finds that the farmers are committing suicide as a consequence of Monsanto's exploitation of the farmers' monetary debts. While farmers are in extreme debt, I also think it is important to note that monetary debt is not a new phenomenon in agrarian communities. What is more pressing for farmers is the relatively new phenomenon of suicides seeds and G.M.O.'s, and their continued use by corporations. As I have stated, the failure of the Green Revolution is synchronous with the rise of farmer suicides.

Palagummi Sainath, an Indian journalist most noted for his coverage of rural affairs, also locks the farmer suicides within the discourse of monetary debt by ignoring

the glaring connections between environmental issues and the farmers' sense of guilt in relation to the land. Smita Narula, faculty director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University Law School, co-author of the report, "Every Thirty Minutes: Farmer Suicides, Human Rights and the Agrarian Crisis in India" limits the farmer suicides to a non-moral issue. Rather than contextualizing the farmer suicides within the tradition of farmers' movements in India K. Nagaraj, economist and author of *Farmers' Suicides in India: Magnitudes, Trends, and Spatial Patterns* (2008), focuses on the farmers' monetary debts and the tradition of market fundamentalism. Nagaraj argues that "suicide is a cry of desperation rather than a form of social protest."⁵⁴

As part of this discourse, *Peepli Live* re-inscribes the figure of the farmer within the logic of monetary debt and neoliberal subjectivity and reaffirms the Indian nationalist agenda by contrasting the suicidal farmer with Hori Mahato. Take for example, the film's incorporation of Hori Mahato, the central character from Munshi Premchand's agrarian protest novel *Godaan* (1936), in its narrative. The figure of Hori Mahato in *Peepli Live* is a familiar portrayal of agrarian life in India. At first glance, Hori Mahato's character may seem peripheral to the film, especially considering that he hardly speaks in the first sixty-five minutes of film's one-hundred minute running time. Rather, with all of his attention on his tools and the earth, Rizvi's Hori Mahato simply does not have time to hear, speak, or even protest. Hori just digs the dirt because his life depends on it. It even takes a few

⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Shiva, Sainath, Narula, and Nagaraj are all well-intentioned scholars and activists and their service to the agrarian communities does not go unnoticed in this chapter. In fact, it is because of their respective research that I have been able to contextualize the my conclusions from my own ethnography in Bhiki, Punjab, the collective readings of agrarian-focused literary and cinematic texts, and a range of economical, political, and environmentally conscious theoretical works. And, as I have found, it is the moral debt to the land that drive the farmer suicides—marking the suicides as protest and revolutionary, rather than reactionary.

days for Hori to realize that the village of Peepli has been taken over by media vans and carnival vendors hungry for the possible spectacle of a farmer's suicide.

Rizvi intentionally incorporates Hori Mahato's situation in *Peepli Live* as a sharp contrast to the film's main plot regarding the suicide plans of protagonist Nathadas. Hori is the only *kisan*, or farmer, physically working to pay his dues throughout the entire film. The film introduces Hori Mahato with a montage of close-up shots that emphasizes the effects of his labor on his body. Seen through low angle shot of his body digging past degraded topsoil, Hori tries to find nutrient-rich soil that he can quarry and sell at twenty Rupees per kilo. The camera captures the outline of Hori Mahato's thin body with the sun behind him, as he repeatedly throws his entire body weight into the earth with a hand plow. The camera then quickly moves to a close-up shot of Hori Mahato's bare and corpse-like feet, several feet below the surface and bleached with the dust color of dry topsoil. Without any nutrient-rich soil in sight, Hori Mahato's fate is sealed.



Figure 1: Hori Mahato's Skeletal Foot, from Rizvi's *Peepli Live* (2010)

Before Hori Mahato falls to his death in the plot of land that he had been digging for days, a well-intentioned freelance journalist, Rakesh, takes an interest in Hori, hoping to tell Hori's story as part of his investigation into the conditions of agrarian life in Peepli. But the only story that receives any media coverage within the film stems from a conversation that Rakesh overhears several days prior to his encounter with Hori Mahato. At a tea stall on the side of the road, Rakesh takes notice of two farmers, Nathadas Manikpuri and his brother, Budhi Manikpuri, drinking away their sorrows. With their family in debt, the two brothers have been rejected for loans by the bank and the village moneylender. They are left with only the hope of a suicide compensation package from the government, which they know about only from rumors. At the tea stall, Rakesh overhears the two brothers drunkenly reveal their plan for Nathadas to commit suicide. The budding journalist writes an article on Nathadas's suicide plans to comment on the desperate situations that farmers find themselves in. Rakesh's focus on the importance of the farmer's life in his article is quickly overshadowed by the interests of major news outlets and politicians. When the story begins to receive mainstream coverage, the sleepy village of Peepli transforms overnight into a circus stage for both politicians and media outlets.



Figure 2: Remembering Hori Mahato, from Rizvi's *Peepli Live* (2010)

While Rizvi attempts to poke fun at sensationalist media, she never allows the backstory of the soil's poor quality to surface in the film. Instead, Rizvi captures contrasting shots of Nathadas's plump frame with Hori Mahato's almost skeleton-like body. With attention centered on the Manikpuri family, the story of Hori Mahato dies with Rakesh, as they both meet their end in the small village of Peepli. After Hori falls to his death from literally digging his own grave, Rakesh dies in a fire connected to the chaos of political and media rivalries over the exploitation of Nathadas's suicide. Nathadas is only main character able to escape Peepli, and survives by working in Mumbai as a construction worker.

Both the film's focus on the representation of the media coverage of a farmer's suicide, and the haunting shots of Hori Mahato throughout the film, work to convey the state of debt bondage in agrarian communities in India. Juxtaposed with Nathadas, the film's central farmer--consistently filmed in a state of anxiety and depression--who decides to take his life in order to help his family out of debt, Rizvi's Hori Mahato meets death by labor when he dies silently from exhaustion. The film's fatalist imaginary is

troubling because it frames farmers as victims of monetary debt while suggesting that their only recourse is to commit nobly to migration or death, as Nathadas or Hori do.

The film cannot imagine how suicide is part of current protest practices in agrarian communities of India. These protests are forms of parrhesiatic speech, or speaking truth to power, that appear otherwise when managed by neocolonial Indian state apparatuses and their corporate interests. One of my immediate interventions, then, is to understand how Indian mass media have portrayed the farmer suicides as other than protest. I trace this management through Indian cinema's references and reiterations of Hori Mahato, the farmer of Premchand's famous protest novel *Godaan*. These films decontextualize and exploit Hori's loyalty to moneylenders and landowners, portraying farmers as nobles willing to fulfill the responsibilities of financial debt, even if that obligation requires them to die. This trope of the loyal farmer, I argue, is constructed to manage and obscure the significance of daily farmer protest in India and their agrarian epistemologies. The trope of the farmer in Indian media has insisted on the primacy of the farmer's relation to debt-producing institutions such as the IMF and the Indian government.

Nonetheless, the subaltern farmer in India, dissenting by means of organized protest such as suicide, does in fact feel deep loyalty and obligation. However, these obligations are not necessarily tied to their debt to the bank or the landowner. Another main goal in this chapter is to contextualize the trope of the loyal farmer figured by Premchand's *Godaan*. I also investigate how farmer protests, particularly when farmers ingest pesticides, effectively committing suicide, signify the language of the commons.

Activists protesting for farmers often attribute the suicides to a culture of debt-bondage in rural India, and to the Indian government's incentivization for suicide through compensation packages⁵⁵ for the farmers' families (e.g. the topic of *Peepli Live*). While this is understandable, this framing of the farmers' protest unintentionally re-inscribes financial debt as the primary motivation for radical acts such as suicide, ultimately presenting them as victims of predatory lending. I suggest instead that the farmer suicides demonstrate the farmers' agency over their own lives. Their suicides are a collective denunciation of a "suicidal, globalized free market economy based on plundering and polluting the earth's vital resources" (Shiva 2). Moreover, the farmers' suicides, when taken as a collective and mass protest, signal an agrarian epistemology of "*vasudhaiya kutumbam*," the earth family, in which a societal obligation to the land and seeds that support and sustain life holds unparalleled significance.

