

Visualizing the Fractured Nation: Narratives of (Un)belonging in 21st-century Indian and South Korean Media

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This thesis examines popular Indian and South Korean film and television media which depicts the nation in the context of postcolonial division. Specifically, it looks closely at portrayals of anti-colonial struggle and partition, cross-border encounters, and revisionist nationalist narratives. This analysis illustrates the potential of such media to simultaneously gesture towards reconciliation between populations that have emerged as enemies despite their origins as one nation, and fail to exceed the limits of post-colonial, post-partition ideas of the nation-state and its formation of citizenship. The possibilities of these portrayals lie in their ability to both predict and produce public sentiment, as they provide an outlet for national discourse negotiating exclusion and belonging.

Dedication

For my grandparents, who lived through Partition, and my parents, who enabled me to write about it.

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Introduction

Released in 2014, *Ode to My Father* (Korean title *Kukcheshijang*) garnered lukewarm critical reviews, but massive popular success.¹ Based on the life of director Yoon Je-kyun's father, the film follows its hero Deok-soo from childhood, when his family flees North Korea during the war, becoming separated from his father and younger sister. As he grows up in the South, he works hard and dangerous jobs at home and overseas to support his mother and siblings, even volunteering for the Vietnam War. All his life, he holds on to his aunt's store in Busan, refusing to give up hope in his father's promise to meet them there—a promise which he never fulfills. Despite having little to no social media presence, the film was massively and unusually popular among viewers in their 40s—a dynamic ascribed by critics to the pull of nostalgia for a generation who felt moved by this depiction of the struggles faced by their now-elderly parents (Lim and Jin).

The nostalgia is clear in the film, as is a clear nationalism, despite Yoon's own claim that he “completely eliminated” his own political opinion in the movie, and only wanted to depict the struggles of his parents' generation (Lim and Jin). Still, although the film contains many moments clearly colored by the director's affection for his father, this connection to a real person's life also provides certain anchors that make the story more moving. The most powerful example of this is the film's depiction of KBS's 1983

¹ As of March 2020, it is the fourth highest grossing film of all time in the South Korean box office (KOBIS).

program *Finding Dispersed Families*, which ran for one season on the television station, broadcasting stories of people who lost their family members when the peninsula was divided; it eventually reunited 10,189 families out of 100,952 applicants and 53,536 aired interviews (KBS Archive). The sheer number of people holding signs detailing their missing family members' names and stories, and the real footage of the program interspersed with Deok-soo's interview, which results in him finding his younger sister, give the scenes a genuine and breathtaking power that the rest of the film lacks. I would argue that this yearning, which for so many went unfulfilled, goes deeper than the common understanding of nostalgia, and is one of the reasons for the massive success of this film with Korean audiences. There is an unhealed collective wound formed at the moment of division that this film dramatizes in a way that may be both painful and cathartic to watch.

In 2019, a Hindi-language remake of the film was released in India, titled *Bharat*, which garnered mixed to negative reviews but was commercially quite successful, although it did not reach the astronomic heights of its source material. The title itself is a clue as to why—Bharat is both the name of the hero, and literally means “India” in Hindi. The already overt nationalism in *Ode to My Father* becomes overwhelming in *Bharat*, and is also tied to the hero's chauvinistic masculinity, his unqualified victory in every situation, and a forced “cool” that causes the camera and everyone in the character's vicinity to turn in adoring, slow-motion circles around him in a way that shatters any semblance of credulity—and removes the story completely from the more restrained, if

idealized, treatment given by Yoon to his father's life. Nowhere is this more clear than in an anachronistic episode during Bharat's sojourn overseas as a sailor (which stands in for Deok-soo's time in Vietnam), in which the crew are suddenly overtaken by Somali pirates—in the 1970s—and are saved from certain death only by Bharat's appeal to the pirate's love of Bollywood movies. He manages to save the crew's lives and retrieve his stolen money by singing and dancing a few famous musical numbers. This is only one example of the ways in which *Bharat* entwines its inability to allow the hero to appear as anything less than the strongest, smartest, bravest, and most charismatic man in the room with a type of nationalism that celebrates the superiority of Indian work ethic, economic savvy, loyalty, bravery, and even their pop cultural productions. As his name implies, Bharat literally stands in for the nation in every impossible situation he faces and overcomes. That element is also strongly present, if to a lesser degree, in Deok-soo's character in *Ode to My Father*.

I begin with these two films because they encapsulate a mass reckoning with lived history across geographical regions that are not often considered together; yet they bear productive points of comparison despite their unique characteristics. The impulse to remake this story, and the popularity of both versions with audiences, points to a broader empathy between those affected by these two seismic partitions in 1945 and 1947 respectively. It illustrates how these differing fractures carry particular resonances across the years that echo similarly for those who carry these traumatic memories in their communities, and in the processes of building the nations and national identities that had

to be reconstituted in the wake of World War II. As Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson have observed, India and Korea were among the first cases of partition in the modern era, which differed from earlier divisions because they involved “the simultaneous devolution and division of power” by empires for the stated purpose of resolving ethnic or communal conflict (4). Resting on a concept of ethnic majorities and minorities that itself came to be only in the post-World War I nation-state order, the idea of partition “was invented in very particular circumstances—specifically, by empires trying to extend their lifespans via a carefully calibrated application of some of the characteristics of nation-states in their colonies—and applied by external actors to colonized spaces” (24). It was framed as a solution to violence, exported to many other regions, and continues to be seen as viable even seventy years later by many political scientists, despite the evidence that in fact “partition emerged as an essentially ad hoc response to local, imperial, and international conditions; was enacted by mass violence; and utterly failed to solve the problems it purported to address” (15-6). These divisions did not exist in a vacuum, though they are often studied that way, in an ahistorical forgetting of the deliberate imperial gestures that prompted them.

The elision of these founding motivations, and of the opposite effect of these bloody divisions to their stated intentions to minimize violence, has meant that a fundamental disconnect lies at the foundation of any understanding of the national identities of the countries that emerged from these roughly and abruptly inked borders, not only for the former imperial powers that enacted them, but for the people who built

these new nations in the postcolonial era. As these new citizens were thrust into a changed world, they had to immediately face the incredible carnage that accompanied this sudden displacement, and the complete reshaping of the internal fabrics of these nations in some of the most massive migrations human history has ever seen. Yet these movements have been naturalized in global political rhetoric by using the language of science and medicine, as though they are surgeries removing a sickness (Dubnov and Robson 4). Such rhetoric also justifies the pain and blood that goes along with such a procedure, dehumanizing the bodies that make up that nation by elevating the nation itself to a status deserving of protection and healing, regardless of the human cost.

Why does this matter in popular film portrayals of the nation, past and present, in India and South Korea? There is a simultaneous recognition of sameness and insistence on difference in the nationalisms that have emerged in these countries, and in their cross-border counterparts, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and North Korea. These parallel but conflicting attitudes are rooted in the unnatural process of division and the deliberate forgetting of history that is implicit in the effort to heal and move on from it, to create a whole nation-state from what was a unified whole—psychically if not physically—just yesterday. To borrow a term from Edward Said, in the post-partition era these contrapuntal impulses of identification and rejection live side by side but cannot truly be reconciled, resulting in “landscapes of long-term geopolitical deferral” (Dubnov and Robson 6). The geopolitical implications of the standoffs and military clashes between these nations, the rising and falling political tensions between neighbors that often have

the world holding its collective breath, have been studied at length. My thesis aims instead to analyze the emotional and cultural implications of the conflicting impulses of peace and enmity that play out in national meta-narratives through the medium of mainstream media, and how that reflects popular ideas about belonging, exclusion, and the identity of the nation. Particularly in the instances that these films and television shows depict the precarious acts of border crossings, one can observe “the rhetorical paradoxes surrounding them, which hinge on the antithetical principles of sameness and differences,” and the way that such encounters both challenge and are limited by the mutual alienation that is a constitutive element of citizenship to each nation (Suk-Young Kim 3, 6). I will look closely at works produced in the last two decades, which point to particular trends and continuities in the global context of 21st-century political and cultural realities and their reflections in media.²

Chapter 1 closely analyzes two films that depict anti-colonial resistance in pre-division India and Korea, *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* and *The Age of Shadows* respectively. I look at the ways in which each film retrospectively projects the current nation onto its post-1947 counterpart, in a dual temporality that places the colonial context within the frame of the 21-st century Indian or South Korean nation-state. These films function as ways to process the lingering trauma left by colonialism, while also

² My analysis is more of a close reading of the works themselves, and a discussion of the contexts from which they emerge, rather than audience reaction; beyond recognizing the commercial and cultural influence of these works, it is difficult to quantify the diverse multitudes of viewer opinions into anything resembling a trend.

reinforcing idealized notions about the hierarchy of belonging in the nation, and who has the agency to shape that social order. Both films attempt nuanced portrayals of collaboration and resistance, unity and discord within the indigenous population, but these efforts are limited by the framework of postcolonial nationalism they cannot fully escape.

Chapter 2 takes a close look at South Korean television depictions of cross-border interactions in narrative dramas *The King 2 Hearts* and *Crash Landing on You*, and variety show *2 Days and 1 Night*. I explore how these shows relate to Korean diasporas and claim them on behalf of the South Korean nation; how North-South fictional romances function as emotional gestures to show kinship-building that serves as a bridge to unite the two populations; and how for South Korean citizens, physically visiting the border and experiencing both sympathy and alienation there is a gesture of hope and mourning. There is an aspect of these programs that serves to heal and process the trauma and grief of endless division, but it exists within a narrow, nationalistic frame that limits the potential for revolutionary change—and yet the utility and resonance of these narratives must not be underestimated.

Chapter 3 explores cross-border relationships between Indians and Pakistanis in popular Indian films, particularly the North Indian Hindi-language industry globally recognized as Bollywood, which, as I will explain, often stands in for “Indianness.” I compare *Veer-Zaara* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, two stories of Pakistanis who come to India on spiritual pilgrimages, and form lifelong bonds with Indians along the way. These films

explicitly advocate for peace and understanding between the two nations' people by circumventing the apparatuses of the state, like the works in Chapter 2, but neither is able to escape the impulse toward Indian supremacy. I also discuss the film *Padmavaat*, one example of an increasingly common trend in Bollywood to create revisionist historical films which pit ancient Hindu heroes against stereotypically villainized Muslim invaders, dramatizations of the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism that has reshaped Indian politics and rewritten its history books to take the country in a troubling direction that has led to mob violence and the denial of citizenship rights targeting Muslims and other minority communities.

Media, especially popular media, is often dismissed as less immediately powerful than government policy, or the ravages of war and colonialism that led to these divisions in the first place. It is certainly arguable that often these narratives only reflect popular sentiment. The stories that touch nations on such a massive scale, and become globally influential to the point of eclipsing alternative or coequal narratives, do have great influence in this era of globalized technology that reifies the borders of the nation-state for bodies, but erases them to facilitate the passage of media. In that way, the media I discuss here both gesture toward unity born of a desire to reconcile artificially imposed enmities, and proscribe true reunion due to their essential rootedness in the post-division nation-state and all that entails.

1. The Age of Empire

Although the South Korean and Indian media landscapes differ in important ways, there has been a revival in both film industries of period pieces, especially those set in the colonial eras of each nation, but also going back further to a history so old that it has become mythical—in a way that is both typical of any nation’s historical narratives, and complicated by the legacy of partition. Each of these depictions, whether backgrounded by a setting that remains within living memory or one fading into legend, provides particular perspectives on the way that popular narratives of history intersect with the work of nation-building, the discontinuities inherent in framing a “whole” former national identity from the vantage point of a fractured current one, and postcolonial, post-partition ideas of who belongs inside the nation and who is excluded—whether in representations of the past, or in the lived reality of the present.

One of the ways subjects of postcolonial nations process the trauma and memories of the past, and simultaneously inscribe those historical narratives into a national identity, is through film representations of the colonial era. South Korea and India are prominent examples of this, as they both have vibrant, thriving film industries which have wrestled with the legacies of colonialism and partition starting immediately after independence. These film portrayals have reflected not only the limits—both technological and societal—of the times in which they were produced, but also shifting understandings of history, memory, and the nation as each society moved further from the colonial era, while continuing to grapple with its aftermath. This thesis focuses on a few films produced in the 21st century, exploring how they construct their respective fictionalized

portrayals of native resistance to colonial occupation, and the implications of these narratives for national identity and politics in both India and South Korea today.

1.1. Representations of the Colonial Era

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India, released in 2001, is set in 1893 in a village called Champaner, in the present-day province of Gujarat, and tells the fictional story of a high-stakes cricket match played between the soldiers of the area's British cantonment and a small group of villagers. Captain Russell, the villain of the piece, has cruelly announced that the villagers must pay double the usual year's *lagān*¹ (tax), in the midst of a severe drought. When they protest—and after Bhuvan, the hero, mocks cricket as a child's diversion much like the local game of *gillī-danda*—Russell declares that if they beat his men at cricket, they'll be forgiven the tax for three years, but if they lose, the entire province will pay triple. Since paying even double has the villagers facing the loss of the land that sustains them, they accept the bet even though they know nothing about the game. With the help of Captain Russell's sister, Elizabeth, who teaches them the rules, and by coming together despite their differences in religion and caste, the villagers eventually beat the British at their own game, resulting in the closing down of the local cantonment, and disgrace and exile for Captain Russell.

2016's *The Age of Shadows* does take an actual historical event as its starting point: a failed 1923 attempt² to smuggle bombs into colonial Kyōngsōng (present-day

¹ With the exceptions of those words that already have accepted English spellings, such as the titles of films and people's names, Hindi and Urdu words have been transliterated using the Hunterian romanization system.

² The movie was inspired by the book *1923nyōn kyōng-sōng-ūl twi-hūn-tūn sa-lam-tūl* 1923 [People Who Shook Kyōngsōng in 1923], by Kim Tongchin .

Seoul) by a group of independence fighters called the *Ŭiyŏltan* (Heroic Corps). The film, however, changes the names of the principals involved and gives them a very different ending (*NoCut News*). It centers around police captain Lee Jung-chool³ who was once a fighter in the independence movement, but now works for the Japanese police in Kyŏngsŏng, hunting down and arresting his former comrades. He becomes entangled with the *Ŭiyŏltan* when they entrap him into reluctantly joining them. Woo-jin, who is the other main character in the film, as well as *Ŭiyŏltan* leader Chae-san, lean on Jung-chool's previous work for the movement and eventually convince him to become a double agent for their side. This is especially dangerous given the vicious figure of Hashimoto, a Korean police officer also assigned to the case, a two-dimensional character completely committed to the Empire and suspicious of Jung-chool from the start. A series of twists and turns land both Jung-chool and Woo-jin in jail, but Jung-chool is able to serve a commuted sentence; once he gets out, he successfully carries out a bombing of the Police Bureau Club while it is occupied by many high-ranking police and government officials.

These two films, although released fifteen years apart, take the well-known genre conventions of the sports drama and the noir/action thriller and apply them to stories of colonial resistance. A band of underdogs playing an impossible game and a group of smugglers trying to pull off a heist—these are ensembles of the type genre audiences are conditioned to root for, but the setting adds additional stakes to the conflict. Both groups

³ This paper uses the McCune-Reischauer system to romanize Korean, as is standard for MLA, but I have made exceptions for the names of characters and real people which have officially established English spellings.

are fighting for their lives in a game that will have much heavier consequences for them than for their opponents, and these stories magnify the already nationalistic narratives that often go along with sports or spy movies. They flip the power dynamic, however, so that instead of fighting for one's nation in an international context, the main characters are on the battleground of their own land, trying to defeat (or at least damage) the exploitative infrastructure of an occupying government. Yet domestic audiences, knowing that these narratives take place during the height of empire, enter the story with the bittersweet awareness that these characters will not have access to the greater victory of actually ousting the colonists.

As Grant Farred argues in his analysis of *Lagaan*, which I would extend to include *The Age of Shadows*, the films exist in a dual temporality, so that each story is experienced not only through the loss and trauma of the past, but also the lens of the imagined future of a united and free homeland: “in a single gesture, mourning and hope” (111). In *Lagaan*, this imagined future is an India in which secular multiculturalism has defeated the rising wave of Hindu nationalism that had entered the public consciousness and erupted into Hindu-Muslim violence by the early 2000s⁴; for *The Age of Shadows*, it's the persistent if faint hope that the *choguk*, the homeland visualized in the film, can still be reunited as one. Yet both construct this unspoken, imagined future within the

⁴ *Lagaan* was released around the time of anti-Muslim riots in which Hindu mobs massacred Muslims in Gujarat, the same province that the film takes place in. Gujarat was then under the purvey of Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who is now Prime Minister of India. Chapter 3 covers the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement, or Hindutva, in more depth.

parameters of the post-partition nation-state and its formulations of identity, patriotism, loyalty, and moral good.

