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‘Old habits die hard’^{*}: discourses of urban filth in *Swachh Bharat Mission* and *The Ugly Indian*

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ABSTRACT

Popular framings of the contemporary urban Indian waste crisis focus on the crucial need for public behavior change. This article provides an exploratory study of the ideology and work of two social media campaigns – *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) Mission and *The Ugly Indian*, a social media group – which emphasize the need for inculcating ‘modern’ civic behaviors of not littering, and volunteering to clean up public spaces, and examines the following questions: What types of urban imaginaries are invoked in the discussions of urban filth? Do these discussions betray structural (class-based) biases in the aesthetic ideologies they imagine and invoke? Do these discussions reify the public-private dichotomy that has puzzled scholars concerned with hygiene in urban India? Discourses deployed in these campaigns reproduce colonial and post-colonial narratives of hygiene as a ‘cultural problem’ premised on an idea of a pre-modern urban subject who needs to be disciplined. By focusing on behavior change, these campaigns privilege an understanding of waste as an aesthetic problem rather than as a much more complicated infrastructural one. As these campaigns focus on highlighting and celebrating the volunteer labor of the privileged, they may also obfuscate the economically necessary labors of the marginalized.

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In 2009, the erstwhile Environment Minister in the Indian government, Jairam Ramesh, famously said, ‘I think our cities have the dubious distinction of being the dirtiest cities in the world ... [I]f there is a Nobel Prize for dirt and filth, India will win it hands down’ (TNN 2009). On its homepage, an online group called *The Ugly Indian* (TUI) lauded Ramesh’s statement, ‘We salute them for saying publicly what we all know privately! Let’s face it. We Indians have abysmal standards of public hygiene ... We Ugly Indians are part of the problem and only we can solve it’ (TUI 2010). In 2014, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the upcoming launch of *Swachh Bharat* (Clean India) Mission (SBM) in his Independence Day address urging the nation ‘to give a serious thought’ to the

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^{*}Variations of the quote ‘Old habits die hard’ have been invoked by Modi in talking about the need for *Swachh Bharat* Mission (SBM) as well as by representatives of *The Ugly Indian* (TUI). It highlights the centrality of the need for behavior change that both campaigns focus on. For instance, in a news column discussing illegal dumping of garbage, TUI states, ‘Old habits die hard. Rather than wait for collection, people come here and dump like they always used to ...’ (TUI 2014). Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in one of his speeches encouraging behavior change, said ‘Old habits take time to change. It’s a difficult task, I know ...’ (Modi 2014a).

question of our 'national character' of which public filth is a manifestation (Modi 2014a). The idea that the problem of filth is a cultural one, deeply rooted in India's 'national psyche' is not new (DG Correspondent 2011). News articles in domestic and international media have often framed the issue of filth and the lack of hygiene as a problem that is 'inherently' Indian (Hazra 2015; Joseph 2017; MacMillan 2012; Raghavan 2012; Suraiya 2009).

Both Modi and TUI suggest that Indians often explain away the persistence of public filth as a symptom of a 'we are like that only' (i.e. 'that's just how we are') attitude – a statement that invokes the inexplicable yet shared meaning of certain cultural practices and behaviors as being quintessentially Indian [see for instance the title of Bijapurkar (2007)]. Changing this attitude is precisely the focus of groups such as TUI and the public face of campaigns such as SBM. For both, modern India must have modern citizens who do not trash their surroundings. For TUI, the hope lies in the 'not-so-ugly Indians' (TUI 2010). For SBM, the 'not-so-ugly' behaviors need to be inculcated. At the campaign's launch on 2 October 2014, Modi urged celebrities, major politicians, government officials, and school children to take a pledge to 'devote 100 hours per year to voluntary work for cleanliness' and 'neither litter nor let others litter' (SBM 2017). For both campaigns, although the problem of public filth is one of the old habits which 'will take time to change', there is a sense of optimism in the possibility of such a change (Modi 2014b; TUI 2014).

Research questions

What types of urban imaginaries are invoked in the discussions of urban filth? Do these discussions betray structural (class-based) biases in the aesthetic ideologies they imagine and invoke? Do these discussions reify the public–private dichotomy that has puzzled scholars concerned with hygiene in urban India? To get a preliminary understanding of these issues, this exploratory study attempted to look at the work and ideology of SBM and TUI based on a qualitative examination of social media content, primarily posts on TUI's Facebook page. Posts on TUI's Facebook page were examined for the period starting with the group's inception on Facebook in 2009 to August 2017. Examination of the TUI Facebook discussions allowed for the emergence and capture of themes relevant to the questions posed in this research. For instance, an initial examination captured Facebook discussions focused on issues surrounding public filth and personal hygiene. However, some of these discussions forayed into more specific discussions of public versus private responsibility for maintaining hygiene in public spaces. As a result, other themes such as 'privatization' were included under the 'public filth, private hygiene' umbrella to ensure this theme was captured in the analysis. In addition, the paper also referred to government policy documents such as guidance issued by the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) on implementing SBM (MoUD 2014), speeches delivered by Prime Minister Modi (2014a, 2014b, 2015), texts authored by TUI (e.g. Anamik Nagrik n.d.), and coverage of SBM and TUI in news media.

