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# Migratory Surfaces: An Informal Visual Economy and the Repair of the Colonial Archive

By Timothy P. A. Cooper

**A**n incident in the life of Elihu Yale comes to mind when surveying the pervasive discourse assailing media piracy, the mobility of people and labor, and the lingering stranglehold of imperial power. On one occasion, Yale, a notable governor of the East India Company in the late seventeenth century and benefactor of the eponymous American university, wanted to hang his manservant for leaving his services but, as English law did not allow for such a punishment, he had him tried for piracy instead. The man was hanged.<sup>1</sup>

In London in November 2015, a major exhibition at the Tate Britain will explore the attempted departures, dispersals, trajectories, and trade routes of making and collecting art in the nineteenth century, and how these were mediated by the mutual entanglements of the European imperial project.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Okwui Enwezor, a noted critical voice on matters of urbanity, African art in the postcolonial era, and the archive as subject and source, is curating the 2015 Venice Biennale. Many of the issues at stake in these two European introspectives are brought into focus by exploring another of the products of the interaction between artist and empire in the postcolonial era. The specter of media piracy in developing and emerging economies threatens the permitted flow of cultural labor by a forced displacement of the image as commodity. Following this halted migration, the resultant images become stateless; they are shared across borders; they become mobile; they are passed between data platforms, streaming sites, and torrents; they are the surrogate children of vernacular archives, traversing a colloquial infrastructure. Undocumented, these images cleave a passage from their parent carrier across the surface of their host material.

Taking as its subject both an archival absence and an archival urge, this essay will explore surrogate archives of media and memorabilia in contemporary Pakistan. Formed through pirate distribution channels of orphaned films of the golden era of post-independence production (from 1947 to 1978), the informal spread

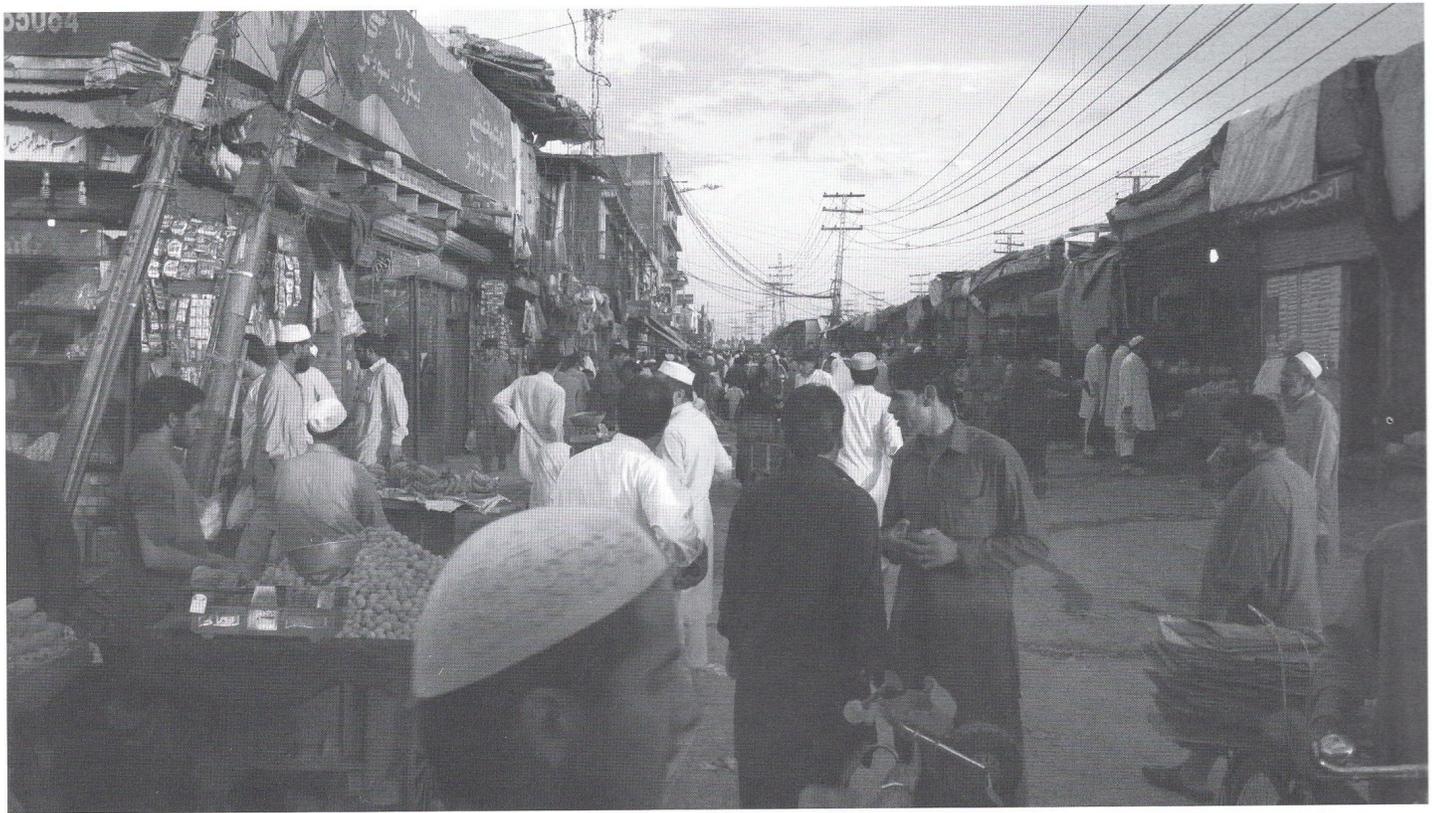
of these films has consolidated the debris of a contested postcolonial history. At the core of this essay is the question of how media migrates through the socioeconomic borders of global cultural consumption, particularly those borders reconstructed and fortified by neoliberal attempts to channel the flow of media and hence capital. Do the labor habits of pirated media, its artistic capital, and its informal infrastructure provide the impetus for a process of decolonization, or do such habits reveal a possible future for states as they emerge and fracture and attempt to collate, consolidate, and aggrandize their nationhood through the foundation of archives, spontaneous museums of citizenry, and memorabilia collections?

