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Rokovoko - Mogas Station inside back cover

At Frontiers

Frequently at frontiers we are asked, "Anything to declare?"

The wisest thing to do when faced with the scrutiny of a border official is to say that you have "nothing to declare", and quickly move on. Crossing borders usually entails an effort not to say too much, or at least to get by with saying very little. A degree of reticence is the mark of the wise and experienced traveller.

Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers seeks to turn this ethic of reticence on arrival at a boundary, at any boundary, on its head. This year, the Sarai Reader considers limits, edges, borders and margins of all kinds as the sites for declarations, occasions for conversation, settings for the staging of arguments, debates, recounting and reflection. Our book invites you to consider the frontier as an open door, a chute into something new, or the rediscovery of that which has been obscured, a covert infiltration of opacity, a porous membrane of liminal potential, a zone of contact and contagion. We want to think of the frontier as the skin of our time and our world, and we invite you to get under the skin of contemporary experience in order to generate a series of crucial (and frequently unsettling) analytical and narrative possibilities.

For us, the frontier is a threshold waiting to be crossed, a space rife with the seductive aura of transgression.

The feeling of being on the edge of something has persisted for most of our lifetimes. The 20^{th} century was an exhausting journey into a receding future, and the first decade of the 21^{st} continues to entrance us with the allure of what seems to be forthcoming forever. We are all pioneers now, chasing and being chased by the shifting border-posts of the frontiers imposed upon us by history. Yet our efforts to break new ground do not necessarily carry any longer the confidence of self-proclaimed 'avant gardes'. As scouts, our task is to survey and report back in detail on the territory of uncertainty. And our ongoing despatches chronicle not our conquest of, but our continuing bewilderment about, the complicated times we inhabit.

We are not talking only of actual, physical borders (though of course we are interested in literal and political borders) that are usually the residues of war, but also of the borders between different temporal registers, between languages, between different modes of action, between different bodies of thought and conviction.

Looked at this way, a frontier is more a condition than a site, more a way of being and doing than a constellation of fixed markers circumscribing a domain.

The DMZ of the present, straddling the recent past and the immediate future, is the most striking frontier of all, inviting us to consider the continuities and ruptures, revolutions

and restorations that, like bunkers and watchtowers on either side, litter the landscape of all our histories.

We could also consider the borders between faith and doubt, between technology and technique, between history and memory, between art and science, between literature and reportage, between the empirical and the speculative...

We are interested in all forms of expression that straddle these spaces, especially in those that make forays into zones of confinement, such as prisons, detention camps, institutions of remand and quarantine. Here we see power relentlessly producing states of exception in a way that constantly redefines the boundaries of what might be considered normal. With each passing day, the normal condition of the world comes to resemble yesterday's state of exception, and today's state of exception seeks to lay the foundations of tomorrow's normality. This tension between the exception and the rule is another kind of frontier that we hope will provoke new investigations.

Today, we live in cities that expand by evacuating people from thriving centres and relocating them onto empty hinterlands. The shifting topos of infrastructural renewal in megacities constantly generates new urban boundaries. In these spaces that resemble maps and grids more closely than they do actual spaces for habitation, the question of what it is to have an urban identity in the time of civic dispossession, upheaval and appropriation, is asked with a violent, daily urgency.

The Reader goes to press at a time when the world observed from the Northern Ridge in Delhi (where this text gets made) seems to resemble a concentric circular maze of successive borderline conditions. Delhi itself, riven by a recent geometry of judicially mandated sealings, demolitions and evictions, is crisscrossed by different trajectories and ecologies of legality and illegality. Further away, to the east, the villages of Nandigram in West Bengal witness a reinscription of lines of force. Hope and despair take positions on the streets of Kolkata. The people of Bangladesh negotiate a repeated destiny, braving cyclones and the wrath of undeclared army rule. Still further east, Myanmar shivers in the icy grip of an amoral junta, and the walking monks of Yangon etch their own cartography of protest in the streets of their city. To the west, in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, a military dictator tries on new costumes even as he performs a script of democracy while sustaining a state of emergency. In the wider world, the invisible strings of money and power raise the price of oil here, manipulate interest rates there, and aggravate the temperature of already seething conflict zones. Battle lines are drawn, erased, recharted. People extend themselves in extraordinary acts of defiance and generosity, and then close in on themselves in exhaustion.

