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(Not So) Far from Bollywood
Videocinemas of India

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This is an essay on contemporary Indian cinema's burgeoning doubles, but not of the kind that once populated films like *Ram aur Shyam* (Tapi Chanakya, 1967) or even the relatively recent *Duplicate* (Mahesh Bhatt, 1998). My interest here is not in twins/doppelgängers as strategies of narration, but in doubling as a process of industrial differentiation. At a moment when commentators stress the streamlining, formalization, and standardization of the industry, I want to suggest that at another level a strategy of doubling – or, more generally, replication – is actually proliferating and diversifying Indian cinema's idioms, modes, and audiences. The replication always arrives with a difference (a bit like the distinguishing mark, the mustache or mole, on one sibling's face), so as to expand and diversify the field of operations.

I pursue this thought not via a focus on the established "Industry," but by attending to the offshoots that have materialized at its edges since the mid-nineties. My objective is to shift focus from globalized Hindi cinema or Bollywood, and even well-established regional cinemas (Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu…), to new emergent videocinemas in dispersed locales such as Khandesh and Manbhum, Ladakh and Malappuram (Mukherjee 2016). Two main factors have aided this emergence. First, the availability of relatively inexpensive digital video cameras and sound recording technologies, personal computer-based editing suites, including pirated software, and the wide dissemination of basic media skills. Second, as Bombay cinema has shifted toward urban cineplex and diasporic audiences that promise rapid and massive returns, it has had to jettison its "All India Film" formula that previously drew in diverse audiences by offering a smorgasbord of generic pleasures within a single film. The resulting gap in entertainment options is being filled by regional-language video industries with a keen sense of place.

These industries appear on the scene as Bollywood's underprivileged cousins, its spectral doubles: spectral not because they lack life or substance, but because they operate in its shadowy peripheries as so many uncanny iterations. While a strategy of reproduction is central to the consolidation of the mainstream culture industry's power, these fringe doubles remain far more ambiguous in their material and symbolic ramifications and in their relationship to Bollywood. No definitive, linear account – proposing absolute influence or pure local authenticity, complete capitulation or uncompromising resistance to an imputed "national" paradigm – can do justice to them. Their significance lies in their tactical bracketing of such sharp antinomies. Unfortunately, these polarized frames continue to structure debates on identity and imagination, agency and politics, masking the canny vitality of cultural practices on the ground. The point of this essay is to track the ways in which vernacular media practices forge "avenues of participation" in relation to snowballing aspirations.[1]

The rise of small-town videocinemas introduces a fresh torque in the old problematic of "national cinema." While commentators (including myself) tend to characterize these vernacular industries as "residual" or "peripheral," local cultural entrepreneurs, while aware of their underdog status, hardly think of themselves as incidental or vestigial.[2] If they focus on their "minor" status, it is to reflexively turn it into a matter of their centrality in their experiential-cultural milieu: their peripherality becomes the precondition for claims to a tenuous autonomy. Hence, bypassing well-worn arguments about the national-regional dialectic, I want to stress that 1) in this post-celluloid era, any conceptualization of "Indian cinema" must also account for the thriving videocinemas that now populate the contemporary national mediascape; and 2) these local formations, in foregrounding their minor attributes, actively participate in the *plastic* production of their own globalities.

Here, the term "plastic" refers not only to the plasticity – i.e., the simultaneous shape-taking mutability and shape-giving specificity – of the medium of video, but also to (i) these local videocinemas' *relational* negotiation of the overlapping scales of the local, the national, the regional, and the global; (ii) their openness to constant *adjustments* in response to shifting conditions; (iii) their frequent and strong invocations of *artifice* against – or in spite of – claims to naturalness; and finally, (iv) their obsessive attention to the gaps, conflicts, and *incompossibilities* that haunt the quotidian experiences from which they arise. The four aspects of relationality, mutability, artificiality, and incompossibility together constitute a condition of plasticity that, I argue, is a defining attribute of contemporary global imaginations, marking their distinction from all assertions of a naturalized universality.[3] These four aspects characterize, more or less, all contemporary videocinemas of the Global South, with their parallel infrastructures and circuits, their distinctly improvisational – and manifestly piratical – modalities, and their preoccupation with working out sutured identities and precarious agencies from the folds of disjunctive scales and temporalities.[4] Opportunistically recalibrating and repurposing

current technological affordances to fit their singular material-cultural contingencies, these plastic media formations forge their own distinct lo-tech, lo-brow digital modernities. "Southern" videocinemas from Malappuram to Nollywood bring to light situated nodes and practices that do not quite fit into standard accounts of cultural globalization and "global media."

To crystallize the analytical stakes of studying Bollywood's localized doubles, this essay focuses on two emergent videocinemas from Manipur and Malegaon. While dissimilar in their visions and strategies, both are located in politically volatile regions; both started well-nigh by chance; and both display great ingenuity on strikingly frugal budgets. If Bhojpuri cinema, also of recent vintage, has already found a huge audience and has begun to collaborate with Bollywood, Manipuri and Malegaon videocinemas remain curious outliers within mainstream imaginations of Indian cinema and stand scant chance of finding crossover audiences.[5] Celebrated by media buffs, yet relegated to a fringe, these two "industries" dramatize the conflicts against which local communities pursue cultural participation and self-making. Embodying two distinct aspirational vectors, they help foreground the incongruous conditions under which collective ambitions congeal from the more inchoate eddies of desire. These conditions take shape from interactions between the subnational, the national, and the transnational, and depend on the felt proximity or remoteness of these scales: hence the title of this essay. I will draw on the experiences of these two place-bound video cultures – the constant negotiations between their local concerns, vernacular idiolects, and techno-economic constraints on the one hand, and national and global norms on the other – to think about the linked questions of aspiration and participation.

Manipur: Between a Rock and a Hard Place

My account of Manipuri videocinema begins in 2000, when the Revolutionary People's Front, one of some thirty Manipuri militant separatist groups at war with the Indian state and often with each other, declared a ban on Hindi films and television channels, denouncing them as agents of a homogenizing Indian nationalism. This interdiction was accompanied by a stern and credible threat of death to any theater owner or cable operator who ignored it. But the story could well begin earlier: in 1949, with the controversial annexation of the princely state of Manipur to the newly independent Republic of India; in 1958, when the Indian Parliament passed the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) to quash radical secessionist tendencies in the north-eastern provinces bordering China and Burma (now Myanmar); in the mid-1960s, with the formation of the United National Liberation Front seeking to attain Manipuri sovereignty by any means necessary; or in 1980 when Manipur was declared a "disturbed region," thus activating the most draconian provisions of AFSPA.