Throughout the former colonies, informal economies have filled the void left by the departure of informal political sovereignty. Media piracy is by no means emancipatory of a Western sovereign visuality, nor is the abandonment and subsequent repackaging of these carriers of national image-work an imitation of the tactics of cultural subjugation or control. Rather, the spontaneous and informal organization of fields of vision evidenced in the routes of Pakistani film piracy collide with modern visual hierarchies and are inexorably linked to the migrations of people, ideas, and images. Arjun Appadurai termed this phenomena “interocularity,”<sup>3</sup> the ubiquity and interactivity of modes of vision as they are cast as diasporic entities in the shifting political contexts of global trade, public practice, and political exchange.

## THE (AN)ARCHIVAL IMPULSE IN POSTCOLONIAL PAKISTAN

Previously I have compared public destruction ceremonies of seized media to the burning of vernacular media archives, halting processes of preservation by dissemination, and of acquisition through digital migration.<sup>4</sup> In many media landscapes, particularly in those countries indicted by the United States Trade Representative (USTR)’s Special 301 Report Watch List, an annual list of top violators of international copyright law, the architectonic environments of bootleg trading are revelatory of the socioeconomic conditions of the postcolonial metropolis. In his 2009 book *Pirate Modernity: Delhi’s Media Urbanism*, Ravi Sundaram writes about India’s own hub of media piracy in Delhi, the Palika Bazaar, which has enjoyed a period of prosperity ever since the era of video gave birth to the bootleg cassette. Elaborate, intricate, and informal, Palika is the doppelgänger of Pakistan’s own Rainbow Centre in Karachi, an environment that succinctly captures the new underworld order and digital ecology of the subcontinent’s illicit media distribution channels. Dealing in cracked copyright and knowledge declared unlawful and sacrosanct, contemporary media piracy is often a vessel for a clandestine process of modernization.

In the case of Pakistan, a vast subsection of manual labor is given over to the repair and reconstruction of broken goods and services, filling the faults and fissures of a crumbling urban infrastructure. This informal economy organically creates and sustains itself as a parallel economy, and gains currency when paired with Deborah Poole’s conception of the “visual economy.” Poole’s definition is sourced from her study of the spread of



Board Bazaar Peshawar (2013); photograph by Drsaeed90

images of the Andes and of Andean people, and remarkable for its fascination with “not what specific images mean but, rather, how images accrue value.”<sup>55</sup> Recently, Hito Steyerl’s powerful argument against a social structure, “class society,” or “circulatory system” of image value heralded a reappraisal of those classed as “poor images,” whose “lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement.”<sup>56</sup> Yet post-independence Pakistani cinema intended only to challenge the recesses of Pakistan’s feudalism with light social themes and their displaced and migrated forms; the contested surfaces of their pirated incarnations barely manage to contest the hierarchization of images in a classed visual economy. Instead, these migratory surfaces enact Steyerl’s vision of an image on a global trajectory, and one that “builds alliances as it travels, provokes translation or mistranslation, and creates new publics and debates.”<sup>57</sup>

Through thorough consultation with the National Archives of Pakistan, it has become clear that the earliest transferred (non-35mm) carrier of most extant Pakistani films, dating from partition with India (1947) to the advent of video cassette technology, held in the Pakistan National Archives, is a VCD or DVD copy complete with watermark of the first trader to transfer from the last legitimate VHS. With the original 35mm reels long presumed lost or degraded beyond restoration, the continued existence and spread of this filmic cultural heritage is reliant on the informal and systematized copying and recopying of the earliest known carrier. It is the generational loss aggravated

with each copy, the palimpsest-like inscriptions of the pirate film outlet, and the affront to losslessness that characterize this cinema of tactile disorder. In contemporary Pakistan, for whose citizens access to legitimate media products is often indicative of social class, pirate media encourages the transference of media to the most modern, economical carrier—as a process and product I have termed, in the absence of a formal national archive, the “Black Market Archive.”<sup>58</sup>

In 1997, the authors of the *Pakistan Archives: Biannual Journal of the National Archives of Pakistan* reported an “absence of archival consciousness”<sup>59</sup> in governmental departments, echoing the complaints of one historian of India’s National Film Archive, who cited the reasons for the late establishment of an archive in India as a disinterested foreign occupying force and a “traditional apathy towards preservation or documentation.”<sup>60</sup> What the imperial force *had* been interested in was censorship. In 1918 the Indian Cinematograph Act was introduced to restrict elements related to the burgeoning Hindu and Muslim nationalist movements appearing in films, requiring that every film be certified by the local state authority. 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. 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.”<sup>61</sup>

