

(De)Constructing the Self and Other in *Veer Zaara*

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Abstract

Films as cultural texts articulate the politics of everyday lives and one of the issues often depicted is on nationalism. The chosen case study for this article is *Veer Zaara* (2004), a romantic Bollywood movie telling us the story of two lovers from India and Pakistan who have to undergone multiple challenges to be together. The conflicts represent the on-going and completely unresolved sibling rivalry between the two countries particularly after the partition in 1947. The main research question is how the film depicts the process of self-identification from the Indian characters by looking at the “cultural similarities and differences” compared to the Pakistani character while representing the effort of drawing a boundary between India and Pakistan? Research findings show that there are three dominant representational elements (space, religion and gender) in which the film with its authority select what forms of representation it would present concerning each country. In doing so, the film is making sure that India is identifying itself as a nation which is different from Pakistan or by drawing the boundary of India as the self and Pakistan as the other.

Keywords: self-other, film, Bollywood, nationalism, representation

Introduction

The discussion of nation and nationalism has not only been discussed in the politic, geography or economics area, but it has also been a very important issue in literary and cultural studies. Gellner & Breuilly (1983) argue that the cultural aspect of nationalism in the idea of a cultural ideal, which can be found within the drive to unify the members of the nation for them to identify themselves with a national-culture (the way of life). This ongoing process of identification is a part of the creation and re-creation of nation and nationalism through the repeated symbolic cultural practices. Since culture is not fixed, the process is “dynamic and dialogic” (Edensor, 2002) which can be found in a variety of cultural milieus of “images, ideas, spaces, things, discourses and practices” (Edensor, 2002).

One of the key elements in the process of identifying one’s national identity is making a distinction between the self and the other by drawing a boundary (physically or metaphorically). Members of the ‘imagined community’ distinguish between themselves and the others both collectively and even individually to



articulate and exemplify a sense of national identity. Moreover, as mentioned above, the process is dynamic and involves battles of exclusion or inclusion. In other words, it is constructed through the clear dichotomy on who belongs to a certain national space and those who do not. This is an important framework, especially to discuss conflicting countries which used to share the same territory. An intriguing element of this particular discussion is the way in defining who belongs that can be done not only through the differences but could also cover the similarities they shared in view of the same cultural and historical roots of the countries involved. This article discusses about this process of drawing a boundary while at the same time searching for cultural similarities between two countries, India and Pakistan, in a Bollywood film entitled *Veer-Zaara*.

In a surface reading of this text, *Veer-Zaara* is just like any other romantic drama in Bollywood where two lovers are estranged from each other and eventually have their happy ending. But to go beyond that storyline, a critical analysis could lead to a better understanding on how this kind of media, the film, can capture the ongoing discussion of nation and nationalism of the two conflicting countries, India and Pakistan. As an Indian product, does this influence the elements of representation in the film especially when it is representing Pakistan, which in reality is the “other” or even considered as the “enemy”? How does *Veer-Zaara* visualize the two countries, India and Pakistan? Is there any process of self-identification from the Indian characters by looking at the “cultural similarities and differences” (Edensor, 2002, p. 25) compared to the Pakistani character? In other words, are there any signifiers that represent the effort of drawing a boundary between the self (India because it’s an Indian product) and the other? To answer these questions, the analysis will focus on three selected representational elements because the film has its authority to select what forms of representation it would present concerning each country. To narrow down the whole discussion, the three elements which will be discussed are space (geographical landscape), religion and gender.

Method

By utilizing textual analysis as the main method of data analysis, audio-visual elements of the film are analyzed by categorizing the findings according to the dominant representational elements: space, religion, and gender. Furthermore, the data is contextualized with the political and cultural contexts of India-Pakistan ongoing conflicts and also by contextualizing *Veer Zaara*, a Bollywood (Indian) film, as a part of Indian national cinema. The analysis was done by taking apart every element such as the narratives (conflicts, characters, settings), the mise-en-scene, the audio (diegetic and non-diegetic) and the song and dance sequences which are essentially Bollywood’s trademark. As argued by Turner (2003): “Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself.” (p.3). In other words, doing an analysis of films is basically an effort to deconstruct the ideological underpinning that controls the narratives.



