Media and Moral Atmosphere

Interdiction and Reproduction in a Pakistani Marketplace

Timothy Peter Alexander Cooper

University College London (UCL)

Department of Anthropology

December 2019
Declaration

I, Timothy Peter Alexander Cooper confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed:

Dated: 18/12/19
Abstract

This thesis develops an interdisciplinary approach to the technical and social grounds of media circulation, through the study of the reproduction of secular and religious film and media in conditions hostile to their spread. While I set out to explore the forms of guardianship and mediation fostered by media informality in Pakistan, the research came to focus on the relationship between audio-visual media, popular piety, and community ethics that became entangled in the marketplace trade in Pakistani film. Through a repertoire that includes film as well as other kinds of religious media, this thesis attempts to understand the relationship between ethical interdiction and marketplace reproduction. Through ethnographic study among independent traders on Lahore’s Hall Road, a vast and diverse electronics and media marketplace, and among religious media traders in denominationally homogenous communities, this thesis tells the story of the marketplace circulation of Pakistani media and the associated moral atmospheres and ethical characteristics of social life that film and media have the power to shape.

The conditions of māḥaul are central to this intimate ethnography of the relationship between public morality and the circulation of media. While the word has come to be used in ways akin to the English word for environment, in its usage it is closer to the idea of a moral atmosphere. Each of Pakistan’s religiously diverse communities and denominational schools of thought have their own nuanced take on the appropriate place of media in the enactment and
endurance of faith. To such orthodoxies, the elemental conditions of media, as well as mediums through which popular culture transmits and transforms itself, proffer an expanded environmental space riven with challenges and possibilities for action with little clear precedent in received rules governing moral conduct. Through ethnographic research into the contours of media and moral ecology in Lahore this thesis provides insights into the ambient ethics of communal practice, and how these can be shaped or broken by the circulation of media.
Impact Statement

Those potentially impacted by the research detailed herein include academic researchers, pedagogues, and higher-education stakeholders across the humanities and social sciences; visual anthropologists and ethnomusicologists; as well as creative practitioners including artists, filmmakers, musicians, and their audiences. Beneficiaries of the research could include stakeholders in cultural, performative, and religious traditions in Pakistan; NGOs, community groups, and religious congregations, as well as scholars, journalistic commentators, and individuals engaged with local concepts of how religious and phenomenological attitudes to media and civil society play out.

My doctoral research has achieved impact in a number of ways. I have published three peer-reviewed essays in discipline-specific journals and submitted three others for peer-review. I have also co-convened panels at leading international anthropology and area-studies conferences, always looking beyond my immediate training to broker new discussions on timely issues such as ecology and conservation, the built environment and urbanism, infrastructural informality and ethnographic filmmaking. At the beginning of the third year of my graduate studies I co-curated a three-day retrospective of the films of Jamil Dehlavi with Ali Nobil Ahmad (ZMO, Berlin) at the British Film Institute in London. It was the first international retrospective of a Pakistani filmmaker and was accompanied by a symposium and a career-spanning public interview I staged with the filmmaker himself. It was followed by BFI-funded digital
restorations of two of Dehlavi’s most important films, and their subsequent commercial release on Blu-Ray DVD. The London-based retrospective received broad coverage in the Pakistani (Dawn, Herald Tribune) and international press (The Guardian, The National, Sight and Sound Magazine), which called for a revised understanding of Dehlavi’s work.

I produced three ethnographic films while conducting research for this thesis. The first, titled *King of the Cockroaches* was screened in competition at the 15th Royal Anthropological Institute Film Festival (2017). My film work has also been shown in academic contexts at the SOAS Ethnographic Film Series and the Visual Image Network Conference at the Manchester Granada Centre. The most recent film, *Scratches on Celluloid*, co-directed with Vindhya Buthpitiya, was screened at the 16th RAI Film Festival (2019), at the SOAS Ethnographic Film Series, Film SouthAsia 2019, and was discussed at the British Association for South Asian Studies (BASAS) Conference 2019.

Plans for future impact include further dissemination to non-academic audiences through consultation with key stakeholders and users that might result in the joint identification of endangered materials for digitization.
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the input of all my friends and interlocutors in Pakistan who feature, often in anonymized form, in this thesis. Thank you all deeply and sincerely for giving your time, energy, and input. I hope that you recognise the contribution you made to my time in Pakistan. I would like to thank my Multani friend in Sharjah and remember clearly his manner and generosity, as a way of thanking the intellect, openness, and enthusiasm of all those who engaged in this research, both in Pakistan and in the diaspora.

While the sweat and excitement of fieldwork are so immediate, no quantity of fieldnotes or recordings can stop the freshness of these experiences melting into air. That I got to share these with my beloved wife, Abeera, archives them forever in our shared experience. This manuscript is dedicated in gratitude to her companionship, intellect, and independence. I would also like to acknowledge the input of my family and friends, firstly my sister-in-law Aysha Khan, without whom the time I spent in Pakistan between 2013 and 2018 would not have been possible; my parents, Karen and Andrew, for raising me in an atmosphere conducive to life-long learning; my brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Natasha Cooper, and my nephew Johnny Cooper; my grandparents Pamela and Ernest Cooper and Margaret and Donald Watson; and my dear friend Rachele Rapisardi, her partner Chris, and their young daughter Robyn.

At the Department of Anthropology at University College London, I would like to thank my supervisor Christopher Pinney, whose support and encouragement provided a mixture of great intellectual freedom and a forum
through which to refine ideas. I thank my second supervisor Haidy Geismar for giving such supportive and incisive guidance, and whose feedback to our cohort group was such an inspiration to us all. Other faculty members were particularly generous with their time over the three years spent at the department, particularly Ashraf Hoque, Victor Buchli, Charles Stewart, and Ammara Maqsood. This thesis benefited greatly from the input of my doctoral cohort and friends at UCL, particularly Francisco Vergara Murua, Stefan Williamson Fa, Vindhya Buthpitiya, Thomas Fry, Toyin Agbetu, Adam Runacres, Gwen Burnyeat, and Andrea Lathrop. Outside of the department Nasreen Rehman, Paul Rollier, and Tariq Rahman offered support and guidance in advance of my fieldwork. Ali Nobil Ahmad and Chris Moffat have been immense sources of advice, guidance, and encouragement throughout. My previous mentors at King’s College London, Michele Pierson and Mark Betz encouraged me to proceed further with doctoral research. Working with filmmaker Jamil Dehlavi on a retrospective of his films at the British Film Institute in 2018 was an immense pleasure.

Finally, this manuscript is also dedicated to the memory of Barbara Harrell-Bond, a dear friend of my wife, who blurred the lines of scholarship and activism in ways that deserve to continually transform our discipline; and to my late friend K, who would requisition anything of mine with a surface and scrawl thereon the ambiguous, if mildly admonishing phrase, “Keep It Together”. As my attorney, I like to think he too would have loved the perversely rooted derangement of ethnographic fieldwork.
Notes

This thesis was written in the months following 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Pakistani city of Lahore. Short research trips were spent in Sharjah and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The research was funded by the London Arts and Humanities Partnership (LAHP). Grant Number: AH/L503873/1. Any local terminology will be written in italics and followed by a brief translation in parentheses. Unless otherwise noted, the italicized term will be in the Urdu language. Transliterations endeavor to follow the 2007 Annual of Urdu Studies notes on transliteration, unless a common spelling in English exists. While few of my interlocutors requested to appear anonymously, I anonymize names throughout to ensure that the analytic placement of their discourses and vignettes alongside material unknown to them (or me) at the time does not put them in any danger or reflect negatively upon them in their private life or place of work. The unit of currency, Pakistani Rupees, are referenced by the acronym PKR rather than Rs, which is common to many South Asian countries. During the period of the fieldwork the PKR fell heavily against the pound sterling and dollar. To take an easy average over the year, currency amounts detailed herein can be converted at approximately 150PKR to £1. Due to the quantity of illustrations, and so as not to break up the flow of the text, in what follows figures will be referred to in the text for reference together at the end of each chapter. A glossary is given at the end of the thesis as Appendix A.
Table of Contents

Declaration ........................................................................................................................................ iii
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iv
Impact Statement ......................................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... viii
Notes ................................................................................................................................................ x
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................... xv

Introduction: Recording, Retrieval, and Reproduction ................................................................. 1
    Moral Atmospheres, Moral Ambience ...................................................................................... 3
    Interdiction and Reproduction ................................................................................................. 18
    The Intermittent State ............................................................................................................... 25
    The Hall Road Repertoire ......................................................................................................... 29
    Media, Mediation, and Religion ............................................................................................... 42
    Media and Marketplace Pakistan .............................................................................................. 48
    Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................................................. 55
    Methodology: Working on the Surface .................................................................................... 60
    Introduction Figures ................................................................................................................. 69

Chapter I: Cinema Itself ................................................................................................................ 75
    Cinephobia and Public Morality in Pakistan ......................................................................... 81
    The Māḥaul of Film Labour ..................................................................................................... 91
    Cinema Itself: Exegeses on Film, Ontologies of the Moving Image .................................. 103
The Hypothetical Image ................................................................. 115

Chapter I Figures ........................................................................... 118

Chapter II: Cassette and Video Houses in Muharram ......................... 124

The Muharram Distinction ................................................................ 129

Social Histories of Recording: Jaffriyah Video House ................. 135

Social Histories of Recording: Panjtan Paak Cassette House ........ 142

Live has a moral atmosphere of its own ........................................ 147

Recording and Moral Space ................................................................. 155

Moral Exception ................................................................................. 162

Chapter II Figures ........................................................................... 164

Chapter III: Film Under Erasure ......................................................... 176

What Is A Film Archive? ................................................................. 181

Home Video As A Recursive Archival Event ................................ 188

The Censorial Record ........................................................................ 193

Incisions and Excisions .................................................................... 198

The King of the Cockroaches ........................................................... 203

An Open Non-Government .............................................................. 208

Chapter III Figures ........................................................................... 211

Interlude: Raddi Infrastructure ............................................................ 216

The Cinema ......................................................................................... 216

The Commons Beyond ...................................................................... 219

The Collector ....................................................................................... 224

Dissemination ..................................................................................... 227

xii
The Vernacular Antiquarian .............................................................. 228

Deaccessioning .............................................................................. 230

Scrap ............................................................................................. 232

Interlude Figures ........................................................................... 235

Chapter IV: New Heritage in Old Lahore ...................................... 243

A Short History of Idris in the Plazas of Hall Road ....................... 249

The Infrastructural Sphere .............................................................. 257

The Kačcha and the Pāka ................................................................. 262

Nostalgia, Class, and the “Refugee Māhaul” ................................. 270

“New Heritage” ............................................................................. 278

Chapter IV Figures ........................................................................ 284

Chapter V: The Mastercopy ............................................................ 300

The Blood Line: Durrani Electronics .............................................. 303

A Pre-history of Lossyness .............................................................. 307

Redemption .................................................................................... 314

The Middle-Man: Haji Shams ......................................................... 321

Faciality and the Watermark .......................................................... 327

Reserve ........................................................................................ 330

Keeping Steady: Kasur CD House .................................................. 332

Patina ............................................................................................ 338

Chapter V Figures .......................................................................... 342

Epilogue: A Sensory Commons ....................................................... 348

Demand .......................................................................................... 349
Mutual Coercion ........................................................................................................... 359

Anthropology at the Threshold ............................................................................... 367

Epilogue Figures ........................................................................................................ 371

Appendix A. Glossary ............................................................................................... 375

Bibliography ............................................................................................................... 384
List of Figures

All photographs taken by the author unless otherwise stated.

Fig 1. A book on the permissibility of media objects.

Fig 2. DVDwalla in Lahore

Fig 3. Postcard featuring popular Lollywood billboard or hoarding art.

Fig 4. The 100PKR note entrusted to Tahir Jafri.

Fig 5. Discarded celluloid film strips in Evernew Studios.

Fig 6. The Khurshid Cinema, Rawalpindi.

Fig 7. The projection room of the Odeon Cinema.

Fig 8. Two stills from a video produced by the Jamaat-e-Islami.

Fig 9. Former cinemas.

Fig 10. Anti-film placards.

Fig 11. An actor promoting her tauba.

Fig 12. A disc of the kind that takes the place of film and music on Hall Road during the commemoration of Muharram.

Fig 13. Devotional prayers sung by Afshan, a former singer of film songs.

Fig 14. Black alam flags fly over the Walled City of Lahore.

Fig 15. Media at a time of moral exception.

Fig 16 & 17. Shi’a media stores in Lahore

Fig 18. Interior of Jaffriyah Cassette House.

Fig 19. Waiting at Bibi Pak Daman Market.

Fig 20 & 21. Posters of Hasan Mir performing self-flagellation.

Fig 22. Copies of Hasan Mir’s procession recordings.

Fig 23. Tazia Storage Room, Walled City of Lahore.

Fig 24. Stills from the first procession recordings made by Panjtan Paak Productions.
Fig 25. Stills from advertising identifier on Shalimar Recording Company Videos.

Fig 26. Examples of censorial incisions on Pakistani film objects.

Fig 27. The Punjab Archives walled within the Punjab Secretariat.

Fig 28. A poster hung in the halls of the National Archives of Pakistan.

Fig 29. Lollywood film on Lahore’s Abbott Road.

Fig 30. Building the Sharjah “heritage area” in the United Arab Emirates.

Fig 31. Badar Khan and his cassette transferring station at Jalalabad Music House, Sharjah.

Fig 32. Film collector Guddu Khan.

Fig 33. YouTube watermarking.

Fig 34. A film music collector with his latest acquisition.

Fig 35. “Wonders of the Past,” a scrap book made by a Lahori film collector in the 1930s.

Fig 36. A maqadas [holy papers] box for the respectful disposition of materials.

Fig 37. A man reads a Pakistani film magazine a short distance from Hall Road.

Fig 38. Banners erected by the Khidmat Group over the entrance of Hall Road.

Fig 39. Public information banners over Hall Road.

Fig 40. An advertisement for event photography and filming.

Fig 41. A loudspeaker affixed to a Hall Road plaza broadcasting the call to prayer.

Fig 42. Low-cost cooling units and solar panels on Hall Road.

Fig 43. A mud-splattered standee of a Pakistani film star on Hall Road.

Fig 44. Rafi and Zaitoon Plazas as imagined in maquettes before their construction.

Fig 45. Zaitoon Plaza, Yaseen Street to the left.

Fig 46. Rafi Plaza, Yaseen Street to the right.

Fig 47. Yaseen Street.

Fig 48. Sunday DVD Market at the entrance of Yaseen Street.

Fig 49. Political parties attempted to win votes with the promise of ending loadshedding…

Fig 50. …And with an appeal to voters’ passion for construction projects.

xvi
Fig 51. Orange Line Metro Train constructions on adjoining McLeod Road.

Fig 52. Hidden Message in an Eid card.

Fig 53. The Mastercopy

Fig 54. Idris in Durrani Electronics.

Fig 55 and 56. Haji Shams' store beside the gangway over Yaseen Street.

Fig 57. Animated watermark, or patti, of film collector Mirza Waqar Baig.

Fig 58 and 59. Kasur Video House six months apart.

Fig 60. Portraits of Imam Ali and Imam Hussain in a tazia storehouse.

Fig 61. Inherited images brought out from their tazia storehouse.

Fig 62. Poster publishing firm Abu Islami Images’ designer, Malik, at work.

Fig 63. Malik showing how Abu Islami Images produce Pakistani film posters.
Hafiz Bilal, a dealer in vintage film posters, with whom I had often spoken about the supply chains of Pakistani film materials and memorabilia, is also an ardent supporter of an aggressive religious street movement recently risen to prominence in urban Pakistan in 2017. The fortunes of the Lahore-based film industry known as Lollywood had long faded and taken with it its high-octane aesthetics and distinct style. For those interested in the visual culture of the recent past, Hafiz’ bookshop on Lahore’s dust-choked Nisbat Road stocked a wide range of paper ephemera. Now that Lollywood – a popular, even populist filmmaking idiom closely allied with the Punjabi *awaam* [people, public]– had waned, kitsch, themed cafes had begun to spring up in elite neighborhoods, their proprietors mining Hafiz’ back store-room for colourful posters of a lascivious

---

1 The rise of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) can be seen as a direct consequence of one of Pakistan’s recent anti-terror measures, that of the “mainstreaming” of militant groups by encouraging them to participate in political process. This political climate saw the TLP, a Barelvi (of Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence) group established to enforce Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, grow rapidly since their establishment in 2015. In 2017 they protested purported changes to the declaration of *Khatam-e-Nabuwat* (the finality of the prophethood) in oaths of office through a number of mass protests across the country, one of which took place in Lahore. Throughout the city, members of the movement burned tyres, destroyed cars, and paraded down the street with long sticks.
and half-remembered past. His store often seemed to specialise in juxtaposition. His cash-desk was framed by a set of early first editions by Gottfried Leibniz, autographed pamphlets by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the Pakistani Prime Minister deposed and executed on the orders of General Zia-ul-Haq, and a framed composite photograph of the funeral of Mumtaz Qadri, executed for murdering the Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, for speaking out against Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. I had come to Lahore to find out more about the marketplace circulation and distribution of media in Pakistan, but soon found the mutual coexistence of conflicted, often opposed viewpoints evinced a disjuncture between how my interlocutors felt about popular entertainment and how they acted.

Despite boasting a poster of *Maula Jatt*² in his kitchen, the famous, blood-soaked 1979 Pakistani Punjabi-language film that spawned a thousand imitations, Hafiz was quick reiterate his belief that film is impermissible in Islam. Whatever name its defenders give to it – entertainment, culture, or *time-pass*, - Hafiz could not give his approval to such a multi-sited and multifaceted object bound not to its apparatus but contingent, diffuse, and resistant to moral order. He was particularly incensed by Iranian films about the life of the Prophet Muhammad or his family and companions, films which can be made in Iran due to different sensibilities over depicting important figures in Islam. Moral permissibility

---

² *Maula Jatt* is perhaps the archetypal Lollywood film. It screened to packed audiences for two years after its release in 1979. The film took many elements of the genre formula that had begun to emerge in 1970s Pakistani film and pushed them to the limits of violence and taste through high-octane acting and ecstatic camerawork.
concerning matters outside the juridical sphere and orthodoxy of the Quran or the
sunnah, the body of literature that compiles the sayings and comportment of the
Prophet Muhammad and the prototypical Islamic community, is particularly
varied with regard to multi-sited media events such as film and cinema-going.
On a regular basis adherents and sources of religious authority are required to
consider not just the ontology of the film or photographic images but the social
space of production and viewership. However, for the changing media situations,
formats, and events about which traditional orthodoxy are not always so well
prepared to debate, many situate their critiques in terms of moral environment.
Hafiz continued, “In this māhāul of filmmaking, some people acting the role of
Prophets might be drunks or lechers in real life; how can they be allowed to work
on such a pious topic?” Hafiz’s refusal of film a place in his conception of good,
pious, moral, or ethical values referred to the atmospheric space, the māhāul that
surrounds it.

Moral Atmospheres, Moral Ambience

In this thesis I develop an anthropological approach to the circulation and
reproduction of the kinds of media that threaten the maintenance of a proper
moral self under Islamic law. By understanding the moral atmospheres brokered
by the sonic and visual presence media can evoke as technologies of mediation,
it is possible to see how film and media become boundary objects around which
forms of religious life are contested. This thesis attempts to tell two stories; one
of the ethics of technological mediation explored through a case study of the
circulation of Pakistani film, and the other of the production and containment of
moral atmospheres perceived to be either constitutive or harmful to the ethical
character of a community. Following a material turn in the anthropology of film
and media (Larkin 2008, Hoek 2013, Meyer 2015) this thesis is an ethnography
of media and morality in Pakistan. I ask, what can the technical and social
grounds of media circulation reveal about the reproduction of such content in
conditions potentially hostile to its spread? Putting these practices under scrutiny
exposes the pervasive ambivalence felt towards various mediatic and
performative experiences that are often connected to religious anxieties over film
– such as music, dance, and the ontology of still and moving images – as well as
broad sociological conflicts relating to the felt absence of the state and the public
place of Islam.

In Pakistan, forms of popular entertainment such as film have long been
held by some to foster a bad māḥaul, a term that describes an environment, a
locality, a sense of proximity, but also an ambient aura of right and wrong.
Māḥaul can be made into a locus of negative labour by association with the
context of its descriptor. One can speak of the bad māḥaul of diaspora life in the
West, or the bad māḥaul of a film studio, or the general māḥaul of secular songs
and singing. Māḥaul therefore describes the contextual characteristics of
ambience. The tactile earthiness of the term is somewhat reminiscent of the
concept of terroir in environmental discourses; the habitat, contributing factors,
and the unique sense of place that can come to be embodied in a crop yield and
shape the product from which it is made. To define *terroir* is also to suggest that these elements can be harnessed and influenced by humans. Similarly, *māḥaul* as moral atmosphere is the product of human cultivation and disturbance; it is a felt, perceived, affective weight that transforms space, time, and pervades the diversity of both pious and secular space.

Seemingly distinct from the Hindustani words *mahal* [palace] or *Mūḥalla* [neighbourhood], *māḥaul* is an Arabic root word, literally referring to what is *around* or *about*, that has been adopted comparatively recently into the Urdu language. While it has come to be used in ways akin to the English word for environment, in its usage it is closer to the idea of either ambience - if ambience is taken to mean a container environment that acts upon an absorptive or porous subject - or what we might call a *moral atmosphere*. Unlike other possible synonyms; context or character, for example, *māḥaul* can be an avowedly social formation, referring closely to the cultural dynamics of stratification. In English, the word ambience has been used to describe a mental or moral environment since the late eighteenth century and, along with the term atmosphere, appears to have been widely adopted in response to the need to describe the kind of tonal and textural effects that emerged in Romantic poetry and art. By the twentieth century the idea that something, particularly a work of art or object of great value, could possess an “aura”, was established enough that Walter Benjamin famously claimed that it was the only thing that mechanical reproduction could not replicate ([1936] 2008).
The Benjaminian loss of aura gave a sensuous vocabulary to a much older debate on the difference between originals and copies. The aura as the felt presence of a work of art also authorises the regimes of power or transcendence associated with its efficacy. For Benjamin, the means of the dissipation and destruction of the power of the original also showed the way to a revolutionary politics. In Pakistan, few would assert that the original works of art being copied in bazaar settings, that is, popular Pakistani films, music, or stage shows often shunned from academic study and widely disowned by the state, ever possessed the kind of aura that many would more readily associate with the “high art” of Mughal miniature painting, the poetry of Waris Shah, or the devotional Qawwali performances of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Instead, māhau as an affective aura of contestation or kinship with media forms can be communicated by mechanical reproduction. In this way it has more in common with mana, the Polynesian concept by which persons, places, and things may be imbued with a force of prestige or authority, which animated Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915, Mazzarella 2017A).

Recent interest in the efficacy of atmospheres and ambience in anthropology have their roots in one instance in sound studies and the anthropology of the soundscape, in another in the “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences, and in the writings of German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993, 2017a, 2017b). In the latter, atmospheres occupy a third space between the agency of persons and of things, fully attributable to neither, yet avowedly a constitutive part of communal sentiment. Böhme defines
atmospheres as, “tuned spaces” (2017a:162), acknowledging their role in attempts at harmony or dissonance. His work considers how, in aesthetic discourse - literature, art, and architecture – to describe something as possessing an atmosphere is to express something slippery and evasive, yet integral to its effects.

The production of ambience and aura is an issue that crosses aesthetic, architectural, and ecological concerns. Recent research on the subject has attempted to build an aesthetic toolkit for understanding atmospheric “attunements” (Stewart 2011: 445), that remains sensitive to architectonics, gesture, luminosity and the flow of light, and the spaces through which bodies move. Rahul Mukherjee’s focus on radiance (2020 forthcoming), on the other hand, brokers an important conversation on how media ecologies can be formed from the ambient environments formed by infrastructures. However, atmospheres have a difficult tendency to evade their objects, working more in the liminal spaces that lie between ontologies and ways of being. Atmosphere also relies on the response of a subjective interlocutor, troubling the extent to which their transduction becomes merely the experience of their mediation (Sørensen 2015: 64). Mikkel Bille, Peter Bjerregaard, and Tim Flohr Sørensen take atmospheres to be a threshold zone between materiality and immateriality. What they call “staged atmospheres” (2015: 31) demands anthropological enquiry into the manipulation and production of ambience in terms of the consequences of their configuration as instruments of change.
Effectively applying Böhme’s work to the anthropology of media in Muslim communities, Patrick Eisenlohr (2018a, 2018b) identifies in the circulation of devotional na’at recordings that praise the Prophet Muhammad “atmospheres” of contact and contagion that give the sonic experiences their efficacy. In Mauritian Muslim communities the act of presencing and praising divinity through sound reproduction forms a “sonic presence” (Eisenlohr 2018a: 3) which defies description. While the term “atmospheres” and its instantiated use in music studies is a useful way of taking sound and the effects of the voice seriously on its own terms, my use of the term takes the māḥaul my interlocutors described as an expression of communal piety and power, as a co-produced quality that both demarcates secular space and pervades sacred space. In the manner and context in which it is used – that is, referring to performance forms, their permissibility, and efficacy – māḥaul describes the ways in which tone or mood is shaped by the principles of right and wrong and the material confluence that follows.

In The Ethical Soundscape, a deep and immersive ethnography of the sensory landscapes of Egyptian cassette sermons, Charles Hirschkind called for a phenomenological understanding of the "technological scaffolding" (2006A: 2) of the Islamic revival movement. The power of cassette sermons operated through, "sedimentation" (ibid: 26), the idea that re-listening sediments proper conduct and comportment. As Hirschkind admits, environments for the reception of religious media can be sonically crowded - cacophonous and polyphonic – but they can also by suffused with other ambient conditions that disrupt practices
of ethical self-fashioning. It is at this juncture that this thesis is situated, at the
ambient point of connection and disjuncture between the disciplinary
functionality of the technology and the deliberative and variable nature of the
content. Ambience has elsewhere been studied as the result of cultivating
inattention to maintain equilibrium; a studied act of indifference to the sounds of
others’ faith (Larkin 2014) or as a moral backdrop created through the circulation
of media forms. Matthew Engelke (2014) has written about how “ambient faith”
mediates the anxieties over public and private devotion and its sensual
manifestations, while Naveeda Khan described battles between neighbourhood
mosques in Lahore over defining "the rightful atmosphere for prayer" (Khan
2012b: 146). In short, mood can be a pious agent, particularly among those who
assist in the creation and maintenance of an ambience shaped towards communal
aspirations. It is my contention that studying media environments in Pakistan
inflects the Urdu term we can use for ecology, māḥauliat, with moral dimensions
that might bring media into productive dialogue with the recent ethical and
affective turns in anthropology. After Sara Ahmed (2010: 40), C. Jason Throop
argues that moods contain the qualities of what is “around”, and “therefore reveal
moral concerns in flux” (2014: 70). If mood can be a medium to be mediated,
duplicated, and reproduced like a video-disc, John Durham Peters’ The
Marvelous Clouds: Towards A Philosophy of Elemental Media (2015) and its
proposal to consider nature as a medium, is a timely contribution to a potentially
rich field of interdisciplinary enquiry. Peters draws attention to how digital media
has amplified the presence of the “stranger” (2015: 6). A similar sentiment is
evident in Böhme’s writing on atmosphere. In a dialogic sense, minor shifts in tone might cause disturbances, or the “tearing open” (2017A: 107) of an atmosphere communally produced yet traversable by others. Indeed, the “appearance of a stranger” (Ibid) turns an atmosphere into a more perceptible human infrastructure. Mazzarella discusses how recent scholarship on affect from across the humanities and the social sciences has shown the entangled workings of the intimate and the impersonal, or what he calls, “the distance between our ability to respond and a potentially infinite horizon of responsibility.” (2017B: 200). The circulatory dynamics of media in Pakistan are reflective of this troubled relationship between affect and ethics for the ways in which their surfaces and interfaces are marked by the felt presence of a public that is expected to be suffused with a certain ethical receptiveness. Yet such an imagined public sphere is undergirded by changing notions of permissibility that have not been formalised in rules or regulations. Therefore, when agents affected by media speak of moral atmospheres they speak of the difficulty of reconciling individual moral selves with the unruliness of public affect. By discussing these moral atmospheres in terms of media containers they also discuss the reification of affect into something that can be moved, circulated and transferred. In this way, the subjective responsibilities of individual mediators become intimately entangled with the conservativism of marketplace mechanisms.

While a moral atmosphere can be quickly identified as present; the constitution of its being is often beyond the bounds of naming. As with many others in the film business, Hafiz found his religious feelings easy to reconcile
with his trade in film posters from the Lollywood-era of filmmaking; buxom women towers over leering men, wielding a Kalashnikov or a bloody knife (Fig 2). Not that he could explain the bifurcation of his trade and his faith; his confidence in the hybridity of religious and entrepreneurial worlds trumped rational explanation. While he felt comfortable enough trafficking in objects the labour and effects of which he was quick to condemn, his moral objection to film concentrated on its māḥaul, a moral atmosphere that was neither replicated within the confines of his store nor within him. After a few months of visiting his store Hafiz became aware that my research was broader in focus than a study of the networks through which local films circulate. Waiting for me beneath the counter one morning was a copy of _Alat-e Jadida ke Shari’i Ahkam_ [The orders of the Shari’a on modern inventions] (Fig 1), a book on the religious permissibility of technological apparatuses and media forms, written and compiled by Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi, an influential Pakistani Islamic scholar and Deobandi authority on _tafsir_ [Quranic exegesis]. I was surprised when Hafiz, ever a man to strike a hard bargain, presented this to me as a gift, remarking on the ways in which it might add to my research. I became aware that for Hafiz and many of my interlocutors, it was important to first understand the māḥauliat, or the moral ecology, of media before getting to grips with the communication of its content. On bookshelves, internet forums, and television talk shows, technologies for audio-visual communications and social media are the subject of questions over permissibility and comportment. For some, media are expected to aggregate and condition themselves to prevailing attitudes towards the performance of an
Islamic self. Each of Pakistan’s religiously diverse communities and denominational schools of thought have their own nuanced take on the appropriate place of media in the enactment and endurance of faith. To such orthodoxies, the elemental conditions of media, as well as mediums through which popular culture transmits and transforms itself, proffer an expanded environmental space riven with challenges and possibilities for action with little clear precedent in received rules governing moral conduct. Studying media technologies through the lens of permissibility shows how religious actors have been doing comparative media studies for as long as scholars of technology, providing nuanced ways of understanding the deeply contingent, relational, and local labour of technological use.

Hafiz’ participation in aggressive religious protests surprised me not because of an essentialist association of negative sentiments towards film experience with Muslim phenomenologies, but because up to that point I had been told a fairly straightforward narrative that pitted film production and appreciation in Pakistan versus political Islamisation. The narrative I had assembled from film collectors, newspapers, and connoisseurs was that the military coup that brought General Zia-ul-Haq into power in 1977 transformed the country’s film scene from an industry of family melodramas and madcap cosmopolitan pastiches to a dour, violent, and sexually repressed scene that destroyed from the inside any vestiges of morality in filmmaking. The Zia era was found responsible for the dismantling of cinemas and the creation of shopping plazas, tyrannical censorship policies, and the transformation of audio-
visual culture. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 and, perhaps most importantly, the advent of the Afghan wars in 1978, are rarely cited in newspaper articles’ similar diagnostic narratives of decline and rebirth. The former instituted a renewed political awakening in Islamic majority nations, while the latter initiated a brutal proxy war in which the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan fought the Soviet Union through various insurgent groups which brought violence and upheaval to Pakistan. Because Zia’s planned Islamisation of the country appears such an obvious binary to the exorbitance of indigenous Pakistani Lollywood film aesthetics, it became entangled in a chain of cause and effect. Even before this time, in 1971, writer, filmmaker, and later government minister Javed Jabbar described the aesthetics of exorbitance that defined what he saw as the ideological binaries of the cinema in Pakistan as the reflection of, “a society stretched tight and taut between the mulla and the movies… between these two edges of darkness, the black void of the mulla’s mind, and the comforting night of the theatre interior…” (1971: 149). The reality is perhaps more nuanced; the continued ambivalence and uncertainty towards integrating film in the national project as it was passed between military and civilian regimes meant that Pakistani film has been allowed far greater freedom than other forms of discourse or debate. While my purpose is not to exonerate any rulers living or dead, in the Zia era the coexistence of discourses of Islamisation and sexually explicit material in films, and the push and pull between morality and immorality, vulgarity and purity, are as startlingly pronounced and contradictory as many of my interlocutors’ own viewpoints.
As awaami [for the people] inner-city cinemas close and new, multiscreen cinemas open in gated, high-income developments, the remaining celluloid films that circulate among the cinemas of Lahore’s Abbott Road add to the impression that Pakistani “Lollywood” film can seem obscure in its origins, like a family member cut or torn out of all the pictures in a photo album. Before one looks at the smiling faces on holiday, the eye is drawn to all the pictures with that excised member missing. There are hints at a great wrong having been committed to deserve such excision. I initially noticed this in 2013, when I first lived in Lahore. Having recently worked for a film cooperative in London that promoted the use of analogue equipment, I was eager to learn about Pakistan through the materiality of its film history. I was struck by the absence of a national film archive in a country that was once one of the largest film-producing countries in the world when its rich and vibrant film tradition flourished in Lahore from the 1960s to the 1980s. Instead, the decreasing presence of cinemas and the shift to private consumption had led to specialist urban shop clusters in Pakistan dealing in the dissemination of mass-copied images, preserving them not by altering the quality but by bringing them into the marketplace for public consumption.

The kind of māḥaul that Hafiz describes is not experienced purely in proximity to film actors or to film experience, but is contagious and omnipresent, mediated by individuals, collectives, by hardware and by software. The central hub of such a constellation of mediators has long been Lahore’s Hall Road, its

---

3 The peak year being 1968 when 122 films were released (Gazdar 1997, 263).
name is known around Pakistan for its trade in film and music, pirated or copied materials up for grabs due to a historic lack of copyright enforcement. What are currently referred to as DVDwallas⁴ – a descriptor that may change with formats for access – are store-holders, usually only one or two individuals, who work from a dispersed repertoire to produce cheaply-made reproductions of films in copy. Unlike in other countries, Pakistan’s DVDwallas have rarely fallen foul of intellectual property laws but have occasionally been the target of hardline religious groups given the public visibility of their trade. Violent raids on DVD stores in Islamabad in 2007 were a favoured tactic of the groups that centered around the Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa madrasah, who would boast of their anti-vice activities with large, public bonfires of secular media. The combined repertoire of Pakistan’s DVDwallas go some way towards negotiating anxieties over the place of film and media in the nation-state by circulating an unfixed object, its origins ambiguous and its network vague. As its bounded site of study, this thesis explores the practices that undergird the repertoire that operates from Hall Road, a vast and sprawling commodity zone formed of small, modular shopping units, and in one chapter from religious video stores who define what they do by normative inversion, in that they sell what is not film or music. Due to a more relaxed attitude to film and sonic performance, most film and video stores of a religious nature one is likely to come across pertain to the minority Ithnā‘Ashariyyah, or Twelver Shi’a branch of Islam in Pakistan. Yet, because

---

⁴ The suffix -wala in Urdu defines “one who does” the word that precedes it. Conversely, DVDwallas usually manufacture on cheaper Video-Compact Discs (VCDs). Naturally, newer forms of access are beginning to eclipse the VCD, including loading films onto USBs and directly onto smartphones.
they circulate religious media – which should not share space with film and music – what they trade constantly redefines the thresholds between film and not-film; music and recitation; permissibility and impermissibility. The coexistence of attitudes towards interdiction and reproduction are too easy explained away by citing hypocrisy or contradiction. This type of contradiction is inherently productive. Issues of permissibility with regard to film and music build atmospheres of moral exception that come to be felt as perceptible infrastructures, which themselves undergird the circulation of cultural forms.

In her study of the ways in which performance and performance art has been preserved in practice and cultural memory, Diane Taylor makes a differentiation between the “archive” and the “repertoire” (2003). Its contents impossible to reproduce without change, the repertoire of media content on Hall Road includes religious media, devotional recitations, Pakistani films long inaccessible even to their directors, stars, and producers, as well as pirated computer platforms and drivers, local and imported pornography, and curated compilations of music loaded directly onto smartphone memory cards. This repertoire remains grounded in the technical and social conditions of person-to-person circulation. Michael Warner’s (2002) insights into how collectives are formed by the circulation of artefacts show that repertoires, their miraculous survivals and sudden omissions, can register the constitution of a public. As Taylor argues, “the repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by ‘being there,’ … As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do
not remain the same.” (2003: 20) Taylor’s model allows objects to naturally disappear from the repertoire and re-enter, as per the contributions of those for whom the repertoire is a vital resource. While archival knowledge separates knowledge from the bearer the repertoire allows things to survive through re-transmission if the object attains a social life within a given community.

Hall Road’s repertoires take shape in friction with the coexistence of ecologies of interdiction and reproduction with regard to film and media, and the creation of moral atmospheres defined by their acquisition, selection, and disposal. Due to its central place in the Hall Road repertoire, in this thesis the moral ecology of media circulation in Lahore is explored through the lens of indigenous film. Its recursive presence in the marketplace, often surprising due to the non-existence of formal or industrial support for the preservation of local cinema, is marked by what Ali Nobil Ahmad has called, “infrastructural wounds” (2014: 91). Ahmad argues these, “[are] not the death of cinema.. but a subversive avowal in circumstances utterly hostile to its existence” (ibid). Similarly, on Hall Road, circulation leaves “wounds”; debris, cuts, and incisions. To focus on media repertoires, their contents, omissions, and mediation, is also to explore moral ecologies formed by individual obligations towards how other kinds of repertoires should be approached; whether to look or avert one’s gaze, to become attuned to secular music beside a pious space or tune-out altogether, or whether to delete a dubious news item or circulate it further.
Interdiction and Reproduction

When I first visited Hall Road and befriended a trader in the basement of one of the rickety plazas in which informal copies of films are sold, I was quickly offered material that only circulates on unlabeled discs, by invitation only. The trader, who had been eager to show me photographs on his phone of his recent pilgrimage with his wife to the shrine of Bari Imam near Pakistan’s capital city, Islamabad, confessed that he had come to the decision to offer me amateur, potentially violent pornography, on the basis that my research might be able to help the women depicted. Choices such as these accumulate their onward circulation as the result of values. It is worth noting that the term pornography is used ambiguously in the context of Hall Road, variously describing lurid Pakistani films that have passed the censor board, sexually suggestive mujra dance videos, and domestic or international material with sexually explicit content. This fluid definition of the pornographic led Lotte Hoek to suggest that it is concomitant notions of vulgarity or obscenity, rather than essentialist religious values, that render film an uncivil micro-society in South Asia (Hoek 2013: 13). When the word pornography appears in this thesis it does so as a record of a value judgement rather than as a reference to a classificatory schema. When traditional religious orthodoxy has much to say on issues which are primarily a matter of taste, but little theological leverage, many fall back on

---

5 Darshana Sreedhar Mini tracks the residual anxiety over soft-porn in mainstream films and its “spectral” presence that hangs over contemporary sentiments about film (2016). For Mini, the ways in which pornographic material haunts the present draws attention to the ways that the repertoire is not always defined by its contents but what those presume to be dominant elements of it.
embodied social hierarchies that inscribe order based on a system of binaries between high and low culture (Bourdieu 2013: 470).

At the core of the practices with which this thesis is concerned is the dialectic of the coexistence of interdiction and reproduction. In the basic terms of mediation, this is unusual. For something to be often eschewed or tainted with associations of immorality and then found in such abundance suggests that the controversies and anxieties surrounding its morality might be doing other work. Following the pathways of interdiction and practices of reproduction in Pakistan show that they are not mutually exclusive nor is it a surprise to find them coexisting within the same public sphere or within the opinions of a single individual. In fact, due to their radically subjective nature, moral atmospheres require mediation and reproduction to become an object of others’ comprehension. Furthermore, in a geopolitical era characterised by the rise of political populism, the coexistence of two competing narratives that impinge upon and challenge one another is increasingly common. Circulation, therefore, operates as a kind of container technology for forms capable of injuring moral sentiment, blunting sharp edges without homogenizing transgressive material to the body politic.

Reproduction is the broad concept I will use to describe the mechanical production of duplicate containers of media content. If systems of interdiction allow for the production of consensus, reproduction is the material conduit of continuity rather than its rupture. The kind of technical reproduction I study begins its trajectory in Western philosophy with debates over the bifurcation of
speech and writing, in which the material mediation of the word and its later mechanical reproduction has been the source of a primal ambivalence about the separation of knowledge from the bearer. *Phaedrus* (1972), one of the Platonic dialogues that stages a conversation between Socrates and a young interlocutor, is an important record, as Jacques Derrida (1968) established, of the shift from orality to literacy. The possibilities of circulation and recording inaugurated by such a shift can be seen in another, more recent, incarnation in the adoption of recording technologies and their creation of a distinctly marketplace mediascape. Speaking through Socrates, Plato defined writing as a kind of play that can vary in seriousness and vary in beauty. Stopping short of wholly condemning writing, the *Phaedrus* dialogue argues that the fixity of the written word allows it only to bear witness to its content. That is, the meaning of the written word cannot be cross-checked with its writer. Mediation of this kind necessitates such fixity, and as a consequence, writing cannot stand in for dialectic argument, engagement, or critical response. Writing itself harbours no ontological ills, but its merits are centrally a question of moral comportment (*Phaedrus* 1972: 274b). As far as writing is concerned, its exercise should be undergirded by an ethics of instances rather than universals. In the twentieth century, Derrida identified in the *Phaedrus* dialogue the overbearing presence of the Greek word *pharmakon*, that can variously mean a drug, a poison, and a medicine, and its use at a crucial point in Socrates’ explication of the mixed merits of writing. This “anagrammatic” (Derrida 1968: 98) way of writing served as a reminder that the mediation of discourse is always polysemic and relational. Writing as *pharmakon* becomes a
figure of dialectical argument not by what it contains but by nature of its discursive contestation.

In a section titled “A Writing Lesson” in his *Tristes Tropiques* (2012: 286-297), Claude Lévi-Strauss reiterated the Platonic preference for speech as pure communication and looked longingly at an imagined era before the written word. Lévi-Strauss recounted the story of the chief of a non-literate community of Nambikwara in the Brazilian Amazon imitating not only the machinations of the anthropologist’s scribblings, but its application in recording, registering, and thus asserting order and power. In this act of imitation, recording was exposed to Lévi-Strauss as a colonial import and as a tool for enslaving others that inscribes hierarchies and quantities in the hands of the powerful. In his critique of “The Writing Lesson”, Derrida argued that even in the data that Lévi-Strauss presented of this non-literature people, language had structured society with the same violence as writing, in which the inscription of otherness is coded into all ideological constructions (Derrida [1974] 1997: 101-140). Speech is merely another incarnation of the power systems that Lévi-Strauss saw embodied in writing, rather than an emblem of purity and immediacy; other kinds of inscription and effacement are at play, even in pre-literate societies. Derrida argued that writing cannot be wholly condemned, nor can it be celebrated only as a tool of artificial memory. For Derrida, “to recognize writing in speech,” is to understand that, “there is no ethics without the presence of the other.” (Derrida [1974] 1997: 139-140). With what Derrida calls a, “non-ethical opening of the ethical” (Ibid: 140) in mind, what if forms of reproduction and mediation beyond
writing and speech challenge the age-old ambivalence over the oral-literate binary that runs from Plato to Derrida?

Referring back to some of the foundational ideas in the anthropology of religion shows that the coexistence of interdiction and reproduction is commonplace in dealing with the threat of societal rupture. Likewise, in secular polities, the mark of a strong liberal society is increasingly associated with the incorporation and presence of disparate elements and viewpoints, and the ability for punishment to rehabilitate. By taking the marketplace media object back to these foundational ideas invites the possibility that, while film and music does not contaminate the individual as much as stricter orthodox taboos, the moral atmospheres it cleaves pollutes a secular space which piety is expected to undergird.

James George Frazer wrote widely on the Polynesian borrow-word in English, *taboo*, and the conceptual ramifications of it that came to animate turn-of-the century anthropology. Taboos were said to undergird the whole undercurrent of the external, social world (Frazer [1890] 1959) and, through Freud’s influential *Totem and Taboo*, the internal world and its ruptures ([1913] 2013). James George Frazer classed taboos as a material infrastructure that buffers and averts the saturation of holy danger into porous bodies. They are, “electrical insulators to preserve the spiritual force with which… persons are charged from suffering or inflicting harm by contact with the outer world.” (1911: 224). Frazer’s image of the electrically charged, suffering mediator, is a reminder that taboos are forbidden and ritually avoided in fear of the pollution of
incompatible forces. Consequently, and as Mary Douglas argued, rules about pollution and dirt, and attempts to order them, are just one of many tactics for avoiding anomaly (2003: 49) and that which does not conform. By offering me pornography as evidence of exploitation – rather than for the consumption of its content – the trader on Hall Road evinced the polysemic agency of media containers. If, “dirt offends against order” (Ibid: 3), the re-assertion of order over contaminated spaces is itself a reaction against precariousness in other, less benign forms. We can see the Hall Road repertoire as ritual in itself; a threshold technology of containment that averts the danger of a volatile presence like film; volatile in its atrophying process and volatile in its ambiguous marginality. Unconvinced by the essentialist power of taboo, Émile Durkheim in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life ([1915] 1964) saw instead a wider “system of interdiction” (Ibid: 299) that ensures the separation between the sacred and the profane. This critical bifurcation is complicated in Durkheim’s account by the contagiousness of the sacred, a current which can be viewed akin to flow or circulation, in which the sacred attaches itself to that in proximity and risks the pollution of its essential nature. Regimes of interdiction guard against this and form what Durkheim called the “negative cult” (Ibid), which provides access to its sacred inverse. While Durkheim’s system of interdiction is undeniably a system of forbidden rites, focusing on questions of permissibility with regard to that which the proscriptions of orthodoxy are inert captures the ambivalent and processual workings of the social world.
The inverse of Frazer’s negative magic, his category of sympathetic magic, is the process by which contact accumulates the qualities of the index. In these instances, in which the potentially damaging efficacy of otherness is severed by reproducing its impression in copy, danger is subsumed to a standing reserve of powers. As Frazer explained, “Through contact (contagion) the finger makes the print (a copy)..., [a] testimony to the fact that contact was made...” (1911: 220). The reproduction I discuss, though both associated with contagion and continuity, produces atmospheres of consensus and common ground. The (mechanical) reproduction of media content and containers deemed immoral can be said to define consensus, in that they are the accumulated body of value-decisions such as, to circulate or not to circulate; to whom to circulate? The empirical richness of a debate which unfolds visually and sonically adds much to current debates into an anthropology that has markedly shifted focus from the “dark anthropology” (Ortner 2016) of the suffering mediator to an anthropology of the “good” (Robbins 2013); the ethical, moral, and value-laden strategies used by subjects as tools of orientation.

What Brian Larkin, through his sustained engagement with anxieties over the circulation of the fragmented and dispersed elements of film experience, describes as the, “problematics of cultural circulation and the uncertainty generated by copying and repetition” (2013: 238), calls for a greater understanding into the atmospheric conditions of mediation. Due to their

---

6 Frazer’s contribution to both early anthropology and his articulation of mimesis and contagion has been explored in greater depth with respect to storage media (Taussig 1993) and photography (Pinney 2012).
subjective nature, moral atmospheres good or bad require mediation and reproduction to become an object of others’ comprehension. If atmospheres can survive reproduction and mediation, the built and lived environment, like material culture, are not merely neutral backdrops, but an active, co-dependent element akin to what Christopher Tilley sees as “space as a medium rather than as a container for action” (1994: 10). As such, in this thesis the reproduction of images, sounds, and sentiments on media containers are taken as a medium for the mediation of moral atmosphere.

The Intermittent State

In late 1978 General Zia-ul-Haq was mid-way through his tenure as Chief Martial Law Administrator, after declaring Martial Law and seizing power in a coup in July 1977. He would become President of Pakistan in September 1978, a position he held until his death in 1988. On the 1st December 1978, General Zia addressed the nation on television and radio on the subject of Nizam-i-Islam, a term often rendered in English as the programme of political “Islamisation” long associated with his period of rule. This remarkable and unprecedented speech outlined the juridical and social reforms he intended to implement, all delivered in his singularly threatening manner. He joked that daily prayers would only not be made a legal obligation because of his inability to police it, “For the time being we want to rely on persuasion rather than compulsion” (“Documents” 1979: 278).
However, he did begin his speech full of stern persuasion with one clear order. The first of December also happened to be the first of the month of Muharram.

During the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram Pakistan’s minority Shi’i population mourn the death of Ḥussāin, the Grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Regardless of sect or denomination, most Muslims and many of Pakistan’s religious minorities, avoid celebrations, music, and film to preserve an atmosphere of communal mourning. Like those fallen on the battlefield of Karbala that the climactic tenth day of Muharram, the Day of ‘Āshūrā’, commemorates, Zia’s national project of personal piety - brought into the realm of the state and expressed on national media - was sold as a programme of communal sacrifice and solidarity. Like the mourning period of Muharram, the nation itself was to be suffused with a permanent atmosphere of observance and moral exception. To achieve this, General Zia ordered cinemas to remain closed on the ninth and tenth of Muharram. Nizam-i-Islam had been inaugurated, so he said, with this act, a practice that had likely been previously voluntary or undertaken as a precaution during times of communal tension7. “Persuasion rather than compulsion,” did not apply to the public space of cinema-going. In tracing the tension between systems of interdiction and modes of reproduction, I ask how moral atmospheres draw attention to the intimacy required to negotiate

---

7 The involvement of the state in closing cinemas for Muharram can be traced to Iran as early as the 1920s (Rekabtalaei 2019: 77). In Pakistan, the policing of Muharram cannot be seen without a hint of path dependency. Before Partition, British authorities in India were eager to depict Muharram rituals as picturesque and otherworldly, but always did so by representing them as controllable and subject to (colonial) order (Siebenga 2013). In the mid -1950s, anthropologist John J. Honigmann noted the informal practice of closing cinemas during Muharram in Pakistan (1958: 58).
what is and is not permitted for the self and for others. Adding to the argument that “prohibitions create lasting, material states of affairs” (Boylston 2018: 2), the coexistence and intersection of ecologies of interdiction and reproduction recreate the phenomenological and emotive boundaries that demarcate periods of moral exception.

At the birth of the country following its Partition from India in 1947 there was no agreed definition of quite how religious morality would help constitute Pakistan as a secular nation-state (Jalal 1994 cf. Khan 2012: 5) and little agreement regarding how consensus with regard to Islam was to be built among a religiously diverse populace. Naveeda Khan has argued that this residual pluralism enhances choice and expands the possibility for debate, resulting in situations in which Islam might not only bring something to Pakistan, but that Pakistan contributes something to Islam (Khan 2012: 8). This is one element of what Faisal Devji describes as Pakistan's "ambitious heritage and sheer abstraction as a political idea" (Devji, 2013. 6). A large and diverse country of at least 195 million people, seven administrative units, six main languages, and ten primary ethnic groups, politics in Pakistan has been characterised by the role of individualism and patronage in political organisation (Barth 1965). The central thesis of Fredrik Barth’s influential Political Leadership Among Swat Pathans was that individuals working in accordance with their interests dictate the flow of power by creating allegiances with rivals and less powerful people. Such acts of decision-making are marked by asymmetry and unexpected symmetry and are
the result of a pluralistic “ambition” and “abstraction” that often wagers more on the possible than the probable.

With my ethnographic focus firmly situated in Lahore I focused my attention closely upon urban experience in Pakistan (Donnan and Selier 1997, Verkaaik 2004, Ring 2006, Gayer 2014) and on forms of social organization beyond the landowning classes. In a similar strategy to those adopted by Lahore’s Hall Road *DVDwallas*, Stephen Lyon has argued that in many rural settings patronage networks are sought out by Pakistanis to deal with situations in the absence of formal infrastructures (2002: 228), and that in such situations the patron/client relationship is often reversed (2004) or hybridised into a dual patron-client role characterised by brokerage and flexibility. But the extent to which Pakistan’s political instability and procedural informality thus constitutes a “negotiated state” (Lieven 2011: 94), has been disputed by Magnus Marsden (2005) who argues that studying top-down political structure rather than political culture shifts focus from the changes undergone by Pakistanis themselves. For example, Ammara Maqsood (2017) defines the “new Middle class” in Lahore as a product of both the urban public sphere that emerged under colonialism and one defined by consumption and ideas about Islam forged through entanglement with a global south Asian diaspora. In another instance, the acceptance of endogamous and close-kin marriage among women stems from the prospect of a kind of welfare support system that the state does not provide (Agha 2016). The personal histories that surround the traffic in Pakistani media – rather than its content – tell a story of how the past is understood and managed, how resources
have been used, and how bottom-up preservation has done more than the state. But the intermittent presence of the state, rather than its failure or breakdown, create periods of exception, insurgent moments when the state manifests itself before receding into the background, as with the wielding of Muharram’s moral atmosphere.

*The Hall Road Repertoire*

Media environments like Hall Road are central to the stakes at play in the contestation over the public place of Islam in Pakistan. Such media repertoires are not just the result of value-decisions based around consumption but also diverse consent-decisions about what the shared environment of Pakistani Islam should look, sound, and feel like. In studying the technical and social grounds for media circulation in a Pakistani marketplace, I worked extensively with traders associated with the powerful conservative middle class, mainly Sunni Muslims whose attitudes to public piety marked the physical landscape in which their goods circulate with certain ethical qualities. To the ethnographer, of course, these ambitions towards fostering a good moral ambience appeared to clash with their trade in media associated with negative ethical attributes. At the centre of this primal contradiction are attitudes towards mediation and permissibility that provide agents with moral immunity from the objects in which they trade, and which defer ethical agency to the wider body of the community among whom the media objects in question circulate. To pick apart these material, affective, and
discursive realms requires bringing three bodies of literature into dialogue with one another. Firstly, the study of film and media in South Asia, secondly, the role of mediation in the study of religious media, and thirdly, the interaction between ambivalence and permissibility in an anthropology of Islam that has typically focused on either discourse or practice.

Hall Road is a street embedded in the heart of the colonial-era Civil Lines area of Lahore, between the ancient Walled City to the north and the former British military cantonment to the south, that once allowed for the commercial intermingling of coloniser and colonised. The street established its reputation as a hub for communication, entertainment, and technological hardware following the birth of Pakistan amid the Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, when a number of outlets offering the sale and repair of radio sets were joined by traders dealing in its constituent parts. The local model of the commodity zone – in which traders dealing in similar produce congregate in densely occupied bazaars – proved particularly well suited to the boom in the sale of consumer electronics in the 1980s, when existing radio stores were joined by those dealing in audio- and video-cassette hardware. By the end of the decade, many of the owners of properties assigned to them following the migration to India of their original, often Hindu or Sikh, owners, had bypassed laws concerning such “Evacuee Property” and sold their land to developers. Tall and poorly constructed buildings known locally as “plazas” were built in their place, providing small units for traders’ salesrooms, repair workshops, or offices. As a commodity zone that now included spare parts, audio and visual hardware old and new, local
entrepreneurs and established businessmen with operations in the Gulf, Britain, the USA, Canada, and beyond, it is no surprise that Hall Road began to generate its own signature produce. Drawing on the availability of production and distribution materials and manpower, Hall Road’s plazas became one of the central junctures of the trade in pirated and informally-copied film and music in South Asia. Its distribution networks were both intimately local and widely dispersed. For example, a London-based video distributor would secure from the producers of the local Lahore-based Lollywood film industry celluloid reels and have them converted to video in London for rental shops around the UK. Hall Road traders would pay a premium to secure one of these videos, from which it would produce hundreds of copies in the top-floor duplication factories of the street’s new plazas, before selling them as master-copies to traders in the Gulf, who would then make their own commercial duplicates for sale to the male expatriate labour population residing there.