## FEATURE

When Radio Pakistan was established following partition, Zulfiqar Ali Bukhari was appointed the director general of the project. In the mid-1930s, Bukhari had been charged with directing the programming of All India Radio (AIR), a station founded in the hope of devolving cultural agency to Commonwealth citizens. As Radio Pakistan—and later Pakistan Television—grew under his authority, Bukhari cracked down heavily on Urdu spoken in the local Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, or Balochi accents, institutionalizing a narrow idea of what was deemed suitable for broadcast. As the national cultural topography formed, inflections, accents, and cadences were ironed out. Pakistani cinema followed suit, and regional film industries in the linguistically diverse state were distrusted as a mode of address and discourse separate from the sanctioned Urdu form. Pashto, Balochi, Saraiki, and Sindhi micro-industries are thus impossible to separate from an equivocal desire to restore linguistic independence from the attempts to impose Urdu as the lingua franca of the fledgling nation. Even in its current state of nonexistence, a Pakistan national archive has always been a contentious and disputed space.

Following the decline and breakup of many of the major colonial powers following World War II, the second wave of archive building saw the cultural command centers migrate and settle in the geographic heartland of new, fledgling nation states and state-nations. When film became accepted as a legitimate art form and economy in the 1920s, cinematic archives followed the nineteenth-century model as taxonomic reserves of state authority. Thomas Richards's 1993 study *The Imperial Archive*, while stubbornly refusing to engage with postcolonial discourse, argued for the conclusion that British colonialism in the early nineteenth century tendered the first green shoots of the information age. Collating immense expanses of knowledge from the corners of its empire, a postindustrial global economy was created and sustained by a series of entanglements that hinged on how it received, employed, and re-distributed knowledge. The result was the creation of an archival heterotopia in the colonies, a "coherent imperial whole,"<sup>12</sup> in whose entangled genealogies and palimpsest-like surfaces was articulated a mode of existence that aimed to curb any future attempts at repair, adjustment, or appropriation.

The unintentional archivists of Pakistan's cinematic heritage have pre-emptively upheld the first thesis of the Public Access Digital Media Archive (Pad.ma), in which "the archive that results may not have common terms of measurement or value . . . It will remain radically incomplete, both in content and form . . . riding on the linking ability of the sentence, the disruptive leaps of images, and the distributive capacity that is native to technology."<sup>13</sup> The consideration of archives as spontaneous, participatory, consumer-based, or even, in this case, linguistically vernacular, transforms the act of preservation itself into a cultural commodity. The "Black Market Archive" of Pakistani film piracy not only paralyzes the fetish to reconstruct the most complete copy of a historic film, but also reimagines the conditions of its first appearance: it assumes a public, rather than awaits one. Just as the rough palimpsest of VHS to VCD images flicker between

the textual watermarks of previously pirated copies, Pakistani golden-age cinema, viewable to the diaspora on YouTube and available to citizens for thirty Pakistani rupees a disc, occupies a liminal space between digital migration and the atrophic fate of a lossy-to-lossy oblivion.

### THE THIRD PARTITION

More so than any other event, it was the trauma of partition with India that initiated the chaos and confusion from which Pakistan has yet to recover. Eager to cut their losses and run, the British authorities divided the country along Hindu and Muslim nationalist lines, surprising even the leader of the All-India Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who found himself the symbolic father at the premature birth of Pakistan. What followed was the forced migration of perhaps fifteen million people, the largest mutual mass expulsion in history. The legacy of partition was the imposition of a shared communal postcoloniality that was geographically foreign to many refugees, and the linguistic divisions that quickly emerged undermined the attempts at a cohesive nationalism. The trauma of Pakistan's second partition, one less discussed and even categorically denied in some circles, was marked by the genocidal reprisals enacted on East Pakistan as it made the transition to an independent Bangladesh. Lahore's pre-partition film industry lost much of its talent during the flight to Bombay in 1947, and the loss of East Pakistan's emerging Dhaka industry in 1971 was a further blow to an industry already drained of skilled cineastes. Thus, the movement of people and the partition of the fledgling state was a considerable source of shock for the Pakistan film industry, which conversely proceeded to discover its perceived golden age during the exuberant limbo between two mass migrations and mutilations.