The texture of twilight seems to invade each hour of night and day. Everything everywhere is contingent. The margin infiltrates the centre. The core expands to the periphery. Our streets oscillate between anarchy and sullen calm. Sometimes the journey across continents still leaves us occasionally with the feeling that we haven't come very far

– and yet, in the short walk across the road to a news-stand, we may instinctively, intuitively, negotiate a dozen frontiers...

Sarai Reader 07: Frontiers invites you to become an adventurer at the fringes of your experiences, speculations, memories and histories. We have always viewed the Reader as hospitable to new and unprecedented ideas, as a space of refuge where wayward reflections can meet half-forgotten agendas, where the 'disappeared' of Buenos Aires can come upon the missing people of Nandigram. This is why we imagine Reader 07 as setting the stage for a productive encounter with the demand for an account of the limits, verges and thresholds of our times.

Welcome to these frontiers. They're a little wild, but the horizons ahead of us are wide and open.

The Editorial Collective Delhi/Amsterdam, December 2007

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EXTRACT from an Office Memo: No. 2086, dated Simla, the 21st October 1865, from the Secretary to the Government of India, in the Foreign Department.

With reference to the dockets from the Home Department regarding Mr. Johnson of the Great Trigonometrical Survey, who is understood to have proceeded to Khotan, the undersigned is directed to state, that no persons should ever be allowed to go beyond British territory, and more particularly, into wild and dangerous tracts, without specific sanction conveyed through the Foreign Department.

CIRCULAR NO. 84-3474.

GENERAL DEPARTMENT.

Dated, Lucknow; the 31st October 1865.

Copy of the above forwarded to

for his information and guidance.

J. REID

Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Oude.

FRONTIER SCOUTS AND BORDER CROSSERS

Narrating the Frontier: Perspectives from Kachchh

FARHANA IBRAHIM

I.

On the far western extremity of Kachchh, right about where the land makes way for a complicated stream of waterways and creeks that divide Kachchh in India from Sindh in Pakistan, there lie the ruins of an ancient town. Its fort is almost entirely extant; the few breaks in the geometric precision of its walls provide a tantalising glimpse beyond, into the blinding bluish-white of the Rann of Kachchh, the salt-encrusted flat desert of clay and mudflats extending for miles north, and then to the north-west, where a deeper blue sea creeps up to join the Rann.

This is the town of Lakhpat, approximately 170 kilometres from Bhuj, the district capital of Kachchh, and more or less its geographical centre. Today Lakhpat has the appearance of being no more than a ghost town, the remains of a few low mud-brick houses emerging from an unremarkable spread of scrubby vegetation. The monotony of the landscape is broken by some magnificent ruins dating back a few centuries. The fort walls enclose what may well have once been a thriving city, and curious artefacts are littered about – bits of broken earthenware, and fascinating little fossilised remains – that may tempt the intrepid visitor to flesh out the site's sketchy historical record. Apart from a handful of religious structures that stand as mute sentinels of the secular ideology of the Indian nation-state at its western edge (for there is a *gurdwara*, a temple, a mosque and two *dargahs*), there are only a few inhabited houses. Most of the adobe and mud structures date from earlier centuries and are in ruins.

It is easily understood why people would choose to not live here if they had any alternative. Quite apart from Lakhpat's distance from Bhuj, there are no markets nearby; a single bus service connects it to Bhuj once a day, making the return journey the following day. Besides, livelihood options in this part of Kachchh are scanty.

It is not entirely clear when the town began to decline, or what the causes were. But there is a wealth of narrative accounts about Lakhpat, and this essay pieces together some of these from a variety of genres to discuss the nature of the frontier that Lakhpat forms between Kachchh and Sindh. My text will move between the present and the past to try and come to terms with how we might be able to understand this frontier area today, and how movement across it has been understood over time.

There are elaborate references to Lakhpat in the writings of colonial officers as they sought to cross the forbidden frontier into Sindh prior to its conquest by Britain in 1843. Lakhpat also finds fond mention among Muslim pastoralists in this region, who recite poetic narratives redolent of a time when the customs post in Lakhpat witnessed the passage of trade items - opium, silks, perfumes, rice and ghee. Lakhpat also features in an imaginative popular geography that belies the present geographical distribution of people and natural resources. In contrast to these accounts, the modern state has converted Lakhpat into one of the outposts of the Border Security Force (BSF). Amidst the residue of the past, bored officers try and pass their time looking for 'footprints' – evidence of cross-border flows that defy the mandate of the state they represent on this distant edge. Interweaving different narrative strands, this essay seeks to historicise a frontier that has been converted into a 'sealed' border zone. For the agents of the state who are here to protect the border, any movement across it is a transgression, punishable by law. For locals, it is an elastic frontier that stretches the imagined region well past the border security posts. Ultimately my argument suggests that only by being attentive to narratives other than those of the modern state can we begin to think of alternate ways of inhabiting and negotiating contemporary political frontiers.