This continual dispersion of an origin indexes a protracted history of internecine warfare, utter marginalization, and punitive repression – a history which the 2000 ban on Hindi media was responding to. For six decades, Manipur has remained in a perpetual state of exception. Since 1980, citizens' rights have been held in abeyance: army officers can open fire with the intent to kill, conduct searches without warrants, or arrest on the basis of "reasonable suspicion." Legal redress is not easy: no case can be brought against the army without the sanction of the Central Government. Oddly, these extreme provisions have been derived from a British Ordinance of 1942, designed to quash the historic Quit India Movement. This colonial hangover in administrative policy is mirrored in popular "mainland" attitudes: the North-East is seen as a wild, lawless frontier, and its denizens dismissed as lazy, simpleton tribals who are incapable of becoming modern citizen-subjects. Such colonial-era stereotypes produce a schizoid mix of policies, reflecting the conflicting tropes of paternalistic protection (tribal welfare measures) and disciplinary control (most notably, AFSPA) (McDuie-Ra 2009; Singh 2010; Tarapot 2003).

The state of virtual "martial law," along with the armed militant groups, has chipped away at the provincial government's sovereignty. Identity politics around ethnic affiliations is a messy affair: if the Kukis fight for autonomy of specfic districts, the Nagas want certain areas to go to Nagaland, the Indian state to the north; yet others want Manipur to secede (Oinam 2003). Common people find themselves caught in the crossfires between the armed forces and warring militant factions. A state of siege pervades every aspect of life: several people I spoke with described a feeling of being in an occupied territory (one mentioned Palestine explicitly) where the most basic day to day activity such as going to work, meeting friends, or shopping in the market produces unnecessary vexations. Then there is the constant profiling of young men as potential insurgents, or the scandalous and chronic instances of sexual violence against women. As McDuie-Ra observes, people are constantly worried "that each search, each routine questioning, each suspicion on the part of the armed forces could escalate into violence or destruction" (265). This affective terrain is crucial to a situated account of contemporary Manipuri cinema – although its most discernible traces remain largely off-screen. Only a few works, such as *Red Rose* (2008), *Kaboklei* (Pilu Heigrujam, 2009), *Bomb Blast* (2010), and *Mami Sami* (Ningthouja Lancha, 2010) directly engage this tense, imbrued context. The more recent *Lady of the Lake* (Haobam Paban Kumar, 2016) focuses on the state's forced eviction of fishing communities from the Loktak lake, ostensibly to safeguard the environment.

The ban on Bollywood came precisely when Bombay cinema was pushing to deepen its hegemony in every corner of India and to establish new markets abroad. From the insurgents' perspective, the injunction made good political sense: the articulation of a demand for political emancipation with a desire for an "authentic" cultural identity, the ban sought to expand the popular base of a limited, often alienating insurgency. While its political efficacies remain debatable, its effect on Manipuri cinema was spectacular. Just as theater owners faced imminent shut down for lack of screenable material, affordable video equipment became

available on the market. This happy conjunction provided an energizing fillip for Manipuri cinema: within the next few years, the annual output shot up from two or three celluloid films to over fifty video-films. Resourceful entrepreneurs stepped in: of these, a company called Kangla Films managed to procure and rent out not only cameras, accessories, and lighting, but also used or knock-off equipment such as trolleys and cranes sourced from the back alleys of Chennai and Bangkok. This company, which now offers comprehensive services including location scouting and production coordination, also produced the very first digital Manipuri film, *Lammei* (Oken Amakcham, 2002). No longer did films have to be sent to Kolkata or Bombay for development and editing: homegrown studio and post-production facilities now dotted the by-lanes of otherwise residential neighborhoods of Imphal, Manipur's capital. The average budget for a digital film ran around half a million rupees (the current figure being 1.5 million). Local boys and girls had a whole new set of opportunities: soon, a pantheon of local stars emerged. Like their counterparts from Bombay or Hyderabad, they now grace commercial bill-boards all over town, promoting everything from cosmetics to soda drinks. A vibrant cine-culture has developed, infiltrating practically every aspect of quotid-ian life: the street corner *paan* shop sells video compact discs or VCDs, as do women who peddle vegetables, pickled fish, or sweets in the market (Figure 3.1).[6]

Figure 3.1   Women selling groceries, sweets, and VCDs in Imphal's famed Ima market. Photo: Author.

I landed in Imphal in August 2011, in the middle of yet another embargo: a tribal community, seeking to exert its political clout, had decided to block one of the three National Highways connecting the state to the rest of India, constricting the supply of essentials from gasoline to medicines. Every evening, long lines of vehicles formed outside gas stations in the hope of some fuel in the morning: one could see young men playing cards or simply hanging out in these overnight queues. The main streets had open sewers, a condition unthinkable in most of India's provincial capitals. Inadequate electricity generation, coupled with antiquated distribution grids, caused long and frequent power outages. No account of Manipuri videocinema can ignore the grace with which the locals negotiate these everyday vexations: their resilience in this routinized state of exception is also a defining aspect of this creative industry. But could we not say, with just as much accuracy, that the local people are exhausted? A certain degree of giving in (or over) is a crucial element of survival: resilience names the capacity of an entity to absorb stress and strain, and to retain, more or less, its defining characteristics. Resignation and resilience: these are the two poles that mark the average Manipuri's daily existence. My fascination is for the perseverance, even alacrity, with which they continue to navigate, inhabit, and dream in this seemingly impossible space. For some, this comes across as a form of apathy, a disavowal of, or an inability to come to terms with pressing problems. Thus Phanjoubam Tarapot finds it unfortunate that people in the Imphal valley are so "easygoing" as to indulge in round-the-year festivals and celebrations even when the region is "rocked by anti-ceasefire agitation, insurgency-related crimes, ethnic conflicts, underground factional fights etc." (Tarapot 2003, 57). Consumed by the region's political crisis, Tarapot seems to miss the pragmatic dimensions of enduring – of *living on* – with the anchoring rhythms of seasonal celebrations.