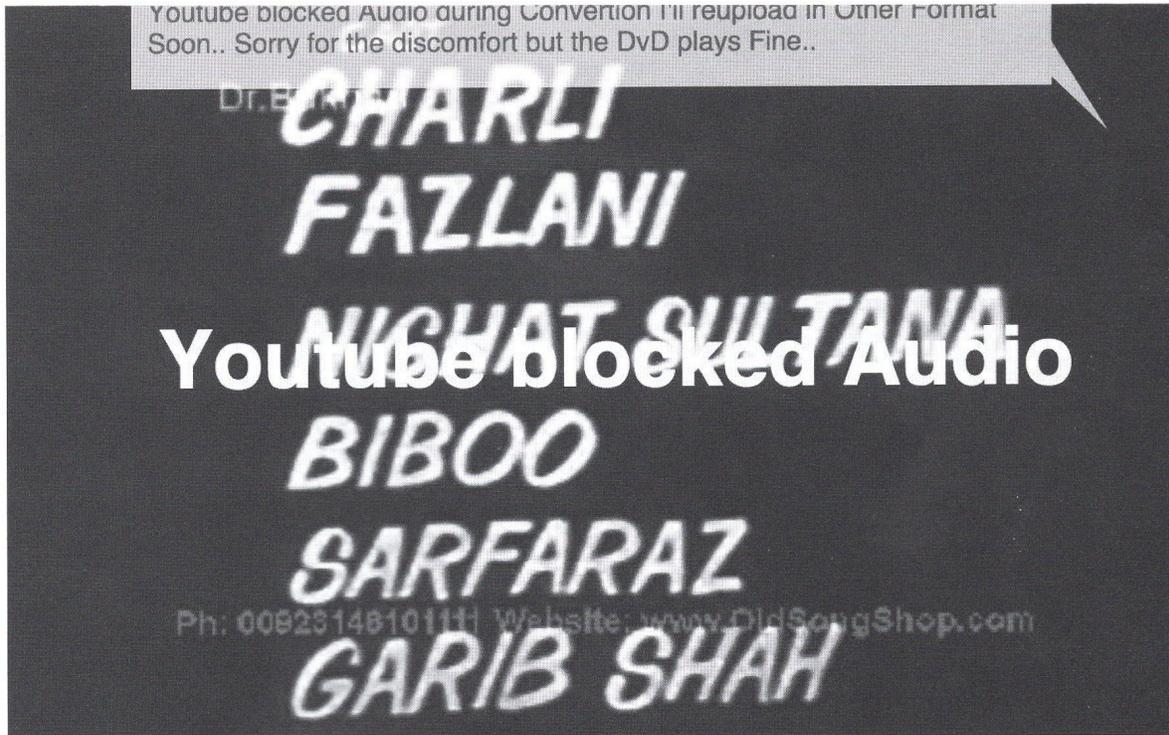
A formative diasporic identity that has been cemented by media access beyond Pakistan's borders is often far more pluralist in character than that inside the nation. In many ways, media access has led to a third partition of the country, following on from the initial partition from India in 1947 and the 1971 partition from East Pakistan, which saw the violent birth of Bangladesh as the culmination of two decades of the nationwide Bengali language movement. In the same way, the third partition, an organic split of cultural distribution, began sometime around the advent of satellite and VHS consumption. It is reflected in the visual characteristics of the debris of Pakistani film heritage, which appears as a trans-media evolution wherein the class hierarchy of the visual economy and the raw leverage of image power has been informally devolved since independence from British rule.

Transfers of Pakistani films on video hosting sites such as YouTube reveal the routes of fandom, transmutation, and dissemination. At the extreme end of the scale, they are marked by major deficiencies and ellipses—such as the copy of the 1956 *Umar Marvi* (directed by Shaikh Hassan), a film notable for being the first Sindhi language feature, and uploaded by one Dr. Bukhari, whose personal collection of DVDs allows slightly wealthier film consumers to order copies of his collection rather

than rummage through the pirate VCD stores. The credits of the film are partially submerged under the notice that YouTube has blocked the video's audio, while the watermark of Bukhari's website appears as the visual counterpoint to the subtraction of the sound. As is a common feature, the watermarks of the pirate retailer are an index to the most recent layer of the palimpsest of appropriation. The deepest layer is usually the scratches and dust of the aged 35mm print; the second, the throbbing horizontal strips that evidence the transfer to VHS. From

this point on, the most legible layer is textual. By the 1990s, the influence of television adverts had inspired some media outlets to insert calling cards and adverts at a climactic moment in a film. This intermission also provided a marketplace for skills and services and is an expression of the intermedia outlook of the retailers, who blurred the lines of pirate and legitimate products beneath the banner of their brand. As the dust settles following a fight scene in the Pashto film *Shaal Wā Shimla* (1991, directed by Ansakh Saeedi), the retailer responsible for the transfer, Sabah CD, cuts to slides of services and skills they offer, then finally to a brief interlude from one of their top-selling musicians.

The formative diaspora, the advance exiles of the third partition, highlight in their geographic spread the importance of local ownership. Researcher Joe Karaganis noted that file-sharing sites (such as DesiTorrents, which serves primarily migrant communities), and subtitling sites that allow their dissemination to wider audiences, have become embedded in the transnational and trans-platform access of surrogate pirate archives. Karaganis writes that fan-based subtitling communities have “played a role in the circumvention of slow—or sometimes nonexistent—exportation and localization of media products.”<sup>14</sup> He concludes that the issue of pricing is fundamental to the issue of film piracy, pitting the average price of an official product and a pirate copy against the comparative purchasing power of various nations and exposing distribution gaps, unequal urban clusters of legitimate vendors, and a severe lack of low-cost models to combat the market for media piracy. Evidenced both in the ways Pakistani films traverse the informational landscape and the scars of production and circulation that proliferate on the surface of the material, the informal visual economy has become a way of subverting the re-colonizing mission of the organizing architecture of global trade.

