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# Mobilizing Conflict Testimony: A Lens of Mobility for the Study of Documentary Practices in the Kashmir Conflict

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**Abstract:** In this paper I introduce a lens of mobility for the study of documentary film practices and gender in zones of conflict. By drawing on my qualitative research regarding the practice of the independent filmmaker Iffat Fatima, I will argue that a lens of mobility helps to grasp highly mobile media practices both conceptually and methodologically. Through a lens of mobility, my focus lies on the potential of documentary film to open the imaginative boundaries of conflict zones and to politically and emotionally mobilize the testimony offered from everyday life in a highly militarized zone. This specifically requires the tracing of moments of political mobilization beyond cognitive questions of conflicting narratives and representations.

**Keywords:** conflict cinema; documentary film; mobility; Kashmir; gender

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## 1. Introduction

My research focuses on the articulation of subjectivities through the form of an independent digital documentary film in relation to the Kashmir conflict<sup>1</sup>. I took approximately a year of fieldwork—mostly in northern India, Kashmir, and a number of places in Europe—following professional documentary filmmakers who were actively screening or producing their films on the Kashmir conflict from 2013 to 2014. In this paper, I will draw on my research into the practices of the filmmaker Iffat Fatima, broadening discussions on new methodological and conceptual approaches for transregional media studies. I will further embed my contribution within the emerging field of film practices in zones of geopolitical conflict.

Iffat Fatima was born and grew up in the valley of Kashmir. In the year 1989, she moved to Delhi for higher education and completed her Masters in Mass Communication at Jamia Millia Islamia in 1990. Since then, she has been working as an independent documentary filmmaker and installation artist. Her recent work in Kashmir is closely linked to a documentary film she made on the Sri Lankan conflict that is titled *Lanka: The Other Side of War and Peace* (Fatima 2005). In this film, she drives up the highway A9 that was closed during the high intensity conflict between the Tamil north and the Sinhalese south of Sri Lanka. On the road, she encounters people whose lives have been afflicted by enforced disappearances<sup>2</sup>. Although Fatima regularly kept track of the events in Kashmir by visiting her relatives, it was through the previous film and the changed socio-political setting in the mid-2000s that she decided to undertake a project on disappearances in Kashmir. During those years the decline

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<sup>1</sup> The independence of their practice must be understood in relation to other media formats (like the commercial Hindi-Film) and in consideration of the kind of restrictions that can be expected within the networks of documentary film.

<sup>2</sup> According to Amnesty International, one speaks of enforced disappearance when security forces capture and imprison people without officially acknowledging the imprisonment or giving any information about the whereabouts of the victim (Amnesty International 2015).

of highly militarized violence in Kashmir coincided with the emergence of digital film technologies. The fluidity of digital technology enabled a constant refinement and re-editing of the form in response to multiple test screenings during the eight-year long production that finally resulted in *Khoon Diy Baarav* (Fatima 2015).

At the end of the opening sequence of *Khoon Diy Baarav*, Fatima's voice-over states the intention that guided the making and screening of her film:

Over eight years, I travelled with her [Parveena Ahangar; see Section 4] across the scarred landscapes of Kashmir, a witness to its brutalization, its trauma. The film is a testimony, a consequence of my baring witness.

My research questions follow this opening statement from the voice-over: How does Fatima organize the textures of the film so that it can work as testimony? In which way is this linked to questions of the representation of Muslim women's agency in conflict zones? How does she enable the film to become public in a way that makes this testimony palpable? What are the difficulties she encounters in such an attempt? And finally, what is the potential for opening up the hardened imaginations of the Kashmir conflict through such a testimonial practice?

In the background of my discussion of *Khoon Diy Baarav* is academic work that deals with gender and conflict in the Kashmir Valley (Kazi 2008; Shekhawat 2014), anthropological research on the category of "everyday life" within the Kashmir conflict (Bhan 2013; Duschinski 2010; Hoffman and Duschinski 2013) and studies pertaining to the visual regimes of the conflict zone, primarily in relation to the commercial Hindi film industry (Kabir 2009; Gaur 2010). These texts share a common concern for moving away from realist geopolitical approaches and research that focus on the conflict around the relations between India and Pakistan or the established conflict parties such as the Hurriyat, Indian and local parliamentary parties, the different Indian security forces, and the various militant outfits. The above mentioned authors have sensitized us to the multiple dimensions and stakeholders of the conflict and, in particular, to the lifeworlds of those who are forced to live under conditions of enduring militarization, refusal of citizenship rights, censorship, and torture (for a recent contextualization, see: (Hoffman and Duschinski 2013)). However, my own research is not primarily a contribution to this field which some have called Critical Kashmir Studies (<https://criticalkashmirstudies.com/about/core-scholars/>) and nor is it a contribution to media-anthropology, sociological theory, or film studies; however, I hope that it may be of interest to each of these disciplines. From the example of Fatima's practice, I aim to introduce an interdisciplinary approach meant to open up new theoretical and methodological avenues for the study of conflict cinemas. With this intention, my goal is to turn the sometimes-professed lack of method, theory and subject matter of "regional studies" into its strength by linking such work to the new interdisciplinary research paradigm of "new mobility studies" (Sheller and Urry 2006). Through this lens, I hope to further the study of cinematic practices that are concerned with conflict zones from a transregional media studies perspective.

In this paper I argue that, in Iffat Fatima's filmic practice, different mobilities intersect. In the social sciences, the research paradigm of "new mobilities studies" investigates a wide range of levels of mobility and concepts of mobility beyond the more traditional focus on social mobility. For example, physical and social mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006) are linked to imaginative, communicative, and emotional mobilities (Robins 2004; Schneider 2015, p. 226). A mobility approach will direct our attention towards intersections between these levels. For example, in *Khoon Diy Baarav* representations of the filmic subject's physical movements through the space of the valley of Kashmir create audio-visual testimony for—and at the same time *beyond*—a conflict narrative. I have said "beyond" because these representations are often creatively negotiated between film, audience and filmmaker. When Fatima travels with her film, the representations intersect with the affective mobilization and emotional and intellectual mobilities of audiences. In the following I will show, how the intersections of these levels are of specific significance for Iffat Fatima's film practice. Thus, "Mobility" is not used as a conceptual catch-all but as a metaphor (Urry 2000) that enables me to describe and analyse

communicative moments of high importance and intensity to both, the filmmaker and her audiences. For this purpose, I will draw on Nadja-Christina Schneider's introduction of a "lens of mobility" (Schneider 2015; see my explanation in Section 3) for the analysis of transregional media practices. In the following paragraphs, some of these intersecting mobilities will be introduced, before I go into further detail in the Sections 4–6 of this paper.

*Khoon Diy Baarav* depicts everyday movements of women in a highly militarized zone. In Kashmir—as in other zones of geopolitical conflict—an infrastructure of checkpoints, curfews, and strikes restricts freedom of movement. In Fatima's *Khoon Diy Baarav*, depictions of the movements of women, together with the filmmaker's camera, create a testimony of everyday life in a militarized territory. These representations also portray the agency of her filmic subjects as women participating in a social movement of political self-determination by showing sequences of people marching through the streets and shouting slogans of "freedom" (*azadi*). These depictions intervene in dominant visual regimes. On the one hand, Fatima challenges the depiction of "immobilized Muslim women" in post-liberalization India (Schneider 2015). On the other hand, the film interrogates Kashmir's hypervisibility as a place of touristic pleasure and a terrorist threat for the national integrity of India: Kashmir as a "place of national affect" (Urry 2007, p. 254) and "symbolic centrality" (Gaur 2010) within Indian nationalist discourses. These national discourses are again linked to the trope of 'secularism endangered by the Kashmiri muslim' (Kabir 2009): a threat to the Indian nationalist imagination of 'unity in diversity'.