The narratives that blame alcohol, depression, the IMF, or the Indian government for farmer suicides undermine the agency of the farmer. Articulating farmer suicides within the narrative of financial debt, activists and Indian media inaccurately situate the farmers' actions within the logic of market fundamentalism. While my work is informed by my own activism and interaction with farmers in India, I do not purport to speak for them – the suicides speak for themselves, if in a hard-to-read and *vulgar* manner. The practice of farmer protest, rooted in an allegiance to the land, has been ignored in popular culture and mass media. The lack of responsible coverage has shielded government officials, corporations, and non-agrarian communities from the moral questions that

⁵⁵ <http://psainath.org/farm-suicide-trends-in-2012-remain-dismal/>

farmers must face every day: What does it mean to owe the land? What kind of moral debt do we incur in the violation and degradation of the land? The farmers' protest, more than anything, obligates us to take up these questions in our own activist and intellectual work.

THE TROPE OF THE NOBLE FARMER IN THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF INDIAN NEOLIBERALISM

Though media and the Indian government try to explain away the farmer suicides with tales of alcoholism and depression against a backdrop of insurmountable debt and degraded land, neither the threat of debt nor the reality of a bad crop season is new to agrarian communities in India, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world. What are new in India, however, are the simultaneous demands for high-yielding crops and reduction of farmland in India's transition to neoliberal economy. India's land-grabbing policies, which effectively maintain previous colonial mechanisms, follow what David Harvey describes as the guiding economic strategy of neoliberalism: "accumulation by dispossession." Indian state apparatuses manage the accumulation of land for corporations with colonial state apparatuses, which for India includes a variety of laws that are leftover from the British Raj. The Indian government's response to the failure of the Green Revolution (1985-1991), in which the increasing use of high-yield seeds and chemical fertilizers resulted in infertile soil, land degradation, and water contamination, has been to continue its unwavering faith in agribusiness. The free-market restructuring of the agrarian economy and its practices have created a "revolving door" between agribusiness and intergovernmental organizations (IGO). For instance, Dan Amstutz, co-founder of Cargill Investor Services and the former Vice-President of Cargill, was

appointed as the United States Undersecretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services in 1983, and as Chief Negotiator for Agriculture at the Uruguay Rounds Agreement Act (URAA) meetings from 1987 to 1989. In drafting the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA), which heavily influenced the way in which economies bailed out by the IMF were restructured, Amstutz institutionalized a policy that sought to “increase market orientation in agriculture trade” (WTO.org). For India, this transition into a neoliberal economy structured by WTO and the IMF guidelines resulted in a series of land-grabbing programs for non-agrarian related projects.

The Indian government continues to assist corporate agribusiness by managing the redistribution of land through a regime of dispossession and privatization. This has involved dispossessing the farmer’s land with laws created during British colonialism, such as The Land Acquisition Act (1894). The Land Acquisition Act decriminalized the “provision of land” for *any* “scheme of development sponsored by the government.”⁵⁶ In other words, this law contributed to the legal framework necessary for the British Raj to colonize India. Yet, even after India’s independence in 1947, the Land Acquisition Act was maintained, and even amended fifteen times, under the Indian government.⁵⁷

In 2013, the Land Acquisition Act was effectively replaced with The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act (LARR). LARR created the illusion of free exchange by stipulating compensations to farmers dispossessed of their lands. The law effectively denies the farmer’s first right to land. In other words, within indigenous agrarian epistemologies, priority should be given

⁵⁶ <http://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/acts/1894.01.pdf>

⁵⁷ <http://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/acts/1894.01.pdf>

to those responsible for the cultivation and protection of the land, such as farmers. The implications of LARR have prompted massive protests from the farmers in India. On March 18, 2013, five months before LARR passed, more than a hundred thousand farmers and members of the nation's agrarian communities gathered in New Delhi in an effort to "defend land and agrarian livelihoods." Medha Patkar, a team member of the National Alliance of People's Movement, openly protested, "The Indian government cannot grab our land for private corporations at any cost." Another protestor, Nandini Jairam, also pointed out that though "the government is always proudly announcing more and more loans for farmers," farmers understood that these loans would not help them, but, build up more debt in agrarian households and generate a non-remunerative farming economy (National Alliance of People's Movement).

As indigenous farming practices shift to accommodate the needs of nation-building, which is to also say transnational corporate agribusiness, representations of farmers in Indian media play an integral part in managing conventional understandings of the farmer's relation to society and to money-lending institutions. This has been especially important for the Indian government given the everyday presence of farmers' protest. While it might be "normally expected" that farmers would be disgruntled by devastating changes in agrarian practices, as evidenced over the last twenty years by farmer suicides, Indian media have chosen to ignore the farmer as a contemporary protesting figure, conventionalizing this figure instead as a loyal and dutiful, if heavily indebted, citizen.

As opposed to agrarian protest and social movements, which foreground the earth family's moral debt to the land, popular Indian media's representations of the Indian farmer, when we do find them, often function as a trope. As Hayden White explains in his *Tropics of Discourse* (1978),

Tropes generate figures of speech or thought by their variation from what is normally expected...it is always not only a deviation from one possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation towards another meaning, conception, or ideal of what is right and proper and true 'in reality'" (2).

As a state apparatus, the Indian media does considerable work in "deviating" public considerations of agrarian politics; this may explain the respective presence and absence of popular agrarian-focused films and television during the specific phases of India's economic liberalization. For instance, the years leading to the Green Revolution saw the success of blockbusters such as Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin/Two Thirds of an Acre of Land* (1953), Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957), V. Shantaram's *Do Aankhen Barah Hath/Two Eyes Twelve Hands* (1957), and Nitin Bose's *Gunga Jumna/Ganga Jamuna* (1961). In 1963, the initial year of the Green Revolution, Trilok Jetley's film adaptation of *Godaan* was released, followed by Manoj Kumar's *Upkar* (1967). The first decade of the Green Revolution also saw a steady production of agrarian films, including Shyam Benegal's *Manthan/The Churning* (1976) and Goutam Ghose's *Maa Bhoomi/Our Land* (1979).

From 1980 to 2001, during the failure of the Green Revolution, the image of the farmer fell out of popular culture, resurfacing with *Lagaan* in 2001. In the years between these two phases of popular agrarian-focused films, India's Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting organized the National Film Award for Best Agriculture Film, which supported documentaries focusing on agrarian issues throughout India. The award was first presented in 1984, just as the farmer suicides began to surface throughout the Indian agrarian community, and the failures of the Green Revolution could no longer be ignored. In 1991, as the eighth award was being presented to P. Govindan's documentary *Malberiyum Pattunoolum* at the 38th National Film Awards Ceremony, P.V. Narasimha Rao, the ninth Prime Minister (PM) of India and his Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, introduced the first wave of neoliberal policies in India.

Paralleling the government's adaptations of colonial law, these agrarian films often manage perceptions of contemporary farmers by recalling the memory of Hori Mahato, the fictional character of Munshi Premchand's protest novel *Godaan*. *Godaan*, written during the anticolonial protests leading up to India's independence, was intended by Premchand to establish a Hindu national solidarity amongst Indian peasants and the Indian elite. Hori's loyalty to the money-lender and the community elders in 1930s India, and in the wake of the 1930 Salt March, was to be read as opposition to British colonialism. More tellingly, Premchand wanted to offer, through the figure of Hori, an alternative form of anti-colonial protest to the class-based protests that the Indian agrarian community of Oudh had practiced against landowners throughout the 1920's. Post-independence reiterations of *Godaan*, however, decontextualize Hori's loyalty by presenting it as an abstract ideal rather than context-specific expression of protest. Instead, Indian media have remembered Hori as a good and noble Indian subject, rather than a protester.

PREMCHAND'S *GODAAN* & THE PROTESTING FARMER

Permutations of Hori Mahato as a subservient and loyal subject have dominated popular representations of agrarian culture since the mid-twentieth century. Hori Mahato's loyalty to monetary debt and the zamindar have been used to idealize how agrarian communities ought to respond to the corporatization of agriculture, even if such a process is contingent on the erasure of agrarian epistemologies of debt and obligation *to the earth*. Using Premchand's Hori Mahato to support privatization schemes, which for agrarian communities result in the dispossession of land, is to ignore Premchand's own political vision of 1930's India. One necessary critical intervention then, is to re-member Hori Mahato as an invention of Premchand's appeal for solidarity among Indian people against the colonial dispossession and privatization of the land.

While this section presents a recuperative reading of *Godaan*, I do not wish to overstate the political significance of Hori or *Godaan* to the agrarian communities they purport to represent. As a figure of speech and speeches in Premchand's *Godaan*, Hori Mahato certainly evinces a moral obligation to the earth that is indicative of agrarian epistemologies. However, the novel effects a formalization and management of protest speech through Premchand's treatment of Hori Mahato's wife and son, neither of whom share Mahato's loyalty or obligation to the *zamindar*. To re-read Hori Mahato in the political urgency of the present is to consider how the novel's own subaltern figures—Hori's wife and son—are also dismissed for their protests against the zamindar.