Findings and Discussion

“Re-presenting” the Nation through the National Cinema

Films, as a part of the cultural practices, are one of the mediums in which the nation is depicted through many forms of representations. On the screen, the nation and other aspects related to it could be reconstructed using many cinematographic elements. Moreover, the film itself is a part of a bigger cultural artifact which is the national cinema. The national cinema, which is still in an ongoing debate on whether or not this idea could have a proper and exact definition, is a part of the symbolical practices mentioned previously. Choi (2006) asks this problematic question of what is national cinema? The most challenging aspect in defining national cinema is the idea of generalization on whether or not it could be applicable to discuss all national cinemas. Another problem lies within the word ‘nation’ itself since the definition of this word is also still a part of an ongoing discussion within the study of nationalism. “National cinema, either as an art form or as entertainment, is often considered to be a cultural product that forms and exemplifies a certain national identity or nationhood” (Choi, 2005, p. 310). He offers three approaches, which are territorial, functional and relational.

The first approach is the territorial approach which focused on the production of the film. “National cinema is the product of activities and institutions within a nation-state” (Choi, 2005, p. 311). Therefore, the definition of a national cinema should refer to the location in which the production takes place and also the institutions involved. Choi also explained that this approach has several challenges because some shooting locations are not even in the same country as the production company. Bollywood is a perfect example for this because even in one song sequence, the setting can be the Trafalgar Square in London and moves to the mountainous areas in Switzerland. This kind of multiple shooting locations will make it difficult in defining the film’s “territory.” Therefore, Choi offers “...the nationality of a cinema is determined by and transferred from the nationality of a production company or studio...” (Choi, 2005, p. 311). In his argument, Choi also stated that the territorial approach can be problematic especially if the film is a co-production between several countries.

Choi then offered a second approach which he called the functional approach. “...what a film embodies at the level of text and how it functions within a nation-state ...” (Choi, 2005, p. 311). In his discussion of the functional elements of a national cinema, Choi referred to Benedict Anderson’s arguments, which are used by many scholars in film studies to talk about this particular concept. Anderson stated that a nation is an imagined community in which each individual needs to envision him or herself as a part of that nation to obtain a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging developed through the consumption of modern print culture. The third approach, relational, is used to differentiate one national cinema with others especially with Hollywood. “In order for a body of films to form a category of “national cinema,” they should manifest common characteristics – narratively and/or stylistically – that significantly depart from those of Hollywood and other national cinemas” (Choi, 2005, p. 314). This is an important approach concerning the analysis of Bollywood as a national cinema because as a national cinema, Bollywood has a particular narrative style which has developed throughout its



history since the first Indian film show was held on July 7, 1896 (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004, p.13). The narrative structure of Bollywood cinema is significant in analyzing the three elements chosen in analyzing the representation of India and Pakistan in *Veer Zaara*.

Bollywood is one of the biggest film industries in India. It is even bigger than Hollywood if we compare the number of films produced and also the number of audiences all over the world. In 2003, Hollywood produced 600 films while Bollywood produced 1100 films. Furthermore, Bollywood attracts 3,6 million audiences every year which is one million more than Hollywood. Like many other film industries, Bollywood has also undergone changes as a response to the evolution within the social, cultural and political context in India. Therefore, as a part of this evolution, the relationship between India and Pakistan has also been portrayed in many Bollywood films. Before the 1990s, the partition of India and Pakistan were not explicitly portrayed in Hindi cinema. Filmmakers often avoid the topic of Pakistan and often referred to this country as “over there, neighboring country” or even the “enemies” (Dwyer, 2006). Released in 1995, the film *Bombay* was the first film acknowledging the inter-religious and inter-nation narrative between people from India and Pakistan. Afterward, there were several other films portraying this sensitive issue. Some are even critically acclaimed and more importantly were acknowledged as box office blockbusters.

Articulating Similarity between India and Pakistan: Space and Geographical Landscape

In the discussion of the representation of nation and nationalism in popular culture, the concept of space is very significant because of the spatiality of the nation itself. Moreover, the concept of boundaries which demarcate one nation with other nations is also a spatial concept. Benedict Anderson’s theorization of a nation explained on the limited aspect of a nation. Even though later on Anderson also explored the idea of the non-physical boundaries on the maps where lines or dots or any other forms of symbols are used to represent the borders between one country and the other whilst in reality sometimes these borders do not exist physically, the spatiality of a nation is still determined by these boundaries. The boundaries ‘limits’ the space of the nation and it also marks the territory in which people live and work as members of that particular nation.