II.

Lakhpat is said to have acquired its name both because it was built by Lakhpat-*ji*, one of the rulers of Kachchh from 1752-61, but also as an allusion to its wealth, measured in lakhs of *koris* – Kachchh's own distinct currency till it joined the states of the Indian Union in 1948. The right to issue its own money was granted to the kingdom of Kachchh by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in exchange for safe access to the sea for the empire's Haj pilgrims. The seas off the Kachchh coast were known for being infested with pirates and bandits, and the area's able seafarers had earned themselves a strong reputation for the strength of their fleet. An important dimension of Lakhpat's orientation to sea-bound travel was the fact that during Mughal times it was a port of departure for pilgrims sailing to Mecca. Oral histories from the region also credit Guru Nanak to have done just this, and he is believed to have stayed at a house here before leaving for Mecca. The descendants of the owners of the house built a *gurdwara* on the spot later, and it continues to serve as one today, restored recently by UNESCO. Lakhpat was also the crossing point between Kachchh and Sindh for traders; a taxation and customs house was located here at the point where the Indus river had to be crossed by those entering Sindh.

Much of what is apparent as physical decline in Lakphat today is likely to be the result of destruction during an earthquake that struck this region in 1819. This earthquake had a decisive impact on the physical and social landscape of the region, since it is seen as being at least partly responsible for an alteration in the course of the Indus. The shifting of the

river westwards reduced Lakhpat's access to the water that irrigated its fields of rice, a crop for which the town was reportedly famous.

III.

Popular accounts in Kachchh speak even today of the unfortunate turn of events that led to the desertification of Lakphat. Although scientific accounts attribute much of the destruction in this region to the earthquake of 1819 and the resultant effects on the course of the Indus, the primary lifeline for the area and major source of the prosperity ascribed to it, the more common refrain relates to the 'evil' intentions of an 18th-century Sindhi king, Ghulam Shah. It is frequently asserted in Kachchh that the epic battle of Jhara fought in 1762 saw the armies of Kachchh and Sindh confront each other menacingly. After a prolonged battle on the hill of Jhara, a little to the east of where the Lakhpat fort stands, the Sindhi armies were defeated. At this point, Kachchhi historians and lav people alike mention the terrible act of revenge undertaken by Ghulam Shah. Unable to accept the fact that he had been defeated in battle, he crossed the Indus at Lakhpat to return to Sindh, but not before erecting a giant embankment across it. This embankment, it is ruefully recounted, is what eventually led the Indus water supply to dry up, thus enabling the collapse of Lakhpat's hitherto thriving economy. E. Rushbrook-Williams (1958, pp. 159-60), one of the first historians to consolidate the oral accounts available in Kachchh and publish them as an authoritative history of the region, writes of Ghulam Shah,

[...] he also did his best to injure Kutch by raising an earthwork which diverted one of the branches of the Indus from the Lakhpat district, where it had been used for irrigating the rice crop. It is not easy to estimate exactly what damage he did, because his original undertaking has been entirely obliterated by seismic disturbances early in the nineteenth century. These had very serious effects indeed upon the entire water resources of the Abdasa district and a low mound, known as Allahbund, or God's Dyke, was thrown up; and the course of the Indus and of all of its waters was diverted right away from Kutch. Popular repute still saddles Ghulam Shah with the blame for the whole catastrophe, although in fact the worst part of it occurred long after his death through the operation of natural causes.

Rushbrook-Williams' history in turn has had a powerful impact on local accounts that he claimed to have codified in the first place, so this story of Ghulam Shah's revenge has steadily acquired more believers over the decades. However, there is another interesting aspect to the story of this embankment known as Allahbund or 'the embankment created by Allah'. A community elder of the pastoral nomadic Muslim Jatt community that straddles both sides of this border, a poet familiar with the Rann since it constituted the community's main pastoral route, associates the 1819 earthquake not with creating but *destroying* the Allah Bund. "The bund was created by God", he informed me sagely. "How can a person change the course of a river?" But according to him, the earthquake broke the dyke apart, leading to the formation of the Rann by flooding out the cities in the area. He continues,

"...the cities were ruined and divided into two, some on one side of the Rann, and some on the other. It is said that the Sindhi king was cruel, and Allah never condones injustice, which is why this destruction must have come about".