Screenings of Fatima's film have often been accompanied by highly emotional engagements from members of the audience. Besides of travelling with her film beyond the physical boundaries of India, Fatima gave particular importance to screening her film within India and in front of audiences where individual members may feel patriotic and/or dismissive of narratives that represent a desire for Kashmiri political self-determination. In these instances she needs to negotiate "anger" by contextualizing the actualities of her film, but she also furthers "empathy" through the same process of framing her film in post-screening debates. Often, audiences are silent for a while after the film finishes; sometimes members of the audience cry. These highly affected individuals often say that they have had little contact with Kashmiri narratives and images of everyday life from Kashmir. Notably, there are sometimes aspects of their national and personal identities which are challenged by the visible evidence narrated through her film.

Connected to the question of affect, there is a particular danger pertaining to what Fatima considers to be the wrong kind of publicity: will angry groups from the Hindu right use the film as a scene for the creation of publicity, as they have done with other documentary films on multiple occasions (see Section 6)? Visibilities resulting from these performances may again harden around the binary of "national-antinational". This could prevent her film from retaining its intended effect when becoming public: it could break her attempt to open up the imagination of audiences and create empathy for the subjectivities she wants to articulate. The eight-year long work of refining the filmic form was intended to create a spectator's engagement that is compassionate and empathic. It should enable audience members to acknowledge her filmic subjects' desires for political self-determination. This spectator's engagement will be lost if she cannot to some extent protect her film from the particular kinds of affect-driven publicity that I will describe in Section 6.

Thus, the metaphor of mobility needs to be extended to the way filmmakers emotionally mobilize audiences for a particular testimony of a conflict. Representations and affect are interlinked: one is always mobilizing for something that is again part of a social distribution of affects and symbols. But how does Fatima protect the way her film becomes public from the above mentioned conundrum of emotional mobilization around an area of "national affect" (Urry 2007, p. 254) and "symbolic centrality" (Gaur 2010, p. 15). I will argue that her physical mobility helps her to protect the "skin of the film" (Marks 2000). This concept refers to the vulnerability and materiality of film practices, where small networks enable particular audience-film-filmmaker interactions. I use this concept to speak about ways in which becoming public may prevent the force of her film to work as she intends.

In short, through the intersecting mobilities of Fatima's practice both representations and affect need to be seen as deeply interwoven. Throughout this paper, I will show how Fatima interrogates dominant representations of the symbolic and affective importance of Kashmir within an Indian nationalist imagination (Section 4), as well as the way she examines the national public sphere as a space of media effect (Section 6). I shall first contextualize my contribution within the emerging field of research that Smets (2015) calls "Cinemas of Conflict" before I clarify the above mentioned intersecting mobilities first methodologically (Section 3) and later by drawing on examples from Fatima's filmic practice (Sections 4–6).

## 2. Cinemas of Conflict

Smets (2015) introduced the term "Cinemas of Conflict" as a field of research at the intersection of Cultural Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies. Cinemas of Conflict focus on filmmakers as participants in a given conflict: "[...] because they are encapsulated in a model that takes into account production context, the nature of the conflict, the impact of the conflict on everyday life, the situation of the filmmaker and crew, and the position that they occupy vis-à-vis the conflict" (Smets 2015, p. 2438). Through this focus "vis-à-vis the conflict," Smets develops typologies which are primarily drawing on Galtung (1969) and Bar-Tal (2003), organizing filmic practices in relation to cognitive conflict dynamics. In zones of geopolitical conflict, identities are often seen as being played out against each other in zero sum games (Bar-Tal 2003, p. 77): our history vs. their history, our memory vs. their memory, our trauma vs. their trauma. Zones of "intractable conflict" (Bar-Tal 2003, p. 84) are defined by Bar-Tal as places where cults of victimhood and socio-political interest have led to the impression of an unending reproduction of a respective conflict's logic. However, the opposing narratives are asymmetrically positioned, with evocations of security threats to national integrity in popular News-TV channels or in commercial war films having considerable more visibility than the (increasingly digitally "mass self-communicated" (Castells 2013, pp. 58–71)) narratives emerging from the region of the valley of Kashmir.

In a survey of studies concerning the field of war and cinema, Smets concludes that these—besides looking primarily at European and American films—are bound to the framework of national cinema. On the other hand, he also suggests that we think beyond the framework of exile and diaspora cinema where many studies on Palestinian and Kurdish cinema are located (see for example: (Shohat 2010; Horat 2010; Dabashi 2006; Naficy 2001)). Smets discusses in particular the influential work on exilic and diaspora cinema undertaken by Hamid Naficy:

According to Naficy, the concept refers to films that signify [ . . . ] upon exile and diaspora by expressing, allegorizing, commenting upon, and critiquing the home and host societies and cultures and the deterritorialized conditions of the filmmakers. They signify and signify upon cinematic traditions by means of their artisanal and collective production modes, their aesthetics and politics of smallness and imperfection, and their narrative strategies that cross generic boundaries and undermine cinematic realism. (Smets 2015, p. 2438)

Smets also points to the predominance of textual analysis in relation to conflicts in non-Western areas (Smets 2015, p. 2438). He omits to refer to the work of Shohat and Stam (1994) which would have been helpful in showing a transtextual and transnational approach that does not focus primarily on questions of diaspora or exilic subject-positions, but densely contextualizes film practices in relation to particular conflicts.

In most of the above-mentioned studies, the cinema dealing with conflict zones has been addressed via the trope of memory, both collective and individual, that is sometimes thought to challenge official state narratives (see e.g., (Edwards 2015; Wang 2014; Macedo and Cabecinhas 2013; Chanan 2008; Pickowicz and Zhang 2006)). This relative 'dominance' of memory-cultural approaches is understandable because of the agents' attempts to render minor subjectivities visible by drawing

on the enhanced possibilities of digital media. High quality films can be made with tiny crews and little budget, thus also supporting more individual film practices (Renov 2004) and new forms of observational realism—especially in the field of Chinese independent documentary (Berry et al. 2010). Recently, these memory and textual approaches within the field of media and conflict have been extended and partly circumvented by approaches of “political aesthetics” drawing on French philosopher Jacques Rancière’s “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2013, p. 7) by topographically tracing “practices in which time and space—that is the conditions for the possibility of subjectivity—are taken as the object of experimentation” (Tanke 2010, p. 15). This approach is meant to investigate artistic practices, where the limits of what can be seen and said are pushed and new ways of living are experimented with (Tanke 2010). This approach earned a certain popularity with the rise of the emancipatory, egalitarian potentials of digital media that make didactic media politics increasingly difficult to sustain in the light of a pro-sumo culture (Tanke 2010, p. 15). So, instead of looking at conflict–memory, political–aesthetic analyses are primarily interested in opening potentials (scholars drawing on Rancière for the study of the visual culture of conflict regions include: (McLagan and McKee 2012; Hochberg 2015)). This again may be conceptually difficult to connect to both the politics of representation and a more sociological analysis, where one would be interested in the specific practices and limitations of individual agents within larger networks of documentary film (see the critique of (Kastner and Sonderegger 2014)). It also means that political-aesthetic approaches may not be helpful when we are trying to understand the moments when filmmakers inscribe themselves *within* pre-existing identity narratives or are negotiating a certain representation of testimony. The latter problem is of particular importance for the way I will further frame my question: how does Iffat Fatima mobilize testimony in the attempt to articulate a subjectivity *of and beyond* existing conflict narratives?