Social media in development communication

Both TUI and *Swachh Bharat* rely extensively on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, to spread the message of the need for behavior change and recruit volunteers for their cleanup efforts. TUI and *Swachh Bharat*'s reliance on social media as the main

communication channels for creating awareness of public filth and encouraging public behavior change towards it, behooves an examination of the role of social media in development communication theory and practice. There is little doubt that social media are now integral to daily life across the world even though access to specific platforms and their use are unequal. Scholars have called for treating social media content as crucial cultural texts, a critical discourse analysis of which might help us better understand how a new communicative environment has emerged as a space for new forms of socialization and identity formation (Bouvier 2015; Miller et al. 2017). While some communication scholars see the emancipatory potential of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital networks as vehicles for local/global activism and civic engagement (Loader, Vremon, and Xenos 2014; Melkote and Steeves 2015; Servaes and Lie 2015), others are critical (Fuchs 2017). Existing research interrogating the relationship between social media and behavior change campaigns has found that online interventions can significantly influence voluntary health behavior (e.g. see Cugelman, Thelwall, and Dawes 2011; Laranjo et al. 2015). However, the role of social media in influencing civic engagement in voluntary clean-up and anti-litter campaigns remains relatively understudied.

In their examination of a national volunteer litter clean-up event in Estonia, Pikner and Jauhiainen (2014) argue that interactive ICTs were crucial for collective action. Taguchi (2013) argues for reading cleanup campaigns such as Mumbai's *Fight the Filth* in terms of the demands and expectations placed on India's middle classes to become 'proper citizens' in a rapidly developing country. By contrast, Doron (2016) argues for understanding the work of groups such as TUI as an indication of a middle-class aesthetic bias in the creation of an urban 'spatial imaginary' that 'necessarily excludes the poor' and constructs them as 'deficient citizens who are yet to embrace the pleasures of capitalism' (727). In doing so, Doron draws upon and extends the work of urban and postcolonial studies scholars including Baviskar (2011), Chakrabarty (2010) and Ghertner (2015) who have also argued for seeing middle-class ideologies and practices of civic engagement as a new aesthetic regime that betrays structural biases of class, caste and gender. These scholars, among many others, have attempted to explain what van der Geest (1998) has described as a 'hygienic puzzle', specifically the apparent paradox of public filth on the one hand and high standards of personal hygiene on the other hand in urban India (Chakrabarty 2010; Kaviraj 1997; Mukhopadhyay 2006; Srinivas 2002). Within this body of work, Chakrabarty's (2010) interrogation of the continuity in the language of modernity deployed by both colonial and postcolonial nationalist projects of hygiene is particularly instructive. While his project is primarily 'methodo-philosophical' in that he is concerned with how a discourse of modernity establishes the boundaries of social science methods, his argument that the universality of public hygiene as a self-evident fact needs to be questioned is relevant to this article.

In the following section, the two campaigns are introduced showing the convergences and divergences in their discursive strategies and practices centered around the topics of public filth, anti-littering and volunteer clean-up.

A Swachh Bharat for The Ugly Indian

On 2 October 2014, Mr Modi, India's Prime Minister, launched *Swachh Bharat*, a five-year-long nation-wide cleanliness campaign in India. Although in the immediate aftermath of

its launch, the most publicly visible part of the campaign was its focus on anti-littering and volunteer cleanup activities, the campaign's scope is much broader. Funding in the amount of INR 620 billion was approved for the five-year-long program, of which INR 140 billion is allocated as government assistance, jointly managed by the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) for urban and rural projects, respectively (MDWS 2014; MoUD 2014). The program funds three types of projects: the building of individual and community toilets in villages and cities, solid waste management systems, and information, education and communication (IEC) campaigns to generate awareness and effect behavior change. For IEC activities, the program has earmarked 15% of government funds amounting to approximately INR 22 billion, of which 80% is allocated to the central and state governments to 'undertake massive public awareness campaigns on sanitation and establishing its link to public health, hygiene and the environment through various means including radio, social media, documentaries, plays, workshops, etc.' (MoUD 2014, 13).

The cleanliness campaign, much like Modi's election campaign, relies extensively on social media to garner public support and attention (Das 2014; Willis 2014). In his inaugural speech, Modi urged Indians to use the tag #MyCleanIndia on social media:

I appeal to all the countrymen [*sic*] to upload photographs of garbage, clean it and upload the video and the photographs of the cleaned place. I also appeal to media ... Come let's see on MyGov.in, Facebook or Twitter the mood that I am witnessing, the enthusiasm that I see. (2014c)

On the campaign's website, one is encouraged to 'take up the *Swachh Bharat* Challenge and challenge others ... (Login to Publish Your Activity)' (SBM 2017). Participating in a social media challenge involves cleaning up a public space and then posting 'before-and-after' pictures of their activity. As of 17 July 2017, the website boasted 27,000 'active participants', over 1200 'challenges taken' and over 26,000 'activities done' and over 1.2 million 'contributed hours' from participants across the country.

Through SBM, Modi wants to inculcate a spirit of volunteerism, of civic duty towards public hygiene among citizens. Meanwhile, TUI, a group of volunteers from Bangalore (India), has been doing this since 2009. TUI is an online community of individual volunteers which organizes cleanup activities referred to as 'spotfixes' – a 'method of fixing ugly spots' in urban public spaces (TUI 2017). Spotfixes could involve a number of different activities such as cleaning up garbage from a spot, fixing a broken sidewalk, and removing posters and repainting public walls. How does the group work? If one is concerned about public filth in general or in a particular spot in their city, and wants to do something about it, one can click the 'Volunteer' button on TUI's Facebook page, fill out information about themselves, and be added to a database of volunteers. This allows people to be invited to a planned spotfix. Interested volunteers are also encouraged to plan one on their own rather than wait for a planned spotfixing event. Volunteers are encouraged to share 'before-and-after' pictures of their spotfixes using a 'Report a spot fix' app on TUI's Facebook page.

