Precarious Viewing: Film & Television Consumption within *Jhuggis*

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Abstract

This paper examines the importance of film and television within jhuggi[77] settlements in Lahore—urban environments that lack even basic amenities such as water, electricity, and sanitation—including the practices and social formations that emerge around them. Lahore, as one of Pakistan's largest urban centers, has been sprawling for decades now, and transformations have occurred to the extent that individuals visiting Lahore after extended periods have failed to recognize parts of the city. Within what may be seen as favorable[78] growth, the emergence and eviction of these jhuggi settlements has been a constant feature. I posit that these communities, while often deprived of the most essential of facilities[79], and considered temporary[80] by virtue of their settlements' precarity, have developed ways to establish a sense of belonging within their designated yet prone to uprooting spaces. Moreover, I argue that film and television[81] play an integral role in this establishment. Through this research, screen viewership within these settlements was studied in great detail. Here I focus on the physical characteristics and infrastructure of these spaces, the residents' attitudes[82] towards media narratives, and their access to and consumption of kinds of media. This research also addresses the linguistic aspects of these films and the gendered dimensions of viewership practices. Overall this research seeks to unfold the meaning media narratives hold for these communities, and how screen narratives seep into their lived realities. By examining the entwinement of media narratives with their lives, this paper demonstrates the role film and television must play in creating a sense of belonging, community, aspiration and, most importantly, home in an otherwise precarious shanty setup.

Keywords: Precarity, Informal Settlements, Urban Ethnography, Reception Studies, Viewing Practices

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[77] Described as "shanty clusters" which can be further classified into five forms, the one I am employing being understood as "squatter settlement" (Gupta iii). I am using this definition for my work on shanties in Pakistan. These are tented structures, supported mostly by bamboo shoots and covered with layers of cloth/plastic as ceiling. Bricks are mostly missing in these structures, but a few un-cemented bricks may occasionally be seen serving as support for the walls and/or marking the cooking range. See Fig.1 and 2.

[78] Lahore's development has many pros and cons including better infrastructure, road networks and safety mechanisms, but is similarly facing environmental problems such as smog, traffic congestion (Pros and Cons of the Development of Lahore, 2018)

[79] The communities I have surveyed for the purposes of this work lack water, gas and electricity access.

[80] These communities have also been subject to evictions time and again by Lahore Development Authority officials, who grant them no notice prior to their evictions, nor offer alternate housing solutions. This information was gained through primary data collection.

[81] I understand film and television as forms of cultural technology. This understanding has been derived from Raymond Williams theorisation of television (1974: ix, 1-5)

[82] A consumption attitude is defined "as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular consumption-related entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly and Chaiken qtd.in Wang and Zhou, 2008: 240)

Watching Film in *Jhuggis*

"This computer was being thrown away, so I asked them[83] to give it to me. We watch cartoons on it," explained Mumtaz[84], who lives in a jhuggi, in an empty plot near Jallo[85], Lahore. Residing in an impermanent tented setup, with no means of stable income, no mobile phone and an electricity connection borrowed—with consent—from a neighboring house, a PC playing *Puss in Boots*[86] (dir. Chris Miller, DreamWorks Animation, 2011) was a perplexing site. Her husband pulled out an Adobe Player installation disk, and asked me to translate instructions, while her three children sat cross legged, heavily engrossed in a Punjabi-speaking Puss. "I've asked him to download material onto USBs for people through this computer to earn some money…"[87] Mumtaz continued. This case is not isolated, as many of my respondents have some kind of media technology available in their impoverished settlements. In this paper, I examine the nature of media consumption within such shanty settlements in Lahore. I study the existence of viewing technologies within these vulnerable spaces, and what the presence of these media entails for the inhabitants. Through this, I highlight what relationships are fostered between these communities and film technology.

Figure 5: The jhuggis at the Bhatta Chowk site. The area is littered with trash as the residents' primary occupation is trash collecting and recycling.

Be it by peers, family members or my respondents, I have personally heard many a times that film and television are middle to upper-class consumptions simply because of the luxury of having the monetary means, as well as the spare time, to watch it. However, as technology has become more affordable its reach has also grown, which is very different from what we were accustomed to perhaps a mere 10 years ago. The first mobile phone (launched in 1983) cost nearly $4000, while today one can be purchased for as low as $40 (PKR 5647)[88]; this is without having taken the second-hand market into account ("Cellphone Cost Comparison Timeline" 2017). Such cheap production has allowed for markets worldwide to be flooded with mobile phones, making mobile phones ubiquitous across multiple social stratifications. Pakistan has 154 million cellular subscribers, amongst whom 62 million are cellular data users, which indicates the expanse of this service ("Pakistan Telecommunications Authority: Telecom Indicators" 2019). Through this research, I will not only elucidate the existence of these devices

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[83] "Them" here are Mumtaz's extended kin, who live in a furnished house, and are relatively well off.

[84] Pseudonyms for all individuals have been used to protect identity.

[85] The neighborhood she was residing in at Jallo was surrounded by semi made, mostly unpainted/unfinished homes surrounding her tent. Hers was the only shanty in the plot. Animals such as buffalos, hens and dogs could be seen around.

[86] I have used the Punjabi dubbed version from Mumtaz's PC.

[87] This had come to her knowledge through her interaction with the neighborhood shops selling downloaded films/music/soap operas.

[88] Price quoted from primary research from Hafiz Centre, Lahore. The exchange rate used is from 10/05/19.

within these communities, but also attempt to trace how they acquired them in the first place, and whether they are being used for viewing films in addition to text/call-based communication.

It may then be plausible that within these communities, there is a presence of mobile users that may be going unaccounted for. Consequently, the kind of film consumption practices they engage in points to the importance of media consumption for a significant number[89] of the urban population, one that is more than often pushed to the margins. This research has implications for similar communities across the city, and for cities akin to Lahore.