Critical work on Premchand's *Godaan* has often focused on the decided limits and vulgarity of novel's aesthetics. This has reinforced the cultural and political capital of

the Indian literary tradition within an east to west, and south to north structure of literary development. For instance, in her 1970 book review of Gordon C. Roadarmel's translation of *Godaan*, "Versions of a Colossus" (1970), Spivak confesses her uncertainty about how to approach the novel given its cultural history and lack of literary merit, asking "what is the 'just' way to approach Premchand?" (31-37). Spivak's conclusion both answers and defers the question by suggesting that the novel needs a much more sensitive translator than Roadarmel. As she notes, Roadarmel's "boringly literal" translation of *Godaan* distorts dialogue; inserts "clumsy Indianisms on every page." It employs American slang and colloquial expressions, which, according to Spivak, "fit very ill with the tone and cast of characters"; and consistently makes "unpardonable" errors in grammar and syntax.

For Spivak, the political importance of Premchand's *Godaan* stands uncomfortably alongside the vulgar translation of Premchand's break from the Hindi literary tradition. The implications of Spivak's review draws a contrast to those of her later, and understatedly, more famous work, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1985)—a text critiquing the process of normalizing and privileging a narrative of history. Without question, Roadarmel's translation of Premchand is poor. However, it seems that even a sensitive translator would not have altered Spivak's highly insensitive portrayal of India's literary history in her critique of Premchand's novel. According to Spivak, the lack of an Indian literary history comparable to the Western literary tradition makes it difficult for readers to relate to *Godaan*. Specifically, she attributes her difficulty to reconciling Premchand's shift to social realism from "the epic, the scriptural anecdote, songs of love

and war, and mystical allegories,” or “the origins of the Hindi narrative tradition.” She characterizes this shift as too “quick,” as if one went from reading “Chaucer to Arnold Bennett.” So while Spivak identifies Premchand’s work as “genius,” she pities the text for its flaws, which for her are apparently not the fault of Premchand, but of a poor and underdeveloped literary tradition.

As president of the Progressive Writer’s Movement (PGM), which was initiated by the 1932 Urdu publication of *Angare/Burning Coals*,⁵⁸ Munshi Premchand was emblematic of the PGM’s political stance against the British Raj. At the first All Indian Progressive Writer’s Conference in 1936, Premchand, in his Presidential Address, “The Nature and Purpose of Literature,” identifies the value in art today as that which is “dynamic and leads to action,” specifically non-violent action against British colonialism (83). Premchand, a follower of Gandhi, also promoted literature as a political medium to manage class antagonisms. He argued that only by arousing a “critical spirit” through literature could harmony exist between the “rich man sitting in his beautiful garden and listening to the song of the birds” and the “poor but intelligent human being who regards this pomp of wealth as being tainted with the blood of workers” (83). For this reason, Premchand’s work, in line with some of the Movement’s ideals, appealed to the sentimentality of the Indian bourgeois. Premchand, like many of his colleagues involved with the Progressive Writer’s Movement, rejected emphasizing class conflict because it reinforced the colonizer’s modes of dominance. As one of the Movement’s initial

⁵⁸ A collection of four short stories published during the British occupation of India.

members Ahmed Ali stated, Premchand's political platform incited "no one against anyone" (Ali 95).

National solidarity among Premchand and the members of the PGM was contingent on an anti-colonial consensus, but Premchand's formalization of this consensus in his own work did not necessarily reflect the aims of other members. For instance, Noon Meem Rasheed, the father of modern Urdu Literature and contributor to the movement's publications, offers a contrast to Premchand's politics when he historicizes the Progressive Writer's Movement's cultural politics as having "two aims in view: firstly, to write for and on behalf of the proletariat, rather than for the elite; and, secondly, to use literature for creating hatred against the upper classes, feudal lords, and the clergy" (Ali 92). Rasheed's conceptualization of the Movement prevailed, though Hori Mahato and Premchand's appeals for cooperation remain iconic in mainstream media.

Godaan reflects this genealogy of literary protest but idealizes the universal morality of generosity and forgiveness. Premchand was writing in a historical moment wherein the monetization of India's rural economy under British colonialism produced a financial atmosphere where "money was plentiful, security good, credit easy and borrowing uncontrolled" (Islam, 84). While the emergence of a monetized economic system class allowed peasants and farmers access to loans so that they could manage the profound insecurity of agrarian life such as improvident weather, disease, and drought, this system also depended on a logic of privatization since the farmer's only possession of security often took the form of their rights to their land (Darling 108).

As Sir Malcolm Lyall Darling⁵⁹ suggests in *The Punjab Peasant in Prosperity and Debt* (1925), British colonialism's management of the agrarian debt economy, which encouraged money-lenders to prey on peasants by offering loans at high interest, created both immense prosperity and high volumes of debt unevenly distributed between the creditor and the debtor. Darling attributes this phenomenon to the irresponsible behaviors of the creditor or lender in a system that functions on the insecurity of agricultural production. Darling specifically emphasizes both the naiveté of the peasant, whom he describes as unable to grasp the significance of “applying a thumb-mark to a bond,” and the bad faith of moneylenders, whom he describes as making “reckless advances by the high rate of interest commonly charged when no security is taken” (Darling 8). The irresponsibility on both ends of the loan agreement, however, only punishes borrowers as they are bonded to a debt they have no capability to repay. For Darling, while this debt economy produces an increased standard of living for moneylenders and the colonial state, it also intensifies and entrenches the farmer's debt.

For Premchand, the “behaviors” of fraud and duty-bound “transactions” of both creditors and debtors reinforce and exacerbate colonial and caste-based exploitation because they privilege a self-interest that disrupts the coherence of solidarity. *Godaan*, set in 1930's Awadh, a site of agrarian uprisings and protests during British colonialism, urges generosity and sympathy between Indian peasants and the elite landowners by idealizing a *common*-interest, as opposed to the *self*-interest expressed by the actual

⁵⁹ Darling served as officer for the Indian Civil Service. He was characterized as a 'rogue-civilian' dissatisfied with British rule and its failure to improve India. Darling remained unpopular amongst fellow British citizens for his open critique of the massacre of the unarmed civilians at Amritsar in 1919, which was ordered by General Reginald Dyer.

protests of Awadh peasants. Through Hori Mahato's performances of obligation, *Godaan* contrasts Hori's acts of giving for *common*-interest, and acts of giving for *self*-interest, idealizing the latter's negative social impact. Media adaptations of *Godaan* appeal to the middle-class by obscuring the importance of self-interest in agrarian epistemologies, especially those expressed by the 1920's Awadh uprisings.

"Mother earth" is the primary giver, or creditor, throughout the novel. By characterizing nature as a creditor, the novel identifies an ideal model for the creditor/debtor relationship as one that relies on mutual cooperation for profit and gains. Through Hori, Premchand presents a critique of unethical loans and collusion amongst creditors that makes space for exploitative systems of power to develop, and defrauds debtors of their legal rights to participate justly within the economic paradigm:

Trees produce fruit for men to eat. Fields produce grain which feeds the world. Cows produce milk—not for themselves, but for others to drink. Clouds produce rain which quenches the earth. In such a system there's no room for petty selfishness. (21)

In this system of credit, where the debt owed cannot be legally documented, the equivalent of high interest rates and poor communities develop when the land, or "mother earth," is not cared for properly. For this reason, Hori and the other farmers of Awadh try to stay away from selfish behavior as they spend their entire lives "cooperating with nature" (21) i.e. assisting trees to produce fruit. If the trees, fields, cows, and clouds are feeding others—providing nutrition and life—then it follows that society must also contribute to the processes of production. Society must, in return, nurture the earth. For *Godaan*, compelling a party into a transaction that is motivated by the self-interest of the

creditor or giver is, when situated within an agrarian epistemology, a fraudulent agreement.

Hori understands the ethics of the creditor-debtor relationship in principle, since “ingrained in him was the idea that taking anything from a person in trouble is a sin” (22) and that “one doesn’t warm his hands on the flames of another man’s burning house” (21). Hori’s awareness of the looming potential of drought or flood that could, at any moment, bring anyone to their knees with perennial debt was enough for him to avoid poor or unethical credit and loan deals. He repeatedly states throughout the novel that he could not endure God’s punishments for such actions. At most Hori would “increase the weight of jute by soaking it, or of cotton by leaving seeds in it,” but, in any case, “he didn’t consider this kind of deceit as deceit” (20). Still, in his desire for a cow, Hori takes out what he believes to be benign loans from other creditors. Nonetheless, his blindness to his own self-interest results in a series of punishments.