TUI's Facebook page not only features its own work but also the work of organizations it has inspired across the country. As of 17 July 2017, the page has had over 450,000 'likes' and 440,000 followers. TUI has inspired teams in more than 65 cities to perform thousands of spotfixes. Forty-three such teams have their own Facebook pages that have reported

spotfixes using the aforementioned app on TUI's page. While TUI inspired the formation of most of these groups, some that pre-date TUI have started deploying TUIs nomenclature such as spotfixing in their clean-up activities. While many were inspired by TUI, SBM has provided an additional impetus for the formation of new groups. Modi himself lauded TUI's activities through his own Twitter account in February 2015 (Doron 2016, 731). In fact, approximately 40% of the 43 groups on Facebook were 'born' after the launch of SBM.

Aside from the snowballing of its work across the country, TUI has received much publicity in domestic and international media (DHNS 2013; D'Souza 2013; Fast Company Staff 2015; Hariprakash 2011; Hollis 2013; Rai 2013; Tabassum 2013; TNN 2015a). Anand Mahindra, 'one of India's most respected corporate leaders ... who runs a US\$15 billion business conglomerate with operations across 100 countries and was recently voted one of the most influential voices on twitter globally, tweeted "Bravo! Whoever's behind this initiative deserves the Bharat Ratna [a prestigious award in India]. We need to make this a national movement; Now!"' (TUI 2017). A TEDx talk titled 'Why is India so filthy?' by a TUI representative had been viewed over 2.5 million times on YouTube by 17 July 2017. Even as early as April 2015, this TEDx talk was already listed as the top-viewed TEDx talk out of India and No. 79 in the all-time global TEDx videos list (TUI 2017).

TUI's Facebook posts

TUI's Facebook page reveals that many of the volunteers belong to the vibrant information technology (IT) industry of Bangalore, TUI's birthplace and home in India. Spotfixing is a local activity conducted in or near an area where volunteers live and/or work. Teams from many big IT firms such as InfoSys, Lenovo, McAfee, Oracle, HP and IBM have been involved in spotfixes around their offices and in the 'tech parks' where their offices are located. But spaces around the offices are not the only spotfix targets. Prominently featured spots include those in which upwardly mobile middle classes of Bangalore City shop, eat and play. For instance, TUI's website showcases its very first spotfix in 2009 on Church Street or 'Bangalore's prime "fun" street – with over 30 restaurants, pubs, bookstores and entertainment spots', which thanks to 'the efforts of a few not-so-ugly Indians' has transformed into 'quite a pleasant, walkable street'.

Recently, TUI shared an article titled 'Does disorder comfort Indians?' on Facebook in which Joseph (2017) argues that the reason for a romantic celebration of the chaos of urban India in comparison to the orderly cities of the developed world is that disorder gives the daily lived urban experience in India a 'certain depth' and 'saves us from a dull life'. Urban modernity of the developed world, with all its rules and orderliness, is also disorienting and boring, suggests Joseph. The article generated a lively discussion on TUI's Facebook page with discussants grappling with the 'hygiene paradox' that many aforementioned scholars have also addressed. Some commenters affirmed Joseph's ideas suggesting that becoming 'neat and tidy' was akin to becoming 'soulless' and that India must not 'lose her essence' or 'life' and 'become a cheap copy of the West'. Others disagreed. One person suggested that while one could be as chaotic as they want in their private space, order and 'respect for others' in public spaces was necessary. Another recounted his experiences with 'people abroad who are a mess' in their private spaces but 'maintain hygiene' in public spaces. Indians, on the other hand, are

the exact opposite, obsessed with cleaning their private spaces and completely indifferent towards and even actively create filth in public spaces. Another argued that order is what 'binds' us as a society. Resisting order is 'suicidal' and akin to 'resisting the notion of society'. Chaos must be replaced with 'order, straight lines, cleanliness and economic development'. Yet another person commented that it was 'scary' to equate the Indian 'comfort with chaos' with a 'tolerance with poor sanitation and public hygiene'. The two belong to separate realms. If the conflation of the two is 'what it means to be Indian, then I am not sure if I really want to be Indian', the commenter added.

Monitoring this discussion, TUI's Facebook administrator provided a 'middle solution' out of this chaos versus order dilemma by invoking the viewpoint of a 'TUI spotfixer' who

sees this unique Indianness as a given and tries to devise acceptable solutions to change Indian behaviour in public spaces and introduce some order in public spaces, with the sole intent of creating orderly behavior (not to satisfy a particular aesthetic or express a point of view).

Yet, particular aesthetic notions remain crucial in defining and maintaining order in public spaces. Even though TUI discussants declare that they 'have no design or aesthetic agenda', discussions on Facebook show a deep level of engagement with aesthetics. There indeed appears to be a design agenda: abstract geometric patterns are selected for their role in the deterrence of vandalism; color choices are based on TUI's notion of universal cultural acceptability, and particular public spaces are chosen for spotfixing. Colors and patterns, painted on public walls by TUI volunteers, impose their own aesthetic on the physical landscape of the city. The choice of spotfix locations and the socio-economic status of the spotfixers, and the selection of colors and patterns for spotfixing public spaces, reveal the class biases inherent in the determination of urban aesthetic taste. Concealed in the language of 'universality' is the aesthetic of the urban Indian bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 1987).