The Audience Situated

As aforementioned, this study is grounded in the lives of jhuggi dwellers. My informants comprise mainly daily construction wage workers, trash collectors and domestic employees, who earn approximately PKR 200-500[90] per day. I have four main field sites[91]. They are as follows:

1) Emporium Mall[92]: Parallel to the mall, there is space that has been occupied by about 15-20 shanties. The number of households keeps changing as the site undergoes frequent evictions by government authorities. This serves as one of my four prime field sites.
2) Johar Town: Two major sites can be identified within this vicinity. The first is the recent residence of a few individuals displaced from an eviction at the Emporium Mall site. It rests directly opposite the mall. The second site here is the residence of the extended family members of the above-mentioned individuals. This site is a few streets away from the first Johar Town site. Since individuals living there do not have electricity access, they turn to this site for electricity-related needs. It is here that they watch TV.
3) Jallo Morr: Like Johar Town, this is also the recent residence of one family, namely Mumtaz's. Owing to Mumtaz's transient lifestyle, Jallo Morr can be subdivided into two more categories: Mumtaz's shanty (which she has now abandoned), and Mumtaz's rented home (which she is currently in, but is planning to move out).
4) Bhatta Chowk: This is my final site of research, and my largest. An estimated 200 people (all belonging to the same kinship group)[93] occupy this spot, and about 60-80 jhuggis are in place. The numbers here are based on estimates self-reported by the respondents.

 Oscar Lewis argues that amongst these impoverished squatter settlers, a distinct culture is prevalent (1). Oscar's work is a study of squatter settlements in Mexico, which are similar in outlay and structure to the ones I have studied. He argues that the culture these communities espouse has developed as a result of the government's failure to provide of basic needs (Lewis 4). It stems from a reaction to the widely discriminatory system of Western capitalism and is essential in coping with the "strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority" that those entrenched within this culture experience (Lewis 4-5).   By understanding their cultural context, I assess how media bring influences,

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[89] Lahore has been referred to as "a city of slums and shanties" as incalculably large numbers of people migrate to the city from rural areas and are unable to afford housing (Lahore a city of slums and shanties, 2017). Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and the provincial capital of Sindh, is estimated to have 40% of its residents in squatter settlements (Squatter Settlements, 2011).

[90] This is equivalent to $1.5 - $3.5 according to the exchange rate on 10/05/19.

[91] See also Table 1 and 2 in Appendix.

[92] This is an elitist mall and the second largest in Lahore and Pakistan.

[93] Kinship networks are crucial here, as they represent a sense of interconnectivity, belonging and shared occupations. At the Emporium Mall site, all of the men work as daily wage labourers at construction sites. At Bhatta Chowk, both men and women are part of the trash collecting and recycling economy.

apprehensions, and ambitions to their lives. Additionally, this understanding also familiarizes me with the reasons behind these communities' decision to continue to live under such circumstances—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—and how this in turn shaped their narrative, understanding of reality, and use of media. Davis asserts that the pull of the city is so strong, it acts almost like a magnetic force drawing everyone towards it; it is the aspiration to a better lifestyle and socio-economic conditions, coupled with the dire need to escape the despair of the village that entices many such impoverished rural communities to move to the city (10). I extend this understanding to film—a product whose consumption is heightened within the city[94]—as one that uniquely inspires this desire for upward social mobility.

The poverty of these communities is conspicuous. "Some days we eat, other days we go hungry. Sometimes we sacrifice our meals for our children. On other days, our children too sleep hungry. This is our life," lamented Farzana[95], as we sat together on a sunny winter morning. The children here can be seen running without shoes, with clothes that are often tattered. Even on the coldest of winter days, I have seen children in just a single layer of clothing, barefoot. Despite the circumstances, she urges me not to pity her conditions. This is not the first time I hear this from a community member. It has been stated time and again, from multiple people. "We are happy here," specified Amna[96]. The concerns they have both highlighted circulate around electricity, water, and in some instance's education for their children.

Judith Butler describes all humans as precarious beings. Through this precariousness, she argues, we expose ourselves to a degree of vulnerability which reduces the agency we feel we always exercise over ourselves: "The being of the body, to which this ontology refers, is one that is always given over to others, to norms, to social and political organizations that have developed historically to maximize precariousness for some, and minimize precariousness for others" (Butler 2-3). We are affected, and continue to be affected by those around us, especially by hegemonic socio-political structures. The extent and scale of these structures may, perhaps, never be absolutely realized, but it is crucial to acknowledge the power that their existence entails. Butler argues that these hegemonic structures in society constitute the imposition of a framework which seeks to reduce and alienate certain individuals. Thus, even though everyone is vulnerable, the extent of this vulnerability differs for different individuals. Some are inevitably at a greater risk than others. Not all lives are valued in the same fashion. This can be understood through her classification of precariousness and precarity; she asserts that while all lives are precarious, some are impacted by "a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic systems, and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death" (Butler 25).

Drawing upon this notion of precarity and precariousness, I argue that the inhabitants of jhuggis are not only precarious beings, like the rest of us, but are also subject to precarity. Through their mere presence on land that is not 'legitimately' theirs, they expose themselves to unprecedented risks and subjugation at the hands of socio-economic structures. Many of them lack national identity cards and are also often

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[94] My respondents claimed that while they sometimes had television and film access back in their village, with Azhar stating that even in this time and age VCRs were sold and consumed back in their villages, while being redundant in the city. Nearly all of my respondents claimed that their interaction with media narratives had increased with their settlement in the city.

[95] Farzana belongs to the Sheikh clan, residing near Emporium Mall. Communal ties are significant aspects of their lives; kinship networks shape their occupation, residence, mobility and freedom of choice.