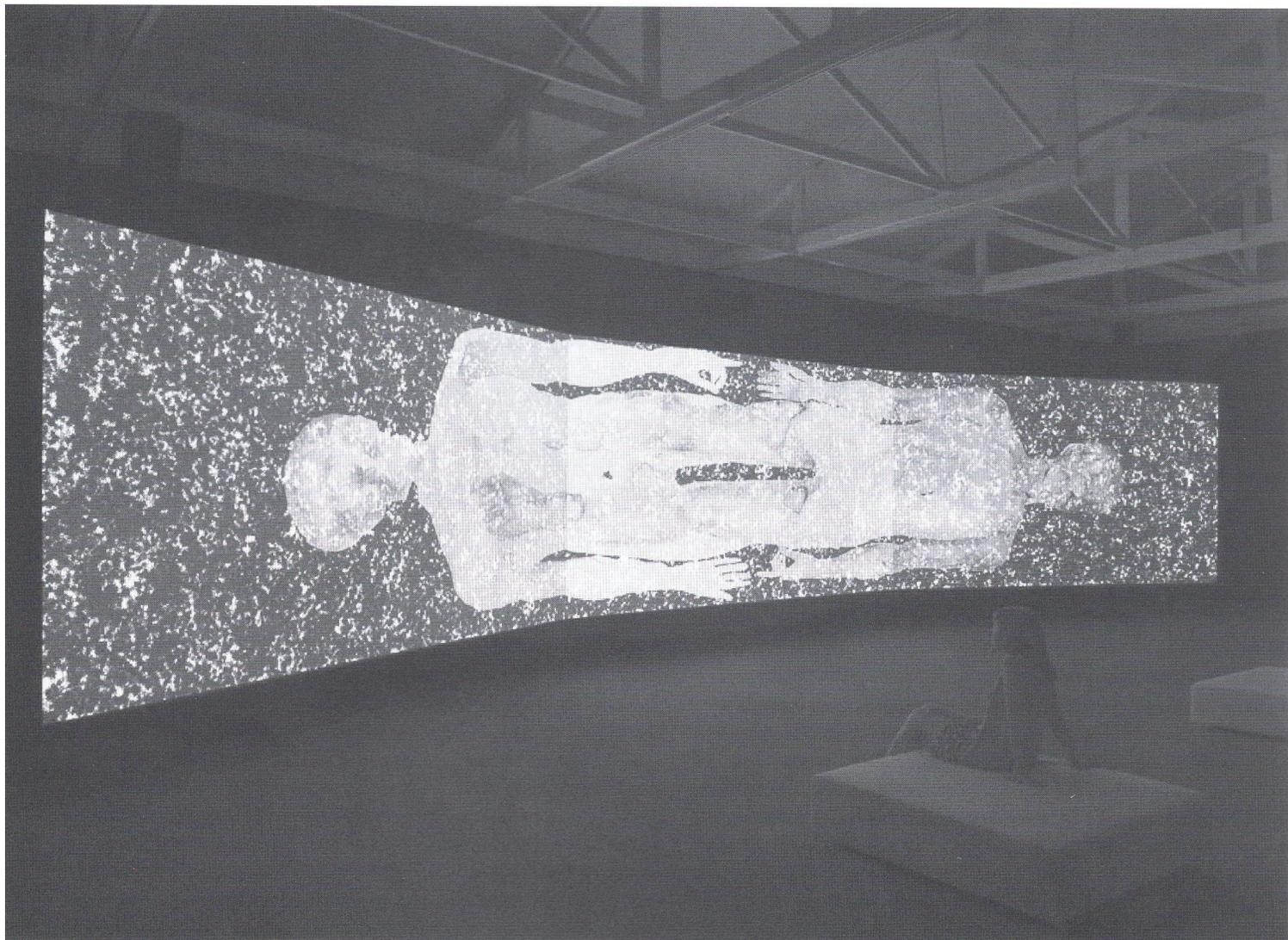


Screenshot of *Umar Marvi* (1956) by Shaikh Hassan, as seen on YouTube

#### THE NEW UNDERWORLD ORDER: PIRATE DESTRUCTION CEREMONIES

The archive of a future Pakistani cinema must not only guard against the danger of degradation but the threat of war, secession, fundamentalist militant groups, and, in the digital age, data loss. The acquisition process of many other such surrogate, spontaneous, or informal archives has frequently been obstructed by punitive measures and destructive iconoclasm. Following the collapse of the European imperial projects and the rise of multilateral trade empires, copyright has been transformed into one of the primary mediators of social power. The vacuum left by the Empire Fairs and Colonial Exhibitions in Britain and France in the first decades of the twentieth century—the colonial siblings to the Grand Exhibitions of technological utopianism—has been filled by World Intellectual Property Day, just as the triangular trade routes of cotton, tobacco, and slaves have been replaced by the unilateral trade agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO). One of the key tactics of public outreach in countries threatened with inclusion on the Special 301 Watch List is the public destruction of pirated media carriers. In these usually bombastic shows of quasi-military punishment, profane media artifacts are bulldozed, crushed with tanks, or beaten by uniformed personnel. When transcoded artifacts mobilized by the pirate film trade remain the earliest existing carrier of most pre-VHS era films, their confiscation and destruction is tantamount to the burning of the future holdings of a state or vernacular archive.