There are, of course, many films from both countries that explicitly depict historical events such as the First War of Independence in 1857⁵, which was the first large-scale uprising by Indians against the British, or the March First Movement, which launched a broad popular independence movement among Koreans in 1919. Those narratives, while pivotal, have tended to depict the anti-colonial struggle as a black-and-white contest between heroes and villains, rife with patriotic symbols and slogans that fall into familiar and obvious nationalistic narratives. Far more instructive are these smaller stories of what might have been, which function as re-imaginings of a fictional past that speak in a roundabout way to the present and future of the nation. Cricket is a national obsession in India, as in many other former British colonies, and these black and brown players today dominate the sport worldwide in a particularly enjoyable reversal. Writer-director Ashutosh Guwariker's choice to use this now thoroughly indigenized leisure pastime to depict a battle between colonized Hindustanis⁶ and the British who introduced it to them, ultimately defeating them at their own game in an echo of current cricket rankings, is obviously laden with meaning.

Lagaan's conceit, as evinced by its narrator, is that this story has been forgotten by history, turning it into a myth that can be used to fuel the nation. Yet at this time in the

⁵ Historically referred to in English-language academic sources as the Mutiny of 1857, an imperial nomenclature that I reject.

⁶ For clarity, I have chosen to use "Hindustani" to refer to the colonized people of the subcontinent under the Raj, as Hindustan was the name the Mughals coined for the region, and "Indians" to refer to citizens of the modern nation-state, although I recognize that that the former term has come to be associated with Hindutva in latter years.

subcontinent's history, both exploitative land tax and the deliberate spread of cricket by the British were at their apex—in that sense, the film is speaking directly to the past. Nissim Mannathukkaren argues that although the film centers the subaltern, it “ultimately ends up reaffirming the hegemonic nationalist project in which the subaltern has no place” via its false portrayal of the raja who rules Champaner as a benevolent figure (4581-2). It ignores the real exploitative practices of indigenous landowners during that time, and the massive and recurring peasant uprisings against them, in favor of a flattened binary narrative along racial and national lines which sees the raja as another innocent Indian victim of British greed.

The film does always return to the wholeness and unity of Hindustanis, despite the villagers' momentary anger at the raja for increasing the tax, before they all agree that he, too, has no power in this situation. There is also the temporary betrayal of villager Lakha, who spies for the British out of romantic jealousy towards Bhuvan, but upon discovery is told to earn the forgiveness of the other villagers by proving his loyalty—which he does, and is thus welcomed back into the fold. Even the uniformed announcer who works for the cantonment abandons his fancy clothes halfway through the cricket match and puts on the same simple white clothing as the villagers, reminiscent of *khadi*, unabashedly cheering for them through his megaphone. (Lichtner and Bandyopadhyay observe that with symbols like this, the film places the Gandhian philosophy of non-violent resistance several decades before he popularized it (446). As I argue below, this is another way in which *Lagaan* operates in multiple temporalities and gives the audience visual reference to nationalist symbols—although Gandhi was not in favor of Partition,

he has certainly been adopted as a national hero by the nation-state of India in the decades since.) Mannathukkaren says that this ethnic unity ignores any reckoning with the reality for most farmers at the end of the 19th century: victimization by greedy landowners' increasingly steep rents, the symbiotic relationship between the British and most of the rajas, and the many agrarian rebellions during this time which explicitly addressed class and caste oppression, not just colonialism (4581-2).

I would argue, however, that although *Lagaan* does reinforce nationalist ideas, it does not simply ignore class, gender, caste and other forms of indigenous inequalities. Instead, it is in conscious conversation with the idea of who belongs in the nation, not just in 1893 Champaner, but also—maybe even more so—in 2001 India, of which the village stands as an allegory. The film uses this idealized united past to reflect the ideals of secular multicultural India, which were already being heavily challenged in the late 1990s and early 2000s by the revisionist right-wing narratives of the Hindutva movement led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, although few imagined then the cultural and political dominance that the BJP would eventually gain (Lichtner and Bandyopadhyay 433-4).

Lagaan may underscore the duality of good and evil that pits the British and the Hindustani against each other, but as Chandrima Chakraborty has pointed out, it also focuses on the lives of subalterns in a way that centers their voices; this is not a story of princes and princesses, of military conquests and uprisings, but instead focuses on the impact of colonial exploitation on ordinary poor people, and depicts the layers of oppression they labor under. The villagers ultimately disregard the raja as a source of help or target for anger, not because he is benevolent, or an insider, but because he fails

early on to provide them with any sort of useful intercession. In fact, the film's mise-en-scène always places the raja apart from the villagers and on the same side of the frame as the British, demonstrating how entwined his interests are with theirs. If anything, the protagonists' dismissal of the raja is an indication of their canniness and practicality, and their awareness of the multiple structures of exploitation they are up against.

More importantly, however, the film's message of unity still fits inside a national framework—not because of overt representations of the nation-state, but due to cultural cues that an Indian audience cannot but associate with the post-partition homeland. This includes Bhuvan and his friends vowing to protect their home, as in the song “Mitva”: “Listen, my friend, why do you fear/ this earth is ours, so is the sky” (1:09:00). This song and much of the dialogue strongly connects land, people, and justice as rightfully belonging together, forcefully rejecting the “*farangi*” (white foreigners) who have dared to set themselves up as kings in an explicit criticism of the British Raj. The opening voiceover frames the story from the perspective of the present day looking back, telling the audience the year and setting the stage as “a small village in the heart of the *desh* (country)” (4:25). These elements combine powerfully with the national feeling that, inevitably and always in the subcontinent, is tied up in cricket. The resulting spectacle avoids the jingoistic tendencies of many depictions of colonialism, while still invoking national identity and projecting it onto the past, simultaneously bringing the colonized subcontinent forward into present-day India—eliding completely that these two entities are not, in fact, the same.

The Age of Shadows is a much darker film both in theme and aesthetic; its characters resist exploitation via the apparatus of the police who are in direct, violent conflict with their independence movement. Their smuggled bombs are meant to kill; the Ŭiyŏltan do not hesitate to punish traitors with death—and neither does the film. Unlike *Lagaan*'s divisions along racial lines, here the characters operate in a subtler world where the enemy has the same face as one's own. The marker of loyalty to the homeland is thus of necessity more explicit; language plays an *identifying* as well as an identity function in the film. In addition, characters are constantly code-switching between Korean and Japanese, and their choice to use one language or the other is always significant. When Jung-chool first begins working with the ambitious lieutenant Hashimoto, he tells him, "When you're with me, speak in Korean (*chosŏnmal*)" (33:36). This is the moment the audience discovers that Hashimoto is ethnically Korean but has chosen to go by a Japanese name, even though the *sŏshi kaimei* policy which forced Koreans to take on Japanese names did not go into effect until 1940, during the brutal period right before independence (Suzuki 20).

It is not only the use of Korean, but also the language of nationalism that is invoked by the protagonists. Chae-san, who tells Jung-chool that he is "a soldier without a country," is only one of the various characters to appeal to Jung-chool's fellow-feeling for other Koreans in order to convince him to return to their side: at one point, Chae-san remarks, "Even a turncoat only has one motherland" (55:58, 38:48). Although the film uses the historically accurate term for Korean, *chosŏnmal*, rather than the South Korean *han'gugŏ*, and in other ways avoids overt anachronism, it falls back on patriotic language

in order to engage the audience's emotions in support of the independence fighters—they are not just fighting to be free, but to *reclaim the nation* that was stolen from them. Similarly to *Lagaan*, the film locates the modern idea of the nation in a time when it was not people's lived experience. As is common in depictions of the colonial era, the film engages in “recovering a Korean self that was paradoxically constructed after the events of 1945 and then retrospectively projected back in time” (Christina Yi 74). Chae-san does not mourn the loss of the Joseon dynasty which ended when Japan annexed Korea; he is nostalgic for the nation that never existed, and which today still does not exist, because reunification continues to be a deferred dream. Rather than complicate the idea of the nation in such films, however, this combination of mourning and nostalgia seems to serve only to strengthen its hold, and serve as an irresistible temptation towards blind patriotism, although South Korean audiences are beginning to be critical of such films as they have become increasingly cynical of the government, especially after former president Park Geun-hye's corruption scandal and resignation (Kim and Shon). Netizens have coined the slang term *kukppong*, a portmanteau of the words for country and methamphetamine, to describe the concept, and the recent success of “*kukppong* films” such as *Ode to My Father* and *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* has received significant backlash from audiences (*Daum Movie*). *Age of Shadows* director Kim Jee-woon has said that his team based the film on extensive research⁷, and that he tried to avoid excessive nationalism but “couldn't help but become so passionate” (Kim and Shon).

⁷ As told to this author, 30 Oct. 2018.

The Age of Shadows lives in the same double temporality I mentioned above: the simultaneous grief for what has been lost and hope for a united future. For Koreans, the hope of reunification is still a collective desire that is constantly discussed; despite the trauma of division, North and South Korea have not psychologically decoupled themselves from each other, either for Koreans or non-Koreans, the way that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have since Partition. And yet the nationalistic language used in this film inevitably erases the subaltern: the sole woman in the Üiyöltan, Gye-soon, is killed and ultimately serves only as motivation and character development for Jung-chool and Woo-jin. North Korea is neither the audience for this film, nor a part of the Korean nation toward whom the film's themes of brotherhood and patriotism—spoken in the standard South Korean dialect, and in the language of liberal democracy—are directed. This flattening linguistic gesture also erases the history of a very deliberate excision of Japanese in the post-liberation era despite postwar Koreans' conflicted feelings of comfort, belonging and revulsion toward the language, especially for those who grew up speaking and learning Japanese as their primary tongue. This “discourse of purification ‘presupposed an authentic Korean language to which present-day Koreans should return to establish a national language,’ even as the actual process of standardizing and codifying Korean paradoxically proved that no ‘one’ Korean language had ever existed,” an attempt at authenticity further complicated by the North and South each creating its own “national” version of Korean (Christina Yi 82-3). A similar gesture can be seen in the languages of Hindi and Urdu, considered the same language by many linguists and still mutually orally intelligible to a great extent, but each standardized into official

languages of India and Pakistan with different scripts after independence, carrying all the emotion and weight that has complicated that post-Partition relationship. None of this is visible in either film, however—instead we see only the whole, unifying, native language set in contrast to the invading, occupying, foreign language of the colonizer.

This retroactive linguistic erasure, however, is only one part of a larger erasure of particular histories that have become charged with political meaning in the post-partition era. One of the most striking examples of this is the complete lack of acknowledgement in *The Age of Shadows* of the strong leftist, communist flavor that was inextricable from nearly all anti-colonial groups in that era, and in the short hopeful weeks after liberation and before American occupation (Cumings 85). As in many South Korean films set during the Japanese occupation, the figures chosen to be at the center of these narratives do not tend to be those who went on to have visible roles in post-division North Korea—especially not Kim Il-sung, despite his very significant role as a hero in the anti-colonial resistance before liberation. As Janet Poole has observed, those who lived during the Korean colonial period have “been subject to a triple censorship—by the colonial censor as they wrote, by postcolonial states for their collaborative actions, and by Cold War states for their postdivision choices of north or south. The crisis of representation...has been only deepened by the historicist logic, through which history is so often told as a prelude to the present,” that has colored how the figures of that era have been read (2). In the Indian case, although the particulars of colonialism and Partition are different from Korea in specific ways, there has also been a historicist logic toward the colonial era that has tended to flatten the complexities of living during that time. This muddling of history

by the evolving political and social imperatives of the decades since independence is complicated further by the deferred nature of these created borders between North and South Korea, India and Pakistan and Bangladesh: seven decades after the moment of the break, the dividing lines have the appearance of permanence, while in essence having “led not to the stabilization of conflict but to landscapes of long-term geopolitical deferral,” as Dubnov and Robson argue (6).

This can be seen in 2015’s *Assassination*, which is mainly set in 1933 and centers around a plot to assassinate a Japanese general and a pro-Japanese Korean businessman by the Korean Liberation Army. They are led by Kim Ku and Kim Won-bong, two real-life members of the independence movement who were leaders in the Provisional Government of Korea established in Shanghai in 1919. Kim Ku was virulently opposed to the division of the peninsula under American and Soviet trusteeship of Korea after the war, and did not differentiate between left/right politics but led an anti-trusteeship movement that was “directed primarily at the [American] Occupation, and especially at Koreans allied with it” (Cumings 221). Although the Provisional Government was short-lived in its contemporary relevance, and indeed became almost ineffectual from 1921 until the war years, when Kim Ku “allied temporarily with moderate and leftist factions led by Kim Kyu-shik and Kim Won-bong,” it has become an icon in popular South Korean retellings of the colonial period (180). Kim Won-bong ended up in North Korea, but is also remembered as a founding leader of the Ŭiyŏltan, and a general of the Korean Liberation Army; it is this latter role as a general associated with Kim Ku that *Assassination* highlights, underscoring his role in armed uprising and leaving any

mention of the two men's eventual fates implicit: in their last scene together, on the eve of liberation, they drink to their fallen comrades, and there is a melancholy that perhaps refers to their later deaths in acts of political violence. The film ends in 1949 Seoul, with the movie's villain on trial for spying for the Japanese during the occupation, now high up in the Korean police. The only reference to the divided peninsula in the final scene, as the villain leaves the courthouse after being acquitted of crimes the audience saw him commit, is a brief glimpse of protestors holding placards in support of reunification.

This sense of futility and longing, affect and loss, hangs over every movie whose setting crosses the time before and after liberation and which attempts to reconcile and make sense of that discontinuity. History is so often periodized by the markers of invasion and annexation, occupation and liberation, and the all-important postcolonial era that we often claim to live in; yet these narratives of memory and imagination blur the borders of such rigidly archived narratives and underline the unfinished nature of such seismic happenings. *Kalank*, a 2017 Hindi film, is set in Lahore in the year leading up to Partition, and centers around the doomed love between its married Hindu heroine, Roop, and the Muslim blacksmith, Zafar, who initially approaches her in order to take revenge on her father-in-law, who is his biological father. Somehow Zafar's convoluted scheme also involves fomenting an uprising among the Muslim steelworkers in his neighborhood against his Hindu half-brother, Roop's husband Dev, who supports bringing in European machines that will put them out of work; yet, bafflingly, this is framed in the film as a false conflict, as though there would be no reason for a minoritized labor class to protest without Zafar's interference. In contrast to Dev, who is an educated and soft-spoken

scion of a wealthy family, devoted to his wife, in favor of economic development and opposed to Partition, Zafar is the son of a courtesan and lives in Lahore's red light district, physically aggressive, emotional, promiscuous, and frequently seen sweaty and half-dressed; he spends most of the film subtly provoking the other Muslim steel workers to revolt against their Hindu bosses in his bid for revenge against his father's family.

Although Zafar is eventually redeemed by falling genuinely in love with Roop and giving up his revenge (ultimately dying for his sins), he plays the role of the only "good" Muslim in the film, while the majority of the Muslim characters are portrayed as a mob with a singular opinion, easy to deceive and rouse to violence; in the final scene of the movie, Roop, Dev, and Zafar run for their lives from a murderous horde of Muslim men all dressed identically in blue kurtas and white topis, as though in uniform. The grievances of the steelworkers against the destruction of their livelihood, Zafar's supposed machinations, and the actual historical conditions that exploded into tragic violence in 1946 Lahore are muddled to the point of incomprehensibility.

There is a deliberate slippage between the romantic heartbreak at the center of the movie and the real violence that resulted from the breakdown of love and solidarity between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs at the time (and this latter group, by the way, is barely represented at all despite Lahore being the heart of Punjab and a very important city for Sikhs both culturally and religiously). Nor is there any attempt by the filmmakers to portray a nuanced recounting of the support for and resistance against Partition in both Hindu and Muslim communities, or the fact that the hands of people of all three faiths dripped with blood during the weeks and months following Partition. *Kalank* upholds a

very particular narrative of the righteous Hindu citizens of India, flawed and damaged but alive, carrying the wound of Partition inside them. The framing device of the film is Roop and Dev telling their story to a reporter ten years later, in their luxurious home in Amritsar. Zafar is a memory consigned to the past, who sacrificed himself to his bloodthirsty fellow Muslims so that Roop and Dev could live in peace.