This territory or the space of the nation is also an important part of the construction of national images. Edensor (2002) offered a number of “national forms of spatialization” in the depiction of the national self through many forms of representations. One of the spatial forms is the “preferred ideological landscape ... these specific landscapes are selective shorthand for these nations, synecdoche through which they are recognized globally. But they are also loaded with symbolic values and stand for national virtues...” (Edensor, 2002, p.31). The landscapes which are selected as the images of the nation are filled with meanings related to the nation’s attempt in constructing its nationhood. Edensor gave several examples such as how Argentina is linked with images of the pampas and gauchos riding across the grasslands, the Morocco with its palm trees and oases and also the Netherlands with the polders and drainage ditches. These geographical landscapes have been imposed as the nation’s self-image through an ongoing process of symbolical practices.



In *Veer Zaara*, the preferred ideological space is limited to the geographical landscapes in India. The film depicted Pakistan's landscapes not through any visualization but through the Pakistani character's words and description. This could be read as the film's way of representing the similarities between the two countries. This can be seen through one of the songs and dance sequence when Veer (the Indian hero) was accompanying Zaara (the Pakistani heroine) to deliver her nanny's ashes to Kiripur. The two characters described the landscape of their home countries in this song and dance sequence.



Figure 1. The beautiful natural landscape of India

In a Bollywood film, songs “fulfill a number of important functions within a filmic experience. They generate emotion; they underline moral messages ...” (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004, p. 31). In this particular scene, the song is describing the beauty of India not only through the visual depictions (seen through the pictures above) and cinematographic elements (long-shot techniques) but also through the song lyrics.

The song started with Veer, who was sitting on top of the bus and telling Zaara about the beauty of India. In this scene, there are many long shots taken to visualize the vastness of the beautiful Indian landscape. The multi-colored saris (Indian traditional cloth) worn by the village women who were walking down the street or dancing among the trees could be read as the representation of India's natural beauty. The lyrics also played an important role when Veer repeatedly mentioned how beautiful India is. In the song, this self-admiration attitude did not only come from Veer (India) but was repeated by Zaara who asserted that this country (India) was no different from her country (Pakistan).

Zaara:

vahi shaam hai vahi savera aisa hi des hai mera

the same sunsets, the same dawns, my country is the same

jaisa des hai tera, haan jaisa des hai tera

just like your country

(Quoted from the song **AISA DES HAI MERA - Udit Narayan, Lata**)





Figure 2 & Figure 3. The male and female main character is singing to each other about how similarly beautiful their two countries are

Zaara's reply shows the film's strategy in describing Pakistan's geographical landscape through the song lyrics while inviting the audience to 'imagine' that Pakistan also had the same beautiful landscape.

Throughout the film, the geographical landscape of India is constantly represented with beautiful flower fields and agricultural areas. These images are selected to represent India's geographical landscape and most of them are taken from the rural areas of India especially its agriculture. The fertility of the nation is imposed through this process of representation. In his work, Edensor stated that "Out of the transformation of raw nature has emerged the most treasured national attributes, and the agricultural means by which the nation has been nourished" (Edensor, 2002, p. 40). The fertile rural landscapes symbolize the nation's triumph over nature and how it had thrived to continuously nourish it in order to provide for the members of the nation. The setting is then transformed as more than a physical setting for the film but as the ideological rural national landscape representing India's fertility and beauty.

What about Pakistan? The film tried to emphasize repeatedly the similarities between India and Pakistan especially through the depiction of the geographical landscapes. Nevertheless, India and Pakistan are described using different techniques. India is described visually while the landscape in Pakistan is described through the dialogs of the characters. In the previous analysis of the song, Zaara's reply to Veer's description of India's beauty is an example on how the film described Pakistan. At the end of the film, when Veer was released from prison by the court of Pakistan, the film once again highlighted that India and Pakistan shared so many similarities. In this particular scene, Veer gave a speech after he was released, and it can actually be read as the moral of the story. This is a part of the narrative structure of Bollywood melodramatic elements which carry a moral message to its audience.

Veer:

I'm prisoner number 786, if I look out of the prison bars I see days, months, years changed into centuries. The nice smell of my Dad's farm is smelled from this country. The sun here reminds me of the warmth of my Mom's lap. The rain here brings spring to my country. The winter here unites with the warmth of the Lodi in my country. She says it's not your country, but why she looks like my country? It's said I'm not like her, then why she's like me?

(Quoted from *Veer-Zaara*)



After 22 years of imprisoned, Veer did not have any feeling of resentment to Pakistan. On the other hand, he explained how during his time in prison, he noticed how similar his home country was with this new country. The farm, the sun, the rain, and the winter were the same. In other words, Pakistan is the same as India.