Despite having described *DVDwallas’* stores still extant as informal, I became aware that my interlocutors in Lahore were not familiar with such a distinction. Informality as a concept developed in adherence to urban planning and, fittingly, the closest approximate binary I found in my fieldsite was that between the *kačcha* and the *pāka*, roughly defined as temporary and fixed, and often used to describe built structures. The masculine and feminine cases of *kačcha / kačchi* and *pāka / pākī* also refer to the distinctions between “raw/unripe” and “cooked/ripe” (Lévi-Strauss 1969) but also temporary, crude, imperfect and permanent. In his study of caste hierarchy Louis Dumont remarks
that while *kačcha* and *pāka* as Indic binary concepts refer to the state of being raw and cooked, there is a more expansive distinction at play, relating to “precariousness and imperfection” in the former and “solidity, perfection” in the latter. Both, “tinged with hierarchy” (1980: 384-5) in the frequent delegation of *kačcha* food, which is “vulnerable to impurity” (Ibid: 142), to lower castes and *pāka* food, which is more transactable and thus transmissible to higher caste groups. Most frequently heard with reference to *kačchi abādi*—slum housing or areas of slum housing—*kačcha* can also refer to temporary bridges over torn-up streets awaiting resurfacing, or a makeshift road demarcated by a collective decision to drive over a section of undeveloped land. Although to be *kačcha* is to be rough and ramshackle, to be *kačcha* can also be communal and unplanned. To address the state of being *kačcha* requires a process of transformation and approval to turn it into *pāka*.

While film traders still reside in many of the plazas, selling cheap copies of three Pakistani films poorly compressed onto one video-compact disc (VCD) or loaded directly onto microSD cards, the street has become a succinct example of the ways in which digital media has brought to attention the blurred edges between mediums. Many of the savviest businesses who made their name as traders in film copies abandoned videos and optical discs when connectivity to the Internet became widespread in Pakistan. They variously moved onto success in the sale of televisions, smartphones and Internet data, air-conditioning, ceiling fans, solar panels, and small and spare parts such as USB connectors and chargers. This is business as usual for Hall Road, having always dealt in
communications systems and the ambient infrastructural objects that undergird them. From the small row of stores dedicated to the kind of blue foghorn-shaped loudspeakers only seen on mosques to memory cards with an ascending level of capaciousness, there is a recognisable logic in the object communities that Hall Road sustains. These containers and spare parts produce and sustain the distributed objecthood of what constitutes a technological appendage to elemental media. With its residual association with the world of Pakistani, Indian, and Hollywood film, recordings of local drama shows, and the sale of pornography, my interlocutors spoke of Hall Road having acquired a very distinctive moral atmosphere which it has struggled to shed. Women are still rarely seen. Some traders believe this is because the commodities sold on the street are essentially masculine, while others blame the quantity of lurid and sexually suggestive film advertising material that proliferated in the 1990s having given the area an air of seediness.

Hall Road as a hub for the consolidation and outward circulation of media assemblages has also been the subject of contemporary artist and media scholar Farida Batool’s 2015 doctoral thesis. Batool explored the spread of mujra dance recordings, a particular mediated form that traverses the networks through and beyond Hall Road, and its journey across formats and audiences. Like Batool I methodologically ground my work on Hall Road as a point of entry into material, moral, and responsive discourses on performance and public culture. In its current incarnation, Hall Road is similar in many ways to the media market in Delhi studied by Ravi Sundaram in an influential body of work (1999) that
resulted in his 2009 monograph *Pirate Modernity*. Sundaram offers a way of understanding the ethical regime of moral atmospheres through what he calls the “bleeding culture” (2004: 67) of media produced by markets like these, whose blurred edges and ambiguous boundaries provide fertile ground for subaltern infrastructures. In these conditions, dynamics of access are adapted to local systems of trade capital and the conditions of labour in which such media forms become accessible in urban spheres.

Due to residual anxieties over the public place of film in Pakistan – which in many ways is also formed of concerns about the labour and visibility of performance, music, and singing – the negative māḥaul of Hall Road has been hard to shift. Yet what remains central to Hall Road’s trade is the mastercopy, the “urtext” of the trade in film, music, and media and the marketplace circulation of moving images that index not just the content of copies but the agency of their mediation. It is not surprising that the marketplace or the bazaar is one locus of mediated moral atmosphere. Webb Keane has argued that economic transactions are events of mediation and therefore imbricated in moral and ethical decisions (2008). Exchange also implies obligations, and with that, the moral life of the social. Throop argues that moods do not actively describe or delimit the other and the community, they are the state of, “being affected and attuned” (2014: 71) to a state of urgency, flux, and the potential for change. Within moods are sedimented moral judgements formed of imagining the movement of that mood into the experiential past and possible future. Film is only one of Hall Road’s mediated products, but one I felt was the primary colour in the bleeding edges of
moral sentiment towards the kind of media environments fostered by its hardware and mediation. These atmospheres that surround film’s mediation and remediation; its repertoires and ecologies, are instructive for learning about the role of media in moral atmosphere and communal sentiment.

With its ancient shrines, colonial-era architecture, and labyrinthine arcade-like plazas, experiencing Hall Road is to experience Lahore in miniature. With the shrine of eleventh-century saint Hazrat Ismail Lahori, over a dozen mosques and three fountains for performing ablutions, the street has enough facilities to sustain the long working days of its multitude of traders. Taking my first walk around Hall Road I attributed what appeared to be an absence of VCD and DVD sellers to it being the first ten days of Muharram, in which both the minority Shi’i population (and many of the majority Sunni population out of respect for the ahl-e-bayt [the family of the Prophet Muhammad] and their co-religionists) refrain from consuming film or music while mourning the martyrdom of Imam Ḥussāin. Despite being almost wholly Sunni, Hall Road’s traders respect this period of moral exception, either out of religious tolerance or as an excuse for a few days off work. I soon learned that the reduced visibility of the film trade, at least since my last visit some five years previously, was due to a shift in media usage. Over the last few years hundreds of traders had switched from trading in film copies to mobile accessories, televisions, drones, even virtual reality headsets, with the old stalwarts pushed to the basement of the two oldest plazas where they once ran street-facing shops. Today nostalgia fuels what remains of many DVDwallas’ trades, in ways akin to what Walter Ong described in the production of oral
transmission and mediation as, “participation in a kind of corporate retrospection” (Ong 2013, 9). But such retrospection adheres to what Svetlana Boym (2008) describes in “restorative nostalgia” as reconstructive rather than longing actions, which create myths and finesse symbols, rather than a reflectivity that engages with passed time and patina.

I would spend much of the year to follow with a tight-knit group of men hailing from the Pashtun Durrani tribe, whose store, Durrani Electronics, had once been known for the image quality of their copies. By the time I first arrived they had sold most of their master-copies to a satellite channel and were dealing in flat-screen LCD TVs; their store all sharp white lights and angular boxes. It had been almost a decade since Durrani Electronics stopped selling films in copy, but like many of their peers, their continued popularity among customers in the congested market hinged on the reputation built during the video era. Yet amid the sharp white lights, stacks of flat-screen TVs still in their flat rectangular boxes, and a few showpieces hung on any empty wall space, hidden in built-in cupboards skirting each of the three enclosing walls was a hint of their former glory. Inside these knee-high cupboards was their archive of Indian films on videocassette, thousands of them, but of little value due to the widespread availability of those same films on the internet. Their stock of master-copies of Pakistani films – rare, scarce, disappearing things – had recently been sold in bulk to a leading local cable channel. Pakistan’s poorly defined copyright laws have long been unenforced, but in practice when one buys or sources a
mastercopy crisp and clear enough for broadcast, one also buys the rights to use it.

Disinterest in preserving celluloid film was such that the longest-serving member of Durrani Electronics remembered a whole street market dedicated to the sale of discarded strips of 35mm Pakistani films sold as kinetic toys to be placed over night-lights for the entertainment of children. He compared this wider ambivalence about film heritage with that of Pakistani paper currency. “We don’t remember when the ten-rupee note changed or when the five-rupee note came and what those notes looked like,” he told me.” No-one kept it safe in their pockets… I know they went out of circulation, but we could have kept it as a memento [nīshāni]. Having come to Lahore to find out more about the materiality and transmission of film heritage in Pakistan I was struck by the way in which my interlocutors referred to the morality and agency of plucking objects from circulation and what this action does to transform the object. These attitudes evinced an understanding of how custodianship (McNulty 2013, Menozzi 2014) and guardianship is, like conservation, an essentially generative activity. As Victor Buchli argues, “conservation is anything but that… it 'conserves' nothing but 'produces' everything' (Buchli 2002: 14)”. In this case, conservation produces the moral standing, discretion, and reputation of their mediators.

---

8 More commonly, banknotes are taken out of circulation when found with the number set 786, the numerical value of the opening phrase of the Quran “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim,” as per the Abjad decimal numeral system. In these instances they are often framed and prominently displayed as a serendipitous omen in the impersonal flow and circulation of wealth.
In terms of its religious demography, Hall Road is comprised primarily of Barelvi Sunni Muslims. During the period of my fieldwork the rise to prominence of the TLP mentioned above saw Barelvi piety and political demands surge to national attention. The proud defenders of indigenous South Asian traits and traditions of Islamic practice, followers of the Barelvi sect are known for their devotion to Muslim saints, eager consumption of *na’at* recitations in praise of the Prophet Muhammad, and their majoritarian and public approach to popular piety. Many pray at one of more than a dozen mosques that occupy rooms and repurposed structures in Hall Road’s labythine alleys. For Friday prayers, many cross the Regal Chowk junction and visit the Jamia Masjid e Shuhada where many other sects faithful to Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence gather, such as the Tablighi Jamaat, a sect based on prosletization, and Deobandis, who hold a more literalist stance towards Islamic scripture. Thinkers, preachers, and followers of the Deobandi school are more likely to produce literature and sermons defining the permissibility of media, decrying Shi’ism and saint veneration, and forms of popular entertainment. Despite their differences in religious practice, these discourses are often likely to be incorporated into the opinions of those from other sects.

Traditionally less likely to denounce or attack the practices of Pakistan’s minority Shi’a (Twelver and Ismaili) or Christians than other followers of Hanafi jurisprudence like Deobandi or Salafi followers, Hall Road’s large Barelvi presence accounts in some way for the variety and diversity of audio-visual
media available that pertains to minority practices and beliefs. For its mostly male customer base, the moral atmosphere of Hall Road proffers anonymity. The anxiety of being between proscription and practice felt by many of the store-holders is well articulated in Rahul Mukherjee and Abhigyan Singh’s work (2017) with traders in a similar context who load content otherwise criticized when consumed in public, onto customers’ microSD cards for their private consumption on smartphones. Similarly, as a commodity zone untethered to a specific neighbourhood or kinship group, Hall Road’s customers can secure material about which they might not want those in their immediate community to be aware. This might include lurid Pakistani films or devotional material pertaining to a religious denomination capable of drawing the disapproval of neighbours. With an estimated 25,000 individual businesses with between 30 to 100,000 workers by the estimation of the Hall Road Anjuman-e-Tajiran [Tradespersons’ Union], it is a place not only where a good deal can be struck on a USB cable, but a sphere of moral anonymity. By way of comparison, in Chapter Two of this thesis, I explore the dynamics of media traders in a contrasting environment; in a Shi’i neighbourhood where everyone knows everyone else and the content that circulates is inextricably connected to the public piety of the community.

This is not to say that Hall Road’s traders are uniformly accepting of Shi’a devotional practices. I was memorably warned, almost rebuked, by my interlocutors at Durrani Electronics for wearing black clothing, associated with the communal mourning of the Shi’a community, during the first ten days of Muharram. I was unsure if their guidance was intended for my safety – random murders and targeted attacks on Shi’a individuals had been common over the two decades preceding my research – or due to their disapproval over the prevailing atmosphere of Muharram.
When the first ten days of Muharram came around, drawing to a close with the climactic Day of ‘Āshūrā’, the city was tense and Hall Road closed due to the processions of the minority Shi’i population often targeted by suicide attacks. A few kilometres away at the market surrounding the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman it was the busiest day of the year for Tahir Jafri. The market surrounding the shrine is a popular market for Shi’i devotional materials. From his small stall Jafri stocks nearby Hall Road with professionally filmed mourning gatherings and copies of Iranian films and tele-dramas on the lives of the family of the Prophet Muhammad to sell in place of film and music during this period of moral exception. Due to the bleeding edges of popular piety, Shi’i media is most likely to be consumed by Sunnis during such periods in which the affective energy of Shi’a public mourning is most apparent. For Jafri, however, his collection is avowedly local; both a personal archive and a reserve on standby for future deployment\textsuperscript{10}. He defines the act of collecting, preserving, and shifting recordings onto new carriers as “guardianship on behalf of the community” [\textit{immanat hai quam ki}]\textsuperscript{11}. He acknowledges that like top-down acts of guardianship, circulation is closely entangled with the agency of its mediation, and the disputed power relations involved with custodianship and inheritance. “In Pakistan,” he told me, “every new government tries to destroy the previous

\textsuperscript{10} What my interlocutors referred to as their “record” was a reserve of materials kept aside for future use, should demand dictate. This has some similarities to Martin Heidegger’s idea of modern technology relying on the surplus of nature as a resource, a “\textit{Bestand} (standing reserve)” (1977: 20), a word that in German is often rendered as stock. Ordering does the work of managing the pervasive latency of \textit{bestand}, which itself is akin to a coiled spring, storing all its energy in the apparatus of its form, and in so doing pointing to the future of its utilisation.

\textsuperscript{11} Andreas Rieck observes that the use of the term \textit{qaum} [Urdu: nation, people, community] by Shi’a groups and individuals often refers more closely to what was called “communal affairs” in the colonial era or sectarian differences in the present (2018: 24)
government’s data”. And with that, like those at Durrani Electronics, he illustrated his point by taking out a rupee note, a 100 rupee note from the 1950s. A local boy was given it by his employers, and he in turn gave it to Kazmi. “Now we are talking about old things,” Kazmi said, “not about media. You can see that this is a dark side of our society. These old things are our culture and they do come back” (Fig 4). That Jafri was seen as the man in the market most worthy to be entrusted with “old things” underlines how media for amateur recording and distribution allowed for the quiet amplitude of the power of mediation. Among trader-guardians like Jafri there remains great prestige in being the mediator of prized, rare, or high-brow religious content without whose efforts at safekeeping they would not have survived.

In the Shi‘i communities in Lahore with whom I worked, the production of these boundaries has long been done by public processions but is increasingly expressed through the production of religious media that materializes the differences between denominational practices. Yet the appearance and availability of Shi’a religious media on Hall Road remains paradoxical. Such media is released, imported, distributed, or pirated from local Shi’a “cassette and video houses”, as stores like Jafri’s are known, that operate either beside shrines widely visited by Shi‘i Muslims or in Shi’a-majority neighbourhoods. The purpose for their existence is either to proselytize or to spread Shi’a azadari, a term which refers to the public and communal mourning for Imam Hussain. Since the birth of Pakistan and waves of migration of Shi’a Indians following Partition, such public piety has increasingly drawn the ire of Sunnis across the Hanafi
school of thought (Rieck 2018: 67). The Shi’a media that can be found in the Hall Road repertoire – documentaries on local saints, imported Iranian films, recordings of majalis sermons, and devotional recitations – often feature images, rhetoric, and affective elements that might directly clash with the beliefs of those who copy and re-distribute them on Hall Road. On the other hand, Barelvi devotion and saint-veneration often draws on its own repertoire of shared saints, Sufic themes, symbols, and sounds whose edges bleed into Shi’a worship. Situated on a permanent threshold of blurred lines and overlap, many of Hall Road’s traders feel they can circulate such content free of the moral repercussions associated with the agency of creation or consumption. It is the production of such a threshold, and the social and communal benefits of sustaining it, to which the conclusion of this thesis will be addressed.

*Media, Mediation, and Religion*

I decided to work with those who mediate moving image content because of the extent to which many such mediators are able to sympathize with different sides of the debate over the morality or permissibility of media forms and the māḥaul they possess. Learning from the entanglements of person-to-person mediation in media marketplaces was the methodological way I chose to participate and engage with the ethical environments of media circulation. As such, I do not talk about mediation in terms of religious intercession. Although the parallels are evident, the equation is not made here. By focusing on reproduction – that is, Taylor’s “being there” in the repertoire- I want to make
theoretical interventions into two domains. Firstly, the sociality and agency of mediation in the spread of digital objects often struck from analogue sources, and secondly, remediation, the telescoping of mediums that bring this dispensation about.

Due to the necessary ambiguity that results from the interpretation of Islamic law (Ewing 1988) and its reliance on human mediation, media produces both secular politics and its co-produced inverse, religion (Hirschkind and Larkin 2008). Mediation is principle to the operations of the latter, without which material devotion would not be able to manifest itself in the world. I see the role of media in moral ecologies as acts of differentiation through participation. Likewise, for Webb Keane, ethical claims-making is not just a labour of the self, but an interaction with others, in which “blaming and holding responsible, denying and justifying, are acts that both the agent, and his or her interlocutors, are doing… for one another.” (Keane 2014: 455). In such a sphere of ethical interaction, the secular or religious source of values is often blurred. It is beneficial, therefore, to read these interactions through the recent literature on religion and media, not to explore the ways in which the sacred is manifested through practice (Eliade 1959: 11), but to better understand the ways in which moral atmospheres are formed through obligations to the other. Situating the presence and morals of the other, as communicated and felt by mediums, drives a discursive sphere that questions whether such media are capacious enough to hold both the individual and the stranger.
What critical insights does a focus on mediation proffer in the context of the tension between proscription and practice? Firstly, it is important that the notion of medium be properly identified. This is because the act of transposing content onto a different form draws attention not just to the act of mimesis but to the presence of a medium from which, and onto which, it was transposed. Marshall McLuhan argued for a clear way of understanding the difference between medium and message, communication and media. McLuhan’s famous maxim that the medium is the message was one of scale, introduced by the medium as an extension of human agency and corporeality, and the message that becomes entangled and imbricated in its mediation. He gives the example of the electric light, which best illustrated how the content of a medium is always another medium (1964: 8). Mediation, therefore, creates mediums. While remediation is the business of what a medium does. In a more explicit, applied sense, remediation brings media into a new sphere for re-evaluation and interpretation, and can be understood as an act of “reform” (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 59). The belief that drives media progressivism - that different mediums can make the message greater or more dynamic - is one reason for foregrounding the study of the ethics of mediation.

Recent literature in the anthropology of media and of religion has seen a paradigm shift towards mediation as an object of material and social agency. In his delineation of the shift from the anthropology of media to mediation, Dominic Boyer argues for a study of media beyond representation or communication (2012: 383). Boyer describes a move in the interdisciplinary study of media from
production and reception to mediation and exchange, a shift that happened concurrently and in a similar form in the anthropology of religion. I follow Boyer in studying the distinction between the “radial” – the massified outward divergence of broadcast media - and “lateral” – or sidelong, peer-to-peer - potentialities of electronic mediation (2010: 87-88). Forms of lateral mediation have lately been enabled by digital platforms and social networks allowing users to distribute and share among one another. On Hall Road and among similar small-scale media traders, such lateral forms of mediation currently associated more with digital than analogue media, prefer to ground such exchange in social ethics familiar to the community in which such reproduction takes place.

Birgit Meyer’s important work on the materiality of religious sensation took root in a wider scholarly effort to correct claims that religious experience was only ever the domain of the spiritual (2011). The schism between inner experience and the possibility of mediation raised the problem of presence (Engelke 2007) and its mediation. By looking at the mediation of profane materials by religious actors, the problem of presence on Hall Road is that with the power to disturb circulatory flows or the tuning of an ethical self. What Brian Silverstein, in the circulation of Sufic CDs and DVDs in Turkey, calls “disciplines of presence” are fundamentally ethical practices that play a role in the formation of moral selves and communities (2008: 141). Likewise, among media traders in Lahore, atmosphere is a way of giving presence to these sites of pious (or impious) reception.
For William Mazzarella mediation is the work of laterally connecting difference in ways that purport to neutrality. Mazzarella explains that mediation is also a “matter of the greatest intimacy” (2004: 357), in that it brings to life the often opaque but hegemonic powers of a framing concept; such as cinema, nation, or religion. As I will argue, marketplace circulation and mediation is, in practice, a balm for many objects of anxiety in Pakistan in which the “market” is understood as a sphere of consensus and dissensus that produces moral permissibility. In this sphere of mediation, religion and film have been known to act upon on another (Hughes and Meyer, 2005: 149). It is precisely the bleeding edges of this relationship, the ecologies forged of secular and pious morality coming together to concretize atmospheres of contact and contagion, that this thesis explores.

Pakistan’s media landscapes are significant in understanding the relationship between religion and media, interdisciplinary studies of media environment, and the anthropology of morality. I take moral atmospheres to be the communal return of an important conversation that people are having about Pakistan itself, that adds to a growing literature on the materiality of Muslim self-knowledge in Pakistan (Khan 2012, Maqsood 2017). Understanding these interactions requires a material approach sensitive to both the “interpretative communities” (Larkin 2013: 240) formed by the circulation of media and to the atmospheres they produce through their reception. I will engage with what Larkin has called “remediation” as a “form of deep engagement, an intimacy with the Other that is transgressive and both thrilling and threatening” (2013: 241). The
precarious conditions through which certain forms of secular or religious media in Pakistan has circulated over the last few decades, becomes a prompt to study the social life of remediation, the “eventness of reappearance” (Ibid: 251). In their mediators’ desire to make moral ambience an object of objective knowledge, media forms cleave a moral space through which they circulate. In these instances, “remediation” shows how atmospheres can be followed, studied, and felt.

If the “discursive tradition” (Hirschkind 2006, Asad 2009, Mahmood 2015) in the anthropology of Islam hinges on the materiality of discourse, little attention has been given to how discourse shelters what Michel Foucault called the, “incidence of interruptions” (Foucault 1972: 4) and discontinuity. By taking a phenomenological approach to moral experience (Mattingly and Throop 2018: 482-3) I attempt to rethink media morality as an engagement with ethical responsibilities to the other rather than the programmes of pious self-cultivation that have come to animate the anthropology of Islam over the last two decades. Amira Mittermaier has argued that too much focus on self-cultivation as a form of submission or subversion ignores pious practices that are subject to contingency and chance (2012). To reach consensus over the thresholds of right and wrong refers to what is religiously permissible for the self, yet remains sensitive to the sensibilities of others, and the sensorium of emotional modesty. Such regimes of interdiction and reproduction operate at the point in which the “discursive tradition” and the “lived” or “living” tradition (Saktanber 2002, Marsden 2005), as described in the anthropology of Islam, bifurcate. The ethical
negotiations that constitute the intersubjective sphere of moral atmosphere involve the kind of affordances to others many in Pakistan would like to see; a social contract formed of being obliged to the Other, against an Islamic phenomenological backdrop, with no ambient interruptions from those whose practices offend.

Media and Marketplace Pakistan

The question of how film, which I take as a key frame through which to understand the epistemologies and ontologies of Pakistan’s media ecologies, has been used to engage religiously diverse audiences has driven much scholarship on early cinema in South Asia, the richness of which I only have space to acknowledge the contours. Film production and consumption, which in South Asia has been predominantly a commercial enterprise, was driven by what Ravi Vasudevan calls a “sociology of the market” that understood audiences, “in terms of their social, religious, and ethnic composition” (2015: 29). Such marketplace knowledge was built in parallel with a latent anthropology of the cinema fostered by colonial authorities. For Sundaram (2009), such bounded environments like Hall Road are best referred to as markets for their commercial distribution of multiple and interconnected modernities. For Kaushik Bhaumik, on the other hand, such locales are more evocatively described as bazaars in that

12 The term ecology is used both in reference to the sub-field of media ecology inspired by the work of Harold Innis (2008), Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong (1982), and to ecological environments that govern through the production and encroachment of ferality and order.
they are impacted by human craft, action, and lateral mediation (2013), which work differently to the historical understanding of a market. Similarly, for Kajri Jain what marks the bazaar out as idiosyncratic are the ways that trading communities manufacture ways of reaching, and in a sense producing, distinct audiences, while doing so in ways that allow for mutually beneficial relationships between bazaar trade and popular piety (2012). In my use of the term marketplace, I hope to conjure both a physical sphere of activity rather than an unbounded “market”, while also acknowledging its relationship to capitalist and neoliberal forms of exchange.

To learn about the networks through which film and video circulates in Pakistan is to hear many social histories of recording. The disparate objects explored herein – film, video, ritual and procession footage, film music, and devotional images - are united into a community by one seismic change; the sociality inculcated by marketplace recording, retrieval, and reproduction. How Pakistan has been transformed by the urge to “record” and in so doing generate duplicates of ephemeral experiences, can reveal much about collectives, mediators, and the uses to which media is put by religious actors. The widespread adoption of home recording technology that fuelled the Hall Road repertoire allowed for the documentation of events of personal, social, and ritual significance. Anthropologists were quick to notice the indigenization of home recording technology, exploring the ways recordings worked as rites of passage into modernity as well as tools through which ritual could be practiced and maintained (Rodgers 1986). Following the introduction of compact audio- and
videocassette hardware in the late 1970s, the dominant narrative of the impact of home recording technologies saw an Eastern Bloc eager for Western music and film provided with tools to subvert state censorship (Ganley & Ganley 1987). Home recording technology was seen as emancipative (Manuel 1993), the inverse of state broadcasting that fostered an “unofficial culture” (Sreberny & Mohammadi 1994: 178) and indicative of the porosity of regimes once believed to be fixed and impenetrable. In Europe and the United States home recording drove the creation of musical undergrounds – particularly in closely connected urban genres like punk and hip-hop – and by the early 1980s there was a recognizable international cassette network, a home taper underground which actively attempted to transgress large recording corporations’ copyright and the laws that enforced them.

Much motivated the rapid adoption of audio and cassette technology among inner-city merchants in Pakistan. In the sphere of film, the rapid expansion and acquisition of hardware responded to the appetite for knowledge of Indian films from across the border. In October 1958 when military general Ayub Khan had assumed power in a coup d'état, immediately the distribution of film was wielded as a political tool amid growing tensions with India. When the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 began, Ayub Khan cancelled the censor certificates of Indian films imported earlier into the country and banned future imports (Kabir 1969: 98). As with many of the embargos and protections from Indian film that proceeded and followed it, Ayub’s order differentiated between apparatus and content, such that while film content of Indian origin was banned, technology of
Indian manufacture continued to sustain the industry and the continued performance of film screenings (Hoek 2011: 80). It took another military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, to formally overturn the ban on the import of Indian films in the early 2000s. The ban continues to be sporadically imposed and relaxed following flare-ups of regional tension with India, particularly with regard to the disputed status of Kashmir.

Another motivation for the adoption of audio and cassette technology were the ways in which the act of recording became an agent of competitive prestige which allowed its users to demarcate pious localities, claim status, and improve the social standing of oneself or one’s immediate circle by navigating ritual and mundane temporalities. For its users, recording has the uncanny capacity to mediate moral atmospheres both good and bad. What was at stake in the adoption of such technologies was the communally produced ambience of public space and collective activity, what Sandria Freitag described in colonial Banaras as the increased role of expressions of communal identity in producing a wider public sphere marked by the production of moral authority (1992: 228). The quiet amplitude of recording remains in the continued use of the terms, “cassette house” and “video house” for religious media stores, indicating owners’ provenance and proximity to analogue mastercopies rather than advertising the digital formats on which content is now sold. These motivations are well expressed by the expansion of what Justin Jones calls, in the popular culture of Shi’i piety, the vernacularizing power of the marketplace (2011: 73). Such a popular, even populist, upsurge in public and processional religiosity ran in
parallel both to scholarly renewal among the *ulamā* and in response to the insularity of the formal sphere of religion (Ibid; 74). In relation to film, the marketplace facilitated what Ravi Vasudevan has called a “certain modernizing imperative that had a troubled relationship with the very porosity and indeterminacy of the popular” (2015: 28). When my interlocutors referred to “the market” they referred to a mixture of a brand of neoliberal populism and conservative religiosity that allows the engine of demand to decide the fate of things possessing unresolved ethical baggage, and as a synonym for a public who dictate consensus by (financial) exchange. I also use the idea of the marketplace to describe a space conducive to vernacular culture and pluralism, inspired by studies of the visual culture of the bazaar in South Asia (Pinney 2004, Frembgen 2006, Jain 2007, Elias 2009, Saeed 2012), but one suffused with the establishment and propagation of values through networks sensitive to the morality of exchange (Parry and Bloch 1989).

Being able to think through issues of access and environment challenged and mediated by marketplace processes in Pakistan owes a substantial debt to over two decades of scholarship on film and media in South Asia. Central to this was the research and publications emerging from the Sarai group, which began in 2000 focusing on the relationship between media, urbanity, and the public sphere in India, founded by Ravi Vasudevan, Ravi Sundaram, and contemporary art practitioners the Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta). The latter’s 2010 text “Seepage” can be seen as a manifesto for a new approach to the practice of, and engagement with, media,
driven by engagement with pirate infrastructures, practices, and market methods. The idea of “seepage” drew attention to the porosity and fragility of seemingly stable infrastructures. “They destabilize the structure, without making any claims. So the encroacher redefines the city, even as she needs the city to survive. The trespasser alters the border by crossing it, rendering it meaningless and yet making it present everywhere” (Raqs… 2010: 112). Such statements lay bare the residual influence of piracy as an object of study, particularly evident in the work of Sundaram and Lawrence Liang (2005: 15).

Building on the research conducted by the Sarai group, and as the dominant scholarly focus on television began to wane (Mankekar 1999, Abu-Lughod 2008), the BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies journal demarcated numerous primary topics of study that has inspired and informed the writing of this thesis. These include an issue on infrastructures and archives built on the networks and repertoires of peripheral forms of screen culture (2016), an issue on media dispositifs that called for further study on how film events have the tendency to begin and end in temporal scales long outside of the screening or duration of the film (2016: VIII), and a special issue of essays on Pakistani cinema, edited by Ali Nobil Ahmad and Ali Khan (2014). The latter crystallized and brought together research into a long-neglected field of study. Preceding and following it, the startling history of film-industry output in Pakistan has been explored in a number of ways, from diagnostic journalistic articles on the industry’s decline, star-studded industry audits (Gazdar 1997, Kabir 1969), to those tracing the connections between media, religion, and politics (Rajput 2005,
Imran 2016, Akhtar 2000), as a product of its Partition with India (Siddique 2015), its vernacular popular culture (Kirk 2016a), and recent attempts to situate Pakistani cinema in the complex tide of social change and visual culture (Ahmad 2014, Ahmad and Khan 2016, Dadi 2012). The journey that this thesis takes through fragmented time frames, sites, and modes of exhibition attempts to arrive at a general picture of some of the ingredients that constitute the moral atmospheres of media in Pakistan. In this context, I take up Iftikhar Dadi’s call for further study of the “complex relay between screen imagination, modernization, and political authoritarianism” (2010: 13) in the history of film experience in Pakistan and Kamran Asdar Ali’s (2013) observation of the connection between urban experience and the moving image in Pakistan.

Scholarship on South Asian film and media has been effective at showing that much of the affective power of this relationship between city and screen can be found in the extent to which the density of populations, trade, and mutual inspiration allowed for multiple repertoires to flourish. In a recent editorial, the editors of another Bioscope journal issue on “Archives and Histories” acknowledged this position of absence from which investigations into South Asian histories of film and media depart (2013). In the same issue Stephen Hughes’ engagement with a “living archive” of Tamil Cinema (2013) points scholarly research towards the collated subaltern archive of the private collector. Critically, the BioScope issue considered an expanded sense of the social space of the cinema, within and beyond the cinema theatre, forms of bottom-up augmentation and annotation through web-based platforms, and the possibilities
for ethnography to help scholars to explore, “the ramifications of the cinematic practice in the material world” (Vasudevan et al, 2013: 3). What follows in this thesis also draw parallels with Ashis Nandy’s, “slums-eye view” (1998) of film in India and its relationship with the dominant state. Nandy’s search for a workable system of subaltern agency, “an ethically sensitive and culturally rooted alternative social knowledge” (Nandy: 1983:xvii cf Pinney 1995: 7), saw his attention turn to popular cinema. Nandy used the motifs, memories, and repertoires of popular film to imagine what might be termed a non-governmentality, that operates independently of the residual effects of colonialism and its postcolonial continuities. Christopher Pinney sees Nandy’s work as much more than a celebration of mass culture, in ways that resonate with Carlo Ginzburg’s microhistories built of the archival traces of the most marginal and precarious (2013a, 2013b).

Structure of the Thesis

The first half of this thesis explores the contextual foundations, structures, and architectonics of media’s moral atmospheres in Pakistan, before exploring how these conflicts play out on Lahore’s Hall Road, the site from and through which many media forms circulate. By way of introducing some of the ways in which the role of media in the performance of Islamic selves has been discussed, Chapter One is driven by a question that many pious persons often put to sources of juridical authority; is cinema permissible? The answer is not always clear-cut.
Ongoing dissension and contestation over film’s place in Pakistan has helped to produce different regimes of permissibility. For many, aversion to, rather than enthusiasm for film suffuses everyday life. What does such cinephobic sentiment do in Pakistan? How are these standpoints formed historically and re-produced in the present through relationships with other forms of political distance and emotional intimacy? To disentangle the subject and object-hood of film I divide focus between two popular targets, the epistemology of film labour and the ontology of the film image.

The dynamics of media intimacy and separation is brought into focus during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram, in which the death of Imam Ḥussain is commemorated, and Pakistan transforms its media, social, and emotional landscape out of respect for its Shi’i minority. The largely voluntary practice widespread across Pakistan originates in the belief that celebrations, entertainment, singing, and dancing should be avoided during periods of mourning. During this time, traders on Hall Road temporarily add another moving image product to their usual stock; sermons, recitations, and procession recordings that help to produce a space conducive to public mourning. Driven by an interest in the kinds of moving-image media that are sold in replacement of film and music, this chapter explores the audio-visual repertoire documented and circulated by a number of small, long-established stores situated beside shrines and along Shi’i procession routes. I explore the coexistence of interdiction and reproduction in these stores. Interdiction being the spaces of exception in which intimacy is required to negotiate what is and is not permitted.
And reproduction, when religious media travels on the circulatory networks maintained by the ever-shrinking trade in informal film distribution.

Owing to the coexistence of hostility and enthusiasm for cinema-going, the state has maintained a certain distance from the materials and labour that undergird it. The result is a climate in which film in its exhibited, mediated, and remediated forms often exists under erasure. Chapter Three explores these censorial instances in which media re-produces the space of its moral permissibility by wearing the marks of its contestation. In this chapter I explore the Pakistani state’s ambivalence over incorporating film in service of the national project, particularly in view of the absence of state funded support for the industry, such as a national film school, academy, or archive. Curiously, by allowing it to circulate outside of authorised channels, film has been allowed far greater freedom of movement than other forms of knowledge, perhaps so that its contested and complicated regimes of permissibility were not tangled up with any governing regime. Instead, roles usually adopted by the state – both the preservation and censorship of film – are taken up by self-appointed guardians of both material culture and morality.

As the first half of this thesis argues, in pious, state-secular, and moral lifeworlds certain kinds of media hold an ambiguous place. As a crucial hub of urban political power Hall Road is an ecological space for the reproduction of technology and capital. Much of this power was built through dealing in the dissemination of mass-copied films, preserving them not by altering their surface quality but by bringing them into the marketplace for public consumption. By
cataloguing, retrieving, restoring, and ensuring continued access to domestically produced Pakistani films, workers on Hall Road forge non-archival contexts for access. In a brief interlude I trace some of the staging posts in the disposal, acquisition, and dissemination of media objects, and the labour involved in navigating an intermittent state and systems of interdiction. Borrowing structural elements from the photo-essay, the Interlude unfolds against the backdrop of a space transformed by the ways in which capacious media perpetually brings its latent contents to the surface as interface.

On Hall Road the mass reproduction of Pakistani films in copy grew in tandem with the appearance of “plazas” across the city. Plazas are cheaply constructed vertical bazaars formed of modular units housing numerous small businesses. Demand for plazas grew with the segmentation of electronic media and the trade in its constituent parts and hardware. Many in Lahore express palpable anxiety and animosity towards what are called the “plaza mafia”. Also known as “qabzā groups”, a term meaning occupation, possession, or encroachment, they are held responsible for unchecked plaza construction and are blamed for the destruction of Lahore’s built heritage. The circulation of certain kinds of media on Hall Road can be seen to mirror the logic of qabzā; that appropriation and the assertion of ownership responds to the felt absence of the state. Chapter Four documents how my interlocutors felt that the marketplace logic of Hall Road either aided them in navigating infrastructural precarity or contributed to the destruction of what they deemed to be Pakistan’s heritage. By looking at the experience of Hall Road’s urban form this chapter argues that the
circulation and reproduction of film, music, and performance on changing formats requires an understanding of the expanded ethical environment against which transfer, recording, and transmission takes place, in ways that are quite separate from traditional understandings of piracy and informality.

In 2008 Hall Road’s official traders’ union publicly burned 60,000 discs containing “pornographic” content following an anonymous bomb threat. Many worried the event would mark the beginning of the “Talibanization of Lahore”. Hall Road’s traders however saw this as an act of pragmatism rather than appeasement; they were cheap copies that were burned, not the valuable mastercopies from which duplicates are made. Ten years later, in the digital era the camera-print and the mastercopy continue to be key terms in the vernacular terminology of the residual trade in film copies, reflecting reputations traders have long-nurtured as mediators of a film’s genealogy. Chapter Five shows how Hall Road’s audio-visual media trade has never been based on legality or legitimacy but on quality and provenance, particularly proximity to the mastercopy. Through these practices traders on Hall Road describe what they do as an essentially participative, future-oriented activity, using watermarks and head and shoulders portraits as guarantees of image quality. I explore what role these incisions on the surfaces of media objects play in establishing professional reputations, particularly in a trade that relies on the integrity of flimsy discs and the navigation of the moral atmospheres of media.

On Hall Road, among Lahore’s Shi’i “cassette and video houses”, and publishers of Islamic material and visual culture in Lahore, the English borrow-
word and local system of demand guides and buttresses the recording, retrieval, and reproduction of media content. Among the former, demand explains the existence or absence of a rare film, while in the latter demand speaks of the devotion, respect, and disciplinary character of the customer. I conclude the thesis by considering both the maintenance of a media commons and the demand that pervades and dictates the retrieval and circulation of media in Pakistan. I ask, how is demand – for both secular and sacred media - gaged and expressed? How does demand constitute the felt presence of a public who appear to have come to a consensus? Changing spheres of permissibility – over perceived vulgarity in film and the politics of representation in religious images – rely on the idea that consensus comes from demand. While the projection of public piety can establish the position of individuals, in my doctoral fieldsite the making and breaking of moral atmospheres establish consensus through a social contract of communal piety. Moral atmospheres create communities of sentiment and an other against which to be defined. Through their making and breaking they constitute a sensory commons, one continually revised, reiterated and re-bounded.

Methodology: Working on the Surface

I grew up in an era when audio and cassette culture was at its height, the few years preceding the Internet when recording late-night or pirate radio shows onto blank tapes and sharing recordings of Channel-4 films was how one learned about alternative art forms. I was always eager to learn of comparative instances in
which informal circulation, pirate networks, and home recording helped its users navigate social exclusion and the gaps in formal infrastructure. When I first lived in Pakistan in 2013 I tried to learn about the country through its film scene and was struck by the absence of a national film archive. What I found in its absence was the pervasive presence of copies; blurry, deteriorated, and glitchy discs that circulated on Lahore’s Hall Road. Following this line of enquiry during fieldwork between 2017 and 2018, allowed me to consider not only the repertoire formed by the circulation of media, but the social and technical grounds of circulation.

In this thesis the ethnographic method is utilized to study the networks, catalysts, and chain reactions initiated on Hall Road, and the practices of image reproduction and distribution there. In a slight departure from much of the anthropology of contemporary Pakistan, which has, as a body of literature, tended to build rich ethnographic detail through the study of kinship networks, corporate groupings, and family units, this thesis builds its argument through individuals and their status as subjective moral agents. Methodologically I took inspiration from Naveeda Khan’s 2012 monograph *Muslim Becoming*, which similarly explores the struggles of individual agents and their attempts to shape, as well as reconcile themselves to the prevailing ethical environment. Ethnographically, this thesis takes an exploration of moral ambience to require a material approach sensitive to mediation and presence (Meyer 2012), in which acts of fabrication generate a point beyond intention and immediate use (ibid: 214-5). To explore the materiality of the repertoire of mediated moving images I build on scholarly interest in film as a techno-material object (Kittler 1999, 2010), the affective and
emotional conditions required to perform film (Bruno 2002, Vasudevan 2010, Mahadevan 2015, Pandian 2015), and the relationship between the sensuous experience of durational media and the social imaginaries and aspirational networks brokered by the content (Marks 2000, 2002, MacDougall 2005). Attempting to cleave space for an ethnographic model of viewership, Lakshmi Srinivas (1998) called for a phenomenological ethnography to explore the sensory activities of viewing and reception. In her recent monograph Sensational Movies: Video, Vision, and Christianity in Ghana (2015), Birgit Meyer argues that in the classic phenomenological study of film experience, Vivian Sobchack’s The Address of the Eye (1992) mediation was particularly under-theorized (Meyer 2015: 120), stemming from a wider problem with the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty that Sobchack drew upon. Sobchack’s program was to deal with the address of the film, its active and socially encoded intentions. A more nuanced and reflexive approach was taken by Laura U. Marks, who finds film characterised by the "contingent and contagious circumstances” (2000: xii), of spectatorial contact. In this way the surface of the image, as Pinney argues, can be considered as a site for refashioning (2003: 219). Also building from the work of Merleau-Ponty, Marks argues that perception expresses itself through the surfaces of sensory events, for which “the image is connective tissue” (2002: xi). In responding to these methodological frameworks, I aim to centralise the act of mediation in the circulation of media by paying close attention to the exorbitance and unruliness of its interfaces for access.
In *Optical Media* (2010), Friedrich Kittler tried to move the conversation beyond studying information – and the signal and noise of its reception - to storage and mediation. For Kittler and Pinney (2008) exorbitance necessarily follows capaciousness, becoming a kind of unconscious that breaks free from the index and the confines of fidelity to the recorded event. Storage vessels run counter to reciprocity and circulation yet are also the sites wherein object communities are made and suspended. Capacious media is simultaneously archival object and repository, access criteria and means of access. Rather than facilitating the flows of transaction they facilitate what Shryock and Smail have recently called “cisaction” (2018A: 1); stasis, aggregation, and order.

I argue that the role of atmosphere is closely entangled with storage and mediation. In 1969, composer Alvin Lucier devised his performance work, *I Am Sitting in a Room* through the re-recording of his voice reading into a voice recorder the lines, “I am sitting in a room, the same one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice.” Playback after playback of the short monologue was recorded, capturing Lucier’s voice, the ambient, architectonic sounds of the room, and the signal of its reproduction. With each recording of the last the frequencies and atmospheric sounds drowned out the human voice and began to document the magnification of the space of its re-inscription on a capacious media technology. Lucier showed how ambience could be engineered and refracted through reproduction. Throughout my fieldwork and the collection of data featured in this thesis, I grappled with the question of how to understand the atmospheric layering of an image that has been re-recorded into oblivion.
through reproduction, used through overexposure, and orphaned by one disinterested owner before being adopted by another. Animating this thesis is a question that I feel also lingered at the back of some of my interlocutors’ minds; how to catch hold of an image as it dies?

Unlike the Pashto-language industry the Punjabi-language film industry in Pakistan has struggled to switch to digital technologies since the closure of the last domestic celluloid processing lab at Lahore’s Evernew Studios in 2013 (Fig 5). The laboratory was responsible for the distinct aesthetic of Lollywood films. Always hampered by a lack of funding, the high rate of import duties on processing meant that chemicals required for developing one reel were stretched for eight, ten, often twenty reels, leading to overexposure, saturated colours, and an improperly fixed image. Expired film stock was bought from Iran for as little as a fifth of the price of new stock. When Paolo Usai said that the history of film is, “the art of destroying images” (Usai 2001: 7) he could very well have been describing the marketplace circulation of media in Pakistan. Once they reached the marketplace, the circuitous routes of films – across carriers, formats, and interfaces – began to sediment the traces of their received public on the surface of the image, even coming to obscure much of what lay beneath. The object of unavoidable attention becomes the gauze, the patina encrusted over the image, and the ever-accelerating threshold of deterioration. Maintaining the circulation of the precious or valuable object while managing the threshold of deterioration is one of many future-facing activities evident from my research on Hall Road, in which precarity in human and object forms is addressed. Surfaces, thresholds,
and atmospheres are central concepts in what follows, the constituent elements of which early-twentieth century philosophers such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer defined as a material culture in a state of evaporation. Kracauer’s notion of the “Mass Ornament” was driven by the idea that through surfaces, or surface-level expressions it is possible to grasp the logic to which the system aspires through the spasmodic “aesthetic reflex” (Kracauer 1995 [1927]: 79) manifested on the surface of objects. In the proliferation of mastercopies, the resultant patinated palimpsest, and the unstable origins registered on the surfaces of Pakistani film objects, the degraded image reveals the aspirations and anxieties of the intermittent state.

In this same spirit, Caitlin DeSilvey has examined decay in ways other than that which implies cultural loss. Residual material culture - what has been left remaining from the atrophying of the recent material past – takes the form of what DeSilvey calls a proliferation of "ambiguous matter" (2012: 309). Such repositories of waste require a particular kind of attention and empirical receptiveness to incorporate both revulsion and attraction. In many ways decay helps in thinking beyond the assumed stability of objects, specifically the moving image, which is a media form with a distinct finitude. Larkin, who so deftly explored how, “piracy creates an aesthetic, a set of formal qualities that generates a particular sensorial experience of media marked by poor transmission, interference, and noise” (Larkin 2008, 290-291), was less interested in the morality of informal infrastructures than their aesthetics. But the aesthetic form an artwork takes is not always the most satisfactory way of defining an object, as
it neglects the actions and agency that propel the object to act on persons and for persons to act upon the object. As Alfred Gell argued, in contrast to the spatial-temporal spread of persons, an object can be distributed by prior design, comprised of constituent parts with their own networks and life histories, or as part of an art tradition that speaks to other objects across platforms. Distributed object-hood can also be a biographical dispersal of projected selfhood across time and space. For Gell, distribution was not just the spread of artifacts or individuals but the notion that “images of something (a prototype) are parts of that thing (as a distributed object)” (1998: 223). On Hall Road, I found that the act of retrieval becomes a valuable and beneficial skill, capable of accruing respect and honour on their agents. This work is done on the surface of the image, at the brim of the container, and at interfaces of access. Sanjay Srivastava has theorised such thresholds as reactive to the unstable nature of boundaries as a site for self-making (2007: 209-219). Inspired by Pinney’s work on the image surfaces of Indian visual culture and the inscription of inner selves onto their exterior (Pinney 1997), Srivastrava argues that focusing on the superficiality of acts, objects, and their moral interpretation is to engage with objects in free-fall and in processes of change. While never intending to pursue an anthropology of superficiality, I found the patinated surfaces of objects and the lives inscribed upon them the richest subjects of discussion with my interlocutors.

Through regular visits and informal interviews, I built on market-based and observational ethnographies (Geertz 1978) that focus on urban bazaars as spaces distinctly hospitable to vernacular visual culture. I gathered material data
that helped me to understand the visual economy of distribution; the watermarks, jacket-sleeves, and imprints that register and re-assert ownership over the contents of media repertoires. Short periods of research were spent in the United Arab Emirates with established Pakistani diasporic communities, in which Pashto-language Pakistani film, music, and performance spreads widely on media containers and builds on established infrastructures for their spread. Areas like Sharjah and Dubai have become firmly integrated in Pakistani lifeworlds, just as the Gulf has also long been a staging post in pirate and informal histories of South Asian film, a repository and a dispersed repertoire of which has been both a friend and a resource for expatriates in the Gulf.

I initially approached this subject by exploring informal modes of copying and distribution and their place in making Pakistani film accessible in the absence of a national film archive. While the focus soon shifted, the original line of enquiry remained a consistent conversation-starter with my interlocutors, new and old. By asking how, in the absence of a national film archive, informal processes of copying and reproduction have ensured continued access to media artefacts and experiences, talk would soon move onto the terminologies, contexts, and biases implied by the question. Such as, why should museological initiatives be prioritised over infrastructural provision; what is the situation in India; does film or media have heritage value; whose responsibility is it to look after Pakistani culture? Another methodological icebreaker was to ask for a film, a song, or a recitation I knew was particularly hard to find or totally absent of the Hall Road repertoire. This immediately allowed unstructured interviews to flow
around the reasons over why it might be unavailable, methods for possible retrieval, and so on.

The turning point in the thesis came after about four months of fieldwork. While looking for a site associated with the inaugural Lahore Biennale, a festival of contemporary art, I crossed paths with a trader in Shi’a devotional objects and media, whose recording of ritual processions taking place on his street made a sharp differentiation between the ethical qualities of media recorded live and studio recordings. I was told that live recordings, their rough grain, shaky sound, blurry vision, and proximate and participatory bodies, have the added quality of māḥaul. Up until that point I had strived to understand my own fascination with the palimpsestic surfaces and visual noise of mass-copied Pakistani films. Through the comparative study of Shi’a media traders and producers I came to learn that it was simply the contingent and unruly presence of locality and proximity to the moral selves of the mediators of such material that added that unique spark. For those on Hall Road and the Shi’i neighbourhood recording companies engaged with in Chapter Two, māḥaul, the moral atmosphere of locality, serves to shape the conditions of knowledge transmission, patronage, and power. In the end, I think it was my desire to understand my own attraction to māḥaul that endeared me to certain individuals, who saw my attempts at navigating moral ambience as a journey of faith.
Due to the rarity of older Pakistani films small, market-based shops like this one, sitting beside a small coal store in the Walled City of Lahore, have long kept personal collections of VHS or DVD copies of films for later retrieval and copying should a customer or another trader request them. In some cases, these stockpiles account for one of the last available instantiations of a film, owing to the fact that most directors and producers did not save copies of their works. The reserves these shops hold work like the coal supplier; money in the bank, a future surplus to wheel out when demand requires, as well as fuel for the kinetic energy of a circulatory system that sustains their continued existence (January 2018).
Fig 3. A postcard featuring popular Lollywood billboard or hoarding art.
Fig 4. The 100PKR note entrusted to Tahir Jafri. When it was legal tender in the 1950s, the note would have been worth a significant amount. To some of my interlocutors the safekeeping of Pakistani films is comparable to collecting or keeping paper Pakistani currency once they fall out of circulation (April 2018).
Fig 5. Discarded celluloid film strips in Evernew Studios, Lahore’s last functioning film studio. This strip of negative film was part of a enormous pile of debris left over from after the studio’s celluloid processing laboratory, the last of its kind in the country, closed in 2013. With it ended the distinct surface aesthetic of domestic Lollywood film production (February 2018).
Fig. 6. The Khurshid Cinema, one of the last functioning Pashto-language cinemas in Pakistan, began life before Partition as the Lakshmi Cinema. In January 1991, a timebomb was left in the stalls of the cinema, killing seven. The attack coincided with protests over the advent of the first Gulf War (April 2018).
I set out looking for parched lips and listening for rumbling stomachs. These were the indices of Ramazan, I thought, the physical and phenomenological connection in time and place to private piety and communal modesty. Upon reflection, I acted more like a volunteer agent for the moral police, eagerly noting a trader half-hidden in the shade of his cooking pot, dealing transgressive plates of food in a dark alley, or a driver ducking into her glove compartment for a sip of water. Nostalgic Lahoris from all backgrounds had told me that Ramazan had been reduced to these signs alone. Once, self-restraint was considered the most important thing to exercise during the holy month. The sight of others eating or drinking was supposed to strengthen one’s fast. It is common now to read of those eating or drinking publicly, including the elderly or those belonging to non-Muslim minorities, being thrashed or beaten. Though not the first to wield the atmosphere of Ramazan for political purposes, during my fieldwork the then-incumbent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government of Pakistan made violating the conditions and periods of abstinence during Ramazan a punishable offence. As part of the Ehtram-e-Ramazan Amendment Bill 2017 (Respect for Ramazan) the government had also decreed that cinemas should not
open during fasting hours of the holy month, a bill refined by the Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Division of the government\textsuperscript{13}. The highest tier of fines to be imposed – between 25,000PKR and 500,000PKR depending on the violation – were levelled at cinemas and TV channels that played films that trespassed upon what Samuli Schielke described as Ramazan as a period of "moral exception" (Schielke 2009: S32) to the ambivalence with which many may outwardly practice their faith throughout the year.

By trying to establish its own moral atmosphere through the regulation of film experience, the state attempted, through the Ehtram-e-Ramazan Bill, to generate political influence in a crucial election year by countering what is seen as an imbalanced observance of the fast (Armbrust 2005) and by fostering a pious ambience through the closure of cinemas. But even with the enforcement of state regulation, ambiguity appeared to saturate even this period of moral exception. As I took a walk from Hall Road through the dust-clogged construction site of the new Orange Line Metro Line that had lain waste to Lakshmi Chowk and its famous cluster of cinemas, the whole city felt like a Sunday. Along Abbott Road, where the majority of the city’s single-screen analogue and re-fitted digital cinemas remain, the lascivious and colourful plastic banners advertising film screenings were still flying. One cinema advertised a one-off showing of \textit{Kurian}

\textsuperscript{13} The preceding bill that was in force from 2014 to 2016 prohibited the screening of movies during \textit{iftar}, the sunset meal when the fast in broken and \textit{taraveeh}, the period of prayer and contemplation that follows. The 2017 Bill, however, stated that cinemas must not show films during the fasting times as well as \textit{iftar} and \textit{taraveeh}, leaving a narrow gap from around midnight until sunset for them to legally open.
Shehrian (Girls of the City), an old celluloid film that still circulated among the analogue cinemas in the absence of anything else to screen. Owing to the observance of their staff and their prominent place on public thoroughfares, however, the cinemas remained closed.

Perhaps because the māḥaul of film labour and experience is so bound up in a social contract of intimacy and emotional modesty structured by obligations and affordances to others, that it is so often used as a provocative object lesson for what Pakistan should and should not be and how its citizens should and should not act. This chapter explores some of the ways that the moral atmosphere of film – as a formative element of Lahore’s media environment - has been defined and negotiated, from questions over permissibility put to sources of religious orthodoxy to cases taken to legal courts over the compatibility of cinema exhibition with the public culture of Pakistani Islam. In these ways the latent potential of film – and its sheer public-ness – shows some of the ways in which the thresholds between permissible and impermissible are formed historically and re-produced in the present through relationships with other forms of political distance and emotional intimacy. The question of film’s permissibility - as an object of ethical practice - and the question of film’s morality - as an object of social practice - pervade everyday choices and values. The extent of which makes such multifaceted debates too unruly to situate within the project of self-cultivation associated with the “discursive tradition” of Talal Asad (1993, 2009), Saba Mahmood (2009, 2011), and Charles Hirschkind (2006). The moral atmosphere of film; defining it, engaging with it, changing it, and escaping it, is
essentially a project that works with and for others, with demands for ethical audition and pious self-discipline often abandoned in favour of ambivalence or ambiguity.

This chapter introduces Pakistani popular media in terms of its ability to wield, forge, and break moral atmospheres. Due to the prevalence of possible points of entry into the changing media repertoires that emerge from Hall Road, and in need of a bounded area of enquiry, I decided to begin by exploring Pakistani film. I see film in Pakistan as both the end product of, and point of reference for many types of repertoire and assemblage; of imitated dance sequence borrowed from popular “item numbers”, of the melodies of film songs repurposed into devotional contexts, of the pervasive unease over the public place of associated forms of musical and bodily performance. Scholarship on film and media in South Asia has been particularly adept at showing how the emergence of cinematic space in the Indian subcontinent occurred in tandem with controversies stimulated by the nature of its proper subject. Such scholarship has also shown the convergence of film as a circulating, unfinished object. It is well established that the convergent forces of film experience are found in a much wider sphere than the immediate event of its exhibition (Bhaumik 2011). Stephen Hughes, for example, argues that Tamil cinema took the form of a confluence with other forms of address, such as with popular music and sound technology, to forge an event that was both reproducible and itself an assemblages of sights, sounds, sensations, and their mediation and remediation (Hughes 2007: 4). In its earliest days, the emergence of cinematic space in India was a product of both
the racial anxieties of the Empire and the emergence of Indian middle-class anxieties that stratified film experience amidst the emergence of an urban poor (Dass 2016). In its uncertain, unbounded, unfixed, and unfinished ontology, the very appearance of film culture and experience was dependent on and conducive to repertoires that might challenge social order. This was despite the attempts of colonial-era reports such as the Indian Cinematograph Committee (hereafter ICC) of 1927-1928, to order and regulate the emergent film industry. Sudhir Mahadevan, echoing Christopher Pinney’s *The Coming of Photography in India* (2008), provides a model for historicizing this changing material and moral assemblage. Because the associated technology of the cinematic apparatus does not have a linear lifecycle and the intellectual and ambient infrastructures of film culture permeate everyday life, Mahadevan contends that film culture in India is the product of the, “coexistence of artisanal and commercial versions of the cinema” (Mahadevan 2015: 5).