What is often left out of the way commercial cinema and news-television frame conflict zones is the everyday life, e.g., the mundane difficulties that result from living in usually densely militarized territories. A number of studies in an edited volume by Matar and Harb (2013) address this problem in relation to Palestine/Israel by showing the wide range of media practices in conflict zones that narrate conflicts “from below” (Matar and Harb 2013) by focusing on the everyday life of conflict zones. Amongst these media formats, documentary film has widened its potential since the emergence of digital technology in the field (in the late 1990s) to render visible the subjectivities of filmmakers who are deeply involved in the conflicts or themselves are numbered among the conflicts’ victims. It has been argued that digital film practices often make it possible to circumvent state regulations pertaining to the visibilities of highly contested regions (Ezra and Rowden 2006). Thus via an independent digital documentary practice new forms of creating testimony and mobilizing audiences beyond the nation state’s regulation are available. Indeed, Filmmakers not only participate in conflicts and are socially positioned in relation to the conflict’s logic and the possibilities of the documentary field, but increasingly able to go beyond them without losing the grip on the local struggles they represent.

To extend the existing ways of looking at film practices in conflict zones, I draw on recent theorizations in “new mobility studies” (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2000) and the data from my own qualitative research in order to introduce a “lens of mobility” (Schneider 2015) for the study of Cinemas of Conflict. Following Kevin Smets, my attempt is to point beyond studies of conflict zones that privilege exile and diasporic “in-betweenness” or reproduce the framework of national cinema. By researching the filmic practice of Iffat Fatima, I look into the ways through which she tries to challenge and open up the imagination of the Kashmir conflict. In this respect, typological categorizations through corpus-analytic approaches (as undertaken by Smets or Morag) are not helpful either when it comes to our understanding of the affective, opening and closing potentials of the documentary form. Thus, I have begun to investigate the form at the intersection of various mobilities—an approach which I shall outline in the following section.

### 3. A Lens of Mobility

Two recent works by [Schneider \(2015\)](#) and [Mukherjee \(2012\)](#) have suggested the framing of film practices through questions of mobility. The field of professional documentary practice is in many respects highly globalized and interconnected (e.g., in the funding and festival circuit). Thus, travelling with films, and pitching and negotiating them at various places which host festivals and workshops, is part of many filmmakers' practice. But how do these mobilities intersect and how could these intersections be conceptualized to capture which levels of mobility are at stake in (or even central to) independent documentary film practices of today?

[Schneider \(2015\)](#) looks at the "entanglement" between representations of mobility, politics of (im)mobility, and the mediation of mobility in the case of Indian Muslim womens' film practices. For Schneider, this includes questions of "emotional-", "intellectual-", and "imaginative mobility" ([Robins 2004](#), pp. 114–32), and the possibility of questioning stereotypes of Muslim womens' "immobility". This lens would enable us to "sharpen our understanding of the interrelationship between new media configurations, emerging practices of mobility and processes of sociocultural change" ([Schneider 2015](#), p. 225) enabling also an understanding of the various localities people appropriate within the media environments of today ([Schneider 2015](#), p. 232). Mukherjee analysed the movements of "always-on-the-move filmmakers who attempt to connect place-based struggles, stitching together recorded footage from various places to bring out the commonalities and shared patterns among them" ([Mukherjee 2012](#), p. 54). He points out the importance of both representations of movements—e.g., depictions of train journeys for labour migrants—and the affective registers of songs. In Biju Toppo's film *Kora Rajee—Land of the Diggers* ([Toppo 2005](#)), for Mukherjee, the use of songs "is an invitation to all of us to experience not only the spatial journeys with Toppo and his co-travelers, but also move across time joining the colonial and postcolonial coordinates of tribal suffering in India to question development's spatio-temporal logic" ([Mukherjee 2012](#), p. 65). We get a sense of the intersection between the mobile lifeworlds of *adivasi* labour migrants and the film's mode of production and circulation. To flesh out these modes, the term "translocal" serves Mukherjee as an "analytical category to understand the circulation of documentary films in international festivals, the use of social actors in documentaries from various locales, or to explain the use of multi-sited documentary ethnographies to create critical 'geographical vocabularies' ([Chanan 2010](#)) for local-global audiences" ([Mukherjee 2012](#), p. 65).

In what follows within this section, I shall argue that a lens of mobility is particularly helpful for the study of independent documentary film practices that engage with regions of geopolitical conflict. In this description, I shall link questions of representation to those of physical movements and emotional mobilization. In fact, what I have been mostly interested in are form-driven attempts by filmmakers to find ways out of the "intractable" and long-enduring Kashmir conflict, made to establish the conditions through which alternatives can be communicatively imagined and affectively mobilized. Iffat Fatima<sup>3</sup> often asks herself how to emotionally move and politically mobilize audience members who may have been exposed to nationalist rhetorics of mutually exclusive national/religious identities or invested in top-down geopolitical arguments about the strategic necessities of territory and national security. She considers her filmic form partly as an attempt to affect audiences through visible evidence that shakes the ground of discursive attempts by members of various audiences to explain away some concrete realities of "everyday life" in an occupied zone.

As taken up by [Schneider \(2015\)](#), an understanding of mobility refers beyond representations of mobility and the physical movements of filmmakers, including aspects of affect and creative negotiation through the audio-visual form of documentary film. To conceptualize these crucial attempts of

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<sup>3</sup> When I speak about Iffat Fatima's intentions, I refer to a large number of recorded conversations I had conducted with the filmmaker since the end of 2013. Amongst them are conversations in New Delhi (28 February 2013; 27 October 2014; 16 December 2014) and via Skype (21 October 2015; 23 October 2015; 27 October 2015; 7 April 2016).

filmmakers, to think outside of the box of established narratives, she draws on Robins (2004) concepts of “intellectual-”, “emotional-”, and “imaginative mobility”. Robins uses these terms to refer to media practices that not only inscribe themselves in one of the many already available identity narratives—or “imagined communities” (Anderson 2006)—but open up new subjectivities “beyond” (Robins 2004, pp. 114–32) them. In the case of my research on film practices that deal with zones of conflict, imaginative mobility refers to collective creative imaginations that challenge dominant frames of territoriality, sovereignty and public sphere(s). In his work on the media practices of Turkish labour migrants, Robins argued that individual agents challenge national imaginations by thinking outside of identitarian logics (Robins 2004, pp. 114–32). He draws here—as do other mobility thinkers—on ontogenetics: the constant movement and change of *life as movement* that is epistemologically favored, instead of thought that epistemologically favors concepts which suggest a fixity of such social imaginaries as “national security” or “identity-politics” (see (Adey 2010; Urry 2000)). However, the danger may also arise here that one concentrates on opening potentials without contextualizing practices within the existing structural moments to which imaginations of the nation belong just as state regulations and the financial strictures of the field of independent documentary filmmaking. This is why I find Schneider’s attention to the importance of representations of “im-mobilities”, and (Sheller and Urry 2006; Göttisch-Elten 2011, p. 29) arguments to link processes of mobility as a reflexive category to immobility, fruitful. As Schneider (2015, p. 227) conceptualizes the term, processes of mobility would “also include the image distribution, circulation of perceptions, and information in local, national and global media. The politics of mobility as well as the representation of immobility should thus be central to any analysis [...] (Schneider 2015, p. 227).

In these above mentioned approaches, I regard immobility as a metaphor for structural moments such as sedimented narratives and visual regimes (e.g., memory and history writing, iconic depictions of conflict; media-discourses), social boundaries; social imaginations (the nation), and state and societal regulations (censorship, public shaming, etc.). I begin here with representations.