The title of Premchand’s famous work *Godaan/A Gift of a Cow*—*gau*, meaning cow, and *dāan* referring to the act of giving and feelings of generosity—is the first invitation to address the various creditor-debtor relationships that develop throughout the novel. A “*godaan*,” intended to absolve the deceased of their sins, is “a gift of a cow made by pious Hindus to a Brahman (priest) at the time of death” (440). *Godaan* traces multiple examples of gifting between creditors and debtors to criticize the “behaviors” of fraud within duty-bound “transactions. In other words, *Godaan* suggests an understanding of gifting that accords with that of Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), a Sanskrit scholar and sociologist. For Mauss, prestations, or exchanges of debt, often take on the

form of a gift, “but the accompanying behavior is formal pretense and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest” (1). While a *godaan* connotes piousness, loyalty, and duty, it is also a generosity given with the intention of receiving something in return. The act of giving actually becomes self-serving because it formalizes a relation of debt that cannot be easily documented.

Within the first chapter of the novel, Hori makes several deals in an effort to achieve his ultimate goal: owning a cow. A cow, Hori believes, would ensure a more prosperous existence in his next life. A cow would also give his children the nutrition they need to be healthy and happy. While daydreaming of the auspicious day that would bring a cow—“a western cow, a Punjabi cow”—to his front door, Hori tries to strike a deal with God. This is the first negotiation for generosity that the reader witnesses. In his thoughts, Hori claims that if “God would just send enough rain for the crops to come up” he could buy a cow. Hori is motivated to buy a cow because it serves his self-interest, even though owning a cow remains completely dependent on forces beyond his control.

But instead of buying a cow with his earnings from the crops, Hori takes part in a deal with Bhola, the milkman from the neighboring village. As the sequence of events unfolds, Hori betrays his principle to never warm his hands with flames that are burning his neighbor’s home. Hori is willing to take advantage of his neighbor, in this case, Bhola, because Bhola has more than he does. It is this lack of solidarity amongst the Indian communities that Premchand critiques. And although Hori is very much aware of this moral dilemma, he is driven by his desire to own a cow.

After Hori has generously offered to introduce Bhola to a potential second wife, Bhola offers Hori a cow on loan to secure his obligation to find Bhola a new wife. In this instance, Hori takes advantage of the sense of obligation and economic self-interest embedded in gifting as he preys on Bhola's loneliness. Although Hori believes he is acting justly, he is participating in a transaction motivated by self-interest.

Hori's scheme to obtain the cow as an obligation to the gift of the wife further strains his relationship with his brother, Hira. Out of jealousy and a desire for revenge, Hori's brother kills the cow and inadvertently frames Hori, which prompts the *panchayat*, or village council to exile Hori from the village. Hori, out of respect for the village elders, accepts his exile. He leaves out of respect for the common-interests of his community, rather than for the sake of his brother. Ultimately, it is Hori's unwavering faith in the system, more so than Hira's actions, that becomes the cause of Hori's demise. Hori, loyal and honest, accepts the guilt and debt of the cow's death. Hori's acceptance of the guilt and willingness to accept an uneven responsibility was a result of his faith in the gift-debt cycle that he had, until the death of the cow, believed in for the sake of improving his lot in life.

Hori Mahato is a prominent neocolonial trope because he normalizes the production of poverty and wealth within a debt economy by privileging the laws of private property, a common interest that actively works against agrarian epistemologies.

As he says to his brother Hira:

Does one ever grow fat at my age? Only those who have no honour or worry of debts grow fat. In these evil times it's a crime to grow fat! To make one man fat, hundreds have to be lean" (Premchand 87).

While Hori recognizes the contradiction of one person's labor for another's leisure, he is also an ardent believer in private property and responsibility.

Moreover, what distinguishes Hori from other characters of *Godaan* is his willingness to sympathize and work with the landowning elite and clergy. For instance, Hori assures his wife and children that the wealthy landowner, Rai Sahib, is miserable: “[Although] we think those rich people are happy, the truth is they're more miserable than we are. We only have our stomachs to worry about. They have thousands of worries plaguing them” (Premchand 30). For neocolonial state apparatuses, Hori's characterization is another gift from its colonial history.

Regardless of the plague that Hori sees eating away at Rai Sahib and his family, Hori's wife and son have no empathy for the rich landowner. Gobar, Hori's son, refuses to hear the woes of Rai Sahib and responds to his father's lessons with a sarcastic quip, implying that Rai Sahib should just hand over the land to them so he would have less to worry about. The intricacies of a landowner's internal suffering that Hori seems to understand is not knowable for Gobar. Unlike his father, Gobar has no desire to die with the honor of having a cow, or to have claim to any particular ideology, particularly the bourgeois ideology. Gobar is concerned only with the truth he sees in injustice and extreme inequality. Gobar's unattachment, however, results in his complete loss of community—his alienation from the village and then from the urban city, minimalizes his resistance that was so admirable at the start of the novel.

Hori Mahato, unlike his son, recognizes private property and it is through his acceptance of private property that he is able to justify the inequalities of Awadh. In

other words, understanding the language of private property and inequality seem to go hand in hand for Hori. For Hori, an accumulation of good deeds in the last life is what amounts to an accumulation of private property and wealth in the present life,

“God creates men great or small. Wealth is a reward for penance and devotion. Those rich people are enjoying happiness because of their good works in the last life. We built up no merit, so how can we expect pleasures now?” (Premchand 31).

The untranslatability of private property to Gobar permits him to refuse the justifications of inequality as well. Hori, however, from the start of the novel, remains indebted to the system of private property; he wishes to participate in that system in order to overcome his exclusion from it. Still, Hori is unable to explain the affect of power, and why it is that when someone “gets hold of a little power, he beats down the poor and becomes rich” (Premchand 31). Instead, Hori, in accepting the gift of a cow and in assuming the patriarchal position within his household, becomes a slave to property as ideology, and therefore a slave to debt. Premchand reiterates the correlation between private property and patriarchy in the exchange of the gift of a cow for the gift of a bride. For Hori, the cow is just as auspicious for the home as the wife, whereas for his son, the two are very much unrelated. Unlike his father, Gobar is driven by love, which is consistent with his drives for truth; his drives, however are not rooted in any community.

DHANIA AND THE REAL: FARMER SUICIDES AND THE VULGARITY OF PROTEST

The ongoing remembrance and celebrations of Hori’s loyalty have played crucial roles in supporting the corporatization of the India’s agrarian culture and in suppressing the “unsophisticated” objections to the environmental ramifications of agribusiness. Unlike

Hori, Indian farmers have rarely been deferential to local, national, or international creditors. When viewed from the perspectives of the various farmer protests throughout India in the last eighty years, Hori Mahato, as represented in Indian media, seems like an odd, if not selective, expression of agrarian subjectivity. And the nostalgic turn to an image of a loyal farmer in the last twenty years severely contradicts the everyday lives of Indian farmers.

Indian farmers rarely share Hori Mahato's approach towards landowners; they would rather protest than "flatter the landlord or lick his feet" (Premchand 1). In fact, Indian farmers prove to be more like Dhaniya, Hori's wife. In *Godaan*, Dhaniya, "refusing to admit defeat," argues daily with her husband about the politics of offering praises to the landlord (15). While Hori is adamant that "when someone's heel is on your neck, it's best to keep licking his feet" (15), Dhaniya has little interest in being a sycophant to the *zamindar*. Dhaniya is constantly worried about the condition of her family's future, not about how to speak properly to the zamindar. Whereas Hori, on the other hand, needs the recognition of the *zamindar* to attest to his own authority in the community and even within his own household where Dhaniya obviously maintains the power as it is through her own sacrifices—either made by skipping meals or forgiving her husband's abusive behaviors—for the sake of the family. For Dhaniya, the zamindar's authority is no different than Hori's as both are ceremonial and conditional on one another; for this reason, she dismisses both as she carries out her undisciplined speech.