The moral atmospheres that cling to film is not an example of a rigid and unchanging moral fact, antipathy to film is not the default Muslim position in Pakistan or elsewhere, nor are the atmospheres my interlocutors described the thoughts of a self-expressed collective. Rather, film in Pakistan flows and ebbs with the radically individual and contingent opinions of those who believe they operate within the bounds of consensus. What these opinions share is an awareness that the moral thresholds that film transgresses require the policing of such ontological disturbance. Lotte Hoek’s work on cinematic obscenity in Bangladesh shows how these emotional discourses can be taken to the field in
fruitful ways. Hoek takes sentiments excited or angered by film culture to map a complex terrain of moral permissibility. What Hoek describes in the need for film actors to position themselves within the labour force of the industry as the negotiation of, "regimes of visibility” (2013: 92), might be adapted to describe dissension and contestation over film’s place in Pakistan as the production of different regimes of permissibility.

In her work on religious programming on Pakistani television, Taha Kazi engages with how ongoing negotiations over permissibility focus on the present through an orientation towards the future. Religious panel talk shows that represent the diversity of Islamic thought in Pakistan offer viewers guidance on modes of correct comportment. These formats and modes of production encourage viewers to question traditional sources of authority and bring religion into the sphere of competitive politics (Kazi 2016: 478). By providing a platform for debate on crucial matters of everyday life, as well as the mediation of these opinions by producers and television workers, they allow for multi-sited forums for what I call everyday exegeses. I follow Kazi in studying the forums for dissension and debate over matters of faith and practice in Pakistan (2018), in this instance with regard to film labour and experience. Such regimes of permissibility are sought as much to register ambivalence as they are for guidance over matters of piety and comportment. Film in Pakistan embraces this ambiguity and runs with it, becoming a shape-shifter, a moral trickster. At the heart of this moral morphology are perceived obligations to the other, and the expectations of
those obligations being reciprocated, that forms oscillating social contracts of emotional modesty.

Cinephobia and Public Morality in Pakistan

While much recent scholarly interest in the cinema in Pakistan engages with the question of how it might be possible to conceive of a Pakistani (national) cinema in terms of production and representation, I would like to slightly tilt the axis of enquiry to ask what film actually is in Pakistan, to probe its ontology, and ask where its moral body has been situated and negotiated. Perhaps the questions which drive the ambiguity and ambivalence over film labour and experience are better phrased as, what is film for Pakistan? With the frequency with which attitudes antagonistic to film are wielded, can the moral atmospheres of its contestation be material agents of influence and change? To address these questions requires considering film rather broadly as the aesthetic and political labour evident from attempts to utilize, manage, and reproduce the event of film contact. I take Brian Larkin’s work as the foundation upon which to explore the conflation of the event of film exhibition, film as an object of ethical inquiry, and its relationship with Muslim audiences. I refer to film infrastructures as a conceptual object and mode of address (Larkin 2008: 245), the aesthetics of which work by rearranging hierarchies of function so that the phenomenological dimension rather than the technical dimension of infrastructure remains dominant. The māḥaul or moral atmosphere of film is, in part, a question of
visibility and cohabitation. Moral anxieties evident from early twentieth century reports and studies into film experience show the moral body of film located in communal living rather than individual conscience, such as the 1917 investigation into film in Britain by the National Council of Public Morals or the 1927-1928 ICC\textsuperscript{14}.

By the end of the twentieth century, anthropologists saw film’s latent power as a proscenium arch through which ethnographic examples of spectatorship, ideology, and order could be viewed; its capacious halls sites for the rehearsal of societal transformation. Anand Pandian’s work on Tamil film studies the extent to which film expands beyond the screen, suffuses public life and gives a frame for social imaginings (2015) at the same time as refining its own historic ontology (2011) as one defined by experiential contact with the real (Bazin 1960). South Asian film studies has so far been adept at showing how cinema halls can be venues for the creation of a participatory public sphere (Srinivas 2016) and elucidating the materiality and censorial regimes of film exhibition (Hoek 2013, Mazzarella 2013). Taking a slight departure, I suggest a sideways look at the inverse of cinephilia\textsuperscript{15} by studying how, for many, aversion

\textsuperscript{14}The exhaustive investigations undertaken by the ICC in 1927-28 produced four fascinating volumes, including written and oral interviews from 353 “witnesses”: film producers, exhibitors, distributors, actors, film censors, newspaper editors, and educationists working in India. In the form of the ICC, India became the site of one of the first state-sponsored expeditions into the status of film labour and production within its polity (Shoesmith 1988, Jaikumar 2003, Mazzarella 2009). The ICC was established by the British Indian government to assess film censorship, audience demographics, the advancement of an Indian film industry, and to explore the possibility of creating regulatory preferences for “Empire films” in India (Chowdhry 2000, Grieveson and MacCabe 2011).

\textsuperscript{15}The term emerged in tandem with the European modernist “new wave” traditions of filmmaking in the post-WW2 era, particularly around the cineaste (a combined cinophile and filmmaker) social circles centred around the founder of the Cinematheque Francaise, Henri Langlois. Attempts to address and cultivate such tastes under the auspices of an Islamic frame
to film suffuses everyday life and provides both a platform for sub-alternity and an imagined vulgar, obscene, and secular other against which to form reactionary and populist religious outrage.

After Ali Nobil Ahmad (2014, 2016) I explore ambivalence and animosity towards film performance and the social space of the cinema in the philosophical and religious underpinning of Pakistani public culture. The place of film infrastructure and experience in the contested pasts, presents, and futures of Pakistan as a political and religious idea shows that the Durkheimian “collective effervescence” often used to describe film enthusiasm (Mazzarella 2013, 2017) is hard to reconcile with what is frequently described as the bad māḥaul of film culture. While back in 1928 the ICC report noted that particularly in North India there are “objections to the moving picture” on religious grounds (ICC 1: 20), the entire basis of the investigation itself rested on the moral and ideological anxieties of the colonial regime that film had the power to destabilize. Scholarly reflection on cinephobia is almost as old as the discipline of film studies itself. Jean Giraud’s Lexique français du cinema cites the frequent use of terms like cinephobe or cinéphobie in cinematographic trade journals, growing between 1908 and 1912 (cf. Cassetti 2018) and Ricciotto Canudo mentioned it in a growing glossary of terms to categorise the assets of film phenomenology and affect in his seminal essay “The Birth of a Sixth Art” (1980 [1923]). The social

can be traced to an article titled “Islamic Images and the Cinema” in Middle East Forum in 1963 which argued that “Moslem cinephilia” need not be a challenging concept, for Islamic art expresses change as its foremost drive, cohering with the ability of film to observe the “extreme mobility of beings and things” (1963: 5).
commentators who theorized this negative labor of film experience became its first theorists (Ionita 2013: 21), driven by a distaste for visual excess.

While this scholarly trajectory adds a dark patina to the European “golden age” of early cinema, cinephobia in South Asia possesses its own history. Ravi Vasudevan’s work on Indian film publics in the three decades preceding Partition (1995) reveals fears that the demarcation of social boundaries was seen to be threatened by an incorporeal force, materialized by an audience, that together produced a third space of becoming. He argues, “cinephobia sprang from fears that the accelerated circulation of images and ideas through the technologies of the modern public sphere might result in animosity between groups and cause civil strife.” (Vasudevan 2000: 15). While M.S.S. Pandian (1996: 952) noted a late flowering of cinephobia among Tamil political and literary elites in the 1940s, S.V. Srinivas (1999) argued that by the 1930s these largely bourgeois anxieties about the intermingling of classes had been aggerated to popular opinion.

I first lived in Pakistan in early 2013, a few months after countrywide riots on September 21, 2012 saw dozens of inner-city cinemas destroyed. The “Day of Love for the Prophet” saw incensed crowds demonstrate over The Innocence of Muslims (2012) a crude and amateur – and, to some, blasphemous - video uploaded to YouTube in the United States. Amid the uproar over the Innocence of Muslims, Javed Ghamidi, reformist scholar and critic of Pakistan’s
blasphemy laws\textsuperscript{16}, appeared on television to urge calm, encouraging responding to the film with \textit{tableegh} [proselytization] rather than violence. Yet it did little to assuage public anger. After the attacks, a poster hung over the gutted remains of one cinema hall in Karachi featured before-and-after pictures of the charred remains inside and captioned in English and Urdu, “Who is going to take the responsibility for this catastrophe?” Despite the prevalence of disapproval over the morality and permissibility of film, there was widespread confusion over why cinemas themselves were targeted and held responsible. This is despite there being recent precedent, namely attacks on CD and video shops by Lal Masjid students in 2007 and the destruction of cassette stores by supporters of the Muttahida Majlis–e–Amal (MMA) administration in Peshawar in the early 2000s. The MMA coalition had then recently banned musical performance in the province, leading to a period of vigilante activity in which a number of musicians and dance performers were attacked and killed. More recently militant factions have also chosen cinema houses as soft targets. In February 2014 grenade and bomb attacks on the Shama and Picture House cinemas in Peshawar killed dozens. The press cited both theatres as exhibitors of pornography, a label often given to low-budget Punjabi or Pashto-language films screened in inner-city cinemas frequented primarily by male laborers.

\textsuperscript{16} Anti-blasphemy demonstrations in South Asia have their roots in colonial structures which allowed the state to play arbiter in religious disagreements (AA Ahmed 2009: 173), the outcome of which often drove the emergence of popular and public displays of defence for the Prophet Muhammad.
If the figure of the burning cinema is a potent symbol of sporadic public outrage in Pakistan, what anxieties over the efficacy and ontology of the built space of the cinema turn them into apposite targets for mob violence? Attacks on cinemas are equally common across the border, in India, where outrage and agitation are rarely seen to be solely about religion but also an arm of political will; street-power wielded for more diffuse aims. In India attacks usually centre on cinemas screening a particular film deemed transgressive in some way. In Pakistan, however, the *Innocence of Muslims* was not being screened anywhere; its offense radiated from its interface of access\textsuperscript{17} to the cinema hall. In other instances, cinemas are destroyed only for what they are; they are not necessarily attacks “about” film but rather protests made possible by film (Mazzarella 2013: 137). It must be said that Lahore has maintained a tentative distance from such anti-cinema violence. Ali Haider, manager of the Odeon Cinema in Lahore, told me how, as mobs approached the cinemas of Abbott Road in 2012 (Fig 7),

“…people came and threw things at the cinema. They even threw petrol-filled bottles. We decided we had to make them understand and told them that this is their property, the property of Pakistan, and begged them not to do this. You could say those people were uneducated, some didn’t even know why they were doing it, and those who knew why they were doing it didn’t know this was property for public use.”

\textsuperscript{17} In this case, the platform for access was the video-sharing site YouTube which, as a response, was banned by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority due to the platform refusing to comply with demands to remove the video. The ban was not lifted until 2016, when YouTube developed a local version that made it easier to for domestic authorities to remove content.
Without pausing, he went on to implicate the government for causing deeper and more sustained damage to the industry, “But if you are talking about the prints of the films and their negatives, in our film industry people have just earned money and never invested any back in. If you look for Pakistan’s biggest film, there is nothing of it remaining, neither [film] negative nor sound…” In the threat of mob destruction to his cinema, Haider Ali’s act of negotiation with the mob appealed to sentiments warm to nationalism and public leisure, while drawing attention to the wider problems facing the film trade; greed and the absence of the state. Chiming with Ali Haider’s line of thought, Ali Nobil Ahmad argues that the spectacular iconoclasm of these attacks paled in comparison to the more sustained, incremental damage to film-going that has occurred over the last few decades (2016A).

While these sporadic examples of anti-cinema iconoclasm reflect a limited mindset in Pakistan, it is instructive to look at the affective and individual responses to material and materializing images that inspire philosophical exegeses in some and direct action in others. In the three primary monotheistic faiths – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – that base strictures against idolatry on the actions of Abraham and the prohibitions of Moses, idolatry is defined by the relationship with the thing – the idol - , not by the shape or form of the thing itself. As such, idols come to form materialisations of fluid definitions for which a particular “intimacy” (Khan 2012: 372) is required to be aware of which are unfit for use, because often, “iconoclasts no less that iconophiles engage with the power (if not the animateness) of the image” (Flood 2002: 654). Iconoclasm in
this regard can be seen as a kind of aesthetic sensibility, a kind of ‘taste’, but also as a form of anxiety over the protean power of images to catalyse and acquire potency\textsuperscript{18}. Hamid Naficy notes that many anti-cinema tendencies prevalent in Iran preceding and following the 1979 revolution can be seen as ideologically functioning within Louis Althusser’s “hypodermic theory” (Naficy 2012: 5), the idea that cinema changes people morally, ethically, and ideologically.

In April 2016 the Supreme Court of Pakistan sought a comprehensive report from the Sindh government and Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) following the repurposing of a latent Islamic cultural Centre, the Al-Markaz e Islami, into a CinePax cinema hall (Nasir 2016). An article in the \textit{Jhang} newspaper that prompted court proceedings on September 3, 2015 described how the building was constructed for the purposes of accommodating a combined Islamic academy, cultural space, and research center. Completed around 2001, the auditorium was one of the largest in Karachi, being able to seat around 750 persons, but lay empty for many years when public funds dried up before the building could be put to its intended use. When the mayor of Karachi who initiated the project left office the building was let out for concerts, dance shows and stage dramas. In 2015 an Expression of Interest tender was released under the Public Private Partnership Act\textsuperscript{19} and seized upon by the CinePax Company. Perhaps this infrastructural tender of the long-postponed Islamic cultural centre

\textsuperscript{18} Musa Ibrahim has shown how film, in the emergence of a popular Kannywood film industry in Northern Nigeria with its moderate, Sufi-inflected themes, can counter the influence of Islamists (Ibrahim 2017)

\textsuperscript{19} The 2014 act passed in the Punjab province served to expand the scope of private provision of infrastructural development.
angered the leadership of the Jamaat-e-Islami (hereafter JeI) as much as the screening of Indian films. These screenings prompted them to compare, through the juxtaposition of edits in an accompanying video, the inhabitation of the Al-Markaz e Islami by the CinePax company to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, in December 1992\(^{20}\) (Fig 8). Following the *Jhang* article an application was filed by the Karachi *amir* [leader] of the JeI requesting details under which law an Islamic centre owned by the City Government of Karachi had been permitted to be converted into a cinema, an action the JeI claimed was un-Islamic and contrary to the ideology of Pakistan. In early deputations the chief justice expressed anger over the Sindh government’s inaction over the use of a cinema on land reserved for an Islamic centre, particularly noting the covering of the *shahada* – the calligraphic expression of Muslim faith – with a billboard hung on the façade of the building. While the defendants claimed that no mosque or religious structure existed on the property, nor was it declared as a *waqf* [religious or charitable endowment] nor an Amenity Plot as defined by the Karachi Building and Town Planning Regulations (2002), it was the architectonic and calligraphic features – domes and Quranic text – that made cohabitation with performance activities impermissible. While an Islamic “cultural centre” might

\(^{20}\) In 1992 Hindu nationalist groups destroyed a sixteenth-century Mughal-era mosque in Ayodhya in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. In Pakistan, the Babri Masjid event, as it became known only after destruction, is often drawn upon when anti-Indian sentiments are voiced. The image of Hindu nationalists gathered en masse on the dome of the mosque has become as efficacious an icon of the perceived aggressor as any other photographic image to date.
become a cinema by means of private tenancy laws, it was inconceivable for my interlocutors to imagine a cinema becoming a mosque.\(^2\)

Iconoclastic violence such as an arson attack or a bomb blast is just one of the anxieties present in cinema-going in Pakistan, with others including harassment, concerns over genders intermingling, and moral corruption. Another is the anomalous place of cinema halls, situated as they are on thoroughfares, as monuments to a once-religiously plural public sphere. Cinemas are key landmarks in South Asian cities (Fig 6.). Across Pakistan you will find streets named “Cinema Road”, just as you will find Jail Road and Canal Road. Even after such buildings stop operating as cinemas they remain palpably former-cinemas-wedding halls, car parks, apartment buildings-in a way that gated multiplexes do not. With many cinemas dating from before Partition and assigned as Evacuee Property after the departure of their Hindu owners, cinemas halls share similar status with the gurdwaras left behind by Sikhs, temples left behind by Hindus, and churches left behind by the British. Cinemas in Pakistan have an aura of being a temple to something possible; to duration yet to elapse, a residual container technology for ambiguous morality (Armbrust 1998) or as a reminder of an earlier ordering of urban space (Larkin, 2002). When a video like *Innocence of Muslims* is said to insult the Prophet – after hearing about which few would then have gone and watched it lest they see the Prophet depicted – the cinema as a capacious, urban temple becomes filled with a hypothetical image of offense.

\(^2\) Pentecostalism in Nigeria is more fluid in its appropriation of public spaces, capitalising not only on representational media, but also the spaces of its consumption, by turning cinemas into Pentecostal churches (Adeboye 2012).
and outrage. That they are on the thoroughfares, built to be attended, and property “for public use”, means that they are readily filled by whatever offenses are deemed possible, simply because they “nazar ata hai” [come into view], as the Urdu would have it. That Lahore is filled with former cinemas repurposed for other means (Fig 9); as car parking lots, drama theatres, “godowns” [storehouses], and housing is the result of cinephobia in religious and civic forms and the attempted navigation of ellipses, intermittence, deterioration and decay in institutions and infrastructures. The result is a material circuit that itself constitutes a visual economy of decay and a malleable moral atmosphere that takes centre stage in the negotiation of consensus and dissensus.

The Māḥaul of Film Labour

Some months before Ramazan, the city had been in a similarly untimely mood of a Sunday, its lack of traffic making the streets more conducive to traversing on foot. Large protests over purported changes to the declaration of Khatm-e-Nabuwat (the finality of the prophethood) in oaths of office had seen Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) supporters (the phrase used in Pakistan, “workers”, often seems more apposite) block central junctions and traffic arteries, attacking vehicles, and destroying property. At a busy traffic junction, a sign, written hastily on cardboard, informed passers-by that: “film actress pictures are haram”. Next to it another sign, half bent over on the pole to which it was affixed, read, “From film pictures to the fire of hell” (Fig 10). On one side of the road, a short
distance away lies the former Plaza Cinema, and on the other, billboards featuring film actors advertising the newest Chinese-made smartphone cover the facades of Hall Road’s colonial-era buildings. Yet neither the Plaza nor Hall Road – whose association with the film trade was on the wane in favour of smartphone paraphernalia – seemed efficacious enough to attract such resentment. Even passers-by were scarce; the sign having been erected at one of the busiest traffic lights in the city, so haphazardly policed that few pedestrians were able to stop and decipher the scrawl. In a city so difficult to traverse on foot, who was this sign for, demanding as it did such an intimate address? It is likely that the sign was placed during the recent dharna held by the TLP, the Sunni Barelvi street movement that had attracted a large portion of the Hall Road vote in recent byelections22. Despite the diminishing presence of film as a popular form of public leisure in Pakistan, its latent potential – and its sheer public-ness – continues to be a source of outrage for groups whose political clout hinges on their ability to wield “street-power”. That the authors of this makeshift public service announcement wrote “From Film pictures to the fire of hell” indicates the possibility of a journey towards damnation that still and moving images initiate.

To disentangle the subject- and objecthood of film targeted by the two placards on Regal Chowk I divide focus in the second half of this chapter between the

---

22 Usually referring in Hindi and Urdu to a non-violent sit-in, often in demand for justice, such dharnas destabilised Punjab and the Islamabad Capital Territory on two occasions during the period of my fieldwork. The tactic has gained increased notoriety in Pakistan following Imran Khan’s famous dharna in Islamabad, the “Azadi March” of August to December 2014.
epistemology of film labour – the film actresses referred to - and the ontology of the film image - “film pictures”.

The “binary logics” (Larkin 2015: 65) of religious narratives in Pakistan, particularly those that operate through processes of normative inversion that define proper comportment through the image of its opposite, frequently take aim at performance entertainment. In early Islamic philosophy the moral atmosphere of performance practice was expressed as a more nuanced threshold to be demarcated and known. In twelfth-century Persian philosopher Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali’s Book of the *Ihya’Ulum Ad-Din* (translated by Duncan MacDonald in 1901 under the heading “Emotional Religion in Islam as Affected by Music and Singing”), the author advocated sensitivity towards motives, arguing that one must first define the object of the emotion entangled in the act of listening or performance before defining the permissibility of the intimate relationship with that object. Pathways to impermissibility – with the pious halting before crossing the threshold - must be well-trodden to gain an intimate understanding of the precipice so as to identify the guises through which it might be unintentionally crossed. For Al-Ghazali, phenomenological and durational practices such as music and singing were permissible in their absolute, in their ontology, and only impermissible, "on account of an accident external to their true entity" (1901: 242). The result are thresholds of interdiction in which socially produced habits governing comportment are made to remind one of their responsibilities to the other.
When wielded from above, regimes of permissibility wrought to preserve and protect the emotional modesty of the other often enforce majoritarian, even populist, morality. During my time in Lahore my wife and I were fortunate enough to forge a friendship with Shamaila Begum and her children. Shamaila, whose family village and cattle are situated near Kasur some fifty kilometers from Lahore, believed there to be greater prospects for her two sons and six daughters living in Lahore. They moved to a majority Christian area in Bara Pind, a village adjacent to one of the partially-gated, elite housing communities in the south of Lahore where she took work as a cleaner at the homes and businesses of wealthy residents. Noticing our curiosity with her urban village, Shamaila invited my wife and I to a performance at her church for the *taj poshi* [garlanding or crowning] of the Virgin Mary, in which her teenage daughter was scheduled to perform. When Shamaila arrived to pick us up to supervise our dash across the dual-carriageway that separated our apartment from Bara Pind, she was downcast, spitting invectives at the federal government. Responding to outrage over the rape and murder of an infant girl in Kasur – and to assuage widespread calls for the public hanging of the accused - the Punjab Government had banned dance performances in all private and government schools. Her daughter’s long rehearsals and new dress would come to nothing; any sections of dance in the performance were swiftly cancelled.

Following a spate of rapes and murders of children in the town of Kasur, the popularity for reproducing “item numbers”, the extended song and dance
routines in Indian and Pakistani films, was brought under scrutiny\textsuperscript{23}. While these discussions circulated widely on social media in Pakistan and the diaspora, the Punjab Government appealed to populist sentiment and diverted blame to the imagined actions of future victims\textsuperscript{24}. The resolution was followed shortly after by another banning “DJ nights” and “dance parties” at educational institutions to shield the young from “immorality”. Few were surprised by the decision. Female dancers, singers, and performers popular on the “stage drama” circuit are often cited as figures of immorality, and the frequency with which they face violence is met with little protest. During my fieldwork at least two female performers were killed by admirers or covetous spectators.

The career trajectories of actors, dancers, and singers associated with the film industry in Pakistan offer insights into the feelings associated with such trades\textsuperscript{25}. Both female stage and film actors, often undertake \textit{tauba}, an act of repentance to Allah that serves to renounce their former life in the business (Fig 11). Famously, film actor, dancer, and stage performer Nargis undertook \textit{tauba} under the supervision of celebrity Islamic scholar Maulana Tariq Jameel, who

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{23}] Silpa Mukherjee understands the item number as an assemblage of sensations and spectatorial expectations, of which dance is just one. Its origin in an ecology of emergent technologies and low-brow forms, as well as a source of repertoire-building itself, produces what she calls, “the infrastructural world that produces the item number” (2018: 208).
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] A similar proposal was made in Sindh in 2016 but was withdrawn by the Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, who argued that such dance celebrations were a part of the nation’s heritage.
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] Debashree Mukhrejee’s research on women in pre-Partition Indian film, suggests that the moral atmosphere of film was formed in the way in which the women actors’ professions – their lack of conventionality and routine – were alien and removed from viewers’ everyday lives (2013: 10). Mukhrejee takes scandals around women film stars to be not a symptom of a wider anxiety but a reflection of strategies for managing the changing conditions of modernity.
\end{itemize}
accompanied her on the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Her remarkable career and turbulent public persona took another turn when she later returned to the stage, thus effectively renouncing her renunciation. Female actors and singers from Shi’a communities, on the other hand, rarely undertake tauba, but often transform their careers as performers to that of reciters of noha, marsiya, and soz-o-salam laments and elegiac poems in commemoration of Imam Ḥussain and the family of the ahl-e-bayt (Fig 11). In the same way that tauba does the work of renunciation, female Shi’i reciters transform from performance personages to that which is emphatically not musical, and away from the negative contagion of singing and performance simply by crossing the threshold between song and recitation. When both film actors and singers renounce their former life in the business they underline how meaning can be derived from difference. In these instances, one can navigate between the poles of its contaminant and its salvation, underlining the pliable nature of film’s māhaul. Restorative, born-again systems of interdiction guard against this and form what Durkheim called the “negative cult” ([1915] 1964: 299), which provides access to its sacred inverse. Like tauba, one must travel through the former to get to the latter. For Durkheim the practices of the negative cult were constituted of rites. The materiality of film discourse constitutes them differently, as a constellation of provocations and contestations, in which film images and actors constitute a journey rather than an irreversible contaminant. The public renunciation of film by former female actors was a frequent occurrence in 1980s and 1990s Egypt (Van Nieuwkerk 2013: 80). Yet the instances in Pakistan do not cohere with what Lila Abu-Lughod describes in
Egypt as “media management” (2008: 163) in the production of a national community of pious, performing selves, but instead a challenge to the perceived secularity of Pakistani public culture.

The next day, Shamaila Begum came to our home early to vent her frustrations. Her daughter’s *taj poshi* performance had been amended so, instead of dancing to an upbeat Christian song, the girls, all dressed as angels, filed up the stairs of an open-air courtyard and stood rigid on the adjoining walls for the finale. Shamaila could not understand why singing, dance, and performance, or its associations with “mīraśī” groups, are viewed with such distain by her high-income patrons and employers. For her, the trade one is born into should be above reproach. Many film stars and singers are said to come from “mīraśī” families, but the term is now frequently used in a derogatory way to describe anyone who is involved in activities usually associated with performances deemed immoral. Etymologically, the term derives from the Arabic word for inheritance or heritage, and describes the genealogists, bards, and minstrels of North Indian oral storytelling. British administrator Denzil Ibbetson first categorised the mīraśī as a caste unto themselves, reflecting the already changed dynamics of a social group once lauded – or at least patronised – by the Mughal elite. He explained, “the social position of the Mirasi, as of all the minstrel castes, is exceedingly low, but he attends at weddings and on similar occasions to recite genealogies…. [the Mirasi] is notorious for his exactions, which he makes under the threat of lampooning the ancestors of him from whom he demands fees. …” (Ibbetson 1916: 234). Thus, entrenched in anxieties about the public place of performance
is an anxiety over the power of mediators, specifically the power to mediate genealogies. This is reminiscent of the *badhai* rituals of transgender or third gender performers – often referred to as “eunuchs” - at contemporary Pakistani weddings; “inspiring both reverence and fear, they play upon their own supposed impotence” (Pamment 2010: 32).

Film labourers – a term I use to address attitudes towards film work rather than to specific hierarchies of fame - arguably face fewer dangers than stage performers, yet for many their social place is often seen as equally contaminant, the beginning of a journey that ends in the fires of hell. Female actors regardless of their heritage are inexorably linked to the Hira Mandi, the red-light district of the Walled City of Lahore. An area known as much for its musical traditions as for prostitution, the mixed origins of performative trades are amplified in the *masala* elements of Lollywood film. For many, the Hira Mandi is an indivisible part of the *māḥaul* of film culture. In the 1990s, to help budding actors – and their anxious families from whom they were forced to run away – navigate such a societal taboo, a film professional by the name of S.M Shahid wrote a guidebook, “dedicated to those young people who have a deep interest in acting and have been separated from their parents” (Shahid 1994: 5). Specifically focused on runaway children and the social stigma towards acting, it warned against networks of fraudsters, pimps, and cheats waiting to exploit budding film labourers. Even before Partition, Shahid argued much of the Lahore and Mumbai film industry was built on runaways. “Watching a film was considered *haram*. In those cases, a Muslim child’s interest in working in the film industry would be
an invitation to judgement day” (Shahid 1994: 27). Shahid’s book can also be read in parallel with a rise in rural-to-urban migration in Pakistan during the last decades of the twentieth century. With the dishonour of a child in the film trade coupled with the fear of the depopulation of the villages, Shahid welcomed the arrival of permanent stage dramas in smaller cities and villages as a way of stopping runaways and providing local work.

Among the film industry professionals I interviewed – from a veteran film editor in Lahore’s Evernew Studios to young directors of documentary short films - there was a broad consensus that the rule of General Zia-ul-Huq coincided with the spread of religious conservatism across all state institutions and the media, leading directly to the collapse of the Lollywood film industry through the institution of Islamisation. The predominance of this narrative seems to be derived largely from what was until recently the only authoritative book on film in Pakistan, Mushtaq Gazdar’s Pakistan Cinema (1997). Gazdar was one of a small contingent of arthouse filmmakers who benefited from the pre-Zia era sponsorship of film productoin under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and suffered under the subsequent decade of military rule. Recent scholarship on Pakistani film has begun to challenge these narratives (Ahmad 2014) of industry decline and rebirth said to have begun specifically with Zia. While his regime immediately muffled journalism and the fine arts, the more Pakistani films I watched from the late

---

26 The 2017 census counted over eleven million people, up from just over five million in the 1998 census, since the results of which Pakistan has become an urban majority country.

27 For a more nuanced approach to the atmospheres and anxieties over women’s performance during the Zia era see Fouzia Saeed, Taboo!: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area (2002).
1970s and 1980s the more improbable the religio-political lobby as the grounds for the “decline” narrative appeared. It seemed that rather than fewer films being made, a great many more were produced, if to a more formulaic template and largely in the Punjabi and Pashto languages\(^{28}\), rather than in Urdu. Under the rule of Zia, the propagation of top-down Islamisation was only implemented a few months before his death in a plane crash. Only after the June 1988 Shariah Ordinance were television authorities required to reduce the number of adverts featuring women, or for cinema agents and producers to remove film poster hoardings showing women from the public sphere\(^{29}\). Following Zia’s death these requirements were swiftly abandoned or only voluntarily enforced. Curbing obscenity and vulgarity was the purpose of replacing the Censorship of Films Act, 1963 with the Zia-era 1979 Motion Picture Ordinance. Despite this, the films that followed appeared as standard to be more lascivious, violent, and unruly as anything that could have been imagined under prior regimes.

At the same time, popular theatrical traditions and performers were making their way to the government-built theatres in Lahore (Pamment 2012: 115, Saeed 2011). There they created a comedic style interpenetrative with \textit{filmi}

\(^{28}\) This is most likely down to the impact of rural-to-urban migration and a new audience demographic of male labourers with income to spend in urban cinemas. Both Punjabi and Pashto films, often like the language in which they are performed, are often denigrated by elites and have been seen as symptoms of the “decline” which is often diagnosed in Pakistani film. Gwendolyn Kirk has explored the register used in these films, which she called “Filmi Punjabi” (2016A) and argues how narratives of decline do not often fit with those in question, who feel still to be flourishing (Kirk 2016B).

\(^{29}\) Farida Batool’s explores the important contradiction at play when cinema hoardings were ubiquitous in the urban milieu while figurative representation in the arts were being clamped down upon by the state and Quranic calligraphy was proffered as official forms of art (Batool 2004: 10-11).
Punjabi styles of social and political satire. Both Punjabi theatre and Punjabi film exposed the porosity of Zia’s supposedly rigid codes of gender and morality through the materialization and performance of gender relations (Butler 2011). Performative expressions largely governed by male sexual discourse refined in the era of Zia (Batool 2015) led to the popularity today of mujra videos and their incorporation into Lollywood film. Lotte Hoek found that concerns over obscenity in Bangladeshi film are primarily the domain of the secular sphere, rather than of Islamic morality (Hoek 2013: 4). By portraying a national culture vulnerable to obscenity and vulgarity allows such threats to be mapped onto women’s bodies, trades, and performances. Discourses of transgression can also make the unstable nature of boundaries of sexuality or class a site for self-making (Srivastava 2007: 209-219). Less evident, then, is a flagrant Zia-era clampdown on film, other than through heavier taxation and stricter censorship rules over criticism of the government, the military, or of Islamic orthodoxy. Instead, the era saw a greater sexualisation and segmentation of women’s bodies across media forms and formats. The Women’s Action Forum (WAF), whose “action-based research” was an attempt to harness the outrage and the anger of the 1980s, conducted a pioneering study titled “Re-Inventing Women” to explore the attempts to reduce the visibility of women in the public and political sphere at the same time as transforming and institutionalizing the female body as site and symbol of male honour (Hussain 1985: 4). Such an anomaly resulted in a censorial tension between concealment and obscenity (Sher 1985), honing an aesthetic of excess operating on the level of what Michael Taussig has called a,
“skilled revelation of a skilled concealment” (1998: 222). In these instances, “magic is efficacious...on account of its exposure” (Taussig, 2003: 273), in the same way that morality is undergirded by periods of abeyance such as Ramazan and Muharram in which disputed forms are eschewed as reminders of it’s precarious permissibility.

Recently, the development of multiplex cinemas and the relocation of film exhibition to shopping malls has served to negotiate a way out of negative moral and class-based distinctions over film. In 2017, following Gulf countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates’ sponsorship of film production and festivals, Saudi Arabia announced it would lift its 35-year ban on cinemas, allowing chains to open, theatres to be built, and film production to begin. The opening of new, high-end multiplexes in cities across Pakistan coincided with a seminal change in the public and urban cognization, public image, and morality, of cinemas in Gulf Islamic polities that Pakistani investors have sought to emulate. The resurgence of Pakistani cinema and the demands and expectations of it can largely be seen as a desire to fill these newly built multiplexes with domestically produced films, and to wean themselves off their need for Indian imports. This has created a noticeable bifurcation between the entertainment associated with Lahore’s historic “Lollywood” film industry and the return to aspirational, middle and upper-class Urdu language entertainment being made in Karachi by a new generation of producers, directors, and actors who previously had little association with the old industry.
This bifurcation between Lollywood cinema, with its recognisable aesthetic, its diluted colours from the overstretched developing baths at Evernew Studios’ laboratory and the “New-Wave” Pakistani cinema, with international-standard production qualities, can also be seen as the gentrification of public leisure. The bifurcation in Pakistani film was prefigured by that of Pakistani performance traditions, which associated female performers in Punjabi dramas with vulgarity while “educated” women forged celebrated careers in Urdu and English-language drama and on Pakistan Television (PTV). Pamment calls this bifurcation a “split discourse” (2012: 126) and argues that these strategies recall the anti-nautch movement of the colonial era, run by missionaries and high-caste Indians (2012: 122). Such a bifurcation witnessed during the period of my fieldwork is part of an ongoing negotiation of the performance of filmic events. In the tradition of the “historical dynamics of naming” (Hacking 2002: 26), actors that renounce their career and singers who commit to no longer “singing,” utilise a discursive tradition of translating and regulating the permissibility of performative trades.

_Cinema Itself: Exegeses on Film, Ontologies of the Moving Image_

If the film actresses alluded to as the beginning of a journey to damnation result from the recalibration of the female body as site and symbol of male honour, anxieties over the particular ontology and materiality of the film image are renewed by changing platforms for image access and availability. The
permissibility of the film image – rather than the built and social space of the cinema – and its materiality has been addressed by Muhammad Iqbal and Syed Abul A'la Maududi, both formative figures in the philosophy of Pakistan as a political and religious idea. Their arguments provide two divergent examples of the ways in which the permissibility of film- and by extension the moving images that have come to constitute television, Internet, and social media content - in Pakistan has been expressed in the project of politically-infused piety.

As we have seen, in Pakistan the permissibility of film has often been questioned in relation to a commitment to moral piety, as opposed to the censorial sphere of obscenity and vulgarity. This is particularly evident in the extent to which the image is distributed and fabricated by cinematic technologies, or in the case of the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), Syed Abul A'la Maududi, whether or not images are made material. I argue it is the mobility of the moving image that plays a key role in the extent to which film's materiality affects its reception across religious fields of experience. Mutable and in latent stages of transformation, these ethical pathways are informed by epistemological and theological reflections on the permissibility of the private and public spheres that circulate around both the ontology of moving image media – both film as text and cinema as event – and are driven by utilitarian questions of use and objectification. The materiality of the moving image – rather than the content - has often been the initial departure point for those trying to think through the place of moving image media in Pakistan. I hope that the argument I trace will not be taken as an interpretation of alterity. Rather, I aim to acknowledge the
existence of multiple ontologies as an alternative conception of epistemological truth in the tradition of examining “‘worlds’ rather than ‘worldviews’” (Holbraad 2007:82). That fatwas or answers to questions over permissibility so often refer to the earthy materiality of celluloid and digital ontologies, the bodies of film labourers, and the permissibility of a kind of image with few easy parallels in the Quran or Sunnah, make the atmospheric conditions of media in Pakistan subject – at least in part – to religious cohabitation.30.

In the mid-1920s, Muslim disinterest in the cinema was of clear concern to the British governing authorities, which in the wide-ranging ICC report mourned that Muslims appeared particularly unmoved by film-going (ICC I 1928: 83). Their conclusions were reached even though the small number of ulamā interviewed displayed neither an explicit aversion nor an overt enthusiasm for film entertainment. At much the same time, jurist and journalist Syed Abul A'la Maududi, later to found the JeI, was eagerly consuming films in Delhi (I. Ahmad 2009: 54). Maududi’s political theory has played a pivotal role in the transformation and growth of a distinct brand of political-religious activity in India and Pakistan, rooted in Deobandi thought. Following his example, Islamic revivalists across the world became, “not only moderns but modernists” (Nasr 1996: 50-51). As a young journalist Maududi argued that giving legitimacy to

30 As Naveeda Khan notes, fatwas – rulings issued by an authoritative source - are useful for scholarly study as forms of performative text that reveal the social sphere of the everyday (Khan, 2011, 574). The erudite arguments of Hussein Ali Agrama (2010) clearly demarcate some dimensions of the ethical structuring of the fatwa; the tension between ethical agency and power wielded in its name. The problem of the fatwa is a problem of inheritance and renewal, achieved by both the questioner and respondent, who together address the precarity not of situations but the affairs of the soul.
technology was the only means to effectively debate with the modern world, which could then be infused with a Muslim identity, pioneering the modernizing attempts of Islamic revivalism and its transformation of technology for its own ends.

In the second volume of *Rasail O Masā’il*, one of his many juristic compilations in which he responded to questions of religious comportment, Maududi answered an enquiry over whether cinema is permissible in Islam³¹:

> “Many times before I have shared this thought that cinema itself [*cinema khud*] is permitted. It is its non-permitted use that makes it forbidden. The image that is seen on the screen of the cinema is in fact not an image [*tasveer*] instead it is a reflection just like a reflection seen in a mirror. That is why it is not forbidden [*haram*], so long as the image inside the film is not printed on paper or any other thing, nor is the image applied [*atalaq*] to the film, nor used for any purpose relating to any of the operations [*kamo*] to be abstained from under any law that would proclaim the image forbidden. Because of these reasons, to me, cinema itself is permitted.” Maududi, ([1954] 2000): 204).

---
³¹ The question put to Maududi from an anonymous reader, in its entirety was, “I am a student and have attended Jamaat-e-Islami lectures and followed them in detail. With God’s blessing I have gone through a radical religious change [*inquilab*] due to these lectures. For a very long time I have had an interest in cinematography and for that reason I have obtained a lot of information in that regard. After listening to debates for and against cinematography, my heart’s wish is that if cinematography is permissible I can use it for religious reasons and in the assistance of moral wellbeing [*akhlaqi khidmat*]. Could you kindly elaborate on whether or not this art can be used for beneficial reasons? If the answer is in favor of its usage then could you please elaborate whether a woman is allowed to be shown on the curtain of the screen?” (Maududi [1954] 2000: 203).
Maududi’s comments are accompanied by strictures on the preferable genre and content of films – documentary, tactics of war, industrial, and educational – and the industrial labour that should undergird them – women must neither feature nor should men act their roles. Significantly, Maududi qualifies his statement as entirely subjective; “to me”. This is either in order to ensure that his comments are taken as contemporary readings, and not as exegeses from the hadiths or Quran, or to emphasize his statements as an engagement with, and reading of, the experience of film which, in its objecthood, can and has been understood in different ways. It is interesting to note how these comments, written at much the same time as Andre Bazin’s *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1960) provide an analytical counterpoint to classical film theory and its conceptions of an objective, emancipatory film image released from its techno-material origins. In the discipline of film studies the ontology of film is linked variously to objective reality, to semiotic indexicality, or its “privileged link to the contingent” (Doane 2002: 142). Maududi’s reading of the ontology of the film image and its evasive “surfacing” (Pinney 2003: 218, Larkin 2009) relies on a notion that the inability for the social experience of cinema to self-archive, to impress its morality in material terms, resists assigning its visual data transcendental value.

---

32 For means of contrast the “Film Acting Guide”, defines film as, “something which entertains by means of any important or non-important thing…. Children and young people get mesmerized by talking pictures walking about on the screen [chalti, perhti, aur bolti tasaveer]” (Shahid 1994: 19).
It is important here to note that Maududi begins his proscription by noting that he has long authorized and permitted cinema *itself [khud]*, what one might take to mean the techno-material phenomenon before its mediation or utilisation. This *itself* underlines the importance of the reciprocity of the subject and the embryonic immanence dormant before the entrance of the catalyst. Maududi gave a similar response to queries over the use of loudspeakers in prayer, saying their ontology was “pure” but only the way that they had been used was immoral (Nasr 1996: 52-3). Use value, film’s ability to be transformed into something in the world through application, suggests a familiar kind of porous screen upon which the self can be projected. By arguing that the image on the cinema screen is a reflection, similar to a reflection seen in a mirror – historically ruled permissible in Islam -, and therefore immaterial, unfixed, temporary, and transient, Maududi suggests the reflection of light bifurcates film and its image into separate things. What makes cinema forbidden for Maududi is the potential for the image inside the film to be manifested on paper or any other receptacle, as if the film were a capacious storage unit for embryonic forms that have the potential to solidify. A projection on a wall is thus considered something formed of light, whereas the static image, applied [*atalaq*] on paper, as opposed to the moving image, is classed as an image. It is the process that pulls one towards the other, complicating the ontology of the machine and the ethical aspirations of the viewer, which is the realm of jurisprudence. Maududi’s comments on the

---

33 Over 120 years since its invention questions on the permissibility of film, video, and moving image media continue to be raised, whereas a kind of consensus has been reached over other questions, such as over the use of loudspeakers in the call to prayer (cf Khan 2011 citing Shafi 1996). While in 1954 Maududi displayed a more open mind towards cinema, by the time of his
ontology of the film image thus attempt to define its material characteristics and effects so as to determine the permissibility of its use.

The structures of colonial British governance in which Maududi lived much of his life were acutely sensitive to the discourse of what Christopher Pinney calls "imageology," the forms of knowledge relating to permissibility that circumambulate images in an attempt to situate them ethically or morally (Pinney 2015). Pinney draws attention to the relationship between different forms and lived practices in Islamic polities and the efficacy of the still and moving image. He notes that in 1906 and 1907 the Colonial Office in Sierra Leone appealed to the Governor General of India for a senior Muslim authority to provide comments on the use and application of images, in an “attempt to take the measure of a transnational Islam” (Ibid: NP) across the lifeworlds of an emergent (colonized) global Islam.

Yet the interlocutors whose accounts inform this thesis never cited sources of authority. Instead, such discourses of permissibility can be seen in light of Veena Das’ work on ethics and morality as a philosophy of the everyday, who calls the work of moral orientation, “the labor of bringing about an eventual

---

*Tafheem-ul-Quran* [finished 1972] he had taken a different course with respect to images. This is a reminder that in Pakistan strictures against cinema were always discursive, with film itself as a figure for thought (Lyotard 2011); hypothetical proposals were never enacted in law as they were in Saudi Arabia. Mian M. Shafi, in a repudiation of Maududi’s exegesis on film, argues that the worshipping of idols *[shirk]* does not originate in the objects, rather from the heart of the viewer. He argued that only literalists find the quality of idol-ness inherent in the thing. (Shafi 1982: 11) Shafi lauds images as figures that supply and inform discourse, “If we still feel that making or possessing picture is “shirk” or “haram”, we have to declare all persons on earth as mushrikeen (polytheists) since everyone who listens, talks or thinks pictures, in mind, of everything heard, spoken or thought.” (Shafi 1982: 12)
everyday from within the actual everyday” (Das 2012: 134). As such, questions of permissibility stimulate everyday exegeses, that operate more on intuition or consultation of the Internet hive-mind than knowledge of juridical sources. A few examples to which everyday exegeses variously respond include; those curious of the correct methods of respectfully disposing of Quranic and Islamic pedagogic videocassettes; the morality of renting property to tenants who work in the film industry; rulings on employment in cinema lobby customer service; the extent to which images projected on the screen of a cinema and the immaterial structure of digital photographs can be considered images [tasveer]; and the extent to which they are prohibited. A quick Google search reveals how the ontology of media interfaces and experiences are sites of frequent return for online ulamā who are often asked to revisit questions that ultimately relate to the materiality of the still and moving image. These “online Imams” – as they are often called - offer advice on masā’il [problems] and authoritative advice on Islamic law and codes of public and private comportment in everyday life. As in Maududi’s time, the issue of film’s permissibility remains not an abstract theological argument; underlining once more the extent to which film harbours an ambiguous presence owing to its multi-sited and dispersed object-hood.

Muhammad Iqbal’s *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, a series of lectures given in Madras, Hyderabad, and Aligarh, and published in 1930, sought a greater understanding of the conception of knowledge and religious experience and its place in early twentieth-century modernity. The study investigated the materiality of religious experience by looking at acts of
fabrication and how they generate a point beyond intention and immediate use that Birgit Meyer argues brings forth a “genesis of presence” (Meyer 2014: 214-5). Rather than a materiality of substance, Iqbal’s theory of materiality is one he cites as compatible with the Quran and *sunnah* and is constituted by a phenomenological being-in-the-world and resultant series of actions that bring about the apparatus of religious dispensation. Iqbal argues that unlike the Christian division between subject and object and the concomitant schism between the ideal and the real, Islam acknowledges the way the ideal and the real brush against one another. His ideal is one of recursiveness, of immanence, that derives from the Quranic assignation to mankind of the ability to develop concepts about an ever-shifting and dynamic reality.

While the platform of Kantian ethics from which Iqbal proceeded conceives of the human subject as an end-in-itself, Iqbal argues that the Quran teaches that the human is not the terminus of value. Rather, thought and being are mutually entangled. In identifying this relationship with the world of matter, things perceived in the world are subject to verification from one’s sensory experience of them. As reliance is put on sensory faculties to decode the nature of matter, Iqbal asked whether religiosity as the ultimate character for reality can be maintained if the predominance of sense perception is adhered to. In many ways his was an attempt to divorce the natural sciences from materialism to emphasize spirituality as the basis of reality. As the Quran teaches that the plane of Allah’s existence is not interdependent from the lifeworlds of Allah, it is as if there is nothing else in the world except for Allah. Ascribed the qualities of
exertion or movement in the Quranic term *ijtihad*, the application of energy towards the judgement of a legal question or an otherwise ambiguous proscription, it is therefore the praxis of reason; more or less independent of human agency, that places emphasis on the machinations of thought.

Yet Iqbal was more caustic in his criticism of the medium of film than Maududi, as expressed in a short poem titled “Cinema” (1935). The direction of his critique was not over the politics of representation provoked by depiction, but what he saw as an idolatrous and parochial fetishism that the technology reproduced, composed of the very dust and ashes of modernity’s disputed linearity:

(Iqbal 1935: 210)
Cinema - or new fetish-fashioning,
Idol-making and mongering still?
Art, men called that olden-vooodoo –
Art, they call this mumbo-jumbo;
That - antiquity's poor religion:
This - modernity's pigeon-plucking;
That - earth's soil: this - soil of Hades;
Dust, their temple; ashes, ours.

“Cinema” (Translated by V.G Kiernan, 1955:7)

Victor Kiernan’s English translation, perhaps exercising a fair amount of poetic license to maintain the rhythm of the couplets, elides some of the key subjects of Iqbal’s polemic. While Kiernan’s choice of “fetish-fashioning” neatly sums up the idea of an idol worshipping its own idolatry, the second line might be more succinctly made in the following proposition, “Is it cinema or industry?” From this point on, what Kiernan renders as “art” – perhaps reflecting early twentieth century arguments in Europe over cinema’s place in the art-historical canon – Iqbal wrote as “industry [Ṣan‘at]” (Iqbal 1935: 210). Immediately, Iqbal posits an answer. This is not an industry but a part of the canon of sorcery; an idolatrous religion for the idolatry of nationalism. While Kiernan maintains the earthy
materiality of the final two lines, the original literally described, “the clay of the world,” rather than “earth’s soil”, appearing to reference the Quranic tradition that human beings were created from clay (Qur’an, 38:71-72, Qur’an, 37:11, Qur’an, 23:12). In turn, what Kiernan has as “soil of Hades,” Iqbal had as “the clay of Hell”. It is therefore possible to see “Cinema” as a continuation of the theory of materiality articulated in Reconstruction. The mutable matter of clay points to the transformative potential of a dynamic and ever-expanding universe, of which cinema is an expression of just one possible – and ultimately undesirable - modernity.

Throughout Reconstruction... Iqbal was markedly struck by verse 190 of the Quran, sūrat āl ’im'rān, which reads, “Surely in the creation of the heavens and earth and in the alternation of night and day there are signs for men possessed of minds.” In this entangled ending and beginning Iqbal saw the revealing of an experiential and sensory approach to the world, in which it is the duty of the faithful to "reflect on these signs,” of a “universe… dynamic in its origin" (Iqbal 1934: 121-2). Knowledge must find its point of commencement in the balance between the finitude of matter allocated by God from the “storehouses” (Quran 15:21 cited in Iqbal 1934: 63) of the world and the dynamism of an unfinished universe. Preceding Heidegger’s “Question Concerning Technology” ([1954] 1977) – and equally agitated by the predominance of the technological over ‘nature’ – Iqbal argues that it is, "power over the concrete that makes it possible for the intellect of man to pass beyond the concrete” (Iqbal 1934: 125). Cinema, for Iqbal, is thus an entangled form of its technology, industry, and its earthy
materiality - sculpted into an idol rather than observed - that masquerades as a finite surplus of serial images, and thus motions towards finitude and fixity.

The Hypothetical Image

These textual sources provide an understanding of the ways in which the moral ecologies of moving image media, particularly in the history of Pakistan as a political and religious idea, might be better understood by acknowledging the multiple ontologies that coexist and circulate around disputed technological and image-based forms. Maududi’s answer in Rasail o Masā’il contained more than a straightforward answer to whether or not film is permissible. It starkly referred to the ontology of film, pointing not as many others do, to the content, but to the surface of the moving image whereupon its moral body is located and whereupon its morality can be negotiated. Anxieties about “misuse,” that run throughout Maududi’s advice on the moving image brings cinema back to the ambiguous and elemental ontology of first contact, as an essentially transformative tool, a site wherein ideologies are contested. This, Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein identified in specifically drawn animation as, “the protean element… which contains in ‘liquid’ form all possibilities of future species and forms” (1986: 64), or what we might term the hypothetical origin of an image without an indexical relationship to divine authority.

In Pakistan today, disapproval towards the māhaul of film culture plays a complex role in the often-ambiguous relationship between political support,
public piety, and personal faith. Central to the case brought against the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation over the use of an Islamic cultural centre as a multiplex cinema, is the belief that the moral atmospheres of faith and performance are incompatible. This correlates with building regulations from the colonial era that, still in use in Pakistan, dictate that cinemas must not be constructed within two hundred yards of any school, hospital, or mosque. While no mosque was constructed at the site, the judge presiding over the case agreed that the very fact that the building supported five domes and bore walls with Muslim prayers was enough to deem it intended for Islamic purposes.

As I have shown, film is a frequent site of return for those negotiating the varying regimes of permissibility that pervade everyday life. Whether it is contemporary scholar Maulana Tariq Jameel taking film and stage actor Nargis on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca to strengthen her tauba—her renunciation of the performance industry—or a recent court case brought by the Karachi Jamaat-e-Islami party decrying the repurposing of an Islamic cultural centre into a cinema, the labour and contagion of film contact has often appeared an ill fit with the aspirations of Pakistan’s religiously diverse constituents. Like fatwas, the creation of moral atmospheres around questionable acts, objects, and infrastructures, respond to the changing challenges of everyday life as a sustained project in the present. The identification of moral atmospheres amid the residue of film infrastructure and experience is the result, creating both ambivalence to sustain everyday interaction and certitude for periods or moral exception in which lines between permissible and impresible must be more clearly drawn.
As film seeps into the everyday, answers entangled in public leisure and the ontology of images in Islam come to form an example of everyday exegeses, whereby ongoing private and public negotiations instantiate a future-facing community, open to innovation and debate.
Chapter I Figures

Fig 7. Two precautions for navigating anti-cinema violence; fire hydrant and prayer beads in the projection room of the Odeon Cinema, Lahore (August 2018).
Fig 8. Two sequential stills from a video produced by the Jamaat-e-Islami to support their case launched against the KMC. Through an edited succession of images the Jaamat-e-Islami compare the installation of a cinema in the vacant Al-Markaz e Islami cultural centre to the destruction and demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, India, in December 1992.
Fig 9. Ex-cinemas (Clockwise): the Pakistan Talkies, Nigar Cinema, Ratan Cinema, and City Cinema (2017-2018)
Fig 10. Following a violent protest on the main thoroughfare adjacent to Hall Road a sign, written hastily on cardboard, informed passers-by that: “film actress pictures are haram”. Next to it another sign, half bent over on the pole to which it was affixed, read, “From film pictures to the fire of hell” (April 2018).
Fig 11. This newspaper clipping describes how Aliya, a famous Pakistani actor who for years dominated the Lollywood screen, has renewed and strengthened her faith. She has started participating in lectures and religious interest groups and has completely boycotted show business and cinema. Newspaper scan courtesy of Guddu Khan/Guddu’s Film Archive.
Fig 12. Video Compact-Disc (VCD) of Dhamals and Qassidas celebrating Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, a Muslim saint buried in Sindh, sung by Afshan, a former singer of film songs.
During the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram Pakistan’s minority Shi’i population mourn the death of Ḥussāin, the Grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (Fig 14). Regardless of sect or denomination most Muslims, and many of Pakistan’s religious minorities, avoid celebrations, music, and film. From the eighth day until after the climatic tenth day, known as ‘Āshūrā, media markets such as Lahore’s Hall Road close to preserve the annual period of mourning. One must observe ‘Āshūrā as one mourns a death, enjoying neither festivities nor anything that distracts the mind from sadness and remembrance. On the first seven days, however, the audio-visual atmosphere of the city transforms rather than dissipates and Hall Road’s film traders reflect that in their stock. Three-pack sets of high-octane vintage Pakistani films, foreign pornography, and pirated Bollywood films fade into the distance of the racks behind the counters, and devotional releases relating to Muharram and ‘Āshūrā are brought into view. This temporary addition to traders’ repertoires includes
professionally filmed majlis [mourning gathering. plural: majālis][34], sold in packaged video-compact discs (VCDs) featuring as many as a dozen reciters of laments and elegies. Produced and released by what are still referred to as “cassette-“ or “video houses” which often operate near Shi’i places of worship or shrines associated with Shi’i communities, majlis VCDs travel on the circulatory networks maintained by the trade in informally distributed media in Pakistan.