On one of my first days in the city, I visited a shooting location: a two-storey home built around a courtyard, frequently rented out to film units. A set of camera tracks lay incongruously next to the traditional basil plant in the middle of the courtyard, the site of daily worship. The entire space had the disarming air of a homegrown enterprise, a mediatic version of the Gandhian cottage industry. It was right after lunch: a couple of cats were feasting on the used plates stacked in a corner. Bala, a popular young actress, was in makeup on the terrace (Figure 3.2). A group of teenage girls were practicing dance moves for a song routine to be shot later that afternoon. Although Gokul, the lead actor, was indisposed, the crew got busy setting up lights and reflectors after some hasty adjustments: there was no time to be lost in a tight schedule operating on a shoestring budget.

I noticed posters of Western and Korean actors and pop singers, all part of the décor in the young protagonist's room. While Western celebrities (Marilyn, Metallica, Madonna) along with Hong Kong martial art stars (Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan) have been a big part of Indian urbanity in the late twentieth century, the popularity of Korean popstars is a new phenomenon. Over the past few years, I have been following media reports about the inroads that *hallyu*, the Korean

Figure 3.2   The actress Bala in makeup on location. Photo: Author.

cultural wave, has made into Manipur. Unlike South-East Asia, though, the *hallyu* influence had not yet quite taken South Asia by storm; so, why Manipur? When the ban on Bollywood came into effect, cable operators were left scrambling to program the 24×7 television channels made possible by the nineties' massive expansion of telecommunication infrastructures. Enter Arirang and KBS World, two South Korean satellite broadcast networks offering news, K-pop, and soap operas. Within a few years, Korean pop-cultural references had become a part of everyday Manipuri lexicon. *Stairway to Heaven* (Lee Jang Soo, 2003), *Endless Love* (Yoon Seok-ho, 2000)*, I am Sorry - I Love You* (Lee Hyung Min, 2004). and *Boys over Flowers* (Jeon Ki Sang, 2009) mesmerized local television audiences. Subsequently, cheap pirated media circulating along the "Golden Triangle" smuggling routes of South-East Asia, facilitated the popularization of K-pop. Practically every one I spoke to in Imphal mentioned an affinity for the values and sentiments in Korean media: in their minds, Indian and Korean family melodramas and romantic comedies shared similar cosmologies (stressing values like chaste romance, filial piety, and respect for elders). What remained far less acknowledged was the promise of the good life under the sign of neoliberal globalization: South Korea, standing in for a resurgent East Asia, now fuelled the desire for accelerated development, social mobility, and consumerist fulfillment. For people in this part of the world, "Korea" competed with Euro-America as the model horizon of aspirations.

The more striking element of this felt kinship has to do with the recognition that "Koreans look more like us than mainland Indians." As one high school student cheerfully described herself to me: "small nose, small eyes, no eyelids."[7] Invoking a blatantly racialized affiliation in terms of physiognomy, the average Manipuri now opines that Korean fashion – clothes, make up, hairstyles – suits the local populace more than Bollywood-induced standards of beauty, grooming, and sociality. The material effect of this shift is visible at the level of local malls, commercial billboards, and hair salons. I am also struck by the distancing epithet "mainland," which intimates the alienation from decades of military repression and official disregard for local demands. Perhaps Manipur's Korean connection comprises an instance of a localized "minor" identity drawing on transnational resources to resuscitate a subnational vitality, calling into question the imputed hegemony of a nationalist mainland.

But this Korean connection may be a tad overstated in journalistic accounts. When I chatted with the teenage girls on the film set, they told me breathlessly of Korean boy bands such as *Big Bang* and *Supernova*; yet, their favorite star was Hrithik Roshan, one of Bollywood's reigning heartthrobs. Customers at media stores appeared to sift, almost invariably, through Bollywood titles. While the ban on Bombay cinema continues, people who can afford DTH and streaming services now have access to Hindi films at home. And to mainstream Indians, contemporary Manipuri video idioms appear closer to Bollywood than to *hallyu*. This has not been lost on the censorious militants: in 2005 and in 2007, two underground groups decreed that Manipuri films must avoid Bollywoodish inflections, and be true to Manipuri mores. But in the absence of a stable locus of sovereignty, such interdictions remain baffling.

Of course, the question remains: what is a properly Manipuri film? Most releases belong to the family melodrama and romcom genres, and are heavily influenced by the Manipuri folk play form *Sumangleela*: literally, courtyard play, where viewers surround the stage. The militants' ire was directed at the fantastic song-and-dance numbers, flashy costumes, and brash mannerisms that project a Bollywood-style Indian-ness. The objectionable elements included not only physical intimacy between male and female characters, or indecorous performance that might offend family audiences, but also location shooting outside Manipur, use of non-Manipuri actors in principal roles and playback singers: clearly, economic expediencies overdetermined cultural propriety in these regulatory edicts. Since then, a number of film production guilds have come together to form the Film Forum of Manipur, one of whose main functions is self-censorship in deference to an enigmatic "they." The forum appoints a committee of four or five members who ask for changes in the script and, later on, in the edited film.

The shifting barriers that any Manipuri video-film enterprise has to navigate bear testament to the remarkable plasticity of this creative industry. What analytical purchase can the concept of "resistance" possibly retain in such a scenario, and what forms might it take? In spite of the political ban on Bollywood, this industry's truck with Bollywood is far from over. In the past dozen years, some of the most

celebrated playback singers of Bombay have recorded songs for Manipuri films. National accolades remain important to the industry: in 2012 a Manipuri film, *Phijigee Mani* (O. Gautam), was honored with the Best Film Award by Delhi; and in 2016 a Manipuri documentary, *Phum-Shang* (Hao Bam Pabankumar), won the Golden Conch at the Mumbai International Film Festival. Manipuri cinema is overwhelmingly commercial in intent, although there are a handful of filmmakers who want to pursue alternatives, who count the modernist stagecraft of the legendary theater directors Kanhailal and Ratan Thiyam and the poetic realism of veteran filmmaker Aribam Shyam Sharma as their cultural antecedents. Since admission to the affordable state-run film schools is limited, some industry veterans conduct workshops to encourage and train aspiring actors and technicians with an eye to the future. The State has helped set up the Manipur Film Development Corporation (MFDC), whose brand new premises boast a 1200-seat state-of-the-art auditorium, studio facilities, post-production labs, and plans for media festivals and archiving. There is much interest in developing Manipuri cinema as a brand: the Film Forum has organized a Manipuri Film Festival intermittently since 2007, and the MFDC plans to promote exports. Other enterprising groups set up their own facilities to promote more "indie" productions: units such as the Shallow River Studio, Mamikon, and Effective Television often have overlapping personnel, indexing a fluid community of dreamers. One of the journalists I was interviewing asked me for suggestions on improving the industry's presence on the Internet; an aspiring actor wondered whether their physical gestures and acting style will work for global audiences, or do they have to adapt to Western standards. A Facebook page for "Maniwood" has taken such efforts to social media. Such organizational endeavors and concerns about artistic/commercial feasibility are signposts of pragmatic aspirations on the part of a fledgling culture industry that has no delusions of unqualified cultural autonomy *or* political alterity.