For Dhaniya and farmers, protest may be undisciplined and even vulgar to those in power, but it is nonetheless an honest expression of the community. While vulgar

speech is typically understood as improper or unsophisticated language, it is also often the only language that farmers can use to foreground epistemologies that have been marginalized or recuperated by the “proper” speech of the landowner or creditor. In other words, vulgar speech, or the *vulgare*, is necessary for protest because it reveals the limits of “proper” forms of speech. Dante Alighieri, in his fourteenth century essay *De vulgari eloquentia* (The Eloquence of the Vulgar), advocated the *vulgare* for precisely this reason. Dante also declares the vernacular (in his case, Italian) as a more “noble” --or virtuous and ethical--form of speech as it is more organic and indicative of the commons. The “nobility” of the *vulgare* is arguably its inherent undisciplined truth as expressed by the people.

The *vulgare* functions similarly to Michel Foucault’s understanding of *parrhesia*, his *Courage of the Truth* (1983-1984) and *Fearless Speech* (1983). Like the *parrhesia*, the importance of the *vulgare* rested in its duty to speak freely beyond formal speech, or within an epistemology. The ongoing efforts to eradicate the community of the commons is also an eradication of free speech. A clearly marked dialogue between the *parrhesiastes* and the *parrhesiastes*’ subject who is identified in the speech of the *parrhesiastes* also forms out of Premchand’s construction of cross-class, cross-gender dialogue, which tends to be omitted from the tunnel focus on the working class in social realism.

For decades, even prior to the Green Revolution and the introduction of transnational agribusiness in the 1960s, Indian farmers, like Dhaniya, have been choosing direct action and civil disobedience when protesting against landowners and debt collectors, even when these protests are marked as unsophisticated (15). Dhaniya, like her

non-fictional counterparts in 1920's Awadh as well as present-day India, believes it is her right to be less sophisticated, especially in her duty to her family and self. And in Gyan Pandey's analysis of protest in Awadh, the fictional home of Dhaniya and the non-fictional site of significant protests in the 1920s, he notes "the idea of a just, or moral, struggle appears to have been fundamental to the peasants' acceptance of the necessity of revolt" (Pandey, 261). Dhaniya's reading of protest offers a framework to better understand how "less sophisticated" speech—the *vulgare*—indicates a method of truth-telling as well as a language of the commons. More importantly, the *vulgare* can contest the ways in which "proper" speech makes way for private property. Identifying protest and resistance as simultaneously less sophisticated and just expressions of speech refers to a distinction between less sophisticated or vulgar language and sophisticated or "proper" language.

Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence discourse actually critiqued civil disobedience in agrarian communities as being "less sophisticated" and, unlike Dhaniya, Gandhi was unwilling to identify a just method for agrarian protest. For example, in the name of non-violence, Gandhi instructed the farmers of Awadh after the 1920 uprising to refrain from the methods of protest that they themselves had implemented, such as using railway travel without purchasing tickets, and withholding rent from landlords (Pandey 242-247). In his February 1921 speech to the Awadh peasants, Gandhi specifically stated in his list of nineteen items that "we may not withhold taxes from government or rent from the landlord" and "we may not stop railway trains nor forcibly enter them without tickets" (243). Gandhi even suggested that the peasant communities of Awadh refrain from the

“age-old practice of social boycott—*nau dhobi band*” (257). Gandhi’s plea for kindness assisted in squashing peasant revolts and, therefore, fell in line with the colonial regime. He strongly believed that any further revolt from the agrarian community would interfere with attaining *swaraj*, or self rule. However, by not making space for the agrarian revolts in the Non-Cooperation Movement, and even fearing that it could impede independence, made it quite obvious that India’s eventual independence from the British Raj was in itself a very classed movement. And, moreover, it was perhaps one of the earliest indicators of the class segregation that would be left behind once the British Raj did decide to leave. The peasant who withheld rent or participated in ticketless rail travel after Gandhi’s speech would be identified as going against the only declared freedom strategy, since “Gandhi’s word is supreme” (253).

Regardless of Gandhi’s impact on the Awadh peasants, it was perhaps the peasants’ actions and the divide they caused amongst Indians that inspired Premchand to set *Godaan* in Awadh, and to situate Hori as a key character willing to unite the farmers and zamindars with his empathy for the landowner’s woes and relative hardships. It was the Awadh revolts that proved that a divide between the peasants and the landowners in India would only lead to further colonialism. According to Pandey, the Awadh revolt was “the first time since 1857 that the Awadh peasant had forced himself on the attention of the elites in colonial India” (233). The Awadh revolt made it obvious to many, including Premchand, that the British would never “quit India” so long as the Indian elite maintained their relationships with the British Raj. For Premchand, an alternate method

of dissent would be to build strong relationships amongst both Indian peasants and Indian landowners in order to gain a larger opposition towards the British Raj.

Perhaps what Premchand could not see was that such a relationship, as it is framed in *Godaan*, depends on the farmers' willingness to be disinterested in their own lives and in the life of the earth. While Indian media perpetuate the nobility of the farmer in his or her loyalty to the state, agrarian protest and movements in India, or *andolans*, present a very different understanding of agrarian subjectivity. In 2002, for instance, in order to protect the Ganges River from the Suez-Ondeo Degremont plan to privatize the holy river, five thousand farmers from Uttar Pradesh gathered and protested in the village of Bhanera (Shiva 141). "The Haridwar Declaration," which united activists for this movement, states that the farmers intend to "boycott the commodification and privatization of the Ganga and any other water resources," and to demand that anyone from outside the local community of the river needed "permission of the Gram Sabha (local government) for utilizing these resources" (140). The protest against Suez-Ondeo Degremont illustrates the farmers' loyalty to their own community and to the natural resources that sustain life. For these protestors, the privatization of the Ganges River was unethical towards the local communities; it was also an offense to the sacred river, the life source of India.

The Tebhaga Andolan in 1946 Bengal is another example of the farmers', or in this case, sharecroppers' sense of duty to the self. In this uprising sharecroppers revolted in order to retain a majority share of the produce, and to decrease the share of their produce given to jotedars (rich farmers with more rights in land) (SinghaRoy 51). The

Tebhaga Andolan was motivated by the land grabbing practices carried out by offering loans at usurious rates to poor peasants. When they were unable to repay the debt, the peasants were resettled on the same land as sharecroppers to work off the debt. In these few examples of farmer protest and demonstration, farmers are not trying to escape their duties by means of protest. Moreover, they do not treat financial matters as their only, or primary, obligation. The same was the case with the Narmado Bachao Andolan (1989); in this movement the goal was to protect a water source. In fact, each of these protests, like those that space does not permit me to discuss, emphasizes an obligation to the earth and the integrity of its natural resources.

From the British Raj to the rise of an Indian bourgeoisie, and now to the current global project of development that relies on a liberal economic scheme, an imperial legal system is normalizing the logic of corporate colonialism by diminishing and regulating the space for the *vulgare* and the duty of *parrhesia* in favor of disciplined language. The selective memory around Hori Mahato and the overall dismissal of farmer protest and direct action in Indian media is arguably a continuation of the suppression of peasant protest in Indian nation building. Indian media have contributed to the deterioration of agrarian culture by limiting the space for the *vulgare*.

What happens when we lose the space for vulgar speech, the speech of the commons? If vulgar speech loses its relation to the commons, then how do the people speak? This question is especially important to postcolonial studies regarding the speech of the subaltern. It is without question that the subaltern can speak. However, the

subaltern has a hard time being heard, which often results in the subalterns' use of their bodies to speak, to react, and to critique injustice.