The selection of spaces to spotfix is not random. These are sites where those who are involved with TUI live, work and play, which betrays a class bias in TUI's cleanliness projects. In some ways, this may simply reflect the existing geographies of class that are manifested in the spatial segregation of most Indian cities. However, superimposed on a landscape of unequal service delivery, whereby the urban middle classes have been able to exert political pressure to demand a certain level of service delivery from the state in ways that the poor cannot (Chaplin 1999), those underlying spatialized differences become even more stark. Parts of the city inhabited by the poor receive lower levels of public sanitation services than other parts. The location of TUI's spotfixes, that is, the public spaces that are deemed filthy and worthy of cleanup action, aggravates the underlying spatial inequalities in sanitation services.

Although the main efforts of TUI focus on assuming individual responsibility for public problems, discussions on its Facebook page veer towards broader issues of public versus private delivery of services. In a post from May 2013, TUI celebrated how efficient and customer-oriented a private garbage collection service was for commercial customers such as 'Corporate sector, Tech Parks, Hotels & Restaurants and anyone willing to pay for it' and asked, 'When there is an efficient pickup service available, why don't all restaurants and eateries use it?' The answer to the question is simply an apparently 'ugly' Indian penchant for freeriding:

[W]hen you can get away by illegally dumping for free (and some Bangalore City Municipal garbage worker clears it every morning), why pay for a private service? Give us half a chance to take a free ride, and we will!

Discussion on this topic concluded that privatization resolves the problem of an inefficient public system by being reliable, on-time and customer-oriented while the public system causes free-rider problems, and being a free-rider is yet another characteristic of the ugly Indian. To be 'not-ugly, we must pay for the services that we want instead of relying on the state provide them for free'. One Facebook post raised the issue of how much an average homeowner pays for garbage collection through their property taxes. After a lengthy discussion, the consensus was that urban Indians pay too little and therefore cannot expect better services from the state. The solution, however, was not to raise taxes because a corrupt bureaucracy would just end up with heavier pockets. Instead, the consensus was the institution of user fees to private service providers for better services. In another post, TUI shared the news that 'India's largest housekeeping firm BVG, backed by Kotak and 3i Capital, will take care of half of Bangalore City from Nov 15th [2012]. It's high time the city got some professional cleaners for the money it spends.' User fees for waste management services are also the direction in which the Indian government is heading (MoEFCC 2016; MoUD 2014). Although user fees paid to a 'professional' cleaning firm may resolve the problem of poor service delivery for those who can afford to pay them, those who cannot must continue to rely on an inefficient and unreliable state.

Just as there was agreement that public services need to be privatized, there is also agreement that volunteer citizen action can help avert the crises continually produced by a failed or failing state. In 2012, when *The New York Times* featured a story (Harris 2012) about Bangalore City's garbage crisis, TUI shared some good news,

We can say with some pride that Bangalore's Central Business District has remained clean through this crisis – and if you were to walk ... where TUI has an active presence, you cannot tell that such a garbage crisis is going on.

Apparently, the conclusion was that where the state failed, responsible citizens stepped in and saved the day.

Discussion

By taking a deeper look at *Swachh Bharat* (SBM) and TUI, this paper builds upon the vibrant literature in critical development to show how these campaigns reproduce colonial and postcolonial narratives of hygiene as a 'cultural problem' premised on an idea of pre-modern urban subject whose hygienic practices need to be disciplined in order to become modern. By focusing only on behavior change (e.g. anti-littering), these campaigns privilege an understanding of waste as an aesthetic problem rather than a much more complicated infrastructural one. As these campaigns focus on highlighting and celebrating the volunteer labor of the privileged, they may obfuscate the economically necessary labors of the marginalized such as the vast army of waste pickers that collects, segregates and recycles waste materials in urban India (Chaturvedi and Gidwani 2011).

National cleanliness campaigns are not new in India. What makes *Swachh Bharat* different is its scalar reach to the public that has been possible partly because of the

use of social media. Past campaigns were limited in what they could achieve in terms of public engagement. Modi's highlighting of the issue in his Independence Day speech and his use of social media has made cleanliness a nation-building project – one that you could participate in, or at the very least, tweet about. What is also notable is that while in the past, public support might have had to be garnered through mass media campaigns, in the contemporary moment, as the existence of groups such as TUI attests to, middle-class public support is already in place. In a 2015 survey of 1200 middle-class respondents from eight Indian cities, *Swachh Bharat* was by far the best liked of Modi's national initiatives (TNN 2015b). Seventy-one percent of survey respondents noted having participated in a cleanliness initiative since the campaign's inception. A 2016 study of online conversations related to the performance of the Modi government revealed that *Swachh Bharat* continued to be among the top ten triggers for online conversations (Layak 2016). A word cloud analysis in this study showed that 'clean' and 'cleanliness' were among the topmost topics that garnered more positive public support for the current political regime than other issues such as governmental accountability and corruption.

Order versus chaos: being modern in urban India

Miller et al. (2017) note that one of the impacts of social media is that communication has become more visual than in other traditional modes of communication. Both SBM and TUI deploy images, specifically 'before-and-after' pictures that powerfully represent the cleanup work of volunteers. In an attempt to mimic the highly successful ice bucket challenge (in which participants dump a bucket of ice water on themselves to show their support for those affected by Lou Gehrig's disease), Modi initially picked a set of nine 'brand ambassadors', prominent public figures who were expected to spread the word about the campaign in their own spheres of influence and to 'make a contribution towards *Swachh Bharat*, share [their contribution] on social media, and invite nine other people to do the same, hence forming a chain' (PMO 2014). The sharing of videos was key to the viral success of the ice bucket challenge. In much the same way, the sharing of 'before-and-after' photos of clean-up campaigns via social media was expected to go viral. But long before SBM was launched, TUI had already been using this visual strategy to amass a following on social media. Cleanup campaigns invoke a particular teleology of urban aesthetic transformation: ugly/dirty urban spaces can be transformed into clean/beautiful spaces through the actions of disciplined and civic-minded urbanites. 'Before-and-after' photos on social media provide a means for producing, representing, circulating, consuming and debating those aesthetics.