Malegaon Comedies: Subaltern Camp?

Sometime in the late 1990s, a group of twenty-something friends from Malegaon, a town about 180 miles north-east of Bombay, made a parody of the biggest Bombay blockbuster from the mid-seventies, *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975). Made on a miniscule budget (around 15,000 rupees), *Malegaon ke Sholay* was a runaway hit in local video parlors, yielding 200,000 rupees in first-run box office receipts during 1999–2000.[8] Soon, other spoofs of Bollywood and Hollywood hits followed; of these, titles like *Malegaon ki Shaan* (Shaikh Nasir, date unknown), *Malegaon ki Lagaan* (Farogh Jafri, date unknown), *Tarzan ki Baraat* (Shaikh Nasir, date unknown), and *Malegaon ka Superman* (Shaikh Nasir, date unknown) have become widely known, if not actually seen. Distributed first on videocassettes and more recently on VCDs, these works have garnered cult following in the interiors of Maharashtra and beyond.

After a report on *Aaj Tak*, India's premier twenty-four hour Hindi-language news channel, and a PSBT documentary in 2003, the media buildup gradually rose to a crescendo during 2007–2009 with wide coverage in newspapers and magazines, segments in the ZDF-CBC four-part program *India Reborn* (2008–2009) and the Channel 5 broadcast *Paul Merton in India* (2008). The last two shows, following in the wake of *China Rises* (2006) and *Paul Merton in China* (2007), effectively inserted the Malegaon story of vibrant cultural entrepreneurs into a triumphalist account of globalization with "Chindia" as its acme and the neo-liberal windfall seemingly extending to the remotest nook and corner of the globe. Finally, a 2008 documentary *Supermen of Malegaon*, directed by Faiza Ahmad Khan, financed by KBS (South Korea), MediaCorp (Singapore), and NHK (Japan), hit it big on the international film festival circuit, bringing unprecedented transnational attention to the home-boys of Malegaon.

With a population of around half a million, Malegaon is known for the power looms dotting its narrow alleys. While the post-liberalization decline in Maharashtra's textile industry has spelled hard times for the city, crumbling infra-structure and rising poverty are not its only problems. Malegaon's sizeable Muslim community, the result of more than a century of migration from various parts of the country, has had to face communal strife with the rise of a chauvinist Hindu fundamentalist politics. Two sets of bomb blasts in 2006 and 2008 led to a long enquiry and court case, produced a host of conspiracy theories, and engendered a fractious image of the community. The local videomakers have been countering the doom-and-gloom media stereotypes with imagination and humor.

While much of the current media hype in India centers on the new *hatke* or out-of-the-box Bollywood genres (metro films, violent gangster films, films focused on sexuality) that purportedly broach mature, heretofore taboo subjects or break new aesthetic grounds, Malegaon videocinema has captured the imagination of the national cine-cognoscenti like no other nascent formation. With its Do-It-Yourself or DIY aesthetic, biting humor and camp panache, it is representative of a brash new India emerging out of its postcolonial melancholy and self-imposed austerity to claim its place under the neoliberal sun. Projecting distinctly irreverent, under-dog sensibilities, Malegaon cinema also musters a street-cred that invests it with an aura of subaltern "authenticity." More than its hallowed Bombay idol, Malegaon video now comes across as the real deal: envoy of the Indian masses, channeling their imagination, resourcefulness, and vitality.

Perhaps the main reason why Malegaon cinema has become the toast of global cine-communities lies in its apparent *tabula rasa* nature, its echoing of the early days of the medium: commentators often note that watching these videos makes them feel as if they are observing the reinvention of cinema from its very basics. While intended as a compliment, this comparison is somewhat condescending: the Malegaon group owes its art to a passionate cinephilia and a general appreciation of the arts. The cast and crew of the videos include several locally respected stage actors and comedians. Nasir Shaikh, a Chaplin fanatic, started painting film posters

in his teens, and went on to produce increasingly intricate photocollages before working as a wedding videographer. Farogh Jafri, the most successful screenwriter of the area, is an accomplished poet with a college degree. Akram Khan wears multiple hats as actor, director, editor, and music composer. Far from being naïve dabblers, these frequent collaborators evince a sophisticated level of media literacy. However, the association with early cinema is not altogether misplaced. Compared to the originals they parody, Malegaon video narratives are not so interested in telling well-crafted stories as they are focused on action, slapstick comedy, and sarcastic social commentary. More than the storyline, it is the moments of hyper-action, the overblown melodrama, the visual pranks and verbal puns, and the caustic digs at an ossified socio-political order – these flashes of intensities and sensations – that capture audience attention and imagination: in that sense, the videos constitute a "cinema of attractions" (Gunning 2000). Like the early films before 1907–2008, whose preoccupation with the thrills and sensations of modern life inspired Tom Gunning to posit a medium-specific tendency toward exhibitionism and stimulation often at odds with the more literary and psychologizing storytelling drive that became dominant in subsequent commercial cinema, the Malegaon videos zero in on the sensorial, technocapital-driven, and incongruous aspects of contemporary life. Beyond the barebones and episodic narratives, one discerns an overarching impulse to point things out to audiences, fostering a very particular kind of spectatorial engagement. Like the early films, the address of these videos – intent on "this harnessing of visibility, this act of showing and exhibition" – breaks the illusion of "a self-enclosed fictional world" and solicits the active attention, even participation, of viewers (Gunning 2000, 229–230).

The Malegaon video industry draws its inspirations not only from mainstream Bombay cinema, its epic narratives full of plot detours and performative interludes, but also from folk stage and musical forms like *tamasha, nautanki*, and *yakshagana* that have deeply influenced Indian films, and that routinely incite audiences to join in the performance via modes of discursive embellishments such as chorus, commentary, even more spontaneous and plebeian catcalls. Unlike Gunning's corpus of early films, Malegaon videos are able to mine a field of audiovisual sensations forged by a century of shared global cine-cultures. Hence the fascination with the spectacular gags and follies of slapstick comedy, or with the hyper kinetic 70 mm canvases of the 1970s' Bombay blockbusters *Sholay* and *Shaan* (Ramesh Sippy, 1980) and of the Roger Moore-era James Bond films, especially their vast landscapes dotted with horses and trains, fast cars and helicopters, plush hotels and arcades, rugged yet suave heroes equally at home in urban spaces and the wilderness, larger than life villains in pimp-baroque dens, and mesmerizing gadgets invoking an encingly proximate pop-techno utopia.