If we refer back to the discussion of nation and nationalism and the key element in the process of identification in terms of national identity is by drawing a boundary of the self and other, in this stage of analysis, the film seemed to be erasing this metaphorical boundary between the two nations. I used the word metaphorically because, in the film, the physical borders were also shown (the border of India and Pakistan), but in the metaphorical sense, the film is stating explicitly that the two nations are actually the same (one). Through the image of the rural national landscape of India and Pakistan, this message could be clearly read throughout the film. Nevertheless, I would argue that the techniques in which these images were built up in the film are actually a representation of how the film was actually confirming Pakistan's position as the other country and not a part of the self.

All of the descriptions of India's landscape are visually available. The audience can see them within the filmic space with all of its beauty and fertility. Meanwhile, Pakistan's landscape could only be 'imagined' through the dialogs and was not visually available. These 'imaginative landscapes' became the mere representation of Pakistan, the country on the other side of the border which we cannot experience directly. In the film, the settings in the Pakistan side were mostly indoor settings (Zaara's house, the prison, the court) and there were not any vast and beautiful geographical landscapes from the Pakistani side.

Besides the ideological rural national landscapes, Ederson (2002) also proposes the notion of home as a part of the national spatialization. As the metaphor of the nation, home constitutes a sense of belonging which is related to the concept of nationalism. A home becomes a symbolical space of the nation. In the film, this symbolic space is represented through Veer and Zaara's physical home: Veer's village where his parents live (at the Punjab area of India) and Zaara's house in Pakistan. The depiction of these two 'homes' is quite different especially on how the characters related themselves to the symbolic space. Veer's village, in the rural area of India which was visualized as India's beauty and fertility, was a warm place where any kind of guests was welcomed. When Veer brought Zaara to his village, Veer's parents welcome Zaara wholeheartedly.

Veer's Father : *What's your name?*

Zaara : *Zaara Hayat Khan*

Veer's Mother : *A sweet name. Where are you from?*

Zaara : *Pakistan*

Veer's Father : *My God, it's really strange. **You're my noble guest.**
I often serve people of this country. Now I have the
chance to serve my country's guest.*

(Quoted from *Veer-Zaara*)



A Pakistani girl was welcomed wholeheartedly in an Indian family without any skeptical ideas and they even felt honored to serve her as a noble guest. This home, Veer's village/house was open for anybody, even a Pakistani girl from the other country. Furthermore, Veer's parents embraced Zaara as a part of their family. In one scene, Veer's mother was helping Zaara in getting ready for the bonfire festival. There were also several scenes where Veer's father showed his admiration for Zaara's attitude and ingenuity. Veer's home was represented as the warm, open and positive space.

On the other hand, Zaara's house was represented differently. If Zaara was welcome in Veer's house, Veer was not at all welcome in Zaara's home (the house or even Pakistan, as the country). When Veer went to Pakistan to 'save' Zaara, Shabo (Zaara's cousin) warned him that he should not come to Zaara's house and she would try to set up a meeting for the two of them. Veer was definitely not welcomed in Zaara's home. He was even then imprisoned by the Pakistani's court for 22 years for a crime he did not conduct. Zaara's home became a negative space for Veer, the Indian man, and this highlighted the opposite representation of the two nations. The effort to illustrate the similarities of the two nations is deconstructed when Pakistan is still represented as the other side of the coin. A preliminary conclusion is that the film is identifying the two nations by drawing the boundary of self (India) and other (Pakistan). I would like to investigate further by looking at the other two elements: religion and gender.

Depicting Religion: Islamicate as Attributive Values

The Indian film industry has incorporated religion and nationalism within the cinematic experience since the very first film in 1913. At the early days, the three genres "maybe loosely labelled "religious" from their titles alone: the mythological, the devotional, and the Moslem social. Through these genres, filmic ways of viewing religious symbols and practices became part of the visual culture of Indian cinema" (Dwyer, 2005, p.277). Throughout the development of the film industry, the religious elements on the screen also experienced some significant changes according to the political, social and cultural changes in India. A clear example of this was after the independence when the representation of religion in the films was affected by the Nehruvian ideology in which secularism was not an absence of religion but a separation of religion and culture from politics. Religion was then conveyed to the non-political space and this was captured by the film industry in the films produced at that time. After the 1980s, Indian nationalism was once again reformulated and it was the beginning of the Hindutva or Hindu Nationalism which meant that the religious factors (Hindu, not other religions) were drawn back into the political sphere.