Explicitly drawing upon 'broken windows theory', which posits that the physical condition of the urban environment can play a role in encouraging or deterring ant-social behaviors such as crime and vandalism (Kelling and Wilson 1982), TUI believes in spotfixing as a disciplining strategy:

An ugly space stays ugly, and often gets uglier, while a good-looking, well-maintained public space attracts respect. The same Indian behaves differently inside a clean airconditioned [sic] mall than he does right outside (a person who may spit on a wall outside a mall or urinate, will not do so inside a mall). (2017)

According to TUI, the reason that transit systems in Indian cities such as the Delhi and Bangalore Metro Rail are much cleaner than spaces outside is 'pride, ownership, urban design, maintenance spend and enforcement'. To TUI, air-conditioned malls and sparkling new metro rail systems represent beautiful spaces. However, they are also semi-private, carefully controlled spaces that employ an army of low-wage workers who spend countless hours keeping them clean. By contrast, the outside is public space, chaotic, open and available for the 'ugly Indian' to litter, spit, urinate and defecate. As Chakrabarty (2010) and Doron (2016) have already pointed out, air-conditioned malls and metro rail systems are the pleasures of capitalist urbanization available to those who can afford to partake in them. For the rest, the cleanliness standards that these spaces embody remain far from a 'self-evident fact'.

These discussions allow us to conclude that although chaos might be endemic, order is necessary for modern India. The idea of order, however, is an almost amorphous amalgam of hygiene and aesthetics. And what constitutes order versus chaos relies on a comparison of the urban Indians and urban Indian spaces against the urban residents and spaces of the developed world, particularly those cities that bourgeois Indians and the diaspora vacation and live in. In his Independence Day speech, Modi (2014c) said,

Often when we go to foreign countries, we say how clean it was, there was no dirt anywhere. Then I ask these people, did you like the fact that it was so clean? Then I ask, did you see anyone littering or spitting? They say, no we didn't. Then I say that the secret of cleanliness is in the discipline of their citizens ... I believe that the countries of the world that appear clean are so because their citizens don't indulge in littering nor do they allow it to happen.

Those foreign places are clean because their citizens are disciplined, not burdened by their 'old habits' as Indians are. Indians' comfort with disorder gets in the way of becoming modern and disciplined. Similarly, TUI also argues that the root of public filth in India is the people themselves, 'not systems, money or technology' but its deep-rooted cultural attitudes and behaviors: 'it has something to do with us as a people' (TUI 2017). One of the examples the group often uses to demonstrate this point is the state of cleanliness in diaspora communities:

After all, even in cities like Singapore, London and New York with efficient civic systems and a culture of rule-enforcement, Indian-dominated neighborhoods are dirtier and have lower civic standards than other parts of the same cities. Seems like we ugly Indians can beat even the world's best managed cities into submission! (Anamik Nagrik n.d.)

At the same time, it is only a certain class of Indians that can 'see' ugliness. The diaspora communities in Singapore, London and New York that TUI mentions are working-class communities. By contrast, TUI volunteers are mostly upper-middle-class IT industry professionals – a socioeconomic status that affords them the privilege of traveling abroad for work and/or leisure and later imposes their comparing gaze on to Indian urban public spaces in those countries (Jeffrey 2015). An analysis of these discussions reveals a teleological ideology of modernization and modernity, what Kaviraj (1997) has described as a 'transition narrative': 'an untenable illusion that given all the right conditions ... the rich and the poor would "understand" the principles of being private and public in the right ways' (113). TUI volunteers and *Swachh Bharat* advocates read public behaviors such as comfort with chaos and littering trash as pre-modern through psychosocial explanations but hardly ever as structural, infrastructural or politico-economic problems (Jeffrey

2015; Manku 2015; Ranjan 2014). Although TUI participants regularly invoke comparisons with other developed countries to talk about the need for behavior change, they rarely invoke these in terms of differences in infrastructure investments.

Apolitical anonymity

At the launch of the campaign, Modi suggested that the goals of *Swachh Bharat* were 'beyond politics': 'This work [is] solely inspired by patriotism ... There is no place for politics' (PMO 2014). Yet, a closer examination of the campaign reveals quite the opposite. For example, Jeffrey (2015) has shown how the symbols chosen for *Swachh Bharat* – i.e. Gandhi and the broom – were also ways to coopt the 'proprietary' and party symbols of opposition parties. Some have suggested that celebrities and political figures sweeping the streets do little more than provide photo opportunities for them to demonstrate their allegiance to the ruling political party (Sengupta, Misra, and Ittiye 2014). Shortly after the campaign's launch, news media reported deliberate littering of the areas where celebrities were going to be making their 'broom-in-hand' appearance to clean up those spaces (PTI 2014). A particular kind of politics, expressed through visual symbols and photographs, matters crucially for the campaign's success.