[96] Amna belongs to the Bhatti clan, living near Bhatta Chowk. She told me how media personnel would sometimes venture into their homes, make their children remove shoes, and sometimes clothes, and take pictures of them. It is in this context, that she urged us not to be deceived by the squalor we may see around their homes but believe her when she claimed to be happy with her living conditions.

harassed at the hands of different public institutions[97]. By contextualizing this framework within jhuggis, I understand the place film and television occupies in their lives, and what contributions it makes in dealing with the insecurities by the inhabitants. For instance, Dickey explores how viewers may perceive connections between issues shown on screen and those faced in real life (89); she complicates this by arguing that films show nearly magical solutions to many of the problems encapsulating the urban poor, which provide an escape for them from their stressful realities (175). It is hence possible, that the audiences in question here are perhaps employing film as a means to deal with the vulnerabilities they experience on a regular basis.

Looking at Film Consumption

Stuart Hall argues that in media, things hardly ever carry innate meanings. Instead the viewers assign meaning to the clothes, gestures, sounds that they encounter (3-5). It is keeping this framework in mind that I delve into the world of screen viewing amongst the urban poor. One may be quick to assume that media narratives carry obvious meanings, and have predictable impacts on viewers, however I argue that viewers extract meanings differently, based on their unique life experiences. Similarly, Ganti argues that media consumption engenders subjectivity, precisely because "scholars regard film and television audiences as active, critical and reflective subjects" (7). She draws on the work of Sherry Ortner, who posits the viewer as a complex agent, one who feels, thinks, reflects and consequently manufactures meaning (33). Through my research, thus, I do not assume my subjects to be passive recipients. Friedman echoes Ganti and Ortner, as she states that audiences read media in creative ways not intended by the producers (603). Simplistic causal links cannot be drawn; instead

Figure 6: A cooking range outside a jhuggi at the Emporium Mall site. This depicts the arrangements they have made for themselves while residing in such uncertain settlements.

informants provide complex and varied interpretations of media texts. Consumption of any kind falls into the mode of repetition, of habituation (Appadurai 67). This mode, he argues, seeps into the consumer and forms a part of their personal and social identity (112). Thus, by pivoting consumption as a practice that penetrates into and influences the individual's identity, I delve into media consumption to understand what impact it generates on viewers. Moreover, as Appadurai suggests, the power of imagination is even more pronounced in today's day and age. People imagine a greater set of possibilities, a wider range of

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[97] I had to take one of informants (Mumtaz) who was pregnant to the nearest public hospital myself. She complained of being maltreated and sometimes not even catered to whenever she would go alone. Similarly, Mukhtar complained that the National Identification Office, Nadhra, would not facilitate him in acquiring an identification card for his father. Farzana complained that the nearest public school would not take her seriously when she went to inquire about admissions for her children and wanted me to accompany her there.

lives they can possibly live; these imaginations, he argues, can largely be credited to the greater availability and dissemination of mass media. Images do not directly generate new scenarios for being, rather "as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan word…" (Appadurai 53). This research thus understands how this influx of images permeates and influences the desires and realities of their respective audiences.

Shah asserts that fantasy narratives in popular Bombay cinema are linked to effects of poverty, and furthermore these affects link subjectivity with socio-political reality, where affect may be understood as a deeply ingrained or over learnt habit (133). Given India's socio-economic growth, the rags to riches narrative is extremely popular, as it demonstrates the fantasies held by a number of viewers (the majority being of the middle-class) aspiring to make a shift into the upper echelons of society (Shah 138-139). In *Deewar* (dir. Yash Chopra, 1975) for instance, she argues that the fear of pauperization is very real in Indian society. The humility felt by the characters is drawn from the stigma present in society, and its portrayal further enhances the fear of falling into that stratification in those that are not part of that group, while highlighting the ostracization experienced by manual laborers (Shah 140). The various interpretations and effects of a single film elicit different reactions from different groups of people. While viewers cannot simply be reduced to their economic standing, Shah's study displays how reception varies for distinct groups. Her argument aids substantially in assessing how distinctive communities and socio-economic groups variably digest film content. Moreover, this research is framed as an ethnographic receptive study, drawing upon Friedman's methodological paradigm. For her, ethnography is a tool to consider the relationships that may be effusing between the subject and object through film; she formulates how film and culture are both forms of situated practice infused with specific understandings of gender, sexuality, locality, and modernity (625). Through such an interactive approach, I examine what goes onto constitute meaning—and what kind is then constituted—amongst the different individuals that encounter film.

One LCD for an Entire Community

When speaking of those individuals who consume film in these communities, one broad assertion can be confidently made: film is almost always viewed together. Screens are limited within these setups, so families choose to use them together. Media choices and timings are decided while keeping this communal consumption in mind (I expound upon further in the subsequent sections).

Screen time is a moment for men, women, young and old all to come together. One TV screen serves the whole community (numbering nearly 50 individuals) at the Emporium Mall site. Here, prior to the eviction that took place in late December 2018, one of the community members Asma, informed me of an LCD within their jhuggi. The electricity connection used to power the TV was borrowed from the Emporium Mall (Asma informed me they had gotten permission and paid for it). "We watch (Indian) dramas every day at 1:30 in the afternoon, which get repeated at 10:30 at night. You should join us someday…" exclaimed Asma, while her sister-in-law Nazma and 20-year-old son Bilal nodded in unison. The way they responded to this indicated that all three were participants in drama viewing, which demonstrates the collectivity of the act. After the government authorities evicted them, they were coerced into finding alternate space to settle. A month later, they had returned to their Emporium Mall site again, which is where I met them. The LCD they cherished had been transported back to their village, to their uncle, since after the eviction and resettlement, they no longer had an electricity connection. They could also not afford for it to be damaged. The drama serial they religiously followed had been abandoned for a good number of months now.