### 3.1. Representations

In zones of conflict, military presence leads to different kinds of physical immobility, such as roadblocks, checkpoints, id-controls, etc. Representing the everyday life in a conflict zone could be regarded as a particular strength of the independent documentary film, and often points towards the question of the (im)possibility of everyday movements (Morag 2013). Such everyday immobilities may not be very prominent in highly visible media formats where questions of national security frame images. The Hindi film industry is known for its allegorical treatment of the nation state and anxieties constructed around the “territorial integrity” of the mother nation being played out in relation to the “Muslim Other” (Gaur 2010). In the mediascapes of the Hindi film and 24/7 news television, and its convergent images as seen circulating through social media networks, we often witness how decontextualized images of violence coalesce at “places of national affect” (Urry 2007, p. 254). Representations of Kashmir in the Hindi film often resemble statements of India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who saw the region as a place of pastoral feminine beauty and religious “otherness” while at the same time being central to the very idea of India (Anderson 2012, p. 80). In the Hindi film, the territory of the Kashmir Valley has been turned into an affect-loaded place, that is at the same time of “symbolic centrality” (Gaur 2010, p. 15)—especially to articulations of national secularism: the Kashmiri Muslim Other serves often to reaffirm a national secular self (Gaur 2010, pp. 36–38). From the 1960s onward until the beginning of the armed conflict in 1989, the region primarily figured as a touristic playground for Indian middle classes against the backdrop of mountains, lakes, and flower fields. After 1989, the same landscapes were re-framed through barbed wire, evoking the loss of paradise after an onset of armed conflict (Kabir 2009). The two main cinematic protagonists here, the terrorist and the tourist, are highly mobile agents, crossing boundaries for pleasure or/and for instilling terror and endangering national integrity. I have shown elsewhere (Kramer 2015) how the processes of touristic permeation (and linkages between the tourism industry, the Hindi film industry,

and local government) and the framing of Kashmir as a security threat must be seen as symbiotic and take part in the continuation of the status quo. These well-known images of tourist pleasures and terrorist threats have been widely circulating through visual cultures in South Asia, overdetermining the political history of the conflict, which was one of central state misgovernance, militarization, and human rights violations by state agents (Bose 1997; Hoffman and Duschinski 2013).

### 3.2. Scales

An analysis of filmic mobilities makes it necessary to scale between the local and the global, looking at the dynamics through which the nation state gets challenged and sometimes transcended by transregional and translocal connectivities (see here the work in critical transnational film studies of Higbee and Lim 2010). To understand these connections, I draw on the word-pair territorialization/deterritorialization, defined by media culture scholar Andreas Hepp in the following way:

Territorialization can be defined as the process in which an identifiable territory (a 'country', a 'region', a 'continent') is constructed as a physically anchored point of reference for a particular (media) culture, or as a form of communitization related to it. [...] Deterritorialization is, by contrast, the 'loosening' of this apparently 'natural' relationship between culture, communitization and territoriality. (Hepp 2012, p. 108)

I find it useful to extend this media cultural approach through the concept of (de)territorialization as it was established within the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1972). In short, this provides a framework for speaking about the potential of audience members being affected by film to open up beyond the already known narratives, categories and stereotypes. It involves attempts to capture new ways of thinking and feeling, thus offering imaginative and emotional mobility (Robins 2004). At the same time, a mobility focus on a filmmaker's agency must circumvent the anti-phenomenological positions of Deleuze and Guattari's subjectless affect theory (no subject, no intentionality, no representation, etc.) to take the agent in an already more cohesive way as a human subject.

One of these new ways of reterritorialization attempted by the filmmaker Iffat Fatima (and other filmmakers who work on the Kashmir conflict such as Sanjay Kak and Uzma Falak) can be seen as the "translocal"—where local struggles are connected and broader scales of interaction established, that may or may not refer to the nation or region (Oakes and Schein 2006, p. 10). In the case of Fatima's practice, we are dealing with moments that are often "transnational" in scale because her film is sometimes negotiated by audience members through a national lens while her funding and film-networks are largely transcending the boundaries of the Indian nation-state. That some audience members negotiate her film via the category 'nation' has to do with Kashmir's above mentioned "symbolic centrality" (Gaur 2010) for the Indian nation-state. I shall follow the warning articulated by Higbee and Lim:

[...] [W]hile the term 'transnational cinema' appears to be used and applied with increasing frequency as both a descriptive and conceptual marker, it also tends, for the most part, to be taken as a given—as shorthand for an international or supranational mode of film production whose impact and reach lies beyond the bounds of the national. The danger here is that the national simply becomes displaced or negated in such analysis, as if it ceases to exist, when in fact the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational filmmaking practices. [...] [O]ne of the potential weaknesses of the conceptual term 'transnational cinema' [...] [is that] it risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images and cultures at the expense of the specific cultural, historical or ideological context in which these exchanges take place. (Higbee and Lim 2010, pp. 10–12)

Thus, if the transnational takes the normative and regulative presence of nation-state institutions and the imaginations of the nation state seriously, one needs to inquire into the moments when opening up our imagination of national sovereignty and security can be described as translocal. The concept of translocality is challenging to our understanding of a “public sphere”, thus the referent of territory in which the films are seen to operate and cause effects. The next section deals with the methodological question: How can we investigate the opening and closing potentials of affect in the way films are “made public” (McLagan and McKee 2012, p. 10)?

### 3.3. Mobile Methods: Affects and Performances

While more text-based approaches from the humanities are helpful to understanding the politics of representation, the tropes of (im-)mobilities, and the discourses surrounding conflict, a lens of mobility as outlined above also requires a grasp of the way films mobilize and get negotiated. This could be achieved through mobile methods that imply: “to move with and to be moved by subjects” (Büscher et al. 2011, p. 7). Following the critical appraisal of mobile methods by Merriman (2014, p. 183), I do not see the focus of a mobilities approach resting solely on phenomenological, presentive aspects of social practices. Merriman warned that “non-representative” (Thrift 2008) methodologies should not be substituted for questions of text, discourse, and representation; otherwise, we would lose our grip on central aspects of social practices. They can serve, however, as an extension of the kind of phenomena and questions that matter to documentary film practices. From a media-culture perspective (Hepp 2012), one engages with the communicative form, of which representations are one important level amongst production, circulation, reception, and appropriation. In fact, without keeping an eye on the politics of representation (e.g., of evidence, memory, and history), the politics of documentary film cannot be understood. But by “following” film practices—by moving with the films and with the agents—I was able to capture the processes of negotiations of filmic form in moments of high intensity contestations. These contestations, again, may not only say something about frames of representation through which the filmic form is negotiated between the filmmakers and audiences. These negotiations are also a central part of a mobile film practice, as in the case of Iffat Fatima, who often moves together with her films.

However, an approach that includes phenomenological questions demands that the researcher looks beyond dynamics of representative categories (e.g., the Kashmiri self-determination narrative vs. the Indian state narrative) towards not yet cognitive, affective potentials of filmic practices. Köhn (2016) recently pointed out the usefulness of film phenomenology for the mediation of mobility. For Köhn, this perspective offers “an understanding of audiovisual mediation that is attentive to the perceptive processes media involve the spectator in, and thus brings into view the meaningfulness of an embodied viewing experience” (Köhn 2016, p. 23). By drawing on film phenomenologist Marks (2000), I would like to refer to theories that conceptualize wider aspects of affect and sense perception for independent filmmakers. These aspects involve filmmakers, spectators, and researchers as embodied beings, who participate in the often ambivalent and contradictory sensory negotiation of a film—or, in the words of Merleau-Ponty (1968), “the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing” (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 18; see also (Köhn 2016, p. 23)).