The disappearing ghosts of people who are no longer seen to represent the nation are rife in portrayals of the colonial era in both India and Korea, and the above are only some examples. In the last twenty years, such depictions of the nation have sharply increased. *The Age of Shadows* and *Assassination* feature military men as the foundation of an anti-colonial resistance that centers around regaining the glorious homeland, while erasing the radical socialist ideologies of communism that resonated powerfully for so many independence fighters and were integral to their movement. *Lagaan* and *Kalank* foreground the Hindu hero—and to a limited extent, the Hindu heroine—as the past and future of India, while representing members of minority religious groups, especially Muslims, either as tokenized symbols of Indian secular multiculturalism, or as foreign and dangerous elements that may be close to India geographically, genealogically and emotionally, but are ultimately untrustworthy, violent, and must be expelled from the body of the nation.

Assassination and *Kalank* are particularly egregious in this regard; the former represents actual people who had particular ideologies, but curates which details of their lives to highlight—an unavoidable and indeed functional feature of any historical film, but one which serves a clear agenda here. The status of communists as the great enemy of

the last seven decades temporally overlays its vision of the past; the ideology of communism is too radioactive to depict in a blockbuster film marketed to a mass audience (or alternatively, a film that chose to depict that aspect of the movement might never have gained such commercial success). The deliberate erasure of history hints at an underlying fear that positive depictions of an ideology antithetical to the structure and identity of the South Korean nation-state will offend or even infect viewers like a virus—even though the clear enemy in the film is Imperial Japan, there is a limit to who is allowed to inhabit the mythologized identity of the Korean freedom fighter.

A similar type of reasoning seems to operate in *Kalank*, which stubbornly clings to the common urge in Bollywood (and in India at large) to blame Muslims for Partition and the incredible violence that it sparked, despite clear evidence that many Muslims were virulently opposed to it, and even the so-called “father of Pakistan,” Mohammad Ali Jinnah, pushed for self-determination within an independent India and resisted separatism for years (Jalal 8-10)—not to mention the undeniable role played by British officials determined to retain some kind of advantage as they were forced to release the reins of empire after World War II (Dubnov and Robson). This, coupled with the exclusive portrayal of Muslims attacking and killing fleeing Hindus, even though at the time the entire subcontinent erupted in bloody violence instigated by Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike, simply reinforces narratives that Hindu nationalism has been fomenting in recent years: a) that the violence during and after Partition was exclusively Muslims’ and/or Pakistanis’ fault, b) that in this one-sided conflict Hindus were victims forced to defend themselves, and c) Muslims are and have always been outsiders, invaders who don’t

belong in the nation and must be either assimilated, ejected, or exterminated. These ideas are based in a vengeful tit-for-tat over perceived historical crimes that are often based in fantasy, and yet are having incredibly bloody consequences in India today—witness the pogroms that have become almost routine in election years in the last twenty years, and the recent law that explicitly excludes Muslim immigrants from the path to citizenship available to those of other faiths, which has sparked massive protests and even more anti-Muslim violence in response (Roy, Chawla et al).

The double temporality of these films strike a chord in domestic audiences because they appeal to broad, sweeping and majoritarian ideas about the nation and who belongs, about the qualifications of the ideal citizen. In neoliberal regimes such as South Korea and India, which in theory operate under the ideals of secular multiculturalism, but in reality have long and entrenched histories of tribalism and hierarchy, nationalism has taken on a particular flavor influenced by the potent legacies of colonialism and partition. Either of these would have reverberations that shake every aspect of the nation-state's functioning, but coming out of colonial rule and then so quickly being subsumed by the trauma and violence of division meant that nationalism was not simply an abstract tool of nation-building but played an integral and healing role in the succeeding half century. These films are accessible to audiences old and young, educated and illiterate, domestic and diasporic; they make legible the pain and dissociation that is left over from being sudden cut off from one's ancestral legacy and being told to accept a battered portion as a whole. They attempt to reconcile the incredibly strong feelings of national pride that have arisen even in people who still remember the undivided nation—a population that is

slowly disappearing and soon will no longer be able to share first-hand accounts of their experience.

All of this may explain the sudden resurgence of these films about the colonial era in a time when for both South Korea and India, their former oppressors might seem like the furthest concern given tensions with their co-ethnic neighbors. Indeed, all of this is connected because partition is *not* past, but endures in the present, and has real consequences for those who live in these countries, and in the countries that share that trauma but not the global power and voice that these two nation-states do. These narratives not only have power in their domestic spheres, but reverberate internationally via an entertainment distribution apparatus (legal and otherwise) that shapes people's ideas about who is Indian, who is Korean, what those two identities mean and look like, and what they are not. They are sophisticated producers of the signifiers of exclusion and belonging to both of these broad identity labels, eliding the complex and multifaceted ways in which people live and understand them, and erasing the fact that these identities and signifiers do not map perfectly onto each other.

2. Making 'Korea': Borders and Belonging

Despite the rareness of truly monolingual nations, monolingual culture plays a large role in the formation and preservation of the modern nation-state. Benedict Anderson believed that the imagined community was largely formed by literature, such as newspapers and the novel, after the development of print capitalism in Europe (Anderson 44). I would argue that television can also play this role, and in today's media landscape, perhaps a much larger one, as popular culture has become the major way in which people shape their in-groups and out-groups, and form and view their idea of national identity and community. Although in many countries, the major narratives that provoke national conversations tend to take place via film, in South Korea these conversations seem to fit as or even more comfortably on television, which is still a vibrant, popular medium that retains its communal nature in a way that it has not in many other cultures.

Cable did not truly gain success in South Korea until a series of hits on tvN, starting with *Reply 1997*'s record-breaking run in 2012, opened the door to a cable revolution that soon broke the established, dominant hold of big three terrestrial networks KBS, SBS, and MBC. Many prestige writers, directors and actors began choosing to work in cable due to its greater allowance for artistic freedom (and later, with partners like Studio Dragon and Netflix, luxurious budgets). Not only is cable still young and vibrant in South Korea, TV has long offered pay-per-view streaming options to watch already-aired shows, and a highly connected, active population of netizens stays very engaged and tends to make certain shows "mania dramas" even if ratings disappoint. And

although the days of 50%-plus ratings are long gone, a significant percentage of mostly middle-aged and older viewers still watch live television, turning TV personalities, stars of both narrative dramas and *ye-nŭng* (variety) shows, into household names. I will first discuss self-described “real wild variety” travel show *2 Days and 1 Night* to illustrate not only the appeal to a mass audience, but how that broad reach turns the show into an instrument of national conversation about who and what constitutes Korea, its boundaries and its people. I will then move to two narrative dramas that depict cross-border romances as allegories for the affection, estrangement, animosity, hope, and loss that hold North and South Korea in constant tension with each other, before returning to *2 Days and 1 Night* for a look at how that program represents the impossibilities of the border.

2.1 The Shattered, Scattered Nation

South Korean variety television does not fit conventional American ideas of a variety program, although sketch/improvisation programs such as *Saturday Night Live* do also fit under the variety show label in Korea. The vast majority of variety in Korea, however, is closer to reality television, but has a very different aesthetic than American reality shows; there is a set concept, either built around games of competition such as *Running Man* and *Infinity Challenge*, or with a lifestyle focus, such as *Three Meals a Day* and *I Live Alone*. The most striking difference between reality television and Korean variety, however, is the way in which the latter often reveals rather than conceals the mechanisms of production, whereas reality television promotes a facsimile of organic circumstances, as though the camera is simply witnessing real life, despite most viewers’ acknowledgment that reality shows are highly orchestrated and scripted artificial

scenarios. Korean variety, however, does not attempt this pretense, undercutting Laura Mulvey's idea of suture, which works to make us forget that the camera exists (25). Instead it invites viewers to participate in creating their own entertainment, and to contribute to the formation of the narrative. The audience is made to feel that they are in on the joke, rather than being deceived, however willingly, by a reality television show.

The best illustration of this is the abundance of chyrons in every variety show, which serve multiple purposes: to summarize the action onscreen; to caption the speech of the people who are speaking, which is sometimes hard to hear; and most importantly, to serve as the voice of the production team, who are often characters in the narratives of these shows. In *2 Days and 1 Night (2DIN)*, the voice of the director is secondary only to those of the cast; his or her voice asking them questions and giving directions is not edited out, and the camera frequently pans to include his or her reaction to the cast's antics. The cast members' designated cameramen also frequently appear onscreen and are included in the narrative—to remind us that penalties suffered by the cast member will also be suffered by his cameraman, or occasionally to have them participate in the games, as staff regularly do. The chyrons that speak in the production team's voice add an additional layer of storytelling to the program, so that we are not only getting subtle cues from the director and writer via the structure of the program and editing choices, but a clearly articulated commentary. Captions are an integral part of the comedy in variety shows, commenting with razor-sharp humor about the actions of its cast members, or pointing out funny details that viewers might have missed; they give the viewer clues to the relationships between the cast, crew, and production team that enrich the viewing

experience with authentic-feeling emotion; and they give the viewer additional context and commentary, as I will expand upon in my analysis.

2DIN is a unique mixture of the two styles I mentioned above, competition and lifestyle: games form a consistent and essential part of the structure of the program, but it also showcases local color and the everyday lives of ordinary people, often poor, elderly or very young, and even migrant workers. This portrayal of the ordinary person's daily life as a worthy subject for television is perhaps the secret behind the show's longevity. A cast of six male members travel around South Korea to show off the beauty, attractions, and local cuisine of different regions of the country. The program is targeted to all age groups, and has been mostly a consistent ratings hit for its network, KBS. It incorporates a lot of comedy, including harshly competitive games of luck that determine whether, for example, members are allowed to eat meals, sleep indoors or outdoors, and endure penalties such as diving into the cold ocean, or working as day laborers at local farms; but the show has also produced episodes with serious, emotional, often patriotic themes.

2DIN has most often displayed regional cuisine and tourist attractions, including historical themes in their comedic travelogues, but I will focus on the program's exploration of the idea of Koreanness at and beyond the national border. For example, in one episode the cast traveled to Harbin, China, and reverently retraced the steps of Korean independence fighter An Jung-geun, who famously assassinated Japanese prince Ito Hirobumi in the Harbin railway station in 1909. The production team and cast of this show have often visited such historical sites to remember, and imagine themselves inside, the past of their people. It can feel manipulative at times, especially when the sentimental

music swells, and the captions on the screen are blatantly patriotic slogans—and yet the emotions, the loss, and the history are undeniably real and powerful.

In October 2017, *2DIN* celebrated ten years on the air, and began an extended series of special episodes in commemoration. The cast members rated the above trip to Harbin as among their top favorite trips (Episode 196 00:08:51). Viewers voted online to rank their favorite episodes as well, and their number one was the Season 1 visit to Mount Baekdu at the China/North Korea border, during which the original cast climbed the volcanic mountain that is regarded as the spiritual home of the Korean people. The cast carried with them water from two islands: Dokdo, the ownership of which is still contested by Japan and South Korea, and Baekryungdo, which lies very near the North/South Korea border. They poured these two bottles into the lake in the caldera of the volcano, with “our wish to see all of it become one” (00:11:32). Another viewers’ favorite was the “Foreign Workers’ Special,” a heart-wrenching trip with migrant workers that focused on the difficulties of their lives, bringing their families to Korea to meet them after years of separation. This ten-year look back illustrates the way that place functions in *2DIN*—and for its viewers—and how while on one hand the show reinforces the narratives and borders of the nation-state, on the other there is a recognition that human beings cannot be defined or confined by them: an effort to embrace humanity across barriers of class, ethnicity, or celebrity status using the empathy invoked by emotion.

For its tenth anniversary, the show went international on an unprecedentedly grand scale, with half of the cast traveling to Kazakhstan and half to Cuba, ostensibly to

meet their fans. The production team reveal their true purpose when the cast arrive: it is the 80th anniversary of Stalin's forced expulsion of about 180,000 *Koryo-in* (also known as Russian Koreans, or Koryo people) from eastern Russia into present-day Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan on the premise that they might be Japanese spies (Episode 198 01:01:52). From September to November of 1937, almost two hundred thousand ethnic Koreans, many of whom had emigrated to Russia to *escape* colonialism, were deported to Central Asia and "forced to cultivate crops...on land almost entirely unsuited for agriculture" and "became victims not only of Soviet nationality policy but also of Stalin's agricultural policy" which functionally restored Russian serfdom (Saveliev 485-6). Notably, this history only became known in South Korea after the fall of the Soviet Union, once Koryo-in were finally allowed to travel out of those farms, and it is still a little-known history for many Koreans. During a quiz given to the members by the director about why the Koryo-in were deported, how they lived once they arrived in Kazakhstan, and how they adapted to the foreign climate and food, the members show almost no familiarity with the topic (01:04:52-01:12:20).

There are two important aspects to the journey; one is meeting Korean Kazakhs. The first group they meet are the Silk Road Choir, who are mostly second and third generation, and perform wearing *hanbok*, traditional Korean dress. Most don't speak Korean, and the few who do interpret for them. An older lady says, "My parents missed Korea all their lives, but at that time they weren't allowed to leave. They died before they could visit Korea. My grandparents told my parents how beautiful their historical homeland was" (00:16:07). As the Koryo-in speak, part of their interview becomes

voiceover, as we see beautiful scenery from previous *2DIN* trips within South Korea, with wistful captions that remind the viewer of the “many forgotten members of the Korean nation (*hanminjok*) in other countries” (00:16:27). The production team is explicitly drawing these people into the nation here, reinforcing the bond of the diaspora to the ethnic Korean nation (*minjok*), the idea of which emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century, when Korean thinkers began to write about their people as a united body with a common lineage in an anti-imperial gesture (Song 140-2).

On the other hand, the Koryo-ins’ stories resonate with their pride in surviving such harsh circumstances, and with grief for those who died needlessly during the difficult journey west and the even more brutal circumstances once they arrived; but what is most clear in their voices is a longing for the ancestral homeland, an idealism common among diasporic people that is especially strong in the forcibly exiled. An older lady proudly tells the cast that she went to South Korea the previous year, and was impressed by its cleanliness and the sense she got that it was “a country for the people”; one man expresses a transnational solidarity with native Koreans, saying, “We’re proud we have Korean blood. Whether it’s Koreans in Korea, or Koreans in Kazakhstan... We like you, and we’re proud of you” (00:17:01).

The second significant aspect of this journey is the team’s visit to the plains of Ushtobe, the site of the arrival of Korean exiles in 1937, where they spent their first miserable winter dug into tunnels in the ground and sheltering under reeds. In this harsh landscape, the cast finds modest monuments to the people who found themselves here eighty years ago; a guide shows them the faint vestiges of the tunnels Kazakhs helped the

Koryo-in build. As he tells the cast the details of that first difficult winter, we see footage of long lines of people being marched overland and the trains that took them west, as well as photographs of the roughly hewn structures that served as their first homes. Captions across the screen describe the Koryo-in as “sacrificial lambs of the Japanese occupation” (Episode 200 01:05:59). Their guide tells them how the Koryo-in were forced to farm rice by Stalin’s regime, despite the barrenness of the land; they figured out how to irrigate their field by digging canals from a river and have maintained their rice farms through the generations, which is why the locals still refer to Koryo-in with a nickname that translates to “hardy farming people”. The cast also visit a cemetery which holds the graves of the earliest Koryo-in to pass away here.

Their last stop is a meal with the three sisters who host them overnight, enjoying Koryo-in cuisine that combines familiar tastes with Kazakh ingredients. The crew gifts the sisters with hanbok, and the women try them on and begin to sing the iconic Korean folk song “Arirang,” prompting the cast to join in (Episode 201 00:39:49). This sudden outburst of patriotism after wearing the traditional clothing, which one woman laments is so hard to find where they live, is a powerful call to the national audience at home in South Korea, who is being invited to welcome these ladies, with their unfamiliar Koryo dialect and their carrot kimchi, into their idea of the Korean *minjok*; perhaps they are not co-citizens, but they are part of the same “blood” that the idea of South Korean nationhood is so strongly premised on, even if government rhetoric has moved away from the idea of a mono-ethnic nation in recent years.