Here the earthquake is linked with the actions of Ghulam Shah to account for the horror of Partition, of inaugurating an era of modern state-sponsored surveillance and sealed borders that must not be crossed. Before the contemporary geopolitical reorganisation of this border, pastoral groups crossed it freely, not merely with their animals in search of pasture and water but also because they controlled a large segment of the cross-border trade between Kachchh and Sindh.

But this narrative hinges around the destruction caused by the 1819 earthquake. At the time that this story was repeated for my benefit in 2001, Kachchh had only very recently suffered through vet another earthquake which destroyed vast swathes of habitation. especially in the area's eastern sections. The Jatt pastoralists did not suffer materially in this earthquake; as a relatively mobile pastoral group that lived for the most part in temporary dwellings set up in the Rann, they would not have been affected in the same way as the inhabitants of densely populated towns such as Bhuj, Anjar or Bhachau. In the years following the earthquake, however, populations such as these have found themselves even more disenfranchised than they already were before the earth unclenched in terrifying spasms one wintry morning. In the flurry of aid and reconstruction, Kachchh found itself a place on the map of global disaster managers, and also etched its name more deeply on the map of Gujarat – a state with which it has had a somewhat tenuous political and cultural relationship. With the series of 'developmental' measures adopted after the earthquake, charted out with a view to boost the industrial potential of the state of Gujarat as a whole, many lesser players have been short-changed in the bargain. The pastoralists of the north are just one of many such constituencies, and it is in this context that I choose to read the Jatt elder's remark about earthquakes wreaking mayhem, in the present as much as in the past. For their impact is felt not just in the physical landscape but has far-reaching social repercussions as well.2

IV.

Before the boundary between Kachchh and Sindh was definitively sealed (at least as far as the official stance on boundary maintenance goes), initially with Partition in 1947 and further reinforced after the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, Lakhpat was an important gateway into Sindh from Kachchh. The northern route into Sindh would have involved crossing the uncompromising Rann on camel, but at least while the Indus flowed by Lakhpat, this seemed to be a more benevolent crossing point. It was here that the presence of a well-used customs post during the colonial period indicates some volume of trade between Kachchh and Sindh. As the customs rate was lower in Kachchh than in British Indian provinces, it was cheaper for caravans of traders to transit through Kachchh. There was also a robust trade between Kachchh and Sindh, the chief articles of which were rice and *ghee*.

In 1827, James Burnes, the Residency doctor at Bhuj and brother of Alexander Burnes, then assistant to the Political Agent at Bhuj, was invited to the court of Sindh to cure its ailing Amir. This was the first ever officially sanctioned visit of a foreign agent into that area, and Burnes' diaries became the basis of subsequent British interest in that region. As he made the journey from Bhui, riding westward into Sindh with mounting excitement born of his "feverish anxiety to cross the forbidden frontier, and particularly to view the classic river Indus" (Burnes, 1829, p. 11), he camped at Lakhpat as he awaited instructions from the other side. When permission to cross was granted, he made his way with his entourage across Lakhpat into Sindhi territory. As he crossed what remained of the eastern arm of the Indus following the earthquake of 1819, and landed on the other side of the stream, he notes "[...] about a hundred camels on the beach, which had come laden with ghee from Sinde, together with several merchants who were planning to embark for Cutch" (ibid., p. 31). Several miles further inland stood the customs gate where "[a] few Sindhian soldiers, not above eight or ten, whose only place of residence is an open wooden shed, and whose chief food is camel's milk, are stationed at Lah to collect a tax on the merchandize which passes [...]" (ibid., p. 32).

Other references to this trade link can be found in poetry recited today by Jatt pastoralists along the Rann. Many Jatts are experts in the *qafi*, a genre of poetry popular in parts of Punjab, Sindh, Rajasthan and Gujarat, especially among nomadic communities. A *qafi* is usually metred verse in four-line sequence, set to classical *ragas* or sung to folk tunes. One story that illuminates with vivid detail the trade and social ties that existed across the Rann is taken from the legend of Sassi-Punu, a tragic love story and perhaps one of the more famous compositions by Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, a master exponent of the *qafi* in Sindh. The story of Sassi-Punu recounted to me is given below, within a larger contextualisation of Jatt history and cross-border trade. The basic trope of tragic passion, fidelity, the quest, the ordeal, separation and suffering is unchanged from its many renditions that occur in Sindh (Verkaaik, 2004), Punjab (Bhattacharya, 1995) and Kachchh. What alters in individual iterations are the contextual details within which the story is placed.