All of the changes in the concept of nationalism in India, which was closely related to religion, have been a part of the visual culture in India including Bollywood. An interesting stage of this development was during the turmoil of India and Pakistan, before and even after the partition. As explained in the introduction, the biggest reason for the partition was due to the conflicts between the two dominant religions: Islam and Hindu. The border between India and Pakistan is now even considered as a symbolical border between Islam and Hindu. One should bear in mind that even after the partition, the Moslem population in India was still high (India has the 3rd highest Moslem population in the world.) In other words, Islam is still a part of India and the fact that the development of



nationalism in India is under the Hindu nationalism could be seen as a form of alienation of the Moslem community. I will not elaborate more on this issue since the focus of this essay is the representation of India and Pakistan in the chosen text. However, I will analyze the religious aspects in the film to see whether the two religions, Islam and Hindu, are also used to represent the harmonious relationship between India and Pakistan. Or are they used to once again draw the boundary between the two countries and emphasizing the self and other dichotomy?

Rachel Dwyer, a scholar who focuses her research on Indian cinema, explored the idea of religious representation on Indian films in her book *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*. In her research of the films in the 1990s, she came up with the conclusion that religions were depicted as a part of the consumerist lifestyle. The houses had larger and more elaborate puja (worship) rooms where the family will get together and pray. More importantly, other religions, the non-Hindu religions, have also been portrayed in different ways. In relation to this essay's focus on Pakistan's representation, I will now look into the representation of Islam in this film by using Dwyer's conclusion on the Islamicate tradition in Indian cinema.

The word "Islamicate" actually refers to cultural and civilizational things where Islam is a central matter. In this sense, Islam becomes a part of the social and cultural lives of the character who are Moslems but not necessarily pious. Dwyer argued that as long as Islam is represented in the Islamicate tradition and not as a part of the politicized and globalized factor, it will not cause any problems. That is why the representation of Islam on the big screen became a popularized Bollywood imagining of this particular religion. One element is the Moslem phrases like "Allah" or "Subhanallah" which are commonly used but as a part of the daily expressions and not as a religious practice. Islam appears in forms of architecture, design, clothing, and expression, but not in its religious piety. I would argue that it was merely an attributive element of the film and was not an essential part.

In *Veer-Zaara*, since the main conflict is the love story of an Indian man and a Pakistani woman, the interchangeable connection between India-Pakistan and Hindu-Islam could have been seen as a foreseeable element in the film. In my reading of the film, the two religions might have appeared constantly in many forms throughout the first half of the film, especially Islam (the religion of Pakistan). Unfortunately, these elements disappear gradually up to the end of the film. At first, Zaara's religion (Islam) was represented through her clothes, the way she prays, the architecture of her house, and even though her name, especially her family name, Khan, which is a typical Moslem family name in India. However, the elements chosen to represent Islam were still a part of the Islamicate tradition, as explained previously.

Hindu was also represented in a similar pattern through the same visualization of giving greetings (saying Namaste which means salutation used in some religions like Hindu, Jains or Buddhism) or through the character's names. In the history of Bollywood cinema, this major religion has played an important role and has a more significant representation compared to Islam. In this particular film,



Islam has its significance to portray the Pakistani's most prominent image, the religion, especially when we look back to the history of the partition. That is why Islam was portrayed through some consistent signifiers especially when the scene took place in a Pakistani setting (through the clothing, architecture, way of praying or Islamic phrases). Islam became a signifier of Pakistan. Hindu, on the other hand, was not portrayed as clearly and as significantly as Islam is for Pakistan's image. On the other hand, the film didn't even show any parts of worshiping spaces in Veer's house (the 'home' image of India) or religious ceremonies usually depicted in Bollywood films such as the morning prayers. Does this mean Hindu, as India's distinctive characteristic compared to Pakistan, is not a part of the representation of the self? And does giving a bigger proportion for Islam mean that Pakistan has a bigger role in this film?

To answer these questions, we should go back to the previous discussion on how the signifiers in the film were simply parts of the Islamicate tradition. By using these Islamicate elements, the film steered clear of the possibility of political manifestation in the film. As Dwyer argued, Islam can be a part of the Indian cinematic experience as long as it is portrayed within the Islamicate tradition and out of the politicized problems. In *Veer-Zaara*, Islam might seem to have a significant part especially in the first half of the film, however, it gradually disappeared and even lost its significance at the end. I would say that the India-Pakistan theme in this cultural text tend to avow that the problem of the two countries is more national than religious. So, for Zaara's family, Veer was a 'threat' not because he was Hindu but because he was an Indian. Veer's parents welcomed Zaara in their home even though she was a Pakistani girl. Her religion was not off importance. The religious factor, which was the main reason for the partition making it the entity of each country, was relinquished from the discussion of nation and nationalism in this film.