The other half of the cast and crew went to Cuba for the 10th Anniversary Special, another location that surprised the cast. The cast's first mission upon arriving is to go in search of "traces of Korea," which they do very soon in a DVD store that sells Korean dramas subtitled in Spanish. Later, they go to "confirm the Korean wave" in a small house which holds the Korean Cuban Center, established in 2014 to cater to about 1200 Korean Cubans as well as those interested in Korean culture, with old photos and artifacts from the first generation of immigrants on display. The cast meet a group of passionate fans with varying degrees of Korean language ability, and play music and have a quiz about Korean history and culture (Episode 199 00:22:53). There is a sense of pride in the spread of Korean popular culture to a place none of them have given much thought to, from the cast but also from the production company, as is evident not just from their choice of segments but from the captions that are unabashedly impressed and excited to find young Cuban women who know Korean history, and can speak broken Korean.

As with the Kazakhstan trip, this one also takes a more serious turn. We see a pre-taped interview with Im Eun-hui (Martha Lim Kim¹), the daughter of Korean Cuban independence movement leader Im Cheon-taek. She wrote a book in order to preserve the history and lifestyle of their people, who came to Cuba via Mexico at the turn of the century for economic reasons (Episode 201 00:43:50). The cast travel to Mantanzas,

¹ I refer to the siblings by their Korean names here, because that is how they introduce themselves to the show's crew and audience; their "official" Cuban names are in brackets.

where a fifth of Korean Cubans live, to meet her brother, Im Eun-su (Primitivo Lim Kim).

Eun-su welcomes them to El Bolo, “the Koreatown of Cuba,” and shows them around a henequen plantation like the ones which early Korean Cubans worked, in conditions of severe poverty and hard labor; a Korean newspaper article from 1905, displayed onscreen, describes their lives as those of slaves (00:46:39). In her interview, Eun-hui describes how the Koreans who came to Cuba at that time had dreamed of earning some money and returning home, but found themselves suddenly unable to go



Figure 1: The South Korean flag superimposed on Cuban Koreans in the colonial era

back after Japan annexed Korea in 1910. Here we see the first appearance of a recurring image in this episode, in the way that images of Koreans deported on trains repeat in the Kazakhstan portions—an old photograph of Korean laborers in Cuba, overlaid with a black-and-white South Korean flag (see Fig 1). It is a retrospective claiming of these

people into a nation-state that didn't exist when their photo was taken, and in fact may not geographically represent their ancestral hometown, which just as likely may have been in present-day North Korea. Here, again, is the dual temporality that I discussed in Chapter 1, which places historical events into the frame of a nation-state that came into existence after and separate from them. *2DIN*, however, does this with real people's lives and struggles, rather than imagined reconstructions of historical conditions, taking this retrospective claiming even further. Eun-hee explains that the Japanese embassy in Cuba at the time tried to officially register the nationality of Koreans upon their arrival as Japanese, but they refused, and were designated as "Colonia Koreana" instead (00:47:10).

Eun-su tells the cast that the Korean Cubans during the colonial period collected one third of the rice for their meals and sent it to the Provisional Government of Korea in Shanghai, within four years sending \$1836 in the currency of the time, when they were being paid 0.6 cents a day (00:48:45). Interestingly, a lot of the information shared by the Im siblings is confirmed or given extra detail and context using research from archival South Korean sources, which are both verbally delivered to the cast in real time, and displayed onscreen for the benefit of the audience at home. To reinterpret the idea of suture in a very different sense than I mentioned above, this is one of the many techniques used by the production team to attempt to close the gap between the homeland and the diaspora. There is a sense of effortful bridging of a great distance—of geography, language, history—and an implication that there is nobility not just in coming close to one another, but in the effort that is required to do so. The producers' research and work is visible onscreen and acknowledged by the cast, echoing the way that the effort of

creating the show itself is regularly on display to the audience rather than being coyly disguised by the magic of television editing.

Im Eun-su takes them to a henequen field, and the cast experience for themselves how back-breaking it is to harvest; henequen is a type of agave that is used to make nautical rope, and is sharp, thorny and densely fibrous. The director explains that it was a job most Cubans were unwilling to do, and thus relegated to Korean migrant labor that worked in “slave-like” conditions, getting paid only once every six months. Deeply moved, Jun-ho remarks, “There must be so many unknown patriots,” and the above image of the laborers overlaid with the South Korean flag reappears, captioned with his words. His fellow cast member Shi-yoon reflects, “We’re able to inherit Korea today thanks to them” (00:53:30). The show thus explicitly knits together the suffering of migrant laborers, who originally moved to Cuba for economic reasons, with a patriotism for the homeland that present-day Koreans should be grateful for.

It is worth noting that in all of this, “Korea” always refers to South Korea. The show loses no opportunity to display evidence of the economic and cultural power of contemporary South Korea; it is subtext even in visits to schools both in Kazakhstan and Cuba, which teach the standard South Korean dialect. There is no escaping the cultural hegemony of the South Korean state, when its flag even travels back through time to be superimposed on a people who never imagined a future where Korea was divided in two. That recurring image is a moment in which subtext becomes text, a potent illustration of the kind of cultural and ideological consent that is subtly mobilized by the state (Hall

164). As I mentioned above, a type of dual temporality that is both imposed on and being embraced by real people as they participate in the making of public history.

And yet the genuine connection and happiness felt by the people who are touched by *2DIN*'s efforts to learn about them, meet them, and document their story is undeniable; there seems to be a kind of relief in many of the people they interview, just to be afforded a chance to speak to and be heard by the homeland they had longed for, and to have that homeland acknowledge their existence to its domestic population. In Cuba, while having dinner with a Korean Cuban family, the cast asks an old musician to sing, and he begins "Arirang,"; everyone joins in, and the image goes to a split screen of the old Korean Cuban and one of the ladies in Kazakhstan, singing this old, quintessentially Korean folk song side by side. The show brings their images together, bridging the distance this time *between* diasporas; we see footage of the two communities, singing together, of the diasporic cuisine the cast has enjoyed, and the captions read, "Koreans in different countries try not to forget, and not to be forgotten."

There is undeniably a powerful, perhaps even healing element to this emotional act of reconciliation with a "lost" part of the diaspora. It is a somewhat radical choice for a hugely popular variety show that typically displays domestic travel destinations to celebrate ten years on the air with a trip to countries that most Koreans have little knowledge of, using it to educate its viewers about the little known history of the diasporas that live there. Yet a strong nationalistic thread runs through the choice to visit these particular diasporas, who center their founding narratives around the violence of Japanese imperialism and the heroic struggle for Korean independence, even from

thousands of kilometers away, and despite their own status as marginalized victim diasporas. This narrative dovetails well with revived interest in South Korean film and television in portraying the occupation period, perhaps reflecting a feeling of urgency in the face of the recognition that the people who experienced these events are passing away, and a desire to preserve their stories. The emotion that *2DIN* expertly evokes in its audience with imagery, language, and music is a powerful ingredient in the formation of present-day nationalism, and an undeniable reason that television and film are so influential in shaping the idea of the nation.

Despite this preoccupation with the suffering of Koreans under Japanese rule, however, and the ripple effects of colonialism on even those geographically beyond its reach, the show never engages with the status of Kazakhstan and Cuba as formerly colonized states in their own right, even when that directly intersects with the experience of the people they meet. For example, most Koryo-in spoke Russian rather than Kazakh, because of the strict language assimilation policy of Stalin and the way they were isolated and tied to their farms (Saveliev 489). In that sense, the show's effort to bridge the gap is limited strictly to those who claim ancestral ties to Korea, or who are interested in learning the language and culture of South Korea; there is no gesture towards solidarity with other historically colonized populations. Nor is there any recognition of the Koryo-in who have repatriated to South Korea, mostly as migrant labor, and the way they are often marginalized and isolated upon their return to the homeland these Koryo-in speak about in such glowing terms (491).

The reconciliation stops at recognizing 1937 as what Kim Soyoung calls the “primal scene for Koryo people,” the foundation of their collective trauma. As she says, Koryo-in, especially those that have returned to Korea, “wait for a response from, and resonance with, Koreans living on the peninsula” (8). This response by *2DIN*, however, ignores those Koryo-in who have physically returned, and embraces only those who continue to be displaced, making no demands upon the state beyond the sentimental. It also ignores the fractured nature of the “Korea” that the cast and crew are representing to these diasporic communities, and which Korean Cubans and Kazakhs have latched onto as their distant homeland—again erasing North Korea and its people from the idea of the Korean nation.

2.2 A Political Marriage

In 2012, MBC aired *The King 2 Hearts* (*Tök'ing T'uhach'ü*), a 20-episode drama about the love story between a fictional South Korean prince and a North Korean special forces officer who comes south to marry him—and the various obstacles they must overcome in order to realize their happiness together. The story is set in an alternate reality in which the south is a constitutional monarchy; the marriage is arranged by hero Jae-ha's (Lee Seung-gi) older brother, the king, and high-ranking officials from the north. Jae-ha first meets the heroine, Hang-ah (Ha Ji-won) in training for a World Officers Competition (WOC), a contest between military teams from various countries; in a historic first North and South Korea are competing as one team. (Watching the drama again now, it is impossible not to be reminded of the North/South women's ice hockey team that would compete together in the P'yöngch'ang Olympics six years later.)

In true K-drama fashion, Hang-ah and Jae-ha hate each other upon first sight and refuse the idea of a political marriage to unite the two countries, but they soon fall into a game of competitive one-upmanship, and eventually develop real feelings along the way. Overhanging the romance plot are the sinister machinations of villain Bong-gu, an arms dealer who covets the throne and is invested in escalating the conflict between the Koreans for his own profit. Bong-gu assassinates the king and queen and severely injures the princess, thrusting Jae-ha unwillingly onto the throne, and making his relationship with Hang-ah even more fraught and public. The drama ends with the ultimate conflict that has been hanging over the characters' heads, and over the drama itself, all along: a declaration of war, and imminent violence. The king and his fiancée are separated once again as Hang-ah goes back to North Korea to negotiate reopening communications; ultimately war is averted, the villain tried and imprisoned by the International Criminal Court, and the royal couple settle happily (although never totally tension-free) in Seoul.

The King 2 Hearts (hereafter *The King*) opens on Jae-ha and his brother as children, witnessing the fall of the Berlin Wall as children with their parents, positioning the narrative within the hopes of reunification that are at various times explicit or implicit, but never absent in the drama. The WOC through which the protagonists meet is a gesture of inter-Korean solidarity; their eventual marriage negotiations are made in the same vein. The North and South Korean halves of the WOC team start out hating and mistrusting each other to such a degree that their first major practice war game results in Jae-ha pulling the trigger to shoot Hang-ah in the chest and “kill” her. Just as the teams must overcome this initial, ultimate symbolic betrayal, Jae-ha and Hang-ah move from a

dynamic where they constantly lie to, betray, and compete with each other, to one where they learn to trust each other; eventually each is willing to sacrifice their own life for their spouse—and both are prepared to die for peace between their countries.

This drama uses a romantic relationship as an extended metaphor for a reconciliation between the North and South Korean nations, and as such involves many political and military structures that must be adhered to, worked around, or outright upended (but never ignored) for the relationship to progress. The language of nationalism shifts depending on the situation; when characters are gesturing toward unity, the nation is the entire peninsula, as when Jae-ha earnestly declares the Koreas “the only divided nation in the world” in the final showdown between the two countries (Episode 20 00:38:45). In times of conflict, however, North and South Korea are framed as independent, antagonistic entities. In the early stages of their relationship, whenever Hang-ah and Jae-ha argue, they abandon their tentative truce and revert to language that positions them on opposing sides of that divide, highlighting the precarity of any ceasefire between them, and by extension, the two countries.

Although the drama is about two people coming together in order to become conduits through which North and South can find common ground, it is never an equal relationship. Hang-ah’s journey is that of entering and becoming part of South Korea. As her father leaves her in Seoul for her engagement, he bows tearfully to Jae-ha and asks him to teach her well and promises she will be obedient; in his goodbye text to Hang-ah, he tells her explicitly, “No matter what, follow South Korean ways. From now on, you’re a South Korean” (Episode 7 00:09:12). Her first days in the palace are full of lessons

about the South's language, customs, economics, and culture, all exacerbated by the crushing weight of royal protocol and the ever-present threat of a turn in public opinion. The Queen Mother even says to Hang-ah that it's better to say nothing than to be caught making a mistake—as a commoner herself, the Queen Mother says that at first she lived “as though I was dead, prostrating myself. But you're not just a commoner, but a North Korean. Shouldn't you lower yourself even more?” (00:32:27).

A definite hierarchy of power and authority exists between the two nations, played out in the gendered dynamic of Hang-ah entering both South Korea and Jae-ha's family; as usual when nationalism is heightened, so too is the gendered policing of bodies, which is exacerbated by the fantasy construct of a current-day royal family. As Foucault observed, inclusion can be as much an instrument of control as exclusion, and here the apparatus bending Hang-ah to its will is clear. Neither the royal family nor the other South Koreans Hang-ah meets are acting with malicious intent, but there are obvious structures she must submit to in order to achieve the status that will allow her to pursue the relationship that she desires. By this time, Jae-ha has become king, and he, too, is endlessly tied down in procedural minutiae, protocol, and misunderstandings—not to mention outright deception by bad actors—that keep him and Hang-ah from being able to have a peaceful and happy life together.

The pressures of an implausibly powerful external enemy and the endless machinations of the U.S. and China are repeatedly portrayed as the main causes of conflict between North and South Korea, making the Korean nations mostly blameless in the escalations and de-escalations that continually threaten their relationship, and thus

sidestepping the more painful wounds that lie at the center of the Korean divide. The villain, Bong-gu, works from outside the nation, a disloyal Korean who has given himself an English name and thrown his lot in with international arms dealers, the U.S., China—anyone who can be bought for the right price. The show seems unwilling to tackle in much detail any internal forces more sinister or difficult to reconcile than fickle public opinion and stubborn but well-intentioned politicians on both sides. Even the royal secretary to the king who sells his boss's vacation address for a Beatles album, resulting in the King and Queen's murder, is bafflingly portrayed as a poor old man who meant well but accidentally went astray. The show's devotion to the unity of the Korean people is unwavering, whether militarily when the Korean team faces off against the U.S. in a war game; sentimentally as is represented by the growing trust and love between its protagonists; or geopolitically as the two countries face off against each other, on the edge of war, until they decide to stand together against an American plan to bomb P'yŏngyang in misdirected retaliation for a terrorist attack.

In a final, tense showdown between the two sides, Jae-ha and Hang-ah meet each other at the border, in a proxy negotiation between the two governments, to try to avert a pre-emptive strike by North Korea on Seoul. Jae-ha reveals his plan: they will marry in great public ceremony on the day of the scheduled U.S. strike, gambling on the fact that no one will want the international diplomatic mess that would result from dropping bombs that day. Jae-ha pushes for a decision immediately, daring the North Koreans to shoot him now if they plan to go to war anyway. "Is it us who is are trying to open fire on you? It isn't, right?" Jae-ha asks the North Korean prime minister. "So why not fight that

country directly, or if you don't have the confidence to do that, just stay put. Why are you always threatening us and causing a commotion?" (Episode 20 00:37:09-17). This representation of North Korea as overly sensitive, aggressive, and irrational can be justified given the country's past record of provocation, but it also puts South Korea in the position of the innocent peacemaker, superior and paternalistic, that plays into the same rhetoric of hierarchy that plays out between Hang-ah and the royal family.

Hang-ah is the only North Korean brave enough to aim her gun at Jae-ha; she asks through her earpiece, "Do I shoot? Why, do you think that because it's the person I love, I can't shoot? I can kill this comrade. And die with him" (00:43:40). They stare at each other over the barrel of the pistol, resolute in their love for each other and their devotion to their people, committed to the vows they took on their engagement day to avert war between their countries even if it means their death. The prime minister gives in, and Jae-ha's plan works: they get married on the Military Demarcation Line, stepping to each side of the border and bowing facing each country in turn. North and South Korean soldiers laugh and congratulate the couple, standing side by side.