While the moral atmospheres that circulate around and cling to film labour and experience have been negotiated in a number of ways, the arrival, availability, and adoption of recording technology provided a new interface through which to rethink the role media forms should play in an ongoing revision of urban religious orthodoxy. What some soon realised was that while ambient piety was radically subjective and resistant to traditional orthodoxy, recording live had the ability to mediate moral atmospheres and capture the tone and mood of a community. That this involved the demarcation of sacred and pious space means that a degree of this moral labour was done by first defining an other against which to build an ethical scheme of praxis. What began as a common strategy for building headmanship through the utilisation of technologies of amplification soon turned into a thriving marketplace for religious media that both attuned its users to urban ecologies and served to defuse transgression and conflict. I explore these developments to give a holistic framework with which

34 A majlis is a gathering which prohibits secular music but permit forms of musical expression (Qureshi 1981) and participation in which draws in both professional and amateur reciters.
to understand what film is in Pakistan, by first understanding what my interlocutors – appropriating and producing these binaries already in play - say it is not. The threshold between film and entertainment on the one side and pious moving-image media on the other is socially and materially constituted as a space of ongoing rupture, becoming, and change. Behind this ongoing narrative of religious reformism is a long history of religious thought defined by oppositional stances and pious narratives of breaking with the past, so as to constitute an other that lags behind (Larkin 2015: 65). Larkin argues that these pragmatic ruptures have been interrogated by scholars in ways that reify the distinctions made by competing groups. The result is a tradition of “binary Islam” (Ibid), the understanding of which requires skepticism over the use to which the idea of rupture is being put.

Most commonly, religious media stores pertaining to the Shi’i minority focused their activities on the recording of mourning gatherings known as majlis and the sermons and recitations that feature therein. With his exuberant charm and sonorous voice Hasan Mir, the owner of Panjtan Paak Productions, a recording company in a Shi’a majority-neighbourhood in the Walled City of Lahore, speaks of his life’s work spent publicising the mourning of his community for the ahl-e-bayt [family of the Prophet Muhammad] with a vitality that borders on joy. Since returning from expatriate labour in the Gulf, he has enlisted recording technology in refining his position within his neighbourhood as a headman of sorts, responsible for demonstrating local piety in the public sphere. Hasan Mir claimed to have been the first to focus his recording business
on the processions taking place in his neighbourhood, so that visitors could return with a keepsake of the audio-visual experience. He refers to these as mātam dari recordings. While the term mātam refers to an act of mourning, the compound Urdu verb mātam dari usually denotes a physical action, either light or vigorous chest-beating as well as self-flagellation with curved blades known as zanjeer zāni.35 While Hall Road’s film traders can usually turn to their own master-copies, to wholesalers, or to the Internet to generate stock, due to the annual appearance of new recordings during Muharram they must look to small production houses like Hasan Mir’s for mātam dari and majlis recordings. For these Shi’i traders having their pious media sold alongside media deemed obscene in the days preceding ‘Āshūrā is a necessary consequence of creating an environment conducive to the spread of ‘azādari, a state roughly translated as an atmosphere of mourning and lamentation for the ahl-e-bayt.

In this chapter I explore a contrasting environment to that which follows in the chapters on the moral ecology of Hall Road (Chapter Four and Five). That is, the backdrop to the circulation of content intimately connected to the moral atmosphere of religiously homogenous communities, where everyone knows everyone else. In what follows I explore the distinctive audio-visual repertoire documented and circulated by a number of small, long-established stores situated beside shrines and along Shi’a neighbourhood procession routes. Named after the analogue formats that made their name, these stores distinguish themselves

35 While communal suffering is one of the main ways of participating in and performing Shi’i piety there are wide disagreements over the permissibility of mātam that is injurious to the body.
from other traders of DVDs and CDs by their collections of analogue master-copies of recordings of processions, gatherings, and laments. The strategies they employ in the marketplace and within their communities aim at retaining their position as trusted guardians of valued objects relating both to the past and the proselytization and publicity of communal piety. Struck by the intimacy and intensity of the media produced by Shi'i “cassette- and video houses” that circulates on Hall Road during Muharram in place of film and film music, this chapter attempts to understand some of the ways in which the negative moral atmosphere of film experience was complicated by the potentially community-making moral atmosphere of recording.

I refer to recording as both a local term used to describe on-site sound and video recording as well as a durational act of copying through which traders build up collections and reserves, or what they called their record, using the English word. I also use the term in the sense it came to be used after the arrival of what Michael Taussig has referred to as, “mimetically capacious machines” such as the phonograph and the photograph (1993: 198). To the human qualities of mimesis, the act of both resembling others and presenting the self, was added the intimacy of, “a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived” (Ibid: 21). From its original meaning, “set down in writing”, in the 1890s “recording” also came to mean putting sound or images on containers capable of their reproduction, a history that paralleled these same machines used by early anthropologists (Brady 1999). The arrival of home recording technology in Pakistan in the late 1970s and early 1980s, served as an indication of the growing popularity of recordings in the region.
invitation to participate in producing the moral atmosphere of a pious locality. Among these small neighbourhood traders run by minority Shi’i adherents, recording serves to shape the conditions of knowledge transmission, patronage, and power that both demarcates secular space and pervades sacred space.

The Muharram Distinction

The Islamic month of Muharram fell both at the start and end of a year-long period of fieldwork in Lahore, affording me the opportunity to experience several of the different ways of participating in this atmosphere of communal mourning and public piety. In the first instance, confined to my apartment by the security warnings of friends and government proclamations, I watched televisual media signal the shift to a recursive, sacred temporality with overt change in tone, colour, dress, and programming (Fig 13). In the second, recordings made by participants and professionals were uploaded to YouTube, hosted on Facebook after having been broadcast on Facebook Live, and sold in Shi’i religious shops throughout the year. And lastly as a participant, I watched through a sea of hands as smartphones held aloft made the recordings of sermons and laments that I would later consume on various media platforms. The agential act of recording captures a more general phenomenon of the conflation of technology, mimesis, and event, that in this specific case serves to continually renew the event of Imam ʿHussain’s martyrdom.
In the basement of one of Hall Road’s plazas an older woman with broad-rimmed sunglasses was looking for a film of the story of the battle of Karbala. She had seen it on the television featuring all the personages who stood alongside Imam Ḫūsāin on the battlefield in 61AH (680AD), and she had come all the way from a village north of Lahore on a rickshaw to find it. Owing to the change in the moral atmosphere during the first ten days of Muharram a greater number of women visit Hall Road, a street usually associated with male shopping and public leisure. Another woman came in shortly after with her brothers in tow, looking for the famous nōḥa “Na ro Zainab” [Don’t cry Zainab], which had been played frequently on television during Muharram over the last few years. Such media sold in replacement of film and music and defined in context as fundamentally not film or music (or, worse, film-music), helps in understanding what audio-visual documents do to the demarcation of sacred space and time, and the production of pious selves. Hall Road’s temporary repertoire of Muharram-appropriate materials takes shape in friction with the coexistence of ecologies of interdiction and reproduction with regard to film and music, and the creation of a moral atmosphere defined by their absence.

The day after, on the morning of the eighth of Muharram all of Hall Road’s modular units were shuttered, their lattice grills hiding darkened

---

36 A nōḥa is a performative lamentation derived from the South Asian elegiac tradition of mārṣīyah poetry and is frequently heard during the month of Muharram. A reciter of nōḥay [plural] is also referred to either as a zākīr or a nōḥa khāvañ.

37 Despite this, Muharram, ʿĀshūrā, Ḫūsāin, and Karbala motifs resound in the few instances of Pakistani “art films”. From Blood of Hussain (1980) by Jamil Dehlavi to Mustaq Gazdar’s They Are Killing The Horse (1978) the commemoration is an indigenous trope characterized by protest and indignation.
staircases. Over at Lahore’s last working film studio, the picture is much the same. Muharram is also a period of moral exception in the film industry, due to it being comprised of a large number of Shi’i actors, many of whom refrain from recording musical sequences during the entire month. Out of respect for their colleagues, many non-Shi’i performers similarly take a break from work. In the national media, entertainment and rolling news channels on cable television stop playing films, change their colour schemes and scrolling news tickers to shades of red and black, and play video recitations of nāḥay with dramatic green-screen animations situating the reciter on the desolate battlefield of Karbala. In the absence of musical instrumentation other techniques are used to expand the acoustic space, including echo and reverb effects on vocals. The act of chest-beating or mātam associated with mourning is replicated in contemporary nāḥay by a percussive beat somewhere between a snare drum and a handclap. Pakistan’s telecommunications providers offer dial-tone nāḥay to publicise the piety of the person you are calling. Many of these also use the mechanical mātam beat while other phone users choose to have na’ats – a genre of poetic recitations for the Prophet Muhammad more commonly associated with Barelvi devotion - as their ringtones as a way of loudly projecting to those proximate that they are not Shi’i. On the roads, rickshaw drivers project and broadcast their piety by playing nāḥay through speakers with the mechanical mātam audible from far away like a distant heartbeat.

These conditions coalesce to give Muharram in Lahore very particular visual and sonic conditions, an emotional atmosphere produced both by the state
– which is required to provide expansive security arrangements for public processions - and sustained in collaboration with others. While atmospheres as less-than-material and more-than-immaterial agents have been subject to recent scholarly interest, few other than Matthew Engelke (2012) have explored religious ambience as a logic of community-building. For Engelke, ambient faith is the recognition of forms of sensual manifestation that do not cohere with the realms of public or private faith but benefit from the very ambiguity of ambience that works when, “intentionally nonintentional” (Ibid: 166). Muharram as a period of moral exception provides a transformed site of emotional discourse and an atmosphere conducive to the circulation of ambient ‘azādari. Meaning mourning and lamentation, in the way the term was used among my interlocutors ‘azādari can also be described as the praxis of creating an atmosphere conducive to the collective mourning for Imam Ḥussāin, one central to Shi’i traditions of lamentation that create an affective space conducive to emotional modesty (Tambar 2011). Mahmoud Ayoub’s study of suffering as a doctrine of redemption in Shi’i Islam speaks of mourning as a horizon of faith and existential striving that resists strictly theological categorising. Writing shortly before the Iranian revolution, after which Shi’i mourning became entangled in a revolutionary project, Ayoub describes, “fulfilment through suffering” (1978: 23) or the praxes of mourning that does as much as it feels. Suffering as a doctrine of redemption increases its chances of efficacy in the creation and sustaining of a moral atmosphere hospitable to mourning. Among other Shi’i recording companies beyond the Walled City of Lahore it is common to hear such activities
described as proselytization or promotion of Islam, rather than ‘azādari. ‘Azādari is an emotional project, an atmospheric one connected to what Hasan Mir calls “the aura of Hussāiniat [lit. Ḥussāin-ness]”38 that is supposed to be cultivated throughout the year, culminating in a heightened display during Muharram.

The marketplace circulation of vernacular Shi‘i media over the last three decades has occurred in tandem with widespread instances of marginalization against the Shi‘a in Pakistan. I arrived at a time in Pakistan in which anti-Shi‘i violence had declined, a new, largely urban orthodoxy had risen through the transnational influence of Iranian Shi‘ism, and new technologies were allowing for the wider circulation of devotional media to rural areas. A recently developed recitation form known as qaṣīda is emblematic of these ongoing changes. While the word refers more commonly to an Arabic poetic ode, in this context it is the name given to a type of panegyrical recitation conducted by Shi‘i reciters which emerged in rural areas of Western and Southern Punjab. Qaṣīda remained in rural areas until the mid-to-late-1970s when, due to the arrival of home recording technologies, the style spread to the cities and was fed by the widespread accessibility of film music and hardware on which to listen and share. Never sold on solely audio platforms such as CDs, cassette, or mp3s, Pakistani qaṣīda performances achieve impact by drawing on the affective power of bodily gesture, the distorted layers of the amplified sound, and the intimate and reactive relationship with the assembled congregation. Backed by a chorus of four, who

38 Hussāiniat was described variously to me as the characteristic of resilience in the face of insurmountable odds, self-sacrifice, and an ongoing refusal of tyranny in all its forms.
create a wall of sound composed of chants put to the shouted refrains of Punjabi folk or Bollywood film songs, *qaṣīda* reciters hold the assembly with surprising contrasts, changes of tone, and sudden crescendos. Lately, younger reciters have trimmed the style to provide a surge of emotion in often no more than a minute.

Such *qaṣīda*, their proximity to musical performance, and their use of a wide repertoire of melodies from popular films are a source of great controversy for both Sunni and Shi’i ‘ulamā. Like their Sunni neighbours, most conservative Shi’i clerics consider singing, playing musical instruments, or participating in musical experience strictly incompatible with prayer. Yet in their marketplace circulation rarely are sources of authority cited, with many preferring intuition to knowledge of juridical sources. In the case of *qaṣīda*, one cannot simply revert to a source of theological authority but must feel the threshold between recitation and song and refer to its production in the perceived moral atmosphere of the individuals or community from which it emerged. Thresholds of permissibility are socially and materially constituted as part of a wider project of rethinking and renewing the space of media forms for which traditional orthodoxy has little to say. Both Hirschkind and Brian Larkin (2008) have focused on the role of clerics in Islamic renewal, the production of religious access, and interfaces through media and the adoption of technologies of mediation. Yet, overreliance on Habermas (1991) and Warner’s (2002) notion of

---

39 The use of film as a way of defining good practices by negative comparison is commonly heard in the critiques of some popular devotional *naʿat* praising the Prophet Muhammad (Eisenlohr 2018b: 33) and the anxieties around other religious genres that incorporate film songs, such as *bandiri* in Northern Nigeria (Larkin 2004) and certain Hindu forms of recitation (Manuel 1993: 114–115).
a public sphere open to all does not take into account the production of ambient conditions media are believed to foster that are contingent on that which must remain outside of orthodox practices as much as those participating. What was so evident among my interlocutors were attempts to pick apart the assemblage that characterises cultural mediation rather than finding new ways of speaking through it. Amid the production, circulation, and consumption of devotional recitations and their attempts to cohere with, or defy, an orthodoxy in flux, threshold practices and threshold thinking provide a conceptual pathway towards understanding the making and breaking of consensus and its operation from peripheries rather than from centres of power.

Social Histories of Recording: Jaffriyah Video House

On the eighth day of Muharram devotees from villages surrounding Lahore come to the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman. As they pass through the security bottleneck, they come to a commodity zone packed thick with stalls selling devotional items from beneath the awnings and behind the jangling *zanjeer* [lit. chains, referring to blades for ritual scourging] of small modular stores. The market is a prominent centre of public leisure for local Shi’i; behind its security cordons and roadblocks it feels almost akin to a gated community. The narrow market street leads to the shrine, in which a women’s *majlis* is taking place behind a thick black curtain, held by members of the Twelver Shi’i community who are the primary, but not only, adherents of the shrine. A female *zākīr* narrates the torments of Zainab, the
daughter of Imam Ali, as she watched Hazrat Abbas gallop into the battlefield of Karbala and its waiting armies, to fetch water for Bibi Sakina, the infant daughter of Imam Ḥussāin. The zākīr begins her sermon with a lesson about self-sacrifice and ends with a gory narrative of the mutilation and death of Hazrat Abbas who, with his arms severed, still tried to make it back to Bibi Sakina with her water-gourd clenched between his teeth. The narrative is embellished, having been honed over time and through interactions with audiences to heighten the emotional power of the story. It is a common complaint among conservative Shi’i ʿulamā that popular recitations contain narratives of the lives and deaths of the Āhl-e-bayt that do not figure in any accepted sources of historical validity.

Outside, while the women’s majlis takes place, a contingent of black-clad men signal their arrival to the shrine said to be the resting place of a number of pious women, with chants of as-salāmu ʿalaykum yā Sayedah [Greetings to you, honored woman] before removing their shimmering black polyester qāmeez to reveal backs deeply etched with diagonal scars. Together they recite a popular nūḥa refrain, with the wavering yet consistent tune of the lamentation repeating itself to powerful off-beat slaps on bare skin, like a deep, raw, and elastic bass note thundering on the lowest register.

Despite the security guards’ strict prohibition of cameras, anyone assembled who is not participating lifts their smartphones in the air, recording the bodily gestures of communal mourning. Inside, men press their phones against the black purdah capturing the women’s majlis on their phone’s built-in voice recorder. So resonant and affective is the demonstration of piety that one
cannot help but want to retain what visitors refer to as a *nīshāni* [memento] of the immediacy of the event. Fulfilling this demand, a number of Shi’i cassette and video houses beside the shrine offer new and old recordings of *majālis*, compilations of *nōha* recitations, and documentaries (Fig 16 & 17). Due to the demographics of the area and its visitors, most of the recordings are in the Punjabi or Saraiki[^40] languages. The oldest store in the area, Jaffriyah Video House, is run by Tahir Jafri, who has been recording, storing, reproducing, and retrieving *majlis* recordings for thirty years, and to whom a 100PKR note was entrusted in the Introductory chapter to this thesis. Behind his counter is a collage of Shi’i poster art, all sourced from journeys to Iran, and unavailable in the commodity zone beside him. In the same spirit, the visibility of the videocassettes – mastercopies of recordings made by himself and his brother – boast of the antiquity they have at their disposal. Before they established their shop beside the shrine, the market was no more than a single individual by the name of Ghulam Hussain who sold sweet sherbet to devotees. Through Ghulam the Jafri brothers began to sell their cassettes on commission. Between then and 2018 as many as a dozen cassette and video houses came and went, leaving Jafri’s the oldest in the market.

In the late 1970s the adoption and adaption of home recording technology allowed for the documentation of events of personal, social, and ritual

[^40]: The most detailed scholarship in English on the Saraiki language and its literature has been undertaken by Christopher Shackle (1972, 1976) at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.
significance. Suddenly broad demographics could create, edit, and document the world around them using tools previously associated with habitual mediums of popular enchantment like radio, television, and cinema. What was previously the remit of the elite, the act of commissioning records of events, became widely available and affordable, the residual effect of which is visible today in the widespread use of smartphones to capture and circulate images, video, and sounds. Like the digital present, analogue home recording media reconciled individuals to the social solidarities inculcated by the circulation of the video or audiotape. During the era that audio- and videocassette hardware was widely adopted in Pakistan, broadcast television programming was dominated by the theocratic and ideological hallmarks of General Zia-ul-Haq’s state, in which Pakistan’s Shi’i minority, increasingly the target of polemic and physical attacks, found tools for creating their own media trajectories.

Jafri’s daily routine consists of fulfilling the requests for majlis, marsiya, or noha recitations while monitoring the little green bar on his desktop computer that shows the progress of customers’ USB and microSD cards being filled with curated content (Fig 18). These requests can span time periods, languages, and national and international points of origin. In his trade the difficulty in retrieval is paired with the physical and organisational effort of recording and duplication. Jafri remembers that,

“During the cassette era there was a lot of demand... demand still exists but beyadabi [disrespect] has come... Previously people would come from really far away, from Mianwali and even as far as Karachi, to buy
the recordings. They would come from so far to procure it [Hašil karnā] and there was a lot of hard work in that procurement. If they put so much hard work in this procurement then they would put a similar amount of hard work in keeping it safe.”

This idea that the increase of demand and platforms for its accessibility corresponded with a decrease in devotional and disciplinary character Jafri links to changes in listening habits from groups to personal listening. Jafri remembers when half a dozen people would sit and listen to religious cassettes together. For him, these pious listening regimes associated with devotional audition have been disrupted by the personalisation of the smartphone, whereby one can listen while on the way to work or while doing other tasks. Jafri describes this as, “kanon-komazer [enjoyment for the ears]”. In many cases public culture and its deliberative forums are not necessarily formed around secular public-ness but by putting adapted technological forms into circulation as living and dynamic moral invitations to participate (Rollier 2010). Yet what Hirschkind describes as media as a potential, “prosthetic of the modern virtuous subject” (2006: 74) is one that requires a zonal separation, rather than an extension of the body that for Jafri merely opens space for its non-deliberative use. Furthermore, a prosthetic infers an appendage that replaces a lost function. Pious media as amplification more closely captures the uses to which recording is put among my Shi’i interlocutors.

Jafri’s cushioned bench is a diverse meeting place of different classes, castes, and professions. The leather covered bench acts as waiting area for customers while their requests for the reproduction and compilation of content is
fulfilled, either by loading up a USB or memory card with digital content, or by making copies from a master-disc or cassette. As a place for repose in a busy religious site and commodity zone, Jafri’s bench reminded me of sabīl stands set up by local volunteers distributing free water and other refreshments to the participants in Shi’i processions taken through hot and densely populated urban areas. The act of loading files provides a small a break from the back and forth of the market. Such a deliberative atmosphere is retained by Jafri’s choice to keep the long bench in a store so greatly starved of storage space. While copying many hours of audio and video files to memory cards takes much less time than the minute-for-minute copying of analogue media, my time spent waiting with others for devotional content to be digitized from cassette mastercopies or loaded onto microSD cards suggested that the durational exercise of waiting is still associated with being provided with an object of greater spiritual value. The disciplinary medium of cassettes therefore retains the emotional modesty, as well as the patience and repose, which quantifies devotion in terms of duration.

The circulation first of video and audiocassettes and then media, CDs and DVDs of processions and majālis not only amplified religiosity but siphoned Shi’i devotion into distinct parts of daily life. Jafri refers to what he trades as the asasa [assets] of the community. For him, the best way to ensure the continued existence of these assets is to distribute them across as many formats as possible. This movement he describes as, “imanat hai quam ki [guardianship on behalf of the people/community]”. Jafri remembers the first footage of Shi’ism in the public sphere were televised sermons of Rasheed Turabi a Shia alim [plural
ulamā\textsuperscript{[1].} In the mid-1960s his was the first majlis shown on the only state television channel PTV, whose archives are fiercely guarded and inaccessible to most. He blames this mindset on the problems of inheritance and custodianship in the political sphere,

“During Zia-ul-Haq’s time they destroyed all the data made in Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s time. Every new government tries to destroy the previous government’s data. Because people become personal and when they get personal things get lost.”

From the dozen cassette and video houses around the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman, most had closed a few years after Pakistan saw widespread connectivity to the internet. Jafri explains that without the weight of a reserve of original material behind them and without the importance of the connection between those doing the recording and its reproduction, other traders’ role as mediators was rendered ephemeral when they were only able to trade copies of content easily procured on the internet. Jafri is not afraid of circulation undermining any rights he has over the monetary value of his recordings. Instead, he is sensitive to the intimate connection between the labour of procurement and safekeeping. What he describes as, “guardianship on behalf of the people” is a reminder of the residual populism of the marketplace and its objections to the problem of inheritance and accessibility in the secular polity, as well as the sphere of traditional orthodoxy.
As the ninth of Muharram approached, all attention in Lahore turned to the Mochi Gate area of the Walled City, and to Hasan Mir’s Shi’a-majority area known to its residents as the Mūḥalla Shian. A Mūḥalla is a Mughal-era term used widely in north India and across Pakistan to describe a neighbourhood of an urban quarter (Masselos 1976), and usually carries with it the implication of a caste identity. In Pakistan it less rigidly describes particular borders or streets and is more porous to the changes in social or corporate groups identified by profession or religious denomination. The Mūḥalla as social entity strengthens community security through political patronage, necessitates participation in religious rites, and enforces conformity. As the Day of ‘Āshūrā’ approached one unnamed street – the widest in the area – was resplendent in flowing red flags. Hasan Mir had hung up new banners to project his own persona during this most visible of times for their street. Throughout the year large plastic pana-flex posters advertised his long-established “Panjtan Paak Cassette House” with an image of him performing zanjeer zāni with a tangle of extravagantly long blades (Fig 20 & 21). “Look, that’s me,” he would often remind me, quietly. Despite the influx of new visual material, local Shi’i police officers are tasked with wandering around ensuring no outsiders take photographs of the mourners. At a time of such public piety, many are afraid of being photographed and blackmailed; such is the disapproval felt towards such corporeal devotion by some non-Shi’i Pakistanis. These local anxieties relate to broader and considerably more widespread instances of violence against the Shi’a in Pakistan over the last four decades or
more. Continually embattled groupings, such as the Shi’a Hazara communities in and around Quetta, face assassinations and targeted violence, even while Pakistani Shi’a count for as much as a fifth of the population and are represented at the highest levels of military, entertainment, politics, and trade. From the 1990s to the early 2010s violence against Shi’i communities affected every corner of the country. Muharram and the climactic Day of ‘Āshūrā’ became a flashpoint for random and opportunistic attacks on large crowds, congregations of mourners, or those displaying more publicly than usual their religious affiliation.

Only authorized individuals like Hasan Mir, and groups known and respected within the community are permitted to record the processions. Hasan Mir claims to have been the first to have hit upon the idea of recording majlis and processions at the nearby Nisar Haveli and on the streets surrounding his store. Aware of the similarity in appearance between his religious media store and the film and music traders on Hall Road he is eager to emphasize, “it is all mazhabi CD and cassette work. I don’t even know the meaning of songs or singing.” As the only production company that records the processions and mourning gatherings around the Walled City of Lahore, so influential is his enterprise that he has long been the one who decides where that threshold lies. “You won’t find

41 The practice suggests anxiety about the power of the referent, requiring it be transmitted through an external authority rather than relying on its own. Like the stamped seal of Mughal Emperors (Gallop 1999) the transformative power of the referent advertises the authorised passage of the ritual from event to recording through the logo of Hasan Mir’s enterprise that hovers beneath the surface of the image on his video recordings like a watermark.

42 The procession in question is the famous gathering that begins in the Mochi Gate area of Lahore and ends at the Imam Bargah Karbala Gamay Shah. The latter is named after Hazrat Baba Syed Ghulam Ali Shah who, it is widely believed, along with his female associate Mai Aghaie popularized the public demonstration of azadari for the ahl-e-bayt in the streets of the city.
songs or singing,” he would often iterate. “We’ve never done that, since the beginning.”

Like Taha Kazi’s work on religious television programming, Yasmin Moll’s research on “media claiming a pious mandate” (2018: 235) raises the question of the changing impressions of what Islamic media should and should not look and sound like in a sphere of increasing media professionalism. Moll well articulates the way that, “contested parameters of permissibility” (ibid: 242) pave the way for a system of evaluation that manifests where the dividing line lies, and the ways in which these binaries can help to recruit others to causes antagonistic to the other. Moll calls for scholars to involve religious conservatism and illiberality in anthropological critique by tracing, “ethnographically the social life of theology as a space of critical contestation” (ibid: 258) in a similar spirit to Birgit Meyer’s argument that the contestation of media is key to understanding the dynamics of mediation and medium (2011: 33). As in Hasan Mir’s store, often the contestation of certain forms of media circulation happen at the same time as the eager adoption of other practices for the purposes of mediating faith and proselytization.

It was evident from other recordings Hasan Mir had made that others had been eager to record the māḥaul of the community for at least as long as there had been the hardware to do so. The first procession Hasan Mir recorded on

43 A remarkable series of recordings brought to light by Ali Karjoo-Ravary (2017) and the Ajam Media Collective evince this urge to record processions on the first widely available portable magnetic tape recorders. An Iranian curtain manufacturer Mohammad Taqi Noei-Asgarnia (1938-2008) in Tehran bought a reel-to-reel tape recorder in the 1960s and recorded Muharram processions on the streets of his family village of Qazvin. Communal mourning, such an integral
video after briefly returning from a period of expatriate employment in Saudi Arabia was the ‘Āshūrā’ that fell on the sixth of October 1984. In the grainy video, as a stirring lament is recited in a dense crowd, men can be seen holding up recording technology; cassette recorders, microphones, and video cameras. As the lament comes to an end there are more recording devices than there are voices in recitation. It would be apt to generalise that recording- and its elicitation – functions together with an interlocutor; events deemed significant. Whether for personal consumption, sharing, or circulation, recording evinces an awareness that the “elictory power” (Stathern 1992: 249) of the event and its transaction in things, form lasting relationships.44

Hasan Mir’s desire to record was borne during his time in the early 1980s as an expatriate worker in Saudi Arabia. In the Sunni-majority country he found that the Shi’i minority were only permitted to do mātam dari and zanjeer zāni in a private hall, if at all. His account of his difficult re-acculturation once back in Lahore – recounted as ever with a wide grin and in a taut baritone - is worth quoting at length,

“In short, I am a matamī [a mourner], I am a zanjeer zān [one who self-flagellates]. When people came from outside Pakistan, just like you, they would say, “I have just watched this speech and I would like a recording

44 In this remarkable essay Marilyn Strathern describes strategies of elucidation that work to know and “decompose” an image offered as an elicitation of contact that, by measure of the often-overwhelming might of such “elictory power”, serves to assert dominance.
of it”, but there was not a single shop in the Mūḥalla. So, I asked around if anyone has any recordings and they had nothing. The public [in English] would ask about the programme, speech, or procession they just watched, and if they could have a recording of it. I thought to myself, “What is all this? Over here you can find everything. We have zanjeer for sale, why are there no cassettes available here?” The following year I had to go to Saudi Arabia. I missed all this very much. I, who used to do so much [mourning and lamentation] was now stuck in a desert with Arabs for eight whole years. During that time, I only came to Pakistan once for a holiday. The māḥaul ka Mūḥalla [local moral atmosphere or environment of the Mūḥalla] we have here doesn’t exist over there. I decided that when I leave Saudi Arabia I will open a shop just for this purpose.”

For Hasan Mir, by equating the sale of Shi‘i audio and video cassettes with the public sale of (and by extension, permitted public flagellation with) zanjeer, his urge to record was a result of the residual shock of the prohibitive attitude he found himself in while working in Saudi Arabia and his ability to exercise his ability to engage in such public piety once back in Pakistan. In Saudi Arabia, Shi‘i ‘Āshūrā’ processions and public mourning are strictly regulated, having been banned in much of the country since the early twentieth century. Returning home for a year between 1984 and 1985 he recorded those years’ ‘Āshūrā’ processions for the first time on video on the street in which he lives. That year he did not leave the house without his signature double-cassette deck, making
audio recordings of *mātam dari* and processions wherever he came across them among the city’s sprawling neighbourhoods, before going home and making one copy at a time. Engaged in religious work, neither smoking nor chewing *paan*, his parents approved of his pursuits. He had also found that videocassette recorders were cheaply available in Saudi Arabia when their legality in Pakistan was still not proscribed by the theocratic regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. From the Gulf, Hasan Mir brought back five videocassette recorders (VCRs), multi-deck audiocassette recorders, and some eight hundred audiocassettes. Missing meals and eschewing cigarettes during his time abroad, he would also work overtime to buy as many as twenty audiocassettes at one time, sending boxes-full back with colleagues returning to visit their families in Lahore. Even today, he keeps a few behind the counter as mementoes of the time, still sealed in a crisp blue Sony-brand plastic wrapping.

*Live has a moral atmosphere of its own*

What Hasan Mir continues to find so special about his personal archive of recordings is the addition of *māḥaul*, a term that describes a locality, a sense of proximity, but also a sense of moral ambience (Fig 22). Picking up a DVD copy of the 1984 procession he told me,

“This is the *live* recording. The public are reciting, and we are there recording it onsite. Almost immediately we make copies of it and provide
it to the public. Live has a māhaul of its own [Live ka apna hī māhaul hota hai].”

What are these participative and embodied qualities of being live that make recordings so special and such a smooth index of the moral atmospheres from which they emerge? The recording evidently benefited from a powerful and pious index, but one which evinced not simply the smooth yet contingent impression of contact, but the result of the sacred brought onto the public thoroughfare. These phenomena resonate with Philip Auslander’s idea that the recording of bodily gesture creates a category of experience of its own known as “liveness”, bifurcating the experience of performance and the experience of its remediation. As Auslander explains, “Recording technology brought the live into being, but under conditions that permitted a clear distinction between the existing mode of performance and the new one” (2008: 59). While Walter Benjamin argued that reproduction “extracts sameness even from what is unique” (Benjamin 2008: 24) as a consequence of the destruction of the aura of art in reproduction, “liveness” is a construction of the reproducible index of one-off performance.

Intrinsic to “sameness” as an expression of the mimetic faculty, is the existential connection between copy and contact, which in the age of recording media defines the nature of the encounter between language and the voice, between body and presence. Before “liveness”, Roland Barthes found in the "grain" of the voice (Barthes 1978: 181) a site where these entangled corporealities and materialities interact. The grain is "the materiality of the body
speaking its mother tongue" (Ibid: 182). Barthes’ desire for unruliness, the untamed voice, was also a desire for "noise", the elements that create the good māhaul of procession recordings. The grain is the body of the system that performs, but the grain can also threaten to overload that same system when it reaches the threshold point of what Barthes describes as “fuzziness” (Ibid: 189). The term is echoed by Kittler, who described “fuzziness” as the “noise of the real” (Kittler 1999: 14). As such, “Liveness” creates its own relationship with the recorded event, capturing atmosphere over fidelity.

Hasan Mir believed I would enjoy neither the procession recordings nor his mātam dari recordings. He told me that such live recordings, “have a lot of noise [shōr] in it,” telling me,

“It is for the people who have attended that programme, they have the whole māhaul [in this sense, environment, ambience] in their mind. They are watching it with their eyes and listening to it with their ears. That is why they want to buy the live programme.”

Unlike Tahir Jafri, Hasan Mir remains adamant that there is a radical subjectivity to the moral atmosphere of communal mourning that is impossible to mediate. Perhaps this is because, managing both a procession supplies store and a procession recording company, the objects Hasan Mir deals in are not the pedagogic, deliberative majālis that Tahir Jafri sells, but rather ephemeral objects used as adornments to ritual celebration and commemoration. While in Jafri’s recordings of majālis there is a pedagogic divide between those recording the majlis and the participants, Hasan Mir’s recordings are taken as participants in
the processions. For Hasan Mir, \textit{mātam dari} recordings capture the movement of sound and bodies that sonically and viscerally maps the moral terrain of the Mūḥalla, a map that can only be read by the initiated. He explains, “Those people who have watched it with their eyes and listened to it with their ears, those are the people who appreciate it… Because \textit{live} is the only thing that works [\textit{chalna}]. I do \textit{live} only for this Mūḥalla.”

I would often experience one element of what Hasan Mir describes as the \textit{māhaul} of the Mūḥalla, but an experience resistant to “liveness” due to the threat of onward circulation outside of the kinship group. One evening Hasan Mir sat my wife and I down and raised his fingers to his lips, to listen out to the sounds of a woman’s function celebrating the birth of Imam Ali in a courtyard behind the store. Most sources of religious authority agree that while the female voice is not considered necessary for concealment, interaction that leads to temptation can be evoked by the voice. Overhearing non-kin voices in proximity has come to be understood as a necessary consequence of urban living. But, as circulation obscures its audience, in this case an audience of unknown men, the recording, storage and reproduction of women’s mourning commemorations is layered with many complications. Commemorations in which women do \textit{mātam dari} only happen inside private houses and prayer halls. Hasan Mir narrated how the overload of emotion can reveal hair, skin, actions, and gestures that in usual modes of comportment would be concealed from the eyes of others. My wife recalled to him one video she saw on YouTube of women in Pakistan doing \textit{mātam dari}. Hasan Mir recoiled in horror,
“They shouldn’t have put that on YouTube…. I know many people who don’t take permission and take a shot of a woman for two or three minutes and put it in their videos. Doesn’t anyone ever tell them that they must be mad to do such a thing? Don’t they realise that their sister, mother, or daughter could be in that film? Even if their mother or daughter isn’t sitting there, someone else’s is, and you shouldn’t do that.”

The ways in which Hasan Mir describes the morality of abstaining from recording women suggests a sensitivity towards the relationship between technology and an ethics of responsibility. This, he believes, is a necessary response to an inherent flaw in recording technology; its ability to render itself near invisible. The miniaturization of capacious media is also the concealment of consent. With the predominance of recording technology on smartphones, it is acknowledged that women may record them for their own purposes or to share with their kin group. However, women’s functions are never recorded live and sold by his or any other shop, extending the gendering of ritual space into the outward spread of its circulation. In this way the intimacy of viewing private women’s recordings can be considered a consanguineous category of media circulation, in which only permitted relations may share the intimate social space of recording and reproduction.

Tahir Jafri remembers that the first wave of นํ่าฮ่า audiocassettes available in the marketplace were recited by female reciters. He remembered fondly the sounds of the home, a soundscape of amateurism and domesticity. The intimacy
of home recording technology in this era found equivalence with its widespread use as an “audio letter” sent to relatives in the diaspora. He remembered,

“The recording wasn’t done in a studio, they were just sitting in their house and recorded it on a tape player, but you could hear the noises in the background as well. While sitting at home they read it with such style.

So sorrowful! [pūr dārd]! It sold in great numbers.”

For him, the new wave of female nūḥa reciters’ VCDs do not boast an equivalent sense of what he calls the ‘aqīdāt [devotion] of the original adherents. Cassettes were welcomed because they were emotionally proximate – live - but not corporeal. New female reciters, on the other hand, release professionally produced VCDs with clips made against animated backdrops. Some, such as devotional performer, Afshan, are former Pakistani film playback singers. Jafri describes most contemporary female reciters in this way, somewhat disparagingly, as ganay-walay [singers] and, like other proprietors of Shi’i cassette and video houses, is quick to make a distinction between the usual produce sold by media markets such as Hall Road and what he has.

As we spoke evening fell, and the exposed light bulbs of the Bibi Pak Daman market lit up the night with a piercing brightness, two women and their children came in and sat down, massaging the soles of their feet. They had come barefoot to the shrine from a village north of Lahore. Exhausted, they asked Jafri for a glass of water, which he had already reached over to pour. To the younger woman, whose small baby bivouacked beneath her thick shawl, clung a young boy; thin, shy, serious, and no older than six. The women sat down next to me on
the waiting bench and sipped the cup of water that Jafri had given them while the boy addressed him in a quiet and focused manner. It seems he had been preparing for some time for what he would say. He asked for discs of zākīreen because he wanted to become one himself. He didn’t want audio content because he wanted to see the reciter and learn by imitating his rhetorical style and gestures.

When they left, Jafri packed the paper-covered discs they had flicked through back into bundles and sighed, “Nowadays the copying style is very popular.” He had come to the realisation that circulation preserves but also inhibits change and originality. Previously reciters would recruit and train adherents through both direct oral mentorship and mediated mentorship, he explained,

“Nowadays people just buy discs from here and start reciting. No-one tells them that you have proven you can recite; go ahead. With the change in technology the reciter’s job has become easier. When there were no amplifiers, they would have had to exert more energy.”

Usually calm, strong, and forceful in the clarity of his ideas, Jafri initially found himself uncertain of how to historicise the influence of marketplace recording companies, having never been asked to trace their development. Caught between a preference for less elite forms of recitation with its roots in vernacular Punjabi and the authorised transmission of knowledge that comes from teacher-student relationships, Jafri appeared surprised to find himself in a network of circulation and amplitude that mediates the tradition of ustād [teacher] and shagīrd [student] for those who may not be visible to each other face-to-face. Perhaps Shi’i cassette
and video houses prefer to deal in live rather than studio recordings in part as a commitment to the oral transmission and face-to-face authorisation of knowledge and religious experience. “In the studio you wouldn’t be able to get that māḥaul [moral atmosphere],“ Jafri said, telling me of the benefits of live. “When you listen or watch the live recordings you can get the reaction of the people who are sitting there listening to it and you feel as if you are sitting amongst them.” On the morality of media formats Ayala Fader (2013) has argued that Orthodox Jews uncertain of the effect the Internet might have on their communities have come to look for “kosher” ways of negotiating media usage. One such strategy is the reliance on audiocassettes, “to index a pious moral technology” (Ibid, 81) that stresses continuity and assured contact and circulation.

Like the proselytization – or daʿwa – that Charles Hirschkind explored in the context of the Sunni Revival movement in Egypt through the circulation of audiocassettes, the recordings sold by Shiʿi “Cassette and Video Houses” in Pakistan are implicitly non-commercial in their spread. Any anxieties about the “copying style” diluting the authorised transmission of knowledge is more or less negated by the fact that, while copying the discs is not overtly encouraged for proselytization, Hasan Mir and Tahir Jafri do not seem to mind as long as it spreads ʿazādari. Particularly during Muharram, recording companies like Jafri’s are not concerned about assured contact or acting as involuntary wholesalers to Hall Road. Haider, the son of Hasan Mir and proud heir to Panjtan Paak Productions, told me, “Copying is the only trend these days. If you take a CD from me, you can go back to London and make a thousand copies of it and start
dealing in CDs. It all depends on you”. For him the difference between these work ethics is drawn from the period of moral exception itself. “For those on Hall Road, Muharram lasts from the first to the tenth of the month, but for us it lasts from the first of Muharram to the thirtieth of Al-Haj [the entire lunar calendar]”\textsuperscript{45}, he told me, embodying at least half of the oft-heard Shi’i slogan, “every day is ʿĀshūrā, every land is Karbala”.

\textit{Recording and Moral Space}

Hasan Mir exercises the power he has established in the community by recording the processions by \textit{continuing} to record the processions amid the dangerous conditions that the Shi’i community in Pakistan have faced over the prior three decades. As I have shown, in his Mūhalla recording the processions is not just something anyone can do, it requires permission from local state authorities and integration and presence within the community, something which must be continually renewed and cultivated. The advertisement of his spectacular piety in the form of posters that are hung around the Mūhalla also does the work of maintaining that presence and trustworthiness, effectively producing the role as one that cannot be done by just anybody, despite the widespread availability of

\textsuperscript{45} The Islamic lunar calendar is used for commemorative occasions like ʿĀshūrā. The ʿĀshūrās in question in this chapter fell on 30\textsuperscript{th} September 2017 (1439AH) and 20\textsuperscript{th} September 2018 (1440AH).
the technology to do so. In Pakistan there are few ways to strictly and bureaucratically demarcate a Mūḥalla, the boundaries of which change with its inhabitants. One way Hasan Mir’s neighbourhood is demarcated is by the *tazia* and *taboot* processions that pass through the Mūḥalla Shian. Taken out on the ninth and tenth of Muharram every year, the procession leaves from the nearby Nisar Haveli and follows a route that takes it through the small adjacent alleyways. *Tazia* are model mausolea and floats evoking the shrines or symbols of specific members of the *ahl-e-bayt* and are distinct from the *Taz’iyeh* passion play which developed in Iran (Chelkowski 1979, Dabashi 2005). In the days approaching ‘Āshūrā’, *tazia* representing the deaths of individual members of the *ahl-e-bayt* are taken out on processions. The *tazia* of Ali Asghar, the infant son of Imam Ḥussāin killed by a single arrow, takes the form of a blood-stained cot adorned with wooden arrows capped in silver foil. While presence and authority in the Mūḥalla is expressed by being at the head of a *tazia* procession and bearing the weight of the wooden float, in some parts of Pakistan, Sunni Muslims carry the *tazia* of their Shi’i neighbours following funerary practices in which the family of the dead do not carry the coffin (Abbas 2007: 9).

It is the Mūḥalla itself and its inhabitants that are the symbolic bearers of the Tazia, rather than the particular individuals that may have financed it or carry its weight as an object of competition between communities (Freitag 1992: 158). On the Indian subcontinent they have been viewed as evidence of Hindu-Muslim syncretism and evidence of the often-blurred boundaries between Sunni, Shi’i, and Hindu practices and their spaces of public confluence. *Tazia* processions
were creolized in the nineteenth century to places such as Fiji and Trinidad through the spread of indentured labours (Mansingh and Mansingh 1995, Mishra 2008, Korom 2012). They also manifest a palpable element of the association of Muharram rituals with public protest; not only the ongoing protest against *zulm* [injustice], but the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates’ historic prohibition of the public mourning of Ḥussāin (Abbas 2007: 6). Varying in age, size, and antiquity, with the finest crafted in the nearby town of Chiniot, the *tazia* are kept in storehouses throughout the year, surrounded by paintings and poster portraits of Imam Ali and Imam Ḥussāin. While bearing the Tazia is the work of the Mūḥalla, to be the guardian of a *tazia* also confers prestige on a family group. This is because in most cases it is associated with the patrilineal inheritance of licenses issued by the government to take out the *tazia* in procession, in continuation of colonial-era laws.

Similarly, among Shi’i “cassette and video houses” power as mediators lays in the act of guardianship. With its precursors in the guardianship of the *tazia* and the humble presence of the *sabil* stand, feeding the regularity and permissibility of processions in the public sphere builds status within communities of kin and sentiment. The commissioning of *tazia* by individual families can be seen as the antecedent to the creation of documentary records of public piety, their storage, and subsequent retrieval (Fig 23). Many of my interlocutors linked the growing number of *tazia* processions across Pakistan with an increase in wealth and disposable income enabling families to build status by having a procession depart from their home. The requirement for video-
recordings of these occasions also drove the indigenization of recording media as not wholly profane, despite its genealogical link with film and music. Reza Masoudi Nejad (2018) has recently explored the place of Shi’i ritual in the urban sphere and the spatiality of its actualization. Following Victor Turner’s work on ritual and pilgrimage (Turner & Turner 1978, Turner 1979) Masoudi takes processions as ways of negotiating spatial thresholds, which both produce and distinguish the other as those who are beyond its imagined boundaries. The act of recording similarly became an agent of competitive prestige which allows its users to demarcate pious localities, claim status, and improve the social standing of oneself or one’s immediate grouping by navigating ritual and mundane temporalities.

When he returned to Lahore permanently in the late 1980s, Hasan Mir made a small duplication factory capable of producing twelve 180-minute videocassettes in three hours. The insatiable demand of the public that he recalled at the time required he build a reserve of other materials to transfer onto cassette and video. He scoured bazaars and the homes of family friends for tawa, the Punjabi vernacular term for a vinyl record, featuring Shi’i content which he could transfer onto cassette. “I have about seventy- or eighty-year-old things in my stock; laments, prayers, majālis.” He said, marvelling at the antiquity of his material, “I am not that old.” To the atemporality of ritual remembrance recording adds the shock of the temporal. Thus, the residual presence of reminders of the analogue past is not evidence of nostalgia. Raising his arm to his forehead, he told me “Even now I salute audio cassettes, it is the King…” A
format associated with storage and safekeeping confers the “cassette and video house” with a mark of distinction that trumps the march of technological progress.

Both Hasan Mir’s 1984 and 1985 recordings are still sold, transferred from analogue to DVDs with handsome red sleeves. After the experimental prototype of the 1984 video, the following year’s recording is longer and more drawn out. Crowds at Lahore’s Delhi Gate can be seen surrounding the tazia of Ḥussāin and participating in the recitation of a lament to which it is addressed. Mourners in a nearby section of the crowd have cleared a line so that they can flagellate themselves in between breaks in the lament. By 1985 others had caught on to this idea of depicting and reproducing ritual for sale in the marketplace, or for personal use. As the camera zooms out dozens of cassette recorders can be seen balanced on the tops of people’s heads, their recording devices becoming an embodiment of the materiality of mourning, like the tazia that store and activate the memory of the ahl-e-bayt.

Engagement with Hasan Mir’s collection of procession recordings shows how the moral demarcation of a pious community is done by the creation and enforcement of the relations that are materialized by the processions that take place in the Mūḥalla. Mircea Eliade might have referred to the way this act of demarcation is done as the “myth of eternal return” (1954). What Eliade called “sacred space” (1959 22) is a strategy of orientation, one of a toolkit of “techniques for consecrating space” (Ibid: 28) in which the sacred fixes limits and powers of genesis, while replicating the act of world-making through
consecration. In this light, Hasan Mir’s procession recordings are not mediation but the replication of a divine act. If sacred space makes possible the reproduction of the world, where this ontological genesis can unfold once again, it also makes possible flow between the sacred and the profane, or “ontological passage from one mode of being to another” (Ibid: 63). Shi’i procession recordings exist partly for this purpose, because they are the unfolding of the time of origins.

Unlike Eliade, Maurice Bloch considers “ritual time”; cyclical or “static” in nature, an ideological and social construct, while “mundane time”, linear and marked by the impression of duration, is derived from shared faculties, surroundings, and context (Bloch 1977). The contradiction between multiple temporalities and the retrospective surprise at their overlapping, coheres with Bloch’s argument that in the presence of the past in the present another kind of cognition is found through ritual. In this uncanny temporality, ritual and recording are apt bedfellows. For Bloch, ritual works by cloaking cognition that might challenge authority, yet ritual and mundane time are not mutually dependent but can comment upon and challenge one another (1974: 287). Such friction organises another kind of communication, aided by tools for recording which break the boundaries of the separation of minority ritual from public life, as Hasan Mir experienced as an expatriate worker and continues to challenge back in Lahore.

For example, to capture the patronage and piety of the Mūḥalla Shian requires a spatial awareness capable of editing together both the geography of the
area and the content. Hasan Mir was always confident that, “Whoever sees it says, “Yes, Brother, that’s how it is.””. To create the filmed footage of the processions from the Mūḥalla Shian, the videos taken by Hasan Mir’s cameramen are edited together keeping in mind the rhythm of what he calls the “sequence.” When, for example, the ambient sounds of the Mūḥalla are recorded, such as *azaan* from nearby, possibly non-Shi’i mosques,

> “We have to be very careful that the wording of the *azaan* is not broken, so that *bid’ah* doesn’t happen. The *azaan* has to come in a sequence [*tārteeb*]; four times *Allāh hū Akbar*. If the sequence is broken, then *Allāh hū Akbar* can come six times as well. Then the *azaan* would be *khārab* [broken].”

*Bid’ah* is innovation perceived to be negative to orthodoxy, namely the forging of new rituals that have no origins in theology. This level of continuity required in recording is both spatial and theological, as well as that which needs to be approved and verified by the experience of those who attended, and sensitive to the discourse of *bid’ah*. These are discursive positions that may not always be easily reconciled. Preparing for these dangers acknowledges how the practices associated with recording technology, the “mimetically capacious machines”, materialise contingency while fabricating fidelity to the event of its recording.
Moral Exception

Such “mimetically capacious machines” emphasize the constitution of public mourning through a mimetic relationship with other mourning bodies. One social history of recording that I have outlined in this chapter to show the diverse permissibility of media hardware over the content of secular media, takes the project of ʿazādari and makes material and efficacious the moral atmospheres it attempts to cleave. Shiʿi procession recordings in Lahore, for example, transform ʿazādari as an act of mourning for Ḥussāin into a site of spatial and gender relations; an atmosphere of inside and out, conducive to public mourning and fidelity to the recursive events at Karbala. If recording exists opposite its other, be that the friction between sacred and mundane time or the gendering of ritual space, the affective ambience of its appreciation is one wrought by a dynamic relationship with impermissible acts as well as the power of consecrating space and time. The kind of emotional discourses Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) described as an object of social practice that communicate and constitute affective atmospheres, often take their most immediate form through negation. While apophatic – or negative – theology attempts to know God through negation, discourses of permissibility show the productive friction of negation in the mediation of practice.

I have argued that media atmospheres can be material agents produced by exception, permissibility, and use. Ambient environments characterised by the imminence or intermittence of periods of pious exception like Muharram and Ramazan direct attention towards the kind of intimate engagement required to
negotiate what kind of media practices are and are not permitted. Out of these spaces of exception the agency of recording produces a pious “liveness” out of the sphere of communal piety that is a fabrication of the perceived moral atmosphere of its origins. In the contingency of *live*, the demarcation of sacred space, and the ambient atmospheres of periods of abeyance or abstention, aesthetics and morality converge. These spaces of moral exception operate at the juncture of rejection and acceptance and allow space for nuance and ambivalence to emerge in the study of pious praxis. While consensus is dialogic, periods of exception acknowledge the continuity of dialogue while observing faith-based discipline in the secular spheres of everyday life.
Chapter II Figures

Figure 13. A cover, featuring the concealed face of the twelfth Imam, Imam Madhi, of a DVD showing the kind of material brought into view and sold in Hall Road’s DVD markets during Muharram. The disc features an Iranian documentary dubbed into Urdu. (author’s copy).
Fig 14. Black *alam* flags fly over the Walled City of Lahore indicating devotion to the *ahl-e-bayt*, the family of the Prophet Muhammad. Usually raised over the homes of Shi’i Muslims, they multiply in number and visibility during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram (September 2018).
Fig 15. On the days approaching ʿĀshūrā, film, entertainment, and rolling news channels on cable television stop playing films, change their colour schemes and scrolling bars to reds and blacks, and play video recitations of laments. Above, the usual palette of rolling news and below, the look of Lahore’s City42 News on the ninth of Muharram.
Figure 16. A Shi’a cassette and video house in the market beside the shrine and Imam Bargah of Baba Gamay Shah in Lahore. (October 2018).
Fig 17. Interior of a “cassette house” in the market surrounding the Bibi Pak Daman market (August 2017).
Fig 18. Interior of Jaffriyah Cassette House. The waiting bench, used by customers since the cassette era while they wait for requested content to be copied from master-copies, is also a place of discussion and debate over newer styles of devotional recitation (May 2018).
Fig 19. Waiting at Bibi Pak Daman Market (March 2018).
Fig 20 & 21. Posters of Hasan Mir performing self-flagellation, erected outside his shop, captioned with the words Salaam Ya Hussain. (September 2018).
Fig 22. Copies of Hasan Mir’s procession recordings (October 2017).
Fig 23. Tazia Storage Room, Walled City of Lahore (November 2017).
Fig 24. Stills from the first procession recordings made by Panjtan Paak Productions in 1984 and 1985.
Chapter III

Film Under Erasure

It was the third successive day I sat waiting behind Mubaraka Hussain’s palatial desk with its cracked glass counter, looking at nothing but the catalogues of the Punjab Archives. So proud are her team of the catalogues they have produced over the last two decades detailing the holdings of the archive that visiting scholars often find themselves compelled to scrutinise them as closely as the evasive contents of the repository. Despite Mubaraka’s efforts to transform the reputation of the archive as a frustrating and impenetrable fortress, few manage to get further than her lively and effervescent company. Mughal-era papers in Persian, the court records of Indian nationalist Bhagat Singh, records pertaining to the immediate post-1857 era of British expansion in Punjab, and an unknown and unassessed trove of papers languish in numbered wooden lockers that line the walls of the archive. Occasionally a locker will yield a yellowed manuscript, other times tea-cups and sugar. While they remain tantalizing and within reach, the only documents I ever accessed were index upon index, catalogued by year – beginning in 1860 and ending in 1900\textsuperscript{46} - each of which took Mubaraka between

\textsuperscript{46} I was guaranteed not to find much researching the history of moving image media and its traces in the Punjab Archives, especially in catalogues with a cut-off date of 1901; while the Lumiere Brothers first brought the cinemascop to the Watson Hotel in Bombay on 7 July 1896, and indigenous film production grew in British India, Lahore had to wait until 1924 when the first
6 and 18 months to compile. On every page of the hardbound catalogues, themselves now yellowed with age, she had stamped her name, title, and department, an act that indexed her time spent making sense of the repository, her time spent making it knowable and showable. A project to secure funds to catalogue the rest is, “In the pipeline”, Mubaraka explained, with the eyebrows of someone about to deliver a punchline. Before exclaiming, “But the pipeline is blocked.”

In his study of Pakistan’s paper bureaucracy, Matthew Hull states, "A Pakistani government file….is an unusual sort of artefact because signs of its history are continuously and deliberately inscribed upon the artefact itself, a peculiarity that gives it an event-like quality." (Hull 2012: 116-7). What are these archival events that Mubaraka’s catalogues evidence and the blockages that constrain the continued cataloguing of knowledge? How do these practices of making visible the agency of guardianship and mediation in the sphere of bureaucracy compare to those amplified by the marketplace trade in electronic media among the minority Shi’a? As Shaila Bhatti argues, in her ethnography of the nearby Lahore Museum, many of those in charge of Pakistan’s archives, libraries, museums, and heritage institutions adopt, “the role of guardians who protect, maintain, classify and expand the archive, which in return... proffer a

---

This chapter proceeds from Lisa Gitelman’s interest in the forms of knowledge brokered by documents as things which are “known and shown” (2014: 4), a study of the materiality of media closely related to Latour’s interest in “inscription” (Latour and Woolgar, 1979) as an act of making apparent and motioning towards fixity.
sense of authority and legitimacy linked to ownership.” (Bhatti 2012: 143). Responding to Haidy Geismar’s call for a “critical anthropology of the materiality of heritage... necessary to understand the emergence of new forms of heritage artifact” (2015: 79), this chapter presents the extant traces, indices, incisions, and excisions relating to moving image media in bureaucratic procedure and public regulation in Pakistan. This chapter begins in contrast to the work of Hull and Ann Laura Stoler (2010), by addressing instead the archival invisibility of film in Pakistan rather than the proliferation or detritus of controlling documents. In the first chapter, I detailed the moral anxieties about the compatibility of film with public religiosity in Pakistan and the moral objections to the social space of film labour and experience. In the second, I explored the asserted guardianship over media objects became a way of wielding a moral atmosphere that governs sacred and secular space. Following on from these, this chapter explores the infrastructural intermittence of top-down projects to protect, instrumentalize, or regulate film and media. On the one hand, the Hall Road repertoire that thrives outside of archival contexts operates in a comparable way to the constituents of extant Pakistani archives, whereby events – inscriptions, access, or indexing – maintain the circulation of objects, thereby sustaining the assertions of authority over them. On the other, this chapter explores how the felt absence of the state, brings to the surface of documents what Foucault called, “perishable individualities.” (1972: 100,103). The idea that the political does not have its own domain but various faces (Navaro-Yashin 2002) is undergirded by the materiality of institutions like archives and libraries.
which usually clearly delimit those individualities’, “possibilities of reinscription and transcription” (Emphasis in original. Foucault 1972: Ibid). The event of archival or bureaucratic experiences can also be seen in view of a project of individuation and becoming, in which inscriptions directly reflect personal aspirations.