If we refer back to the questions of analysis on how the film portrays India and Pakistan especially in the images of the self and other, it seemed that the boundary between the two countries is not based on the religious difference. At first, through some signifiers, Islam was represented more significantly due to the film's effort to identify Pakistan since this religion is the country's most prominent distinction especially compared to India with Hindu as the major religion. In this stage of analysis, the film seemed to draw the boundary of India (self) and Pakistan (other) only through identifying Pakistan with Islam, and not India through Hindu. However, as the film progressed, religion, specifically Islam, lost its importance and at the end, it was no longer a part of the representation. In the end, it was more on issues of the two nations: India and Pakistan rather than religions.

Representing India and Pakistan in *Veer-Zaara*: Gender

The discussion of gender and nationalism is still under an ongoing debate, especially among feminist scholars. Enloe (2014) argues that in the discourse of nationalism, women often work in a symbolic stage which is as an icon of nationhood that needs to be "elevated and defended." In other cases, women are "spoils of war" that are denigrated while the hero of the war always falls to the men who are defending their country and home. This distinct and symbolical role in national culture is a part of the feminine and masculine dichotomy constructed in the patriarchal ideology. These traditional roles, which were assigned to women



by the nationalists, such as supporting their husbands, producing and raising their children (the progeny of the nation) have been a constructed role which at the end creates the stigma that women serve as symbols of national honor. This construction also creates a stigma for the male counterpart because their constructed masculinity in the process of nation-building involves going into war to defend their country or being the active actor in protecting and upholding the nation.

In Bollywood narrative structure, this role division of men and women within the discourse of nationalism could be found in the formulaic characters. “Two fundamental character types ... the first one is the hero ... the hero estranged from his lover or detached from the world.” (Mishar, 2006, p.6). To be reunited with his lover, the hero usually has to face a villain character in order to achieve a moralistic balance at the end of the film. “Indian popular films are basically morality plays, where good triumphs over evil, and the social order, disrupt by the actions of immoral and villainous people, is restored by the power of goodness” Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004, p. 29). The whole plot will be the hero’s effort to overcome all of these evil disturbances, and when he overcomes it, he will be reunited with his lover either in present time or in the after-life. Another formulaic character is the mother. “The second figure is the Mother ... the filmic Mother often renounces everything for the sake of her husband or son” (Mishra, 2006, p. 17). In the history of Bollywood cinema, the birth of this formulaic character is through the character in *Mother India* (1957), which is a film about a mother who raised his two sons alone, worked very hard for the well-being of her sons, and at the end she had to ‘balance’ the good and evil by killing one of her sons who was the ‘villain’ in the film. When the hero tries to balance the moral of the story by defeating the villain, the mother’s role also has the role as the moral barrier.

In this part of the analysis, I will examine how each fundamental character represents the constructed gender roles in relation to nationalism. First of all, the male character, especially the hero, signified his gender identity through the masculine qualities which are actually a part of Bollywood’s narrative structure. Veer, as the hero of the film, had to go through several obstacles to be united with his lover, the heroine. Like in many other Bollywood films, the main obstacle is from a villain character, in this case, a Pakistani man named Raza who turned out to be Zaara’s fiancé.

Abdul Sherazi (Raza’s father) pada Mariam Hayat Khan (Zaara’s mother):

It’s not just a wedding of Raza and Zaara, but it brings a very strong and profound peace. Based on that, your husband and then my son’s fate will be bright. Raza knows all that well and Zaara must also understand. If the wedding is not carried out tomorrow and at the same time the daughter’s name of Jahangeer Hayat Khan is united with the name of an Indian guy, then Khan’s effort will be in vain. You won’t win the general election and will bear shame all your life.

(Quoted from *Veer-Zaara*)

The engagement was arranged by the parents as a part of a political coalition due to Zaara’s father’s position as a political figure in Pakistan. Through the quotation



above, we can see that if Zaara and Raza broke the engagement, it would affect the family honor. So, it was a part of Zaara's role as a daughter to maintain this honor by putting aside her feeling toward Veer.

The binary opposition between the hero and villain is very clear in this film even though the conflicts are not physical. The black and white characters are depicted clearly through the two characters. Raza had the power to destroy Veer because he was the son of a political figure in Pakistan and had strong connections with the authorities. The climax of the hero and villain character was when Raza used this power to put Veer in prison because his ego was wounded due to Zaara's impulsive act to run to Veer during their engagement party. Furthermore, as a part of his heroic role, Veer, faced by this dilemma, finally chose to stay silent and sign a letter confirming that he was a spy for India in Pakistan confirming that he was a criminal and to be imprisoned there. The preliminary conclusion is that the film put an Indian character as the one being persecuted by the Pakistani villain. In other words, India is the hero while Pakistan is the villain.