2.3 A Secret Love Affair

Crash Landing on You (hereafter *Crash Landing*), which began airing in December of 2019, is another cross-border romance, but this time the relationship that develops between Se-ri (Son Ye-jin), a South Korean cosmetics company CEO and chaebol heiress, and Jung-hyuk (Hyun Bin), a North Korean soldier, happens in secret and faces a different and arguably more serious set of obstacles than those faced by the royal couple above. She accidentally paraglides into the North's territory, and when Jung-

hyuk, recognizing that it was an accident, tells her how to get back, she goes the wrong way and is unable to easily return home. Jung-hyuk and four of his men become implicated in hiding her from the authorities and work in secret to try and send her back, while affection grows between all of them and especially Se-ri and Jung-hyuk, who begin to fall in love. He even pretends that she is his fiancée to provide her with some cover, after which Se-ri is able to become part of the community in his small village, forming deep bonds with the women who live in the neighborhood.

This is a very different drama from *The King*, as most of it takes place in a small village near the border in North Korea. Uprooted from her life, Se-ri is forced to live under many of the same harsh conditions as the locals—although Jung-hyuk’s elite status as a sergeant and the son of a high-ranking government official allows him to provide her with many of the contraband luxuries she demands. Still, the show represents aspects of ordinary life in North Korea that had never been portrayed in a South Korean TV drama before, and North Korean defectors have praised the details of the set design and script that bring those to life, courtesy of one of the writers who is himself a defector. The *changmadang*, or village market, for example, that comprises the center of the community, is recreated in loving detail, from a pawnshop which works on a totally different economy than the limited-edition-brand-name one Se-ri knows, to a cosmetics seller with a hidden shelf of black-market products from what she calls “the neighborhood below”. There are constant electrical outages and long train delays that routinely last many hours, so that travelers are forced to dismount and spend long hours waiting, buying food and water from opportunistic “grasshopper peddlers” (Episode 5

01:02:12). Though some details are fudged for dramatic effect, defectors say that many are true to life (*YonTongTV*).

All of this speaks to the effort made to ground *Crash Landing* in reality despite the inherent fantasy that comes with such a premise, unlike *The King* which can only imagine a romance with a happy ending if it takes place in an alternate reality. Jung-hyuk not only manages to return Se-ri to South Korea—after many failed attempts and his own near-death—he follows her south when he realizes she is being hunted by a North Korean murderer. He is willing to risk never going home in order to protect her, and when he finally finds her, she nearly dies saving him. Like Hang-ah and Jae-ha, both are willing to die for each other, but that love doesn't extend to their nations—in this situation they are not representing their home countries, but are in fact trying desperately to escape the two governments' notice. It's a shift from the inevitability of the weight of the nation and of global politics that often feels like a crushing weight in *The King*, which is replete with ceremony and danger, scored with majestic and portentous music, and continuously reminds viewers that its protagonists never have the freedom to act only on behalf of themselves. As Lee Seunghyun has observed, the fantasy provided by the “alternative history” of *The King* ultimately still lives within the conservative confines of the nation-state (192).

Crash Landing, in contrast, truly centers on the individual journeys of people who are caught in the merciless and cruel whims of geopolitics, unable to achieve their hearts' desires because of borders they aren't allowed to cross. When they meet, Jung-hyuk has had to give up his dream of being a pianist to join the army, and has been living his life as

though numb; Se-ri is a loner that pushes people away before they can reject her, due to her miserable upbringing as the illegitimate youngest daughter in a cold and materialistic chaebol family. The drama frames their meeting as fate, and healing: they discover that they actually met in Switzerland seven years earlier, when he was about to give up his piano career and she was on the verge of committing suicide; their chance encounter was part of what made her decide to live again. Switzerland's political neutrality provides them with an original home for their love, an oasis of natural beauty that feels outside time and space.

Yet even the universe-defying power of *unmyǒng* (destiny) cannot bridge that “sad fact of history,” the insurmountable barrier of the Military Demarcation Line (Episode 13 00:28:00). The border is an-ever present and explicit obstacle in their interactions, even in moments of humor and romance. When Jung-hyuk returns from taking his real fiancée home, a jealous Se-ri has created a line with beer cans across his living room, telling him drunkenly that it's the 38th parallel, and that crossing it to approach her will cause war (Episode 5 00:30:27). When Jung-hyuk's cover is blown in the south, he and his men are arrested by the National Intelligence Service and eventually offered the choice to defect, but there is no question that any of them will stay. They must go home, where they belong, where they have families who will be punished if they don't return—the separation is heartbreakingly permanent.

Yet despite Jung-hyuk and Se-ri knowing from the beginning that they mustn't fall in love, and can never live a normal life together, the drama is not fatalistic; it lives in a strange no-man's land between hope and despair, ultimately emerging just slightly on

the side of hope. Before Se-ri crosses back into South Korea, she and Jung-hyuk's men stop for a while by an empty house in the DMZ, abandoned since the war. Se-ri sees a broken prayer bowl, and the men explain that they never touch it: it was left with hopes for a soldier to return home, most likely by his mother. Se-ri wonders if the two ever saw each other again, asking, "If I wait and pray desperately, will I eventually be able to meet the person I miss?" Jung-hyuk replies that waiting is the only option: "You have to wait in order to keep living" (Episode 10 00:13:34-00:14:20). This explicit connection of their difficult situation to the tragedy of families who were scattered and lost to each other by the Korean War is a powerful condemnation of the state of things; not just of the division itself, but of the impossibility of healing and reconciliation across such a highly militarized, surveilled and rigid border. Se-ri remembers this conversation again at the end of the drama, once Jung-hyuk has returned home after promising her that one day he'll see her again in Switzerland. She keeps going there, every year, and one day he finds her again. They live that way, meeting once a year for two idyllic weeks, presumably for the rest of their lives.

This is not a traditional happy ending—certainly no wedding in P'anmunjŏm—but it speaks beautifully as a metaphor for the long waits between visits for cross-border families referenced in both dramas. In a way, they have succeeded in shortening that wait time and finding a way to spend their lives together in a somewhat unconventional relationship. Yet this partial victory is afforded only to them, and is only possible due to Se-ri's extreme wealth and Jung-hyuk's highly privileged position. None of the other cross-border relationships are able to overcome that final separation. Jung-hyuk's fellow

soldiers, who formed such a deep bond with Se-ri, never see her again; neither do the village women who befriended her. Most tragically, the drama's secondary couple, a South Korean con man who was hiding out in North Korea and Jung-hyuk's erstwhile fiancée, fall in love, but he dies in her arms after saving her from his enemies. The possibility for happiness is slim and limited, the story seems to be telling us; reunification is distant and unlikely but not outside the realm of hope. Even the music seems to reflect this—ethereal, melancholy, but dreamy and ultimately sweet. Yet a bitter aftertaste remains when one realizes that only the rich and powerful can ever achieve the beautiful dream presented at the end of the drama, a feeling that creeps over the viewer increasingly with each episode that further glamorizes wealth, luxury, and the trappings of neoliberal greed in both North and South Korea. The writing lightly satirizes the hypocrisies and corruption of the wealthy, but the camera's eye looks upon their lifestyles with a naked desire that is verbalized when Jung-hyuk's men arrive in the south and openly marvel at the wonders of capitalism (Episode 12).

More effective than the drama's resolution is its many emotional representations of the endless losses of division that are felt in small and big ways by so many of the characters. As Jung-hyuk's men patrol at sunrise, one of them sings along to the South Korean national anthem that they can hear blasting across the border. When the others rib him for knowing the words, he replies, "We hear it every time the sun rises and sets; why wouldn't I have memorized it?" (Episode 10 00:12:37). This small moment emphasizes the physical and emotional closeness that exists alongside a practical and psychological gulf that is impossible to bridge. Like the repeated goodbyes between Se-ri and her North

Korean friends, every time one side or the other tries to go back home but is uncertain of success, there is misery not simply in separation but in uncertainty. As with the broken prayer bowl and that family's unknown fate, the instability and anxiety of not knowing the fate of loved ones—of family left on opposite sides of the borders from each other, of men and boys who went to war and were never able to come home—hangs over the drama and paints even its most beautiful moments with melancholy. And while this drama makes the personal political rather than politicizing the personal the way *The King* does, it also operates in a revolutionary space: that of humanizing and equalizing the pain of Koreans in a way that if not physically, at least emotionally transcends the border. Given that emotion is as powerful a weapon of nation-building as any other, this may be end up being *Crash Landing's* most significant legacy.

IV. 2 Days and 1 Night in P'anmunjŏm

Seven months after *2 Days and 1 Night's* 10th Anniversary Special, the world was transfixed by the Inter-Korean Summit of April 2018, and the first meeting of North and South Korean heads of state in eleven years. In June, *2DIN* went to P'anmunjŏm, the area around the 38th parallel that has historically been almost solely restricted to military personnel; *2DIN* is the first variety program to receive permission to film in this area. The show opens with footage from the Korean War, and a shot of an old, rusted train halted permanently at the closest station to the border, personified by captions as “waiting” until it can go to North Korea again on its old route. The cast members visit Freedom Village, a small, heavily secured town near the border where only descendants of indigenous residents are allowed to live, and which *2DIN* are the first outsiders to

visit; it sits across the border from another small town in North Korea called Peace Village, which they can just barely see on a clear day with binoculars. The cast later reflect on how it felt to be unable to go that extra few kilometers, because of “the pain of history,” as cast member Shi-yoon says. “I feel wronged somehow” (Episode 222 00:46:16).

The cast participate in replacing a gigantic flag which stands tall in a perpetual standoff with the North Korean flag that faces it from across the border. The mayor of the town describes the slow escalation in size and height between the two flags as they have competed over the years in one of the few forms of communication possible between these two communities. The cast help to lower the old, tattered *taegukgi*, soberly fold it, and reverently raise the new one in a strange show of patriotism that illustrates the hollowness of nationalism even more than most flag rituals—because what does this reverence for the nation-state of South Korea even mean, in an instance where it is being used as an instrument of jingoistic bravado towards a people that they acknowledge as their own, across a division that has been artificially and traumatically erected largely by imperial outside powers?

The flag-raising passes without addressing this, but the question returns with inevitable force on the second day of the trip, which brings the cast and crew to P'anmunjŏm, to the concrete step between blue buildings that the world breathlessly watched Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un step over two months earlier. The air is heavy as their military guide explains to the cast and crew that they will be allowed to step into the building where north-south summits are held, which sits on the border but is considered

neutral territory, but that they are strictly forbidden from communicating with the North Koreans who guard the other side. The two armies are still technically at war, so even the soldiers are not allowed to talk to each other, and he warns the cast and crew to stay alert because they are technically going to the front line of that war—a reality that is brought close when they cross the heavily barbed fence of the DMZ that is lined with bombs every ten meters.

The show intercuts the cast's approach to that iconic step with black-and-white footage from when this was “the scariest place on earth,” and clips from the inter-Korea summit in April, giving their steps a feeling of significance and history as the music swells dramatically. The cast nervously take selfies with their phones, but reflect that people likely won't believe that the pictures are real—yet none of them can resist the impulse to self-document, despite the many cameras already filming this moment. Shi-yoon reflects, “I've seen this place on TV, but now that I'm here, it feels real that I can't go over there even if I want to. The fact that the country is divided really comes home to me” (01:09:57).

The production team here inserts clips of cast member Defconn talking about his grandparents, who are from North Korea and cannot go back; of the heartbreaking televised reunions that have sporadically taken place between elderly Koreans²; of the two heads of state meeting across that invisible line, to bring home the reality of the divided nation and a hope for reunification. We hear the cast members in voiceover

² Like the imagery of the border itself, depictions of and references to these reunions are a recurring theme in these works; they are portrayed in *Ode to My Father*, as mentioned in the Introduction, and alluded to in *The King 2 Hearts*.

talking about a future day when they can just walk over to North Korea, putting themselves in a global context—as did *The King 2 Hearts*—by saying that they have the same dream that was realized in Germany with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Although in reality, as time passes and the cost grows more daunting, most South Koreans no longer find hope or relevance in the success of German reunification, the imagery remains evocative and visceral (Victoria Kim). Chen Kuan-hsing noted about televised reunions he witnessed when he visited South Korea that although “it was obvious that the South Korean state was staging [them] for political purposes, the tears and sorrow were overpoweringly real, overshadowing or even transcending the symbolic power of the state: the scenes cut into the affective space of the collective social” (Chen 115). In the same way, these scenes of the mingled pain and delayed hopes of the present overlaying the past are also functioning in this dual role; although of course *2DIN* is not sponsored by the nation-state in the same way as the reunions were, this show airs on the only public broadcast network in South Korea, and in September 2018 received a Presidential Commendation for promoting Korean tourism (Park).

The most powerful moment of the episode, however, is when cast and crew enter the building that straddles the border and cross to the North Korean side—amazed and saddened at how it feels like nothing and everything at once—and North Korean soldiers, who have been watching from their observation deck this whole time, appear in the windows, peering in at them with cameras. The cast members stare back, commenting on how strange and heartbreaking it is that they’re not permitted to smile or wave at their fellow Koreans. They take pictures of and even with them, thus participating in the only

kind of exchange possible. This silent moment is far more moving than any of the heavily scored, sentimentally framed scenes that come before and after. The reality of the division is so close, and so difficult to face. As Chen reflected that visiting South Korea makes him think about and understand Taiwan, so too do I find familiar the secondhand experience of these barbed wire fences, the heavily militarized border, and the inexpressible sensation of gazing across at the person who is meant to be your enemy, but who has your face (115). The echoes of the Partition of India are inescapable (and I am far from the only person to think so—the comment section of this particular episode on YouTube was full of comments from Indians and Pakistanis feeling the same way).

Although all of this is happening within the restrictive structures of the Cold War system that still have so much power in this region, and layered upon those the vagaries of the nation-state imposing its power through militarized nationalism, the format of this variety show also gives us, as Chen noted, an authentic and affecting emotion that eclipses all of those things. Perhaps this is one part of what Paik Nak-chung describes as the South Korean “third party,” a citizen movement that goes beyond the actions and agendas that drive governments and politicians to upend the status quo and create new formations of what Korea means that will create a true path to reunification (14).

Watching the episode again, I am struck by the cast’s dinner game from the night before they visited P’anmunjŏm: a quiz about the meanings of North Korean expressions, in anticipation of, in the words of the director, “a peaceful termination to the war...[and that] we might be able to meet North Koreans soon” (Episode 222 00:46:51). This reminds me of Se-ri’s many conversations with North Koreans in *Crash Landing in*

which they teach her various slang words in their dialect, some of which become permanent fixtures in her vocabulary even after she returns home.

These television shows, although fulfilling their primary purpose of entertainment and an implicit secondary one of nation-building, also serve a third, even more important function of humanizing the other. In a space that is simultaneously private and public, they underscore the human cost of war and partition, and paint a picture of what might be regained in a way that sidesteps the limitations of realpolitik. In a similar way, *2DIN* shows us the lasting trauma and pain felt by the descendants of colonial-era Koreans who were exiled to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and who were unable to return from Cuba; there is a different but equally emotionally powerful gesture towards reconciliation and unity in those episodes.

On top of these internal functions, *2DIN* also portrays the idea of the Korean nation to a very engaged external audience, not only the global, mostly non-Korean audience it has increasingly recognized and courted, but most importantly for this discussion, a covert audience of North Koreans who have been catching KBS' analog signal with their antennas as far north as Pyongyang, and spreading recorded episodes of *2DIN* around on memory sticks and DVDs, since the early 2010s. *2DIN* is one of the most popular South Korean shows in North Korea, and when Season 3 went on indefinite hiatus due to a cast member being exposed as a sexual predator—cut off from much of the news broadcasts and social media firestorm that would explain this—they wondered why they couldn't watch it anymore (Jang).

North Koreans love the show because it shows them ordinary life in many different parts of South Korea, rather than the more artificial and idealized settings of dramas, and shows them small commonalities between the North and South, such as games played in both countries, while also fascinating North Koreans with its portrayal of South Koreans' freedom of movement, a freedom that they lack (Jang). It's possible that when deciding to film in P'anmunjŏm, the production team considered the fact that they have an audience in North Korea. Perhaps they were secretly speaking to North Koreans through their overt statements of hope for communicating one day. This is one more dimension to the power of visual media to cross the borders of physical and political space and allow people to identify with each other.