"Do you remember the name of the drama you used to watch?", I inquired. "We called it the Gopi drama," replied Mehvish, Asma's 12-year-old daughter. They never knew the name but referred to the serial by the name of one of the protagonists. The attachment to the show was remembered through its lead characters. Curious to understand what exactly they watched, I pulled out my smartphone. This was not the first time they had seen my phone, as I would sometimes take pictures with the children, nor was it the first time these children were seeing a touchscreen phone. They huddled around me, nonetheless. I typed in '*Gopi Drama*' and found out that the name of the serial was *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* (dir. Pawan Kumar Marut, Star Maa, 2010-17). Excited children gathered around me and squealed in delight. On screen was the Gopi they had enjoyed watching and finally saw again.

The repeat of the drama at two different times of day was another crucial factor in understanding the placement of television within the community. As men would go off to work, mainly women and children of the household would watch the show in the morning, but the one at night would be a communal activity. Men, women, children, everyone would huddle together and watch the drama. However, Farzana stated that men would sometimes refrain from watching the drama and put on the news or other programs[98] instead. Bilal stated that they had a cable dish in place back then, and this would let them choose from a wide array of channels, including many Indian channels[99]. The choice of their film would thus also depend on what was provided by the local cable they had installed. Sometimes some channels would be present, at other times the government would impose stricter control, and they would be banned. This was because there were times when political tensions with India would surge and the available Indian channels (as well as some local news channels) would cease to be serviced. Nevertheless, whatever they would watch, would be done collectively; here they would sit, watch, discuss and relate the similarities or differences in visual experiences to their real-life ones.

Television Translated into Lived Experiences

Film and television often resonate with viewers in ways that are unique to their life experiences, and as Lila Abu-Lughod states "one cannot simply analyze the overt messages of plot and character" (117). It would thus be too reductionist an approach to simply assume the meaning film carries for its viewers; distinct life experiences differentiate how meaning is made from film. A multiplicity of text/subject relations is sprung up through these interactions (Mankekar 17). Mankekar, in her research on television and womanhood in India, writes about a young Sikh widow who would watch a TV show called *Ramayan* because it showed the trials of a good woman who was always misunderstood by her family, which was something she would connect to very profoundly (138). Similarly, Farzana (a member of the community at Emporium) explained to me that in *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* was a character named Kanjal, and another who was Kanjal's mother-in-law. "This is Kanjal and that her mother-in-law," she described, as she pointed towards Asma's daughter-in-law and Asma. There is constant bickering between the two in the drama, and these two (Asma and her daughter-in-law) were the same in real life, Farzana explained, half giggling. "We tease them this way," exclaimed Asma, and her daughter-in-law too smiled, guiltily, as if their secret had been revealed. They did not disagree with the statement that had been made about them.

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[98]I did not find out which movies they watched, but I plan on understanding this phenomenon from my later visits.

[99] Watching Indian film and television has been a controversial topic ever since partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Indian films have been banned time and again, with one being in place since February 2019 in Pakistan, and the longest from 1965-2005 ("Pakistan ban may hurt Pakistan more than India," 2019). Many Indian films including *Manto* (dir. Nandita Das, HP Studios, 2018) and *Padman* (dir. R Balki, Columbia Pictures, 2018) have also been banned in recent years, and Indian channels are also not available through all cable servers ("Pakistan Film Producers Association agrees with ban on Indian content" 2019).

At the same time, there is sensationalism that is attached to this screen viewing. There are acts that incite shock, and sometimes even horror. These are those scenes (which I elaborate upon in the next few sentences) that audiences come into contact with only via film, which leave them stunned. Moreover, in all my encounters, such scenes are nearly always narrated to me by children, which perhaps demonstrates the stronger impact these visuals have on children. While we were discussing the Gopi Drama, the children present had urged me to play clips for them, which I did. One particular scene they were very keen on re-watching was the one in which Gopi died—or rather, was shot. "*Gopi ko goli lag jaati hay aur phir woh mar jaati hay*" (A bullet hits her and then she dies), the children told me, the awe obvious in their voices. Similarly, Tahira, who uses her father Mehmood's smart phone at the Bhatta Chowk field site, recounted a video she had recently seen. A young girl had been thrown into a giant pressure cooker, she explained, partly amused, partly horrified. Upon asking how that was even possible, she solidified her statement by saying she had seen it with her own eyes and would show it to me too once her father returned. Her sisters added that they had also seen images of the Indian pilot, and the Indian plane shot down by the Pakistani army[100]. Everything was made available to them just by subscribing to a Rs.150 monthly internet package.

This differences between the world of technology and film versus their own was more pronounced when Jamila introduced me to her aunt, who named the children at birth in their community. I had commented on how beautiful the name of one of her nieces was, and before I knew it, I was greeting the woman who had pioneered these names. What was noteworthy in this encounter was how Jamila said "*Filmy naam rakhnay ka faida nahi*" (there is no benefit in keeping names from films), which demonstrated a negotiation between what was available via media and what they chose to incorporate within their lives. This also demonstrates how observers are not to be mistaken as passive recipients, as also mentioned earlier; rather they sift through the material that is available to them, and consciously extract meaning.

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Humming Melodies

"Music is 'like a language' insofar as it uses musical notes to communicate feelings and ideas, even if these are very abstract, and do not refer in any obvious way to the 'real world'. Music has been called 'the most noise conveying the least information'" (Hall 5). A significant outcome of the interaction of film and technology with these audiences is that they would use a lot of words from the languages they saw their films in. The children watching *Saath Nibhaana Saathiya* at the Emporium Mall site, had their speech dotted with marked Hindi vocabulary that they presumably had picked up from Indian dramas, but often times these audiences—especially the young—would also retain the music heard in these media. This interaction with music was not just limited to film exposure, but also included seemingly ordinary, yet significant things such as caller tunes[101].