The poet, a middle-aged Jatt man living in a tiny hamlet in the middle of the Rann, who composes and transcribes *qafis* in an elegant hand, begins with the story of an earthquake about 200 years ago that destroyed the Allahbund, created the Rann and flooded out cities in the vicinity of Lakhpat. He goes on:

I have seen the ruins of these old cities with my own eyes. If you walk in the Rann, you come across old artefacts – vessels of iron and other such things. I saw them as a child. I don't know if they would still be there; perhaps when measuring and securing the border, the officials would have removed them; I can't say.

At the time when these cities were flourishing, traders used to go back and forth. They would come here from Baluchistan and places up north, hawking their wares, perfumes, silks and opium. In Lakhpat there used to be a city called Bhambhor. It would be in Sindh now, but then it was all one land. In this city there lived a childless Brahmin couple. They

went to a seer who predicted that they would have a daughter but that she would end up marrying a Muslim. They were thoroughly distraught when they heard this.

Sure enough, after some time a baby girl was born to them. The wife said to her husband, "It is better that before she blackens our name [by marrying a Muslim], we set her free". So she put the baby into a small trunk and floated her out to sea. A Muslim washerman saw this trunk floating by and thought it must surely contain treasure. So he opened it up. Seeing the tiny baby, he took her home and he and his wife brought her up as their own. She was named Sassi and grew to be extremely beautiful. Everybody envied her looks, but her father would not agree to give her in marriage to anyone.

About the same time, in the area called Makran in Baluchistan there was a Jatt king named Ari. He had five sons, of whom the youngest was named Punu. One day their minister, a Hindu of the Lohana caste, was going to Bhambhor on business. Punu said, "Now when you go to Sindh, you must find me a bride".

The minister reached Sindh, and saw all the women who had come out to buy perfumes and silks from the traders passing through. He saw Sassi there and liked her immediately. He summoned Punu to Sindh, and Punu married Sassi forthwith.

However, when Punu's relatives in Baluchistan heard what had happened, they were enraged, exclaiming, "How can a Jatt's son marry the daughter of a mere washerman?" So saying, they loaded up their camels and rode into Sindh to fetch Punu back. In the dead of night they gagged him and carried him back to Baluchistan, leaving poor Sassi behind.

Sassi woke to find her husband gone. In anguish she pined for him for years, and wandered all over Sindh looking for him in vain. Wandering thus, she finally met with her death somewhere in the hills of Sindh, near where Karachi is today. She asked the earth to open up and receive her, leaving merely the tip of her scarf above ground.

When Punu finally received word of this, he came to look for her. On coming upon this scene, he was so overcome with grief that he too died on the spot; and today their graves lie side by side in Sindh at the spot where they died, united finally in their grief.

As the present is the most powerful filter through which we recall events of the past, my interlocutor began by locating the popular folk tale within a landscape of a border and security guards who are measuring the land. When he mentions Bhambhor being in Lakhpat he may not be entirely correct, at least if one were to compare with written accounts that refer to Bhambor as a possible ancient site in Lower Sindh. For instance, Burton (1851, p. 389, f. 25) wrote,

It]he town is supposed to have been built upon the plain and was destroyed by divine wrath in one night as a consequence of its ruler's sins. To judge from appearances the place must at one time have been rich and populous: even now after heavy rains the people find coins, ornaments and broken pieces of metal amongst the ruins of the Fort.

However, the veracity of historical records is not set in stone – their truth claims owe much more to wider circuits of power and knowledge. In the Jatt poets' imagination, Sindh and Kachchh remain tied together inexorably. When he says, for instance, "...then it was all one land", again his narrative deviates from what we know of the geographical lay of the land, now or in the past. For Kachchh and Sindh, even before they nested within two separate nation states, were always distinct kingdoms and even in the past continually discussed how to demarcate their borders from one another. However, what does emerge from narratives such as the one above is that in the imagination of these migrant pastoralists, the land was one, for the state did not insert itself into their lives in quite the same way as it does now. Despite border disputes at the official level, pastoralists came and went without giving the question of a border much thought. Significantly, these narratives as they are recited today continue to reflect territory as it was thought of in the past, allowing for a persistent suspension of current geopolitical reality. By transposing the narrative logic onto everyday reality, the pastoralists of northern Kachchh are subscribing to a somewhat different notion of territorial inclusivity than that which is imagined in official narratives of the region, which draw a firm border between Kachchh and Sindh.