By following Iffat Fatima’s practice, I became particularly interested in the affective politics linked to performances of films. How do they initiate and partake in forms of collective or individual “anger” and “empathy”? How do they create compassionate reactions and what do these imply for our understanding of who belongs to a group and who does not? By “performance”, I understand the documentary film as something, which is negotiated between images of possible realities and possible interpretations of those realities (Bruzzi 2006, pp. 6–7). This understanding conceptually serves my study by moving away from older questions of ‘what *the* reality of the documentary image is’ while keeping its mimetic claim. Corner (2011) refers to this as “propositional realism” (Corner 2011, p. 72) that, by drawing on the words of documentary scholar Winston (2008), “claims the real”. For Corner,

this strongly links the form to the creation of “testimony”, where audiovisual sequences and actualities testify for events expected to have happened in some reality.

In connection with social imaginations (such as “the nation” as an imagined community; [Anderson \(2006\)](#)), affects, when symbolized and negotiated via language, can become the basis for inclusions and exclusions within and beyond established narratives. Inclusions and exclusions can get sedimented in metaphors such as “our history”, “our memory”, “national integrity”, or “the national public sphere”. This also means that we have to look at the way the categories of “(the/a) public(s)” are performed and mediated through aspects of mobility, and as both moments where territory is marked by negotiations of otherness, and by increasing instances of deterritorialization. In the case of Fatima’s practice, I argue that her movements and filmic form open up spaces beyond often normatively used categories of civil society or the “bourgeois public sphere” ([Habermas 1990](#)). This understanding builds on the critique of Jürgen Habermas concept of a “bürgerlichen Öffentlichkeit” put forward by a number of scholars ([Negt and Kluge 1972](#); [Fraser 1992](#); [Warner 2002](#)). In short, questions have been raised about who is excluded from Habermas conceptualization ([Fraser 1992](#)), what is the implicit territoriality of the public sphere (e.g., the nation-state; ([Eley 1992](#))), where are liberal boundaries drawn between reason and affect ([Warner 2002](#)) and what does this imply in terms of the politics of mediation, form and address ([Mazzarella 2013](#))? For the South Asian context, [Bhandari \(2006\)](#) and [Mazzarella \(2013\)](#) are important references regarding the plurality of publics and (affective) styles of public performances resulting partly from a post-colonial historical trajectory. I shall argue below in Section 6 that the plurality of publics—often different in style, in address, and in their potential for publicity—is taken as a serious concern by Fatima, who through her physical movements and emotional mobilization often renders the ideological boundaries (especially invested in normative ideas) of publics porous.

One rather obvious question may arise in relation to the above delineated approach: if so vastly different aspects are included—from emotional mobilization, to physical mobility, to representations of mobility and publics—where is the conceptual coherence that enables us to describe and explain these moments as significantly resulting from mobility? How does this instrument of analysis add anything to the way we understand film practices and subjectivities in conflict zones? Following Schneider and Mukherjee, I argue that a lens of mobility adds to our understanding primarily when we draw on empirical data to show the intersections of those levels described above in specific descriptions and analysis of filmic practices. In the remaining sections of this paper, I shall outline aspects of my own research that led me to a conceptualization of a lens of mobility via the example of the filmmaker Iffat Fatima.

#### 4. Representations of Gender, Islam and Mobility

The mothers and wives of the Association of the Parents of Disappeared People (APDP) holding pictures of their disappeared family members have in recent years become the subjects of some of the Kashmir conflict’s more visible images. The APDP, headed by Parveena Ahangar, is an organisation which strives toward making the Indian army accountable for human rights violations, drawing attention to the enforced disappearances of the last 20 years as committed under the draconic Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which gives impunity to the operations of armed forces in “disturbed areas”. In a number of documentaries and feature films, these individuals have been framed as depicting the ‘human side’ of the conflict, displaying the sorrows of the waiting women, while sometimes linking them up in a somewhat departmentalised way to the suffering of other groups—in particular, Kashmiri Pandit and Sikh women. Fatima’s film *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2015) takes a rather different route in offering an explicit political positioning in an embedded production. The film was funded by the Norwegian women’s rights’ organisation Fokus as part of a long-term project supporting the APDP. Besides the support of Fokus, the production costs were limited because of the cheapness and malleability of digital film. While Fokus did not pressure the filmmaker to make any changes in the film, questions were raised regarding why she neither develops a character-driven

narrative nor positions herself more reflexively in the film's textures. Fatima holds that this would be detrimental to both the political nature of the Kashmir conflict and the assertive political articulations of gendered resistance which have hitherto been rarely expressed outside of the discourse of human rights abuses with a focus on passive loss and suffering as inflicted by the ongoing conflict. In many reportages and documentary films on the Kashmir conflict Parveena Ahangar is depicted through a certain almost iconic sequence of mourning and a demand for justice directed at an unresponsive government. This sequence has now moved on in intermedial space and can be seen in a number of recent Hindi feature films as well (amongst them are: *Lamhaa* (Dholakia 2010); *Harud* (Bashir 2012); (*Haider* Bhardwaj 2014)).

As mentioned above, women in conflict zones (Sharoni 2001)—and in particular Muslim women in India after the economic liberalization (Schneider 2015)—have often been represented only as (religiously) immobilized victims. Fatima's strategy was to challenge this visual regime by showing her female subjects in their everyday (im-)mobility and in their participation in the popular demands for political self-determination. Thus, she contextualizes this demand through the everyday and links it to the memory and passions that drive the subjects of her film to continue the demand for justice and freedom. In order to clarify this strategy of representation, let me discuss the beginning sequence of *Khoon Diy Baarav* that also serves as a signature for the formal approach of her film.

The film begins with a fade-in from black. We see Shamima Bano, whose husband Shabir 'disappeared', steering her boat through the backwaters of the quarters where she lives as a member of the Hanji community dwelling in the lakes of Srinagar (See Figure 1.). She speaks about the memory of her disappeared husband who came to her in a dream, saying, "I am Shabir"; she replied, "You cannot be Shabir, his face was the same, not his feet. I [Shamima Bano] tell him: I have put a mark on him [ . . . ] we have to do a DNA test." Next we see some images of the flora and fauna of the lake in winter. Shamima continues to recount her dream: Shabir tries to reassure her that it is actually him, but she tells him "No, no, no, we'll take blood from your father and test it to find out if you are his son, I woke up, my god what did I see". The boat passes by a group of men sitting in boats at the shore of the waterway. There is the close-up of one of them smoking his water pipe quietly while a little bird magically lands on his right shoulder. The next images show a few dogs—one puppy lost between barbed wire—and two children standing at the shore of the lake. We hear Fatima's voice asking Shamima, "Did you ever hear anything about him?" She replies: "Nothing, no trace of him."



**Figure 1.** *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2015), beginning sequence, by courtesy of Iffat Fatima.