Mariam lives at a 2-minute walk from the Emporium Mall site, which was also her previous abode (prior to the eviction). As I dialed her number and waited for her to answer, I noticed Mehvish, Asma's daughter humming the whole caller tune. She knew the song note by note. At Mariam's home, there was no TV. However, her sister-in-law did have one. It is there that Mariam would go with her children and the rest of her in-laws to watch TV. I requested to be taken too, and my request was met. Upon arrival, I was introduced to a chirpy 7-year-old girl called Shazia, who was Mariam's niece. Shazia not only told me

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[100] Tensions have recently heightened between India and Pakistan, with reports stating both countries being on the verge of another war ("Five Indian Soldiers killed as Pak Army retaliates across LoC" 2019). The Indian plane being shot was an eminent feature of these tensions.

[101] "This is a service that personalizes the audio that callers hear before a call is answered-replacing the traditional 'ring-ring" music tunes." ("Caller Tune FAQs" 2018)

about all her favorite shows and actors, one of which included a show called *Doraemon*[102]. I was familiar with it too, so discussed the characters with her; when I mentioned Jeeyan's[103] name, she excitedly exclaimed that he sang a song too. I nodded. She sung a portion of it for me, as we both smiled. I noticed a cassette player next to the television set too, which was used for playing Punjabi music.

At Mariam's abode, a speaker—seemingly out of order—was present. Electricity supply had been connected for a couple of days, which allowed the speaker to stir to life, and play felicitous music for her sister-in-law's wedding. "*Gaanay lagaye see, tay barra maza aya see*" (we played music and had a lot of fun), she told me. While visiting Jamila at Bhatta Chowk, I could hear a melody nearby. Her husband was lying on a charpoy next to her jhuggi, sunbathing whilst listening to music aloud on his mobile phone. Surrounded by litter, noisy children and multitudes of relatives, her husband lay enjoying his music, as if he did not have a care in the world. Music then perhaps, in these contexts, creates a realm that is beyond the one they normally inhibit. The language, emotion and sensation that is produced is one that is starkly different from the one they are normally accustomed to. It allows them to be transported, temporarily, into this domain while being physically present in their own; in other words, it births

Figure 7: This is the speaker from Mariam's jhuggi. Vestiges of her sister-in-law's wedding decorations can be seen in the back.

connections to places, moments and feelings that they otherwise would not be affiliated with. As Krishna Lewis suggests, listening to music brings forth an empathetic identification with the personhood of the maker and the listener (136). Thus, it perhaps allows the listeners to revive connections with film and television narratives they have been exposed to vis-à-vis these songs. Jeeyan's song primarily did this for Shazia.

"She's Beautiful"

"Media texts function as technologies of gender" (De Lauretis qtd.in Krinjen & Bauwel 139). In many cases, these communities admire and aspire to the notions of beauty shown in the media. In Mehmood's cousin Rehana's shanty, a string of magazine cut outs of women was on display. These women physically looked nothing like the ones I was interacting with in the community, nor were their dresses even remotely similar[104]. Yet they hung, high up, in her home. One of Rehana's daughters admired these women, and she had put these photos up. I had the chance to speak to her about them, and she explained how she found them beautiful, and so put them up to be appreciated and

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[102] I am not sure which episodes she used to watch, but I do know that they were a Hindi dub of the Japanese cartoon series.
[103] Jeeyan was one of the main characters of these series. As the best friend of the protagonist, he would often appear in each show, and sing a theme song that had been associated with him every time.
[104] Most of the community women were short, thin and dark skinned. The women on these posters were fair toned, curvy and had let their hair down. They were not covering their hair or bosoms in the way the women in this community did.

remembered. The depictions of femininity in media thus mold viewers' perceptions of beauty as well.

In Johar Town, 7-year-old Shazia had also said something similar. *Butt Badshah* (dir. Masood Butt, 2006), a Pakistani Punjabi production, was playing on her TV. I asked her if she had seen it before to which she replied in the negative. However, she knew the names of all the actors, and emphasized Saima (a well-known actress featured in the film). "*Is mei Saima bhee hay*" (Saima is in this too), she declared. While she was watching this film for the first time, it was not the first time she was encountering Saima. Shazia made it a point to demonstrate that Saima was not the only actor she knew of, as she went on to name popular Bollywood actors such as Akshay Kumar, Salman Khan and Kareena Kapoor. Something or the other had fascinated her in each one of these individuals, be it Salman Khan's heroic moves, or Akshay Kumar's punches. She was mesmerized by most of the women in media and these ranged from Mariam Nawaz[105] to Kareena Kapoor, Saima and others. There was one in the movie she called "*Kabhi Kabhi*" but whose name she could not recall. I took a guess and said "Kajol," another Bollywood actress. While my guess was not correct, Shazia was enraptured by her looks as well. Jamila, at Bhatta Chowk, was fascinated by late Bollywood actress Sridevi. "The shape of her eyes is beautiful," she explained to me. She went on to describe her clothes and how much she appreciated her dressing. While fashion trends were frowned upon by the community and seen as immodest to be integrated within their culture[106], women would covertly exhibit aspirations that had been shaped by media narratives.

Children are the most heavily impacted by these media—be they shocking images of plane crashes or Bollywood songs. Mehvish, Shazia and Tahira range in age from 7 to 14, and they have been the ones who have not only talked the most about film but also most enthusiastically. Marie Winn explains this phenomenon as a kind of 'sensory assault' on children, who are more susceptible to passively intaking the images they come into contact with (Winn 14). In comparison to adults, children are more likely to be unconsciously influenced by media texts.

No Film for Us

Although film and television are a regular part of this environment, not everyone is as enthusiastic a viewer as Shazia. Some of my informants also expressed apathy or ambivalence towards film. There are many who do not consume film; these can be divided into two further subcategories: 1) those who are unable to 2) those who would never express the desire to, especially when questioned individually. These include Mariam, who says that she never quite watches it alone. "*Laga hou tou dekh letay hain*" (if it is on, I watch it), she explained to me. Her sisters-in-law had mobile phones, "*Touch wala phone*," as she called it. They would frequent in watching various videos on it. "*Mujhe kabhi zarurat mehsus hee nahi howi*" (I have never felt the need), she went on as she revealed her thoughts towards owning mobile phones. Her tone was laced with slight objection and seemed as if she did not fully agree with her mother-in-law permitting her sisters-in-law to keep these phones[107]. This is discussed in detail below in the section on technology.