The Pleasure of Debt:

Decoding Neorealist Cinema from Social Critique to Poverty Porn

If Danny Boyle's Jamal Malik, the protagonist of *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009), had watched Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay!* (1988), Satyajit Ray's *Panther Panchali* (1955), Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953), or any other example of Indian neorealism rather than the several dozen films from the era of modern Indian cinema starring Amitabh Bachchan, then Jamal would have neither collected his twenty million rupees, nor been afforded the opportunity to live happily ever after with the love of his life. Although Boyle made several mistakes in filming his neorealist-influenced film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009) (a series of errors resulting from a British director profiting from screening poverty in a previously British colony), he accurately depicts the film knowledge of the children in Dharavi⁶⁰ (Banaji 131). About eleven kilometers south of Dharavi in Kamathipura, Bombay's red-light district, the children in Nair's neorealist film *Salaam Bombay!* also escape into the fantasies of Bollywood cinema as evidenced by their references to songs such as "Mere Sapno Ki Rani" from *Aradhana* (1969) and "Dum Maro Dum" from *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971), and in their lip-synching and dance performances to "Mere Naam Chin Chin Chu" from *Howrah Bridge* (1958) and "Hawa Hawaii" from *Mr. India* (1987). Well-versed with the everyday life of the poor, the subtleties of survival, and the meaning of hopelessness—the defining characteristics of neorealist cinema, which are then reiterated with the various film techniques that define neorealism, such as natural lighting and minimal editing—the slum children from

⁶⁰ India's largest slum.

both films are not acquainted with the films made about them. And, in fact, the heightened awareness of Bollywood cinema speaks to the slum children's use of Bollywood's fantastical aesthetics for brief moments of escape from an impoverished reality. And although neorealist cinema is made with the intention to challenge hegemonic epistemologies by offering what Federico Fellini describes as "a way of seeing reality without prejudice" (Bondanella 32), popular, nationalist cinema, as Nair and Boyle illustrate, offers lower class communities a momentary flight from the "real" that neorealist directors are so keen on capturing. In addition to being a strategy for coping with the "real," popular, nationalist cinema is also a medium through which citizens of shantytowns can impeach the elite and upper classes for their public displays of decadence as such films provide access to spaces that are typically protected and guarded to keep out the "real," or the types of characters that the roving cameras of a neorealist director invariable happens upon.

So while the documentation of the "real"—specifically, the reality of poverty—in neorealist cinema can function as the social critique that the director intended, it can also, depending on its audience, become poverty porn: a vehicle to memorialize class distinctions and a means to provide upper classes with the pleasure of imposing debt and suffering. Likewise, popular, nationalist cinema can reaffirm the hegemonic power of the elite, but it can also become a display of decadence if screened by the poor and working classes through what I identify as the "proletariat gaze." It is true: neorealism exposes the "real" that is typically edited out of nationalist cinema. And nationalist cinemas are moving-image testaments of national progress and wealth reiterating the dominant

ideologies that govern the forces and relations of production within a particular territory. The reception and processes of decoding both neorealism and nationalist cinema can imitate a very “real” experience between lower and upper classes. This chapter illustrates how witnessing the decadence of popular cinema can actually be disruptive as well as restorative when imagined through the lens of slum children. Similarly, I find that screening poverty can easily become pleasurable for elite audiences. The spectacle of popular film has created an equally pleasurable diversion—or a momentary suspension of reality—for the working class. And although many critics might read this phenomenon as part of a propaganda project, I argue that the working class consumption of popular cinema can actually be a space from which to introduce new modes of producing class struggle awareness. In fact, I find that with a working class and impoverished audience it is actually more effective to film the gluttonous, decadent, and insatiable habits of the bourgeois. Revealing how elite parties are so dependent on various practices of consumption highlights how colonization (“neo” or otherwise) can also effect the upper classes.

Drawing critical awareness to the sufferings and laborious realities of the working class and impoverished populations throughout the globe will always beget a series of moral conflicts, especially when faced with the creditor-debtor relationship that drives the neoliberal economy framing neorealist films. Through a Nietzschean lens, this chapter addresses how the parallel development of neoliberalism and neorealist cinema effected the message of ‘class struggle’ that is embedded in the transnational roots of neorealism. As I will illustrate in this chapter, the 90-minute films that once spoke directly to the

limited free time afforded by working class have become a tool to constitute higher culture and create pleasure for the gazing bourgeoisie.⁶¹

Thus, this chapter intersects two main concepts introduced in Nietzsche's analysis of debt. One is the pleasure of imposing suffering that the creditor receives such that it also produces a higher culture. The other is the refusal to forget, which Nietzsche identifies as the foundation of any debt. In fact, Nietzsche argues that it is the process of remembering that contributes to the creditor's pleasure. Knowing that creditor is owed something in the future gives the creditor a sense of relief. As I stated in the beginning of this dissertation, it is the obligation and duty that the debtor has to the creditor that stimulates pleasure. To cause suffering, specifically the debtor's suffering, Nietzsche argues, characterizes and constitutes "higher culture" (198). For Nietzsche 'higher culture' is a "striving for distinction" that is calculated by the ability to "witness" the affect and impression a person can have "on the soul of the other," which is most easily attainable by imposing suffering (*Daybreak* 68). Even in equating material compensation with inflicting pain on the debtor's body, Nietzsche suggests that the creditor finds the pleasure of power in accepting the agreed upon 'material compensation.' If the repayment can be considered a punishment then it is the obligation and duty that the debtor has to the creditor that stimulates pleasure. One of the major characteristics of debt is that it must be remembered, and here it is clear that the creditor gains pleasure in

⁶¹ This same phenomenon developed with "blaxploitation" films; originally targeted towards a black and urban audience during the rise of black politics and the lingering momentum of black nationalism at the end of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s blaxploitation films surged to meet the demand for black identity in commercial cinema.

remembering and knowing that some form of the debtor's suffering is guaranteed to be offered to the creditor at some point.

In order to develop a more critical understanding of how the creditor takes pleasure in imposing suffering on the debtor, as Nietzsche argues, I have divided "The Pleasure of Debt" into six sections. In the first section, 'A Brief History of Neorealism,' I trace the parallel development of neoliberalism and neorealist cinema. In the second section, 'The Origin of the Proletariat Gaze' I discuss how early neorealism contributed towards organizing practices and in many tried to marginalize the elite. The third section, 'The Development of Poverty Porn' addresses how neorealism slowly developed into a medium that allowed creditors to maintain a visual memory of their impact on the debtor; and considering how memory, Nietzsche suggests, is paramount in maintaining the creditor-debtor relationship. The final section, 'When the Subaltern Laughs: A New Contrapasso' identifies Pink Neorealism and the satirical tendencies of neorealist cinema as the film aesthetic's most subversive feature that can resist the influences of a neoliberal political climate.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEOREALISM

Yasujiro Ozu's *An Inn at Tokyo* (1935), Ardeshir Irani's *Kisan Kanya* (1936), and Elvira Notari's *E'piccerella* (1922) are early examples of Neorealism that predate any documented work of the neorealist "fathers"; in fact, each of these films demonstrate that neorealism should not be so easily attributed to Italian Cinema or, for that matter, a patriarchal lineage. Yet, neorealism is often contextualized within the history of Italian cinema and as a reaction to the destruction of Italy's cinecitta in World War II; it is also

attributed to the “masters of neorealism”: Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, Luchino Visconti and Federico Fellini (Bondanella 23). Rossellini, De Sica, Visconti and Fellini, with their respective interests in everyday life (specifically of the working class), real social conditions, and a call to reform, have, as I have stated, been noted as the “masters” of neorealism, but the film aesthetic can be traced to Japan, India, and Italy prior to the release of major works by these ‘masters.’ And while it is certainly the case that the “masters of Neorealism” strongly influenced this cinematic form, the fact of the matter is that neorealism should not be so easily narrativized due to its transnational presence. Moreover, the tendency to historicize and archive in Cinema Studies has imposed a narrative onto neorealism that undermines the style’s intentions to disassemble top-down systems and subvert imperial modes of cinema.

Neorealism offers an aesthetics of debt. It is a cinema of duty and obligation that not only illustrates how creditor-debtor relationships shape the working class, but also how debtor-creditor relationships develop between film and its audiences. Neorealism aims to advance a working class culture that promotes community and activity rather than the individuality and passivity that develops from high-budget, popular cinema. The aesthetics of neorealist cinema — which develop from a confluences of its most defining attributes such as the roving camera, wide angle shots, natural lighting, non-professional actors, low-budgets, an emphasis on lost childhoods, and the 90-minute film length — creates a space from which to critique neoliberalism. For instance, the 90-Minute time frame, as opposed to the two to three hour film length characteristic of popular film, is mindful of the limited free time afforded by the working class. However, because it is not

intended to simply be an escape from everyday life, but rather an extension of it. It also conveys a sense of urgency.

Neorealism is a post-war film genre and it is noted to be an “art of encounter” by Cesare Zavattini, which Gilles Deleuze limits to encounters within the film and amongst its characters (Deleuze 1). But, as I argue, neorealism also incites an engaged and active audience that allows the film to carry its “art of encounter” even beyond the screen.

Either by commonly using wide-angle shots to keep the audience aware of the peripheries of each shot or by reversing the role of typecast actors as Rossellini did in his casting of Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani in *Roma, città aperta* (1945), Neorealist directors make a consistent effort to involve their audience. Moreover, as with any aesthetic form, the audience is always already implied and embedded in the performance. Neorealism’s *rasa*⁶²—its taste, or juice—materializes from the moment(s) of “encounter,” which in this case allows the audience to relish in the flavors of social awareness. Zavattini, a neorealist scriptwriter and film scholar, argues that the viewer of a neorealist film should “contribute an intensity of vision” (151) such that the *mise-en-scène* of any neorealist shot can carry with it the intention to extend beyond the borders of the camera to include the audience and, most importantly, to allow the audience to “contribute.”