Iffat Fatima stresses that her film attempts to reclaim the spaces taken away from the Kashmiris through the physical and imaginary occupation of the region. Commenting on what motivated her to

include another boat scene with Parveena Ahangar positioned at the very end of the film, she pointed to a documentary by Zul Vellani called *Aatish-e-Chinar* (1998):

which begins with this man sitting relaxed on the Dal Lake just rowing and [he] says something like: 'Oh what a wonderful thing this is, this great Kashmiri Culture!' Sitting on the boat as if he's in complete control, as if he's the maharaja there, that's why I put Parveena in that style. (Fatima in conversation, New Delhi, 4 April 2014)

Fatima attempts to show how these women exercise their agencies by moving through the militarised spaces of the valley, suffusing them with memories and dreams of loss and assertion. Shamima Bano's boat journey challenges the countless representations of the stereotypical male Hanji, who is always ready to serve Indian tourists as they enjoy their tours through the valley (Kabir 2009). The mention of the DNA test in a dreamlike sequence is a shocking testament of how the legal framework in which the APDP operate is pervading the women's lives, eating its way into their dreams. The sequence also shows Fatima's reflexivity concerning dominant depictions of the Valley of Kashmir. Extending an argument of Kabir (2009), I understand the image of the boat journey on the lakes and rivers of Kashmir as an inverted tourist gaze (Urry 2002) through which Fatima inscribes Kashmiri subjectivities into the overexposed landscapes of the valley. Through this representation, the enjoyments of the tourist figure exposed to a normalising gaze of consumption have been linked to the memory of those living in a region being held under the sway of an overwhelming military presence. I have shown elsewhere (Kramer 2015) that the trope of the boat journey pervades representations of the valley in both Hindi film and documentary films. In fact, the use of this touristic image enables Fatima to address an audience familiar with those tropes that widely circulate among South Asian publics (see (Kabir 2009)). But how do these images—invested in a natural movement—frame the larger presentational form of her film?

Fatima's film is distinctly organized around spatial moments. The women in *Khoon Diy Baarav* are depicted through the logic of "walking with", where in the process they show through carefully chosen actuality footage of everyday occurrences (e.g., encounters with the military, work in the field, walks in the forest, a wedding ceremony) the scars of conflict and their hopes for redress. During the production of the film, Fatima's own movements within the valley had also been at a certain risk, when she was—together with members of her crew—for one day imprisoned in an army camp for shooting footage of its surroundings. Her high social status as a filmmaker from New Delhi and her networks in Kashmir have enabled her to get out of this relatively dangerous situation. Approximately the first hour of *Khoon Diy Baarav* is largely dedicated to making the viewer acquainted with four women of the APDP. By accompanying them and hearing about their disappeared family members, we learn about their desires and dreams. The second half of the film is marked by highly emotive sequences of mass protest and mourning. Since these kinds of images are strongly contested, one could be tempted to read them—following Kevin Smets typology—as taking part in "victim cinema" where filmmakers share certain beliefs of patriotism via the victimization of their own group (Smets 2015, p. 2442). For Smets, following Bar-Tal (2003, p. 85), it is a cinema of "affected parties" (Smets 2015, p. 2442). Even though members of Fatima's audiences have sometimes commented on the one sidedness of her position (in favour of *azadi*) or tried to transcend the political intend of the images by referring to a shared humanity, I like to show that attempts to categorize her film as victim-centric, humanitarian or as being driven by *ressentiment* would fall short of the particular way the film is mediated in relation to highly affective images.

## 5. Refining the Form and Emotional Mobilization

The film has been more than eight years in the making. In the first two years of the project, Fatima did not shoot much footage because of a crisis the APDP was undergoing at that time. The money of Fokus was first used to stabilise the institutional set-up and later extended for three more years. A provisional version of the film called *On a Trail of Vanished Blood* (Fatima 2012) was screened three times,

once in Norway and twice in India, where it garnered one rather heated discussion that provoked the filmmaker to rethink its modes of address. Such changes as were made include the beginning scenes of the film where, originally, groups of young men and women throw stones and perform a *ragḍa* around a blazing fire in the night. In Kashmir, a *ragḍa* has become a new technology of resistance, practiced since the year 2008: it entails a group standing in a circle and stamping their feet on the ground, often burning some object in the middle. This may be an Indian flag or a figure (straw man) of a popular Indian politician. See Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2015), sequence of a *ragḍa*, by courtesy of Iffat Fatima.

Although in the scene the object between the stamping feet is not clear, the intensity of the rioting was later regarded by Fatima as a potential threat to Indian spectators' engagement with the politics of the film, and so it was shifted to a later positioning within *Khoon Diy Baarav*. At the same time, one could perceive a certain impasse between on the one hand the idea of a zero sum game between regressive discourses of victimization and on the other hand, anti-mimetic, experimental practices, that do not sufficiently engage with the politics of representation. She needed this image to show a certain anger, but at the same time this anger should not be conceived as simply regressive. To clarify this point, let me report a rather extensive excerpt from a conversation of mine with the filmmaker:

I.F.: The first comment that comes out [of public debate on the film] is that it is a very powerful film. Now, the term 'powerful'—I do not know what is implied by that.

M.K.: Perhaps that [sometimes] means "politically mobilizing in a problematic way" [...]; people want to be polite.

I.F.: They also say they are very moved by it [...]; many of them have said that "the filmmaker is seducing us, but you don't know what actually is there. Look at the Kashmiri Pandits, look what they have done to them." So that these realities are wiped out and they seem to think that the film also can have the capacity to 'inflamm'.

M.K.: Yes, William Mazzarella describes this in his book (Mazzarella 2013): [A] postcolonial mindset is thinking about crowds that are easily emotionally mobilized: as soon as 'they' hear azadi-slogans, 'they' go out and demolish everything. But the way 'crowds' are functioning is at the same time very well organized as a kind of staged drama they play out. That is a form of delegitimizing political articulation. In Persistence/Resistance [filmfestival in New-Delhi, 18 February 2014] *Jashn-e-Azadi* (Kak 2007) [a film dealing with the articulation of Kashmiri political self-determination, directed by the filmmaker Sanjay Kak] was screened and it [was criticized to] work somehow similar in the way it

creates affects of *azadi*. So you see movements, you see people marching, throwing stones, shouting “*azadi*” and so on. When you watch it you [may also] feel sympathetic...

I.F.: [...] It takes you with it [...], but that is the objective of the filmmaker. The filmmaker does want you to empathize with those women, but that does not mean that people get out and start throwing stones. [...] But you also have to draw in your audience so that they can also engage with it. Those are very serious questions when one is making a film. [...] You have to create empathy; that is in some ways the objective of the film. That empathy factor can get disrupted—it can become a reactionary taste. It is a thin line. That is why I sometimes have a problem with that title, ‘*vanished blood*’. I feel that maybe that also goes into that disruptive area. (conversation with Iffat Fatima, 27 October 2015)

The spectator should through the new position of the *ragḍa* -sequence open up to a Kashmiri experience of the conflict. In other words: The seemingly “resentful” image of a *ragḍa* must not be confused with the idea of resentment. Fassin (2013) differentiates between this nietzschean use of the French term “*ressentiment*” and “*resentment*” as two politically relevant ways of subjectivation, referring to the moral value of affects such as indignation, anger, ire, and bitterness (Fassin 2013, p. 250). For Nietzsche, it was a reactionary mode coming from dialectics where the position from below keeps the “evil one” as its Other and construes its own moral value as an afterthought to the same (Fassin 2013, p. 251). On the other hand, Fassin points to Adam Smith, who considered “*resentment*” as a normal yet disagreeable passion that “can be disciplined as long as a sense of justice prevails” (Fassin 2013, p. 251). Following Fassin’s differentiation, the mode of political subjectivation of Fatima’s film follows the memory trace of affective “*resentment*” that is articulated “from below” and conveyed forcefully through the re-positioning of the sequence at the end of the new film. At the same time, this portrays the deep engagement of Fatima with the temporalities of documentary film. The new positioning of the *ragḍa* sequence is the result of a careful elaboration upon the “everyday” in an occupied territory, which she mediates through the actualities documented and partly provoked by her walking together with the film’s protagonists. For Fatima, the form resulted “organically” out of her long work together with the women of the APDP. In fact, this refinement of form may have led to a phenomena that Fatima has experienced after most of her screenings. A certain silence before people speak points perhaps towards a saturation of evidence throughout ninety minutes of documentary film, in which the consequences of military occupation become difficult to deny or bury under national or geopolitical rhetorics.