While visibility of the 'volunteers' is key to *Swachh Bharat's* social media campaign, anonymity is central to the discourse of TUI. In the aforementioned TEDx talk, a TUI representative who refers to himself as Anamik Nagrik (anonymous citizen) wore a mask to maintain his/her anonymity. TUI professes a philosophy of '*kaam chalu, mooh bandh*' (start working, stop talking) (TUI 2017). This is rooted in two inter-related ideas that make them different from *Swachh Bharat*. The first is a strong belief in action rather than discourse: 'No activism, no lectures, no awareness drives, no moralising. Just go out and DO. Want to change the world? Start with your own street!' Unlike *Swachh Bharat*, where one is encouraged to challenge others or take a pledge, TUI wants people to take action instead of talking. Second, while *Swachh Bharat* is focused on public awareness campaigns, TUI believes that telling people to change their behaviors will not work; showing by example will. Both are on the same page in their dismissal of political activism. The government's dismissal of activism is not restricted to *Swachh Bharat*. Modi's government has been accused of quashing dissent by suspending the registration of activist organizations such as Greenpeace (Bornstein and Sharma 2016). Further, as Doron (2016) has demonstrated, despite the insistence on assuming an apolitical stance, TUI's ideological tenets are clearly aligned with *Swachh Bharat*.

The '*mooh bandh*' (stop talking) in TUI's philosophy refers not only to not talking about public issues and focusing instead on doing something about them but also to maintaining anonymity in the identities of the doers. To provide 'a detailed account of the thinking, the philosophy, and the process that drives the Ugly Indian', TUI decided to tell its story through a self-published book available on its website (Anamik Nagrik n.d.). The reason for its anonymity as articulated in the book is that the volunteers want their work to speak for itself: 'Because actions and results count much more than WHO did them ... Anonymity is power – only those who exercise it, understand it. Anonymity is also a strong filter against non-serious publicity-seekers' (TUI 2017). Speaking might put them in the same realm as moralizing activists such as those from NGOs – people 'who talk a lot, raise funds, and deliver little in the way of concrete impact' that they do not want

to be put in the same camp with. Instead, TUI volunteers ‘work silently to fix problems’, ‘don’t talk to the press’ and ‘do the work quietly seeking no individual recognition’.

In TUI’s book, the reader gets a better sense of the roots of this sentiment against activism (Anamik Nagrik n.d.). In one chapter, the protagonists are on a stealth mission to clean up a filthy spot-on Bangalore’s Church Street. Everyone – the media, the government, activists and the industry – is complaining about the mess but nobody is doing anything about it. ‘One bearded guy in a kurta [shirt]’ described as a ‘stereotypical activist’ tells them ‘don’t waste your time, we have tried for years, cleaned it up several times, and the mess simply comes back’. Our protagonists are sick of such responses from the ‘typical ugly Indian’ who ‘blames someone else, discourages those who want to solve it, offers no practical solutions’. In the context of Modi government’s crackdown on NGOs, TUI’s critique of such organizations shows the ideological synergies between the two. The Indian Intelligence Bureau’s report that led to the Modi government’s crackdown on NGOs had argued that NGOs were anti-development (Bornstein and Sharma 2016). Similarly, the stereotypical activist and NGOs in TUI’s story stand in the way of India’s development and progress in general, and in the way of urban cleanliness in particular.

But even though TUI insists on anonymity of the organizers, pictures on Facebook highlighting their volunteer work often shows people’s faces. Moreover, while some of the ‘before-and-after’ photos only show blank landscapes that have been transformed from ugly to beautiful, many pictures show how such a transformation came to be. Showing people doing this work is important. It allows aspiring volunteers to see how the work is done, how many people might be needed, what kind of tools they use and so on. It also allows a visual story to be told of the hard labor that went into transforming the ugly into beautiful. Even as the labor of volunteers is highlighted and circulated through images on Facebook, the labor of those who perform similar work but for different reasons is rendered invisible. One set of before-and-after pictures captures the erasure of the necessary labors of the poor quite starkly. In the ‘before’ picture, one sees a pile of garbage and two young waste pickers (presumably children) picking recyclables through that pile of waste. In the ‘after’ picture, the pile of garbage is gone. The wall behind the erstwhile pile of garbage is now painted in a beautiful pattern appropriate for the institution (a government school) that it protects. Also gone from the ‘after’ image are the two waste pickers – children who are unlikely to ever reap the benefits of this or any other public school. Instead of receiving an education, their days are spent trying to supplement their household income through whatever meager means they can muster.

Erasing the labors of necessity

In simplifying public filth as merely a behavioral problem such as littering and trashing public spaces, campaigns such as SBM and groups such as TUI construct clean public spaces as a universal, and self-evident fact. Forgotten in this is that many who are marginalized and oppressed due to their class, perform the daily and mundane work of waste removal in India. The invisible work of these invisible workers allows cities to maintain their metabolic functions of consumption and excretion (Gidwani and Chaturvedi 2011). However, as Anantharaman (2014) has argued, the new urban middle classes are increasingly engaging in voluntary pro-environmental waste management behaviors such as recycling and composting that may disrupt the necessary labor of those who depend

on waste for their livelihoods, and yet fail to recognize their contributions. This difference between necessary and voluntary labors is crucial to the arguments of this article and Starr's (1999) concept of infrastructure breakdown – invisible infrastructures only become visible during moments of breakdown – is useful for understanding this difference. Those who perform sanitation work do so to earn a meager living. In the process, however, they also clean up cities. To recognize the value of the infrastructural contributions of waste pickers, for instance, one only has to imagine 'breakdown' of systems of waste collection and recycling. If Indian cities are filthy now, they would be awash with trash if waste pickers stopped doing what they do.¹ Those who volunteer to clean up urban spaces do so to enact a particular ideology of urban aesthetics. Breakdown, in this instance, does not disrupt the system because the system never depended on it to function to begin with. Yet, amid celebrations of the labor of volunteers, the mundane labor of those who do it out of necessity is forgotten.