Dramas, too, are popular in North Korea, especially among young people, despite the extremely harsh penalties they face if they are caught with non-state media (Lee). *Crash Landing* co-writer Kwak Moon-wan, who trained as a filmmaker in Pyongyang, defected about a decade ago to South Korea, and he incorporated this detail into the show: one of the soldiers is a South Korean drama addict, and this later serves him well when he interprets South Korean slang and culture for his comrades. Kwak wonders how they will react once they see this story, "portraying North Korean characters and storylines in a way never seen there before...It's their story. It's about them," he affirms (Subin Kim).

When we broaden the lens to include the diasporic Koreans from the 10th Anniversary Special, the particular episodes of *2DIN I* discussed might be considered as tangential to, and influenced by, a rising documentary culture in South Korea that is

gaining importance as a way to approach and disseminate truth and reclaim history (Kim Soyoung 7). *2DIN* is far from being a documentary, but in one sense, the episodes I have discussed engage with the type of work that Director Kim Soyoung attempts to do in her own trilogy about Koryo people, an effort to “trigger a productive re-orientation of a geopolitical sense of sovereignty centered on the peninsula, which has been the stage of a protracted turf war between the big powers of China, Russia, Japan, and the U.S” (3). This re-negotiation of the nation comes not only from abstract knowledge of history, but from the cast’s human interactions with its consequences; viewers vicariously and directly experience alienation, sorrow, respect, admiration, and empathy as they learn about heretofore unknown parts of the nation that they are now in the process of embracing. It’s a powerful and authentic experience that transcends *2DIN*’s stated purpose of entertainment, and its undeniably nationalistic viewpoint.

Likewise, in popular narrative media depicting north-south interactions, there has been a shift away from stories limited mostly to war and espionage toward more romance, and even a change, as I noted above, between an earlier highly politicized action/romance in 2012 and a very personal love story circumscribed by political impossibilities in 2020. Two dramas can never be a trend, of course, but in comparison to the lukewarm response to *The King 2 Hearts*, *Crash Landing on You* broke cable viewership records with its finale, gaining over 22% ratings on cable network tvN (Yi Min-chi). Despite some complaints that the drama glamorized North Korea, overall this is an indication that domestic viewers are seeking a much more human experience of the alienation and struggle caused by division; that they enjoy and relate to the ordinary

North Korean life they were able to imagine through the gaze of the drama; and that the themes of a limited, unlikely, but urgently prayed-for and awaited reunion are highly resonant. These are powerful and authentic experiences that transcend these shows' primary function as entertainment, whether they are framed as "real" or fictional.

3. Bollywood Encounters: Hindutva as India

The rise of Hindu nationalism in India since the 1990s has been a steady and disturbing trajectory toward fascism, with incidents of Hindutva terrorism happening so often that many have called them pogroms (Gatade, Roy). In their most recent federal elections, Pakistan elected Imran Khan, a proponent of interfaith cooperation who in 2019 initiated a historic program for visa-free pilgrimages for Sikhs to the gurdwara¹ in Kartarpur where the founder of Sikhism is laid to rest (Hashim). Meanwhile, India reelected Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Hindu nationalist Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), formerly the Chief Minister of Gujarat during the bloody massacre of Muslims there following government demolition of the Babri Masjid in 2002.² His government recently passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, which provides a fast track to citizenship for asylum seekers escaping religious persecution but explicitly excludes Muslims (Press Information Bureau, India).

In the weeks since, this same government has looked the other way as Hindu nationalist mobs have attacked and killed peaceful protestors with the support—or at least the indifference—of Indian police. Arundhati Roy has said that the CAA, “with the National Population Register and the National Register of Citizens...is meant to delegitimise, destabilise and criminalise not just Muslims but hundreds of millions of Indians who do not have the requisite documents[sic],” including the Hindus, Muslims,

¹ Sikh temple

² This is the same massacre mentioned in Chapter 1, which happened close to the release of *Lagaan*.

Dalits, and Adivasis subjected to the NRC's citizenship tests which "[forced] people to produce documentary proof of belonging going back several generations" and prove their claims in "foreigners' tribunals notorious for their lack of procedural or substantive standards" in Assam last year (Chawla et al). Those found lacking were suddenly ejected from the nation, their families torn apart and some pushed to suicide—a program many fear is slated for massive expansion.

In the context of this increasingly troubling political climate, I would like to look at Indian examples of cross-border relationships in popular Hindi-language, or Bollywood, films. "Bollywood" is often used to refer to all of Indian cinema, but in fact, the term describes more precisely the Hindi film industry, centered in Mumbai (previously Bombay). This industry is dominant politically and culturally due to its geographically and linguistically privileged position in relation to other regional Indian cinemas, and its global popularity contributes further to the erasure of those cinemas. Ashish Rajadhyaksha has argued that Bollywood and its related media industries "have been crucial in constructing and disseminating messages about Indian cultural nationalism in and through entertainment, not least since...[it] was granted official industry status in 1988 by the state" (qtd. in Dudrah 5). Along with the rise in revisionist history disseminated through school curriculums and state messaging, there was a concurrent co-opting of popular entertainment media, or perhaps a willing cooperation on the part of filmmakers to align with nationalist narratives in exchange for capital and opportunity. Both at home and abroad, for Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, for their diasporic brethren, and for those who have no cultural ties to the region, Indian (and due to its

outsized influence, South Asian) “culture is increasingly represented through the audio-visual idioms of Bollywood cinema” (Durdah 6). Given their visceral power to shape the image of the nation for their audiences, it is vital to recognize that these films are absorbing Hindutva messaging more deeply as time goes on. I would like to examine the ways in which 21st-century Bollywood films depict personal relationships between Indians and Pakistanis, and alternative histories that reify the revisionist narratives about who the nation belongs to, and who may be allowed to remain inside its embrace.

3.1 Cross-border Love Between Indians and Pakistanis

To set the stage I begin with *Main Hoon Na*, a fairly forgettable, corny masala film³ that felt dated already when it was released, and yet speaks to the Hindi cinema landscape of the time. Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan debuted his production company in 2004 with the film *Main Hoon Na [I'm Here]*, an endlessly derivative musical/action/romance/comedy that on its surface pushes back against stereotypical portrayals of Pakistan as the eternal enemy. The plot revolves around a government plan to return fifty Pakistani political prisoners home as a goodwill gesture, which is vehemently opposed by a group of domestic terrorists; Khan plays the hero, an army major who goes undercover to protect their target, the college-age daughter of a general. The film is notable for portraying the few Pakistanis that it actually shows in a sympathetic light, condemning the idea of perpetual India-Pakistan conflict, and arguing

³ A “masala film” is one that, like the many spices that make a *masala*, combines many genres, such as comedy, action, romance, musical, etc. in order to create a film that appeals to a broad audience.

through its protagonists for peace between the people of both countries who have been suffering “from an enmity none of us chose,” as Khan’s character says (2:24:10).

Throughout the film, however, it is India that nobly extends the olive branch first, the implication being that Pakistan would never take such an initiative on its own.

Ultimately, the movie is too broadly comedic and exaggerated in tone to thoughtfully tackle the issues of terrorism, unjust detainment, or toxic far-right nationalism that it blithely raises. Nor does it reckon with its extremely high body count, but simply folds all this murder by both heroes and villains into a blatant jingoism and glorification of the Indian army and its soldiers as the best of men. Khan’s character is blessed with superhuman physical abilities, moral infallibility, and unreserved adulation from almost everyone he interacts with, even though he brutally beats his prisoners for information and repeatedly shoots men point-blank without blinking an eye. There is no engagement with the brutality of the army because they are unequivocally portrayed as noble, righteous, and masculine beyond anything achievable by mere civilians.

Main Hoon Na is a strange mismatch between lightweight execution and heavy subject matter which is further skewed by the difference between the star power of its cast and the terrible quality of the production. It is not a serious movie, and yet it seems to have a serious message: that peace with Pakistan is a noble undertaking that begins with a single step, and that Indians must resist internal narratives such as those of the villain, who claims that the only good Pakistani is imprisoned or dead. There are two aspects of this framing that bear emphasis: its insistence that India must be the first and better partner in this peace process, and its framing of anti-Pakistan, anti-peace sentiment

as originating and existing only in violent extremist groups, outside the government and civil society, and removed from the purely heroic actions of the military, who would never engage in or approve of such indiscriminate nationalistic killing.

The focus on and glorification of the army, and the military man as the hero, has been a constant theme in these cross-border narratives, for good reason given that they deal with relationships that psychically and physically have to overcome barbed wire and guns, land mines and electrical fences in order to find a happy ending. While *Main Hoon Na* is different from the genre of Islamophobic spy thrillers that are as abundant in Hindi cinema as they are in Hollywood, putting the terrorists inside the homeland and making them a threat caused by a twisted patriotism rather than sourcing violent extremism from a foreign or foreignized other, this is not actually a story about Indian-Pakistani relations. Pakistanis appear onscreen for seconds at most, and are only symbols of the nobility of the Indians at the center of this story; the film is about the opposing impulses toward war and peace when one is dealing with the perceived enemy. It does not go very far in that exploration, however, and ultimately falls back on the chauvinistic aesthetic common to masala films of the era, becoming a simplistic paean to the might and righteousness of the Indian army, strong and noble enough to both protect their own people and those of another country from the threat of domestic terrorists.

But *Main Hoon Na* is not the only film produced by and starring Shah Rukh Khan that year which tackles India-Pakistan relations; in fact, it is a lesser film in both quality and influence than *Veer-Zaara*, released only a few months later, which earned the spot of top-grossing Indian film of 2004. Khan again plays an Indian military man, this time

an Air Force pilot, Veer, who falls in love with a Pakistani woman from a prominent family in Lahore, Zaara (Preity Zinta). She travels to India to lay her Sikh nanny's ashes to rest in a holy shrine; he saves her life and then finds himself taking her back to his village for a day to meet his parents. Zaara returns to her home for the political marriage that will further her father's career, but neither can forget the other, and Veer eventually comes to ask her to marry him and go to India with him. He is framed as a spy by Zaara's fiancé and put in Pakistani jail; twenty-two years later, a young lawyer, Samiya (Rani Mukerji), successfully clears his name. Zaara, whom Veer had assumed married and settled, has been living all this time in his village with his parents; she comes back to Lahore to testify on his behalf, and the two finally marry and go back to India to live out their days together.

Although Veer is a soldier and Zaara a political scion, the film's emphasis on their romance causes *Veer-Zaara* to feel domestic in its tone, mostly eschewing the intrigue and violence that is central to *Main Hoon Na* and its aforementioned ilk, and focusing on small moments and ordinary life. 2015's *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* also substitutes emotion for politics—or rather, chooses to explore the politics of emotion rather than those of armies, government agencies, and borders, even while acknowledging the power of all three. A Salman Khan vehicle about a young mute Pakistani girl who gets left behind in India and the hero's journey to protect and care for her as he tries to reunite her with her family, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* centers on the relationship that grows between this giant, simple man and the adorable six-year-old that attaches herself to him when he initially shows her kindness, and how that relationship has ripple effects on not only everyone they meet, but

eventually the people of both countries. In the end, the hero Bajrangi ends up taking little Shahida back home by crossing the border without a visa and is detained under suspicion of being an Indian spy; it's only the viral video—titled “Bajrangi *Bhaijaan* (brother)” — uploaded by a Pakistani reporter who helps them that eventually causes an upswell of public opinion in Bajrangi's favor. At the reporter's urging, crowds of Indians and Pakistanis come to the border in support. The Pakistanis force open the fences on their side, chanting his name, and allow Bajrangi to finally go home.

The bond that grows between Bajrangi and Shahida is represented in the movie as a sort of adoptive uncle-niece relationship; he tells her early on that whenever she is able to speak, she is to call him *mama*, the word for maternal uncle. In the final scene, as he walks away across the border, unable to see her frantic waving goodbye, she finally calls out, “Mama!” and he turns back to catch her running body in his arms, holding her in the air as he stands right in the middle of the river that marks the boundary. Here again, familial bonds are formed across borders as a way to reconcile the deep wound of partition, as in *The King 2 Hearts*, *Crash Landing on You*, and *Veer-Zaara*. In the ending scene of *Veer-Zaara*, lawyer Samiya walks Veer and Zaara to the Wagah border, and she gives them a tin of *sindoor*, the red powder that indicates a Hindu woman is married. Veer applies it to Zaara's hairline in a symbolic marriage, right before they step over the line into India.

The imagery of borders is as inescapable in these films as in the television programs I discussed in Chapter 2; these representations of barbed wire, electrified fences, patrolling soldiers, painted border lines, even the natural line of a river given the

artificial heaviness of a boundary—all have a visual and psychic power that is exceeded only by the act of imagining freely crossing them. As Rajinder Dudrah has observed of *Veer-Zaara*, “one of [its] central aesthetic pleasures...is the emphasis placed on the act of border crossing as a potentially radical act” (26). What is further observable in both *Veer-Zaara* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* is that it is not just borders which constrict and restrict people, and in turn are resisted and crossed by them; it is the borderlands which surround them, a far less rigid space in continual transition, that form the truly creative background for the action of the films. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, the “borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (qtd. in Dudrah 17). Borderlands thus become sites for cultural exploration of the limits of the common understanding of the nation, the nation-state, the family, and the self.

In these two films, we see not only the bodily crossing of borders that took place in *The King 2 Hearts* and *Crash Landing on You*, the physical and deliberate movements that cross over and under borders—Veer and Zaara travel on buses and trains toward and away from each other, and for Shahida and her mother, the train is the instrument of both hope and separation. Shahida’s mother takes her to a famous shrine in India that legend tells will cure any mute, but during a delay on their way back home, Shahida steps away for a few minutes while her mother is sleeping, and when she hops back on it is onto the wrong train, which her takes her in the opposite direction from the border and her home. Shahida’s mother realizes almost immediately that her daughter is missing and pleads desperately to go and search for her, but they have just entered Pakistan, and the conductor tells her she needs a new visa: “It may be five minutes away, but it’s across the

border. It's in another country" (0:15:32). Bajrangi faces the same obstacles when he finally realizes that Shahida's home is in Pakistan; without her passport, he cannot get her a visa from the Pakistani embassy in Delhi, and is forced to resort to illegal means to return her home due to the unreasonable bureaucracies and unforgiving apparatuses of the securitized nation-state.

Veer-Zaara is much more idealistic in its portrayals of the difficulties of crossing this highly militarized border, its characters easily hopping on the bus or train at a moment's notice, with a blitheness that belies the long and fraught history of these hard-won links between the two countries. The Delhi-Lahore bus made its inaugural run in 1999 and was known as the "friendship bus," while the Samjhauta Express—*samjhauta* means "compromise," or "agreement"—has run since 1976 between the two countries (*The Telegraph*). In August of 2019, Pakistan suspended both types of transport in response to India's revocation of Indian Jammu and Kashmir's special status (Shahzad). India soon followed suit and cancelled its own service as well (*The Indian Express*). Air travel between the countries has always been tense and limited, and as of March, 2020, a perfunctory web search reveals no available direct flights.

People can still cross by foot at the Wagah border, however, a borderland with a particular cultural significance because it not only stands on the Grand Trunk Road that links the legendary cities of Lahore and Amritsar, but is famously the site of a spectacular lowering of the flags before sunset. Held daily since 1959, the Beating Retreat Ceremony has become enough of an audience spectacle that both sides now have stadium seating, drawing huge crowds that include locals from each country as well as tourists. Indian

Border Security Forces and Pakistan Rangers strut, stamp, and kick in each other's directions in a display that is somehow both incredibly tense and highly festive, the audience cheering and chanting patriotic slogans as the border guards posture aggressively like the peacocks the high crests of their turbans inevitably call to mind (see fig. 2). A breathtakingly precise choreography balances leashed hostility and a careful politeness: at the end of many minutes of marching up to and away from each other,



Figure 2: The Beating Retreat Ceremony at Wagah

raising their arms and holding them rigid in the air, walking so close to each other that their high kicks pass centimeters from each other's noses, with plenty of ritualized yelling and smoothing of impressive mustaches, the sergeants exchange a quick and firm handshake just before the gates are shut (*Urdu Point*).

This is the border across which Veer walks with Zaara when he finally returns to India; it is the space through which the Samjhauta Express carries Shahida's mother away from her when the little girl gets left behind. The resonances of the chauvinistic ceremony are clearly present in the visual evocation of Wagah, and even the verbalization of its name. Videos of the ceremony remind me powerfully of the interactions between the cast of *2 Days and 1 Night* with the North Korean border guards in their visit to P'anmunjŏm. Of course there is a difference here, in that Wagah is an open if highly militarized border, and there are no restrictions on speaking or interacting between citizens of each country; but in the Beating Retreat Ceremony itself not a single word is spoken between the soldiers. All communication is carried out via intense glares and rigidly stylized gestures, and there is a tension in the air that no amount of audience cheering or popular dance music can completely overcome: an oasis of silent jingoism.