Neorealism has always been noted for its social agenda, but what are the roots of its platform? Neorealism’s 90 minute restriction is in regards to the working day, its low budget and natural lighting makes little room for self-indulgence, it endorses the public

⁶² Sanskrit word meaning juice and often compared to “aesthetics”; The study of *rasa* developed from classical Indian dance and theater where the audience is implied and, therefore, invited to engage in each movement of the eye or gesture of the hand: if there were no audience, there would be no performance.

by focusing on non-professional actors, and its roving camera dismisses notions of the protagonist and their master narratives. Each of these attributes of neorealist cinema, which push back against privatization and deregulation practices, suggests that the social agenda of neorealism is rooted in neoliberalism's early forms. Neoliberalism generally refers to the deregulatory initiatives that started in the 1970s; however, the late nineteenth century marks the beginning of corporate personhood and in the 1930s text *The Modern Prince*, Antonio Gramsci introduced the term "new liberalism" by calling it out for its deregulatory practices, which Gramsci understood as "regulation of a state kind." And while Neorealist directors have continued to critique these economic trends, their efforts certainly began in the 1920s when directors throughout the world picked up their cameras to push back against freedoms lost to market fundamentalism. The activist lens of Neorealism proposes solidarity amongst all non-corporate persons or unincorporated persons of the state, regardless of their socio-economic status. Thus, while Gramsci was calling out the state for pushing deregulatory policies, the neorealist directors forged a filmic style to critique the political-economic policies that perpetuate alienation, individualism, anti-community thought, materialism, false sense of democracy, corporate freedom and other extensions of class struggle.

THE ORIGIN OF THE PROLETARIAT GAZE

To convey what I identify as the "proletariat gaze," I find it necessary to first trace my use of the word "gaze" to W.E.B. Du Bois. Upon hearing the phrase "proletariat gaze" students of cinema might immediately recall Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," just as the psychoanalysts would remember Jean-Paul Sartre's "the look" and Lacan's panoptic

gaze, which evokes the Foucauldian discourse of the gaze as it relates to surveillance and discipline. But I find that each of these routes meets back at Du Bois' concept of "double-consciousness" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1908). In this text Du Bois illustrates the Negro as being "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world, — a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (2). And he defines "double-consciousness" as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (2). Thus, I find that Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is in fact a cinema studies and psychoanalytic reading of Du Bois since she similarly argues that most of cinema is viewed through the lens of the white heterosexual male and, in turn, it forces us all to "gaze" at the world and ourselves through this lens. And I realize that Mulvey is almost unfashionable to cite in contemporary cinema analysis; my students say "her argument is too obvious" and even I have caught myself rolling my eyes at conferences when I hear other scholars reference Mulvey. But her goal to "radically" destruct the pleasure of the gaze (Mulvey 7), which develops from her analysis (via Du Bois) of the three gazers (the gaze of the director, the subject within the film, and the spectator) and the pleasure that cinema is intended to bring to the white-male gazer, speaks directly to Nietzsche's conclusions regarding the pleasure that the creditor receives when punishing the debtor (Nietzsche 196). Moreover, Mulvey calls attention to the potential in considering how a gaze can be subversive. Unlike Foucault, for example, which accounts for the panoptic gaze and its disciplinary effect on the prisoner, Mulvey's argument

allows us to consider the effect of the prisoner's gaze on the outside world and how it effects and affects power.

In response to the hegemonic gaze, neorealist directors introduce what I identify as the *proletariat* gaze: seeing the world through the eyes of the working class—the becoming-capitalist that the already-capitalist fears. The proletariat gaze, an innocent and well-intentioned attribute of early neorealism, was intended to bring awareness to class struggle and even invigorate the working class. However, just as Du Bois predicted a particular struggle to develop from the reality of double-consciousness at the starts of the twentieth century in which the “would-be black savant was confronted by the paradox that the knowledge his people needed was a twice-told tale of his white neighbors, while the knowledge which would teach the white world was Greek to his own flesh and blood” (3), it was also the case that the working class and its sympathizers were also caught in a paradox when attempting to convey the narrative of poverty and struggle. And it is this paradox, introduced through the proletariat gaze, of capturing the realities of poverty in order to incite dissent amongst the working class audiences without creating a space that reaffirms the hegemonic power of the elite classes that I am concerned with in this chapter.

Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* (1948), a template of neorealism, is a prime example of how neorealist directors addressed this paradox through cinema. De Sica uses three strategies to cope with this paradox, and each one of his strategies is commonly used in neorealist cinema: one, creating a space to organize; two, maintaining an open narrative; and three, establishing solidarity amongst workers. In

the first strategy De Sica makes cinema a space to organize and, in doing, so, makes being an audience member or “gazer” a laborious position that does not proportionally develop capital; and, according to Marx, when capital is produced in proportion to labor, it is a clear indicator of a bourgeoisie presence (“The Communist Manifesto” 25). In the second De Sica keeps an open narrative, which I liken to disengaging from “the machine”; according to Marx and Engels, the worker “becomes an appendage of the machine” such that all that is required of the worker the most “simple” and “monotonous” work (25), similarly, I find that the with grand narratives there is no difficult or thought-provoking work required of its audience. Thus, by breaking from the grand narrative, audience members as laborers are required to actively engage with the film by, for example, questioning the use of long shots and close ups, taking account of natural lighting and its effects, and even discussing the film with other audience members. And in the third strategy De Sica advocates solidarity between the northern industrial workers and the southern agrarian workers, which not only actively challenges the segregation of laborers—the “incoherent mass scattered over the whole country, and broken up by their mutual competition” (Marx and Engels 27)—but also contributes to the abolition of bourgeoisie property.

In the first strategy of dealing with this paradox by making neorealist films a space for the working class to gather and organize, Vittorio De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thief* (1948), a template of neorealism, is a prime example of using film as a space to assemble. Shortly after reporting his stolen bicycle to local authorities, Antonio Ricci goes to a meeting space in order to search for Baiocco, a friend he believes

that could help him locate his stolen bicycle. Upon entering the space, Antonio walks in on a meeting of unemployed men fed up with the “humiliating” hand-outs made to the workers forced onto welfare. Against the impending splitting of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro and the American-influenced degeneration of the communist trade union, the men are preparing for their presentation to “the department” with a list of demands: “sociologically oriented programs” that offers work for everyone and not just to a “chosen few”; “equality for the masses”; and a sustainable salary that does not leave every worker back where he started by the end of the day. The men are in an almost theatrical-like setting as they are framed by large white arches. And, moreover, De Sica puts these men in a close-up shot, which is rare in this film and, as evidenced by the other close-ups, a gnarly De Sica’s film. Moreover, their meeting is juxtaposed with a practicing band on the other side of the long-arched hallway. To his own demise, Antonio obliviously interrupts the workers meeting and then walks to the other side of the hall to quietly sit before the band like a passive audience member. Perhaps already acutely aware of the tendency for the working class to choose the more entertaining escape from the insufferable realities of poverty, De Sica, through the unmindful character of Antonio, critiques the choice to walk away from the duty of organizing. The proletariat gaze, then, is a participatory gaze.

The second strategy, to counter grand and over-arching narratives that actively subdue the audience into passive gazers, is prevalent in neorealist cinema and its use of the roving camera technique. With this traveling camera that sometimes glances back and forth, sits tucked in a corner, or just walks nearby, neither a universal narrative nor a

fixed protagonist have time or space to develop. The roving camera serves as a metaphor for neorealism's agenda to unfix collegiality and critique overarching narratives. The aversion to grand narratives is in fact part of the film's aesthetic scheme to subvert the organization of subjects into a fixed role, and not just the subjects in the film, but also the audience. Once a film takes on a formulaic model, not only does the narrative and its characters become bound to the formula, but the audience becomes bound as well—like the worker that is appended to the machine, the gazer is bound within the narrative. The final scene of Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) utilizes the open-ended narrative to critique mainstream cinema. Specifically, De Sica carnivalizes the patriarchal system and destabilizes notions of the bourgeoisie family, or the underlying hegemonic structure of deregulation policies that necessitate the individualistic power of private corporations, which neatly parallels the hegemonic structures embedded in notions of the patriarchal family as well as the fixed narrative that must materialize a conclusion.