All reports on Malegaon cinema focus on its DIY aesthetic, and the incredible resourcefulness of the local cast and crew. The budget of the videos run from Rs, 20,000 to Rs. 50,000 (roughly $500–$1200), with *Malegaon ka Superman* hitting the Rs. 100,000 mark (it was funded by the producers of the documentary, *Supermen of*

Malegaon). In the early years, two videocassette recorders were hooked up for edit-
ing purposes. These days, Akram uses cobbled-together personal computers and
(pirated) editing software, all set up in a corner of the large family kitchen
(Figure 3.3). Eschewing stock footage, Nasir achieves spectacular "special effects"
on camera using the most rudimentary tricks. Thus the large wheel of a bullock
cart becomes the revolving stage for a roundtable of the villain's cronies in *Malegaon
ki Shaan*; the same film uses the close up of a toy helicopter to great realistic effect;
and a tilting bullock cart comes in handy for some homespun crane shots. Then
there is the improvised "green screen" for *Malegaon ka Superman*, a ruse that does
double duty as the performance of local creativity for Faiza Khan's documentary
Supermen of Malegaon. Action shots requiring post-production enhancement are
staged against green textile hung on a truck, which can be moved to take advan-
tage of the shifting sunlight (Figure 3.4); and for the flying shots, the actor playing
Superman is hoisted up horizontally and carried by two men covered in the same
green fabric.

One is tempted to call this amateur or artisanal cinema, à la Stan Brakhage. But
Malegaon is neither non-commercial nor counter-industrial: its send-ups of Bolly-
and Holly-woods notwithstanding, it enthusiastically refers to itself as Mollywood.[9]

Figure 3.3 Akram Khan and Nasir Shaikh at their editing station in a corner of the
former's family kitchen, August 2009. Photo: Shrikant Agawane.

Figure 3.4 Shooting with green screen. Source: *Supermen of Malegaon* (Faiza Ahmad Khan, 2008).

What roots this videocinema in the vernacular-popular is its close attunement to the hopes and anxieties, cultural tastes and cosmologies of its publics. At once playful projections of global aspirations and vicious indictments of their remote sheen, Malegaon videomakers' farcical commentaries register the paradoxes of contemporary life in the shadow of global capital. What happens to global superheroes in the course of these remediations: when Tarzan – idolized figure of imperial boys' adventure stories – swings from Malegaon vines, or when Superman – icon of American soft power – braves the skies of this town? Shafeeq, a slender young man playing both Tarzan and Superman, seems to be on the verge of fainting from his superhero exertions. In the era of Salman Khan and John Abraham, musclebound Bollywood actors with eight-pack abs who Shafeeq himself reveres, this peculiar casting calls attention to local health hazards: Tarzan has diarrhoea (possibly due to contaminated water), while the emaciated Superman suffers from Chikungunya, a mosquito-born disease that rages in many parts of the Global South. (Indeed, this observation on Shafiq's physicality now rings poignant: in the summer of 2011, the part-time actor succumbed to throat cancer at the age of twenty-seven – possibly a result of the constant consumption of *gutka* or chewing tobacco, the very commodity that the Lex Luthor-like villain of *Malegaon ka Superman* is shown to peddle.) Local political frustrations, such as endless delay in recognizing Malegaon as an autonomous district, come in for fierce ribbing. Off-color references to various celebrities tumble out with carnivalesque abandon. And when a would-be-Jane figure wonders where Tarzan's animals are, he replies that because of recession in the forest, they have all joined the circus. Yet another shortcoming – shooting without elephants, lions, or apes – inspires a telling quip: could this be a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Malegaon crew's willingness to leave traditional occupations and join the culture industry circus, perhaps even migrate to Bombay? In the past three decades, Maharashtra has seen a shift to finance, real estate, and entertainment at the expense of its established industries; just as most Bombay textile mills have closed down, the powerlooms of Malegaon have fallen on lean times. Even as local videomakers nurture worldly aspirations, they train an acerbic eye on globalization's vacuous promises so discordant with their realities.

At this subnational quotidian register, fantasies can only be ambivalent, critique folding into – perhaps even animating – enchantment.

This ambivalence about aspirations of mobility and the good life drives Malegaon videocinema's profuse reflexive gestures bordering on an indigenous camp sensibility. For the masses in the Global South, fantasies remain largely fantasies, the glittering allure of techno-capitalism comes with its penumbra of incredulity. Hence the ironic twists: the local Superman has to adjust his flight path to get better reception on his cell phone, while this 007 avatar faces his rival armed with "imported" rotten eggs. The irony extends beyond the diegesis to the downright low-brow aesthetics, kitschy embellishments, and a "so bad that it's good" approach: deliberate stylistic choices that not only allegorize the conditions of media production, but also produce incisive commentary on lives lived in desperation. Here the very idea of "attraction" splits: beyond the "accent on direct stimulation" and the "sensual or psychological impact" that is the purview of early films and avant garde formalisms, the videos revel in their "ability to *show*" the contradictions of local life (Gunning 2000, 230–232). Sometimes, though, camp excess takes center stage: challenging the hegemony of middle-class propriety, a rambunctiously "vulgar" taste culture scuttles all attempts at critical-hermeneutic legitimation. Thus when the amnesiac "memry lose man" of *Malegaon ke Ghajini*, a parody of a Bollywood film [*Ghajini* (A.R. Murugadoss, 2008)] with shades of the Hollywood hit *Memento* (2000), impales one of his enemies on a metal tap and then turns on the faucet to drain his blood, one is simultaneously appalled and tickled by the gory spectacle of revenge. It is such brazen moments, which defy elitist expectations about culture's civilizing mission or avant garde insistence on estrangement and epiphany, that prompt me to speculate on the possibility of a "southern," subaltern camp aesthetic.