In the upsurge in popularity of these destruction ceremonies, we are witnessing a community-building ritual of globalization, a yearning for a sense of “*communitas*,”<sup>15</sup> cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s term for an experience of heightened sociality that transcends social structure and brings the ritual participant under the authority of the community. Ceremonial destruction of



Installation view of *Parallax* (2013) by Shahzia Sikander, at SPACE: The Linda Pace Foundation, San Antonio; courtesy Sikander Studio

pirated media is both an offering (an inanimate object consumed to resolve conflict) and a sacrifice (the ritualized ending of an organic being or process). In this case, it is that of media—or digital migration. In all cultures, what is sacrificed or consumed is of prime economic importance. As such, destruction ceremonies are the emblems of a sedentary sector—referencing both the transition from nomadic life to permanent settlement and the system of spatial flows—of the globalized world that serves to interrupt unauthorized distribution (of both media and of bodies) to make impermeable the borders of culture and of countries.

Cultural anthropologist Brian Larkin's seminal study on the pirate video trade in Nigeria identified media piracy as one of the governing infrastructures of globalization. Instead of an illicit trajectory of commodities that should be destroyed "outside the channels of commerce,"<sup>16</sup> Larkin defines the circulation of pirated film as an organizing network of postcolonial modernity, with its own aesthetic of materiality, "marked by blurred images and

distorted sound, creating a material screen that filters audiences' engagement with media technologies and their senses of time, speed, space, and contemporaneity."<sup>17</sup> The scrolling adverts for media outlets, complete with addresses and telephone numbers, their accomplished dubbing works, and subtitles superimposed upon older subtitles give the shifting, nomadic surfaces of pirated film what Larkin calls "a visible inscription of the routes of media piracy."<sup>18</sup> Despite its distorted visual economy, the faults and fissures of pirated films are celebrated, even emphasized, in order to repair the previous imbalance between colonizer and subject, center and periphery, wherein modern technology was revered as the avatar of colonial civilization. In the same spirit of independence and self-determination that disentangled subject peoples from European mandates and protectorates, recurrent technological breakdown is remedied by perpetual social and technological process distinguished by "repair as a cultural mode of existence."<sup>19</sup>

## MEMORABILIA ARCHIVES, VERNACULAR MINIATURES, AND THE SPECTER OF A PRESTIGE CINEMA

Accompanying the civilizing mission of the imperial project, colonial image-work such as cartography, the refinement of optical devices, and archiving was often ancillary to the demarcation and administration of cultural space. Equally, in the present day, resolution and image enhancement are the key determiners of quality that establishes a global class hierarchy of images. Pakistan's case is unique: for better or worse, the formal visual economy of the troubled state has been unable or unwilling to inherit and apply the tradition of information acquisition and storage of moving image media.

As the disintegration of the British and French empires entered their final phases, Mostafa Rejai and Cynthia H. Enloe conducted a fascinating study on the role of nationalism in stabilizing and integrating the ethnic divisions that were becoming visible in newly established postcolonial entities. Authored in 1969, just two years before the traumatic second partition of the fledgling Pakistani state, "Nation-States and State-Nations" traces the trajectory of the formation of national identity, usually a process that predates by some considerable degree the international recognition of a cohesive political entity.<sup>20</sup> With cultural power confined to the command center of Lahore and the Punjab, and given the hegemony of spoken Urdu as the dictated tongue of the Muslim subcontinent and the inheritance and entanglement of censorship and distribution left over from the British government, authorship of visual media was inexorably interwoven into the militarized process of nation-building. While Rejai and Enloe describe this process of nation building as "formative nationalism," and the process of nation aggrandizing as "prestige nationalism,"<sup>21</sup> appropriate to this essay would be an extension of their vocabulary to the visual economy of pirate media and national cinema. "Formative cinema," like the formative diaspora of Pakistan's third partition, is expressed as a historical process of becoming, a liminality that declines the inheritance of colonial tradition in favor of repair as a cultural mode of existence. Conversely, the governmental and institutional urge for a "prestige" cinema has frequently prevailed. Seven decades of attempting to ferment national unity has been reduced to a series of heavy-handed grabs at Turner's "communitas," as evidenced in Pakistani cinema between partition and the age of video, the studio and distribution systems that forestalled the institutionalizing of an archival consciousness, and the nationwide ban on YouTube.

Contemporary Pakistani artists have responded to these nomadic images of an aborted imagined community in a number of ways. Postcolonial Pakistan has suffered a peripatetic, informal organization of fields of vision that has resulted in a migratory urge rather than an archival one. This itinerant impulse is evidenced in the depthless migration of the surfaces of the Black Market Archive, but is also manifested in the labor-intensive works of artists such as Shahzia Sikander and Imran Qureshi. Sikander's hand-drawn, multi-channel video installations engender order, extract abstract dissonance, and impose disorientation through a measured displacement of scale. Her 2013 installation *Parallax* (a three-channel

HD digital animation) animates the static and oscillating memories of colonial control and maritime trade along the cultural and political borderlines of the Strait of Hormuz. But the shifting surfaces of *Parallax* are anything but depthless. Originally created for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial in 2013, they are topographic embodiments of long-distance mental travel, created from journeys the artist took around the Emirati desert and the crumbling architectonics of the United Arab Emirates' first construction boom.

