

Trains to Nowhere

*Movement, Mobility & Motherhood
in Moor (2015)*

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From:
Khost

To:
Karachi

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Overview

My proposed MRP project is based on a 2015 Pakistani film titled *Moor* (Dir. Jami). It examines the narratives of **separation, movement, and class mobility** through the film. The word **Moor** is from the **Pashto** language, spoken largely in the northern districts of Pakistan and **translates to Mother**. It centers around the protagonist **migrating away from his home**, only to return at the **death of his mother**.

This film is decidedly about mothers. But I wish to argue that this **'motherhood'** is **not only predicated on familial relations**, rather also extends to ideas of **nationhood, land relations and moral quandaries**. At the heart of a film is a **separation from these many 'mothers'**.



These mothers act as totems that form networks of relationality between the different characters of the film. These different characters wish to protect these mothers, betray these mothers, kill these mothers, or even resurrect them through what would be considered dignified and morally upright acts.



Khost

“Kiya kaam hai yahan? Sub kuch tou khatam ho gaya hai”

What work is even left to do here?
Everything is finished, there is nothing left.



Karachi

“Amber tumhay koe andaza hai meinay kya kya kiya hoa hai is shehr mei kuch banay k liyea?”

Amber, do you have any idea the things I have had to do to make it in this city?



Research Questions

I intend to explore the vast space of **tensions and anxieties** pulled taut between these two dialogues.

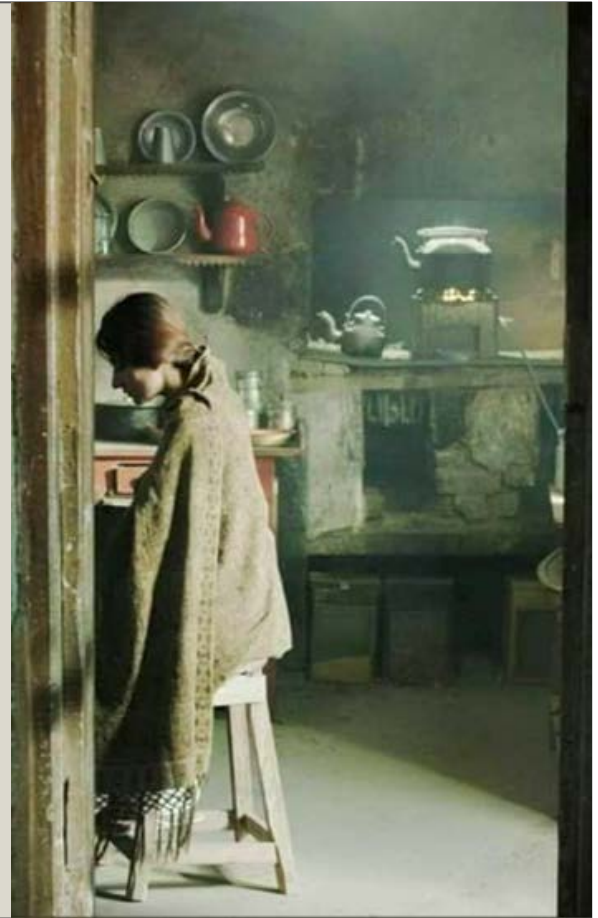
In what ways does the **investigation of the relationality** between **land, leaving and home-making** produce Jami's *Moor*?

To what extent can Jami's *Moor* be understood as a testament for the **necessity of movement in the hopes of class mobility**?



Literature Review: *Home*

Sara Ahmed in her essay “**Home and Away**”, complicates the notion of what is defined as home and argues against the assumed fixity of it. She considers homes as “**complex and contingent spaces of inhabitation**” in which the very forming of homes is informed by “movements and dislocations” (12). It seems then that the making of homes by **immigrants or the families of immigrants’ rests on no stable base, rather on consistent movements and moments of “pain”**. Her work is pivotal to the understanding of the “**fetish**” of home that evades a destination (331). In this case then, the process of migration and the **journeys one takes become more like home** than the spaces one inhabits.



Literature Review: *Exile*

John Durham Peter's conception, in "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora", of 'exile' as different from 'diaspora' is of significance to my argument. Peter notes that "exile suggests pinning for home; diaspora suggests networks among compatriots" (20). Hence, Ahmed's work looks at the communities that sustain a contact with culture, language, and kinship—but **I am also interested in the place of exile in Moor**. Peter notes that, whether voluntary or involuntary, exile suggests "a painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland" (19). It relates to the fantasy of a "glorious return" to a home that is no longer safe or habitable (19). Exile, hence, is invariably linked to **nationalism**. It concocts an image of an "original" home and a national land that inspires longing for return not just to the land but also to a "primordial identity" (31).



Literature Review: *Identity*

Moor complicates the notion of ‘national’ identity by juxtaposing identities that are a product of tradition and inhabit traditional homes versus those that leave these homes and traditions in their path to ‘modernity’. *Moor* places these ‘urban’ identities as deeply troubled ones—unable to find solace in their old homes or the new ones they construct. This practice is reminiscent of Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of ‘mimicry’ where the colonial subject (but in this case, I argue the migrant) feels they can lessen their alienation from the colonizer’s culture by adopting its practices. This imitation gives them a semblance of control over their estrangement but simultaneously splinters them into a dual identity-- an affliction identical to those of migrants trying to settle into foreign spaces.



Methodology

My work largely deals with interdisciplinary concerns and hence, the theoretical foundations I will be employing for my project are from **literary and cultural studies**. The framing of my project will be through **theories of post-coloniality, migrant and diaspora studies and ethnographic works on pain, movement, and borders**. Along with this, I will be providing a close reading of key scenes from *Moor* that capture the **processes of leaving and the nuances of survival**.



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