٧.

From these rich and evocative descriptions of Lakhpat of times past, what we have left today is the abandoned ruined city within the fort walls, a lonely outpost of Kachchh keeping silent vigil over the sea and the Rann. But like the Rann and this border area as a whole, it continues to produce inspired prose within Kachchh, particularly in the local newspapers, and is faithfully repeated in teahouses. The two shortest overland routes into Pakistan from Kachchh would be through the famous black hills of Kachchh - the Karo Dungar area of Khawda (from where it is about 25 kilometres to Chad Bet, once Indian territory but ceded to Pakistan after the 1971 war); or through Lakhpat, about 35 kilometres from Pillar # 1175 that marks the boundary. One of the tasks of the border patrol officers is, as they state, to look for "footprints" – a significant physical indicator of cross-border transgressions. When such traces are found and identified as belonging to either humans or camels, they are assessed for their direction and intensity. Deep and heavy camel hoofprints, for instance, lead the agencies involved to pronounce unmistakably that they are heavily laden with "arms" or "lethal material"; they are supposedly trained by Pakistani intelligence agencies, and the men accompanying them are "thoroughly conversant" with the terrain and topography. Centuries of cross-border trade and social ties are now reduced to illegal "infiltration", the import of "lethal weapons" and influx of "Pakistani-looking people".

On my most recent visit to the border outpost in Lakhpat, the young patrolman on duty starts out asking officiously who we are and why we have bothered to come so far just to wander about; it is well off the regular tourist map of Kachchh. Besides, as it constitutes the official border, it is technically off limits, a "restricted zone".

"Where does the restricted zone begin?" I wonder aloud.

"Right where you stand!" is the prompt response. We are perched on a rocky outcrop, just outside the sturdy fort walls. The rocks give way to a beach-like zone that is partly seabed, partly Rann. "You can't step down, that is restricted area", we are told. This is where officers comb the ground twice daily for the appearance of "footprints", desperately seeking evidence of cross-border activity to fragment the searing monotony of another endless day on the salt expanses. Success on this score is far less spectacular than the reports that are regularly churned out for local consumption by the media. For the most part, these border patrol guards are waiting for the day when they will be transferred to a more hospitable part of the country, where they will be more familiar with the language and local customs, where they are not assigned to futile weeks and months of combing the Rann for elusive "infiltrators", or tracking circuitous escape routes.

VI.

Much of the discourse around borders, especially if you happen to find yourself in immediate physical proximity to one, relates to the "restricted zone". This refers to the space around the actual border that is off-limits to those without formal authorisation to enter; it is surrounded by all the aura and taboo related to a sacred space. It is not depicted accurately on the maps available for purchase by ordinary people; in fact, good maps of border districts are notoriously hard to come by. This near-sacred treatment of the border is necessitated because the relationship between maps or borders and the spaces they represent and/or enclose is not entirely metonymic. Borders, like the maps that they are inscribed upon, do not reflect spaces as much as create them. Like language, cartographies are performative; they generate what they represent, anticipating spatial representation and social practice. In addition, like language they are embedded in a community that believes (or rather, is made to believe) in them. Therefore, borders would be key instruments that work towards the creation of what has been called the "geo-body" (Thongchai, 1994) of the nation. Along with icons like the flag and the map, the border is a contemporary totem of the nation, a condensed symbol of collective representations that binds the national community together even as it allows it to be enunciated in the first place (Durkheim, 1976; Derrida, 1986). We might say that borders, as concrete symbols, are central to the technique by which nations "appropriate the experience of the sacred attributed to world religion and give it civic and territorial shape" (Balakrishnan, 1996).

Since borders of modern states are therefore not just about a convenient bounding of political space, the logical assumption is that they will be strategically utilised by states in their interactions with citizens; this in turn, to invoke the totemic analogy once again, enhances the sacredness of these symbolic creations. Particularly with regard to postcolonial nation-states,³ the new and often arbitrary carving of boundaries makes them particularly anxious and vulnerable over questions of national identity and long-term survival, embodied in what has been described as a form of "cartographic anxiety" (Krishna, 1996).

Border areas such as Lakhpat are apt examples of this kind of tension, for they are expected to perform the political/cultural function of naturalising – and nationalising – an often violent and arbitrary division of space and people. Narratives that produce structures of affect and practice challenging the hegemonising discourses of the modern state are sought to be neutralised, even suppressed. The restricted zone around a border has become "... a sign for the limit of Indian sovereignty and territorial integrity – a limit in the double sense of marking the territorial border of Indian interiority/exteriority and signifying the instability and indeterminacy of the margins of identity" (Axel, 2001, p. 107). The historical and geographical axes of Lakhpat calibrate precisely this unstable limit, where landscape, culture and people continue to be ambiguously distributed along a frontier between two nations that not very long ago were one.