Participation

A central tenet of becoming modern is to not give in to circumstances passively, but to take charge of one's life. But how does one find a role in the shaping of history – how does one become a subject of history? This question has been central to modern political imaginations, from communist programs working toward the revolution, to liberal conceptions of democratic polity. While modernist thought generally championed the original as the hallmark of the modern, mere novelty without potential for meaningful social change came to be frowned upon by its more critical strands. Indeed, political modernism, by definition, came to embrace an understanding of the political that would disrupt the status quo, promoting progress and emancipation.[10]

This legacy of critical thinking, with its attendant teleologies, has introduced some awkward biases in the scholarship on cultural participation from below. Let me enumerate three such contortions relevant to my exploration of Indian videocinemas. First, anxieties about popular consciousness and modes of doing culture and politics persist not only in various nationalist bourgeoisies' apprehensions about lumpen, subaltern classes, but also in leftist intellectuals' discounting of seemingly spontaneous aimless grass-roots mobilizations (for instance, Hobsbawm [1965] associated peasant groups and city mobs with "pre-political" consciousness [6] and "blind and groping" action [2]).[11] Will popular mobilizations take desirable forms, advance consequential engagement, and promote social justice? These liberal/leftist anxieties find resonance in the (neo)colonial maxim of the "not yet" – that certain populations, especially in the Global South, are not ready for full sovereignty – which provides the rationale for colonialist/developmentalist paradigms of modernization. Cultural projects that do not meet universalized standards of techno-aesthetic-moral finesse and political cogency are deemed partially evolved or failed formations. What cultural and political import might Malegaon and Manipuri videocinemas possibly have, given the former's lo-fi aesthetics, bawdy tone, and derivative nature, and the latter's marginal status coupled with its conventional industrial aspirations? What models of participation do they compel us to ponder?

Second, scholars who embrace popular culture's spontaneity and inventiveness still internalize the need to locate within it a properly political – i.e., purposefully transformative – dynamism. Media Studies and Cultural Studies scholarship has often been too quick to equate fan activities with cultural activism, in a bid to wrest intellectual and political credibility for such personal, ad hoc, and seemingly pointless pursuits.[12] What gets lost in this quest for legitimacy is the legibility of cultural practices on grounds of their resourceful ingenuities, performative potencies, and sensuous pleasures. On both counts – exaggerated political efficacy and overlooked dimensions of cultural vitality – the popular has been ill-served by many scholars of the popular. How do the low cost, improvisational videocinemas of Malegaon and Manipur recalibrate the political?

With the advent of the digital, the intersections of popular cultural practices and the explicitly political domain of citizenship have become a significant focus of research. Neologisms such as clicktivism, hacktivism, and slacktivism seek to capture novel modes of doing politics. The proliferation of activist practices has also brought fresh attention to older non-digital activities, collating varied interventions under the term "maktivism": performing citizenship through making, thereby challenging passive consumerism and surrender to corporate taste cultures (Mann 2014). And yet, as Néstor García Canclini (2001) noted two decades ago, consumption-type activities now increasingly serve as the site for figuring out and exercising citizens' rights and responsibilities. The tension is palpable in the idea of *prosumer* video cameras and the nomenclature of the *produser*.

This brings me to a third instance of cultural participation conjoined to categorically political activities: DIY citizenship. If scholars of fan cultures tend to inflate the political valence of their research object, scholars of DIY often reduce citizenship to a matter of individual choice. In expanding Do-It-Yourself beyond home improvement, John Hartley defines it as "the practice of putting together an identity from the available choices, patterns and opportunities on offer in the semiosphere and the mediasphere" (1999, 178). That identity may be prefabricated, "expensive" and straight "off the shelf," or one "more creatively put together from bits and pieces bought, found and purloined separately" (178). Writing in the heydays of poststructuralist theories of the subject, Hartley conceives of DIY citizenship mainly as a matter of fashioning one's identity. How this falls within the purview of citizenship can be gleaned from his understanding of the latter as "no longer simply a matter of a social contract between state and subject, no longer even a matter of acculturation to the heritage of a given community" (178). Still, the assumptions that DIY practices lead essentially to identity politics, and that identity and citizenship are somehow coeval, remain debatable. Much in this conception of DIY citizenship pertains to Malegaon and Manipur, where the "social contract" between state and citizenry is severely attenuated, and where cultural practitioners have to scour their "semiosphere" and "mediasphere," immediate and remote, for inspiration and resources. However, in such sites marked by checkered histories and fissured geographies, identity rarely comes prêt-à-porter: it has to be painstakingly and resourcefully assembled. While Hartley, from his Euro-American vantage, presumes a deracinated cosmopolitanism, our South Asian videomakers are still deeply invested in cultural heritage. Heritage is palpably important to the Manipuri industry driven by racial and linguistic difference. The Malegaon set has to bring in female actors from elsewhere, as the community's Islamic mores will not allow local women to perform for the screen; and its camp irony owes more to the sassy, satirical bite of local theatrical forms such as *tamasha* than to Western subcultural camp aesthetics.

In framing motley quotidian practices in terms of a formal political category, Hartley reduces the latter to "*self*-determination": "DIY citizenship is a choice people can make for themselves" (178, emphasis in original). But what exactly does this choice achieve, what conditions must exist for this form of participation to be meaningful? Reminiscent of the Habermasian public sphere, Hartley's citizenship-as-choice presumes equivalence across social categories and a level playing field: it downplays questions of resource, access, and power. Neither Manipur nor Malegaon enjoys the freedom to choose irrespective of location, materiality, and history: indeed, does any society? The rhetoric of choice, universalized as part of a neoliberal bundle of free markets, privatization, and individual responsibility, reveals the extent to which logic of economics has come to infiltrate our thoughts. As Wendy Brown (2015) has observed, neoliberalism "saturat[es] the meaning or content of democracy with market values" and "cauterizes democracy's more radical expressions" (9). To reduce citizenship to choice and self-styling is to "cauterize" it.

Nevertheless, Hartley's staging of certain productive tensions – between the structural and the contingent, the cultural and the political, the personal and the social – remains germane to studying local videocinemas. Sympathetic to Hartley's formulation, Mark Ratto and Megan Boler (2014) also foreground the specificities and novelties of mediatized citizenship in the DIY realm; they too stress how DIY practices on the ground blur the boundaries "between consumers and citizens, between experts and novices, between individuals and collectives," and between official and grass-roots politics (5). But moving beyond choice as the end-all of DIY politics, they propose that we consider "how individuals and communities participate in shaping, changing, and reconstructing selves, worlds, and environments in creative ways that challenge the status quo and normative understandings of 'how things must be'"(5). This too is relevant to my project, but again we encounter the habitual invocation of a critical politics in the language of challenging normativities. I will take a more expansive approach to consider how creative folks not only contest the status quo, but often also comply with "how things must be" – or, as in the case of Manipur, seek to consolidate an industrial structure that was previously missing (i.e., to produce an industrial normativity or "status quo," so to speak, for the first time). In a sense, I seek to trouble the status quo of critical cultural analysis by exploring a more capacious notion of participatory politics that might involve compliance or even neutrality. The point is to move away from an oddly transhistorical conception of the political-as-oppositional, and to account for the full range of engagements within the material flux of everyday life.