During this long period of production, Fatima did not apply for any pitching sessions of European funding institutions that are often accompanied by normative frameworks regarding the narrative form, such as the “*journey of the hero*” (Friedman 2015). On the other hand, she completely circumvented film certification, which would enable a TV-distribution in India. Since “*questioning sovereignty and integrity of India*” is amongst the guideline of certification, Fatima knew that there is little hope to maintain the presentational form of the film while letting it be certified. Even if screening documentary films without certification is common practice in a large number of grassroots film festivals in India, problems for uncertified films (and their makers) may arise in terms of opening space to political attacks from the Hindu right (see next section). Documentary filmmakers in India can certify more “*balanced*” versions of their films and travel with the uncensored cut. But for Fatima, the refinement of the filmic form needs also to be seen as part and parcel of her attempts at creating the specific conditions through which the film can be seen. This is going beyond the presentational form of the filmic artefact. Since she was especially interested in the way her film worked emotionally with audiences, she needed to follow it herself and—as we shall see in the next section—protect its vulnerable “*skin*”.

In short: the form of the film is neither reducible to the digital or physical artefact of “*film*”, nor to the negotiation of cognitive cues about its symbolic structure. The way in which I briefly framed a lens of mobility above requires us to search for possible openings between narratives, especially in relation

to aspects of affect in documentary practices. I shall elaborate upon this question of affect more closely in the following section and link it to Fatima's practice of accompanying the screenings of her film.

## 6. Mobility and Publics: Protecting the Skin of the Film

I learned about the particular importance of affect while travelling with Fatima and having conversations with her about the interactions of audiences with her film. *Khoon Diy Baarav* touches a sensitive spot in the nationalist imagination of India—the very idea of national integrity. With audience members who identify themselves as national or patriotic in relation to Kashmir (or Pakistan), negative affective responses are imminent possibilities. These include not only reactions to screenings of the film, but the larger media environment, within which documentary films can become visible—even without being seen by those who are out to denounce them. When Iffat Fatima began showing her film in 2016, it was on the background of student protests at Jawaharlal Nehru University and at the University of Hyderabad, during which some Indian news anchors and journalists started a campaign against everything “anti-national” (Nair 2016, p. x). Well known to media practitioners in India, this term can—similar to questions of the defence of “Hindu sentiments” in the face of media liberalization (Ghosh 2010, p. 43)—become a rallying cry for the creation of mass-publicity. During her journey with the film, Fatima had one incident at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi where some students contested the film towards the end of the post screening debate (Joshi 2016). Most of the protesting students had not been present during the film screening and seemingly came just for the purpose of creating a particular visibility around the national-antinational binary and therefore reaffirm the normativity of the nation-state. During the documentary and short film festival ViBGYOR 2014 in Thrissur, Kerala, members of Hindu nationalist groups attacked the screening of Bilal Jan's film *Ocean of Tears* (Jan 2012), which inquired into a mass rape conducted by the Indian army in the Kashmiri village of Konan Poshpura. The filmmaker was protected by the audience of the festival, who stood between the entry point and the angry nationalists (Shyam 2014). One film screening of Sanjay Kak's film *Jashn-e-Azadi* (Kak 2007) that occurred during a festival that focused entirely on Kashmir, called “Kashmir before our Eyes” and which took place in Hyderabad in 2013, had to be shifted to another location after the opening screening was vandalized by a group of activists from a Hindu-nativist political organization that demands the creation of a separate homeland for exiled Kashmiri Pandits within the territory of the Valley of Kashmir (Saleh 2013). Performances to stop screenings from taking place—sometimes accompanied by the above mentioned forms of vandalism—do not require that participants even watch a film—the film can thus have publicity effects that are based on affects somewhat external to its presentational form (Mazzarella 2013).

In such an atmosphere, it becomes particularly important for Fatima to travel with her film. This is a way of protecting its vulnerable “skin” (Marks 2000) from the danger of crossing what I propose to call, following Mazzarella (2013), the “open edge of mass publicity” (Mazzarella 2013, p. 37). The “skin of the film” is a concept at the intersection of film-phenomenology and Deleuzian film studies introduced by Laura Marks. It refers to the haptic workings of small film practices, where:

[ . . . ] the condition of being in-between cultures initiates a search for new forms of visual expression and leads to the hypothesis that many of these works ‘call upon memories of the senses in order to represent the experiences of people living in Diaspora’ (Marks 2000). But unlike Western ocular centrism (the prioritization of the eye as a sense for acquiring knowledge, truth, experience), intercultural cinema embraces the proximal senses (smell, taste, touch) as a means for embodying knowledge and cultivating memory. (Totaro 2002)

But there is another aspect of “skin” that is even more important to my argument than the question of “haptic vision” in relation to the category “memory”. Marks (2000, p. 20) description of the conditions of film practices extends the “skin” to moments of circulation and reception: small screening sites at film-clubs and universities, screenings for friends and family, financial insecurity and strong support by personal networks, vulnerability of a video's material, and the importance

given to the affective involvement of audiences. On the other hand, “viewers often take these contexts into account as part of their experience of the work. [...] Reproducible though they are, the media arts cannot be conceived of separately from the sets of viewers that give them meaning. Traces of other viewings, of differently seeing audiences, adhere to the skin of these works” (Marks 2000, p. 20). In other words: the skin is also a vulnerable boundary of a film’s communicative surroundings and of its force. I have shown above how traces of former viewings have been weaved into the textures of the current form, to enable a refined emotional engagement. The skin opens to publics in highly context-specific ways. In films that deal with conflict zones and “places of national affect” (Urry 2007, p. 254), these small material screenings provide the possibility to stay below the radar of the “wrong kind of publicity”. Still, the screenings of documentary films on Kashmir are often highly politically charged and open to all kinds of contestations. The ease of destroying the material skin of a video has now shifted to the difficult-to-estimate publicity potential of the more fluid digital media. It nevertheless constitutes a vulnerability, consisting now in the materiality and temporality of the digital: the dangers of decontextualization and fast-spreading anger. I see the mobility of Fatima’s practice exactly as an attempt to protect this “skin” by being able to emotionally mobilize audiences into an understanding of what “moves” Kashmiri women to resist for many years in a struggle that often does not seem to offer any reasonable chance for success.

But how can we now establish a connection between the physical mobility of the filmmaker and the mobilizing force of Fatima’s practice? How can we conceptualize the relationship between the protection of the vulnerable skin of the film and the potentiality of (anti-)national publicity that resides within media events which gather momentum by reiterating the dichotomy “national-antinational”? For this purpose, I turn to a discussion of the concept I have mentioned briefly above—“the open edge of mass publicity” (Mazzarella 2013, p. 37). Beyond empirical audiences, there are always imaginations of public(s) at play in any media practice. Michael Warner’s distinction between *a* public and *the* public is a way of conceptually coming to terms with this “open edge”. An empirical public or audience (*a* public) consisting of human beings that come together for some reason or another is always played out performatively at its intersection with an abstraction called “the public”. The latter depends on a modern imagination of a community made up of strangers, but still connected (discursively and spatiotemporally, through media ensembles, etc.) as a unit of sorts. I understand this intersection with the symbolic boundaries of the nation-state in the sense of what William Mazzarella calls the “open edge of mass publicity” in the imagination of a modern public. Drawing on the work of Warner (2002), Mazzarella comprises the concept in the following way:

[ . . . ] what I call the open edge of mass publicity: namely, the element of anonymity that characterizes any public communication in the age of mass publics; the sense that what makes a communication public is not just that ‘it addresses me’ by way of a public channel, but that ‘it addresses me insofar as it also, and by the same token, addresses unknown others,’ others who share my membership in an emergent general public. (Mazzarella 2013, p. 37)

This theorization helps to situate the potentials and dangers of working within a media environment in which, according to Fatima, the “wrong kind of publicity” can emerge easily and destroy the opening potentials of her practice.