Acknowledgements

For Jamal, whose interest inspired this piece in the first place; and with many thanks to Edward Simpson.

Notes

- I discuss this more fully in a forthcoming monograph, Settlers, Saints and Sovereigns: An Ethnography of State Formation.
- 2. For a more detailed discussion on this, see Simpson (2007).
- 3. In "The Third Eye and Two Ways of (Un)knowing: Gnosis, Alternative Modernities and Postcolonial Futures", Makarand Paranjape defines the category of "border gnosis" as knowledge from a subaltern perspective. This knowledge is conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system; and "border gnoseology" as a discourse about colonial knowledge is conceived "at the conflictive intersection of the intersection of the knowledge produced from the perspective of modern colonialisms (rhetoric, philosophy, science) and knowledge produced from the perspective of colonial modernities in Asia, Africa and the Americas/Caribbean". Border gnoseology is thus "a critical reflection on knowledge production from both the interior borders of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, hegemonic languages, directionality of translations, etc.) and its external borders (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonised, as well as the subsequent stages of independence and decolonisation)".

Border gnoseology may be contrasted not only with territorial gnoseology but also with epistemology, "the philosophy of knowledge, as we know it today (from Descartes to Kant to Husserl, and all its ramifications in analytic philosophy of languages and philosophy of science): a conception and reflection on knowledge articulated in concert with the cohesion of national languages and the formation of the nation-state..."

See http://www.tamilnation.org/aurobindo/paranjape.htm

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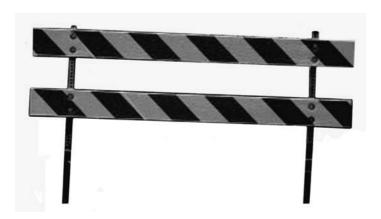
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Chromatic Boundaries

PAOLO NOVAK

Described in colonial accounts as 'the Frontier-Town', Peshawar is to this day a relatively cosmopolitan place, as well as an employment, educational and cultural regional hub. Migration and mobility across social spaces permeate the city with historical continuities and spatial interconnectedness; an ideal location for a doctoral student, like me, enquiring about the experiences and significance of borders and border-crossing.¹

The extent of such spatial and temporal frictions can initially be gauged using a recurrent statement in my field notes – "We are all Afghans" – an assertion that assumed different connotations depending on the context and meaning attributed to it by the speaker. A professor of business management at Peshawar University, for example, told me "we are all Afghans" is invoked in reference to the extent of migration experienced in the subcontinent, and especially that of Pushtun tribes in the area spanning from the Hindu Kush to the Indus. The Yousufzai, of which he is a member, left what is now Afghanistan in the 15th century and 'conquered' Swat (a valley and a district in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan), in turn displacing Kohistani inhabitants to the upper banks of the Indus (Malik, 2000). Named Shah Jehan after the Mughal emperor whose rule extended across parts of today's Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, the professor recalled how, when he was a young boy, caravanserais would go through his village in the Peshawar valley during their annual migration to India. They would leave goods that they were trading (as a complementary activity to pastoralism: see Pedersen, 1994) and would collect payment upon their return.²



Some would also leave their pregnant wives, only to pick them up on their way back, months later; others would have different households along the route. As suggested in colonial accounts, in fact (Holdrich, 1910, pp. 9-10), some nomadic migrations reaching as far as Australia (Davies, 1932):

There was an easy road, from Mesopotamia through Persia to Northern Afghanistan or even to Seistan and not a very difficult one to Makran; and so it came about that migratory movements, either compulsory or voluntary, continued throughout centuries, ever extending their scope...³

"We", in the context of an informal chat with a fellow academic, meant "we Pushtuns in Pakistan", and his analysis was a historical one. At times though, "we are all Afghans" assumed a strictly political meaning in relation either to the historically shifting border distinguishing Pakistan and Afghanistan, or vis-à-vis historical practices of ethnic differentiation by different Afghan rulers. The Pakistani director of a gender-awareness NGO in Peshawar, working with Afghans, told me: "We are all Afghans, you know, it is only recently that we have been considered Pakistanis, in the future we'll see". "We" again meant "we Pushtuns in Pakistan", or perhaps "we" inhabitants of the NWFP (North-West Frontier Province), but the comment in this case referred to citizenship, sovereignty and the future, as opposed to history, people and places.