That day in the Punjab Archives was like many others I would spend thereafter. Inside, students and scholars waited awkwardly for something to happen, while in the doorway dusty stray kittens lingered, not asking for anything. A university researcher looked questioningly at the typewritten, bound catalogues and asked, somewhat derisorily, “Are these the manuals?” To which Mubaraka responded with one punchline eyebrow, “Not manual, womanual; I made it!”. This was not the first time she brought up the unusual presence of a woman in such a senior position in the bureaucracy, nor was it the first time she gendered the materiality of the archive, an act of performativity (Butler 2011) that perhaps critically cited the gendering of space in her society and the challenges faced by women in Pakistani workplaces (Mirza 2002) That day, the walls were lined with teenage girls, interns and students, answering or handing in their answers for their summary examination of their time in the archive. They had spent six weeks mentored by Mubaraka, who taught them about the processes of fumigation and lamination; about how to get their hands dirty. Like the others she put to the group, the question, “What is an archive?” had a right answer. The
correct response, which was expected to have been memorized through their time spent with her was, “A record of non-current documents”\textsuperscript{48}.

A few kilometres away on Hall Road and among religious “Cassette and Video Houses,” I would often hear the personal collections – from taped recordings of stage shows, collections of master copies of rare films, to amateur cassettes of \textit{zākīreen} and \textit{ulamā’} long deceased – described as that community’s or that trader’s “record”, using the English word. In a bureaucratic setting, the “record” describes the debris of authorized procedure that while defined as “non-current” still very much pertains to the present. What Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta describe as “proceduralism” takes the form of “the banal repetition of everyday actions” that produces and reproduces the state (2009: 13). However, procedures that make and unmake archival objects also serve to mediate the authority of individuals in a much smaller domain than the expansive reach of the state. I argue that the kind of moral atmospheres described in Chapter One, and the assertions of guardianship explored in this chapter and the previous, leave incisions on the surface of objects that cannot be completely brought under the remit of either centralised storage or public ownership. In her desire to leave her mark on each and every aspect of the archive’s processes, Mubaraka herself appeared to undermine her own definition of an archive as a repository for “non-

\textsuperscript{48} This definition refers to common guidelines across Pakistan’s Federal Archives, to whom all government departments are required to dispatch their files. The four categories of files; A, B, C, D designates immediate inclusion or exclusion from the archives. Category A refers to papers of high importance such as minutes of meetings relating to Pakistan and its affairs with other countries. B-category documents - visitor records and other instantiations of procedure - are housed in the archives after ten years in their associated offices. C-category records are destroyed after 30 years, while D-category files are immediately disposed of.
current” documents. The ongoing event of use and inscription mark them not only as current, but critical agents of self-making, indicative of personal morality and individuation. I hope to draw attention to both the existence of a kind of non-government agency in the bureaucracy, and a kind of bureaucracy in public life, brought to the surfaces of objects when they become enmeshed in the way people define themselves through practices and praxis.

What Is A Film Archive?

While Mubarak’a’s students were taught to remember and repeat how to define an archive, the idea of a film archive, was for many of my interlocutors an unfamiliar concept, owing perhaps to the particular conditions in which film labor and experience has been cognized in Pakistan. Take, for example, the following vignettes,

A senior bureaucrat and aide to the Mayor of Lahore assures me that there are, “no film archives in Pakistan, only personal archives.” The only material that can be found is held by the friends and families of filmmakers. He believes if a Pakistani film archive is established, it should be provincial and linguistically distinct. “The territory owns it.” By this, I took him to mean that a film archive could never house Urdu –
the language of the state - and Pashto or “regional language” films together\textsuperscript{49}.

On Hall Road, Idris – a recent returnee from the Gulf who we will meet in Chapter Four and Five - describes his Uncle’s “flop” films by portraying a distinction between films that are “on the shelf”, as he describes them, and those that are in the theatres. A film’s success in Pakistan, as in India, is often measured by its longevity in cinema halls. As such, he equates the status of a film in storage with failure, one bereft of an audience.

The idea of a national film archive makes a stub-ripper in one of Lahore’s remaining analogue cinemas a little defensive about his country not having one. At the same time, he compares the state of affairs with what he knows about the Indian Film Archive, the contents of which he believes has been digitised and released for free on YouTube. Yet he remains ambivalent about his government not investing in film. And why should it? He proudly told me that Pakistani film has never sought approval from anyone but its audience.

Qasim, who was in the process of turning his father’s informal film stall, Kasur CD House, into an outlet for Chinese-made electronics, saw the

\textsuperscript{49} Since the birth of the country in 1947, language usage in Pakistan has been a source of internal strife, particularly owing to the difficulty of reconciling ethno-linguistic claims with the Urdu-language hegemony of the nation-state (Rahman 1999, 2002, Ayres 2009, Kirk 2016). Tariq Rahman notes how Pakistani film and its regional language mini-industries highlight how, “the domain of pleasure, with its internal codes of solidarity and intimacy, has become increasingly autonomous of Pakistan’s historically established language-ideology system…” (2016: 294).
project of a film archive as moot in the digital present. “New Pakistani films are coming. All those are available on the internet. The government did not struggle to keep the films. In the same way they have museums they should have made a film museum so that younger generations could know how the films were made, and what those times were like during those years.”

The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) organised the third Film Preservation and Restoration Workshop in India in 2017. A partnership between India’s Film Heritage Foundation and FIAF, in association with several professional and archival institutions, the seven-day workshop took place at the Prasad Film Laboratories in Chennai. Perhaps owing to India’s restrictive visa regime, applications were only open to citizens of India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.

In 1997, the authors of the *Pakistan Archives: Biannual Journal of the National Archives of Pakistan* reported an “absence of archival consciousness” (1997: 5) in governmental departments. Some years later, another scholar diagnosed the cause for neglect as, "apathy towards archives" (Haider 2005: 48) among the public. These sentiments echo the complaints of one historian of India’s National Film Archive, who cited the reasons for what he saw as the late establishment of an archive in India as a disinterested foreign occupying force and a “traditional apathy
towards preservation or documentation” (Dharap 1985: 528). Upon Partition, Nehru’s India became the chosen inheritor of the colonial subcontinent’s earliest British-made films when the director of the British Film Institute donated them to the newly established film archive in 1960 (Ibid: 530). As the spurned successors of Indian film history, Pakistan’s archival impulse became what cultural theorist Hal Foster would term an “anarchival impulse . . . concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces” (2004: 5).

Arguably, one of the more avowedly modernist Western European projects was the establishment of national film archives. While the comparative basis of anthropological enquiry has benefited much from global sensitivities to modernity, I did not hear aspirations expressed towards such ends. I found none of my interlocutors concerned with being or buying modern (Deeb 2006, Maqsood 2014). In most cases I found many confident that the material things they possessed were no more or less than their relatives in the diaspora. Most of my interlocutors’ disinterest in the prospect of a Pakistan film archive illuminated other priorities. The assertion of ownership over objects relating to the past was seen more as a way of aggregating them within individual or collective lifeworlds, benefiting and bettering corporate groups at a very local level.

In the first proposal for an archive of film material, Boleslas Matuszewski, a professional Polish cinematographer working in France on what was known then

---

50 Indeed, a centralized records office was a fairly new concept in South Asia (Haider 2005: 43). The Imperial Record Department was set up by the British in 1891 in Calcutta.
as “actualités”,- slices of life in proto-documentary form- outlined the use value of a, “Depository of Historical Cinematography” (Matuszewski 1995 [1898]: 324). His 1898 letter to a Paris newspaper dated from a time when even photography was not considered an appropriate museum object. He foresaw a time when film would address issues of national and public interest. For this purpose, he argued the embryonic archive could be used to image the past, to condense school lessons into vignettes, or to depict the dynamism of modern cities. In pragmatic fashion, he argued that the tangible traces of events could be contained within both a technology for their reapplication and a wider repository for their storage. For him, the future-oriented efficacy of film and the motivations towards its proper storage could be found in the specifically contingent, capacious, and exorbitant nature of the film image. He explained,

“Thus the cinematographic print, in which a thousand negatives make up a scene, and which, unrolled between a light source and a white sheet, makes the dead and gone get up and walk, this simple ribbon of imprinted celluloid constitutes not only a historic document, but a piece of history, a history that has not vanished and needs no genie to resuscitate it. It is there, scarcely sleeping, and - like those elementary organisms that, living in a latent state, revive after years given a bit of heat and moisture - it only requires, to reawaken it and relive those hours of the past, a little light passing through a lens in the darkness!” (Ibid: 323)
By describing its constitution – somewhat mythical – and its deployment – somewhat ritual – he arrived at its ability to capture store, and in a way, create, history – somewhat talismanic.

By giving scant attention to the materiality of the proposed museum object, his short proposal described not the ontological cinema itself as Syed Abul A'la Maududi would later understand it (Chapter One), but rather the cinematic event. It is rather the debris of this event – both catalyst and co-producer in history – that Matuszewski argued should remain accessible in a kind of archive. Grasping the event of inscription and the latent potential for future screening events was crucial for one of the first archives to materialise following Matuszewski’s call. Philanthropist Albert Kahn’s “Les Archives de la Planète,” a photographic and filmic attempt to catalogue the built heritage and lived traditions of the world’s peoples, struggled over “the excessive visual information in film,” a condition Paula Amad describes as "counter-archival" (Amad 2010: 142). By this she refers to film’s ability to capture an excess of detail and harness plenitude, an ability which recalls the unnameable power of the photographic punctum (Barthes 1981) as opposed to the banal, descriptive nature of the studium. The exorbitance of the photographic (and cinematic) image challenges a singular reading of a story, a subversive latency that can destabilise narratives, anthropological or otherwise (Pinney 2016).

History accepting, one of the central concerns that drove the establishment of the first national film archives and libraries to expand beyond private collections was the distinct fragility and flammability of nitrate film
stock. The early archive movement was always responsive to the needs to an unstable, flammable carrier. Rapidly atrophying reactions such as vinegar syndrome required decaying films be kept clear of reels in a salvageable condition. Even by 1930, the majority of films produced to date were lost, many sold to junk or scrap dealers who were able to extract silver from the nitrate stock (Houston 1994: 16). Film archives were not only containers for (literally) explosive materials or libraries for future historians. A report conducted by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films titled “The film in national life” (1932) paved the way for the establishment of the British Film Institute. Related closely to interpretations of culture and pedagogic value, the report concluded that, having manifested itself in public life, it was felt that film should be instrumentalized. The guiding principle of a film institute was to be one that was separate, but running in parallel to, an effective censorship regime. The combined archive-institute was to order taste rather than regulate content. Owing perhaps to this inherent unruliness film archives were quick to turn from sites of storage to spaces of exhibition, when a methodological schism between Ernest Lindgren of the British Film Institute and Henri Langlois of the Cinémathèque Française bifurcated discourse over how film archives should approach issues of preservation and circulation. Lindgren advocated a strict adherence to public demand and budget constraints, while Langlois passionately enacted a process of preservation through projection (Enticknap 2013, 52) or, like those on Hall Road, preservation through circulation.
In Pakistan a “National Film and Filmstrips Lending Library” was set up in Karachi by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (Anwar 1957: 115) from various 16mm and 35mm shorts leftover by British and US Information Services departments. This pedagogic archive – rumours of which I heard to still exist in a Karachi library – is the only of its kind the state possessed. Of the approximately 4500 films made over seven decades in Pakistan the majority have been lost. For countries with whom Pakistan shared a border or entangled histories, film archives became formative events in themselves in the creation of an independent infrastructure amid political strife. The Bangladesh Film Archive was established in 1978, just seven years after independence from West Pakistan, while the archives of national development body Afghan Film in Kabul were famously saved from a Taliban raid when two workers risked their lives brickling up the most precious reels in an office storeroom (Clouston 2008). For Pakistan it seems, the bad māḥaul of film was too contingent a contaminant for bureaucrats to risk muddying their hands with. The only exception was the National Film Development Corporation (NAFDEC), established in 1973 by the government of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and closed in the late 1990s. While by no means an archival initiative, the most transformative shift in the continued existence of Pakistani

---

51 British Information Services was a department of the UK High Commissioner in Pakistan, playing a role akin to today’s cultural attaches. Continuing the pre-war role of communication under the remit of information, they were ostensibly a propaganda unit.

52 During the latter stages of the writing of this thesis I was contacted by the George Eastman Museum, one of the world’s oldest film archives, and made aware of the existence of a substantial collection of Pakistani films first bequeathed to the British Film Institute and then sold to the US archive. Dating from the 1950s to the 1980s, they had been kept in the shed of a local distributor of Pakistani films in the United Kingdom and include, in various states of repair, many of the most notable films produced in Urdu and Punjabi over the last seventy years.
films in copy can be said to be the arrival of home video technology. I owe the short account of the Shalimar Recording Company (SRC) that follows to email correspondence with Rashid Latif Ansari, the long-serving managing director of SRC, to whom I offer my sincere gratitude for his responses.

In 1974, shortly after the establishment of NAFDEC, the Shalimar Recording Company was established by the Government of Pakistan. As a business it was unique; Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV), Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), NAFDEC, and the Arts Council of Pakistan were its public shareholders, and its private shareholders were poets, music composers, singers and film producers. Perhaps eager to compete with his predecessor Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto – who hosted the second Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Lahore in 1974 – General Zia-ul-Haq was eager for the public to consume his own speech at the Fourth Islamic Summit in Casablanca, Morocco, on the 17th January 1984. He set his right-hand man, Lieutenant General Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, the task of producing and circulating videocassettes of that speech among the population.

Before 1983, Videocassette Recorders (VCRs) had been illegal to import into Pakistan, but home viewership thrived on hardware brought back by Gulf expatriates like Hasan Mir (Chapter Two), those associated with contingents of the Pakistani army in Saudi Arabia, or from the diaspora in the West. Many expatriates came from and returned to economically deprived villages, making Pakistan, what one survey of the video-era described as, “an example of the complex interplay between the migrant, his VCR, and his government.” (Ganley
Perhaps following the influence of Iran (Ibid: 40), who banned videos and videocassette recorders, and Saudi Arabia, who closely regulated circulation and closed all public cinemas, the Zia government were initially hesitant about hardware for home recording and viewing. But with Zia’s prompt, Ansari and SRC – which was already producing audiocassettes – were ordered to produce and distribute a few thousand free copies of his OIC speech. The public gladly acquired these, Ansari said, only to use to record over with their favourite television programs.

At the beginning and end of Shalimar Recording Company video releases, a short introductory clip was illustrated with stills of Shalimar’s all-female technicians – a remarkable achievement at the time and one of director Ansari’s proudest memories – working at the telecine technology imported from German company Bosch (Fig 25). The voiceover advised, “To protect you from buying an inferior, illegally copied cassette, all genuine Shalimar cassettes have brown tape guard with Shalimar embossed on it.” After the film finished another short clip brought the viewer into the science of conservation, with advice on handling and storage. Cardboard inserts on audio- and videocassettes would also remind the user that the recorder head should be kept clean, that cassettes should be kept out of excessive humidity and away from magnetic fields, and to remove the anti-erasure plug to preserve valuable or prized recordings. Such informal

---

53 The emergence of a domestic and international pirated market in home video led to the appearance of video parlors, which staged informal screenings that were often formed as extensions of close-knit neighborhoods. Mayur Suresh’s research argues that as opposed to cinemas, which require people to congregate in a regulated public space, video “challenged the traditional distinctions of public and private space.” (2007: 106)
training in conservation science both inculcated passion for the seriality of collecting and fostered archival knowledge in non-archival systems of viewership and consumption.

All Pakistani films, regardless of language, whose producers agreed to release their films on VHS were transferred from celluloid to video and released by SRC. Ansari remembered that despite his conservative public face, Zia stipulated that one copy of each Pakistani film pressed onto VHS was sent to him fresh from the factory. SRC’s tapes provided the raw materials for the establishment of a new trade in the copying and reproduction of Pakistani films, joining a burgeoning trade in Indian films. The families of expatriates in the Gulf who had sent back or returned with VCRs supplemented their income by giving film showings of SRC videos and smuggled Indian films. The impact on Pakistani film was rapid. A pervasive appetite for Bollywood films available on video took urban family audiences away from Urdu-language film, resulting in the closure of cinemas and the decline of film production in Urdu. Punjabi and Pashto-language films filled the gap, made for the tastes of male workers arriving in cities from surrounding rural areas. These films further alienated middle class and female cinemagoers, encouraging them to consume film on home video or programmes broadcast on PTV.

But the fate of SRC’s own mastercopies, struck from the original celluloid reels, illustrates the diagnosed “apathy towards archives”. In the 2000s a political appointee of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif saw the master-tapes as junk material unnecessarily occupying shelf space and sold them and other master
recordings to scrap dealers. While SRC’s remit was not preservation, the continued existence of Pakistani films was aided by their mass transferral. Copies and recordings came to stand in as multiple surrogates for a single national archive. This dispersed archive is quite different to Claude Lévi-Strauss’ depiction of European archives as systems that rely on the felt presence of its constituent objects rather than their accessibility. Lévi-Strauss compared these systems to the sacred invisibility of churinga objects of Central Australian indigenous peoples. These stone or wooden objects, hidden in caves far from habitation, and handled from time to time by their cleaners, represented the body of an ancestor and were continually reapplied to successive generations understood to be the latest reincarnation or embodiment of that individual (1966: 242). The idea of circulation as a prerequisite for conservation finds some parallels in Lévi-Strauss’ comment on the aura of original objects, whose sacred power is grounded in materiality rather than information. In the tradition of Peter Manuel (1993) and Lawrence Liang’s (2007, 2009) accounts of the emergence of video culture in India, this short account showed how instances of participation and engagement with original objects stimulated acts of renewal that recruited a wide range of agents in the dispersed archive.

54 In a detailed account from an Indian context, Kuhu Tanvir argues that “pirate histories” sustain the memory of the peripheral and marginal forms of film’s expanded environment in ways that challenge the discursive underpinnings of the Indian national film archive. Tanvir argues that the compilations and montages made by collectors and fans, themselves assembled from a dispersed repertoire of YouTube clips, easily-acquired copies, and other material grabbed from the internet, results in a “diffusion of control” that usually characterises the bearer and the user of the archive (2014: 125).

55 Many of the central concepts that drove research on media, informality, and access in the Sarai and Bioscope platforms, also informed the establishment of Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive), an online database of marginalia that aimed to rethink how digital archives might be
The Censorial Record

If home recording technology invited users to participate in acts of storage and transferral usually associated with archival management, the only way the state could actively assert authority over film was in the sphere of censorship. On a residential street in Muslim Town in Lahore an inconspicuous government office occupies the top portion of a family home. Among old desks that get dustier as they near the floor, neat cardboard files, and the occasional Punjabi film star, can be found the Punjab Board of Film Censors. The bureaucrat in charge welcomes applicants against an overpainted sky-blue wall, with the patter of a mild-mannered recruiting officer. After the Eighteenth Amendment to the Pakistan Constitution in 2010 the activities of the censor board were split into provincial boards: Sindh, Punjab, and the Central Board in Islamabad, which also covers Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Punjab board itself is composed of thirteen regular members, seven official, and three ex-members. I am told that every six months, after films are reviewed they are burned in the presence of board members to guard against piracy.

Such waste does not worry them. I was assured that the Central Board of Film Censors in Islamabad has a film library to ensure that, if a cinema is raided, used. The archival debris that has resulted from Pakistani film piracy seems to have pre-emptively upheld many of the platform’s indispensable ‘10 Theses on the Archive’, such as,

“The archive that results may not have common terms of measurement or value. It will include and reveal conflicts, and it will exacerbate the crises around property and authorship. It will remain radically incomplete, both in content and form. But it is nevertheless something that an interested observer will be able to traverse: riding on the linking ability of the sentence, the disruptive leaps of images, and the distributive capacity that is native to technology” (2010: NP).
a base copy exists to compare with what was submitted and which scenes were excised. But amid the decrease in the production of films destined for cinema screens and the reliance of some cinemas on older celluloid material, new problems emerge with this central library of excisions. The mild-mannered inspector mourns the lack of a stable format on which to build a future-facing, censorial archive. “CDs melt, videos melt! What is the correct format? You tell me.” He asks. The creation of a censorial record was originally driven by an urge to guard against totay\textsuperscript{56} (Gazdar 1997: 167). Known in Bangladesh as “cut-pieces”, these aberrant images became the basis for Lotte Hoek’s remarkable study of a celluloid economy of concealment and revelation (2013). Cut-pieces are the sections of a film that did not pass the censor board but are illegally spliced into films during projection. Sometimes they would be completely extraneous sections of graphic violence or sex added in by projectionists to generate rumour and business. Totay in Pakistan were once a notorious feature of cinema-going in Lahore, which briefly competed with insurgent technologies by providing the contingency and surprise that television or home video could not (Hoek 2011: 85). Such remembered transgressions linger behind the murky reputation or bad māhaul of inner-city cinemas, despite the reliance of totay on celluloid projection having led to their decline in the digital era\textsuperscript{57}.

\textsuperscript{56} In Urdu tota (singular), means splice, in the plural, totay means splices, and refers to frames or strips of film. One could say that there has been totay as long as there have been film censor boards. Films exhibited with excised portions reinserted are mentioned in the Indian Cinematograph Committee of 1927-1928 (ICC I: 1928:131).

\textsuperscript{57} In Lahore, the Moonlight Cinema was once a byword for the exhibition of totay but closed when it could not compete with the quantity of pornography available in copy on nearby Hall Road.
In August 1974 a Punjabi film, *Khatarnak* (Dir. Rehmat Ali), was certified by the Censor Board and released. Gradually, allegations were registered at police stations. Claimants began to cry foul over “nude scenes” (Abdul Sattar vs The State 1975: 1138), excised by the censor but re-inserted upon exhibition. The police raided eleven cinemas in Karachi where the film was being exhibited and took possession of the third reel. The censor board found that in the item number “Touch Me Not”, the impounded reel contained an excised portion featuring a low-angle shot looking up a dancer’s leg (Abdul Sattar vs The State 1980: 979-80). In the end, both the initial case and appeals against the decision were quashed because the 1963 Censorship of Films Act could not be applied to punish *total*. But despite the *Khatarnak* case having reached the highest courts in the land, the Motion Picture Ordinance of 1979 – which repealed both the 1963 and 1918 acts – did not define that a film altered after certification becomes invalid or uncertified by the act of being tampered with (Baho vs the State 1981: 314). In a similar case brought against the producers of the film *Maula Jatt* in 1981, the decertification of the film was nullified, with it continuing to remain certified even with fourteen scenes that were ordered to have been excised by the Censor Board. The Zia-era Motion Picture Ordinance more commonly drew its efficacy from being so open to interpretation. Strictures ruling against transgressions such as “offense to Islam” that replaced the clearer 1963 guidelines were so vaguely defined that it worked to make everyone an interpreter and therefore a stakeholder in its policing. Participation in this debate became a necessity in everyday religious and secular practice, requiring
strategies for navigating ambiguities and their response. After a decade of the ordinance’s passing, films were being censored for scenes including, “Holding the wife's hand and making obscene movements…; A woman confessing that she is carrying someone else's child…; vulgar breast movements in the mujra dance…; shots of a mother picking up pieces of bread lying before dogs…” (Gul 1989: 57).

Unlike the Punjab Board in Lahore, the Central Board of Film Censors in Islamabad has the air of a long-established and long-functioning government regulatory body. Its grass well-trimmed, its peeling walls and highceilings cool and slightly damp. Inside an office room mostly used by its female staff for praying, the censorial archive of Pakistani films – in Urdu, Punjabi, and Pashto – was the largest state record of film content I came across during my fieldwork. The record that they have was built only out of procedural necessity, to maintain the efficacy of their excisions, and to build up a reserve of potential evidence to use in litigation. Boleslaw Matuszewski would surely have approved of film being used in such a future-facing way. In this case the “record”, refers to the private debris that exists only as a guarantee that a film circulates as authorised by its base copy. If a film submitted for censorship reaches the marketplace it will be the board members who will have to answer for it. Circulation here works as a regulating force in itself; a threat of exposure.

The period of my fieldwork was a busy time for the censor boards. During 2017 and 2018, a period felt by many to be a new era for Pakistani films, some felt that the censor board acted in ways antagonistic to this new national narrative.
Having initially cleared it for exhibition, the Punjab Censor Board suspended screenings of the popular Pakistani film *Na Maloom Afrad 2* (2017. Dir. Nabeel Qureshi) after the film had first been banned in the United Arab Emirates for satirising the culture of exorbitant spending in the sheikhdoms. Next, despite outrage from Hindu right-wing groups across the Indian border, who believed an upcoming Indian film, *Padmavat* (2018. Dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali), would feature a “love scene” between a Muslim ruler and a legendary Hindu queen, the film was cleared in Pakistan with fewer excisions than in India. Some users on Twitter joked that Pakistan should issue tourist visas to Indians who wanted to see the uncut version. Finally, another Indian film *Padman* (2018. Dir. R. Balki) - about an entrepreneur from Tamil Nadu who introduced affordable sanitary pads to his community - received an outright ban after the Central Board of Film Censors in Islamabad refused to even preview the film. So powerful was the revulsion felt by the board that they were afraid to watch it lest it corrupt their own principles.58

---

58 Even when censorial policies are strict and overbearing, that which slips through the cracks is often remarked upon as requiring a broader public consciousness sensitive to public morality. A Shi‘i magazine, Tafqr, published in Lahore in 1989 featured an article titled “Majlis Attenders and Viewers on Television”, about whether television and radio were being used for the right purposes. Perhaps by nature of the broadcast mediums under discussion, and the mobility of the hardware for reception, television and radio were capable of orienting themselves to the qibla, the direction of prayer. Referring to the government of General Zia-ul-Haq the article mourns that, “Although the last government made a lot of promises that they will turn the direction of the television towards the Kaaba, just reciting *Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim* at the start of each show is not enough to change the direction. (Although Bismillah has a lot of blessings in it)” (1989: 5). The article concludes that what is required is the kind of social activism of the Clean-Up TV pressure group founded in 1964 in Britain to campaign against what social conservatives saw as a culture of permissiveness on broadcast media. According to the article, Pakistan needs its own Mary Whitehouse, the most prominent campaigner associated with the Clean-Up TV movement, whose “jihad” and “fighting spirit” (Ibid: 6) worked to reorient new technologies to moral ends.
It is an interesting conundrum. How does a film become so taboo that the people responsible for deciding on whether it is taboo or not refuse to watch it? These economies of knowing and showing operate through what Michael Taussig describes as a “public secret” born of, “knowing what not to know” (1999: 2) or knowing what it is not possible to articulate. William Mazzarella describes this as a sphere of “performative dispensation”, wherein censorship responds to the dangers of mass-mediation and power is attained in parallel with the demarcation of an affective zone of phenomenological order (2013: 2). But unlike Mazzarella’s India, I do not see Pakistan’s censorship regime as a struggle between liberalism and conservatism, traditional and cosmopolitan. Instead, I found that everyday acts of censorship evince a greater individual struggle with what is publicly permissible. The informal spread of DVDs and VCDs, through small stallholders and DVDwallas, has opened up space for micro-industries to thrive. One stallholder in Peshawar’s own labyrinthine media bazaar, the Nishtarabad centre, began to finance “CD films” or “minifilms”, made for direct release through the networks forged by informal film distribution. He stated, “In the absence of a censor policy, [the stallholder said], “insaan ka apna zameer censor board hota hai.” [Man’s own conscience is the censor board]” (cf. Imtiaz 2010).59

59 Mohamed Shafeeq Karinkurayil has tracked the development of a form of straight-to-market VCDs and DVDs in Muslim areas of north Kerala pertaining to Islamic themes and formed through dissatisfaction with the morality of mainstream media (2019). In these films the constitution of an Islamic subject are thought through local communities’ shared experience of expatriate labour in the Gulf.
One Monday morning, I found Asghar, a part-time programmer who screens old Punjabi films in the analogue cinemas of Abbott Road, inspecting the seventeen cans of film delivered to the parking lot of the Odeon Cinema, along with some promotional material he was erecting with the help of some of the cinema’s staff. From the remaining film poster designers in nearby Abbott Road, Asghar commissions newly designed posters and flex banners to advertise aged and worn film prints. Some of these new posters feature actors with no involvement whatsoever in the production, just to draw crowds. The audience generally see through such marketing techniques, with some even complaining that the cinema owners are trying to fool those vulnerable to the appeal of the new. The poster for one Punjabi film, *Badmāś Gujjar* (Gujjar Hooligan, dir. Masood Butt, 2001) had been censored since its initial certificate was granted. The designers of the new poster had not been made aware that the word *badmāś* [hooligan] was to be excised from the title. Rather than re-designing the poster, they rectified the change by crossing out the word, leaving it evident beneath the cross.

In the world of Pakistani film it is common to see such blatant *incisions* as a strategy for responding to and acknowledging the requirement for censorial excisions. It is the moral equivalent of the mathematical pedagogy of showing one’s workings. What I call incisions refer to strategies of visible concealment, such as the full-body stockings familiar in Pashto films of the 1980s that responded to rules permitting the showing of bare (female) skin. Incisions as visible concealment are common in the public sphere. Cosmetic advertisements
can often be found with the face of the female model scrubbed out, while television channels blur women’s chests on Turkish or Indian drama serials dubbed and imported onto Pakistani screens. By context and content, the viewer understands what is being censored. Incisions are instead an assertion of authority that plays out on the surface of the image. Whether casting aspersions on the modesty of women’s dress or removing credits or intellectual property claims from other channels or producers, the surface of the image becomes a space of contestation in which public, personal, or vigilante acts of censorship commonly take place.

I refer to incisions not in the way Ann Laura Stoler (2010: 7-8) describes knowledge made to incise, but rather as the adaptive inverse of an editorial excision, what Derrida called an act of defacement made to remain visible beneath the erasure. The partial obscuring of ideas that are inadequate, yet still necessary, was used widely in deconstructionist philosophy to point to the polysemic dimensions of a text and its exterior. In Of Grammatology Derrida defined a method of writing sous rature – under erasure - showing both the excised word and its excising cross. Derrida explains, “the gesture of sous rature implies "both this and that" as well as "neither this nor that" undoing the opposition and the hierarchy between the legible and the erased” (1974: 320). In writing this pertains to the word being inaccurate or not fit for purpose, drawing attention to the fallibility of language to express and the absence of a presence to which the excised element refers. In the world of film, writing under erasure might be transduced to the wielding of permissibility defined as more powerful
than the offense of the image. The absence of efficacy is asserted by putting the image under erasure, whereby the curious absence and presence of film in Pakistan is foregrounded to define the morality or individuation of its opponents.

Magazines and newspapers as far back as the 1980s – as well as in studies of Pakistani film and performance (D. Kazi 2006, Pamment 2010, Kirk 2016a, Syeda 2015) – evidence these acts of censorship-from-below. It is possible to find inscriptions with pen – from thick layers of colour to neat lines creating a makeshift gauze – on posters, flex banners, magazines, and hoardings, most commonly covering the legs and breasts of film actors (Fig 26). Often the inscriptions were made on the copy of the photograph before it went to print. The surface of the image is one site where the distinction between “instrumental iconoclasm” and “expressive iconoclasm” plays out (Flood 2002: 646). The former achieves a goal, the latter expresses the achievement of this goal through action. Unruly images become entropic images when allowed to continue in defaced form. These small acts of censorship are important in the outward circulation of film objects in Pakistan. By nature of how film objects travel in the present, an incised film object may form the base version for widely reproduced copies and come to form the standard extant version of that film. For example, during a mujra dance number in the film Dubai Chalo ([Let’s Go To Dubai!], Dir. Haider Chaudry, 1979), unknown hands had drawn or scratched directly onto hundreds of celluloid frames, covering the actors’ breasts and skirting the fringes of her dress. As the film exists only in informal copies bought from sites such as Hall Road, the incised base copy comes to be
more permanent than formal acts of censorship, which are often flouted with the inclusion of *totay*.

Michael Polanyi’s classic work, *The Tacit Dimension* attempted a general theory of human knowledge that operates within the limits of knowing, which exceeds the capacity for telling (2009: 4). In its felt dimensions tacit knowing, meaning implied without explicit statement, is deeply phenomenological and broadly semiotic (Ibid: 11) as well as ontologically experienced in the movement of external experience to inner knowing. This resonates with Laura Marks’ sensuous engagement with film, in which “the image is connective tissue” (2002: xi) and the aim of such sensuous engagement is, “touching, not mastering’ (2002: xii). Yet if the object of engagement is tacit knowledge or a “public secret”, we might say that touching in pursuit of mastery is a pathway towards individual becoming. By taking the law into their own hands, the defaced poster is driven by the demands of its inverse, the intimate and the reactionary, through which visibility and concealment are negotiated. Such *incisions* rather than censorial excisions evince a public culture open to negotiation, experimentation, and debate. The remarkable world of Pakistani cinemas experience a traffic in such defaced images; atrophied by time, use, or by the participation of those who mediate its journey. Such censorship-from-below is also a consequence of the privatization of security and a response to the perceived absence of the state. Combined with the increased participation in matters of religious exegeses, Pakistan’s regimes of media permissibility are a set of discursive spaces where multiple, contested narratives are rehearsed.
Since we had discussed the occurrence of *ya kabīkaj*, Mubarakā had been busy looking for what might likewise be classed as a defacement or an incision. Found in Persian and Mughal-era manuscripts of the type held in the deepest recesses of the Punjab Archives, the invocation “*Ya kabīkaj*” was often inscribed in the first page of an edition or a folio or in the margins of a miniature illustration. The rounded letters I had scrawled on a scrap of paper in my beginners’ cursive was still resting on her desk a year later. She had left it there to jog her memory while looking through the illuminated Persian manuscripts. The “kabīkaj” being referred to by the Arabic invocation “*ya*” had its origins in a kind of medicine made of the Asiatic crowfoot, a pest-repellent that gave off a strong odour known to repel insects attracted to the pastes and gums used to bind manuscripts. At some point the conservational science of kabīkaj as repellent intersected with a protective emblem, the kabīkaj referred to as the, “King of the Cockroaches” who protects books from termites. Writers, illustrators, owners, librarians, and record-keepers would invoke the King believing that, if other insects saw this invocation they would spare the paper. Scholars routinely come across appeals such as, “*Ya kabīkaj, protect the paper!*” (Gacek 1986: 49), as the toxicity of the plant was seen to conversely possess the potential for guardianship as well as deterioration (Gacek 2009: 137). Whether or not this interpretation is apocryphal, the kabīkaj instantiates a transgressive inscription of the artist, owner, scribe, or copyist who traditionally succeeds when invisible, extraneous to the text copied or collected. Mubarakā’s stamp, through which she records her presence in the archive, and
the invocation to the King of the Cockroaches indicates two common inscriptions on objects and surfaces relating to the past in Pakistan; one authorial, the other talismanic: both serve to sustain the archival event by participating with and affirming its continued existence.

Walled within the Punjab Secretariat, the Punjab Archives is housed in an octagonal building built either in 1599 C.E., or 1615 C.E, many believe as a mausoleum to Anarkali, a legendary Mughal princess said to have been buried alive by her jealous lover, Emperor Akbar. Under British rule the mausoleum was first used as an Anglican Church between 1851 and 1891 and converted into a clerical records office in 1923 (Fig 27). In 1973 it was formally designated a Pakistani federal government archive. The biography of the Punjab Archives is a microcosm of Lahore itself; a Mughal tomb to a mythical princess, repurposed into a church, then reconfigured into a regional records office, with a reputation for being fiercely guarded and bureaucratic yet cut through by a pervasive informality. Mubaraka had worked in the archive since 1996. Facilitating the retrieval of research material for scholars was her aim when joining the archive. But she was careful, as a young woman, not to appear to be challenging the status quo. Her research output includes scholarly publications in Urdu; this being her favoured part of the job, closely followed by the creation of indexes and metadata to ensure future access. She explained how,

---

60 Just as the logic of the built environment in Islamabad is crucial to Matthew Hull’s work on the circulation of bureaucratic documents, in Chapter Four I argue that Lahore’s porosity rather than its palimpsestic nature, has an interpenetrative relationship with the logic of its dispersed archives.
“When I joined the archives, my slogan was, “give it to the public, send it to the market”. Can you believe when I joined it was the first time the termite problem was treated? Some people here before us were so scared of giving knowledge to people, worried that the people would get to know more than them. Can you believe this attitude? If I don’t share information when I die and go underground, my information will go underground too. It’s better to give it away.61"

Like Derrida’s notion of the archive as the locus of “commencement” and “commandment” (Derrida 1996) and actants of the archive as archons, or guardians, Mubaraka forms an active, custodial relationship with the objects under her care. Derrida’s idea of the archive was a place of beginnings, from where power branches out. The memory of her victory over the termites of the Punjab Archive two decades previously invigorates her search for the kabīkaj, an older attempt to vanquish the termites.

The Central Records Office was established in Karachi in 1951, when the city was the capital of West and East Pakistan. Later, in 1988, the National Archives was established in the new capital, Islamabad. In its foundational acts film was only mentioned in connection to oral history, confining it to the category of “private archives”. The only film material the National Archives possess is a

61 It is appropriate to acknowledge here that this sentiment would strongly contrast the experiences of many researchers and scholars frustrated by Pakistan’s repositories. Numerous rumours circulate around the Punjab Archives, in particular regarding the careless deaccessioning of objects and, in some cases, their clandestine deaccessioning and sale to collectors. Despite Mubaraka’s professed commitment to public engagement, the extent to which a public can be engaged is demarcated by those who can pass Secretariat security, for which an appointment within its walls and a valid ID card is required.
small collection of videocassettes of interviews with historic political figures recorded from state television. A downstairs office full of severe-looking men assure me it is not their prerogative to collect things such as film. Among them, a secret hero in crumpled *awami* dress, takes me aside and downstairs to a room where photographs of Muhammad Ali Jinnah are labelled and catalogued. From a metal filing cabinet clammy with congealed damp he brings eight overstuffed brown envelopes containing a treasure trove of photographic materials relating to the history of Pakistani film, donated to the archive by Morning News, Karachi in 1992. It was the first time that the envelopes had been opened. The photographs consist primarily of publication shots, film stills, and other photographs for immediate publication or kept as a kind of library to draw upon if a newspaper article required illustration. The photographs are a rich source of information both front and back, with the reverse sides featuring handwritten or printed labels noting the illustrated film star, film, or event. They include material about which little else is known; films that were never released or banned before they were screened and domestic shots of film stars in London or in their homes surrounded by books, projecting themselves as they would like to be seen.

The man in the unstarched *qameez* was Siddiqui from Dera Ghazi Khan. He had been working for 34 years with the collection of photographs of Jinnah, the Quaid-e-Azam [Great Leader] photographs. The years have not dulled his enthusiasm. When he showed me one picture of Jinnah with his dogs, it was as if he was showing a picture of a beloved, recently departed relative. As Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab have their own archives that operate
autonomously from one another, the National Archives of Pakistan is perhaps inaccurately named. It is, more than anything else, an archive of the ideas that sustain the Islamabad Capital Territory, of the concept of spatial (and in a sense, epistemological) isolation of governors from the governed (Hull 2012: 34). It is primarily a documentary repository of uncontroversial issues relating to the state; knowledge of the past that most must agree upon to continue to participate in governance. When flicking over the Pakistani film stills, he whispers of a kind of sacred, dangerous contagion attached to dying industries in Pakistan, that he feels it is archivists’ responsibility to push against because of the cyclicality of cultural trends,

“For many years there has been no work on films in Pakistan. This industry is almost silent [khamosh] now. In this country when such big industries die no one touches the material of that industry for 20 or 30 years. Then we start to waste it [zāy’a karnā].”

Siddiqui told me to photograph the photographs with my smartphone whenever he left the room, instructing me that clearance for authorized copies would take many months or years to facilitate. Echoing Mubaraka in the Punjab Archives, he advised me to “take it to the market”.

Both Mubaraka in the Punjab Archives and Siddiqui in the National Archives share a distinction between documents and records (Fig 28). For the former, a government department called the National Documentation Wing provides liaison between federal archives and a substantial and accessible body of material in copy, owing to the fact that the national and federal archives rarely
communicate with one another and never transfer or lend materials. The National Documentation Centre serves to mediate between each of them, reproducing documents in copy. Established in 1974, it was founded in response to the inaccessibility of documents relating to Pakistan’s past, the imbalance of inheritance of archival records from British India, the availability of technologies of copying and reproduction such as the photocopier, and the widespread use of microfilm in libraries. It was not only the early Phalke films that went to India, the contents of the Imperial Library in Calcutta and the Imperial Record Office in New Delhi were bequeathed to India and made inaccessible to Pakistan. It is this imbalance of inheritance that has required the most substantial and centralised collection of materials relating to British India and post-colonial Pakistan to be a centralised archive of copies. Such materials are, like the evasive Persian manuscript protected by a talismanic invocation, often experienced as an interface fused with the agency of their guardians and mediators.

An Open Non-Government

The evident contrasts of my time in the Punjab Archives and on Hall Road helped bring some clarity to how moral atmospheres are formed by circulation. contrasting the two bounded locales of the messy colonial archive where nothing is accessible and the marketplace repertoire driven by the march of technological obsolescence where everything can be retrieved at a price. As a counterpoint to the impenetrability of the bureaucracy, its inverse, the trade in and transfer of
copies permitted free reign, evinces a remarkable degree of transparency, an *open non-government*. The result is a picture of the past censored and regulated by agents working parallel to, but not necessarily in agreement with the state, and one buffeted by the choices of those who kept films in circulation. In contrast to Lévi-Strauss’ sacred archive as a system that relies on felt presence rather than accessibility, archival events seek detours from the status quo by modifying objects relating to the past rather than simply aiming to conserve their form.

In Pakistani archival procedure and marketplace circulation I saw parallels, namely in the federalised way of working with decentralised and dispersed objects. As Shalia Bhatti observes, the visitors whose ways of engaging with the Lahore Museum are viewed with condescension take the form of a kind of a loitering approach that does not fit with the educational experience of the museum staff’s ideal visitor. Instead, new circuits are traversed and retraced, with the loose set of priorities of the Museum refigured by its active and ambivalent audience. Amit Rai explains that, “Loitering is what popular media does in its nonlinear circulation.” (Rai, 2009. 38). In its circulation, dispersed archives and repertoires similarly do not cohere with the linearity so central to conventional archives and museums, but rather echo modes of embodied participation familiar to the enjoyment of film and popular culture.

This chapter served to explore the presence of systems of top-down archival retrieval in my field-site, to frame the idea of state support for film activity in the form of a film archive, and explore assertions of guardianship over objects relating to the past. In the European model of film archives, conservation
served to bring objects back to an imagined point of perfection, to the “pristine visuality” that Hito Steyerl (2012: 32) defined as the inverse to the circulation of “poor images” outside of repositories for their protection. What I have attempted to describe here is an ecology of reproduction in which individuals create the spaces and resources through which conservation, as a participative act, can take place.

Owing to the coexistence of hostility and enthusiasm for cinema-going, the state has maintained a certain distance from the materials and labour that undergird it. Curiously, by allowing it to circulate outside of authorised channels, film has been allowed far greater freedom of movement than other forms of knowledge. Perhaps so that its contested and complicated regimes of permissibility were not tangled up with any governing regime. Instead, roles usually adopted by the state – both the preservation and censorship of film – are taken up by self-appointed guardians of both material culture and morality.
Chapter III Figures
Fig 25. Three stills from an advertising identifier on Shalimar Recording Company Videos. The consumer is shown the process of celluloid to video transfer, tutored in methods of storage and preservation, and directed to the quality mark indicating a genuine product (video still, early 1980s).
Fig 26. Examples of censorial incisions on Pakistani film objects.
Fig 27. The Punjab Archives, walled within the Punjab Secretariat and housed in Anarkali’s Tomb, a sixteenth century shrine to a mythical princess. Armed guards occupy the turrets (October 2017).
Fig 28. A poster hung in the halls of the National Archives of Pakistan illustrating “your record” in various cycles towards its storage and referencing (April 2018).
Interlude

Raddi Infrastructure

In the first half of this thesis I have argued that systems of interdiction in religious and state forms result in attempts at reproduction that must navigate ellipses, intermittence, deterioration and decay in institutions and infrastructures. By way of an interlude between the first and second halves of this thesis, I trace the material circuit that traverses the moral atmospheres evinced in the first three chapters either towards media objects’ manifestation in media markets such as Hall Road or as raddi [scrap], and the possible routes that might be undertaken through disposition, disposal, collection, and reproduction.

The Cinema

During my fieldwork Pakistan was being transformed by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was compared to the 1948 Marshall Plan in Pakistan’s recovery from decades of insurgency and instability. News reports and politicians measured success in the form of, “returning to surplus” in both food and energy after years of loadshedding or intermittent power supply. Before I began my fieldwork, the state’s economic and political entanglement with
Chinese infrastructural development had already seen cities rapidly transforming at the expense of the expulsion and dispossession of residents in informal settlements, leading to the partial destruction of Lakshmi Chowk, home to many of Punjab’s remaining inner-city cinemas. The opening of new multiplex cinemas in elite areas and gated developments, screening Urdu-language and Indian films, contrasts with the decline of the regional-language film industry, and spaces for their consumption. This change has been driven by an appeal for “international standards”, in this case of film exhibition, and their situation in gated areas of less-than-public leisure. This has created a noticeable bifurcation between the entertainment associated with Lahore’s historic “Lollywood” film industry and the return to aspirational, middle and upper-class Urdu language entertainment being made in Karachi by a new generation of producers, directors, and actors who previously had little association with the old industry. Film and cinema-going is not peripheral to this moment in recent Pakistani history, enveloped as it is in changing class values, economic and urban development, and at a liminal point between the vernacular culture of the past and the reassertion of elite, urban – and Urdu – values. During the month of Muharram, when some Shi’i film professionals stop working, and some of Lahore’s labourers go back to their villages to commemorate ‘Āshūrā’, the cinemas of Abbott Road are usually quiet. Asghar Shahid – a broad, urbane man in his mid-thirties – capitalises on these and other quiet periods to find and rent whatever Lollywood film reels he can lay his hands on, and screen them in Abbott Road’s three remaining analogue cinemas. He is one of a number of independent programmers who draw upon the
shrinking repertoire of Punjabi-language celluloid films that can now only be played on the 35mm projectors of these cinemas. Asghar enjoys what he calls the, “love and care network” built between the cinemas of Abbott Road and their audiences. He considers his work only “time-pass” for both himself and those who run the cinemas. If their owners convert to digital screening technology these cinemas will only glean half a dozen customers per screening from the other cinemas. “As it is, we are like salt in a sack of wheat. Our system is working; it is surviving,” Asghar concludes (Fig 29).

Come Friday, the Odeon Cinema welcomes fifty or so patrons for Asghar’s screening, most of whom are his own friends. The debris of the Lollywood industry is all around them, a plume of cigarette smoke over the light of the projector, the acrid smell of butt-ends, the marble sections of floor - worn by footfall - wiped clean by a rag on a stick, deeply stained carpets and chipped wood-paneled walls dotted with fans. If not navigating the wear and tear of the industry, the cinemas of Abbot Road must deal with an intermittent power supply. As Asghar’s friends sit talking together over the noise of the film and the rattling projector, the wall-mounted fans judder to a halt and the image freezes on the screen between frames. Asghar, bending backwards over his seat, yells out for “roshan! [light/power] and beckons the projectionist to regulate the voltage

---

62 There are about 40 films that rotate between the Odeon, Capital, and Metropole Cinemas. These cinemas are visited by older men eager to see what they describe as “their culture”. They are rickshaw drivers, laborers, and retired men who are unable to afford to visit a multiplex. The Odeon and the Capital on Abbot Road charge 100PKR a ticket and will often accept 50PKR if that is all their customers can pay. These cinemas also provide a space for the employment of older men, those who are elderly, retired, widowed, or lonely, but wish to stay in employment to maintain a sense of self-worth.
before the back-up generator roars back to life. In this interlude, someone, unconnected to Asghar’s entourage, plays a Punjabi filmy song sung by Azra Jehan on their smartphone’s tinny speakers, drawing on the circulating repertoire of Lollywood film to fill in the gaps\textsuperscript{63}. Indeed, it was loadshedding rather than cinephobic violence that dealt the decisive blow to the popularity of single-screen cinemas. In 2010, power supply in Punjab was so sporadic that cinemas were told to close by 8pm. If South Asian cinema viewership isn necessarily more participatory than elsewhere (Srinivas 2016), in Pakistan this experience is related to contingency. The frequency of extra-filmic events such as power-cuts makes Pakistani film a cinema of intermittence rather than breakdown, of stoppages rather than faults\textsuperscript{64}.

\textit{The Commons Beyond}

Many in the trade in informal film distribution operated wings of their businesses from the Gulf, primarily in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, but also Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar where a large and fluctuating Pakistani expatriate

\textsuperscript{63} Pandian argues that the spread of televisions in tea stands and video clubs has led to a fragmented and disassembled form of film, whereby people enjoy brief snatches rather than a film in its coherence and entirety (Pandian 2008: 409) This, he says is equally true of film songs, which are divorced from the body of the narrative and spread in rituals, festivities, and incorporated into other forms of public spectacle.

\textsuperscript{64} Such extra-filmic intermittence recalls Lalitha Gopalan’s influential conception of Indian film as a “cinema of interruptions” as derived from the myriad halts prevalent in Indian cinema; the waterfalls and burst rain clouds that interrupt a sex scene, the intermission that jolts spectators from the diegetic world into the world of the cinema hall. For Gopalan, such jolts are a source of pleasure rather than an interruption of its screen development, a series of filmic repertoires specific to Indian film that are notable for their “in-between-ness, its propensity for digression and interruption” (2002: 28).
population lived. The largest of these was Al-Mansoor Video, which once had branches all over the United Arab Emirates (UAE), from Abu Dhabi to Sharjah, but by 2018 had all but disappeared. Pakistani Punjabi and Urdu-language film and music fed an almost entirely male market for whom Hindi and Urdu was the lingua-franca of day-to-day communication between ethnicities, nationalities, and faiths often impossible in expats’ countries of origin. Pashto-language film, another Pakistani regional cinema, also served speakers from large parts of western Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the UAE the last of these stores to remain is Jalalabad Music House, intermittently run by Badar Khan for the last three decades. Named after his home city in eastern Afghanistan, Badar started the cassette and video store in 1990 after a difficult period as a soldier serving in the 1980s Afghan-Soviet war and the internecine warfare that followed it. Following his discharge after the 1989 Battle of Jalalabad he travelled to the UAE and, through a friend from Swat, found a shop in the Al-Ghwair Plaza in Sharjah, a “whole plaza made from cassette money,” as Badar describes it.

“Imagine, a city built in the desert.” Badar marvelled as the sun set through the doorway behind us, “You have to say something about that. You have to.” In Jalalabad Music House only scraps of light creep through the wall-to-wall posters that paper over every window. Sharjah’s commercial centre of Al-Rolla, which includes the Old Sharjah Cinema, an area named after a theatre bulldozed long ago, is similarly papered with patches of signage offering bed space in shared dorms to “bachelors”, often specifying the nationality, gender, or religion permitted for application. The UAE’s third city, after Dubai and Abu
Dhabi, Sharjah had long been an area rich in pearls and from the trade coming across the Persian Gulf, until oil wealth and proximity to the emergent tourist and transport hub of Dubai made it a prime location for expatriate workers. From Al-Rolla to Al Ghuwair Market the beige concrete built environment, although old and well-worn, packs in a sense of promise that Dubai, built despite rather than for its inhabitants, does not. Over the central doors of the tower blocks old chromium-plated awnings crinkle in the sun like the edible silver foil on South Asian sweets. A little further from Badar’s shop, towards the waters of the Persian Gulf, the Sharjah Heritage Area is being built. Its polystyrene stone dwellings, faux-brick wells, and date frond-roofed huts are studded with bright white power sockets (Fig 30).

Badar’s three decades of faith in the deployment of the music and film of the North-western Frontier of Pakistan and Pashto-speaking Afghanistan recalls something akin to what Anna Tsing defines as the business of “salvage accumulation” (2015: 66) in the supply chain of the matsutake mushroom, which itself flourishes in landscapes marked by human disturbance rather than cultivation. Tsing describes collaborative investiture in a future ripe for foraging as the stimulation of a “latent commons” (Ibid: 255) or the process of developing non-human allies. Badar is aware that he chose a difficult resource to wager his future upon. Pakistani Pashto film is often seen as a bastion of vulgarity, obscenity and the glorification of the Kalashnikov, even by many Pashtuns themselves. To non-Pashtuns in Pakistan, Afghanistan is seen as the sole market for the production of Pakistani Pashto films. Roughly, the narrative frequently
recounted goes that the gradual adoption of violence and sexually suggestive material in Pashto film grew in parallel with the flow of drugs and arms between Afghanistan and Pakistan during the decades of conflicts that have raged since 1978, and that decimated Afghanistan’s fledgling film industry. From this point on, Pashto film was seen by many outsiders to be part of the “Afghan” problem in all its domestic and international dimensions.

A brief golden-age, from the production of the first Pakistani Pashto film *Yousef Khan Sherbano* (dir. Aziz Tabassum, 1970)

65 and others such as *Ajab Khan Afridi* (dir. Rahim Gul, 1971), *Darra Khyber* (dir. Mumtaz Ali Khan, 1971), *Orbal* (dir. Mumtaz Ali Khan, 1973) and *Kochawan* (dir. Yousuf Bhatti, 1975), were shot on location in and around Peshawar and in Lahore’s trio of film studios. These films were as porous to popular Pashto-language culture as the border was in peacetime, monopolising the Afghan market through their use of the most talented playback singers – such as the remarkable Gulnar Begum - to have risen to prominence on Radio Peshawar. The growth and popularity of Pashto-language cinema in this era, linguist Tariq Rahman explains, was due to the mobility of Pashto speakers, many of whom are highly represented in the transport sector and thus more mobile across the country (Rahman 2016: 291).

Badar, himself from Jalalabad, watched all the early Pashto films in their original form in the cinema. He says, “I feel like I’ve always lived in Peshawar. I would go to Peshawar in the morning and back to Jalalabad in the evening.”

65 The first film in the Pashto language was actually a version of the story of Laila Majnu made in India in the 1930s, written by the famous poet Amir Hamza Khan Shenwari (1907-1994).
Many believe that the way Pashtun communities are depicted in regional films, as well as the way they are caricatured in Urdu movies, adds to the stigma over their perceived violence and morality. In 2006, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) government in Pakistan’s provisional district of Khyber–Pakhtunkhwa cracked down on the ownership of film and music content and its playback hardware. Muhammad Arif of the Center for Peace and Cultural Studies Peshawar remembers what happened when media products were suddenly found to be profane: “CDs, Video Cassettes and other gadgets were burnt on the directives of the provincial government. There were clear directives from the MMA government to remove ‘obscene’ material from the shops and the police had to prove their efficiency” (Email correspondence 7/8/15).

Despite its controversial moral atmosphere, Badar saw in the transnational spread of film and music a potentially lucrative opportunity. “Initially I started with recording,” Badar explained, “I would buy one song and then make recordings of it and would always have one mastercopy. Then I would sell the recordings to people.” He soon found that his own copies were more reliable than the copies circulating widely in the market in Pakistan. Careful not to rely on new content coming from areas of eastern Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan at times of such instability, infrastructural precarity, and the violent censorship of musicians and attacks on cinemas and video shops, Badar kept everything he could in reserve (Fig 31). He told me,

“A couple of years ago I was thinking of completely finishing off the video side [of the business] but when I spoke to a Pashto film actor in
Mardan he said to just wait and see. Give it a couple of years and see if the industry survives, he said. If it does, I will be the one who will have everything. If demand revives then I will be better off than a new starter. If demand rises up again I’ll be there, I’ll have everything. I’ll have the stock and I’ve got the experience.”