If TUI erased the economically necessary labors of the urban informal sanitation workers in the example above, *Swachh Bharat* discursively recognizes the labors of formal sanitation workers (*safai karamcharis*). In the campaign inaugural speech, Modi said, 'Sometimes I feel that the job of getting rid of filth belongs to *safai karmchari* alone. Isn't it the duty of all the countrymen [*sic*]?' (Modi 2014b). Yet, a closer examination of funding for solid waste management infrastructure projects reveals that a discursive recognition of *safai karamcharis* conceals material practices of displacing formal and informal waste management service providers from their means of subsistence, particularly those such as the two young waste pickers in the aforementioned TUI 'before' picture. *Swachh Bharat* provides up to 20% as grants or viability gap funding for solid waste management projects through public-private partnerships that encourage municipalities to outsource the provision of waste management services to private firms (MoUD 2014). As scholars have demonstrated, many such projects have already displaced both informal and formal sanitation workers in cities across India (Chaturvedi and Gidwani 2011; Schindler, Demaria and Pandit 2012).

Speaking to business leaders at a summit in Delhi, Modi argued that the economic impacts of cleanliness included aversion of health costs, creation of new jobs in waste management ('*swachhata* entrepreneurs') and increased tourism (Modi 2015). TUI celebrated this speech: '[I]t is heartening to see Clean India put right on top of the national agenda in a business leaders' summit. A clean country makes good business sense and is just good common sense – who can argue with that?' Cleanliness is good for the economy; it will create jobs. Yet, a closer look at *Swachh Bharat* reveals that the '*swachhata* (cleanliness) entrepreneurs' that Modi mentions are not the thousands of workers in the informal economy who currently contribute to cleaning Indian cities. Instead, the entrepreneurs are a handful of private firms eager and ready to expand their operations, often displacing poor, urban, informal waste workers in the process. There is potentially big money to be made in cleaning up India. Critics point out that *Swachh Bharat's* launch has reinvigorated corporate interest in the sector and many firms 'have spotted a killing to be made in cleaning up India are licking their lips in anticipation at windfall projects for garbage and waste disposal, and recycling' (Sengupta, Misra, and Ittye 2014). Such projects often include mechanization such as the introduction of mechanical street sweepers, work that is currently done manually by *safai karamcharis* in many Indian cities. TUI posted an article about the planned introduction of mechanical sweepers in Delhi pointing to

the debate about whether instead this could have been an employment opportunity. To this, one person said, 'if India wants young people rioting in the streets over unemployment like in France feel free to spend money on expensive machines made from imported materials that eliminate jobs'. One commenter disagreed suggesting that 'holding a broom' was not an appropriate occupation for the unemployed, whose skills could be better utilized in manufacturing and service sectors. Further, the commenter argued that cities 'don't need 1000 brooms raking up dust in the process of cleaning when 10 machines can do a cleaner, quieter job of it'. Critiquing the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in India, which guarantees 100 days of wage employment annually, the commenter argued that manual sweeping instead of mechanizing the system would be yet another 'pointless socialist scheme'.

Mechanized street sweepers is not the only technology that threatens to displace labor. MoUD guidelines for implementing *Swachh Bharat* specifically promote waste-to-energy projects which have a particularly negative impact on informal waste workers (Chintan 2012; Demaria and Schindler 2016; Luthra 2017). One of the adverse effects of reduced incomes in the informal sector due to the introduction of such technologies is on children in those communities who have to forgo schooling in order to supplement the decreased family incomes. In the aforementioned 'before-and-after' picture, TUI had discursively erased the two young waste pickers from the landscape. By encouraging the establishment of waste-to-energy facilities, *Swachh Bharat* is materially erasing them from the Indian urban landscape.

Sanitation infrastructure limitations

Urban filth in India and the associated public health and environmental problems are well recognized. Nation-wide campaigns attempting to address the problem are not new either (Doron 2016). At the same time, however, India faces a severe deficit in sanitation infrastructures (Jeffrey 2015). The issue of inadequate sanitation infrastructures has garnered the attention of Indian policymakers at the national level ever since the 1994 outbreak of the plague in Surat City, which directly led to the issuance of the first set of national rules governing solid waste in 2000 (Chaturvedi and Gidwani 2011). Between 1994 and the present moment, national rules have been issued and even revised, several high-level committees – in the Supreme Court and the erstwhile Planning Commission – have deliberated on the issue, and detailed guidance has been issued by the central government to municipalities on making infrastructure improvements (MoEF 2000; MoEFCC 2016; MoUD 2000; MoUD 2016; Planning Commission 1995; Supreme Court 1999). Even so, the deficit in sanitation infrastructure is large and continues to grow. For instance, a report by the McKinsey Global Institute suggests that the gap between supply and demand for solid waste infrastructures and services in urban areas in India will increase fourfold between 2007 and 2030 (Sankhe et al. 2010). The entire waste management value chain – collection, transportation, treatment and disposal – is plagued by infrastructural problems (Kumar et al. 2009).

Yet, groups such as TUI and campaigns such as *Swachh Bharat* frame urban filth primarily as a behavioral problem that is reflective of culture instead of as an infrastructural one (Doron 2016). Although TUI is aware of the limits of behavior change strategies in light of a severe infrastructure deficit, its viewpoint is that 'system-level big-picture, long-term

solutions' such as landfills are issues that a 'common citizen cannot fix in a few days' and are best left to 'elected representatives' to address. TUI volunteers instead use their 'own hands, time and money' to focus on 'local' spots and 'fix them to the best of [their] ability'. Their focus is on 'improving garbage lifting from [their] streets' and not on what municipalities do with that garbage. These long-term, infrastructural issues keep returning in discussions on their Facebook page. Many Facebook commenters question the long-term efficacy of spotfixing: 'But how will this spot stay "fixed"?' This question is not merely about urban aesthetics; it points to infrastructural failures on the part of the municipality as much as it does to the continued 'ugly behavior' of the perpetrators who might trash the place the next day. In response, TUI almost always points to its idea that 'ugly places' encourage 'ugly behavior' citing examples of places that have been spotfixed and continue to remain so. Where the garbage goes is not their concern.