In one instance, Sikander visited a dilapidated cinema in Khor Fakkan, finding encapsulated within it her fascination with the slow disintegration of symbolic forms. A sole migrant worker from Pakistan guarded the cinema, itself a monument to an earlier wave of construction in the UAE, and had even worked on its initial construction. Perhaps due to her highly wrought, labor-intensive works, Sikander's output reflects the toil of migrant laborers, and her dialogue with her compatriot revealed that the cinema was originally designed by architects from Karachi, who modeled it on the architecture of Pakistani cinemas in the golden age of film production in the 1960s and '70s. The guard, who had lived there for thirty-six years, was a remnant of a time when Sharjah looked to Karachi for its model. Yet, like all of Sikander's video works, these symbolic trade routes and spheres of influence crumble and fragment into shards, revealing the visible debris of the entanglements of cultural treasures and technological subjugation. Like her murals and installations, her video work is built in layers, a visible palimpsest that emphasizes an ongoing transformation of political realities. Built using vernacular images and sound, Sikander's open-ended layering of postcolonial image-work is comparable to the informal visual economy of the Black Market Archive. Encapsulating the visual pleasures associated with the textual patina of what Steyerl would describe as the "pristine visuality"<sup>22</sup> that dominates the higher echelons of the class hierarchization of images, Sikander's kaleidoscopic terrain of luscious textures are in stark contrast to the "poor image." Along a trade route of transformation, mutability, and displacement, there are moments when the image is wiped away, revealing its constituent parts. It is left to the soundtrack to reflect the lived reality and interocularity of contemporary cultural commodities in Pakistan, by littering spoken Arabic in the Egyptian standard with the vernacular, to create a fog of intelligibility akin to the superimposed grids and layered subtitles of appropriated pirate watermarks. These fluctuations in intelligibility lend ambiguity to the conversation being broached, underpinned by a nonverbal disjunction of the effaced narrative.

Sikander emerged as one of a group of artists who studied miniature painting at the National College of Arts in Lahore in the 1990s, alongside Qureshi and Aysha Khalid. This Indo-Persian art form littered the margins of ancient manuscripts, and it is this mutual coexistence of narrative and typography that Sikander intermingles with her pristine morphology. Both Qureshi and Sikander deal in contested geographic spaces and "anarchival" impulses, comparable to the historical space of the nonexistent Pakistani film archive, where linguistic hegemony has overridden the fragile process of formative nationalism. Qureshi



Still from *Disco* (2010) by Raed Yassin; courtesy Kalfayan Galleries, Athens and Thessaloniki

uses the form of miniature painting, dating from a time when the Mughal Muslim minority ruled a Hindu majority India, to reverse-engineer the elemental images of a lionized iconography, that has, tinged by nostalgia, been revalorized as a formative expression of a subcontinental Islamic golden age.

Qureshi's precolonial memorabilia and Sikander's colonial trade routes, cleaved and reimagined on a flat spatial plane, take us back to the memorabilia holdings of contemporary Pakistani film culture. In *Whose Gaze Is It Anyway?*, the recent exhibition at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) accompanying the 2014 Safar Film Festival of Arab Cinema, the Arab pop and cinema memorabilia archives of Abboudi Bou Jaoudeh were presented alongside work by artists Sophia Al-Maria, Maha Maamoun, and Raed Yassin. The result was a contemporary history of Arab cinema expressed through purely textual, extra-filmic matter, the ephemera of an era of expressive iconography that cloaked its sexualized themes behind a

veil of Occidentalism. Film memorabilia takes the viewer beyond any question of narrative and surface quality; whether the film is good or bad; or whether it still looks crisp or has been lost to transmutation. The untainted avatar of film ephemera has managed to remain outside of state or industry archives, and within the realm of its perpetual public. Raed Yassin's *Disco* (2010), a single-channel video work that accompanied the exhibition, transmits the story of Yassin's father's youth and fervent love of disco, and projects it upon the varying afterimages of a slowed-down club scene in a 1970s Arabic film. Centrally, the film recounts and embodies the significance of the artist's father having been offered a place in an Egyptian horror film and thus escaping the approaching war in Lebanon, effectively merging reality and fiction through the presence of the bit-part actor as adoptive father. *Disco* brings to the forefront the idea of the surrogate embodied in the interchangeability of acting roles, and thus labor, within the context of an exhibition of extra-filmic debris.

The National Film Archive of India was founded on the personal collection of cineastes such as Harish S. Booch, while Pakistan's cinephilic collections, the Guddu Film Archive, the encyclopedic and optimistically named Motion Picture Archive of Pakistan, and the Citizens Archive of Pakistan consist entirely of memorabilia. Factoring in the certainty of degradation or misplacement of the original carrier, dedicated cineastes, it seems, have shifted their focus to the debris of cinematic labor, to ephemera; to the packaging rather than the commodity, as if the keepsakes of the built space of cinema might somehow act as surrogates for the experience of cinema-going itself.