When interviewed about his feelings when he participates in the ceremony, one Pakistan Ranger replied, "When we parade, our chests broaden with pride...At that moment we feel so much anger and so much passion that we don't know what we're doing" (*Urdu Point* 1:34, 2:17). This spectacle itself is not present in either film, but the painted gates and borders, the guards and flags and signs clearly mark the space, and cannot but hold a special significance for anyone who is familiar with the ritual, especially domestic or diasporic audiences. The crossing of this line and all that it represents, and the relationships formed by staying on the "wrong" side of the border for an extended time, as Veer, Zaara, Shahida, and Bajrangi all do, can be seen as a form of

resistance to the regulations and narratives of the nation-states that control these highly militarized borders.

This gesture of solidarity plays out in multiple dimensions, not only in relationships between people based on shared ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity, but also in people's relationships with the land, which were ripped apart so brutally and re-sewn so hurriedly during and after Partition that the seams are still visible wounds. (One example of this can be seen in the continual return in so many Hindi-language films to Lahore as the great lost city, just across the border, that can no longer be called India's own—a subtext of both *Kalank*, mentioned in Chapter 1, and *Veer-Zaara*.) Both *Veer-Zaara* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* begin with scenes of rural life with no visible markers of nationality; the former features Veer and Zaara frolicking together in fields of grass and flowers, while the latter opens on breathtaking views of Shahida's mountain village in Pakistani Kashmir—two landscapes that exist in both countries, down to small details of farming vehicles and regional clothing, language and music, crops and cattle. Even for Indians and Pakistanis, it is near-impossible to visually distinguish which side of the border these places fall on (and given the disputed status of Kashmir, that region especially lives in a no-mans-borderland of impossibility and flux).

The feeling of familiarity and home felt by the characters when they visit each other's homes is made explicit twice in *Veer-Zaara*. As Veer guides Zaara to the gurdwara where she will scatter her nanny's ashes, in arguably the most beautiful sequence in the film, they travel through the countryside and sing "*Aisa Des Hai Mera* [This is my country]". As they travel through ripe fields on the roof of a bus and then a

cart, chomping on fresh *ganna* [sugarcane], the song describes Veer's love for his land and its people, and Zaara's recognition of how similar they are to her own—that they are, in fact, her people, since they are both Punjabi.⁴ “I don't know why it feels so familiar to me,” she sings. “My country is the same as yours” (0:42:22). Near the end of the film, when Veer has been cleared of wrongful charges by a Pakistani judge and received an apology from the government, he stands in the courtroom and recites a poem about the view through his jail window:

I see days, months and years turn into eras.

This dirt smells like my father's fields.

The sunlight reminds me of my mother's cold buttermilk.

These rains bring back memories of our monsoons.

The winters make me recall the holy fire of Lohri.

They say, ‘This is not your country,’

but why does it feel like my own?

They say I am not like them,

but why do they seem just like me? (3:01:54-3:02:50)

These two scenes, although heavy-handed, are also the movie's most powerful, effectively conveying the message of hope for India-Pakistan solidarity that is at its heart. Veer's speech layers upon that hope a grief for lost time; his eyes are wet not only for the twenty-two years he has unjustly spent in jail, but for over half a century of hatred and

⁴ The province of Punjab was divided (sloppily) into its majority Muslim and Sikh/Hindu parts in 1947, so both India and Pakistan have a Punjab within their borders.

violence, separation and pain and misunderstanding. His words carry both hope for reconciliation and sadness over the need for it in the first place, when the “enemy” is a mirror image of himself.

In *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, Shahida’s silence is used as a device to engender the same familiarity and solidarity between her and Bajrangi. Initially, all the Indians she meets assume she is one of them. She loses her headscarf during her travels; when Bajrangi realizes she can understand him but cannot speak—since vernacular Hindi-Urdu can easily be categorized as dialects of the same language—her young age means that no confusion is engendered by her inability to read or write Hindi. He takes her to his fiancée’s family home, where he lives, and which his bigoted future father-in-law has declared as a Brahmin⁵-only space, and she lives with them while they work on finding out where she’s from (their strategy is to ask her place names, but she keeps shaking her head). Bajrangi is horrified to find her eating chicken at the Muslim neighbors’ one day, but assures himself that she must be a Jain—they eat meat too. He only resigns himself to shocking truth that she is actually a “Mohammedan,” as he and his family derogatorily call Muslims, when he finds her praying in a nearby mosque. The final blow comes during a televised India-Pakistan cricket match, when Shahida cheers for the wrong team.

Part of Bajrangi’s journey is thus to overcome his prejudices not only about Pakistanis but about Indian Muslims as well, people whom he has lived near his entire life but treated as though their mere presence is a contamination. His instant kinship with

⁵ Brahmins have the highest status in the Hindu caste system.

Shahida, and the love he develops for her, conflict with his anti-Muslim biases, which linger until they have crossed the border into Pakistan and are on the run from the police, taking shelter in a local mosque. When Bajrangi runs out of the building in horror after realizing where he spent the night, the *maulana* [religious teacher] there tells him gently that the mosque is open to everyone, regardless of faith. The maulana protects Bajrangi, Shahida, and their reporter friend from the police, and guides them for part of their way. The scene in which they say goodbye is intercut with Bajrangi's future father-in-law back in Delhi, fearing what kind of treatment he's facing across the border. In Pakistan, Bajrangi offers the maulana *adaab*, the Muslim gesture of greeting, and the old man asks him what his people say. A devout Hindu, Bajrangi replies, "*Jai Shri Ram* [Glory to Lord Ram]," and those are the last words the maulana says as he sees them off. In the final scene of the film, when Shahida speaks for the first time, calling Bajrangi uncle, she repeatedly calls out "Jai Shri Ram" as her goodbye to him, not understanding its meaning but knowing it as his all-purpose greeting.

This crossing of the boundaries of religion is an act of compassion and shared humanity, but there are also moments when the impulse for unity can fall into a concurrent confusion or blurring of identity that flattens individual agency, especially of those characters who come from marginalized backgrounds. For example, Veer would clearly seem to be a Sikh based on his name, his Punjabi heritage, and the silver *kada* he wears on his wrist, but the Pakistanis he meets all refer to him as a Hindu; both Zaara and Veer's mother wear *sindoor* in their hair, the symbol of a married Hindu woman. It is unclear whether the audience is meant to assume that Pakistanis would be too ignorant to

realize he has a Sikh name (impossible in Lahore, given the deep history of Sikhs in that city and the prevalence of Indian media in Pakistan), or whether the filmmakers found it unimportant to clearly mark Veer as either Sikh or Hindu, as both represent India, and contrast suitably with Pakistan's Islamic identity. The way that Sikh identity is subsumed by Hinduism also lands awkwardly when one considers the deep anger of Sikhs at the time of Partition, who felt betrayed that they, as the third largest religious group, were not also given a homeland to claim as their own, leading to much violence—a history that Bollywood seems content to forget. While their different religions are never a point of contention between Veer and Zaara—the main conflict is her arranged political marriage to someone else—the coding of Sikh and Hindu as Indian and Muslim as Pakistani, with no overlap in between, is clear.

Bajrangi Bhaijaan does better at acknowledging the nuances of both Indian and Pakistani identity, showing the existence of Muslims in Bajrangi's neighborhood, for example, and reproaching certain strains of Indian anti-Muslim prejudice. The film also implicitly critiques the assumptions characters make that any Indian must be Hindu and any Pakistani must be Muslim, as in Bajrangi's series of wrong guesses about Shahida's identity, or a Pakistani policeman's instant dismissal of Bajrangi's declaration that he has come to return Shahida home as soon as he sees Bajrangi's gift of a Hanuman⁶ necklace around her neck. Still, Bajrangi takes the archetype of the nobly devout Hindu hero that has become increasingly dominant in Hindi-language cinema to an extreme. He is so

⁶ A major Hindu god and the one Bajrangi is especially devoted to.

pious that he refuses to lie, so straightforward that even after tunneling under the electrified border fence without papers he insists on waiting for the patrols and asking permission to enter Pakistan. The Muslim characters he meets and interacts with are the ones who make the compromises: the Pakistani reporter who joins them lies to the police so that Bajrangi won't have to; Shahida wears a miniature of the god he reveres, and to whose worship much screentime is devoted, for most of the film; both the maulana and Shahida recite the words "Jai Shri Ram" as their last words to him. Likewise, in *Veer-Zaara*, Zaara rejects her Pakistani family and home and finds freedom and contentment with Veer's parents after he is imprisoned, and brings him back with her to his village once he is freed. All these years, she has been operating a school for girls after escaping from her arranged marriage, and her own parents die without ever seeing her again.

India is ultimately the space where these characters can live freely and happily together. Once Bajrangi and Shahida's story goes viral in both countries, thanks to their reporter friend, there is a groundswell of popular support by Pakistanis to free Bajrangi and send him home, but he has been chased, beaten and imprisoned for days in Pakistan. In both these films, India is the land of pluralism and multi-ethnic solidarity, while Pakistan has to learn the lesson that such a thing can exist, and even be valuable. Even Shahida's family, when they lose her, put their faith in the belief that "there must be a person of God in India that will take care of" her; Veer's lawyer and his prison guard both call him a "man of God" (*Bajrangi Bhaijaan* 0:16:18, *Veer-Zaara* 1:31:00). This may be an understandable oversimplification given Pakistan's founding identity as a Muslim country in contrast to India's secular multicultural constitution, but it ignores the

reality that Pakistan also has minority faith populations, and more importantly, as I mentioned above, the recent opposing trends in both countries when it comes to state rhetoric about their minority communities.

Those troubling developments in India, which seem headed in an increasingly dark direction, have intensified in the last few years, but they were certainly already gaining momentum when *Veer-Zaara* was made, and even more so by the release of *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*. “Jai Shri Ram” is no longer a neutral religious slogan and has been co-opted by Hindutva; anti-Muslim mobs chanted it in Gujarat in 2002 and have done so in many lynchings and riots in the years since, claiming the lives of many Indians, most of them Muslim. In that context, although the film’s nuanced and sympathetic portrayals of Muslims and Pakistanis are commendable, that last scene of the film where a little girl in hijab speaks for the first time in her life, only to shout “Jai Shri Ram” over and over as she runs toward the border, away from her family and into the arms of the devout Hindu hero who has consistently protected her in a way they were unable to, complicates its affect. The love between Bajrangi and Shahida is moving, and the many interactions throughout the movie between people who are supposed to be on opposing sides are beautiful and clearly well-intentioned, but this conclusion implies a swallowing up of Muslim identity by Hindu nationalism, and of the diversity of South Asian identity melding into Indianness, that has disturbing parallels with the way Modi’s BJP government seeks to expel Muslim bodies from the nation while erasing their cultural and spiritual identities and contributions to India.

3.2 *Rewriting Ancient History*

One of the ways this revisionist history has manifested in recent Hindi films is a string of massive hits that center around fictionalized tales set many centuries ago, which speak to the present and the past simultaneously. These films take the rough outlines of the historical archive and fill them in with narratives that speak to the variously contested histories that sustain the post-division national identity, the origins of which can be traced to the very beginnings of the British presence in Hindustan. Far in advance of its post-1857 policy of divide and rule⁷, the British Raj laid its foundations with a long campaign of Orientalist writing that construed Muslims as foreign conquerors and ravagers of oppressed and passive indigenous Hindus. Over time, not only did India's native populations internalize the idea that the two communities were monolithic, separate entities that could not live peacefully together, but in the early twentieth century, these functional and intellectual divisions dovetailed with a particular strain of the international pan-Islamic movement to create a narrative of separatism that gained enough momentum that Partition went from an impossible whim to a brutally realized reality in a few short years.

It is common knowledge at this point that British colonialism relied as much on academic and administrative violence as it did on military suppression. The European science-religion binary that had developed by the twentieth century increasingly revered

⁷ The failed First War of Independence in 1857 resulted in a transformation in British policy that emphasized "differences of caste and creed in order to prevent, as Sir John Strachey once wrote, 'the growth of any dangerous identity feeling from community of race, religion, caste, or local feeling'" (Stewart 49).

the former over the latter. For many Britons, “if science served as an emblem of their progressively secularizing society, then Hindu-Muslim violence represented the demerits of an India burdened with a surfeit of religion,” even though it was their own systems of classification and administration that deepened the differences they had exaggerated upon encountering Indians in the first place (Gottschalk 6-7). The impulse to obsessively catalog and categorize, to map and regulate as an instrument of understanding and controlling the Indian population, did not operate only on a macro level of governing and politics, but often made important differences in the intimate and local spaces of Indian lives. The global reach of their empire prompted the British to develop “new ways of knowing...[and] more effective tools of social control...Forms of knowledge coalescing in the imperial context relied upon Indian labor, leadership, funding, innovation, and local knowledge.” For example, the field of trigonometrical surveying was advanced far more by those in British India than in Europe, and the modern technique for fingerprinting was developed in the Indian Civil Service (Gottschalk 9-11).

A particularly illustrative example of the way that British writers reimagined Indian society according to its own paradigms was the way that they used translations and reinterpretations of Indian texts to construct a narrative of history that portrayed Muslims as perpetually foreign, despotic conquerors who had been ruling over Hindus so oppressed as to not even recognize the tyranny of those who ruled over them—a convenient story that allowed the British East India Company, and later the Crown, to place themselves in the position of a benevolent conqueror arrived to free India’s beleaguered natives. However, Muslims came to India in multiple ways over many

centuries, the earliest of whom were actually companions of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th century; trade relations show a long history of contact between the Indian Ocean network, connecting Arabs to India well before the military conquests of the eighth century, and “the presence of Arab communities in Sind and Gujarat far predates the beginning of Muslim polities in Arabia.” This demonstrates that rather than a narrative of arrivals, there needs to be “a consistent history of being Muslim in India,” because an “origins narrative forecloses any reading of the Muslim past in India as being interconnected or socially and culturally heterogeneous” (Asif 25).

The most influential case of this was the *Chachnama*, a thirteenth-century text that purported to be translated from an eighth-century Arabic one, describing the reign of a Hindu raja and Muhammad bin Qāsim’s campaign to conquer his land. Colonial epistemology framed this as a hegemonic narrative in which “foreign Muslims entered India as conquerors in 712 AD. Colonial officers and historians explicated Muslim origins as a narrative of conquest, positing a racialized Arab overlord against a weak Hindu subject—a subject eventually liberated by British rule” (Asif 151-2). The foundation for this was East India Company employee Alexander Dow’s so-called “translation” of Firishta’s history of India, which Dow rearranged and excerpted with plenty of his own commentary to fit with his desired narrative of the Oriental despot, ignoring Firishta’s assertion of the longstanding connection and travel between India and Arabia, before and after Islam, and of multiple venues of Islam’s arrival in India (156-7). Dow not only characterized Islam as uniquely murderous, cruel and despotic, and Muslim rule in India as tyrannical, but also painted Hindus as “mild, humane, obedient, and most

industrious, they are of all nations on earth the most easily conquered and governed” (158). These racist stereotypes of the two groups were exactly what the Company, looking to establish an empire, wanted to hear, and Dow’s book quickly became one of the most widely read and influential European volumes on Muslim history in India (158).

In the post-Partition era, and especially in the last three decades as Hindutva has rose to prominence and become mainstream, the nation-state has enabled an eliding of the sources of these historical narratives, and a deliberate forgetting that Partition was not a solely Muslim idea, and that many Muslim Indians primarily identified themselves with the nation, and virulently opposed the idea of division. For example, in the state of Bengal, Hindus voted in favor of Partition, and Muslims were in favor of a unified Bengal (Ahmad). Much like South Korea’s revisionist dismissal of the role that leftist and communist ideology played in the Korean independence movement and the eventual disappearance of most of these leaders above the 38th parallel, India has erased much of the complex, heterogeneous forces that eventually led to Partition in favor of a homogenizing and unified Hindu identity for the nation that projects itself backward almost a millennium.