Milner (1987) argues that cleanliness in India is 'relatively inexpansive'. Because 'a certain amount of dirt and impurity is inevitable', the cleanliness strategy 'focuses on redistributing rather than eliminating dirt' producing a preoccupation with the cleanliness of private rather than public areas. Spotfixing by TUI might merely displace a 'black spot' to a location not so readily monitored by TUI's vigilant membership, spaces that they do not regularly see in their daily lives. In spotfixing certain public spaces, TUI has shifted the boundaries of the private to beyond the 'home'. Redistribution of dirt might be taking place at spatial scales that no longer conform to the simple dichotomy of the private 'home' and the public 'outside'. Without appropriate infrastructure improvements, public filth is merely reordered.

Conclusion

Discussions of urban filth on social media reveal that litter is seen, in the words of Mary Douglas (1966) as 'matter out of place', as stuff that does not meet the requirements of a modern aesthetic imaginary (41). But as Douglas argued, preoccupations with dirt have less to do with public hygiene and more to do with a need to create order. TUI Facebook discussions on a news article highlight this need for order. But, an elitist aesthetic preference for order can be traced back at least to colonial times. An examination of these discussions reveals the persistence of these ideas into the present day, thus reproducing a colonial logic that had deemed the apparent chaos of daily street life as pre-modern, and its subjects as those unwilling and incapable of becoming modern (Chakrabarty 2010, Kaviraj 1997). Urban filth in contemporary India is judged against lack of filth in cities of the developed world. Order and cleanliness in urban spaces represent an aesthetic modernity that cities in the developed world possess and that Indian cities must also strive towards. Social media have been integral to the reproduction of ideas of modern urban aesthetics and urban citizenship in the discourses and practices of SBM and TUI. Discussions and images circulated on social media cite invoke a teleology of modernization that relies on a discourse of a deficient pre-modern urban Indian subject who can *become* modern through an embrace of a culture of civic discipline (i.e. not littering) and duty (i.e. volunteering to clean up urban spaces).

Discussions on social media platforms also betray structural (class-based) biases in the aesthetic ideologies they imagine and invoke. If comparisons with the developed world inform ideas of what urban India should look like, then the class bias in these

aesthetic imaginaries is evident. After all, only those who are able to travel abroad can impose their comparative gaze on the urban spaces at home. But class biases are also reflected in other ways: what spaces are being cleaned up, by whom and for whom? An examination of TUI's projects in Bangalore shows that volunteers are mostly middle-class IT professionals, spotfixed locations are places where they work (technology parks that host their offices), live (relatively new suburban developments) and play (entertainment districts such as Church Street). The specific socio-spatial nature of these cleanliness projects may only serve to deepen the existing class-based inequalities in public sanitation services (Chaplin 1999). In attending to and highlighting the need for cleanliness of these particular urban spaces, some spaces are deemed more worthy of pre-established standards of aesthetic modernity than others. If we consider Milner's (1987) idea of the 'relative inexpandability' of cleanliness in India seriously, then what becomes clear is that removal of dirt from one space implies the accumulation of dirt in another. Volunteers in TUI's and SBM's cleanup projects are simply reordering dirt and not really addressing the need for much needed infra-structural improvements that might actually make dirt go away.

Discussions on social media also show that TUI participants are grappling with the very same 'hygienic puzzle' that many scholars have been. While these scholars have provided us theoretical explanations for the puzzle, TUI participants are more interested in doing something so that the puzzle no longer exists. In other words, public spaces should be just as clean as private spaces. But civic discipline and duty simultaneously demand apoliticalness on the part of the urban subject. The discourse of TUI and SBM is that public problems need private solutions. Political activism to make demands on the state for crucial urban public services is not the answer; taking matters literally into one's own hands is. Interestingly, however, the term 'private' is invoked in two senses: one of individual private action and another through privatized systems of public service delivery. In both senses, SBM and TUI discursively and materially try to erase the urban poor and their labors from the contemporary urban landscape. On the one hand, both TUI and SBM recognize and acknowledge the hard labor of sanitation workers that keep cities functioning. On the other hand, TUI's ideological support for and SBM's enabling of privatization of public services suggest that their recognition and acknowledgment of sanitation laborers merely serves a rhetorical purpose. As scholars have already shown (Chaturvedi and Gidwani 2011; Schindler, Demaria, and Pandit 2012), privatization of these public services economically displaces both formal and informal sanitation workers.

On the surface, anti-littering campaigns and volunteering efforts to clean up public spaces appear to be commendable projects. Clean urban public spaces and the efforts of volunteers who spend their own time and money to clean up those spaces are admirable. Yet, such projects' ideological bases that betray structural and historical biases, and their practical efficacy that reveals a privileging of the aesthetic at the expense of the infrastructural, must both continue to be questioned.

Note

1. *The Economist* (March 3, 2018) reported that though 8 of the top 10 polluters of plastic trash are in Asia, India is not among them. Despite its 1.3 billion people and wide use of plastic, India has an informal recycling system thanks to its armies of waste pickers.

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