By engaging with Fatima’s practice, I was drawn to view the politics of affect—the way traces of affective memory are sedimented and can be reactivated in current events—as her attempts to make public the memory that perpetuates the desire for political self-determination. In this process of becoming public, it was not just the movement between spaces and the subject position “in-between” (e.g., Delhi and Kashmir, the Indian field of documentary, and the world of documentary film festivals and funding institutions), but the very situatedness in the transmission of a local memory that reinforced the importance of translocal movements and the co-presence of the filmmaker with the film. Fatima often told me how difficult it was to choose the right places of screening and also to establish—under the advice of a friend who is a human rights lawyer—a series of film screenings

without the “wrong kind” of publicity effects. This, she was advised, would later result—if it was needed—in a legal defence against charges of her film “triggering communal unrest”. All of these operations must therefore be seen as operating on that “open edge”, defending the vulnerable “skin of the film”. However, this leaves open the question of how Fatima may reach out, widening the scale of her film’s communication in a paradoxical situation where scale effects—potentially enhanced by digital technology—are limited by the protection of the film’s skin, as described above. The question of “letting the film go on its own” is thus crucial to a practice that refined for many years an artefact fit for communication while simultaneously addressing an issue that was constantly of high urgency to both the filmmaker and the film’s protagonists. This happens within a situation where many Kashmiris strongly desire the widening of the conflict’s scale to create transnational solidarity for their cause of political self-determination. Fatima told me that, by screening the film in the way described above, she may be able to reach influential people in academia and in other relevant positions in civil society. These agents may—after being moved by the testimony of her film—expand the scale of her film through their individual engagement and networks in more meaningful ways than uncontrolled publicity would enable. Measuring film effect is a complex and highly contested task, especially when one considers the categories of audiences and genre created in turn and the consequential levelling of different ways films move us and create testimony to expend a conflict’s scale. However, this question is surely one that needs to be addressed more closely when one attempts to assess the transformative potential discussed here.

## 7. Conclusions

To make films on the Kashmir conflict means, for Iffat Fatima, not just interrogating dominant visual regimes by confronting them with images of “the everyday”—a category which is itself used to mediate these images, as they are captured as actuality footage—but engaging with questions of affect and its mobilization for political ends: will the audience show empathy, and will they feel what it means to live in an occupied zone, driven by a conflict memory to continue resistance against all odds? My use of a lens of mobility for the study of documentary films dealing with conflict zones is based on the observation that various levels of mobility are here entangled: representations, physical mobility and emotional and imaginative mobility. Regarding the politics of representation, I argue that Fatima challenges both touristic tropes of the Kashmir Valley and stereotypes of Kashmiri Muslim women as religiously immobilized victims. She achieves this by linking her filmic protagonist’s everyday movements not only to an alternative vision of the Kashmir Valley, but—as in the sequence of Shamima Bano analysed above—by inscribing the agency of Kashmiri women into the tourist gaze itself. Seen through a lens of mobility, however, Fatima’s practice of accompanying her protagonists for many years during the production of the film and later to represent them in the filmic textures, walking through an occupied zone, is just one half of the coin. Physically accompanying her film enables Fatima to create and control the conditions through which testimonies can be experienced and negotiated.

In the last section I have shown that this control of visibilities is particularly urgent in a media environment where the realization of nationalistically coded affects is an immanent possibility of the way films become public. By her travelling together with the film within the territorial boundaries of the Indian nation-state (the addressee of effective claims to legal redress) and addressing audience members with tropes known from the Hindi-film (a form known for its investment into an Indian nationalist imagination), the problem of (trans-)national address intensifies. I argue that Fatima achieves reflexivity through a long production in which the form was carefully refined through test screenings at various locations. This practice is meant to create the type of emotional and cognitive engagement that circumvents the pitfalls of documentary practices engaged with an affectively highly charged media environment. Visibilities are known to cut both ways: the moving-along-with-the film is partly meant to protect its vulnerable skin, and to control its visibility and its affective impact in the face of immanent possibilities for publicity creating performances from the Hindu-right that reaffirms the category of the nation. All these aspects of her practice achieve an intense calm of the performance

and a saturation of visible evidence, enhanced by her presence after the screening as somebody who further contextualizes and authenticates the film's images. However, the problem of protecting her film from crossing the "open edge of mass publicity" remains ambiguous. A potential widening of the scale of the film via an open circulation of the presentational form remains bound to a significant break in the way she intends to mobilize audience members for an understanding beyond interlocked conflict narratives.

Thus, I argue that, for an understanding of these affective and narrative possibilities, the mobility of filmmakers is not just a secondary element of production (e.g., transnational funding, visiting pitching workshops in Europe etc.), but of central (and likely increasing) importance to the particular form through which documentary films will mediate testimony of conflict zones. This communicative form depends on entangled (im-)mobility between the politics of representations, physical and social (im-)mobility, and emotional mobilization. At the intersections of these mobilities, one can observe, describe, and analyze contemporary documentary film practices pertaining to conflict zones at their highest intensities, and in moments of political contestation and hope for possible openings beyond the deadends of the conflict. These are moments that matter to audience members, filmmakers, and researchers alike, as they result from a multilayered investment in the documentary form as it is performatively negotiated. To capture these moments, mobile methods require the researcher to move with the filmmakers to sites of screenings and have conversations with both filmmakers and members of audiences.

To get hold of the social boundaries of the practice and the imaginative boundaries of representations, the opening potentials of imaginative and intellectual mobilities need to be seen as intrinsically linked to immobility, which captures the structural side of a practice. This includes institutional aspects regarding the lack of funding, governmental regulations, and sedimented discourses that seem to enclose conflict zones in always repeated narratives (often asymmetrical in their relation to state power and hegemonic media discourses). Iffat Fatima not only attempts to open between narratives, but also to—reflexively—inscribe herself within certain, often less visible, narrative. The need to negotiate the political dimension of the conflict results in a critical appropriation of a narrative of Kashmiri political self-determination. By doing so, she re-territorializes through her movements new inscriptions in contentious conflict space. At the same time she creates possibilities of moving out of national frameworks, and into translocal and transregional subjectivities, because the everyday of a militarized zone may resonate with everyday experiences of other regions and localities.

Fatima's filmic practice stands widely apart from normative narrative schemes circulating through documentary pitching sessions in the global field of documentary (Friedman 2015; Wessely 2013) and the increasingly elaborated efforts by funding institutions of documentary film to measure and track "social impact" empirically with funding agencies dictating the terms of "impact" (Nichols 2016, p. 223). In this paper, I have pointed out some of Fatima's attempts at not being tracked through available categories (this or that pre-existing narrative, geopolitical argument or idea/space of effect) in highly affective and sometimes volatile media-environments. This avoidance of being tracked was partly enabled by her ability to open up new imaginations of the conflict that emerge from the specific location of her embedded, long term engagement with the APDP and its translation into a highly mobile film practice. In times where affects rush through social media, serving as means of capital-accumulation and 'information' on conflict zones, the search for practices of communication that draw on the emancipatory possibilities of digital technologies without falling into their often attached decontextualizing visibilities and temporalities becomes an urgent and pressing matter. A "lens of mobility" as suggested through my discussion of Iffat Fatima's practice may serve as an instrument to question new possibilities and problems of the independent digital documentary film.

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