Veer himself is the representation of masculinity and militarism because in this film, as a squadron leader for the Indian Air Force's SAR Team, it was a part of his job to do all these heroic acts. Words like honor, patriotism, and bravery, which are closely related to nationalism, can be attributed to this character.

Veer:

That was me and my life. Squadron leader, Veer Pratap Singh. SAR pilot with the Indian Airforce. I liked my job very much because flying in the sky was my favorite since I was a kid. And saving lives are inherited from my dad. He was also a soldier who sacrificed for his country. I was alone, free, alive as if it were my last life.

(Quoted from Veer-Zaara)

It was not only a job for him but also a childhood dream and an inherited nationalistic spirit from his father, who was in the army. By this position, Veer's role as the hero of the film was even more emphasized especially after he met the heroine, Zaara. Throughout the film, the film visualized a series of acts where the hero was continuously saving the heroine.

The first time the two characters met was when Veer saved Zaara from a cliff where the bus she was taking had an accident. Afterward, it was Veer who voluntarily accompanied Zaara to take her nanny's ashes to Kiripur. Another heroic act was when Veer went to Pakistan after accepting a call from Shabo (Zaara's cousin) explaining how unhappy Zaara was a few days before her engagement. This decision to leave India meant that he had to sacrifice his life-long ambition:

Samiya Siddique (Veer's lawyer):

A pilot of Indian's Airforce isn't allowed to go to Pakistan. Knowing that news, you resigned at once. Though you know you can't join the Airforce again. Then without telling anyone, you went to Lahore without thinking about the consequence of your trip.

(Quoted from Veer-Zaara)

His biggest sacrifice was when he was finally imprisoned for 22 years, stripped from his identity because he signed the letter stating that he was another person and stayed silent in his cell for the sake of Zaara's honor. He was not even known as Veer Pratap Singh but as prisoner number 786. As a conclusion, the hero



(India) was not only oppressed by the villain (Pakistan), but he (India) was the savior of the heroine (Pakistan). The clear binary opposition is a reflection on how the film is putting Pakistan on the other side of the line as the other.

The second part of the discussion is about the female characters and their relation to the portrayal of India and Pakistan within the film. The most interesting factor of this element in *Veer-Zaara* is the number of Pakistani female characters (Zaara, Zaara's mother, Samiya and Shabo) which outnumbered the Indian female characters (Veer's mother). Could this be read as to how the film is depicting Pakistan as the feminine side compared to India? This will be a part of the analysis to verify the preliminary conclusion that the film is positioning India as the self and Pakistan as the other. The discussion of nationalism and femininity is still related to the masculinity aspect because the major part of the discussion will still use the hero character as a comparison to talk about femininity in this film. The discussion will cover the mother, the heroine and the Pakistani female lawyer character.

In a Bollywood film, the role of a mother is the second most important role after the hero. It's a closely related concept with nationalism especially when the mother is seen as the symbol of a nation. "... women's role in nationalism is most often that of a mother, the symbol of the national hearth and home ..." (Nagel, 1998, p.256). This symbolical role is also reflected in Bollywood's narrative structure in which a mother's role is to balance the good and evil to settle down the turmoil and regain stability. In *Veer-Zaara*, the mother character also shared the same responsibilities because she was the one who asked Veer to leave Pakistan and forget about Zaara. And the way Veer without any hesitant agreed on this was another heroic act in which the Indian character once again saved a Pakistani character.

The relationship between a mother and her son in a Bollywood film reflects another concept of nationalism and femininity. "Another extraordinary feature in many popular Hindi films is the purposeful deployment of masculine agency to rescue the mother figure ... the Hindi film hero may even die for his mother ..." (Nagel, 1998, p. 255). When Veer agreed to sacrifice his feeling and left Zaara, he was not only saving the mother's character but it can be read as a symbolical act of saving the nation if we refer back to the previously discussed concept of a mother's role as a symbol of a nation. In other words, the son (India) was saving the mother (Pakistan) can be a parallel with the male saving nation concept. In this case, the nation being saved is once again Pakistan putting it in another inferior position.