What is that "everyday life," and where does it unfold these days? If all the hype in the twenty-first century is to be believed, it is becoming increasingly digitized and migrating online. And participation is taken to be expanding even as algorithmic cultures, in their formulaic determination, trivialize what it means to access, interact, and participate. On the evidence of Malegaon and Manipur videocinemas, digital technologies have vastly expanded the possibilities for cultural participation; but how does an inventory of the actual conduits, practices, and agencies of "southern" participation look like? Malegaon videomakers work with computers soldered from counterfeit or discarded parts, filched software, informal channels of distribution – in short, unauthorized or outright illegal modes that border on the piratical. Manipuri videocinema is seeking a more formal industrial structure, with the requisite institutions and networks; yet, much of its equipment, including lights, cranes, and dolly-tracks, is previously used. Pirated media from across the Myanmar border remains a big influence; and as in Malegaon, most "films" here were sold on VCDs – the peculiarly Asian transitional audiovisual format of the 1990s, cheaply produced with low-resolution images and low-fidelity sound, that took root and persisted in the local media economies until recently. Along with the spotty broadband service, salvaged and repurposed equipment, and pirated media frequently disseminated on micro-SD cards, the VCD indexes a media ecology that is a mash-up of the digital and the non-digital, is largely offline,

and is a far cry from the lustrous imagination of an algorithmic digi-globality.[13] That imagination, beckoning from the other side of the digital divide, works as an aspirational horizon: virtual and, thus, all the more enticing.

Aspiration

In complicating the notion of the digital by attending to the makeshift infrastructures, improvised technologies, and offline practices of the Global South, it is easy to slip into neo-luddite romanticism. In the Indian context, inventive and informal utilization of limited resources – concocting and repurposing, salvaging and recycling, even counterfeiting and poaching – now boasts a widely recognized nomenclature, *jugaad*, and has come to be celebrated as a "southern" model of entrepreneurship (Rai 2015). But given the choice, would makers on the ground prefer to continue with such precarious if spunky making-do, or choose more formal and stable pathways of creativity? While many academics celebrate frugal workarounds as de facto markers of a subversive attitude, everyday practitioners reveal more pragmatic attitudes. It is their fond dreams and felt necessities that make individuals and communities look for ingenious solutions to their problems – to conjure new possibilities. Here the question of desires, needs, and aspirations becomes important: people's dispositions toward the mainstream and its alternatives take shape in tandem with such projections about the future. What social pressures and opportunities structure these futurities and becomings?

In her study of the transformations of Chinese society in the era of neoliberalism, Lisa Rofel (2007) tracks the emergence of a "desiring subject" reaching out toward a universalized sense of human nature embodied in "sexual, possessive, or otherwise cosmopolitan" selves. Functioning "variously as a trope, a normative ideal, and a horizon of possibilities," this new conception of the Chinese citizen-subject marks a shift from 1980s discourses of political consciousness to explicit evocations of feelings, desires, and the heart in the 1990s (6). Roffel judiciously eschews abstract, monolithic notions of neoliberalism and transhistorical conceptions of desire, which only lead to "neocolonial questions" implying "infinite deferral" (have they "arrived at the 'real' version of neoliberalism yet?" or "learned how to have pleasure yet?"), to understand China's postsocialist experiences as "historically and culturally situated" (7). Her brilliant insight, that "neoliberalism in China is a *national* project about *global* reordering" which enables China "to participate in the global order," holds true for India as well (20, emphases added). By the same token, Manipuri and Malegaon videocinemas have to be *local* projects about national and global reordering.

Dispensing with standard distinctions between the material and the psychic, the economic and the cultural, the individual and the collective, Rofel approaches desire as a "social field" comprising "a wide range of aspirations, needs, and

longings" (4). While her approach is generative, my specific research objects prompt me to hold on to a basic distinction between desire and aspiration. Desire, for me, is an inchoate and enveloping field of yearnings without clear directionality or unequivocally identified targets; these longings, when articulated more categorically, take the form of displaced fantasies and cathect to objects in the past, present, or future without easily comprehendible logic. Aspirations congeal when desire is organized and directed toward tangible future goals. Put another way, aspirations take shape when desire is rendered teleological via instrumental reason. The contemporary neoliberal ethos – with its stress on individualism, self-help, and economic calculus – provides a very particular grid for the reordering of desire. Nor surprisingly, aspiration has become a preoccupation, even a buzzword.

In his attempts to ascertain a role for culture in the formation of collective aspirations, in thinking about "futurity as a cultural capacity," Arjun Appadurai (2004) provides a cogent discussion of aspiration in the context of globalization. Like Rofel, he wants to go beyond the polarization of economics (the domain of rational calculations, furturist orientation, development) and culture (the domain of habits, allegiance to traditions, looking backwards): economics is not free of the past, just as culture has an orientation toward the future. But unlike many other cultural theorists, Appadurai does not allow the economic to be subsumed into the cultural to the point of the former's evacuation. Which is why I find his conceptualization of aspiration useful in thinking about media emergences that, deliberately (Manipur) or unwittingly (Malegaon), begin to take on the attributes of an industry.

While acknowledging aspirations' ties to the economic categories of "wants, preferences, choices, and calculations," Appadurai argues that they are never simply individual: "always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life," they are also cultural. Unlike Rofel, though, he retains a distinction between dreams, longings, wants and such. At a broad level, all societies have aspirations "about the good life, about health and happiness"; but far from being transcultural or transhistorical, these goals remain embedded in "wider ethical and metaphysical ideas" that evolve over time (67). Thus "happiness" in Nehruvian India, with its insistence on national self-reliance and a Gandhian asceticism, meant something quite different from happiness in the brazen "keeping up with the Kapurs" consumerism of the post-liberalization era. In their encounter with quotidian materiality, these general dreams come into focus as intermediate-level longings: "marriage, work, leisure," etc. But aspirations become most legible only at a third level of definite "wants and choices": for a specific plot of land, a job, or a car (68). This "most immediate, visible" and increasingly mediatized wish list eclipses "intermediate and higher order normative" desires, creating the impression of aspirations being mainly economic and individual (68). As a corrective, Appadurai points to the ethical, metaphysical and relational roots of aspirations. He also reasons that the elite classes, with their vastly superior economic clout and social capital, are far more

capable of recognizing options and making necessary connections, of turning vir-
tual potentialities into realizable opportunities. Meanwhile, the poor (Appadurai's
term, extendable to the socially marginalized, the politically disenfranchised) have
access to a more limited set of "aspirational nodes" and a less developed awareness
of the feasible links and channels between "concrete wants," "intermediate con-
texts" and "general norms" (69). Whatever channels of enterprise exist for the
poor are likely to be overwhelmed by their struggle for survival. Appadurai's rec-
ommendation is to devise policies that might enhance the poor's capacity to aspire.