*The Collector*

The largest “record” of Pakistani film can be found outside of the remit of the state, in private collections sourced at great personal expense by individuals whose accumulated objects are closely entangled with their own biographies. Perhaps most recognisable of which is Guddu Khan, a devoted collector of Pakistani film memorabilia, who explained to me his methods of acquisition,

“Whenever cinemas are scheduled for demolition people inform me… One time I went to one of the cinemas scheduled for demolition and saw, past the padlock on the doors and through the windows, a number of posters on the walls. I requested the guards to allow me to take them but they replied that only once the building is demolished am I free to take what I want…. Believe me even *while* cinemas were being demolished I would run and pick up pictures and posters in the rubble and dust bins. Next to the rubble would lie reels of films and the guards would remind me, “Hey, take those with you too”, but I’d reply, “my house is not big
enough to hold these reels”. As you know one full film in all its parts comes to 17 or 18 boxes. Where would I keep those boxes and what would I do with them? You have to dedicate time to take care of them with chemicals and maintenance, as they sometimes release a very pungent odour. I never had the resources to protect those reels in my house. Then I realised that all those films are on VHS and through that people will be able to access them, but my pictures and posters will be lost forever if I don’t save them.”

What he calls, “Guddu’s Film Archive” consists of objects primarily mass-produced during the 1960s and 1970s, the heyday of Lollywood film production (Fig 32). Until a recent exhibition organised by the Alliance Francaise in Karachi his collection was shown only to those visually represented. In a series of filmed interviews uploaded to YouTube, Guddu gifts film actors the publicity stills, posters, and clippings he collects from decaying cinemas and junk peddlers, and hosts video or audio interviews. These interviews are interspersed with digitized clips from his video collection, all of which are emblazoned with his ubiquitous watermarked-stamp. Through these filmed interviews Guddu works to rescue from anonymity both formerly leading actors and jobbing extras, the poorly paid workers in the labor economy of Pakistani film whose participation in Pakistan’s baroque musical epics involved no speaking roles and was restricted to the visual. Because many of the female actors and extras featured in Guddu’s YouTube interviews have renounced the film industry and embraced tauba (Chapter One),
their interviews remain audio only, layered instead with a montage of digitized film stills, film segments, or scanned artefacts (Cooper 2016) from their earlier lives in film.

Walter Benjamin referred to the “dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order,” (Benjamin 1969: 60) that characterizes the activities of the fervent collector. He compared the acquisition of a much-desired antique object to the object’s rebirth, for which its death comes only when it loses the intimate connection with the owner who commands the polarity of this dialectical tension. Guddu’s practice reclassifies and re-contextualizes his accumulated objects to a chronotope in which the life-cycles of the objects are closely paralleled with his own biography. The precarious existence of Karachi’s cinemas and the climate of cinephobia that mediates the circulation of film is, for Guddu, what James Clifford called the “chronotope for collecting” (Clifford 1988: 236). One might assert that Guddu’s practice has little in common with the essential seriality of collecting, which is often contingent on the probability that similar objects may come up at auction or may be procured from junk shops or, in the case of objects in the sphere of mass consumption, can simply be bought and saved. From his networks in Karachi to Hall Road in Lahore, Guddu’s accumulation and acquisition of objects requires a distinct relationship with the city itself, for the economic and political reality of Pakistani urbanity and its relationship to moving image media dictates the accumulation of his objects. So too is a notion of personal history intricately interwoven into Guddu’s description of his objects,
noting as he does with relish any evidence of prestige conferred upon him in light of his efforts.

**Dissemination**

Eager to see if *totay* (Chapter Three) remained in a film during its long afterlife in the marketplace I bought a VCD of the film *Khatarnak* (1974. Dir. Rehmat Ali) on Hall Road. While I later found the controversial item number complete with excisions, I could not help but notice a more pervasive incision; one less censorial than authorial. Throughout the film, from beginning to end, a permanent *patti* or watermark clung to much of the screen, its purpose being to tell the viewer that its *mastercopy* comes from a man named Mirza Waqar Baig and to provide his phone number. I would find that most old, rare, and hard-to-find films on Hall Road bore his *patti*. Based in Karachi, he makes video to DVD conversions to order from his collection of 1800 films dating from the 1950s to 1990s, most of which are on videocassettes produced by Shalimar Recording Company. The circulation of these copies from his closely guarded collection to Hall Road began when his cousin, who manned a stall at the Rainbow Centre in Karachi, encouraged him to make copies of his collection for the enjoyment of the *awaam*. His reasons for affixing such a prominent watermark are similar to those of Guddu; both want to be appreciated for their acts of retrieval, a token of

---

66 In Urdu *patti* can refer to a hem, a line, or a straight mark, and in this usage refers to a watermark or inscription asserting provenance or ownership.
the same gratitude that they feel when people come to their homes to view their collections, but not in the impersonal, outward circulation of films and images.

The Indian Film Archive was founded on private collections similar to that amassed by Guddu Khan and Mirza Waqar Baig, namely that of Harish S. Booch whose collection formed part of the Archive’s nascent holdings in 1964. Pakistani collectors remain wary of the knowledge that objects, once collected, are always susceptible to appropriation. Therefore, their watermarked stamps imprint their name-logo as they travel from Hall Road to YouTube and regional variants. In the lack of fan conventions, auctions, or museums, the Internet has provided a substitute network for Pakistani collectors and cineastes. With the rise of video sharing platforms such as YouTube watermarking became further codified as a surface aesthetic (Fig 33). One YouTube user without access to postproduction software made his own improvised watermark by using his smartphone to record a clip of a film played on a television screen overlaid with translucent plastic upon which he had placed his name and a passport-style photograph. These pervasive instances in which a desire for presence and ownership is expressed turns the surface of the screen into a visual site for interaction, negotiation, and contestation.

The Vernacular Antiquarian

In Pak Tea House I sat waiting for Fayyaz Ahmad Ashar (2011, 2018) at a rickety table with a sign reading “reserved for writers”. One of the last bastions of
Lahore’s literary café culture felt a fitting place to meet such an ardent collector of Pakistani film music. Despite moral anxieties around its permissibility, a passionate love of vintage film music is considered a particularly urbane, Lahori object of appreciation. Such fandom is reminiscent of literary salons in which poetic couplets are exchanged and recited. Indeed, the lyricists of a film song are often more clearly remembered than the actors. Flicking through old Pakistani film magazines one can see how widely the literary associations spread across social and economic divides. Letters from fans to adult film magazine *Chitrali* were often phrased in the form of a *sher* couplet of a *ghazal*.

Fayyaz Ahmad Ashar calls his collection the “Awaz Khazana” [Treasure of Voices], a collection he started in 1972 when he first listened to the sounds of Ceylon Radio and All India Radio (Fig 34). Like Guddu and Mirza Waqar Baig he lives off meagre resources, funneling whatever funds he does have towards expanding his collection. Recalling Mubaraka’s work in the Punjab Archives, the books he has published are largely inventories of release dates, song titles, and singers. Such inventories are widely used; the Islamabad Censor Board use the online database PakFilm and Motion Picture Archive of Pakistan (MPAOP), while television shows featuring segments on film music consult Fayyaz for details. While others mourn the lack of government support, Fayyaz is mostly annoyed by a lack of reciprocity. He told me how, “on a daily basis I receive phone calls from television channels asking me who sang the song for this film or that film… These same channels are only happy to take my book and promote it if I give it to them for free.”
Deaccessioning

On Sundays, outside the Pak Tea House can be found one of Lahore’s unexpected pleasures, a book market evincing the discursive breadth of the city and the lingering inspiration of the nearby Urdu Bazaar, once the publishing capital of North India. Biographies of English cricketers heaped beside Urdu penny dreadfuls; one-of-a-kind plans for a tourist resort beside the Mangla Dam lay beside 1990s copies of the film magazine Chitrali. One Sunday I came across a strange and unusual goldmine. On one table a scrap dealer had a singular collection of rare books on world cinema, from the 1930s to the present, including a copious number of professionally bound film magazines; including copies of the British Film Institute’s Sight and Sound dating to the 1940s, the short-lived Cinemaya journal frequently contributed to by Ijaz Gul, the former head of NAFDEC, magazines on video technology, and even a scrapbook of clipped comic strips about film culture from U.S magazine, Mad. They had been lovingly kept over a period of seventy years by a single owner. An ex libris stamp of Theodore Phailbus, a notable resident once of Abbot Road, indicated their provenance in the dust of the book market, where traders ate plates of daal and wiped their hands on the dust covers of rare books. After I asked for his phone number, the trader ripped off the first page of one of the bound collections to write it down.

When he passed away, Phailbus’ widow donated his collection of 1800 videos and celluloid reels of various films from 1930 onwards to Kinnaird College in Lahore. Either the product of disinterest or deaccession, his library,
which by itself could have formed a research collection of Western cinema possibly unparalleled in South Asia, seemed to have ended up on this table. Among his library was a scrapbook he had made as a child, evidently before his bookbinding habits, titled “Wonders of the Past”, hand-dated Lahore, 1935 (Fig 35). Inside, Phalibus had cut pictures from another book and possibly even typewritten his own accompanying text on the left-hand page of each illustration. Friends of Phailabus believe that these books were also bequeathed to the library but because of a lack of cataloguing rigor they may have ended up sold to the *raddiwala* along with other material that was being deaccessioned.

Ferozsons’ Urdu-English Dictionary defines *raddi* as “rejected; waste; worthless,” an adjective that forms the verb *raddi karna*, “to waste; to reject.” (1988: 394). The suffix –*wala* denotes a close proximity to an occupation conducted on a day to day basis, designed to prolong the lifespan of objects and forestall their valueless descent into terminal waste or landfill. A *raddiwala* is usually a scrap paper dealer, while *khaberdilwalas* sell varied recycled goods that they buy from a central storehouse by weight. In Lahore this market is in Misri Shah, a scrap market in the north of the city, where metal scrap from around the world comes to be broken up and sold off; from grain silos to scuttled ships. A warehouse [*go-down*] keeps large sacks [*boori*] which are sold according to their

---

67 “Wonders of the Past In Two Volumes By Sir J. A. Hammerton, London: Amalgamated Press, c1934”. That Phalibus cut up the book while it was still new suggests an aptitude for collage and reorganisation as well as a desire to understand or replicate the processes of publishing, typesetting, or arranging a published book.
weight. Their contents are unknown to the traders who buy them and lay them out on the road-side.

Scrap

One evening on Hall Road I came across something new in the urban milieu; a tin deposit box hung against an electrical pole (Fig 36). It was stuffed with calendar pages with the name of Allah written on them, posters for majālis at a nearby shrine, and the cover of a video-disc containing naʿat recitations. On the box it read, “Maqadas [sanctified] holy papers box. Is main dhalaïn. [Please put in here]”. A number of voluntary organisations had begun to take it upon themselves to hang these painted oil tins around the city to keep holy papers safe from the desecration of being trampled underfoot, later collecting the contents for submersion in rivers\(^68\) or in graveyards as the Quran and sunnah permits. If they do not contain holy papers they are sent to paper making factories for recycling. Like the Jewish genizot or shaimot that have been used for millennia as repositories for papers inscribed with the name of God, these bins are threshold containers that help their deposited items pass between different states of being, owing to their contents’ residual, latent, and efficacious power.

Coming to collect that week’s dispositions, a man whose hair and beard was sodden with henna dying it a deep red told me that he takes responsibility

\(^{68}\) Holy objects such as Tazia, rather than papers inscribed with the name of God, had previously been submerged in water (Abbas 2007: 55). In the mountains around Quetta a network of tunnels has even been dedicated to buried Qurans.
for providing a space for the respectful disposition of such holy objects. He tugged some papers from the pile and wiped away a black layer of encrusted dust to reveal a genealogical chart with the names of the family of the Prophet. The widespread availability of source material through which to fabricate religious media, and the low cost of mass duplication, has led to a surplus of easily-discarded copies; flimsy optical discs, photocopied pages, religious posters, and information pasted up around the city. Although these objects are reproduced so easily in copy, the care given to see them through this last stage in their biography is touching. The idea of a material repository as hospice (Zeitlyn 2012, Usai 2001), in which objects are guided into a good death, made me think of Badar Khan in Sharjah, and the comfort he took in the idea that his vast stock would find a buyer in Pakistan, “They will make plastic out of this,” he told me, with a smile. “You know that previously cassettes were made of plastic? In Pakistan they will take the reel out of them and turn them back into plastic.”

Antiquarianism, the practice of collecting and classification that preceded material culture studies, saw objects imbued with a history that is coproduced with the affections of the antiquarian. In an essay on “The Collector”, Walter Benjamin narrates the process by which collectibles are formed into communities that pertain to “the peculiar category of completeness” (1999: 204) as a corporeal system in which the object feels “the shudder of being acquired” (Ibid). As such, the affective pull of this rubble of cinematic infrastructure allows the opportunity to theorize how these artefacts combine to salvage their own agency through their designation as scrap.
As I mentioned earlier, in the context in which Guddu Khan and many other collectors operate, filmic artifacts are rarely recognized as collectibles but rather as scrap – as raddi –; they are scavenged from decaying buildings, bought out wholesale from foreclosed shops, or rescued from the indifference of heirs and relatives. In compiling his collection, Guddu actively works not only to protract the cultural biography of his memorabilia but also to bring his items back to the embodied and indexical origins of their production. Between the cinephilia and cinephobia I discussed in the first chapter might usually lay the quiet act of conservation and the busy art of industry activity. In the absence of either, Guddu Khan and other film collectors turn to the infrastructure for its disposal. The practices that surround collecting film memorabilia in Pakistan evidently requires closer engagement with salvage and scrap merchants than with an existing network of collectors. One might think of this as a raddi infrastructure; forging together with disposal systems an ad-hoc acquisition policy for informal archives composed of scrap, discarded media hardware, and cultural products condemned for their bad moral atmosphere. Raddi infrastructure is a process, product, and simultaneous reaction to the threat of societal purging and the contagion that surrounds dying industries. This invites consideration of how atrophied material culture shapes the renewal of existing infrastructures, directing attention not towards origins but towards points of re-entry.
Interlude Figures

Fig 29. Lollywood film on Lahore’s Abbott Road (October 2018).
Fig 30. Many of the Afghan and Pashto-speaking Pakistani labourers building the Sharjah “heritage area” in the United Arab Emirates were customers of Badar Khan’s Jalalabad Music House (December 2017).
Fig 31. Badar Khan and his cassette transferring station at Jalalabad Music House, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, (December 2017).
Fig 32. Guddu Khan with choreographer of film item number sequences, Hameed Choudhry. The collage was made by Guddu Khan from two photographs marking two temporally distant meetings and Guddu’s presentation to Choudhry of memorabilia relating to his career. Courtesy of Guddu Khan (No date).
Fig 33. With the rise of video sharing platforms such as YouTube watermarking became further codified as a surface aesthetic. One user without access to postproduction software made his own improvised watermark by using his smartphone to record translucent plastic over a television screen upon which he had placed his name and a passport-style photograph (Uploaded 2012).
Fig 34. Fayyaz with his latest acquisition, a 1962 78rpm record of film songs from the film *Shaheed* (1962). (August 2018).
“Wonders of the Past,” a scrap book made by a film collector whose enormous library of film literature and magazines ended up in a book market after being bequeathed to a Lahore university (December 2017).
Fig 36. A maqadas [holy papers] box for the respectful disposition of materials bearing the name of Allah (August 2018).
Chapter IV

New Heritage in Old Lahore

In the days when Hall Road was a byword for the reproduction, retrieval, and sale of Pakistani films in copy, one could hear emanating from it the tinny vocals and the deep bass *tabla* of Punjabi *filmi*\(^{69}\) music being blasted out through a sound system as far away as the Lahore Zoo, a kilometer away across the Mall. Standing outside a newspaper stand beside the bars of the monkey sanctuary I was excited to hear the heavy drawl of low-fidelity amplifiers and the rough grain of urgent voices (Fig 37). In the copy of the weekly film newspaper *Rang-o-Roop* for which I had just exchanged 25PKR, a group of leading film artists and television stars had called for the public hanging of a suspect in the recent rape and murder of an eight-year old girl in nearby Kasur. As I approached Hall Road, rather than finding *filmi* music at the entrance to the street I saw the preamble of a large public meeting. A canopy was pulled up over a single line of tables facing outwards towards Zaitoon Plaza, one of the largest and oldest shopping centres on the street. Hung on top of the canopy, a banner featured a series of gory

\(^{69}\) The adjective *filmi* refers to both a kind of massified kitsch and an organic and independent language register (Kirk 2016) generated by popular Lollywood film. In its associations with mass appeal and its decorative, almost folklorish quality it is similar to how the term *Islami* is used to describe popular culture or commodities with an Islamic character or content.
pictures purporting to represent the violence then raging against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar’s Rakhine State, while a caption implored the Pakistani government to act. Another banner in black and red, evidently representing the murder in Kasur, featured an image of a small girl with an adult male’s hands clasped tightly over her mouth, its borders fringed in dripping blood. As someone dropped a purple 50PKR note into a clear perspex donation box steadily filling up with cash, a man seated in the centre of a dozen others waiting to address the public nodded solemnly. The small throng of white-clothed men gave the tent the feel of a pop-up abattoir, fenced in as they were by all the gore around them.

An edition of the Tajir Log Lahore [Lahore Tradespeople] newspaper was being handed out to coincide with the demonstration. Its cover, emblazoned with the edition’s sponsor, “Khidmat Group, Hall Road,” showed graphic, grainy photographs intended to evoke raw outrage over the violence in Burma and the murder in Kasur (Fig 38). Such images were once a more familiar sight on the slew of rolling news channels which have long competed for the most graphic and sensational footage of the decades-long insurgencies that have blighted Pakistan with sporadic and ferocious violence. Even on quieter days, a tangle of banners hang between the buildings of Hall Road, serving as a weathervane for popular sentiment in a city so characterised by its merchant class (Fig 39). The most prominent banners, usually situated at the entrance to the street from Regal Chowk and the Mall, are festooned with the face of Kamran Mehsud and the name of his organisation, the Khidmat Group, a combined trader’s union, charity, welfare organisation, and development firm. The gore and the outrage of that
day’s banners were placed to coincide with coming elections for the street’s trade union representative, pitting the established Anjuman-e Tajiran [Union of Traders] against the newer Khidmat Group.

That such appeals to public opinion and outrage play out against the backdrop of a wider battle for recognition, authority, and patronage says much about the district urbanity of Hall Road, as well as the environment that proved conducive to the widespread retrieval and reproduction of Pakistani entertainment media, in the form of film, music, and religious content. The Khidmat Group and Kamran Mehsud are less a union and more a loose professional guild known for getting things done. Meaning “service”, the word khidmat also has connotations of religious philanthropy and has long been used by the corporate groups of the merchant middle-class who proffer a business-friendly brand of conservative populism undergirded by public service. Islamically-infused morality and political populism coalesced into a political climate that brought Imran Khan, a populist politician long at the periphery of mainstream politics, and his PTI party to power in 2018 on the promise to transform Pakistan into an, “Islamic welfare state.” With the promise that Pakistan translate the ethical ideals of seventh century Mecca into a “new” Pakistan based on welfare, Imran Khan and PTI party workers pinpointed the populist thrust of khidmat. The idea deftly expressed the deep-rooted association in Pakistan of civil society and common decency with pious frameworks of how to live well by others. It also referenced the perceived failures of the last two civilian governments and the tangible feeling of the absence of governmental
infrastructure and security provision. What might be termed an atmosphere of contingency and intermittence with regard to the state proved ripe for guarantees of formalisation, not by governing schema but by an ethical project integrated with the promise of Islamically-infused public services. As such, Imran Khan’s attempt to nationalise khidmat in ways that only entrepreneurial and community welfare organisations tied to religion denominations did before, proved appealing to many.

Among political parties vying for votes the Khidmat Group are also mediators of clientelism. To their detractors, they are known as the “plaza mafia”, whose actions are described as abetting the destruction of much of Lahore’s architectural heritage. A plaza is a cheaply constructed vertical bazaar formed of modular units for many small-scale traders, often electronics or clothing retailers who can combine workshops, ateliers, and storefronts as well as draw upon other providers in the same building for craft-work, repair, or wholesale. Demand for plazas grew with the segmentation of electronic media and the trade in its constituent parts and hardware, thus closely associating Hall Road with technological obsolescence and the assimilation of change. The Khidmat Group are also known as the largest of a number of “qabzā groups”, a term meaning occupation, possession, or encroachment.

In this chapter I will present different examples of Hall Road’s urban form and the ideas that drive its continuities and ruptures. By following the threads that animate Hall Road’s constitution and character, I ask how my interlocutors understanding of the built environment provides them the tools to navigate the
circulation of media and the system of ethics that undergird it. In so doing I explicitly conflate the circulation of objects and their re-inscription with the atmosphere of its built environment. By conceptualising attitudes to urban atmosphere this chapter serves to define and explore, through the activities of varied representative interlocutors on Hall Road, the associations of the street with the assimilation of change. I do this for various reasons; one of which is to decentre the language of informality and remark upon its unsuitability for Pakistan. I suggest a number of local concepts – if they can be defined as such – more appropriate than the language of informality as a framework for understanding media and moral ecologies in Pakistan. Firstly, the idea of shared, felt investiture in a sensory environment forged by the discontinuity of energy provision provides the backdrop for the circulation of materials that aid the navigation of intermittence and precarity in various forms. Secondly, the Indic binary concepts of the kaččā and the pakkā, and qabzā, a term used for land appropriation, provide a language of urban phenomenology, authority, and ownership. Finally, in the satirical idea of “new heritage” the second half of the chapter comes to consider those resistant to urban appropriation and encroachment, and the entanglement of such opposition with nativist conceptions of authenticity.

Focusing in this way on the technical and social grounds of media circulation as constitutive of forms of ethical environment builds on two decades of sustained interest in the informal infrastructures of Indian film and its dispersed archives, as documented by the research groups SARAI, the Bioscope
journal, and affiliated scholars such as Lawrence Liang and Ravi Sundaram. This diverse body of work shows postcolonial urbanism to be characterized by breakdown, recycling, and discursive and figural forms of extra-legal space. Any attempt to challenge the utility of informality in the study of Pakistan’s media ecologies, particularly ideas around mass mediation such as piracy, must first acknowledge the critical trajectory that has brought such issues into clarity. Liang’s influential body of work explores how pirate practices assert claims over the city, through goods, objects, and commodities in circulation. Such practices transform how everyday utilities are experienced. The ways in which individuals make a claim over, say land tenure (2005: 7), must take into account the varying dimensions, stakeholders, and forms of access which govern how such land comes to be used, rather than owned. Liang saw clearly a time in which the illegality of slum housing and utility theft was joined by a phenomenon similarly infrastructural in scope; the piracy of media. While building on their findings, the language of informality I propose differs from Liang’s call to better understand the lateral spaces through which piracy unfolds (2010) and Sundaram’s call to explore the relationship between the copy and the city (2004, 2009), in my focus on the individual and communal acts that bring about such systems of dispensation rather than the systems themselves.
Whenever I ducked down the stairs and into the basement of Zaitoon Plaza I would hope to see Idris waiting outside Durrani Electronics; his legs slung in front of him like his overhanging moustache slung over his top lip, resting one broad shoulder against the glass doorway at the bottom of the stairs. He often looked pensive, as if he had yet to decide that day whether to be unhappy or not. He is only twenty days older than me; “That makes you my bhai-jaan” [diminutive; “brother-dear”], he often reminded me. He had just come back from fourteen years as an expat working in Dubai, having left Pakistan when he was seventeen. Back after spending his entire adult life abroad, Idris had returned full of hyperbole and self-contained grandeur, ready to reflect on his ever-changing society. With his family home some distance west of Peshawar, towards the Afghanistan border, his family were happy that he was abroad during the worst of the countrywide insurgency that had greatly marked the region for the last decade. Exasperated and detached from his daily work, Idris’ reluctance to work often drew the ire of Faisal, his phopa [husband of his father’s sister], fellow Durrani tribal kinsman, and manager of the store. He would spend hours opining to me on the roots of the crises in his society, often concluding that the solution lies in sensitivity to the ownership and occupation of space, particularly in adherence to conceptions of cleanliness and personal space in Islam. His desire for the inverse of public space, a private, personal, exclusive space so often elusive for men and women of his age, is curtailed by the conservativism of the world he has found himself within. While much of Hall Road’s fortunes were
made in the Gulf, the continual arrival of young returnees marks it with a
generational disjuncture. Idris’ push for individualism, common to young male
returnees from periods of labour in the Gulf, was quickly forced to re-acculturate
to a cooperative and hierarchised merchant community formed through kinship,
faith, outrage, and empathy.

Idris spoke proudly of his descent from a long and prestigious line of
professionals who worked with animals. His grandfather, himself the son of a
bureaucrat in colonial Peshawar, came to Lahore and was made senior zookeeper
at Lahore Zoo, where he worked for fifty years. Subsequently, his father and
uncles became taxidermists. At home Idris maintains a family collection of two
thousand photographs relating to his paternal lineage of hunters, colonial
zookeepers, and taxidermists. “This is my *virsa* [heritage],” he tells me, “When
I am not feeling too happy, I look at the pictures to remember that I come from
this tradition.” His numerous tales of the animals in zoo, each beloved of his
grandfather, all seemed to impart a moral lesson at the expense of the injury of
one of his younger family, less kindred with its caged inhabitants. When his mood
is low Idris’ strength also comes from distinguishing himself from others by
recalling the extent to which he has communicated with other nationalities and
faiths, something that among his immediate peers on Hall Road is unique. While
Lahore has a small Christian and Hindu minority, cross-community socialising
is almost non-existent. Non-diaspora tourism to Pakistan is equally rare.

Idris’ fourteen years in Dubai were spent operating as a dispatcher for a
chain of car-rental firms. On the side he sold pirated telephone call cards. He
named his the “Universal Card” and put as a logo on some of the tokens monuments of Pakistani cities, and Hindu symbols on others, to appeal to the broad labour force and the enforced cosmopolitanism amongst the global south in the United Arab Emirates. He wistfully shared stories of his friends from Dubai; the Chechen boxer with knuckles like pebbles, his Kosovan friends from Pristina who venerated Ghazi Abbas, the half-brother of Imam Hussain, and the Manchester Muslim who deserted the British army in Iraq and whose panic attacks were only calmed by reciting the *kalma*, the Islamic declaration of faith.

Refusing to use the Internet and social media, another product of his oppositional nature, Idris wrote all his friends’ phone numbers in a little black book that he soon lost upon his return to Pakistan. He told me, “I saw all this humanity only outside of Pakistan.” These twin sources of personal pride, from his upbringing amid his grandfather’s labour at Lahore Zoo; the proud source of his family heritage, to his life in the Gulf, Idris’ propagation of his cross-species cosmopolitanism was also a self-conscious attempt to challenge the conservatism of his peers and kin group.

Idris insisted on accompanying me to the basement of the Dar-ul-Rehmat Plaza, confident that any association with Durrani Electronics would assure me safety and polite treatment. Our destination was the last bastion of traders new and old who have decided to continue trading in film copies (see discussion in Chapter Five). Many used to run street-facing shops beside Durrani Electronics but could not handle rising rents and moved, together, to the basement of a newly constructed plaza. We walked through the arcades of Hall Road, with rapidly
constructed plazas having formed new alleyways almost overnight, past stall upon stall of men selling extension cords and mobile parts. Alleyways of one sort or another often manifest themselves on Hall Road; due to the lack of parking the wide road is permanently partly pedestrianised by the dozens of Honda AD70 motorcycles parked at the entrance of each plaza, their engines always kept cool beneath the shade of the trailing banners offering televisions, cable access, and training in smartphone repair. Technological obsolescence is managed well, as shops go into business selling the technology that rendered their previous stock obsolete; the unused hardware quickly sold wholesale to the “parts market” formed by the outlying alleyways to the north. As with its constituent produce, within the market’s growth lies a built-in obsolescence. The establishment of the plaza model in other parts of Lahore decentralised the importance of Hall Road. But it was always more of a concept than a street, an interlocking set of alleyways gravitating around the short-lived reign of the newest media commodity. Loose wires hang deactivated and dormant. Access ramps, built as afterthoughts between plazas, hang precariously in the air. Connecting the archipelago of plazas are power pylons with their clusters of wiring, like date fronds heavy with fruit. In their ambience and immediacy, the plazas have the impression of a funfair set up shop for the weekend, drawing in the crowds with spectacular lights soon to be packed up and moved to the next town.

On Hall Road, when the most prominent traders dealt in videocassettes and later DVDs, on the top floors of the most popular plazas could be found large duplication factories for making film copies. Even today, the analogue
mastercopies transferred onto digital formats on Hall Road are inscribed with a common trace of their origins. While duplicating films, sometimes on hundreds of video-cassette recorders wired together, an interruption in the electrical supply would occur and the recordings would stop. Rarely would those employed to monitor their transferral rewind every nascent copy and start again. Instead they would just restart the process where they left off, permanently archiving that short outage in its onward journey into other futures and onto other formats. While the repertoire traders draw upon was not limited by finitude or limits on its cultivation, it remains porous to the infrastructural and ethical regimes through which it travels. Such instances draw the eye and the mind to the spaces of their re-inscription, remediation, and the paradoxes of new instantiations of old things. I find these same outages on YouTube, on VCD copies, and even on cable television channels broadcasting films with a common provenance. It is hard to pinpoint these intermittences amid the persistent layers of glitches caused by censorial excisions and incisions, burned celluloid from long circuits in cinemas, or in their encoding onto digital. These documented halts occur as both part of the "infrastructure for reproduction" (Larkin 2004: 308) and the "long, picaresque journeys" that film prints take (Ibid: 307). Widespread diffusion brought about by capacious media turned film into a bazaar object and ushered in practices of media informality porous to the conditions through which it travelled. Sundaram describes this as a “pirate modernity, a contagion of the ordinary, which disturbs the very “ordinariness” of the everyday” (Sundaram 2009: 15). The infrastructural patina introduced onto Pakistani film copies and the demarcation
of trading streets beneath tangled wires are the direct products of group-working in plazas and collective attempts at navigating infrastructural intermittence.

Contrary to my assertion that these in-between spaces have formed their own passages, Idris associated them with dwellings. “I am a mouse. I know holes. And this is a hole,” he said. With his typical sensitivity towards my – and his own – alterity, he elaborated, “In English literature the owl and the mouse are distinguished animals, but in our society, mice are vermin and the owl a fatal omen.” To facilitate the delivery of discs, tapes, and copies between the two plazas, at various points after the buildings’ initial construction precarious gangways were built linking each floor, creating arcade-like burrows and warrens beneath which quickly became a street itself. Small fortunes were made in the plazas of Hall Road during the video era, transforming the urban and media possibilities in Pakistani cities and providing a template for countless imitations. Following the growth of Hall Road, the Rainbow Centre in Saddar, Karachi, became an arguably even larger centre for the trade in media hardware and software.

Across the city rapidly constructed commercial properties are directly correlated with the disappearance of pre-Partition buildings, with plazas in particular having become a byword for heritage destruction. It is common to hear of the destruction of a derelict building so that its owner can build a plaza; from the Walled City’s Tarannum Cinema to the urban caravansaries in New Anarkali. Plaza-building began with the arrival of the development paradigm in Pakistani cities, beginning in the 1960s with the Lahore Development Corporation. The
Rafi Group created the “plaza” style of architecture that has redefined Lahore’s urbanity over the last four decades, building vertically on the commodity zoning of its indigenous merchant origins. Rafi and Zaitoon Plazas were built in the early-1980s to accommodate the sudden popularity of home video (Fig 44, 45, 46). In a remarkable study of Lahore’s urban form written around the same time, Muhammad A. Qadeer argued that the city, “absorbs development” (Qadeer 1983: 6). Qadeer’s notion of absorption addresses a kind of vacuum that he observed followed urban development in postcolonial cities still entangled and held back by foreign influence. Absorption can be seen as the unintended consequence of the kind of cyclicality of the development paradigm, or a symbol of the assimilationist, nation-building project of post-colonial Pakistan. Such porosity is one of the “internal dynamics” that Qadeer argued is key to understanding urban form, by remaining sensitive to the “disturbances and accommodations” (Ibid: 10) of an environment in flux. Taking Qadeer’s comment further, absorption is perceptible only on the threshold of its immersion and is resistant to the idea of the city as palimpsest. Absorption necessitates permanent submersion.

For those, like Idris, who work on Hall Road, the plazas are a second home. There are at least a dozen mosques on the street, with many plazas housing a mosque on the roof, with loudspeakers connected to each floor for amplification of the *azaan*. Traders get through the day with tea-boys and *daal-chawal* [rice

---

70 Qadeer’s notion of absorption bears similarities to Arjun Appadurai’s later argument (1990) that claims of homogenisation fail to notice that as soon as additions foreign to an environment are brought in they are indigenized through the coagulation of global flows.
and lentil stew] vendors on speed dial, fountains for performing ablutions, and struggle with a notable absence of toilet facilities. Between Rafi and Zaitoon Plazas the pathway formed beneath the gangways between the two buildings is shaded by flex banners and darkened to perpetual strips of shade by overhanging wires and power cables\textsuperscript{71}. As with the spontaneous streets formed by Hall Road’s plazas and its encroachments to the north and south, this passage is not officially named. But to the traders who rent or occupy any available space with footfall it has come to be known as Khayaban-e-Yaseen or Yaseen Street after the Quranic surah of the same name\textsuperscript{72} (Fig 47 & 48).

While Hall Road’s street-facing shops hawk new media, in the arcades, passages, and temporary walkways between them DVD-shops, repairmen, and junk sellers also deal in bringing the past into the present, retrieving and repairing a, “world of particular secret affinities” (Benjamin 1999: 827). In the \textit{Arcades Project}, Walter Benjamin studied urban Paris not just in texts but in the residual traces of the past still so visible on the surface, namely through its passages, the covered shopping arcades that so fascinated the Surrealist movement. Benjamin saw the arcades as containers, as boundary objects that demarcate areas for study, like the plotting of an archaeological excavation. Benjamin’s study of nineteenth century Paris was formed of notes and sketches whose discursive field emanated

\textsuperscript{71} The creation of passages between built space was seemingly a part of Lahore’s urban growth from the beginning of the twentieth century. The influential town planner Patrick Geddes, who visited Lahore in 1912, noted, “the confused maze of telegraph and telephone posts and wires, their overhead tramway cables and power-cables; … the clumsiest girder forms taken from beneath overhead railways;… this grim and wastefully complicated web overhead” (Geddes, 1917: 32).

\textsuperscript{72} The sura is the subject of extensive exegesis into the “signs” that must be reflected upon by “a people who give thought” (Quran 13:3).
from the arcades but were not necessarily confined to them. Hall Road’s plazas—particularly the unplanned creation of passage-streets – offer a similar boundary object through which to explore contemporary Lahore. The arcades of Paris were objects of fascination because - in the case of Louis Aragon’s *Paysan de Paris* ([1926] 1994) which inspired Benjamin’s lifelong project - they were scheduled for demolition to make way for Boulevards as part of the urban regeneration of Paris. Rather than objects of nostalgia, Lahore’s plazas are themselves the replacement of the past now swept away, a precarious and future-facing affront to the city as palimpsest.

*The Infrastructural Sphere*

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Hall Road’s trader community, to which the Khidmat Group appeals for patronage, are largely made up of Sunni Barelvis. Despite the fact that Barelvi devotion is closely aligned with that of *tasawwuf* or Sufi mysticism, the urban merchant class are often caricatured as being politically devoted adherents of conservative religious groups. In the September 2017 byelection in the Pakistani parliamentary constituency of NA-120 in which Hall Road falls, many owed the sudden rise of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), the Barelvi Islamist group who earned 5.7% of the vote, to the concentration of merchant traders. Like all political parties, the TLP had a registered election symbol. In their case it was a yellow crane signifying a propensity for construction, building, and infrastructural development. The Milli
Muslim League (MML), a far-right Salafi Islamist party that included banned cleric Hafiz Saeed, chose as their symbol an illuminated (energy-saving) lightbulb, perhaps suggesting a promise to halt loadshedding (Fig 49 and 50). Loadshedding is a strategy used by energy suppliers to ensure the central electrical power supply does not overload by withholding energy flow to certain sectors for certain demarcated times. This prevents failure when the central system is nearing capacity. It is different from a blackout or power outage because it is a preventative measure before the uncontrolled loss of power in an electricity network.

Hydropower and energy infrastructure are passionate subjects, allied as they are with the prosperity of nations (Mains 2012, Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018). What the TLP and MML’s appeals to public opinion suggest is the existence of an infrastructural sphere open to illiberal forces that is quite different from the Habermasian (Habermas 1991) notion of a discussant, deliberative liberal public sphere centring on congregation in coffee houses and clubs and discussion in a free press. Nancy Fraser, while arguing for the utility of Habermas’ “public sphere” to understand liberal democracies, instantiates its gaps with regard to gender, race, and its privileging of liberalism. In its place she offered her own influential conception of “subaltern counterpublics” (1990:67) as it stood in the last decade of the twentieth century. These parallel arenas emerge in stratified societies in which a single public sphere is not possible, but rather competitive spaces of contestation stand for a kind of participation that does not guarantee inclusion in the public sphere (Ibid: 93, Warner 2002). While
the predominance of loadshedding generated a kind of counterpublic with the intermittence of electrical utility in common, it is more apt to describe with regard to the ambient interruptions of energy provision the creation of what Pinney called a, “performative public sphere” (Pinney 2002: 2) in which users mediate the nation state through ears, eyes, and bodies tuned to a complex sensory terrain.

At the mouth of Yaseen Street and main Hall Road the traders who can stand the bustle of people and motorbike traffic set up stalls, hawking whatever has recently been unloaded wholesale from containers fresh from the drydock on the Chinese border. New to the stalls is a “3D” Enlargement screen for mobile phones to magnify the screen so videos can be watched thereon, giving a satisfying and clear magnification. Its screen is housed in a frame more akin to a contained television unit, with a side panel whose shade helps the clarity of the image by stopping surrounding light pollution. The salesman told me that if he was in his usual spot outside on the main street he would be unable to demonstrate it, but here, in the arcade of Yaseen Street I was able to see how well it works in the dark. I was told I can watch an entire film on it during periods of loadshedding and can power the phone through my USB power-bank – while he pointed to the back of Rafi Plaza where those can be bought – and the content streamed through a USB-powered mobile internet device – pointing to a franchise of the Chinese internet provider, Zong opposite in Zaitoon Plaza. He said that when settling down to watch a film on television I do not even have to check the Roshan App.

73 The Roshan [power, light, energy] App, a smartphone application courtesy of the government of Pakistan, allows users to monitor the scheduled loadshedding in their district.
to check the scheduled outages. More or less independent from the central power supply, smartphones have created an ambient infrastructure for direct access, privatizing various spheres of public and private life and making them an ideal tool for navigating intermittence.

The roof over Yaseen Street, as well as its proximity to Rafi and Zaitoon Plazas, have made it a prime location for traders, and whose need for backup power have added to the assortment of wiring across the passage. The support of many small traders for the PML-N party in Punjab is due in large part to their partial reduction in loadshedding in their five years of rule between 2013 and 2018. I remembered, in the months before the 2013 elections that swept the PPP [The Pakistan People’s Party] from power, whole days and nights spent by candlelight, without internet or ceiling fans, and the sudden synchronous blackout of whole sections of the city while a sector beyond an invisible border remained illuminated. While contesting the NA120 byelections in 2017 the incumbent Federal Government of the PML-N celebrated, “Rising Pakistan” in a full-page newspaper advert on the seventy-year anniversary of independence, detailing the growth of energy supply since 2013 (Fig 44). The advert was illustrated with two silhouetted Pakistans formed of a montage of photographs. The Pakistan representing the country under the PPP government was smaller and formed of monochrome images detailing demonstrations against loadshedding, while the other pertaining to the present was larger, composed of colour images of energy plants, windfarms, pylons, solar farms, and energy grids. To contrast the black and white of the before image, throbbing, neon-blue outlines were drawn around
the drab colours of energy plants. In the accompanying text, success was measured in the megawatts of energy generated during the PML-N’s tenure. Despite these claims, loadshedding persists. Generators continue to provide the sensory environment as one passes through Yaseen Street. On more than one occasion during my time in Lahore, Tarbela Dam’s transmission line became untethered to the national grid, leading to a loss of power to the Chashma Power Plant and a total power cut in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkwa. Inevitably, within days, workmen on Hall Road could be seen unloading a container delivery of large solar panels. In these instances, the bustle of entrepreneurial activity on Hall Road felt to me like the deft turns on a tuning peg, in which individuals adjust the pitch of the media landscape to the prevailing senory, ambient, and moral environment.

Like Benjamin, the Surrealists passion for the arcades of Paris was driven by the extent to which their material qualities were undergirded by the immaterial play of natural and artificial lighting, creating “true sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral” (Aragon 1994: 14). Such “lightscapes” (Bille and Sørensen 2007: 267) are material agents, sensually and socially active, and in Lahore closely associated with both the personal – in the form of small generators and smartphone magnifiers – and the national. Continuous power without intermittence or breakdown has rarely been accessible to many in Pakistan. Its absence, rather than its breakdown, has mingled into the background. In the study of infrastructure Brian Larkin called for an understanding of the “the role of breakdown and forms of life to which breakdown gives rise.” (2013: 328). Yet
loadshedding is a threshold experience, creating an infrastructural sphere materialized on Yaseen Street, a liminal place created by the offsetting of energy, and from overload rather than breakdown. While infrastructures are material entities that facilitate the interaction, distribution, and cohabitation of object-forms, their physical networks give shape to the conditions of sensory ambience (Ibid: 336-7). While infrastructural breakdown gives rise to an awareness of how governing systems attempt to mobilise the invisibility of failure and the inevitability of collapse, the kind of infrastructural intermittence I have described here operates through performative reciprocity. The imminence of breakdown is felt through the certainty of its eventual restoration; it is a certain uncertainty that draws attention to how precarity is internalised and absorbed by marketplaces like Hall Road into atmospheres common, in some degree, to all.

*The Kačcha and the Pāka*

Another way that Hall Road provides a conceptual framework with which to understand the marketplace recording, retrieval, and reproduction of media and moral ecologies is in the language employed to describe urban form. Scholarship on informality first stemmed from research into parallel economic practices (Hart 1973, Gershuny 1979) centered upon trade, housing, and urban planning, and crystallized around the turn of the twenty-first century in studies of informal labour (Breman 1996, Misztal 2002), the constitutive character of informality to urban form (Roy 2005, Larkin 2008, Hasan 2003), media piracy (Karaganis
2011, Sundaram 2009), and informal film distribution (Steyerl 2012, Lobato 2009, Liang 2005). Pakistan has long been associated with media piracy, despite this reputation being complicated by the extent of the informality of the formal sphere of governance and trade. In 1994, the World Trade Organization (WTO) authored the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), effectively ensuring that copyright compliance become a prerequisite for continued participation in global trade. The early years of the twenty-first century saw the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) threatening the nations of the world with inclusion on their annual Special 301 report “Watch List” and “Priority Watch List”. From being branded as an economic outcast to formal trade sanctions, the punishments can be severe. Long-time offender the Philippines were only removed from the list in 2014 when they capitalized on every haul of seized pirated goods with grand public destruction ceremonies in which discs were steamrolled, hard drives smashed with hammers, and materials burned. In 2016, after Pakistan’s establishment of IP Tribunals in Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi, USTR moved Pakistan from the Priority Watch List to the Watch List.

Contrary to the international language of piracy, the study of the circulation of media in Pakistan requires an understanding of specific social, urban, and phenomenological conditions of transfer, recording, and transmission that are separate from traditional understandings of informality. Viewing acts that focus only on the rights of owners in the case of piracy, or relationships with dominant structures in the case of informality, maligns the complexity, and
withdraws the agency of their individual mediators. In his recent monograph, Amit S. Rai (2019) explores mobile phone ecologies as a form of workaround that brokers sensory infrastructures. In so doing, Rai manages to separate informality from its reliance on issues of copyright and takes its associated practices as a constitutive expression of recycling or renovation. Similarly, for the purposes of this thesis it is important to disentangle informal film distribution (Lobato, 2012, 2015) from the study of piracy (Schwarz and Eckstein 2014) and “copy culture”, a discursive progenitor of the free culture (Brown 1998) movement that infers a circulatory system without obstacles. The specific conditions of film distribution in Pakistan requires focus on the, "counter-itineraries" (Himpele 1996: 57, Himpele 2008) taken through the cracks in urban infrastructure, which transforms the distributive apparatus into one that organises itineraries and distributes difference. Sundaram describes the result as a form of media urbanism marked by the possibility of radical, anti-capitalist subversion by not producing precise copies but rather acting as a, “giant difference engine” that brings subaltern populations into “permanent technological visibility” (Sundaram 2009: 13). Yet despite the appearance of subalterneity, Hall Road operates within the colonial logic of “zoning” (Glover 2008: xiv), splitting up industrial, commercial, administrative, and residential areas and the intermingling of the city with its secular governance.

In the early 1980s, when studies of urban informality were in a nascent phase, Muhammad A. Qadeer build on Clifford Geertz to conceive of a dualistic structural analysis of “bazaar and firm sector” (1983: 19). The former described
a network of competitive exchange, reliant on local knowledge and materials, and locally adapted materials or technology, while the latter described a sphere defined by its impenetrability, reliance on foreign investiture, imported technology, and licensed markets for its activity (Ibid: 20-21). Qadeer, like Sundaram, is sympathetic to the bazaar sector, seeing it as a creative economy forged under conditions antipathetic to its existence, if paradoxically conducive to its growth. By looking to these conditions, Qadeer felt that Lahore’s urban form could be adapted to the indigenization of city planning, in which the role of the bazaar sector is recognised and reflected in land use, transport policies, and housing planning, rather than interrupting the path dependency of the city’s colonial inheritance. He was quick to notice that the relationship between the firm and bazaar economies are related to the hierarchical flow of wealth, power, and income, and therefore do not produce a mutually dependent binary but rather a, “hierarchy of circuits” (Ibid: 22).

Despite the prevalence of the distinction between formal and informal outside Pakistan, on Hall Road few are familiar with the distinction, so fluid and malleable are their potential networks for trade, housing, urban infrastructure, and the consumption of media. Due to the near absence of the state in the enforcement of intellectual property legislation or taxation, concrete categories assigned to material culture and commodities beyond ethical designations appeared inconsequential and unnecessary to many of my interlocutors on Hall Road. Instead, the more conceptually malleable distinction between the kačcha and the pāka, roughly defined as temporary and fixed, proved a more appropriate
language to describe the ambient character of things, the built environment, and the threshold of “absorption” into the urban. As I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, *kačcha* and *pāka* as Indic concepts refer to the binary states of being raw and cooked, temporary and finished, or makeshift and fixed, but have come to refer to interventions in the built environment and are used as a language of infrastructural liminality. For example, a *kačcha* road formed by footfall might be turned *pāka* by the laying of a metalled track or designated as a path to be maintained and cleared by local authorities. The idea of *pāka* bears resemblance to the idea of formality because its designation requires the recognition of an upper echelon capable of managing the transformation from temporary to fixed.

At the liminal point between these two states, at the threshold point of absorption, lies another term for describing urban form. Similarly, *qabzā* [occupation, possession, or encroachment] refers to infrastructure; it is an act of disturbance that works on the threshold of *kačcha* and *pāka* phenomenology and channels absorption into the benefit of a powerful corporate group, although crucially one incapable of managing the transformation from *kačcha* and *pāka*. As I have already noted, besides being known as the “plaza mafia”, the Khidmat Group are known as one of many “*qabzā* groups” or the “*qabzā* mafia”. There is a palpable fear of these shadowy groups that newspapers and my interlocutors talk about as if they are a single unit or corporation. It is significant that they are recognised as authoritative enough to usurp urban power but not enough to be able to manage the transformation from *kaččā* to *pakkā*. They are said to illegally take possession of land through government bribes or coercion and on a larger
scale often occupy swathes of land by constructing an illegal mosque and constructing outward to create kaččī ābādī [slum dwellings] (Hull 2012:239). In colonial Punjab the term encroachment was used as the antonym to public space (Glover 2012: 370) while in Muslim Becoming Naveeda Khan (2012) explores the semantic field of qabzā, and its description of the act of seizure or appropriation, often as violent acts of usurpation. Khan also explores how the act of asserting qabzā can be aspirational and discursive when applied to mosques and can be the act of “Muslim striving” that Khan seeks to define through her ethnography as an instantiation of a future-facing Pakistan open to experimentation and debate. Khan explains that while qabzā is used to describe either the illegal occupation of land, and occasionally the necessary settlement of land following displacement, the term can be used to describe the friction between social actors. For Khan, qabzā elucidates the “state of striving and the obstacles to it in within everyday life in Pakistan” (Ibid: 29).

The Anjuman-e-Tajiran’s estimate of Hall Road’s working population at 30 to 100,000 is based only on registered store-holders; many operate in temporary premises, have yet to register, or choose not to show their presence to the trader’s union and ally themselves with the Khidmat Group. The head of the Anjuman-e-Tajiran, whose decision it was to hold a bonfire of “pornographic” discs back in 2008 (see Chapter Five), has been working on Hall Road since 1969, first with radio sound systems and then cassette decks in cars. For him, the Khidmat Group and their charity are only a front to siphon money into building
plazas on evacuee property. He believes the government, fearing the power of the national trader’s unions with whom Hall Road’s Anjuman-e-Tajiran are allied, encourage organisations like the Khidmat Group to compete under the guise of a union while functioning as private developers. Later, back in Durrani Electronics I would tell Adil, the youngest and usually the most sedate and cool-headed of the group, about the union’s indictment of the “mafia” Khidmat Group. His eyes flashed red and he began, in uncharacteristic fashion, telling me of his passion for their mission. For him they are mosque-builders, they assist in dowries to allow underprivileged women to get married, they are men who, like him, worked themselves up from nothing and focus their energies on welfare and development; two premium political desires.

Whenever Idris was sent to deposit money in the bank, he would take me on a brief tour of Hall Road’s pre-Partition heritage. Between the heave of Beadon Road and the chaos of Hall Road lies a haven of quiet and domesticity: Lakshmi Mansions, upscale, early twentieth century apartments built around a central garden. Idris walked around, looking for the blue plaque installed by the family of the controversial writer Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) to mark the apartment he lived in after migrating to Pakistan after Partition. Instead, we found half the apartments recently demolished, a shiny looking plaza in its place. The number of Manto’s apartment—31—was the last one on that side still standing. Its blue plaque had been prised off and replaced by one bearing the name of the

---

74 Buildings or land left over by former residents who migrated to India after Partition and either rented out by the Evacuee Property Trust Board or whose ownership of, or allocation to, Muslim evacuees in Pakistan is still ill-defined or uncertain.
“Khidmat Group”, into whose possession the Evacuee Property had, somehow, recently fallen. Such assertions of qabzā operate at the threshold of transformation. As it was not the Pakistani government who installed the plaque due to their hesitance over celebrating a poet once tried by its courts for obscenity, the building was considered an appropriate site upon which to play out an urban power grab. While the “Khidmat Group” could have easily demolished this wing of the Lakshmi Mansions, as many other sections of it have been to make way for mobile phone plazas, the Manto family’s attempt to imbue the site with heritage status in the form of a blue plaque was met with a counter-assertion of ownership similar in many ways to the incisive acts explored in Chapter Three of putting objects “under erasure”.

In the Civil Lines area of Lahore in which Hall Road can be found it is common to see signs erected or the words painted onto a boundary wall, “This building is not for sale”. The practice responds to a well-established scam in which a buyer will be shown a building or plot of land for sale. When a deposit or payment is exchanged, and it comes to handing over the deeds, the seller disappears. The publicness of these buildings and thoroughfares and the boundary walls that contain the disputed property are like the surfaces of Guddu Khan’s film memorabilia in which, expecting appropriation, the asserted owner imprints his name on the surface of the object. If it is possible to speak of an urban consciousness on Hall Road as one that saturates into its produce, we can see in the assertion of qabzā over buildings appearing to be bereft of owners and
films unguarded by intellectual property laws, an attempted transformation from *kačcha* to *pākka* phenomenology.

Governmental response to *kaččā* developments and *qabzā* in the form of urban encroachment often takes the form of anti-encroachment drives. In November 2018, Karachi’s Empress Market, home to the Rainbow Centre, saw the total destruction of a vast marketplace similar in form to some of Hall Road’s connecting and outlying alleyways such as Yaseen Street. With some businesses having been in residence since the 1970s, and with most paying rent, the extent to which such markets are held on the threshold of legality make them prime opportunities for *qabzā* groups to exert their shadowy non-governmentality. The provision of welfare, charitable work, and civil protest help to build the ambience of *pākka* over the precarity of being *kaččā*. It is this liminal point of being “fair game” that make these thresholds of ownership so applicable to Pakistani marketplace media. While Qadeer saw in Lahore’s “bazaar economy” the foundation of an indigenous approach to urban development, he overlooked how the tendency of the city towards “absorption” provide an opportunistc space to catch hold of objects, places, and things, as they are left to linger by a weak state reluctant to turn the *kaččā* into *pākka*.

---

*Nostalgia, Class, and the “Refugee Māḥaul”*

As we reached the dead end of Yaseen Street, Idris stopped outside a whitewashed, nineteenth century building of four stories that starkly contrasted
with its surroundings. I squinted at a faded, hand-painted sign; Cheema Sons, bookbinders and booksellers since the mid-nineteenth century. In Lahore, pre-Partition buildings identify themselves by their patina; a combination of rich ochre, a pastel décollage of chipped paint, and the gnarl of rotting wood. Through the passages between plazas one can glimpse a number of such ruinous buildings that seem to have been eviscerated of their mortar toppling backward. They fold into the surrounding area so seamlessly their antiquity is hard to gage at first.\footnote{75}{Being little more than a side-road before the growth of home media and electronics, historical or archival sources on Hall Road are scarce. The following section describing historical changes to the street and its adjoining area is presented as a collage of information sourced from dozens of interlocutors on Hall Road; from pre-Partition families to traders whose business has long resided on the street.} As Idris wandered back to Durrani Electronics, I knocked on the door of Cheema Sons, amid a well-tended array of plants and overhanging trees struggling towards light amid the shade cast in the passage. The Cheema family’s eldest son Usman, an urbane and articulate aesthete, recalled an old friend Chaudry Buzdar, the first to run a small radio shop on the street just beside the entrance that leads to the rear of their property. Even that shop, he said, was built on the property left vacant by an illegally demolished Hindu Temple, which itself sat beside a disappeared Sikh Gurdwara. For Usman the chaos of encroachment did not begin with the radio, video, or electronics shops, instead it originated in the extent to which Hall Road was left practically vacant and given out as Evacuee Property (Zamindar 2007) to Muslim refugees from India or occupied by internal migrants in the new state of Pakistan.
A few doors down is the Shrine of Hazrat Ismail Lahori, a breezeblock mosque built around a tree and housing the grave of an eleventh century saint purported to be Lahore’s first Muslim seer, predating that of the city’s patron saint Dātā Ganj Bakhsh. White-tiled and compact like an industrial refrigerator, its small grave is delicate, slightly floral, and almost entirely ignored. Having once housed Hazrat Ismail Lahori’s hermitage, the land continued to be used as a graveyard during Mughal times, evinced by the presence of another small mausoleum nearby, that of Shah Abdul Menan, where babies and children are taken to restorative waters to be cured of contagious skin conditions. Many old families still resident on Hall Road recite the oral history of their ancestors; when the foundations of their homes were laid they would find skeletons, all facing Mecca. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857 Lahore saw a sudden influx of British building projects and the development of a “colonial sublime” (Larkin 2008: 11) of experimental infrastructure (Daeschel 2012) that forged physical and commercial space for the expansion of a middle class. When the British needed a sizeable church for their congregation they built the Lahore Cathedral Church of the Resurrection on Hazrat Ismail Lahori’s graveyard that had been left untouched by its former misl during the years of Sikh rule. One of the suppliers of the bricks for the church was a local contractor, Muhammad Sultan Thekedar, who erected a small residence for his engineers. The building survived until the middle of the twentieth century and briefly housed one of Amritsar’s deputy commissioners, C. M. Hall, after whom the street was most probably named. The first half of Hall Road, accommodating the commercial spill-over
from the Mall via the junction Regal Chowk was historically a busy place where people gathered to protest. This was due to the concentration of lawyer’s offices, including that of the late Asma Jehangir. The famous demonstration of the Women’s Action Forum on February 12th 1983 against Zia-ul-Haq’s anti-women legislation, was held at the entrance to Hall Road, marking a significant moment in the history of feminism in Pakistan. The other half, its lands belonging to the church and adjacent government buildings, was always more sedate. Before Partition, Hall Road was full of Anglo-Indian families employed in nursing and education, and a sizable Chinese community, with restaurants, dancing halls, and bars, including the notorious Clifton Bar, where Saadat Hasan Manto could be seen drinking away the money he had brought with him from his work in Bombay’s film industry before Partition. Previously the street was flanked by tall, shady trees, and wide enough for public buses to course down it, as they travelled from the Mall to McLeod Road.