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[105] Prominent political figure and Pakistan's ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter.

[106] This was described by Azhar and his sisters who epitomised the traditional shalwar, kameez and dupatta as the best dress.

[107] Pakistani women are less likely to own mobile phones, especially those belonging to poorer socio-economic backgrounds (Dawn). Cultural reasons also factor in with poverty here, as for these women, the ownership of a mobile phone could mean engagement in all sorts of illicit relations outside of the home. It provides that space to access, so many women are barred from owning phones by their husbands, brothers or other male members of the household within these settings.

For some, screen technology simply does not feature in their lives; it is a luxury that they cannot afford to indulge in. These are those individuals who do not own a touch screen phone, or have no community member willing to share it with them. The entire Sheikh clan, after their LCD had been sent back to the village, now fall under this category. The majority of the Bhattis, who reside in my Bhatta Chowk field site, also face similar restrictions. However, a lack of electricity connection does not always hinder these individuals from charging their phones in their localities. Phones are connected to rickshaw or truck batteries, which are nearly always present in the vicinity, and charged. Mumtaz's husband for example, when they were living near Emporium Mall, would go get his phone charged from a nearby shop. They were not part of the larger community[108] so did not share their resources with them. She did not have a PC at this point in time, and her phone wasn't equipped enough to display video, so she would not use it. The issue thus is not the lack of an electricity connection, it is the inability to own a touch screen phone, a gadget financially out of reach for most here.

Those who choose not to watch film and television, despite having access, included Jamila and her siblings at Bhatta Chowk. When asked about film, there was a notable distaste in their response, which hinted at some degree of apprehension, contempt and desire to separate themselves from those who consumed it. "*Hum nahi dekhtay, woh udher kuch logon ke paas touch phone hay, woh dekhtay hon gay,*" (We do not watch them, over there are some people who own a touch screen phone, perhaps they watch them), she stated as she pointed towards a shanty not too far off from hers. The unease could be a result of her inability yet latent desire to engage in the act of media viewing, or just a shunning of those that frequented in it. Sensing her worry, I did not probe further into the possible reasons, but from her tone it seemed that an unfulfilled, shrouded desire to also own these gadgets was present. From my interactions later on, she and her husband told me how they wished to own a car, a house and all the luxuries that money could buy—a smartphone was one of them.

Lived Technologies

Film is one of the many media that have seeped into the lives of these communities. Purnima Mankekar describes "complex, sometimes unpredictable links" between viewers' life experiences and the images they are absorbing. Mankekar's observation holds true for the visits I have made to my respondents as well. Because of limitations to access, the importance of narrative media in these communities must be understood as imbricated within technology and infrastructure. Infrastructure maybe described as "the structural condition of the movement of commodities, whether they are waste, energy or information" (Larkin 218). The infrastructure within these settlements is so weakly developed, that often

Figure 8: The iron that was now non-functional lies here. A close-up of the wedding decorations can be seen.

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[108] By larger community, I mean the middle class neighbourhood surrounding this communal setup. As the jhuggi dwellers were not exactly legally settled in the area, nor did they have proper infrastructural arrangements, they did not enjoy the same access to utilities as the rest of the neighbourhood.

new ways of negotiating with technologies must be developed. For example, Azhar described how most people in the community could not afford touchscreen phones. He had therefore maneuvered a way around this by devising a device that costed PKR 600-700[109] and when connected to ordinary (non-smart) phones would play video similarly. "*Yeh meinay banaya hay, barray barray log bhee nahi samajh payen gay*" (I have made this, even experts will not be able to understand it), he stated proudly.

In Mariam's case, the speaker[110] that rested next to the charpoy where we sat had been acquired for her sister-in-law's wedding. Mariam's family did not have electricity access in their home because they could not afford the monthly bill. However, during her sister-in-law's wedding festivities, they were permitted by the bank next door to use their electricity supply free of cost for the time being. So along with the speaker, they had also brought in an iron[111]. Both were necessary items for the wedding, she elaborated. They played jubilant music on the speaker and used the iron to press their wedding attire. Technology and infrastructure were central to the creation of certain atmospheres during that time frame; liminal, but nevertheless pivotal.

Similarly, radio has played an integral role in the lives of most of my informants. It is through the radio—easily accessible via their mobile phones—that they can be up to date with the news, which they reported is mainly local and concerned with the government. Most of them would nearly always have heard the local news and are well informed about geo-political happenings. However, they would take this information with a pinch of salt, mostly adding "*Suna hay*," (So I've heard), or "*Pata nahi ab*," (I don't know now) at the beginning or end of their sentences. According to them, their lives would not alter much with the changes in political climate[112], nor were they too concerned unless something specifically regarding the poor had been stated in the media, which was rare. Nevertheless, they would turn to the radio to keep up with the political happenings, and some of them also to listen to music. Those with smartphones would have gone a step further, and have seen videos of the news being discussed, for example Tahira and her sisters who had seen the crashed Indian jet from the recent crossfire[113] between Pakistan and India.

At other times, the same technology is used to mitigate doubt over certain issues. Mariam's skepticism over her sisters-in-law owning phones stems from her witnessing her newly married sister-in-law, Ifra, use her phone to contact an old lover. "*Hum nay net pe tasveerain dekhi hain*" (We have seen his photos on the internet), she whispered. Their skepticism regarding her affair had been confirmed through the images they found of him online. The family was sure it was him, since they also knew his number. This later embroiled into a separation between the two spouses, and feuds between (and within) their respective families. Such uses of technology, I believe, offer new ways of negotiating the numerous tensions that may otherwise be prolonged or go unresolved.