Escaping closed narratives, a trait of Neorealism that transcends any of its technical or socio-political attributes since it is in itself the result of a collaboration of the two, allows neorealist directors to critique the socio-political insecurities that develop from imposed narratives. For instance, De Sica's Antonio holds onto anxious insecurities from the beginning of the film since he has limited himself to the narrative of the patriarch rather than engaging with the chaotic presence of his community. His pre-teen son Bruno, who, unlike his father, remains courageous and takes on a caring and nurturing role when comforting his father while having to show him how to be a worker—Bruno shows his father how to carry his packed lunch and gives him directions. Like his mother, Bruno

never loses hope: they both take part in a community outside the limits of the family. Bruno remains loyal to his working community and also displays empathy for his father's burdens, whereas Antonio's allegiance becomes directed only towards his family and thus, only towards himself.

The third strategy—to establish solidarity—is perhaps the most significant message in De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette*. In the final scene, a jostle from a passing bus, navigating its way amongst the crowds along the Via Appia/Piazza Colonna route, brings a destitute Antonio—already weak from his battle with the city of Rome—to tears. For this reason, the typical reading of *Ladri di biciclette* is a reading of hopelessness founded in Antonio's constant state of lack that seemingly makes him prisoner to the cyclical phenomenon of bicycle theft. However, this reading overlooks De Sica's intention to avoid a single protagonist, which is apparent with the roving camera technique, and Antonio's ability to grow and connect to his community. An active reading of the film, on the other hand, notes how empowering this final moment for Antonio, Bruno, and the entire working class—including the laboring audience—has become. The camera's gaze glances from Bruno to Antonio and then cuts to the concluding shot that quickly loses the pair to the crowds of Rome. And it is in this final encounter between Bruno and Antonio that this crowd no longer becomes a chaotic space of strangers for Antonio; instead, Antonio is led by his son's hand into the army of workers that are theoretically heading south to meet their allies, which can be implied through De Sica's subtle reference to the South. To carry out his critique of individualized and linear interests, De Sica illustrates Antonio's alienation as a systematic dilemma that resonates beyond Rome. The final shot

of the film, then, watches Bruno, his father, and an army of people, marching arm-in-arm along Via Appia, an ancient military road that was built to connect Rome to Southeast Italy. The reference to the lack of solidarity amongst the southern peasants and northern proletariat—an alliance that was just as beneficial for the northerners as it was for the southerners—remains at the root of the problem for De Sica and other neorealists.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POVERTY PORN

Capitalizing on poverty is a capitalist tradition. However, in addition to a monetary profit, creditors, according to Nietzsche, also gain some form of pleasure in watching others suffer. The pleasure comes from knowing your actions can have such a strong effect on another person to the point that it can cause a person to suffer. So while it is the case that neorealist cinema aimed to develop a proletariat gaze, its focus on poverty in conjunction with its anti-commercial position made the cinematic form vulnerable to becoming poverty porn as its audience changed from the working class to more elite and selective audiences. In other words, as neorealism became more “artsy” and embedded in an academic discourse, its audience was no longer the working class. Instead, because of the accessibility to popular nationalist cinema, the working class was more inclined to attend the films that neorealism aimed to critique.

It is clear that the effect of neorealism faded as its targeted audiences dispersed and, as Maurizio Nichetti’s *Ladri di Saponette/The Icicle Thief* (1989) illustrates, neorealism has actually come to serve as a method of calculating the distinctions needed to establish a “higher culture.” In his homage to De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief*, Nichetti screens a film within the film in his satire on the reception of neorealist cinema.

Nichetti's film begins at a national television station as a director, played by Nichetti himself, prepares to have his film aired on television. The director quickly becomes skeptical of the multiple commercial breaks that will distort the narrative of his neorealist film. And in an Nichettian manner, the film and the commercials begin to seep into one another. A woman from a colorful soap ad jumps into a pool of water and then finds herself almost drowning in a black and white lake. Similarly, Maria, the mother and wife in Nichetti's neorealist film escapes the neorealist script and finds herself in a colorful laundry detergent advertisement. Maria, unlike the Swedish model that finds herself in the middle of poor family's everyday drama, is thrilled to be in the clean and neat environment of the detergent advertisement as she is also in the company of a male model.

To add to Nichetti's commentary on the lost working class audiences of neorealism, he also makes several cuts to various shots of a family of four watching the film from the comfort of their living room. The mixture of advertisements and upper middle class families screening films about the working class reveals how the reception of neorealist cinema on television contradicts the genre's intentions. The young child of a middle class family surrounded by toys and food is juxtaposed with the young boy on the television screen eating scraps of cabbage after a long day of work. The pregnant mother sitting at her kitchen table surrounded by her family looks to Maria, the mother on the television screen, with pity and even contempt as she witnesses Maria neglect her infant. From the comfort of their well-sized home the family's own wealth is understood in opposition to the impoverished family that Nichetti attempted to illustrate. The mother of

two sitting comfortably in her home can feel bad for Maria, the mother in the neorealist film; and in feeling bad for Maria, the middle-class mother—screened in color—can feel good about herself for feeling bad, or pitying her counterpart, and can also feel good for not having to endure the dire circumstances of Maria’s daily life.

Nichetti, like Nair and Boyle, is also aware of the neorealist subject’s desire to escape the poverty narrative. Maria’s awakening in the soap advertisement goes beyond the metaphor of being cleansed of the filth that is the poor person’s condition, which Nichetti exacerbates with close-ups of trash in Maria’s neorealist home. Her excitement in the advertisement is also a display of her willingness to suspend the reality of her everyday life that neorealist directors are so desperate to capture. This speaks to the disinterest in the poverty narrative of working class audiences. And actually creates a space for scholars to consider why working class audiences actually find pleasure in watching popular, nationalist films that tend to exclude or edit out the working class experience. As I have stated before, in addition to becoming an escape from the harsh reality of poverty, working class audiences, as is evidenced by the children in Nair and Boyle’s respective film and even Nichetti’s *Maria*, the colorful and hypnotic lifestyles of the rich and famous are not only just shallow markers of existence, but they are actually displays of decadence that the working class audience feels justified in ridiculing.

WHEN THE SUBALTERN LAUGHS: A NEW *CONTRAPASSO*

In the beginning of this project I referred to Nietzsche’s question regarding debt and suffering, he asks: how can any suffering compensate for a monetary debt? A fundamental question that develops from this line of questioning is whether or not

equality exists. My conclusion is that equality does not exist. And it is in the moment of the subaltern laughing at the oppressor, or simply just laughing, that suggests that equality can not exist. As Nair and Boyle illustrate, the children in their respective films are able to escape into the popular, national films at their discretion and they are able to do so with a satirical gaze, which is a gaze that disrupts the spectacle and winks at the audience, causing an emotion or reaction to form—literally making the audience active, the satirical gaze makes them do something. It makes the audience laugh, causing a physical reaction. And in this laughter where the subalterns are laughing at their oppressors, the oppressor has lost their power as they are being ridiculed and even mocked.

For fifty years the Italian feminists have been pushing towards a socio-political paradigm that does not rely on the rhetoric of equality. For women, equality implies becoming “Man.” For colonial subjects, equality implies becoming “Colonizer.” For non-capitalist economies, equality implies becoming “Capitalism.” For southern spaces and places, equality implies becoming “Northern.” In other words, equality implies assimilation to a defined universal. “Equality,” for Carla Lonzi in “Let’s Spit on Hegel” (1970), is what is “offered as legal rights to colonized people and what is imposed on them as culture” (15). Moreover, the “juridical principle” that is equality (40) has the tendency to foster sameness and thus, positions subjects in relation/opposition to the universal/dominant subject(s), or they “relate vertically” (Lionnet and Shih 90). Moreover, in her critique of Hegel, Lonzi states, “the feminine, as the eternal irony of the community, laughs at the aging thinker who is indifferent to any pleasure and only cares

for the universal” (43). It is this point of being “indifferent to any pleasure” that concerns the moment of the subaltern laughing. When the subaltern laughs at a hegemonic system and the oppressors that be, there is pleasure, as I have stated, but the subaltern may very well be indifferent to that pleasure it since it is so insignificant to their everyday reality, which is why I find that the children attending popular, national films for a brief moment of escape to be quite subversive. It takes any illusion of equality away from the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed by debunking the power and authority of the oppressor, the oppressor has nothing to become *equal to* in that moment.

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