Neither Usman Cheema nor Idris, freshly returned from half his lifetime in the Gulf, considered themselves neither part of the awaam nor the elite. They identified themselves as “old Lahore”76, an object of embodied heritage that finds closer allies in buildings and the departed multi-religiosity of pre-Partition Lahore than anything offered by the present. Although these men would never sit together over tea, Usman Cheema echoes Idris’ proud cosmopolitanism in feeling

---

76 Idris and the Cheema family’s nostalgia contrasts with the Lahore of Richard Murphy’s ethnography, steeped as it was with anti-Hindu sentiment following the destruction of the Ayodyha mosque in 1992, but which still retained the social self-exclusion of “old Lahore” or “Lahore society” (Murphy 1996: 80).
great allegiance and nostalgia for the colonial era, particularly the materiality of the grid-line roads of the Cantonment – “so adept at stopping uprisings,” he said - and the brickwork and invisible mortar of early colonial buildings. He sent me to go and look at one nearby example, threatened by the ongoing construction of the new Lahore-based Orange Line Metro Train project, taking place less than a hundred metres from their building (Fig 51). Planned and financed in partial connection with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the line was deemed to violate Pakistan’s 1975 Antiquities Act, threatening such protected sites as the Mughal-era Shalimar Gardens. Many of the traders on Hall Road who formed the support base of the then-ruling PML-N party felt that to engage in such “megaprojects” – infrastructure sold to the public by its sublime characteristics - is to engage properly in the act of governance. Such friction, the concomitant “stresses and fissures” of collective interaction (Khan 2012: 12), have provoked acute anxiety over infrastructural development, one characterized by, "the anticipation of arrival, the anxiety of what that arrival would entail, and the insecurity of not getting there." (Jamali 2013: 8), rather than as the harbinger of a "coming modernity" (Khan 2006: 106).

On the adjoining McLeod Road all the trees had been ripped up and what was left of the sidewalks combed into dirt tracks where still-functioning businesses laid their wares. A deeply dug section connected to some already lain tubes, recording deep levels of built structures beneath the surface, leaving the bases of fluted columns of ambiguous antiquity strewn across the road like dusty cauliflower florets. Lakshmi Chowk, a little further on, was practically destroyed
by the Orange Line constructions, with stray trenches dug for smaller pipes left unfilled long enough that they became latrines, sending up plumes of mosquitoes visible in the early evening light and smog, even at the height of dengue season. At the end of McLeod Road, the Lakshmi Building, a symbol of Lahore’s pre-Partition Hindu heritage was covered in a green tarpaulin to protect it from the ravages of the Orange Line. On the other side of the city the looming great overpass suddenly stopped as if in reverence at the Chauburji, a Mughal-era monument covered on all sides by another green protective tarpaulin.

Usman complained, “They are ruining the whole fabric of this city. They’ve just shaved off the colonial goodness of that area.” He told me, “Those buildings were not made by them. Those buildings were owned by Hindus and Sikhs at that time, those were the affluent people of those times. They were not the present class who have been hijacking the system.” He added, for good measure, “No, we are not a refugee family over here,” using the English word rather than the Urdu term muhājir more commonly used to describe Partition-era forced migrants from India. “This is our landed area, our ancestral property,” he concluded. For Usman Cheema the current state of Hall Road is a direct consequence of Partition. This he associates again with the “refugee element. The refugees that came during the exodus …when the division of the subcontinent happened.” That he believes they continue to come either makes his more of a categorical distinction rather than a causal action or allies them with the presence of Afghan refugees in the country, on whom many social ills are blamed. “They don’t own these places, they don’t have any papers that tell them that this is
“Because they were all such working-class people. I mean, I’ve got my own trade here, I have my workers in the back, they work over there. I work with them. But you know in a social fabric you cannot allow them to come over here and sit with us, can you? … Those people were never allowed in such structures, ever…And our ruling class is also from the refugee families. They’re not from Lahore. They are not from Pakistan. No, they’re not…You will not find such dialogue in the media because they themselves belong to that refugee māhaul. How can they talk about it?”

For Usman there was once an urban cosmopolitanism that existed alongside one’s religious identity, “It was a very multicultural, elitist, settled city,” he said, as if those things are indivisible elements. For him, even Lahore’s traffic is “indigenous” and “refugee”, when he recalls how quiet the roads are on Islamic holidays Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Azha, and on the ninth and tenth of Muharram, when so many people return to their ancestral villages. The identification of a “refugee māhaul”, an atmosphere that describes a difference in urban morality, and forged in opposition to Usman Cheema’s nostalgia for a Lahore of Parsis, Sikhs, and Hindus, is even more remarkable for having no grounding in lived experience,
mediated instead by the powerful oral tradition of their family. By siding with minorities and with long-departed adherents of other faiths Usman felt he was speaking truth to power, giving an ambiguous tinge to his disparaging views on the “refugees” he suggests have become the ruling class.

For Usman Cheema, the problems of the city’s absorption of development parallels their ongoing anxieties about the assimilation of newcomers to Lahore and the perceived failures in the assimilation of incoming Muslim refugees after Partition. Plazas and the assertion of qabzā over objects and spaces relating to the past are the result of the absorption and assimilation required by the traumatic early years of Pakistani history. Lahore’s infrastructural unease is paralleled with anxieties over built heritage and the post-Partition allocation of evacuee property and a feeling, for Usman, that the property went to corrupt, socially inferior people. His is an entangled social class, neither the awaam nor the elite, who mark themselves out by having a direct, consanguineous or experiential connection with social and religious hybridity. The creation and production of urban class values tied to being “old Lahore” hinge on the celebration of cosmopolitanism formed by creating a distinction against those who migrated to Lahore, either after Partition or more recently from surrounding towns and villages in Punjab. This is evinced in Usman’s oral family history of cultural connection and peer-networks built on education, business status, and class in pre-Partition Lahore, in Idris’ experience of cross-religious, transnational contact in Dubai, and to a certain extent his kinsmen, Durrani Electronics’ status of
longevity in the market allowing them to recall a time when international businesses and customers came to, or were stocked by, Hall Road.

“New Heritage”

Asking questions about the safekeeping of old films in Pakistan prompted many of my interlocutors to recall other activities and circulatory ephemera that once passed through their hands and through their lives; materializations of routines that they wished they had collected and kept if only they knew how quickly the routines contingent on them would disappear. From videocassettes of now untraceable Pakistani films to discontinued paper currency, one fondly-remembered habit was the sending of Eid greeting cards during the last days of Ramazan (Saeed 2011). Most of the large publishing houses have stopped printing Eid cards, knowing that their former customers now use WhatsApp to send and forward picture messages marking Eid to individuals and groups. Yet on the second floor of an old legal bookshop at the corner of Hall Road, paper Eid cards can still be found, featuring nostalgic, Impressionistic paintings of “old Lahore”, reproduced and printed by a notable artist and cartoonist. The half-imagined cityscapes – featuring grand Havelis, colonial-era architecture, and market scenes - that decorate the covers are elaborated upon on the back of the card with details of their construction, history, and often – in a postscript - the date of their destruction. One had even been captioned in a recent reprint with the words “Bengali Building – destroyed in 2016 for Orange Line Train”. Most
of those evicted from the Bengali Buildings had been residing there since being allocated apartments after arriving as Partition refugees from India. Unhappy with compensation settlements that counted only heads of families rather than the number of households affected, many were forcibly evicted when the building was only hours away from destruction.

Sitting down to sign and address some of the cards, unwrapping one from its neat plastic cover, I found, partially enfolded in the accompanying envelope, another image on the usually blank space opposite the “Eid Mubarak” message. Seeming to echo the inserted addendum and contrasting the chocolate-box image on the cover, a satirical single-box cartoon by the same artist had been printed on the inside, initially hidden to the buyer. The image featured an artist at his easel working on a tourist poster, while an onlooker recoiled in surprise. In the painting the chhatri of a Mughal-style building crumbles into ruin and is captioned with the slogan, “Visit Pakistan: See Falling Historical Monuments” (Fig 52). Sentimental and subversive, the artist’s own interventions on his Eid cards – themselves threatened with obsolescence - neatly capture anger over the state’s ambivalence towards the city’s antiquarian sites.

77 During his time in Lahore Claude Lévi-Strauss might have found this satirical drawing of decay a fitting national image. When Levi-Strauss landed at the old Walton Airport in Lahore, a short distance from the area that is now the upscale Defence Housing Authority, he asked himself, “in this vast and meaningless expanse...Where was the old, the real Lahore?” (2012: 43). His irritable encounter with the decrepitude of the Walled City and the ruins left by recent Partition violence and the 1953 anti-Ahmadi riots, enhanced Lévi-Strauss’ self-image of himself as, “an archaeologist of space, seeking in vain to recreate a lost local colour with the help of fragments and debris” (Ibid).
When I arrived in Lahore, the Orange Line had been halted by a stay order following a campaign by a pressure group led by cultural stakeholders that included the Cheema family. Its looming concrete flyovers lay interrupted, a moment frozen in time. Researching the copying and retrieval of Pakistani media on Hall Road, I would spend my days flicking through and talking over racks of VCDs. With three or four films poorly compressed and squeezed into the capacious confines of one disc, the content would inevitably often glitch, introducing unwanted visual artefacts caused by compression to cause an inoperable error in encoding and playback. The half-finished flyovers reminded me of these persistent glitches, an external interruption to the signal, pointing to both the absence of resources for its continuation, or of an overload of data confined within too small a space. Like the monolithic and forceful nare lagana [sloganeering] rhetorical style common to party rallies, the Orange Line embodies the strongman politics of Pakistan’s Punjab province. Disturbance, even violence, is omnipresent as an appeal for political capital.

Inevitably, on the ninth of December 2017, after a report concluded in the government’s favour, work restarted on the Orange Line. Over tea Usman Cheema quietly seethed over the issue and recalled his involvement in the contestations over the Orange Line,

“I was sitting in that meeting with the world heritage people and there was a discussion going on because somebody had filed a petition, and they wanted the route to be changed. You have the chief minister [Shahbaz Sharif] sitting there and he’s being asked questions by those
people and he’s questioned very sanely that these colonial buildings are not concrete or cement or reinforced structures, they are brick laid on brick structures and they are liable to damage if they are exposed to constant vibration and once that starts we will not be able to put the clock back. So, the chief minister stands up pointing his fingers, and he says “No, I will build them new heritage sites”. Quote unquote.”

It wasn’t the first time I’d heard this story; a number of other people involved in the campaign to stop the Orange Line had reported sitting in the same meeting (Moffat 2020). Other versions circulating on WhatsApp reported that the terms of the CPEC even had Chinese funds earmarked for the creation of “new heritage” sites. The encrypted messaging application WhatsApp had already become a less-than-public sphere for the circulation of information, usually driven by a compulsion to maintain the kinetic energy of the message. These kinds of messages, pertaining to be pressing local or national news contained a kind of circulatory rumour in the form of what is known as “forward as received” messages, unverified news forwarded unchecked and unchanged as if from a legitimate source. While these often circulate in private groups, the velocity of their spread mean that they can quickly become recognisably “public” news items. When the Orange Line construction restarted, private WhatsApp groups buzzed with a palpable anxiety, not just about the then-ruling PML-N party’s propensity for development and building, but that this urge for construction could destabilise the value of objects relating to the past, allowing for the possibility of infinitely scalable reproduction, such as the prospect of “new heritage”.

281
I soon learned that my interlocutors on Hall Road and beyond were unknowingly placing themselves as protagonists in a satirical news item from Pakistan’s short-lived Khabaristan Times. The source article, originally titled “Shahbaz vows to construct new heritage sites along OLMT route,” and written by an unknown author, was a masterpiece of prescient social comment. Its source, a short-lived online satirical newspaper whose pieces were also regularly published in Pakistan’s Daily Times, was blocked by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority in February 2017 and ceased to exist in any form shortly after. I felt that the devotion with which the story was regaled, even with those placing themselves within the story, erected it to the status of a short-lived myth, having circulated widely enough through WhatsApp groups to have detached itself from its satirical origins. While the truth was bitter enough, satire proved to be a more adequate manner for expressing what those at Cheema Sons thought was going on beneath the surface. The disquiet of those who feel threatened by these changes formed figural images: believable lies, such as the short-lived modern myth of “new heritage” in Lahore, to express anxiety over the power and ability of others not just to develop and build, but to build again. Still, in newness and oldness there is always a persistent fusion, even a doubling, not cyclical but co-existent and mutually interdependent.

The issue of “new heritage” was also one of the few assertions I encountered in which the label of inauthenticity was ascribed to a body of
others. Magdalena Crăciun reminds us that people engage with inauthenticity within the climate of its classification (2012: 857). The assertion that “new heritage” is believable for inauthentic persons, is an active transduction of the identification of fake-ness in things to people. In this instance “new heritage” is an imagined inauthenticity where its conception does not otherwise exist, wielding a notion of conceptual (and in the narrative, practically) foreign origin, to translate the more diverse practices of qabzā, kaččā, and pakkā, into clear binaries of right and wrong, real and fake, old and new, authentic and inauthentic, within an infrastructural sphere in which they can be understood. That they do this by placing themselves in a satirical narrative that exceeds the truth while remaining within verisimilitude, underlines how integral these fuzzy boundaries are to Hall Road’s urban form.

78 Like any successful conspiracy theory it operates at the threshold of verisimilitude. Akhtar and Ahmad (2015) consider the predominance of conspiracy theory in Pakistan to be a bottom-up theory of capitalist statehood. Yet believable untruths are also widespread among the economic elite, which appear to rely on the perniciousness of the mass rather than the workings of a small, international cabal.
Figure 37. A man reads Pakistani film magazine *Rang-o-Roop* outside a newspaper stand on Lahore’s Mall. (September 2017).
Fig 3. Banners erected by the Khidmat Group over the entrance of Hall Road. The first protesting the murder of an infant girl in nearby Kasur (January 2018), the second protesting the plight of those in Indian-administered Kashmir (January 2020)
Fig 39. Public information banners over Hall Road, mostly erected by the Khidmat Group, (December 2017).
Fig 40. On Hall Road, famous for its role in the rapid adoption and adaption of audio-visual technologies, an advertisement for event photography and filming features a taxonomic line of icons depicting different mediums for filming (April 2018).
Figure 41. One of many loudspeakers affixed to Hall Road’s plazas, calling a working population of over 30,000 to prayer at one of more than a dozen mosques. (August 2018).
Figure 42. As a media environment, Hall Road is closely attuned to atmospheric changes, moral or meteorological. Following an extensive city-wide power outage resulting from a malfunction in the energy supply from one of Pakistan’s hydroelectric plants, solar panels began to be sold beside local “Lahori cooler” air-conditioners. (March 2018).
Outside, on the street, a mud-splattered standee of a Pakistani film star advertises a new Chinese-made smartphone. The street was once synonymous with pirated and informal film distribution in the Indian subcontinent, stemming from Pakistan’s unenforced copyright laws. Recently this trade has been overtaken by an influx of Chinese-made smartphones on which consumers can stream films, communicate cheaply with relatives abroad, and benefit from increasingly sophisticated photographic “selfie technology” offering “beautification filters” (December 2017).
Fig 44. Rafi and Zaitoon Plazas as imagined in maquettes before their construction, circa 1980s (Courtesy of Rafi Group).
Fig 45. Zaitoon Plaza, Yaseen Street to the left. (September 2018).
Fig 46. Rafi Plaza (Yaseen Street to the right), (September 2018).
Fig 47. Yaseen Street, (May 2018).
Fig 48. Sunday DVD Market at the entrance of Yaseen Street, (January 2018).
Political party advertisements attempted to win voters with the promise of ending loadshedding…
Fig 50...And with an appeal to voters’ love of construction projects. (September 2017)
Fig 51. Orange Line Metro Train constructions on the adjoining McLeod Road. (September 2018).
Fig 52. Hidden Message in an Eid card (September 2017).
Chapter V

The Mastercopy

Adil, always dressed in a crisp blue shalwar-kameez topped with a tweed-patterned sports jacket, started working at Durrani Electronics when he was seven to provide for his ailing father. A photograph of him in the shop as a child shows him in a similar outfit, as if his clothes had grown with him. As he is related neither to Idris nor Faisal, nor is he connected to their wider Pashtun Durrani tribe, he initially took on menial tasks before rising to his current role as salesman. In those days he lived in the residential houses that used to back onto Hall Road, against the facades of which groceries would be winched up with a system of elevated baskets for housewives living at the top. By 2017 these buildings had almost all been levelled to make space for new shopping plazas. Even now Adil winces when he remembers how, in 2008, the flimsy structures shook violently following several low-intensity blasts that targeted the floor above them in Zaitoon Plaza. These attacks, designed to maim and inspire fear, followed an anonymous bomb threat sent shortly before, prompting Hall Road’s Anjuman-e-Tajiran, the official traders union, to burn 60,000 discs containing “pornographic” content on the street outside. Those protective of Lahore’s famous liberalism began to describe the event as the beginning of the
“Talibanization of Lahore” (Alam 2008). While traders saw this act as pragmatism rather than appeasement; others worried about the radicalisation of the powerful merchant class (Masood 2008) through the spread of a creeping zealotry that might soon infect society from its core. At that moment Hall Road, albeit briefly, came to encapsulate Lahore’s liberalism, isolation, and its fragile immunity from the upheavals taking place in the rest of the country. The street – and all it stood for - had evaded the censors, copyright law, and the city corporation’s planning department, but had responded to one anonymous letter and its accusations of immorality with a public bonfire.

Those on the side of appeasement recalled to me that by 2008, in that interstitial moment between formats when videocassettes were still in use while low-cost video-compact discs (VCDs) compressed moving image content onto a cheap, low-quality carrier, it would have been the proliferating copies that were burned rather than the more valuable videocassettes from which copies were struck. This was not the same as the affective outrage and wounded sentiments of the cinema-burnings that would follow a few years later in 2012 (Chapter One). To the extent of its public address, the bonfire bore close resemblance to recent precedent. A few years before, in 2006, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) – a coalition of religious parties that formed the regional government in Pakistan’s province of Khyber–Pakhtunkhwa - cracked down on the ownership of electronics and recordings deemed impermissible; CDs, Video Cassettes and playback hardware were burned on the directives of the provincial government.
These days, at the entrance to Hall Road, the faces of the leaders of the Anjuman-e-Tajiran compete with those of the Khidmat Group (Chapter Four), competing for loyalty with the promise of the face as a legible guarantee of honour and integrity. The face as interface of power is a prevalent tool in Pakistan, an ideogram used to assert presence and power in a masculine sphere of sovereignty and headsmanship (Michelutti et al 2018). Posters for Sunni Barelvi meetings are resplendent with the faces of pious mulvis and ulamā, while majlis compilations of Shi’i qasida (Chapter Two) recitations evince the variety of genres of devotional prayer through the assembled faces of zākīreen. In many Punjabi films, narratives are driven by the villain’s desire to avenge the scar [nishaan] made by the hero on his face. The visibility of the imandar [respectable] male face in the public sphere also serves to emphasize the seclusion of the sharif [modest] woman. Old, established businesses use whitened and retouched photos of their founders to appeal to public faith in the face as an interface of experience and knowledge. Faciality is what Michael Taussig would call a “public secret”, a visible guarantee of fidelity to a hidden prototype. On Hall Road this hidden knowledge is the authority of the mastercopy, the root of the supply chain of media copies, the fixed referent around which a trade in retrieval and reproduction circulates (Fig 53). In these instances, the face, like the mastercopy, promises everything but its index, imparting instead what Deleuze and Guattari called the, “grand-plane of the inhuman in human beings” (1987: 209). If not the human, to what does the face in the public sphere promise fidelity? The performativity of the face is a reminder
of how Pakistan’s present is honed through a “performative public sphere” (Pinney 2001: 2). The merchant middle-class on Hall Road are notable for entrepreneurial acts common to “self-fashioning” (Joshi: 2001: 2) in South Asia which, due to the exorbitance endemic in the mechanical reproduction of film and electronic media cleaves space for often serendipitous and unplanned counterpublic spheres that the face hints at, conceals, or reveals. In this chapter I explore the material and visual economy of the Hall Road repertoire and its formation through duplications and copies struck from a transitory, unstable, and rapidly atrophying base referent. The entanglement of object and agent goes some way to explain why fears of urban informality; the issues surrounding qabzā and urban encroachment explored in the previous chapter, have not carried over to the appropriation and sale of media whose moral atmosphere has the ability to disrupt prevailing ethical equilibria.

The Blood Line: Durrani Electronics

Having come to Hall Road to find out about modes of distribution and reproduction that sustain media and moral ecologies I spent a great deal of time at Durrani Electronics, a store founded in 1984, and once a prominent name in the distribution of Pakistani films during the lucrative videocassette era. Having spent his adult years abroad in the United Arab Emirates and unlike many of his peers, Idris, who I introduced in the previous chapter, was aware of international discourse on media piracy. Pointing to those around him, he said,
“If you ask these people, they wouldn’t know anything about it. The cable television people would send people with cameras into the cinema. The camera would capture the whole film and that camera-print would come the next day on cable. In Pakistan whoever has the stick owns the cow [Jis ki lathi uski bhehns].”

The camera-print and the mastercopy have long been key terms in the vernacular terminology of a residual trade in film copies, terms used by traders and customers alike. Some stores’ racks are organised by these two categories, which in turn determine the value of the product. The predominance of the terminology is rapidly being replaced by the term “data” – in English – to describe digital audio and video content that has never had to traverse the bottleneck of analogue to digital conversion. The relatively new arrival of this word in the vernacular comes from the sale of both mobile phone “data” and Internet content and coincides with a more recent turn towards the replacement of indexical media forms with digital platforms for storage.

While during fieldwork I was alert to the changing conditions of digital media, on Hall Road the relationship with analogue media was a complex and multifaceted one. Firstly, the residual power of analogue media was a marker of reliability and early investiture; mastercopies passed down through family businesses or in collections amassed by a single individual carried associations of trust. Secondly, on Hall Road, the shift to digital did not transform working practices as such but rather destabilised networks of lateral mediation. Attending to the residual presence of analogue media within digital practices is not to focus
on what media were rather than what they are. Instead, focus on the residual is to understand what Mahadevan describes as the “obviation of obsolescence” (2010: 40), in which obsolescence is rendered not only as an unnecessary form of classification but also follows with events and situations crafted to further resist its claims.

“Data” has a far less visible material lineage than analogue media, and with it has transformed the link between the origin of a film copy and its mediation across human carriers. Faisal, the manager of Durrani Electronics, speaks longingly of the days when he worked with stockists Famous Video, the principle traders in Pakistani film mastercopies who operated from Tooting in South London. They were “respectable and principled people,” he told me, who favoured print quality over everything else. They would buy a new celluloid film print from producers, one fresh from the laboratory that had not done the rounds in cinemas, and have it transferred back in the UK. Such telecine technology – the ability to transfer direct from celluloid to another format without cinematic projection – was not available in Pakistan other than at the partly state-run Shalimar Recording Company (Chapter Three).

The perceived decline in moral values that occurred in tandem with an increase of traders and materials with which to trade was exemplified one day when the store opposite theirs closed for a day to attend the funeral of their founder, whose business started at much the same time as Durrani Electronics. It used to be the custom that neighbouring stores would close to mourn a death, both out of respect for their peers and to ensure that no extra capital was earned.
at the expense of others’ mourning. Faisal and Idris, for once united in disgust on an issue, were furious to find out that many of the newer stores on their basement floor had remained open that day. Idris pointed outside to one of the visible faces of the trader’s union on a streaming banner outside and suggested he should run for office to restore decency among the community of traders. As voices blared through the megaphone outside, I asked Idris what he would change if he was Hall Road’s union President (Fig 54). As Faisal rapped his fingers impatiently on a stack of Chinese-imported DVD players, Idris told me,

“Idris: You have heard the name Genghis Khan? The Mongol. When he became king, he commanded all Mongol people to come to hear his speech. He had a horse-cart wheel… and he said, “One-by-one you will walk past this cartwheel. If just one percent of your height is below the wheel, you are to be beheaded”. So all Mongols are one height now. If you want a good Pakistan, then this is the formula.”

Timothy: Bring in the cartwheel?

Idris: Not a cartwheel, a table like this. *(He gestures to a table two feet off the ground.)* The smallest ones, the children, you can spare… but me, them *(pointing to Adil and Faisal)*, all other people would be killed. These children will grow up and they will know everything, because they would have been shown an example. Pakistan doesn’t have any example. France had their revolution, they destroyed their King, Queen, all their household; everything they destroyed. After that France could rise, and it did. You need blood.”
Idris’ slight overextension of the duties of President of the Traders’ Union also borrowed some creative license in regaling the “measuring against the lynchpin” story of Genghis Khan, portraying both a preoccupation with overpopulation and an anxiety about the manners and morals of his generation. That he transformed the story and turned it into an issue of selective breeding to create a future race of taller Mongols, rather than its purported purpose to have been a way to murder those in conquered territories capable of committing revenge attacks, showed confidence in a future that might be able to correct the wrongs of the present. It also reflected the reputation Durrani Electronics had nurtured as guarantors of the purity of a film transfer, the mediators of a film’s genealogy.

A Pre-history of Lossyness

On Hall Road the trade in reproducing and remediating content sourced from varied prototypes used two key terms to describe the origin of the material, and the audio, visual, and surface quality that the buyer could expect. The English words mastercopy and camera-print refer to the template or prototype from which to duplicate copies. While the content of the carrier might be a particular film, made by a director, starring actors, and released into cinemas, the mastercopy and camera-print refer to the indexical relationship with the film in reproduction. By privileging the chain of transmission, these distinctions negotiate what Lotte Hoek has argued is an impossible search for origins and
completeness in the unstable nature of films that change through their exhibition and circulation (2013: 195).

On Hall Road the *mastercopy* refers to a print made in close proximity to the base material – in many cases a celluloid film – considered to be the earliest or most unblemished recording extant. In the case of Pakistani films, this often describes a VHS copy telecined – that is, transferred direct from celluloid without cinematic projection - in the 1980s by the Shalimar Recording Company (Chapter Three). Before widespread Internet connectivity, the trade in mastercopies was a costly business as far as the acquisition of newly released Indian films was concerned, which operated through smugglers and across borders. Because of the value associated with this trade, the *mastercopy* emerged as a mark of distinction in terms of image quality, as well as a blood-line, a guarantee of provenance in Hall Road’s wholesale film trade.

In current usage, the inferior relative of the *mastercopy*, the *camera-print* has come to mean a poorly compressed copy of another poor copy. Once, the term referred to a recording made of a cinema screen by a bootlegger, who had either bribed the cinema-owner’s silence or had concealed themselves well enough to escape detection. In Pakistan during the celluloid era, the absence of copyright enforcement may even have rendered these two precautions unnecessary. In the present, however, *camera-prints* more broadly describe the ease with which such material can be acquired and then copied. In many instances, a recent request for a particular film may prompt the trader to begin using capture software to download the film from YouTube, where it has been
uploaded, and then write it onto a disc for sale. That would be described as a *camera-print*. If the customer then made copies of that copy, those too would be *camera-prints*. If, in the years that followed, that film fell out of circulation and suddenly found itself in demand, perhaps the customer’s copy might be elevated to the status of *mastercopy* in the absence of other legible origins.

In many ways this system finds echoes in the history of printmaking; in painted woodcuts, engravings, etchings, and lithography. William Ivins study of the impact and complexity of the “exactly repeatable pictorial statement.” (1969: 24) looked at prints not in terms of their artistic content but their value in the study of science, technologies, and the dissemination of knowledge. He argues that the benefit of the repeatability of pictorial statements outweighs the inaccuracy of their rending, their relation to their origin, or the chain of authorised reproduction. Ivins was stimulated by the theoretical question of how much historical knowledge was known first-hand and how much known through reproduction (Ibid: 90). Following the arrival of the first books with instructional or informational prints, later material written or compiled from this base material attempted to replicate illustrations until they had become warped, adapted, shrunken, and marked by, “degradation and distortion” in reproduction into decorative motifs (Ibid: 40). One of the first photographic technologies, Henry Fox Talbot’s invention of the calotype, was an explicit attempt to do away with the errors, deterioration, and omissions of engraved reproductions, or what Ivins called the “syntax” of hand-made pictures (Ibid: 122).
There are many parallels between the repeatable “pictorial statement” explored by Ivins and the repeatable editions of Pakistani films on Hall Road. As with print-making, the syntactic elements of Pakistani film copying do not allow them to be infinitely repeatable in perfection, although on Hall Road one may produce infinite quantities if one has enough time and discs. When printing from an engraving, however, an early impression might produce a sharper representation, while a later copy might be fainter. This appears to differ in comparison to the concept of the mastercopy, as one might assume that proximity to the mastercopy will make infinitely precise copies, but with inter-media transfer, such as between VHS to DVD, the marketplace entails data loss.

Importantly, Pakistani film VCDs are not only copies but very often transductions from other media platforms. As such, often no two batches of the same film are the same, varying by lineages and replete with the watermarks of different copyists.

Gene Youngblood, author of the influential Expanded Cinema (1970), argued (1989) that through technologies of image processing, image synthesis, and three-dimensional display, the digital image could be considered material through the signals that allowed it to form an image. The first of Youngblood’s criteria of image objecthood; signal processing, helps describe the visible marks of data transfer which so richly characterize the distributed and inscribed constituent of the Hall Road repertoire. In the field of archaeology an artifact is a product of human craft; an object of functional, combative, or decorative design. In the language of signal processing, an artifact is an error in the
manifestation of visual information introduced by the very technology used to reproduce it. A visual artifact is therefore an anomaly in the representation of the visual, a distorted image file as a result of channel overload, signal disruption, or any other instance in which the machinations behind the visual presentation of a signal become visible through malfunction. Like the visual artifact or technological error a compression artifact is, “a data error resulting from the loss of information when data is compressed using lossy compression“ (Galatsanos and Katsaggelos, 1998: 67-8). “Lossy” compression occurs when data is shed so that audio and visual media can be simple enough to store on restricted disk space or transmitted on smaller bandwidths. The lost data that cannot be reproduced in the same way as the original introduces visual artifacts (meaning an error in encoding) and reduced image quality. Minimizing compression artifacts is a primary goal in migrating media to newer storage types.

Ivins’ history of the repeatable image can also be seen as a prehistory of lossy-ness. Grappling with the circulation of knowledge known only through reproduction and the extent to which an object can be known through sense perception, Ivins compares words and visual images to a fishing net. The existence of fish in a bay on a given day for a fisherman are those big enough and small enough to get caught in his net. “So far as the fisherman is concerned fish are only such creatures as he can catch in his net. In the same way words and visual images catch only the things or qualities they are adequately meshed for.” (Ivins 1969: 53). What, then, are the ethnographic and ethnosocial conditions of the containers of Pakistani media “adequately meshed for”? While they retain a
trace of the film, its simulated colours, the grain of its encounter with video, the scattered salt of dispersed pixels, they also catch the individuation of the transferrer.

In many cases, chains of circulation taxonomize audiences as much as does media content. The Bolivian city of La Paz, where Jeffrey Himpele (1996) conducted his fieldwork and to which US distributors sent old, out of date, broken or incomplete prints, was one of the terminuses of global chains of formal film distribution. In the early twentieth century, accounting for the breadth of the country, and before distribution chains were organised, many provincial Russian audiences were shown weathered and worn prints (Tsivian 2013: 105). This inculcated an unbalanced ability to distinguish the unintended effects – scratches, interference, patina, and their technical terms “rain” and “fog” – that had built on the surface of the image from the image intended. As with distance from the mastercopy in Pakistan, “the wear and tear increased in proportion to the distance from the centre” (Ibid 2013: 110). Such an aesthetic of the periphery was characterised by intermittent supply from the centre, inviting the appropriation of such chains through informality and piracy which Sundaram argues are able to “[fracture] the surfaces of media spectacle through a tactic of dispersal” (Sundaram 2009: 45). Since Hito Steyerl’s influential essay “In Defense of the Poor Image,” (2012) the poor copy of moving image media has become an object of artistic and scholarly appeal. In contrast to the commitment to flatness, surfacism, and impenetrability that Clement Greenberg argued characterised modernity painting ([1960] 1982), the poor copy celebrates the porosity of
moving images, adding a planar dimension to the photographic “spark of contingency” (Benjamin 1999: 510). Pinney calls this an aesthetic of “submersibility” (2015: 36) that captures the without from within, rather than the depths of an interior depicted from the outside.

The mastercopy as an object of value relies not on provenance as an art historical concept of an unbroken chain of documented ownership but attains its presence in the marketplace as a fabrication of a genealogical link through trusted mediators who can guarantee the best image quality. For Andre Bazin (1960) film most lived up to its ontological possibilities when its indexicality, its physical connection to the moment of its impression, was foregrounded. Due to the materiality of this encounter, indexicality in film has often been closely connected with epistemologies surrounding medium-specificity. For film theorist Mary Anne Doane the digital era spells the “annihilation of the concept of a medium…a dream of immateriality, without degradation or loss” (Doane, 2007: 143), taking with it the certifiability of the celluloid imprint. Yet, on Hall Road such qualitative categories defined by mediation serve only to amplify degradation and loss and resituate the indexicality of the copy outside the film “text”. Instead, its physical, existential connection points to the expanded backdrop of its storage and reproduction. Brian Rotman’s argument on the semiotics of zero through a study of the circulation of paper money provides a point of comparison in the underwriting of the value of currency by anchoring it in gold bullion. The possibility of a qualitative difference in money led to the introduction of a kind of coinage whose value was determined independently of
its materiality. Bank-money became an “absent but potentially recoverable specie” (1987: 88), a convertible currency that could, in theory, be converted to something outside of itself. If we apply Rotman’s terms to the Hall Road repertoire, the film copy is underwritten not by the film but the world of its retrieval, what in the case of paper money would be known as redemption. After video, to which a stable indexical analogue referent is based, the film copy, in its digital, copied form, unbounded by the temporality of its transfer, takes on similar qualities to Rotman’s conception of xenomoney, or currency that circulates electronically and beyond borders. “Xenomoney achieves a certain sort of self-creation. It is a time-bound sign that scandalously manufactures its own signified, what it insists is its value, as it goes along.” (Ibid: 101). While film copies, unlike paper currency, are potentially unlimited in their ability for reproduction, the necessity for mediators to continually attempt to reify the value of their own mediation comes to entangle the carrier and trader in this ongoing act of self-creation.

**Redemption**

The creation and storage of mastercopies is a source of pride for market traders on Hall Road, who distinguish themselves based on the service they provide to unknown others and by making material available in the absence of state support. Echoing the work of collectors such as Guddu Khan, Faisal told me, “None of the filmmakers have their own films. They would come to us.” Conversion and transfer, as well as the mediation of mastercopies, is key to negotiating
obsolescence, an act both profitable and one that brought moving image media of Pakistani origin into the present. Of the films that were produced in Pakistan and were screened in cinemas from the age of video to the present, my interlocutors estimated that only a fifth were transferred and released onto video in the marketplace. Due to the unavailability of telecine technology the disentanglement of Pakistani films from their formats took on the qualities of authorship. Celluloid prints of films that were not released or found their way into the market were left in storage at Lahore’s Evernew, Bari, or Shahnoor Studios, quickly succumbing to heat, rainwater, or termites.

When producers require capital they occasionally sell old, unreleased reels to the highest bidders, who then transfer them onto new formats through rudimentary telecine technology. This process achieves something closer to a camera-print, in which the film is projected and then recorded with a video-camera, although due to the contagious magic of its proximity to the base-version it will often be referred to as a mastercopy. These films kept in reserve would often have aged and decomposed due to improper storage conditions. It is for this reason that many Pakistani films in the marketplace do not have what my interlocutors described as, taqat [power], by which they meant image clarity, quality, and sound continuity, but also strength and influence. Collectors of paper film memorabilia such as Guddu Khan and Mirza Waqar Baig began collecting mastercopies when they learned that the trade in videos to the diaspora, through Al-Mansoor in Dubai and Famous Video in London, provided the spark of rarity compared with the widespread availability of Shalimar Recording Company
videos in Pakistan. The exorbitant prices paid for valuable mastercopies, such as those smuggled from India to Dubai for copying and release in Pakistan was often entangled closely with the *hawala* or *hundi* money transfer system, an informal system of transferring wealth or value through an expansive network of brokers. *Hawala* stems from the Arabic word connoting, “change” or “transformation” but in Urdu has closer connotations with “trust” (Farooqi 2018: 143-148) and, in practice, worked in a similar way as writing a check from a checking account. The major difference is that to be involved in the process required one sustain a lasting relationship with the broker. The only difference between the formal realm and that of *hawala* is the system by which the transactions are monitored. Formal systems have penalties and easy recourse to lawsuits if financial protocol is not maintained, whereas hawala is based on trust on the *hawaladar*, the relationship with whom is brokered by already existing codes of trust and reliability within the community.

Each year billions of dollars are transferred through these systems, known in the parlance of international finance as Informal Value Transfer Systems (IVTS). These systems often predate their formal counterparts and are most frequently used in South Asia because of the ease of implanting the value transfers within already existing translocal networks of trust and already existing kinship groups. Other benefits include anonymity, invisibility from the state, low transaction costs, and quicker transit time. Like *hawala*, the informal transfer of film has no specific centre other than its potentially multiple mastercopies and is thus spatially dispersed. Perhaps due to the shared use of IVTS, reports on
informality in Pakistan have often traced the well-trodden path linking media piracy with global terrorism and organized crime. 

Faisal of Durrani Electronics remembers when the circulatory dynamics of the master-copy, combined with the influx of hawala capital from the Gulf - was a valuable, transformative object, 

“Whoever bought one print would earn a lot of money from it. It wasn’t just in one person’s hand; if we bought one master from Famous Video in London for 10-15,000PKR we could increase our money tenfold. Anyone who bought from us would earn a lot from it as well. Upstairs there were thirty or forty shops. They all bought one copy from us and made their own copies. People would buy our films and take them to Dubai or would make a copy of a mastercopy in Dubai would sell it here.” 

As with the assertion of qabzâ at the threshold of kaččâ and pakkâ phenomenology and transformation (Chapter Four) the mastercopy as concept contains within it the interrelation of authorized, informal, and pirated procedures. In the case of films released into the market with the permission of producers, after three months screening in cinemas the mastercopy would be

---

79 This association also centres in part on one of the world’s most wanted men, Dawood Ibrahim, whose D-Company group ran numerous operations in India for over two decades. One RAND study (Treveton 2009) reveals that Ibrahim moved operations to Karachi, establishing connections to terrorist groups al-Qaeda and Lakshar-e-Tabiyiba. The RAND study remarks upon the funding capabilities drawn from such activities, the purported quick leap from crime to piracy in the philosophical underpinnings of D-Company, and its acquisition of the SADAF trading company based in Karachi, allowing them the facilities and infrastructure to manufacture pirated VHS and VCDs (Liang and Sundaram 2011: 380). It was these systems that, even before the spread of cable broadband, and while an embargo on Indian cinema remained in force, allowed mastercopies of Bollywood films to arrive in the Pakistani city of Karachi before they were even released in India.
auctioned on a limited number of videocassettes, with bids ranging from 25,000PKR to as high as 150,000PKR for each. In the case of pirated Indian films, the auction would usually take place in Dubai, with bids taken over the telephone from Pakistan. The aim of the producer or pirate would be that the combined bidding would, at the very least, match the cost of the film’s production or the cost of its smuggled transit. Once the bid was won the biggest challenge for buyers was making copies of the film in time for a coordinated release with other traders, a date incorporated in the terms of the sale. Wholesale orders would also be taken and fulfilled. Durrani Electronics’ recording room was offsite, a large hall where three-hundred VCRs were hooked up and manned by two or three young workers. Idris’ insight was correct; the trade in Pakistani film did not cohere with the international discourse of media piracy. The trade in pirated Indian film was a different matter. My interlocutors believed that Bollywood film was fair game because there were no trade agreements with regard to film between the countries before the liberalizing reforms of Pervez Musharraf in the mid-2000s.

Thus, a film was sold off as a one-off payment, with the highest bidders purchasing both proximity to the celluloid print, and the ability to release it first into their requisite areas. The mastercopies they would buy would also be free from any patti; advertisements or watermarks, so the winning bidders could then affix their own throughout or during intervals in the film. During the video era a

---

80 At the same time in the Western art market of the 1980s and 1990s such a “limited-edition” model allowed for the sale of video as an art object (Balsom 2013).
dozen other large and respected traders would buy copies from Durrani Electronics specifically to make their own copies. Sometimes these smaller firms could pay a premium for a transfer without any patti so that they could affix their own, usually if these were to circulate in other cities beyond the demographic reach of the winning bidder. If these terms were not in place they would simply overlay their own patti and obscure the original. As such, the mastercopy was always contingent on the production and advertisement of provenance. In archival contexts Ann Laura Stoler describes the watermark as that element of history that cannot be removed without piercing the surface (2010: 8). In the marketplace, a film in its mechanical reproduction was not subject to the destruction of its “aura” but rather generated a new aura produced in collaboration with its mediators and the lineage of its mediation.

Immanuel Kant, in “On the Wrongfulness of Unauthorized Publication of Books” [1785], traced a similar trajectory at an early phrase in the piracy of books and their unauthorized printing. Kant defined a work in comparison with the performance of it, a distinction made between the work, what he called the “opus”, and the affair or the “opera” of its mediation. The copy of the author’s work, the opus, rightfully belongs to the publisher once he has secured the rights to the manuscript - or mastercopy. The fact that this copying is enacted in the name of the author makes it an affair, an opera, which requires a separate contract besides that relating merely to the ownership of property. Kant argued that the act of making an unauthorized copy wrongs those with authorization to copy it and recompense should go to those subject to the opera rather than the producer.
of the *opus*. The *opus* are things and exist in their own right, whereas as *operae* can only be transmitted through persons (Kant 1999: 35). A work of art can be copied from a *mastercopy* that has been legally acquired, and can circulate without the permission of the artist, as it does on Hall Road. Because the work’s re-execution in eighteenth century Europe – the engraving of a painting for example - required artisanal skill, Kant argued, “what someone can do with his thing *in his own name* does not require the consent of another” (Ibid: 34). The addition of the dimension of artisanal skill circulated around issues of medium specificity in copyright law, so that authorship can be asserted on an engraving by the engraver, even if he is working from a copy. As such, we can see Hall Road’s traders appeal to a similar morality of reproduction that takes as a given the artisanal labour engaged in transferal. Thus, authorship is bound up with having the tools and skills to achieve something, rather than fidelity to provenance or the bearer of the *opus*.

To return to one of the vignettes that framed the introduction to this thesis, after a few months my enquiries had begun to stir within Faisal a concern that they had not kept any reminders of their time as film traders,

“We did not keep the thing which gave us this name. The name which is famous in all of Pakistan... The same is with our Pakistani currency. We don’t remember when the 10PKR note changed or when the 5PKR note

---

81 Nelson Goodman (1968) was similarly interested in the causal connection between artwork and its point of origin. Goodman distinguished between autographic and allographic art forms, with the former connected to a chain of production that valorizes the hand of the artist and the latter reliant on notational forms that allow the work to be reproduced in copy.
went and what those notes looked like. No-one kept it safe in their pockets.”

Like the note entrusted to Tahir Jafri (Chapter Two), the circulation of film in Pakistan no longer offers the promise of redemption in gold, now that they are pegged to storage devices rather than analogue mediums. According to Rotman, the introduction of a kind of currency whose value was determined independently of its materiality can only refer “to this world, outside (itself)…, unmediated, filled, pre-semiotic, real to itself without the agency of signs” (Rotman 1987: 100). On Hall Road the film copy is not only an index of a film but a latent trace of the world of its transferral; that is, Faisal at Durrani Electronics or, as we will see, Haji Shams at Jibran Video House, or Qasim at Kasur CD House. Indeed, for Durrani Electronics my enquiries often seemed like a misplaced search for origins that elided the opus in favour of the opera. Idris once chided me, with his usual humour, “If you look hard enough you can even find God [dhondnay say to khuda bhee mil jata hai]”. I think many of my interlocutors would have agreed; if Pakistani films on Hall Road are underwritten to the individual moral, ethic, and entrepreneurial decisions of their mediators, then the circulation of even secular Pakistani media is contingent on the will of Allah.

*The Middle-Man: Haji Shams*

Before beginning my fieldwork, I pieced together information about Hall Road from adverts on VHS covers sourced from the last Pakistani video rental libraries
in English cities like Blackburn and Birmingham. One recurring distributor stood out. Haji Shams, the proprietor of Jibran Video House, would affix a head-and-shoulders photograph prominently on the front cover of his releases; a guarantee of image quality with a human face. To my early enquiries in Lahore most traders responded, with some relish, to my list of old video-era stalwarts with the words, “dead, all dead.” But eventually, towards the back of the Rafi Plaza, beside a gangway cleaved in the side of the building that dangled precariously over Yaseen Street, I found Haji Shams sitting in the dark of that hour’s scheduled loadshedding (Fig 55 and 56). The Haji prefixed to his name not only denotes his having performed the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, but also served as a reminder of a period in the 1980s when his business operated from Saudi Arabia and prospered on expatriate labour capital. It was a strange and euphoric experience, meeting this man whose face was an interface between the UK and Hall Road, once the only identifiable human in a once invisible trail of mediators.

Haji Shams arrives for work a few hours earlier than any of his neighbouring storeholders on the first floor of the Rafi Plaza, when the building below is dusty and the hallways echo quietly. By the time the first traders arrive and say their salams to Shams he is already dealing with a collector or trader buying discs from him wholesale. The late-morning clatter of ascending metal shutters gives way to the sounds of tinny speakers playing film songs and the young son of the trader next to Shams whispering in recitation from a bottle-green Quran bound in felt. As he does every day, a gaunt, elderly man arrives at midday to open his tiny DVD store, shouldering the weight of a large degh full
of his wife’s *biriyani* that he sells to his fellow traders to supplement his income. At first glance, Haji Shams’ modular trading unit is like that of many others, but this uniformity hides an intricate, ordered, and ergonomic arrangement. The front and side customer-facing counters are on wheels topped with a rack of DVDs to flick-through at chest-height, matched to the bodies of customers and stallholders. These wheeled units box Shams into his stall but allow for the internal storage of materials; discs, ledgers, bags, and tea-cups. In all visible spaces around the eyeline of the customer are front-facing DVDs, usually cardboard-boxed cases with colourful designs, behind which are the plastic wrapped and printed reproductions which the buyer is given when they make a transaction. Directly behind Shams’ head there is a fan, and to the right of that a wall-mounted television used to test and preview discs. Every adjoining unit is panelled with mirrors or reflective glass to give the illusion of depth and magnify the little light that creeps in from the gangway over Yaseen Street. Display stands on the front racks boast curated choices, showing Shams’ evident love of Lollywood excess, grouping together Lollywood films like *Miss Hippy* (Dir. S. Suleman, 1974) and *Sharabi* [Drunkard] (Dir. Hameed Chodhary, 1973).

Haji Shams started selling film music on vinyl in 1975 from his family convenience store set into the back of Lahore’s upscale Liberty Market. When video hardware crept into the country at the start of the 1980s his store became a hub for the informal exchange of videocassettes. He remembered,

“In those days you couldn’t just go and buy a film but rather had to use our store as a *middle-man* [in English]. Customers and friends would
come to us and say, “I have one Indian film, called Sholay, which I have bought from India. Please write my name down. If someone comes with another film I would like to exchange this with them”. Another man would come and say that he has an Indian film called Bobby. I put them in touch and helped them exchange the films, and like this our network began.”

When Shalimar Recording Company began selling video transfers of Pakistani films, Haji Shams’ store in Liberty Market was one of the first official stockists in Lahore. As the video trade became more saturated, Shams decided to build up a reserve of materials, either by transferring the vinyl records that were being eclipsed by audiocassettes in his store, or by recording television transmissions and drama performance, spectacles previously experienced only live. As PTV drama serials on television gained in reputation and respectability, even the writers and producers of the shows would come to Shams to buy keepsakes of the recordings that had not been archived by the station. But it was the trade in recording Punjabi stage dramas that made it financially viable for him to relocate to Saudi Arabia for the best part of a decade, where he opened three outlets selling a mixture of live recordings, informal copies, and authorized material to the large expatriate labour population in the Gulf state. Finding an absence of recordings of Punjabi-language stage shows he began acquiring licenses to record more live spectacles back in Lahore and distribute them among the diaspora in the Gulf.

Many of the diverse examples of interdiction and reproduction presented in this thesis share the transformative experience of expatriate living in the Gulf.
Hasan Mir (Chapter Two) and Haji Shams decided to dedicate their lives’ work to capturing liveness and performance following either the alienating effects of their labour migrations in Saudi Arabia or the observation of a budding market for mementos of home among expatriate labourers of Pakistani origin. Idris, having spent his adult years away from his communal networks and family kin groupings, struggled to acclimatize to the machinations of Hall Road’s corporate groupings and absence of private, contemplative space. Many life trajectories, like much of the ethnographic knowledge on kinship, power, and economic and political organisation in Pakistan, were destabilised and complicated in the 1970s and 1980s by the impact of large-scale national and transnational migration. The two key destinations for permanent or cyclical labour migration were Britain (Shaw 1988, 2014, Werbner 2002, 2003), in which a large and important diaspora community was established, and the Gulf states. In the latter, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, an explosion of wealth and infrastructural development following the 1973 oil crisis attracted vast numbers of Pakistani labourers, clerical professionals, and entrepreneurs. In this sphere of employment and travel informal processes thrived; as many as half of all remittances in the 1970s and 1980s came through the informal *hawala* or *hundi* transfer systems. The knowledge and skill set applicable to navigating the informal marketplaces that undergirded Gulf migration both undermined the centralisation of the Pakistani state (Addleton 1992) and articulated the country as one interwoven with the economic system of the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia (Lefebvre 1999). For Hasan Mir and Haji Shams, on the other hand, the absence of public culture
or demonstrations of bodily performance spurred their interest in establishing small, independent recording companies. But the restrictive atmosphere of the Gulf not only provided an impulse to document, reproduce, and spread Pakistani film, video, and music, but also brought into sharp focus the utility of the commons created by reproducible media.

When he returned to Pakistan in the mid-1990s following the death of his business partner, Haji Shams found Hall Road a much more profitable commodity zone for film than Liberty Market, which had by then become widely associated with women’s shopping and public leisure. He faced a quandary; Pakistani film during the Zia-era had become increasingly lurid and sexually suggestive, and the advertising material on show on Hall Road had put many women off visiting. However, with commercial rents skyrocketing, the varied and expansive reserve of materials he had collected over the years could allow him to keep mastercopies offsite and operate a small store producing copies struck from his base versions. The reputation he had gained in the Gulf was not based on legality or legitimacy but of quality and provenance, particularly proximity to the *mastercopy*, the “urtext” of the Pakistan video trade. These days, Haji Shams mourns how the ease of accessing knowledge on smartphones has reduced the need for middlemen like himself. Rarely is he called upon to assist in retrieving something that previously only the video shop would have been able to access. He claims his was the first shop in all of Punjab to develop a style of trade in which authority was associated with intimacy with the material, “All these shops you see in Lahore and Punjab, they all used to be our servants
[mullazim]. We trained them.” These days, wedged into an orange high-chair, with his impeccable black moustache and two gold signet rings taking up a good half of his left hand, Shams maintains his self-respect by reminding others of what marks him out. He feels he is hawking a different product, of prized, rare, and high-brow works that without him would not have survived, through acts that boast of guardianship, of early investiture, and faith in Pakistani moving image media.

Faciality and the Watermark

His reputation, long cultivated, continues to pay dividends. He is the only film trader on Hall Road to whom women occasionally visit, as well as rarely visible minorities such as members of the small Hindu community centered around nearby Nila Gumbad. Such repeated visits, as well as my own, only further strengthened his prestige amongst the other retailers. Being imandar [faithful, respectable] or fostering a reputation for being sharīf [pure, honest] is an important part of a line of work which relies on the navigation of the potentially transgressive māhaul of film. The head-and-shoulders photographs that he and so many other established traders use is an avatar of this appeal to reliability. Shams tells me, “I give my photo because everybody should know the middle-man by his face. People should know the face of the person who has released the film.” Beyond Hall Road the face as a logo of business is used by famous local restaurants, both as a reminder of their long-deceased founders and
as an ideogram for illiterate or semi-literate customers to pick out of a crowded marketplace. Christopher Pinney refers in Camera Indica (1997) to Johann Casper Lavater’s science of physiognomy, the once influential science of reading external characteristics to discern internal qualities or deficiencies. Pinney found the ability to “know a man by his face” complicated engagement in the context of Indian studio photography. Inspired by Pinney’s work on the image surfaces of Indian visual culture and the attempted inscription of inner selves onto their exterior (Ibid), Sanjay Srivastava argues that focusing on the superficiality of acts, objects, and their moral interpretation helps in locating “processes that index the permeance of flux” (2007, 211). As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this kind of “faciality” operates at the juncture of subjectivation and signification. Deleuze and Guattari argued that faciality bears a “black hole” which is an affective repository for what is to be signified by the face, contrasting with the “white wall”, the surface upon which such things are projected and refracted. Faciality is a system of surfaces (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 170), a cartographic and topographic terrain related to the vocabulary of the close-up in film. Faciality evokes the contrast between the covered and the uncovered, what Taussig calls a mobile social contract (1999: 223), after Emmanuel Levinas (cf. Taussig: Ibid) who regarded the face as a kind of event which supersedes the word in its ability to promise honour.

A textual instance of this kind of faciality can be found in the patti or watermarks of many of the distributors that appear at the point in each film that features the most notable song, love or “rape” scene, or, more recently, the
segment most likely to be clipped and uploaded to YouTube. Often the imprint playfully matches or compliments the content of the scene, as in Mirza Waqar Baig’s copy of \textit{Nagin} (1959, Dir. Khalil Qaiser), which sees the watermark curl around the body of the actor, coiling around her face and propelling her forward on a garden swing (Fig 57). The stylistic evolution of these watermarks also reflects the changing modes, demands, and norms of viewer reception. Pre-Youtube transfers tend to bare fixed watermarks in the style of a television-channel imprint, while later \textit{patti} scroll across with the information flow of televised news. The collector Guddu Khan, who has his own watermark imprinted onto digital scans of his posters and publicity photographs as they circulate across Facebook, believes the use of watermarks acknowledges credit and participation, that the person responsible for keeping it in circulation deserves to be credited.

Brian Larkin’s work has explored these tactile surfaces of the palimpsest of film piracy. The scrolling adverts for local branches of pirate stores in the form of telephone numbers, emails and faxes, are redoubled by dubbing scores, and multi-lingual subtitles superimposed on older subtitles, giving the informal film product what Larkin calls “a visible inscription of the routes of media piracy” (Larkin 2008: 296). These are also an instance of what Matthew Hull called the “graphic ideologies” (2012: 14) that underscore how documents are and are not supposed to be circulated. This also resonates with the semiotics of zero, the origins of which refer to the absence of other connective signs (Rotman 1987: 12); signifying this absence allows calculations to move to paper, from the
previously used abacus. Rotman argued that, “To move from abacus to paper is to shift from a gestural medium ... to a graphic medium.” (Ibid: 13). As neither an act of communication nor the content of the copied film, watermarks are neither addressed to posterity nor exist as a product of the visual excess of duplication. Instead, they presuppose a third category whereby an appeal is made to an outside agency to accept a graphic contract pertaining to both the onward circulation of the object and its provenance, resulting in the entanglement of mediator and mediated.