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[109] This equals $ 0.42-0 $0.5 according to the exchange rate on 10/05/19.

[110] See Fig. 3.

[111] See Fig.4.

[112] Major changes such as elections, and governmental changes did impact their lives. The current Pakistan Tehreek -e Insaf government was frowned upon by most of these community members, since this government had reduced construction initiatives in comparison to the former Pakistan Muslim League - N establishment. These construction projects were the main source of employment for many of them. However, apart from such major shifts, political changes did not really make a difference in their lives.

[113] As Footnote 23 explains, tensions were created between Pakistan and India in February 2019, in which both sides engaged in cross border violations. Further details regarding this matter can be found on Dawn, BBC, Al Jazeera.

A Sense of Support through Piracy

"*Mujhe tassili hogee keh meray bachay khush hain,*" (I will be satisfied thinking my children are happy), Mumtaz explained as we discussed the recent addition of the PC in her life. As mentioned earlier, this PC was screening Puss in Boots upon my first visit to her new shanty. On my second, she had moved into a rented room where again the PC was in place. She claimed to have acquired a decent sum through a donation, which is why she could now afford this living quarter. This time her son was using a keyboard to play Grand Theft Auto[114] on it. These media were obviously pirated. Mumtaz had acquired them from a nearby shop for a small sum of money (PKR 10 or 20[115]) while the original version costs a few thousand rupees. I looked outside and saw a broken CD lying at her doorstep too. The purchases were frequent[116].

Mumtaz had folders upon folders on her computer's hard drive loaded with films, soap operas, music videos and cartoons. Most of them were either in Punjabi or Hindi and included Indian comedy shows, soap operas named *Allah De Nargas* and *Chandni Bazar* and other obscure files simply named "drama/*darama*". A collection of Noor Jahan's[117] albums was present too. The range of films was expansive and speaks of the great possibilities that piracy opens in the lives of those who would otherwise never have been able to purchase film. Brian Larkin argues that piracy represents the potential for technologies of reproduction, when shorn away from the legal frameworks that inhibit their circulation (217). Lobato further substantiates this by arguing that informal supply of media allows for the further creation of demand for content that would otherwise not have been available (91). Audiences thus consume media that they normally would not have been able to.

Today a very real technological divide is in place. Certain regions are significantly disadvantaged in terms of their ownership of technology, an aspect Bridget Wessels credits to the disparate levels infrastructure present in different regions. This hinders them from linking into the global media worlds (18). It is in such weak infrastructural arrangements that piracy allows access to media narratives that may otherwise not have been experienced. This availability occurs at the expense of the quality of these films, for none of the material that Mumtaz had was top quality. Some files were corrupt and would not open, something that Larkin mentions as an outcome of constant copying in the regime of reproduction (218). Nevertheless, the social consequence of this piracy cannot go unacknowledged. These films kept her busy when no one else was around to share her sorrows. They brightened up her day during extremely challenging times and gave her reason to smile. Larkin describes this as pirate infrastructure that organizes new modes of sensory perception and time (219). These pirated media thus inspired ways of dealing with different tensions within her life; in the absence of piracy, these options would remain unavailable to Mumtaz.

Mumtaz continued explaining that the PC yielded her some relief even while doing her household chores. Given that she was sustaining a family of five children single-handedly, the PC allowed some room for her to perform certain tasks without constant interruption from her children. She planned on seeking employment in the near future. With the PC here, she would experience some relief. Her children would remain occupied, and while away, she would know that they were happy back home

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[114]Action - Adventure video game first released in 1997. I could not discern which version it was.

[115] This equals $ 0.071 - $0.14 according to the exchange rate on 10/05/2019.

[116] Mumtaz described how just yesterday she had bought more material, and every now and then her husband would make some purchases to add to their list. It was very cheap so they could afford it.

[117]Popular Pakistani singer who was also known as Malka-e-Taranum (1926-2000).

Solar-Powered Punjabi Videos

In the absence of electricity, about five to six households at the Bhatta Chowk site had attached solar panels[118] instead. "*Bus 2-3 maheenay howay hain*" (it has just been 2-3 months), replied Jamal, when I inquired about the installation time of the said panels. Most of the members of this community lived without electricity and had been doing so for an extensive period of years now. These solar panels were a recent addition, something they referred to as *dhoop plate* (sunlight plate). These solar panels would power fans, bulbs and television screens that they had recently purchased.

As described above, I was curious about the source of melodies I heard upon visiting Jamila. Jamal, her husband, was pointed towards as the person responsible. He was soon summoned and once he arrived, he escorted the two of us into a neighboring jhuggi that belonged to his sister. Here, on the wall, a shrouded television screen was present.[119] The LCD was connected to a pair of batteries, which were charged through the aforementioned solar panels. As it stirred to life, a series of contemporary Punjabi music videos played. These seemed diasporic in nature from their foreign setting and South Asian actors, comprised lyrics such as "*Dil kerda sojaan teriyaan baahaan chay*" (the heart longs to sleep in your arms), and mostly revolved around tales of love and ache. The aforementioned lyric was from Jamal's favorite music video, which he liked because he appreciated the theme of love and yearning that framed it. When speaking of music, Krishna Lewis asserts that it listeners hear the artists as people, and that is primarily what orders connections between the two (2014:136). It is hence possible that these music videos served a similar purpose for Jamal, as he could sense connections between his personal emotions and those of the artists.

Language here was key too. While he did not know the names of these music videos, and when asked how he got access to content of his liking while being unable to remember he names, he said, "*Mei card mei dalwatay waqt unko bata deta hoon keh Punjabi gaanay daliyay ga. Yehi zyada like kerta hoon.*" (While the [shop keepers] download items onto my [memory] card, I ask them to download Punjabi music for me. This is what I like). Punjabi, being this community's native language, was what Jamal understood best and preferred whenever accessing media content.