What complications do contemporary Indian videocinemas pose for Appadurai's
analysis and policy recommendations? The expansion in telecommunication ser-
vices, the arrival on the market of affordable audiovisual technologies, the wide
dissemination of media-making skills, and the ubiquity of branding/marketing as
a meta-trope have, no doubt, augmented the cultural capacity to aspire at all levels
of society. Clearly, both the state and the market have played significant roles in the
expansion and intensification of media as stepping stone to a better life. While neo-
liberal blueprints of "success" now enjoy great influence across all classes, under-
privileged communities often rewrite the script for social mobility: rewiring market
structures and reworking entrepreneurial modes for their purposes, flouting/sabo-
taging institutions of private property and social propriety. And what of the role of
official policy? In light of our two fringe media formations, Appadurai's interven-
tionist agenda seems rather top-down. To be fair, he does refer to social movements
from below, "driven from and by the poor themselves" (70), but recurrent policy-
wonk phrases – "how the poor may be helped" (64) or "we need to strengthen the
capacity of the poor" (66) – reveal an inordinately paternalistic orientation.

Manipuri videocinema began almost as an accident, in spite of the provincial
administration's indifference and following a ban imposed by outlawed groups. If
the state has stepped in subsequently with infrastructural and institutional assis-
tance, its enervated sovereignty induces a necessarily flexible orientation in local
mediamakers. In spite of its decidedly orthodox aspirations of becoming a culture
industry, Manipuri videocinema cannot quite channel conflicting local desires and
compulsions according to any preordained script – whether of global media capi-
tal, or of competing political power blocs. More informal emergences such as
Malegaon videocinema operate without any official backing. In fact, they experi-
ence the state mainly in terms of its regulatory dispensation: censoring content,
closing down unlicensed videoparlors, raiding pirate distribution chains. If any-
thing, local video cultures thrive *in spite of* the state. The proximate Bombay indus-
try provides inspiration to Malegaon by its sheer example and the whiff of
glamorous possibilities: its nodes and linkages, concrete and virtual, feed into local
aspirations. Very often, these aspirations do not materialize as imagined; neverthe-
less, disappointments are turned around into negative "aspirational nodes." In a
remarkable sequence of Faiza Khan's documentary, Nasir Shaikh goes to Bombay
to procure costumes and make-up for his superhero narrative, only to discover that
the cost would outstrip his entire production budget. Undeterred, he comes back
and works wonders with what is locally available. The same film documents

Farogh Jafri's failed attempts to break into Bollywood as an actor; while visibly disenchanted, he goes on to produce more hit comedies. Widely celebrated as the main creative figure of Malegaon videocinema, Nasir has made inroads into the Bombay industry: he directed seventy-five episodes of a silent comedy, *Malegaon ka Chintu* (2010–2014), aired on Sony Pictures Network's SAB TV channel for three seasons. At the time of writing, there are speculations about an impending Bollywood film based on his life story. The itineraries of the serial's protagonist, a Mr. Bean-like figure, from Malegaon to Bombay to increasingly more exotic global destinations, reflects Nasir's own peregrinations: from a small town videographer to the toast of international film festivals (including Berlin and Goa).

   Realistically, the Manipuri industry can hope, at best, to be something like a "minor" cinema in the global arena. Malegaon video, because of its markedly local preoccupations and insider idioms, does not stand the chance of gaining crossover audiences even within India. And yet, in spite of all the real challenges and constraints, these fringe cultural formations dream on. While they have to modulate their aspirations in light of their prospects, they learn fast, improvise furiously, and take chances, thus enhancing their potentialities against all odds. What comes into play is a dynamic of proximity and remoteness in relation to the national–global cultural nexus embodied in "Bollywood" (and, metonymically, "Hollywood"). Navigating the dual anxiety of reaching a certain aspirational level and falling short of it, localized Indian videocinemas emerge as vital yet spectral components of contemporary global media.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   The phrase "avenues of participation" was invoked by Singerman (1996) in the context of informal, yet concrete and effective, strategies devised by common people to achieve shared objectives. Writing about piratical media practices that contravene or subvert legal parameters, Liang (2005) stressed the creation of new potentialities.
2   See Kumar (2015) for a more nuanced discussion of vernacular industries.

3   For a development of the term "plastic" to think the global, see Sarkar (2015).
4   Eschewing hemispheric determinations, the Global South is understood as a histori-
    cally constituted and constantly shifting terrain.
5   Collaboration has involved sharing stars and technicians, financing sources, and distri-
    bution channels (Tripathy 2013).
6   See Mamta Murthy's evocative documentary, *Fried Fish, Chicken Soup, and a Premiere*
    (2011).
7   Interview conducted in Imphal, August 2011.
8   These numbers change practically with every account, as there is no formal account-
    ing. I quote Nasir Shaikh from an interview, August 2009.
9   Mollywood is a name also claimed by the more established Malayalam film industry
    of Kerala.
10 This line of thinking has informed much of media and communication studies.
    Carpentier (2015) usefully distinguishes participation from the two overlapping con-
    cepts of *access* (involving some form of presence) and *interaction* (which forges "socio-
    communicative relationships"); following Pateman (1976), he argues that participation
    entails the power to take consequential decisions.
11 Scholars associated with Subaltern Studies have assiduously interrogated such appre-
    hensions in colonial/postcolonial contexts. See Guha and Spivak (1988), and
    Rodriguez (2001).
12 The writings of John Fiske and Henry Jenkins reveal such a search for political bite on
    behalf of popular and participatory cultures. See Fiske (2010), and Jenkins (2012).
13 For an extended discussion of lo-tech, improvised modes of digital participation in
    Asian contexts, see Neves and Sarkar (2017).

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