Reserve

As mastercopies age, disappear, or are subjected to devaluation and disinterest, the circulation of media in Pakistan loses the promise of “redemption” in its decoupling from mediums for access in favour of digital interfaces for experience. Despite this, many film traders maintain faith in the efficacy of the redemptive possibilities of their reserves of mastercopies. As with Idris’ incisive comment, most traders were puzzled by my interest in the origins of these films before their arrival in the chain. Such ambivalence towards origins contrasts with faith in their reserves 82, which stand for exactly that; money in the bank, future surplus to roll out when the demand requires, rather than as an archive or nīshāni

82 A notion that resonates with Martin Heidegger’s notion of the “Bestand (standing reserve)” (1977: 20) a word that in German is often rendered as stock. In his critique of technology, Heidegger pointed out how modern technology relies on the surplus of nature as a resource. Ordering does the work of managing the pervasive latency of bestand, which itself is akin to a coiled spring, storing all its energy in the apparatus of its form, and in so doing pointing to its future utilisation.
[memento] of past endeavors. As such, the preservation of films on Hall Road through their circulation is merely incidental. Yet in many cases the maintenance of a reserve of Pakistani films is based on the faith in a revival of both the film industry and of the fortunes that capacious media formats open up. While the development of a reserve in the production of religious material is based on a belief in continuity and the preservation of a moral atmosphere conducive to prayer and mourning, what these examples share is their status as future-oriented reserves built up in connection with an ongoing desire to act as guardians of performative expression. In Chapter Two I explored how the sociality of recording, driven by the adoption of capacious home media led to the development of personal reserves, stores of value that await future audiences. Such a future-facing enterprise resonates with Arjun Appadurai’s call for an anthropology of the future (2013), towards the politics of possibility over probability. If manipulating and withstanding risk is at the new heart of global flows, intrinsic to this is the wager, a gamble on harbouring resources to shore oneself with at the expense of their maintenance and acquisition.  

---

83 The accumulation of a reserve is an action I found particularly resonant with my own experiences. Ethnographic fieldwork is similarly an act of building up reserves for future deployment at some ambiguous future opportunity, to piggyback on some studied and generated realm of experience.
As I mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, taking my first walk around Hall Road at the beginning of my fieldwork I attributed what appeared to be an absence of VCD and DVD sellers to it being the first ten days of Muharram. I soon learned that while the period of exception changed the moral atmosphere, hundreds of traders had permanently switched their businesses from trading in film copies to mobile accessories, televisions, drones, even virtual reality headsets, with the old stalwarts pushed to the basement of the Dar-ul Rehmat plaza, having once ran street-facing shops. Months later, in the basement, Qasim showed me the new passport photograph his father had glued onto the DVD racks at eye level. From 1960, 1980, 2000, he had added another since our last meeting, perhaps uncertain if the family business will still exist by 2020 (Fig 58 and 59).

Even Qasim’s grandfather worked on Hall Road, establishing one of the first radio repair shops, Kasur Radio House. Now his store shares space with the rest of the remaining video stores who decided to sell off their mastercopies and now deal in cheaply copied reproductions sourced from private collectors in Lahore and beyond. They sell “box-sets” of three Pakistani films on one disc, poorly compressed and roughly pixelated, and curated around a certain theme, word, actor, or director. Thus, Aurat Raj (Women’s Rule. Dir. Rangeela 1979) is packaged with Wehshi Aurat (Wild Woman. Dir. Ali Raza 1995) and Zakhmi Aurat (Injured Woman. Dir. Iqbal Kashmiri 1989), together stacked beside pirated computer software and Sunni Barelvi na’at recitations. Down in this
basement the 2008 bonfire of pornography was only symbolic; here it is sold openly with far-fetched English language titles.

Already bald in his early twenties, Qasim exuded a discretionary confidence in himself and his business, as well as an immediate knowledge of the other traders who had once dominated Hall Road. Their current station in the downstairs hall still saw a lot of life. Customers wandered the window-less corridors, drug-addicts with pronounced tics and bored men flicked through the racks of DVDs with no intention of buying, and a khawaja sera [transgender individual], arm in arm with their boyfriend, strode up and asked Qasim for, “a film which involves fighting with a stick, hands, or kicks.” While most had never met someone from abroad, none of the traders seemed surprised to see me, in their all-weather urbanity, surrounded by pornography and devotional Qawwali performances from local shrines, they exuded a cosmopolitanism common to those who traffic in both the sacred and the profane. An untrained voice delivered the azaan through a loudspeaker wired from the mosque above them to the market hall, its aural terrain proximate and immediate. Amongst these traders, film does not have a poisonous residue, the trade in discs is not porous to the moral atmospheres created by them. Hall Road has its own māḥaul, like a free trade exclave outside moral and legal authority.

The roots of this can be traced to the period immediately following Partition. In July 1954 the leading directors, producers and film personalities of the Lollywood industry gathered in front of the Regent Cinema on McLeod Road for the premiere of an Indian film, Jaal (1952, Dir. Guru Dutt). The area was still
known as Charing Cross; only the previous year had the bronze statue of Queen Victoria been removed. The stars of a nascent Pakistani film industry had not gathered to attend but rather to protest the film having broken the import quota on Indian films via a loophole in national commercial trade policy, by shipping the film from East Pakistan where it had already received permission to run, to West Pakistan. After many of the stars of the Lahore film industry were arrested and imprisoned for ten days, what became known at the ‘Jaal Agitation’ resulted in a film-for-film trade agreement with India that ended with the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Relations were so soured that what followed was over four decades of embargo on Indian films, eased only by Pervez Musharraf whose government returned in part to the pre-1965 like-for-like exchange. Through the availability of recording technology and satellite television, the main repercussion of the ‘Jaal Agitation’ was to turn the public towards alternative distribution channels.

By the late 1960s an early form of magnetic tape recording – without the means of duplication and far less inconspicuous than compact cassettes – was reportedly used by, “agents of local producers in India [who] tape-record the entire dialogues and songs of films from cinema halls and smuggle [them] out for Pakistani ‘film-makers’ to imitate to their heart’s content.” (Kabir 1969: 98). Both the porosity of the border and the ban on the import of Indian films allowed

84 Information on the Jaal Agitation can be found on the Pakistani film information portal PakMag (formerly mazhar.dk) - “Jaal movement Friday, 9 July 1954” https://pakmag.net/film/news.php?pid=173.
for the spread of plagiarised materials – both songs and storylines – and
underlined the extent to which copyright and intellectual property was secondary
to a wider conflict over resources.85

After the international trade in mastercopies – both domestic and
international pirated produce – led by Durrani Electronics, and the domestic
reserves built by traders like Haji Shams, a larger, more diffuse trade began in
Karachi with the opening of the Rainbow Centre, a large market plaza with an
array of modular units selling films in copy. In spaces such as this and the
downstairs market hall in the Dar-ul Rehmat plaza, competition was fierce, but
the traders still operated within a recognisable space of a commons. When Qasim
could not provide me with a film I asked for he would shout across the hall to his
friend. If his friend had a mastercopy – or even a heavily pixelated camera-print
- he would let Qasim make copies of it for a small fee. Film copies like this
instantiate an incarnation on Hall Road as a physical site, if not provenance there.
On other films, the opening titles often assert that additional mastering had been
done by a Hall Road trader, giving a film a second life through sound levelling
or image grading. These interventions follow on from the era of video in which
Pakistani films were disassembled as raw material for other things; as video
compilations of song numbers or fight scenes. Hall Road’s entangled presence as
an electronics market and a place for the informal transfer of films grew both

85 Mushtaq Gazdar narrated how, “Some distributors and producers found it a sure bet to adapt
the stories and screenplays of new Bombay hits by giving them Muslim names,” (1997: 54) before
a farcical instance in which two Pakistani films, plagiarised from the same Indian source, both
raced to hit the cinemas, knowing that the second would be classed as a rip-off of the first (Ibid:
104).
when the machinery to copy and re-master was installed in situ and the
design features of plazas allowed for contained units for duplication and retrieval.

Early on in my research I would compose questions using the verb mahfūz
karna, “to keep safe”. Instead, Faisal, Haji Shams, and Qasim used sambhalna
with reference to ensuring the continued accessibility of older Pakistani films. In
its usage this multifaceted Urdu verb pertains to the act of keeping steady, to be
used if one is about to lose their balance. The act of keeping steady operates on
the assumption that the object in question is already in motion and the agential
and ethical responsibility of someone else. In this non-commensurate sphere of
circulation, persons are ethically neutral conduits. As such, the way in which
video traders on Hall Road describe what they do has roots in addressing
precarity in human and object forms, and is an essentially participative, future-
oriented activity. Fittingly, Qasim corrected my assertion that they have kept
anything safe. “We have kept it in circulation,” he told me. The Hall Road
repertoire allows media to survive its immediate release through re-transmission
if it attains a social life within the community. Comparing the absence of a
Pakistani film archive with the absence of centralised ownership, Qasim told me,

“Over here one person makes a film, you’ll hear in a few days that they
have sold the film to someone else. In this cycle, sometimes the film goes
into ten people’s hands. What interest would these people have to keep
the negative or the film safe? It is like property.”

For Qasim property (and thus, piracy) is not a salient category of knowledge in
his trade. The kind of circulation he describes does not require films to have a
fixed referent held by an archive or the producer. If Tahir Jafri described his acts of preservation and retrieval as “guardianship on behalf of the community” - which itself carries religious connotations to shrines, mosques, and devotional practices – on Hall Road the verb *sambhalna* describes an act not of storage but of continuity and participation, an act of maintaining the kinetic energy powering a mobile, circulating object.

The idea of a non-state repository, and a non-government within the bureaucracy (Chapter Three), thriving in the gaps filled by self-appointed guardians of morality and material culture, chimes with Ashis Nandy’s neo-Gandhian, anti-Neruvian politics. Ashis Nandy’s early work took Hindi film to be a particularly non-state repository of sentiment, a kind of laboratory of moral order (Pinney 1995: 8). Often such politics transform into what has been described as “postcolonial nativism” (Bonnet 2012: 140) as a celebration of non-state regulation, transgression, and massified culture as an alternative to the rational, secular, and technological ordering of modern statism. The search for another way, outside of the dominant nature of the state, comes itself to dominate without necessarily opening a space for another replacement from below. Systems of reproduction in the marketplace not only imitate but inscribe hegemonic morals and ethics onto the surfaces of objects whose porosity and capaciousness allows for the kind of depth and diversity that statist power necessarily resists.
This chapter considered issues of individual and participatory media circulation, the circulation of media repertoires on Hall Road, and their operation through the face as an interface of the mastercopy. These examples show that the platforms for sharing, saving, and disseminating such artefacts are notably porous regardless of their analogue or digital ontology. Having driven the piracy of Indian media products and the foundation of thousands of one-man businesses, the mastercopy was a kind of seed fund, a media commons of Pakistani visual culture over the last four decades. This does not tell a story of reproduction media as the free circulation of ideas, but rather points to a space where reputations are made from the contagion of fleeting contact. Unlike paper currency whose value is essential redemptive, the circulation of film is essentially accumulative, both in patina and in the lives of those who mediate its movement through the morality of exchange. The circuits that renew and disperse Pakistani films bear similarities to the kula or keda system of exchange, identified amongst others by Bronislaw Malinowski ([1922] 2014). Valuables traded across vast distances around the Massim archipelago had little if any use value. Instead, participation in circuits of exchange saw objects accumulate value through association with those responsible for its circulation. It is therefore important to consider the shifting objecthood of media containers, the material accumulation of patina as a result of its circulation, and what Roland Barthes called, “the cycle of avatars it traverses far from its original body” (1972: 239). Typically, it is understood that agency can only be that of the subject or the object. The patina of Pakistani media

338
in the Hall Road repertoire points to a third possible way whereby the materiality of the object becomes visible through marks made by the mediator, often occurring when objects in motion fuse with the hands through which they pass. Bruno Latour, in his “First Meaning of Technical Mediation,” describes this third way as “actor-actant symmetry,” that forces “us to abandon the subject-object dichotomy” (1999: 180).

Decay is thus something inherent and latent within the ecology of the object, rather than an iconoclastic act that brings about its destruction. It becomes its face. For images in danger and in times of crisis, iconoclasm, contestation, even deterioration can be productive, in that they require removal, resituation, or negotiation (Spyer 2013: 5). Much of this thesis has engaged closely with the surfaces of images and image-objects, finding that the superficiality of impressions belies the porosity of such surfaces. The surface gleam or encrusted patina of modernity in its plural forms is not subaltern to content but is the interface through which media come to shape how we live or “determine our situation” (Kittler 1999: xxxix). While in certain cases, finding value in object decay fosters a “critical nostalgia” (Dawdy 2016: 79) alert to the trappings of mass culture, patina has historically only conferred power on the ruin, thus reversing what Georg Simmel saw as the usual creative impulse that uses nature as raw material for the finished product or a storehouse of future works (Simmel 1958).

As the first half of this thesis argued, in religious, state-secular, and individual moral lifeworlds film holds an ambiguous place. As a crucial hub of
urban political power Hall Road has its own māhaul, through which it forms an ecological space for the reproduction of technology and capital – with film as just one of its instantiations -, as well as the continuity of social reproduction. The 2008 bonfire on Hall Road was explicitly related to a hierarchy of copies and origins, in which value could be withheld at the expense of carriers of perceived vulgarity. For Walter Benjamin, the absence of an original was the certification of inauthenticity. Technological reproduction, however, “enables the original to meet the recipient halfway” (2008: 21). The consequence is the devaluation of the “here and now of the artwork” (Ibid: 22), or the “aura”. On Hall Road, the copy conjures its own aura, recruited as a technological ally by small traders. This new aura is a kind of patina that – like the event of the face or the inscribed patti - similarly meets the recipient halfway between the artwork and the moral self of the mediator. In the marketplace circulation of Pakistani film the face is not a gateway to an internal state but a deeply superficial surface upon which trades and services are propagated and made respectable. More or less a mask marked by similarity, the face serves to indicate personal, existential contact with a mastercopy of quality and distinction. In this sense, neither the face nor the mastercopy are indexical, but rather they meet at a point in which the object and the agency of its mediation become fused. In this sense, re-copied Pakistani films on Hall Road are not indexes of their celluloid originals but of the space and contact of their transferral. In contrast to Walter Benjamin’s prediction that it would be possible to have copies without originals, Pakistani films as they arrive
entangled with the presence of their mediators are not only copies but traces of their own coming into being.
Chapter V Figures

Fig 53. The Mastercopy (October 2017).
Fig 54. Idris in Durrani Electronics (October 2018).
Fig 55 and 56. Haji Shams' store beside the gangway over Yaseen Street (June 2018).
Fig 57. Animated watermark or *patti* of film collector Mirza Waqar Baig imprinted on a film sold on Hall Road (screenshot, collection of the author).
Fig 58 and 59. Kasur Video House six months apart (September 2017 and March 2018).
Epilogue
A Sensory Commons

This thesis began as a study of the informal processes of reproduction and distribution that have sustained Hall Road’s marketplace repertoire of media artefacts and experiences. What followed was an ethnographic study of the search for technological allies and the identification of moral atmospheres. Civil and religious morality drive many of the decisions that show both the limits and exorbitance of techniques and technologies and turn them into distributed objects of social practice. I took film in its unruly circulation to be one of these objects, but also one that has an infrastructural capacity.

In Chapter Four, I suggested a more nuanced approach to the language of informality, to explain how not all the dynamics operating herein are reconcilable to the poles of state and non-state, or authorised and illegitimate. Instead, the local terms kaččā and pakkā motion towards engagement and temporary consensus in the former and fixity and permeance in the latter. Kaččā agency and phenomenology is formed through communal use; a kaččā road over an undeveloped plot of urban land turns back into scrubland if the tyre-marks that demarcated it are not renewed. If a pakkā road is desirable, the prior creation of a kaččā road might be an effective strategy that can often lead to it. This might
have been what Mubaraka had in mind in the Punjab Archives (Chapter Three) when she suggested that if the public at large have little understanding of what an archive is, or even that documents relating to the past can be useful or valuable, then the archive should open itself up, radically and irreversibly. “Give it to public, send it to the market”, was how she put it. This is exactly what has happened with the circulation of Pakistani media on Hall Road (Chapter Five). Whether by accident or design Pakistani film in particular has been allowed far wider circulation than other forms of image-making or sound, pertaining to languages, sects, practices, and bodies that if broadcast on state media or the Internet might have been subject to stricter control. If to be kaččā is to be communal and unplanned, in the pakkā lies the dangers of being accommodated by governing regimes of visibility and permissibility. Due to the multitude of perspectives over the epistemology and ontology of moving images in the public sphere, in turning film pakkā lies a double-edged sword. Better then, to “send it to the market”, to let it age, patina, fall out of view, return, revive, and disappear once again.

**Demand**

On both Hall Road and among Lahore’s Shi’i “cassette and video houses” the engine of demand as a local category guides and buttresses the recording, retrieval, and reproduction of media content. On Hall Road, demand explains the non-existence of a rare film, while in religious media stores demand speaks of
the devotion, respect, and disciplinary character of the customer. As a system formed by the circulatory agency of others, felt engagement with demand is the motor for the existence of a media commons, an ecology of both interdiction and reproduction that necessitates practices of storage and retrieval. As a local concept expressed through the English word and perhaps as a clipped form of the phrase “by popular demand”, demand describes a felt atmosphere cleaved by a collective wish emanating from an undefined group of people. In this thesis, this urge widely pervaded and dictated the flow of Pakistani visual culture in diverse forms and was manifested by my interlocutors attempts to bring the polyphony of the marketplace into harmony with their interpretation of the Islamic-majority polity. How demand is gaged, expressed, and the bottlenecks through which it reaches those with the ability to mediate it produces the felt presence of a public who appear to have come to a consensus. The frequency with which I heard the term prompted the same mental notetaking; what is the mouth of this flow; what is the motor behind circulation; how is demand gaged and expressed; through what networks does it reach an awaiting ear? This invisible mass public seemed to (willfully) distract agency from mediators, as well as detract ethical responsibility from those involved in the circulation of contested media.

Managing the distribution and restriction of information is a primary characteristic of what Clifford Geertz called “bazaar economies” (1978: 28), whereby traders jostle to apportion knowledge of prices and production scales to the advantage of themselves and to the detriment of others. Geertz called this distribution of knowledge, “known ignorances” (Ibid: 29). As with the notion of
demand, the knowledge required does not pertain to the price or value of goods but to the receptiveness of the buyer to the fluctuating politics of consensus, dissensus, and moral permissibility about the product in question. Some might see this as merely a sub-system of capitalist clientelization, in which traders strive to build a base of repeat customers. But the felt sphere of marketplace contestation in Pakistan resonates with what Geertz felt to be the most constitutive element in the bazaar economy, the “personal confrontation between intimate antagonists,” of actors, “at once coupled and opposed” (Ibid: 32).

Proliferating examples, rough copies, and recopied duplicates are all a part of producing consensus and dissensus over what constitutes the film in question, its morals, and the individuation of its mediators. As the terms of this multi-sited conversation is always changing, the market will continue to produce reproductions. The act of “sending it to the market” means that agreement over permissibility and use comes to be attributable to consensus and from practice rather than attributable to an individual, for whom the consequences might be social stigma, accusations of immorality, vulgarity, or worse, shirk [polytheism] or blasphemy.

It seemed to me that the bifurcation between the grainy, saturated exorbitance of Lollywood film and the new wave of Pakistani films made to international standards, was a microcosm of a wider bifurcation of image acceptability in both the public and private spheres. Similarly, over the last decade, the Auqaf Committee, the Pakistani government body in charge of mosques and shrines, have cracked down on the sale of figurative depictions of
saints. At Ghoray Shah, a small shrine in the north of Lahore, the practice of placing toy horses on the grave of a child-saint has recently been forbidden by the Auqaf, who have told the adherents and hereditary guardians of the shrine that the act constitutes idolatry [bhut-parasti]. Similarly, many roadside sellers of poster art are anxious about being accused of shirk and have begun stocking only Arabic calligraphic designs encased behind glass rather than the colourful, indigenous aulia akram [friends of God] posters that depict the shrines, personalies, and visual piety of Muslim saints. The first ten days of Muharram, the annual period of exception in which celebratory performance forms such as music or film are considered an ill-fit with the period of communal mourning, is conversely the only time in which a usually concealed image form is seen in the public sphere. I had only seen the memorable faces of Imam Ali and Imam Ḥussāin once before Muharram, in the locked room of a Shi’i prayer hall where inherited wooden tazia are kept (Chapter Two, Fig 20). I had been taken there by Nameer, a friend whose family owned a hereditary license to take out a public procession on Muharram. He had been taking a young colleague in the marketing firm he had established on a tour of his Mūḥalla, and, having run into me in the Walled City, agreed to take both of us to his family Haveli. When he opened the door of the tazia storeroom, his young colleague, a Sunni Muslim with little exposure to the practices of those outside his community, was surprised by the sight of human faces in a room where holy objects and texts are kept. He was particularly perplexed by the claim that one framed image was supposed to depict Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad. He iterated that
there are no pictures of Imam Ali, nor is it permissible for the family or companions of the prophet to be depicted. Understanding the rising tension, Nameer closed the door of the storehouse and assured his colleague that the image is *khayaali* – imagined – and that before Ayatollah Khomeni’s rule in Iran there were even coins struck with an image of Imam Ali (Fig 60 & 61).

Religious poster art in Pakistan is subject to a complex visual economy. Both Jürgen Wasim Frembgen (2006) and Yousuf Saeed (2012) have produced monographs detailing the poster art and vernacular visuality of South Asian Islamic image-making. My interlocutors remarked upon a recent censorial turn, roughly coinciding with the international War on Terror that has seen them largely decline from public view. At the shrines where these posters would usually be sold, adherents blame their gradual disappearance on Saudi-funded and Salafi-inspired attempts to censor the mediatory power of intercessors. I found devotional poster art, in its commercial production and distribution in Lahore, notably communal and uncontroversial. This is largely because publishers, who affix their names and addresses on the bottom of the posters for repeat sale, do not want to become mired in accusations from proximate sectarian

---

86 In attempting to classify the public place of poster art, scholars have used varied terminology, such as vernacular, the popular, folk art, or objects of wonder. Kajri Jain argued, in her study of religious calendar art in India, that the term vernacular is “closest to resisting the pitfalls of primordialism and romanticism” (Jain, 2007. 14). Similarly, Elias argues for a non-romantic label that benefits from an association with a locale but is not restricted to it. His is a study in which “the concept of vernacularity reminds us that the people being referred to do not inhabit the past.” (Elias 2011. 15). Certainly, the realm of the “popular” bears connotations symptomatic of what Bhatti finds to be a general derision towards forms of enjoyment, becoming as it does almost a pejorative term (Bhatti 2012). While in the Introduction to this thesis I describe the vernacular nature of the Hall Road repertoire, some of the acts of communal expression and individuation explored throughout what followed instantiate demotic rather than vernacular practices that work from the bottom up rather than the top-down.
groups. The closeness of comparison between picture publishers and their respect for the conservatism of their customers, and the agency of “keeping steady” the Hall Road repertoire is notable. Even if an image is overworked, burnished, and turned into something almost entirely new, its continual churning is reissued through conservative market mechanisms. In such posters, the motifs used portray the ethical regime of permitted imagery and draw attention to the distribution of the visual commons. The sheer nature of their place in the visual commons; recursive, copied and adapted from different sources, turn them into remarkable remnants in a visual culture moving from esoteric and vernacular Islamic iconography towards a stripped-down, exoteric aesthetic.

Abu Islami Images are one of the last publishers in a once burgeoning printing trade that centered around Lahore’s Urdu Bazaar, a company who produce a varied array of devotional and aspirational posters for an ethnic and religiously diverse population. They sell a repertoire of devotional, syncretic, Christian, Shi’i, and Sufi saints’ posters that draw upon a wide and extensive collection of templates. Returning after spending some time in his ancestral village, Jamil, the patient and sagacious foreman of Abu Islami Images, rushed to show me some new designs hot off the press. I was told that demand had called for the new Abraj Al-Bait Towers in Mecca to be included behind the Kaaba, providing symmetry with the minaret beside the dome of Medina. The ruling House of Saud have transformed Mecca and Medina over the last century, bulldozing the homes, mausoleums, and sites of the friends, family, and companions of the Prophet Muhammad. The new clock tower looming over the Kaaba is seen by many as the apex of this building surge.
mysterious force of *demand* had also consigned the production of visual materials relating to Pakistani and Indian film stars to a dusty storeroom upstairs. For decades they have been sensitive to the ambiguous and estimated tastes of regions and demographics, which has told them that across Pakistan religious devotional images have risen at the expense of film posters. “Their place has been taken by the *Islami* posters and *scenery,*” the foreman told me.

Watching Jamil’s team at work I saw how this commons is continually re-produced and how *demand* is channeled into a finished product. *Demand* as an agential phenomenon felt in others but not wholly quantifiable, was expressed on Hall Road but always hard to gage in practice. At Abu Islami Images they speak more clearly of a “system”, a chain of knowledge that connects the roadside sellers to the *murid* [followers] of the shrines, who express the public *demand* which guides the creation of new posters. With a batch of copy-and-paste insertions that took him half a day, the in-house graphic designer Malik replaced the older Kaaba and Medina images that anchor all the five-hundred-plus posters in their repertoire with the new designs that feature the recently built Abraj Al-Bait Towers and clock tower in Mecca. In other instances, the colours of turbans, cloaks, and even skin tones can be changed to fit with sectarian tastes, festivals, or just to create a brighter finished product. He shows me other, non-religious pictures that have also been altered to fit the local market. In one countryside scene, he told me, “We sharpen the colours and add more green. We
replaced the dog with the goat as people do not like putting up posters with an image of a dog."88

Due to the contentious nature of so many divergent devotional images, demand must be negotiated carefully. Every creative decision regarding arrangement or design, Malik says, is “dependent on the demand of people in the market” (Fig 62). Such things relating to the public mass of embodied need do not have the power to offend, as they are not one man’s creative choice, nor one man’s creative act. Over many hours spent sitting behind Malik as he took scraps of older posters and, with post-production design software PhotoShop, reconfigured the colours of turbans, the placement, hue, and direction of heavenly lights, and the configuration of domes, I found a particularly performative practice at work in the continuation of this visual repertoire. Such images are honed through a process of absorption with change. If, as Malik frequently iterated, “muwāfaqat [agreement or consensus] comes from demand,” these demands for occasional infidelity to the perceived source differs from the watermarks on Pakistani films or Guddu’s collectors’ items, Hasan Mir’s communal māhaul, and the proximity to the mastercopy as noted in other parts of this thesis (Fig 63). While all instantiate an engagement with the ways in which material and visual culture negotiates an ethnic, linguistic, and religiously plural

88 This was the only time during my fieldwork to which Quranic strictures on the placement of images was referred. A widely remembered Hadith says that angels do not enter a house decorated with pictures or housing dogs. In the context of Islamic visual culture, Jamal Elias argues that, “the visual object is judged by its social place, with concepts such as efficacy of intended use, somatic engagement, and economic structures of valuation all playing important parts in the understanding of the image and its life in society.” (Elias 2012: 17).
public sphere, Pakistani religious poster art negotiates a wider chain of transmission and authority in the commons of shared experience.

Demand is not just hegemonic Sunni Islamic culture asserting itself, but one sensitive to the demand and flows of minority faiths, languages, and expressions, for obscenity and pornography, that cannot be reduced just to a model of market capitalism, but an ambience sought from the market as one locale of morality understood as consensus. While I could never grasp with confidence the delineations of demand, there are four ways I propose to understand it; first as an alibi, second as mutual policing of a commons of shared resources, thirdly as a demand for the mediation of an atmosphere of communal piety, and lastly as a warning system sensitive to thresholds of permissibility. Simultaneously, the proposed ways of grasping the moral polyphony of the marketplace also serves as a way of understanding the moral atmospheres that frame this thesis. Māḥaul can be comprised of communal effort that shrinks the responsibility of the individual, it can be a coercive force that polices social reproduction, it can be akin to a plea for recognition among embattled minorities, and finally it can also be concerned with demarcating the frontiers of permissibility.

Demand as an alibi sees mediators place their faith in the awaam as the arbiters of moderation and morality. While demand could be considered as an atmosphere that halts change, an engine of inter-social reproduction, or a Benthamite “greatest good for the greatest number”, in its operation this needful ambience provided many with an alibi to protect against moral transgression.
This apportionment of perceived consensus can then divert and detract ethical responsibility from those who distribute them, whereby demand is also a mechanism to absolve responsibility. In this thesis I have tried to explore this system of permissibility that is formed variously by everyday exegeses relating to comportment and permissibility (Chapter One), the religious uses of media (Chapter Two), the absence of the state (Chapter Three), urban appropriation and informality (Chapter Four), and through sensitivities to provenance and participation (Chapter Five). Demand is a result of the navigation of ecologies of interdiction through mass dissemination and the discussions over images that straddle the threshold between religious and secular morality. This system confronts its own “secularity”, that which Saba Mahmood defines as the bedrock of knowledge that sits outside of religious experience; the discourses and attitudes that believers must face as a newly constitutive element of their lifeworld (2015: 207). Demand infers a starting point of reluctance, or at least an air of ambivalence. In the same way that I heard religious trinkets described as “art” or “decoration” so as to remark upon their lack of efficacious or transgressive qualities, things relating to the public mass of demand also do not have the power to offend, as they are not one person’s creative choice.

Demand is pre-auratic, preceding the felt presence of its fabrication in the form of audio-visual media. In that regard it is different in one way from the moral atmospheres that pervade this thesis, as it describes neither prestige nor authority but obligation bound up in the expectation that the urge to oblige is reciprocated. In Photos of the Gods (2004) Pinney writes of a proliferation of
visual material initiating a new kind of mass politics that cannot be ascribed simply to those who are enchanted by their embodied relationship to images. Rather, the visual has a capacity of "exceeding" the present (Ibid: 205) by constituting and drawing upon a "recursive archive" (Ibid: 201-210). While moral atmospheres are a strategy of orientation, one of a toolkit of what Mircea Eliade called “techniques for consecrating space” (Ibid: 28) in which the sacred fixes limits and powers of genesis, Pakistan’s market archives operate through a recursive temporality. Unlike Eliade, Maurice Bloch argued that the extent to which the linear and the cyclical coexist, in which the past remains active in the present, narrates clearly the strictures of hierarchy in a society (1977). As argued in Chapter Two, this uncanny temporality allows ritual, devotion, and marketplace recording and reproduction to work in synergy.

_Mutual Coercion_

Garrett Hardin’s influential essay on the commons as a pool of shared resources began with a call to look beyond science and technology to square the problem of the prospect of infinite growth with finite resources. Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” (1968: 1244) imagined a time free of the forces that aggregate human populations, when individuals who, accessing the commons, were destined to be locked into a system of competitive increase. In his parable, the commons are depleted and the failure of human free will exposed. When it is easier to pollute the commons than dispose of pollutants in other ways, the tragedy of the
commons is a problem of legislation and “temperance” (Ibid: 1245) that situates morality as a distributed element of the system to which it pertains. Even then, for Hardin, individual conscience is doomed to fail. Rather, the answer lies in responsibility as a system that is socially produced at the same time as coercion; a reminder – from the introduction to this thesis - of Zia-ul-Haq’s proposal of a statist theocracy that relied on “persuasion rather than compulsion”. Hardin’s call for a system of “mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon by the majority of the people affected” (Ibid: 1247), acts in ways akin to how demand is described in relation to permissibility. The ambiguity of “mutual coercion” has echoes of the strategy identified in early Pakistani ethnography (Barth 1965) of building allies with those outside of the kin or corporate group in pursuit of a common goal. To that it is possible to add the recruitment of non-human allies who, having been acted upon and acting on persons, create a reactive, sensory commons. In the instances I detailed herein this extends to the morality of circulation. How to keep what is consumed, for the traders’ gain and the buyers’ enjoyment, from polluting a commons sensitive to the frontiers and thresholds between permissible and impermissible?

The “tragedy of the commons” as an assertion of the impossibility of sustainable collective action is as challenging as the idea that an “absence of archival consciousness” (Chapter Two) among the Pakistani public can explain the reluctance of the state to wield archives as a prerequisite for nation-building. The idea that circulating media can, under certain circumstances, be freely used by anyone instead of through payment or subscription has gained recognition in
the online repository Wikipedia Commons and U.S non-profit Creative Commons, both of which mix private intellectual property rights with the idea of the commons. To envisage a media commons is to understand that content can be a resource and an environment like any other. But while the challenge to the ecological commons is sustainability and resource depletion, the media commons is troubled by the unauthorised transmission of information. The unrestrained circulation and appropriation of media content can also be seen as one instantiation of what Plato most feared in the transformation from orality to literacy; the loss of dialogical guarantees of meaning when the text is thrown to the four winds of interpretation. When, then, can collective action and collective mediation be effective at providing a common resource? Elinor Ostrom (1990) showed that Garrett Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” neglected the place of collective management as a third way between private, exclusive use, and state management. Hardin’s argument elided the minutiae of resource use and the extent to which such issues are contingent on local ontologies and ethics. Ostrom argued that shared resources can be governed by coexisting and often conflicting systems of regulation at the same time, such as by the market and the state, or in the case of Pakistani film, interdiction and reproduction.

Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) idea of civil society attributed to it a more refined role than a third sector operating in the interstices of the state. Yet, it was not one that included market production. Rather, Gramscian civil society is composed of organised groupings that form a bulwark of the hegemony of both the state and the ruling elite. Similarly, in the constitution of the public sphere,
Nancy Fraser argues that, “the public sphere produces consent via the circulation of discourses that construct the "common sense" of the day and represent the existing order as natural” (Fraser 1990: 78). The ideas from which Gramsci departed, namely Hegel’s conception of civil society as a "system of needs", resonates more closely with demand as an ethical market system that mediates interdiction and reproduction. The "system of needs" requires common resources to be shaped and prepared to suit the requirements of human wishes. In the labour of this use of common resources, providing for the needs of a body of others perceived to have mutual needs, requires, “the individual contributes to the objective world” ((Enc. 39) cf Stillman 1980: 630). Hegel’s system leaves the subjective world wanting, or at least neglects the phenomenology of collective interaction.

There are echoes of both a performative civil ecology and Hardin’s call for “mutual coercion” in Jacques Rancière’s idea of “the distribution of the sensible”, a system in which the surfaces of signs, and communal, bodily movement in performative and lived form delineate the ways in which sense perception is distributed. He argues, “the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community” (Rancière 2011: 12), making it both that which is distributed communally and a regime of participation in a space of communal activity. Those with whom politics is produced and shared (subjects of it) can reconfigure the distribution of the sensible and redefine what is common by contesting its parts and processes. In its way it is a sensory commons, one continually revised, reiterated and re-bounded. In this thesis I have
shown that the changes wrought by storage media ran concurrent with historical shifts in power in the public sphere. Participation and guardianship confer an ability to define what is and is not permissible, and what is and is not visible among common space and the space of the commons. This is what Rancière argues comes to form a “politics [which] revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it” (Ibid). For my interlocutors this distribution was proof of the recursive provisioning from Allah from the “storehouses” (Quran 15:21, Iqbal 1934: 63) of the world and the dynamism of an unfinished universe, and thus ultimately tied to an ethical, Islamic social contract to the self and to others in the public sphere.

Rancière’s politics of aesthetics and the senses takes consensus and dissensus to be inert attitudes towards what is commonly divided. The policing of the boundary between right and wrong is elided in favour of the possibility that judgement might be permanently suspended in a continual reassembling of what is perceptible. Instead of consensus coming from circulation to produce a repertoire of value-decisions, Rancière argues that the distribution of the sensible is an ongoing, mutually agreed dissensus. In his “Ten Theses on Politics” he argues that dissensus is not a clash of opposing opinions but rather, “the demonstration (manifestation) of a gap in the sensible itself,” (2010: 38) an uncommon article of common sense. In contrast with vernacularity, which settles upon an alternative which is slowly formalized, the distribution of the sensible is notably demotic, forming instead clusters of colloquiality and changing repertoires of usage.
Without being particularly financially lucrative, the distribution of the media commons in Pakistan is also a repertoire of common ground that operates through contestation and debate. In the cases explored in this thesis the commons is neither private nor state property, but a form of social property, the “zone of contestation and mutual cannibalization” (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 5) that constitutes public culture. The commons as an assertion of shared resources helps to understand both organic and censorial changes in the aesthetics of the public sphere and the ways in which these changes are felt and responded to in the form of demand. What Rancière calls an “ethical regime of images” (2011: 20) is that concerned only with their origin and their purpose, and the way they circulate within the commons of communal experience. Disagreement is not a discursive clash of opposites but an existing “distribution of the sensible” between inside and out, or what Rancière calls the system of the, “aesthetics of politics” (Ibid: 9).

For the lives and fortunes of those on Hall Road the material accumulated was not wealth, but what Garrett Hardin argued was the system of responsibility co-produced at the same time as coercion. This awareness, driven by the marketplace, resulted in a sense that mediation as cosmopolitan citizenship could be financially lucrative, in which the promises of storage media confer a sense of guardianship intimately connected with formats yet obliged to unknown others. Actions defined by the presence of unknown others provides a counter to identification as a formation of social relations, instead suggesting what Rupert Stasch has called, “otherness as a relation” (2009: 7). Outside of Pakistan, Badar
Khan’s (Interlude Chapter) “tragedy of the commons” was that while his actions maintained a common resource of Pashto film and music in an environment conducive to its maintenance, the production of his sense of responsibility was met with the coercive power of his host society. The twinned actions of demand and retrieval, the gaging of the former and the performance of the latter, coupled with a constellation of urban forms conducive to its spread, created a unique form of mediation which this thesis has attempted to engage with. The demand that my interlocutors projected into the future and shored themselves to profit from, is an idea attuned to the agency of others; a mutual coercion not yet mutually agreed upon.

To reach consensus over the thresholds of right and wrong refers to what is religiously permissible for the self, yet remains sensitive to the sensibilities of others, and the sensorium of emotional modesty. What I described as “everyday exegeses” (Chapter One) can be seen as a confluence of permissibility as a component of everyday life and ambivalence with regard to how such piety and emotional humility should be expressed. Morality as a lived attribute is driven by ambiguity. The mediatory power of so much of religious experience would be irrelevant if conditions were so fixed that ambient changes never threatened the world of faith. Samuli Schielke has argued that consistency and rounded analyses should be avoided as far as piety is concerned. He argues, "morality is not a coherent system, but an incoherent and unsystematic conglomerate of different moral registers that exist in parallel and often contradict each other." (2009: S30)

In such an environment, for some, "pious commitment is only a period in their
life" (Ibid: S34). How then, Schielke (2019) later asks, might it be possible to recognise God as a social actor and social reality? *Demand* operates in a particular context in which distributors rely closely on the conservatism of their public. The presence of God is felt through others, in the desire not to offend the sensibilities of others, in the fear of police-enforced censorship or blasphemy litigation, or aware of the sporadic appearance of rioting or vigilante punishment on media interfaces to assuage momentary outrage.

Critical exegesis of the Quran divides meaning that can be interpreted into exoteric knowledge, that which can be grasped and reproduced by the public at large, and esoteric, hidden knowledge that can be grasped only by the initiated or those divinely intended. The emergence in medieval Islam of a Sufic mysticism predicated on the alternation between this dialectic of interior [*batin*] and exterior [*zahir*] knowledge, situated in exoteric knowledge the pursuit of comportment, modesty, and corporeal struggle for Islam, while the pursuit of esoteric knowledge came from self-knowledge, the derangement of the soul, and the plumbing of hidden depths. Writing on the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal (Chapter One), Faisal Devji argues that, "by seeking to spiritualize the world of matter, Iqbal had himself abandoned the traditional bifurcation of knowledge that divided a *zahir* (exoteric) realm from a *batin* (esoteric) one, thus implying the former’s lack of autonomy if not its illegitimacy. But the reverse was also true, since by spiritualizing the outer world Iqbal eliminated the inner one as well." (Devji, 2013. 245). Thus, in his ideological response to Western philosophy and attempts to imagine a South Asian Islamic polity, Iqbal’s materialist
phenomenology attempted to flatten esoteric religious thought onto a surface upon which it could be transformed. I would argue that while this has, as Devji argues, given the critical impulse to more conservative anxieties over the inner life of religious experience, it is also a prompt for the exploration of interfaces, containment, thresholds, and patination; in short, an anthropology of surfaces rather than depths.

*Anthropology at the Threshold*

Birgit Meyer’s proposal for a reappraisal of the largely Protestant-Calvinist notion of religious interiority over their outward manifestation advocates further study of the mutual constitution of people and objects of devotion signalled by the material “turn”. Essentially, the "dynamics of fabrication of beings that command belief" (Meyer 2014: 222) are less part of the “sensational form" (Meyer, 2006: P10) Meyer had previously described, and more a question of how interfaces of materialization interact with the power structures and political relations behind these acts of manifestation. Recently Meyer and Stordalen (2019) explore the long trajectory in monotheistic faiths of siphoning anxiety over picturing the divine through making sensible the unseen. I argue that the various ways this is done in Pakistan serves to bring the external and the internal, the visible and the unseen, onto the surfaces of media objects as a kind of interface characterised by its own ethical superficiality. In this way, as a banal, almost harmless surface, lacking in efficacy and enchantment, it can be put to a
public to decide on its permissibility and place in regimes of transcendence, prayer, leisure and pleasure. As such, a greater understanding of moral atmospheres and the systems such as the engine of demand call for an anthropology of superficiality that constitutes a study of thresholds.

Remembering Dominic Boyer’s distinction between radial and lateral mediation, in the changed scale and volume of access and circulation media audiences and users become subject to different authorities and forces of influence. I found that among my interlocutors, digital technology was changing little to do with the moral atmospheres of media. Instead like previous tools, it has the capacity to amplify the laterality of mediation. In her work on crowd politics in Bangladesh, Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury (2019) argues that in the heat of popular sentiment, digital media has the power to energise a dispersed crowd not necessarily visible to one another face to face in ways that feed off, and often energise, a crowd of congregated individuals. In the moral atmospheres that media transmit and transform, Chowdhury argues that, “secular and religious crowds, in their desires to be seen and heard, have ended up mimicking each other,” (2019: 148) due perhaps to the “mimetic quality of crowd behaviour” (ibid). Following Lawrence Liang’s understanding that thinking through unauthorised circulation is to think outside of accepted parameters of a liberal public sphere (2010: 12) and Chowdhury’s call to, “start rethinking the public sphere… from an illiberal perspective” (2019: 148), this thesis has studied the moral ecologies of media by foregrounding sentiment, atmosphere, and community. In this sphere of enquiry the study of moral and atmospheric
thresholds, the felt ethical boundaries that are produced in friction with secular and orthodox religious morality, could provide a pathway for future research. At present, thresholds remain difficult to define and pose theoretical problems. How can an invisible threshold about which traditional orthodoxy is inert be understood until it has been crossed? As we have seen, for a country shared by various faiths and denominations of Islam, ambient interruptions, offending images, and competing soundscapes require the demarcation of what many describe as their local “moral atmosphere”. These are shaped by a communal belief in boundaries, for example that between recitation and song, gesture and performance, permissible and impermissible behaviour. In fulfilling the demand for the retrieval of film objects disowned by the state and resistant to traditional religious orthodoxy, my interlocutors found ways to negotiate environments potentially hostile to their flow. While consensus evinces only the reduction of political space and agency (Rancière 2010: 72), dissensus marks “a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it” (Ibid: 139). When the graphic designer Malik described consensus coming from distribution, expectation, and reception, he well articulated strategies of attunement that can reveal how power structures are normalized through the senses, rather than being agents of their reification. In Pakistan’s regimes of permissibility, film is one part of an ongoing distribution of sensibilities and sentiments in which dissensus and disruption are embodied in the same possibilities of circulation and consensus. In this thesis, consensus and dissensus over what constitutes an accurate copy of a film, the place of film experience in the public sphere, and what is and is not
film have been collapsed into a perceptible focus on moral thresholds and boundaries, rather than their aggregation to binaries of right and wrong. If consensus comes from circulation, latent in this economy of reproduction and retrieval is dissensus as the more likely status quo, of which consensus is merely an eclipse that brings with it the power of its utilisation, formalisation, and fixity.

The technologized commons of films, songs, and saints becomes a source of promise or anxiety when combined with the awareness of the presence of mediation and retrieval that must necessarily bring such things out of storage and provide interfaces for their materialisation. Lahore’s urban visual culture is a space transformed by the ways in which capacious media perpetually brings its latent contents to the surface as interface. The anxieties that surround technological systems of recording and containment turn them into interfaces for protean objects capable of other lives. The result is an aura of holiness, that makes one brace before the patinated image or the materiality of a well-worn film and its various layers of age, overpainting, and retouching, and that speaks of atmospheres inherited, subsumed, contested, and shared.
Fig 60. Portraits of Imam Ali and Imam Hussain watch over the model mausoleums of the ahl-e-bayt in a tazia storehouse in the Walled City of Lahore (October 2017).
Fig 61. Nameer’s inherited images depicting the personages of the ahl-e-bayt and the tragedy at Karbala. Brought out from their tazia storehouse for the first ten days of Muharram, they are half-concealed during the day and uncovered for the evening majlis. (September 2018).
Fig 62. Poster publishing firm Abu Islami Images’ designer, Malik, points out the whited-out face of Imam Mahdi, the hidden Imam yet to appear to the followers of Ithnā’Ashariyyah, the Twelver Shi’a. Malik had opened this Photoshop workfile as an example of a poster that the company had sold in the past but due to the current conditions of felt consensus and dissensus, had been removed from circulation (March 2018).
Fig 63. Malik shows how they produce Pakistani film images by obscuring the watermark of collector Guddu Khan, whose base image they downloaded from his Facebook page (March 2018).
### Appendix A.

**Glossary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahl-e-bayt</td>
<td>Literally “family of the house”. The immediate family of the Prophet Muhammad; Fatimah, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, and their offspring. Devotion to the ahl-e-bayt is central to Shi’i Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alim (singular), Ulamāʾ (Plural)</td>
<td>An individual or group of Islamic scholars recognised as authorities on matters of traditional orthodoxy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aqīdāt</td>
<td>Devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Āshūrā’</td>
<td>The tenth day of the Islamic month of Muharram and climax of the period of mourning for those who died at the Battle of Karbala in 680AD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awām</td>
<td>The word has a dual usage, as pejorative, condescending equivalent of “mass” or as a possessive, communal “people”. It is also used in close connection with the concept of “public”, the population in general, or as a motivational term to address a body of people. “Awaami” means “for the people”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azān</td>
<td>The Islamic call to prayer in its amplified or non-amplified form.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ‘Azādari                  | Meaning mourning and lamentation, in the way the term was used among my interlocutors ‘azādari can also be described
as the praxis of creating an atmosphere conducive to the collective mourning for Imam Ḥussāin.

Badmāš
Hooligan. The word features frequently in the title of Lollywood films.

Bāṭīn
Part of the Sufi Islamic bifurcation between zahir and batin. Batin refers to hidden, esoteric knowledge.

Beyadabī
Disrespect.

Bid'ah
An innovation in ritual practice felt to be go against traditional orthodoxy.

Camera-print
Originally referring to a bootleg film recorded directly from a cinema screen, the term now refers to a poorly compressed copy of another poor copy.

CPEC
An acronym for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, $45.6bn of Chinese investement in Pakistani infrastructure, centered on Gwadar Port in Balochistan.

Data
The relatively new arrival of this word in the Urdu vernacular comes from the sale of both mobile phone “data” and Internet content, and coincides with a more recent turn towards the replacement of indexical media forms with digital platforms for storage.

Demand
As a local concept expressed through the English word and perhaps as a clipped form of the phrase “by popular demand”, demand describes a felt atmosphere cleaved by a
collective wish emanating from an undefined group of people.

**Dharnā**

A non-violent sit-in, often in demand for justice.

**DVDwalla**

Store-holders, usually only one or two individuals, who work from a distinct repertoire to produce cheaply-made reproductions of films in copy. The suffix -wala in Urdu defines “one who does” the word that precedes it.

**Filmī**

The adjective *filmi* refers to both a kind of massified kitsch and an organic and independent language register generated by popular Lollywood film. In its associations with mass appeal and its decorative, almost folklorish quality it is similar to how the term *Islami* is used to describe popular culture or commodities with an Islamic character or content.

**Haram**

Forbidden.

**Ḥāṣil karnā**

The verb to procure.

**Hawala / hundi**

An informal system of transferring wealth or value through an expansive network of brokers.

**Imānat**

Guardianship

**Item number**

An extended song and dance routine in Indian and Pakistani films

**Ithnā‘Ashariyyah,**

Twelver Shi‘a, the largest domination of Pakistani Shi‘a

**Kačcha / kačchi**

Unfixed, temporary, precarious, imperfect, impermanent (m/f)
<p>| <strong>Kačchi abaādi</strong> | Squatted or informal housing |
| <strong>Kālimāh</strong> | Six performative pronouncements confirming and remembering the cornerstone of one’s Islamic beliefs |
| <strong>Kḥātām</strong> | Finished |
| <strong>Kḥāyāli</strong> | Imagined, not genuine, inauthentic. |
| <strong>Kḥidmat</strong> | Welfare, suffused with religious connotations of living well. |
| <strong>Live</strong> | A local concept more or less cohering with its English-language origin of describing a certain quality of recorded performance, usually in opposition to a studio recording. |
| <strong>Loadshedding</strong> | A scheduled power outage to conserve energy supply rather than an unintended blackout. |
| <strong>Māḥaul</strong> | Refers to the environment, setting, and social, cultural, or geographical circumstances in which a person lives, but in its usage describes a moral atmosphere or moral ambience. |
| <strong>Māḥauliat</strong> | Ecology |
| <strong>Majlis (singular) / Majālis (plural)</strong> | In the Shi‘i context it is used here it describes a mourning gathering for the ahl-e-bayt, usually including a mix of different recitation and didactic rhetorical styles. |
| <strong>Mārṣīyah</strong> | An elegiac form of poetry. |
| <strong>Masā’il</strong> | Problems, particularly those in need of the juristic guidance in accordance with the Quran and sunnah. |
| <strong>Mastercopy</strong> | A film copy made in close proximity to the base material – in many cases a celluloid |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mātam / Mātam dari</td>
<td>The term <em>mātam</em> refers to an act of mourning, the compound Urdu verb <em>mātam dari</em> usually denotes a physical action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muwāfaqat</td>
<td>Consensus or agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazhabi</td>
<td>Usually translated into English as “religion” but, with its origins in the Arabic word for sect, more accurately describes fidelity to specific dogma or school of thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahfūẓ karna</td>
<td>The verb to keep safe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi rašī</td>
<td>Frequently used in a derogatory way to describe anyone who is involved in activities usually associated with performances deemed immoral. Etymologically, the term derives from the Arabic word for inheritance or heritage, and describes the genealogists, bards, and minstrels of North Indian oral storytelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mūḥalla</td>
<td>A Mughal-era term used widely in north India and across Pakistan to describe a neighbourhood of an urban quarter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhājir</td>
<td>A migrant or refugee, particularly in terms of those who migrated from India to Pakistan after Partition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muālvi</td>
<td>A learned individual with respect to guidance over religious matters. Often used in a dismissive way to refer to one who attempts to elevate his social standing through the use of religious conservatism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Naʿat
A form of Islamic devotional recitation in praise of the Prophet Muhammad.

Nīshāni
A memento or object of memory.

Nōḥa
A performative lamentation derived from the South Asian elegiac tradition of *māršīyah* poetry and is frequently heard during the month of Muharram.

Orange Line Metro Train
An infrastructural project financed under the terms of the CPEC.

Paan
A mouth-freshener made of betel leaf.

Pāka / Pākī
The opposite of kačcha. Fixed, permanent, stable, perfect, authorized (m/f).

Pāṭi
Refers to a hem, a line, or a straight mark, and in this usage refers to a watermark or inscription asserting provenance or ownership.

PML-N
Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz). A centre-right political party led by Nawaz Sharif.

PTI
Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf. A centrist political party founded and led by former cricketer Imran Khan.

PTV
Pakistan Television. A state-owned television channel formerly the only channel in the country.

Qabzā
An act of appropriation, usually over land, housing, or resources.

Qaṣīda (singular) / Qaṣīdey (plural)
Refers more commonly to an Arabic poetic ode, but in this context it is the name given to a type of recitation conducted by Shiʿi
reciters which emerged in rural areas of Western and Southern Punjab.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raddi / raddiwala</td>
<td>Rejected; waste; worthless; scrap. The verb raddi karna is to waste; to reject. A raddiwala is usually a scrap paper dealer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record</td>
<td>An English word used to refer to a collection, archive, or resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roshan</td>
<td>Light or power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabīl</td>
<td>A volunteer water provider set up by locals to quench the thirst of devotees during processions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambhālana</td>
<td>This multifaceted Urdu verb pertains to the act of keeping steady, to be used if one is about to lose their balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṣan'at</td>
<td>Industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šahādah</td>
<td>The Islamic declaration of faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirk</td>
<td>Polytheism or idolatry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shōr</td>
<td>Noise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sūnnah</td>
<td>The body of literature that compiles the sayings and comportment of the Prophet Muhammad and the prototypical Islamic community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ṣāqat</td>
<td>Power, in objects and persons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablīgh</td>
<td>To publicly preach. The praxis of dawah [proselytization].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tāṣveer</td>
<td>Image or picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tauba’</td>
<td>Renunciation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tazia</td>
<td>A model mausoleum representing the grave or personage of a member of the ahl-e-bayt killed at the Battle of Karbala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totā (singular) / Totāy (Plural)</td>
<td>In the (singular), means splice, in the plural it means splices, and refers to frames or strips of film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCD</td>
<td>Video-Compact Disc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virśā</td>
<td>Heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zahir</td>
<td>The opposite of batin. Meaning exoteric, literal, external, surface knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zākīr (singular) / zākīreen (plural)</td>
<td>A reciter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zanjeer / zanjeer zāni</td>
<td>Zanjeer are chains, the act of zanjeer zāni refers to the self-flagellation with chains or blades to mourn the ahl-e-bayt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zāy‘a karnā</td>
<td>The verb to waste.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Map of Hall Road (Work of the Author)
Bibliography


Anwar, Abdul Aziz, Film Industry in West Pakistan, Lahore: Board of Economic Inquiry, 1957.


Batoool, Farida. Figure: the popular and the political in Pakistan. Lahore: ASR, 2004.


Bazin, André, "The ontology of the photographic image." Film Quarterly (13.4), 1960: 4-9.


Cooper, Timothy PA. "Raddi Infrastructure: Collecting Film Memorabilia in Pakistan: An Interview with Guddu Khan of Guddu’s Film Archive." *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* (7,2) 2016: 151-171.


Fraser, Nancy. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy”. *Social Text*, (25/26), 1990: 56-80.


Houston, Penelope. *Keepers of the Frame: The Film Archives*, London: British Film Institute, 1994.


Kirk, Gwendolyn. ""A camera from the time of the British”: film technologies and aesthetic exclusion in Pakistani cinema." *Screen* (57, 4) 2016B: 496-502.


Lefebvre, Alain. Kinship, honour and money in rural Pakistan: subsistence economy and the effects of international migration, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon 1999.


Meyer, Birgit. *"Mediation and the genesis of presence. Towards a material approach to religion."* Inaugural Lecture, Utrecht University, 19 October 2012.


401


Ortner, Sherry B. "Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties." HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory (6, 1), 2016: 47-73.


PAD:MA, “10 Theses on the Archive”, Beirut 2010, see https://pad.ma/texts/padma: 10_Theses_on_the_Archive/10


Sher, Ferida. Film, in *Re-Inventing Women: Representation of Women in the Media During the Zia Years*. Edited by Maha Malik and Neelam Hussain. Lahore: Simorgh Women’s Resource and Publication Centre, 1985: 43-65


Tafqr. August-October issue., Lahore: Jahaniiyya Academy, 1st August 1989


*The film in national life*: Being the report of an Enquiry conducted by the Commission on Educational and Cultural Films into the service which the cinematograph may render to education and social progress. Commission on Educational and Cultural Films. B. S Gott (Benjamin Scaife), London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1932.


Treverton, Gregory F. *Film piracy, organized crime, and terrorism*. Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2009.