As the television screen showed different videos, Jamal's wife, sisters, cousins and a couple of nieces and nephews all sat engrossed in the film. While most did not recall names of movies, they were well versed in the actors' names. Aamir Khan was a favorite because he would come off as humble on screen, and that was something they could relate to. Salman Khan

Figure 9: The shrouded LCD screen.

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[118] It may be surprising to see pricy items such as solar panels in such a setting, and I have to admit that I was indeed shocked myself. However, a number of community members had made this investment. I did not probe into details of cost and arrangement of funds, as I did not deem it fit to do so at that point.
[119] See Fig. 5.

was admired by the women but detested by the men, surprisingly for the same reason—exposing his body. The women loved the display of skin, but the men felt he was showing off. The children here enjoyed Indian Nickelodeon and Pogo productions such as *Motu Patlu* (dir. Suhas D Kadav, 2012) and *Chota Bheem* (dir. Rajiv Chilaka, 2008). These cartoon characters engaged in different shenanigans, would defeat their enemies, and go on different adventures which excited the children thoroughly. Jamal also argued film often portrayed issues they could relate to, but at other times, instances which could only happen in film were shown. Mankekar describes how one of her respondents' personal experiences colored her understanding of her favorite narratives, where the tragedies and conflicts on screen were compared to those in her own life. This was customary of numerous women interviewed by Mankekar (22). Similar reasoning may be applied to the media narratives resonating most strongly with the realities of these individuals.

Simultaneous to Jamal's account, Azhar, also present within this community, argued that back when his family had an electricity connection (he did not have solar plates like Jamal now), he would bring in Punjabi films from the store nearby—albeit always Pakistani. Never would he indulge in "Sikh" or "Indian" entertainment media, instead would ensure that all material was Pakistani. Sultan Rahi[120] was amongst his favorite actors. While his younger sister Tahira did secretly enjoy Indian films, she was never allowed to consume them by her brother. This preference over language and a particular kind of national culture is a meaning making process (Hall 5). Whereas for Jamal and his immediate family, the media connection they made was mainly based on shared language (Punjabi) and a regional sub-continental identity, for Azhar it was more precise. Media content that was Punjabi and Pakistani was the only one that was suitable. By filtering through media narrative categories actively, specific ideas were extrapolated and connected to their own contexts to create relevance.

Mankekar argues that television also blurs the boundaries of the family "by allowing viewers to connect with larger collectivities such as community and nation" (1999:101). Tying together Mankekar and Hall's arguments exhibits that screen narratives translate into the lived realities of the watchers, who then imagine themselves as part of a collective; be it the subcontinent where like Jamal they would indulge in Indian entertainment media, or be it Punjab, Pakistan, where like Azhar they would only view Pakistani Punjabi production. Cultural connections play a huge role, one that Larkin too highlights when talking of the success of Indian films in Kano, Nigeria. He quotes a respondent: "Their culture is the same," when trying to gauge the reasons behind the popularity of Indian productions (Larkins 2008: 165). Similarly, culture in these setups also plays a defining role as media choices are made and deciphered vis-à-vis cultural understanding.

Media Narratives—A Conclusion

This research explores the presence of film and television in the lives of jhuggi dwellers. Despite their visible impoverishment and heightened precariousness, these communities continued to foster strong connections with media narratives. Drawing beauty aspirations from films, indulging in festive music, and experiencing love, hate and pain through media narratives were all part of their consumption practices. Of course, for many, these experiences may not be unique; many people who utilize media technologies take up similar practices.

In the case of the jhuggi dwellers, however, while living in a community that is in many ways cordoned off by the larger urban community, the presence and strong effects of such technologies was a startling

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[120] 'Legendary' Punjabi actor [1938-1996] (Sevea 2014:131).

feature. In circumstances where even their tenure of settlement is uncertain, I found the continued presence of television and film in so many different forms as unanticipated and surprising. When first exposed to these communities, I never imagined LCD screens to be present within their tented homes. However, over the course of this work, it was evidenced that these screen technologies carried profound meaning for the communities in question, and often translated into varied cultural practices for them.

Bryan Pfaffenberger has argued that "Technology expresses an embedded social vision, and it engages us in what Marx would call a form of life, including political, social and symbolic aspects of social life. It has a legal dimension, it has a history, it entails a set of social relationships and it has meaning" (244). Film and television, as subsets of the technology Pfaffenberger talks about have similarly engendered new social relations within these groups. Connections to the state, the Punjabi language and local culture are traced through these media narratives. The effects are undeniable on all age groups; while children are the most influenced, adults—both women and men—do not escape its impact. Pirated material is ubiquitous here, and in the absence of adequate infrastructure, it has allowed for these communities to have access to media utilities they otherwise would never have experienced. While hegemonic media reflections may not be their realities, media narratives are prominent within their everyday lives—as aspects that provide some semblance of belonging and cultural connectivity within their shanty setups.

Appendix

Table 1: List of Fieldwork Sites

Community Site	Number of Visits	Time Duration	Community Population
Emporium Mall	8	2 hours	100
Johar Town	6	1 hour	40
Jallo Morr	6	1 hour	5
Bhatta Chowk	8	2 hours	200

Table 2: List of Respondents

Respondent	Site
Jamal	Bhatta Chowk
Azhar	Bhatta Chowk
Jamila (Jamal's wife)	Bhatta Chowk
Mehmood (Tahira's father)	Bhatta Chowk
Tahira	Bhatta Chowk
Rehana (Mehmood's cousin)	Bhatta Chowk
Amna	Bhatta Chowk
Mumtaz	Jallo Morr
Asma	Emporium Mall

Nazma (Asma's sister in law)	Emporium Mall
Bilal (Asma's son)	Emporium Mall
Farzana	Emporium Mall
Mehvish (Asma's daughter)	Emporium Mall
Mariam	Johar Town
Shazia	Johar Town
Ifra (Mariam's sister in law)	Johar Town

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