Sanjay Leela Bansali’s *Padmaavat* (2018) is a film that explicitly reconstructs this vision of the past as a legend in service of reifying just such a national identity. Currently the eleventh highest grossing film in India, *Padmaavat* is a follow-up to Bansali’s previous successful blockbuster along the same lines, 2015’s *Bajirao Mastani*. Like *Lagaan*, *Padmaavat* speaks to more than one temporality, looking inward and outward. Its shovel-blunt gaze tells us this immediately in the film’s opening scene, which is

anachronistically placed in “Afghanistan, 13th century.” *Padmaavat* is an adaptation of the allegorical 1540 Sufi poem “Padmāvat” by Malik Muhammad Jāyasī, a semi-historical story about the obsession of two kings for a princess named Padmāvati who is so beautiful that both men are willing to destroy kingdoms to have her. The poem was in its original context was in the tradition of Sufi allegories of the time that adopted Hindu folktales as their subjects (de Brujin 13-15). In the film, Ratansen, a Rajput king of Chittor, falls in love with Padmāvati while visiting her father’s kingdom. They marry and return to Chittor, but their bliss is cut short by the attack of Alāuddin Khilji, the second emperor of the Delhi Sultanate, who has heard of her great beauty and is of the opinion that anything precious must be his. Alāuddin lays siege to Chittor and a series of convoluted twists leads to a final battle between the two armies. Alāuddin kills Ratansen by circumventing the rules of honorable combat, and with his army, easily storms the city walls to claim Padmāvati, only to find that she and every other woman in the palace have committed *jauhar* (collective self-immolation). The broad plot strokes of the film echo those of the poem, but in tone, the film explicitly sets Ratansen as the noble and virtuous Hindu in contrast to Alāuddin as the savage, monstrous Muslim invader; in Jāyasī’s work, however, “the conflict between Ratansen and the sultan concerns different morals of political service, not the religious identity of the king and the sultan, as most modern interpretations of the poem suggest” (de Brujin 18).

The film sparked massive controversy ahead of its release due to rumors that a dream sequence portrayed Khilji and Padmāvati in a love scene; protesting “historical inaccuracy,” right-wing Rajput group Shri Rajput Karni Sena badly beat director Bansali,

vandalized the film's set in Rajasthan, and then burned it down when it was moved to another location. They threatened to cut off lead actress Deepika Padukone's nose as a symbol of dishonor, and petitions to block the film's release reached and were dismissed by the Supreme Court (Borpujari). The film thus begins with no less than three disclaimers, which include emphatic statements to the effect that the film is an adaptation of Jāyasī's poem with no claims of historical accuracy and no intention to disparage any group, and that the producers do not support the practice of *satī* [widow burning], even the promotion of which is outlawed in India. *Padmaavat* certainly has a muddled approach to historical events—this is clear from the simple fact that it conflates *satī* and *jauhar*. The former was a rare practice either performed by or forced upon widows that was famously instrumentalized by the British colonial regime in order to denigrate indigenous traditions, and in the Rajput case, reconstituted and further reified earlier patriarchal structures to subordinate women more deeply (Unnithan-Kumar 53, 50). *Jauhar*, in contrast, was the practice of Rajput royal women of burning themselves to death upon a military defeat in order to preserve not only their own, but their male family members' honor, rather than submit to the touch of their conquering enemies; it is a practice that has become valorized by certain Rajput groups in a post-independence India that has appropriated many colonial narratives about ancient history (Unnithan-Kumar 53, Banerjee).

Ironically, that rumored love scene, if it did indeed exist, was absent from the final cut, and the point of violent contention for this group ended up being nonexistent given the particular perspective that is advanced by the film. Like Bansali's previous film

Bajirao Mastani, *Padmaavat* employs unsubtle Islamophobic Hindutva tropes, portraying a specific and deliberate vision of Indian history that is very much in line with the way the Hindu nationalist movement has instrumentalized a revisionist narrative of the past since the early 1990s in order to forward its agenda of India as primarily a Hindu land in which minorities and especially Muslims must assimilate and adapt, or be quite literally ejected from the nation (Roy). This is the sense in which the film lives in not just a double but a triple temporality: the distant past, the colonial era, and the present nation-state.

The stereotypes that arose so strongly in the colonial era are rife in *Padmaavat*; Alāuddin Khilji is not only portrayed as a conqueror with the thirst for power, as he likely was given the historical archive, but as a villain who embodies all of the worst tropes that have been associated with the Hindutva version of India's history. He is a ravager of women, whether Muslim or Hindu; he murders not just for political power, but because he enjoys blood and carnage; he cheats and betrays at every possible opportunity; he and his fellow Muslims are dirty, darker-skinned than Hindus, always dressed in dark, greenish clothes, and their palaces, tents and armor are rough-hewn, poorly lit, and their design is often reminiscent of animal bones and claws. Khilji is not only single-minded, almost crazed, in the pursuit of his hedonistic pleasures, but the evils he and his men commit are linked explicitly to their faith. True to the film's discarding of historical accuracy, the flags of his army are white crescents on a dark green background⁸, a

⁸ The flag of the Delhi Sultanate was in actuality a dark green flag with a black stripe going down the left side.

purposely Islamophobic (and clearly anti-Pakistani) symbol that ostentatiously lingers over scenes of Muslim-enacted carnage. They are often portrayed praying to or praising Allah in the midst of their most heinous misdeeds, the film implying that such piety goes hand in hand with the depraved actions of the Muslim characters, in line with the Hindu nationalist idea that Islam is inherently violent and vile and needs to be “tamed” by Hinduism, which is the source of all that is good in India (Waikar 162).

In contrast, consistent with the trope of the nobly devout Hindu hero, Ratansen and the Rajputs are all that is honorable, merciful and refined; their palaces are gorgeous, delicate, and full of light, their armor fine, golden and shining. Just as Khilji’s villainy is unequivocal and tied to his identity as the Sultan of Delhi, Ratansen is willing to die for what is represented as the Rajput moral code, declaring, “History can turn its pages, but Rajputs don’t change their principles” (1:26:27). This is only one of many references to history in the film. In one scene, Ratansen warns Khilji to change his ways or become “a blemish on history,” and Khilji replies that he will burn any such pages—a direct contradiction to a scene earlier in the film in which he burns pages of historical records that do not mention his name (1:58:39, 00:58:20). These scenes are ironic when the viewer recalls the emphatic disavowals of authenticity and accuracy in the film’s opening disclaimer, a statement that becomes nothing but posturing in the face of the film’s deliberate and repeated invocations of the historical record and the grand and eternal significance it associates with this story.

Padmāvati’s speech to the women of Chittor when she commands them to jauhar (but not before asking her husband’s permission to die) are a far more honest

representation of the film's manifesto: "In every age, a war for righteousness is fought between good and evil, like the one between Lord Ram and Raavan," she declares, likening the Rajput soldiers to gods whose sacrifice will enable them to live forever (2:24:15). She does not ask their opinion before deciding on behalf of them all that "our bodies will be reduced to ashes, but our pride and honor will remain immortal" in "the greatest defeat of Alāuddin's life," and the women walk as one into the fire in a glorious conflagration (2:28:23). As I mentioned above, this framing of the women's total destruction as preferable to being touched or even seen by the Muslim enemy as a way of preserving the honor of their men, *who are already dead*, uses female minds and bodies as ideological and literal fuel for the preservation of the national whole, completely disregarding their agency and those historical records of cases where "widows [were] tied to the pyre so that they couldn't escape...[or] accounts of entire harems being massacred so that they wouldn't fall into enemy hands" (Banerjee). In addition, although jauhar, like satī, was infrequent, it was practiced not only in Hindu-Muslim conflicts, but indeed when one Rajput clan was defeated by another; nor were conquests such as Alāuddin Khilji's of Chittor motivated by and along religious lines, but were wars of expansion often having both Hindus and Muslim on either side (Unnithan-Kumar 53).

This glorification of the deaths of men in battle and women in self-sacrifice in *Padmaavat* forward a proto-nationalist prescription about the homeland as the ticket to a spiritual afterlife that replaces earlier large, unifying religions and/or philosophies with the idea of a nation that is, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, worth killing for but especially dying for (50). *Padmaavat* links heavenly grace with a righteous victory

carried out by the ordinary people of the nation; despite losing the battle, Padmāvati and her women win the war by preserving their bodies from the defiling touch and gaze of the enemy. (As is often the case, the equivalence of the female body with the land of the nation, and the necessity of guarding both, can be seen clearly.)

The growing phenomenon of period blockbusters in which the noble, homogenous citizens of the nation do battle against the enemy which has been labeled as its greatest threat is clear not only in Hindi films but also, as I observed in Chapter 1, in South Korean ones. In *Chungmuro*, this psychological real estate is taken up by the Japanese, who continuously face off against a mono-lingual, mono-ethnic version of glorified Korean masculinity; for Bollywood, the enemy is the internal Muslim population (and its external counterpart in Pakistan) that has been stripped of its indigeneity and marked as foreign, violent, amoral, and an existential threat to the nation that tore it apart once before and can easily do so again.

The increasingly rigid nationalism forwarded by popular film in India, well-received by both domestic and foreign audiences (including those in Pakistan, Bangladesh and the South Asian diaspora) dovetails disturbingly with progressively extreme government policies that seek to exclude non-Hindus and create a hierarchy of belonging within the nation that is both a long-term legacy of the colonial experience and a tragic failure to learn from the devastating losses of Partition. These narratives are dangerous because they are subtler than blatant bigotry and therefore more insidious; they operate using dog whistles and plausible deniability, claiming only patriotism and the desire for unity as their motivations.

Of course *Veer-Zaara* and *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, with their more balanced and sympathetic portrayals and their earnest and explicit pleas for brotherly love and cross-border understanding, cannot be placed on the same level as blatantly Islamophobic revisionist propaganda such as *Bajirao Mastani* and *Padmavaat*, but they exist within the same landscape, one which is trending toward less understanding and more violence. January saw the release of *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, a slick blockbuster film in the same mold that Indian critics have decried as marred by the saffronization of history and its “evil Muslim” stereotypes (Desai)—blatant ahistorical propaganda that is not only morally bankrupt, but irresponsible given the current political climate (Thakur). Fifty days after its release, it had made nearly as much money as *Padmavaat* did in its entire run, and was on track to be the tenth highest grossing Bollywood movie of all time (Tuteja).

Conclusion

Renowned Urdu writer Ismat Chughtai wrote, “It wasn’t only that the country was split in two—bodies and minds were also divided. Moral beliefs were tossed aside and humanity was in shreds...The bonds of relationship were in tatters, and in the end many souls remained behind in Hindustan while their bodies started off for Pakistan” (Rahman 65). The millions of Muslims left behind in India, who were either unable or unwilling to leave, were faced immediately with a “hardening [of] religious identities in India in the aftermath of partition, a question of food, culture and religion which has seen a vigorous resurgence in India today,” such as violent attacks on Muslims for slaughtering cows or even goats on Eid (70). For many Muslims, choosing to stay in India had been an act of resistance to the League’s separatist politics, but it came at great cost (78). For both Muslims and Hindus, there was not only the horrifying violence to deal with, but a feeling of deep displacement at the realization that “my home was no longer my home. It was a foreign land” (Hasan 42). In the newly created Pakistan, there was despair at the massive refugee crisis and the corruption and ineffectiveness of the fledgling government. People shouted slogans like *Pakistan Murdabad*¹ and said that instead of Pakistan, what they got was *Qabristan* [graveyard] (Raza 182).

Similarly, while North and South Korea were not divided along religious lines, the Korean War was fought over ideology, and the atrocities endured by people on the

¹ This is the opposite of the patriotic slogan, *Pakistan Zindabad*, which means “Long live Pakistan,” and basically means “Death to Pakistan.”

peninsula must have seemed equally baffling and sudden. As former U.S. Foreign Service officer Gregory Henderson noted: “No division of a nation in the present world is so astonishing in its origin as the division of Korea; none is so unrelated to conditions or sentiment within the nation itself at the time the division was effected; none is to this day so unexplained” (qtd in Suk-Young Kim 5). The euphoria of liberation from Japanese colonialism evaporated quickly when U.S. and Soviet rule was suddenly thrust open Koreans. This followed on the heels of the profound and destabilizing changes to Korean society due to the rapid, forced, penetrative nature of Japanese-imposed modernity and the ravages of World War II.

In South Korea, according to Bruce Cumings, the American Occupation simply took on—and in fact strengthened—the Japanese colonial bureaucratic structures, refusing to recognize the fledgling Korean congress led by popular leftist leaders and allying itself with conservative elements and collaborators, which set the stage for the autocratic dictatorship that would follow soon after and beleaguer South Korea for decades. “Koreanization” under American occupation simply meant turning over Japanese colonial structures such as courts and police to Korean hands; keeping the exploitative codes of Japanese colonial law intact meant that they could now be used by police and courts to suppress dissent against the Occupation, to surveil the people, and to censor the media. Even the newly formed Korean army was formed by American officials recruiting those who had previously ranked high in the Japanese army to lead and train its soldiers. Peasants were particularly incensed to see the same landlords who had oppressed them during the colonial era once again installed in power under U.S.

control. Once these people's committees gained some power, these grievances were exacerbated by the Japanese officials in the provinces urgently requesting American soldiers to arrive to replace them, and when those troops did come, there were many cases of combined Japanese and American units breaking up Korean demonstrations (290). Despite the clear popularity of these committee movements, they were systematically rooted out because they were incompatible with American interests. These uprisings ultimately failed to bring either war or revolution, and the brutal suppression of the peasant population by the police and army only strengthened police power and almost completely wiped out or sent underground leftist movements (290).

I highlight here traumas endured by the peoples of these regions leading to, during, and immediately after division because they are foundational scars that have shaped postcolonial nationalism in all of the countries created. For India and South Korea, which both retained much of their colonial infrastructure and slowly became the dominant powers among former co-citizens, this nationalism has taken on essentialist characteristics that have manifested in ways particular to each nation-state's development. What I have examined in this thesis is the 21-st century expression of popular narratives about these nations in each state, specifically through mass visual media.

Each nation has defined itself in opposition to the enemy created by partition. As Suk-Young Kim points out, the identity of every modern nation-state has been inevitably tied to control of its border, which allows it to perform its state authority and legitimacy (4). The borders that divide the Korean peninsula and the Indian subcontinent have taken

on a particularly strong collective psychic presence due to the uniquely violent, colonially germinated, and sudden nature of their creation. They are also ripe for “performative gesture[s] of resistance or compliance for individual border crossers in regard to their relationship to the state power” (Suk-Young Kim 4). The significance of the films and television shows I have discussed, and the logic of examining them alongside each other, lies in this tension between resistance and compliance, absorption by and rejection from the nation-state, and the different ways in which storytellers try to reconcile those impulses—and why they resonate so strongly with audiences.

The divisions that exist today between Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, between North and South Korea, are not natural or inevitable, but are implicated in the final blows of retreating empires that simultaneously devolved and divided power in intentional and artificial ways (Dubnov and Robson 4). A recognition of this fact is the only way to escape the bifurcated and deluded vision that reflects through the prism of postcolonial nationalism in these countries today. Yet the borders created in 1945 and 1947, as quickly as they appeared, are neither imaginary nor temporary. Despite the (increasingly faint) hopes for Korean reunification, even if this seventy-year war ends, peace will likely look much more like a federation or alliance between nation-states than one rejoined country. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have enough war and bad blood between them, and have completely reconstituted their separate national identities to such an extent, that erasing the borders between them is outside the realm of imagination.

What can be and are imagined through these media representations of self/other, inside/outside, citizen/foreigner, and nation/enemy are possibilities for healing and

reconciliation. To reference Laura Mulvey again in a slightly different way, in these works of media there is an effort to suture one's gaze to the perspective of another in order to gain not only empathy but a visualization of a future in which one might recognize the wounds of the past in a healthy way, and then move on from them. Unfortunately, this revolutionary potential of filmmaking is not often used to its full scope; those works that attempt such an endeavor rarely gain commercial success or broad viewership. Some of the works I have discussed here have at least gestured in this direction; they are limited, however, by the strongly nationalistic frameworks which their countries of production have used as a foundational tool of postcolonial nation-building. In the worst-case scenario, there is no gesture of unity or reconciliation, but simply the ugliness of cultural and ethnic cleansing. During the months I have written this thesis, the world has watched with increasing horror the logical endpoint of such rhetoric in India. Media can both produce and predict public sentiment; it is that power, constructive and destructive, that lies at the core of my argument.

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