Another important Pakistani female character is Samiya, Veer's lawyer. As a female character from Pakistan, Samiya's role as the one who saves Veer and helps him in court is a gap from the conclusion reached so far that India was represented as the superior side. The binary opposition of India saving Pakistan is turned around with Samiya's character. Could this be read as the film's effort to promote gender equality or even equality between the two conflicting countries? Through a surface reading of the film, this could be the peace discourse which the film had been trying to visualize. Nevertheless, this could also be read in a different direction especially through the concept of nationalism and femininity.



Veer's case was Samiya's first one to be taken to trial as a new lawyer for that reason it was a very important opportunity for her. When she met Veer for the first time in prison, she explained this motive and asked him to cooperate, which turned out to be quite difficult since Veer had spent 22 years in silent.

Samiya:

But please understand your freedom's very important for you and the girls in this country. All his life, my Dad fought for the decent life of Pakistani women, but his plan didn't succeed. And I've tried very hard to get this very first case. Everybody knows no one can win this case. You want me to lose so that no women can enter men's world? I won't accept defeat. I won't let women become weak. I need your help. Please, talk to me.

(Quoted from *Veer-Zaara*)

Samiya's words clearly show how she was doing it for the sake of women in Pakistan, which can be analyzed as the film's effort to talk about gender equality. Samiya was a representation of Pakistani women who wanted to cross over to the public area (by becoming a lawyer). Unfortunately, this noble effort is deconstructed through her own words when she 'begged' Veer to help her. In other words, the decision of whether or not Samiya would succeed was placed in the Indian male character's hands. Veer (India) had to once again save a female Pakistani character just like when he saved Zaara or her mother.

Furthermore, Samiya's motive was not purely for the sake of female empowerment and this can be seen from the beginning of the film when she was praying at her father's graveyard.

Samiya in father's grave:

Dad, today your dream will come true. This is the first case to be put to court by your daughter. You'd fought for truth and human rights for all your life. Today will be my first step in that field. As usual, I'll bring the faith in your prayer.

(Quoted from *Veer-Zaara*)

In the discussion of nationalism and femininity, if a mother's role is as the symbol of heart and home, the daughter and wife have another important role. "...women as wives and daughters are bearers of masculine honor ..." (Nagel, 1998, p.256). When Samiya expressed her ambition to fulfill her father's dream, she was simply fulfilling her task and feminine role as the bearer of her father's honor. It turns out as a negation to her seemingly noble effort where she wanted to cross the feminine and masculine boundary from the private to the public area.

The gender aspect of the film emphasizes the boundary of the two countries by placing Pakistan as the villain or the feminine side which needs to be saved constantly by the Hero (India). Even though the movie tried to get back to its original purpose with the character of Samiya, who ostensibly tried to maintain the equality between the two countries, there were several gaps which interrupted this righteous effort. In the end, in relation to gender, India's identity as the masculine Hero is drawing the boundary with Pakistan, the feminine counterpart.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the three representational elements have shown how the film depicted the relationship between the two conflicting countries, India and Pakistan. The geographical landscapes in the film, which are the ideological rural landscape, iconic sites and the notion of home, gave a clear representation of India's beautiful, fertile and hospitable spatialization through images and other



visual elements. Meanwhile, the landscapes of Pakistan are not visually available, and the audience needs to imagine them through the characters' dialog or through the song lyrics, the 'imaginative landscape.' Other aspects of the national spatialization, the notion of 'home, also drew the boundary between hospitable India and hostile Pakistan.

The second representational element, the religion, was not as intense as the other two elements in drawing the boundary between the self and the other. Even though Islam was represented more noticeably than Hindu, it was still under the Islamicate tradition and not a part of the piousness. Moreover, religious representation disappeared gradually. By doing this, the film is avoiding the political manifestation of Islam as an entity of Pakistan. The transposable relationship between Hindu-Islam and India-Pakistan seemed to lose its significance in this film. In other words, the discussion of India and Pakistan in this film is more on the national discourse and not through the religious aspect.

The last element discussed was the gender depiction that revealed the feminization of Pakistan, making it the 'weaker' side that needs to be saved by the masculine hero from India. Through these elements, India is identifying itself as a nation which is different from Pakistan by drawing the boundary of India as the self and Pakistan as the other. The process of inclusion was done in the film by depicting the cultural similarities through several signifiers. However, as discussed through the three elements, in the battles of exclusion or inclusion, the film focused more on the exclusion of Pakistan (the other). After the partition, the two countries are still under an ongoing conflict. Through this analysis, as a part of the symbolic practices in the progression of nation and nationalism, Bollywood's effort in denoting this discourse still needs to be criticized.

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