## MEDIA MIGRATION AND THE MIGRATORY SURFACES OF MEDIA PIRACY

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin discusses the pangs of nostalgia that embody an urge to return to an origin of perceived unblemished innocence. This sadness, Benjamin notes, is caused by the awareness that history is, was, and always will be written by the victors. In this procession of victorious rulers, the treasures of the vanquished are paraded. "They are called cultural treasures," which, while passing through historical changes in socioeconomic activity, one "cannot contemplate without horror . . . And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another."<sup>23</sup> Piracy, so often decried as barbarous, is merely an informal process of transmission. It is not the content or origin of Pakistani film piracy that renders it profane and culpable for public destruction and condemnation. In the same way as the document is not free from misuse, the photographic and cinematic surface becomes a shifting location, wherein tools have been downed, labor patterns shifted, and employers, like the personage of Elihu Yale, dismissed.

What has been lost in the transmission, the transmutation? And, if the loss is significant, has the work of art survived the transformation process? The watermarked, appropriated "poor image" of Pakistani cinema is a vessel of image dispersal, an affront to the inefficacy of digital migration, and an enlistment of the informal economy of repair and reconditioning. Most importantly, what remains is a stubborn faith in material image value during a hyperinflation of the visual currency.

Mobility and transmission, labor and urban infrastructure; these are the elemental characteristics of the contested space of Pakistani film history. In this essay, I have described the lossy and transcoded palimpsest of the Black Market Archive as a migratory surface. This vocabulary is not new. In his recent study *The Migrant Image* (2013), T. J. Demos reveals how internationally mobile lives, both lived and represented, have transformed contemporary art. By a process of deterritorialization and the reterritorializing of the notion of global citizenry, the false promises and hopes of a post-communist world order are laid bare by the innovative documentary practice of Demos's representative artists. In a similar spirit, Mieke Bal has attempted to introduce the term "migratory aesthetics" to refer to the ethical imperative to provide an aesthetic landscape wherein "mobility—the migratory—is not the despised exception but the

valued norm."<sup>24</sup> By questioning the role of aesthetics in a world in which the free movement of goods, labor, and capital are paramount, and when mobility becomes both a helpless fate and a key sign of affluence and agency, Bal provides a multifaceted approach to circuitous jolts of technological and aesthetic nomadism.

When we speak about migration we also refer to the transference en masse of material or digital data to the most modern carrier, as well as the "migration" from analog to digital radio, or of archival material. This migration is a technological post-colonizing image, a re-hierarchization of the visual when the former inequalities—state media, national archives, and regional devolution—have been more or less leveled, and when image power becomes resolution power. To control the "pristine visuality" of image resolution is to maintain the colonial hierarchy. The double meaning of the word *migration* gains currency when cultural products are inexorably tied to their material carrier. In an age of archival crisis and the entropy of media, the maintenance of the earliest existing carrier is of paramount importance. As such, forced migration has a lot in common with pirate distribution; a body threatened by war or entropy fleeing to the margins, the body trafficked by an organized criminal apparatus that exploits a need for equal human access to either safety or culture, and the rabid attempts of governments to curb their unsanctioned distribution and dispersal. These two migratory phenomena are set to be the issues of our neoliberal age, sparking human catastrophe and cultural deletion. One will be played out on the coastal borders of haven nations, the other on the porous surfaces of disputed media artifacts.

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NOTES 1. Dennis Kincaid, *British Social Life in India, 1608–1937* (London: Routledge, 1973), 65. 2. *Artist and Empire* will be on view at the Tate Britain, London, November 25, 2015–April 10, 2016. 3. Carol Breckenridge and Arjun Appadurai, "Public Modernity in India," in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 15. 4. Timothy P. A. Cooper, "Destruction Ceremonies as 21st Century Book Burning," *Rhizome*, June 19, 2014, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/jun/19/pyres-profane-and-profound-when-destruction-cultur>. 5. Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 10. 6. Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *e-flux 10* (November 2009), [www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image). 7. *Ibid.* 8. Cooper, "The Velocity, Intensity, and Spread of Pakistani Film Piracy," in *Archival Dissonance: Contemporary Visual Culture and Knowledge Production in the Middle East*, ed. Anthony Downey (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015). 9. "The Pakistan Archives," *Pakistan Archives: Biannual Journal of the National Archives of Pakistan 9* (1997): 5. 10. B. V. Dharap, "National Film Archive of India," in *70 Years of Indian Cinema (1913–1983)*, ed. T. M. Ramachandran and S. Sukmini (Bombay: Cinema India-International, 1985), 528. 11. Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October 110* (Fall 2004): 5. 12. Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 7. 13. Padma, "10 Theses on the Archive," April 2010, <http://pad.ma/texts/Padma>. 14. Joe Karaganis, "Rethinking Piracy," in *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies*, ed. Joe Karaganis (Social Science Research Council, 2011), 48, <http://piracy.americanassembly.org/the-report>. 15. See Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969). 16. As described in Article 46, *WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement*, 1994, 340. 17. Brian Larkin, "Degraded Images, Distorted Sounds: Nigerian Video and the Infrastructure of Piracy," *Public Culture 16*, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 290. 18. *Ibid.*, 296. 19. *Ibid.*, 306. 20. As with Benedict Anderson's identification "official nationalisms" that preceded spontaneous nationalist fervor. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 112. 21. Mostafa Rejai and Cynthia H. Enloe, "Nation-States and State-Nations," *International Studies Quarterly 13*, no. 2 (June 1969): 142. 22. Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image." 23. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 256. 24. Mieke Bal, "Lost in Space, Lost in the Library," in *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making*, ed. Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 33.