The Durand Line, arbitrary vis-à-vis social formations and shifting areas of governance, still constitutes, arguably, an unsettled Frontier (Nichols, 1999). In others cases, "we are all Afghans" would acquire a 'domestic' ethnic-relations perspective: two Afghan NGO directors, who migrated to Pakistan in the early 1990s, are recorded in my field notes as staunchly arguing against a division of Afghan citizens ("we") into Pushtun, Tajik, Uzbek, etc.: "Why do you want to separate us, we are all Afghans..."

Different perceptions of legal and ideological borders are a primary line of enquiry for a researcher interested in migration. Migration laws, in fact, are based on the principles of sovereignty and nationality, which define areas of jurisdiction and belonging on the basis of the territorial fixity sanctioned by borders.

Such ontology is, however, highly problematic when it comes to Afghanistan, for three interrelated reasons grasped through the examples cited above: the extent of historical migration of its population and the integration of Afghanistan in regional and global circuits and flows, creating a tension with territorially based types of social order; the historically and socio-economically arbitrary nature of Afghanistan's borders, affecting state-society relations; and the existence of different overlapping forms of authority, creating multiple claims over people and land.

Further, in "the world of movement" (Turton, 2005), characterising the current world-historical moment, these tensions are clearly not confined to Afghanistan.

What is the relation between the salience of sovereignty and borders in matters of migration, and the existence of a variety of spatial practices that do not necessarily coincide with national borders? There is *no* universal relation, in fact. Borders are social

institutions, and as such acquire different meanings and implications depending on their significance vis-à-vis particular individuals or social groups. In other words: borders are flexibly porous, depending on historically shifting structural and subjective refractions. As I realised early in my field research, I could not simply take borders, and their legal implications, as a fact. Rather, I needed to explore and negotiate their heterogeneous effects, in context.

Despite being an alien, as much as a European diplomat or an Afghan immigrant, in fact, my burgundy passport and the colour of my skin seemed to affect my personal boundaries in Pakistan as much as, if not more than, the type of Entry Visa that legally defined my status there. Such chromatic combination, in fact, distinguished 'me', or rather how 'I' was seen by different people and 'regimes', from the overwhelming majority of the population around me. My 'gora'-ness ('white/fair'; also, generic term for Western foreigner), i.e., my nationality as defined by my skin colour, would open doors precluded to most Pakistanis, even those with higher economic status than mine. My bag would not be frisked at the entrance of five-star hotels: nor I would be checked while crossing the bridge at Attock, the border between Punjab and NWFP, in my journeys in and out of Peshawar. I got away with speeding tickets along the highway (unfortunately only one out three times that I was stopped) in exchange for a chat, and I had privileged access to upper-level bureaucrats, or 'influential people's' huiras (public spaces within villages or houses where visitors can stay to rest or sleep). Sometimes I was at an advantage even in respect to 'higher'-legal-status Europeans: our landlord hesitated to rent the flat below to a French diplomat because she happened to be "black", something that presumably rolled her back in the chromatic pyramidal scheme.

Conversely, I would always be checked on my way out of Pakistan because "all Italians bring hashish", as a guard at the Wagha border (between India and Pakistan, spelt 'Wagah' by India) once asserted while triple-checking my intimate parts. This was not true in all circumstances, though: when travelling together with a UNDP officer in and out of Pakistan, in fact, my Italianness and consequently my condition as a likely smuggler counted less than her status, and we were usually let through borders with a big smile. Impromptu guides told me of several places, in particular certain mosques and some bazaars; market prices would rise almost everywhere at my arrival; people would blow me kisses or shout "Angrez (Englishman)!" and laugh at me in groups. The actions of those around me seemed to be taken on the basis of an assumption built upon a categorisation of myself on the basis of 'objective' factors, such as the colour of my skin. My own perceptions and imaginations (partly consequent to the situation described, partly a-prioristic) about who 'I' was and who 'they' were defined, and modified over time, my literal and motivational boundaries. It seems to me that discovering, challenging, rejecting and finally adopting one's social and material boundaries in a foreign place is one of the most emotionally intense activities related to migration.

More directly related to the objectives of my stay in Pakistan – my doctoral field research – one of the limitations of my chromatic status was the impossibility of wandering

independently, i.e., without compulsory police escort, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATAs), which hosted the majority of registered refugees in Pakistan, at least until the beginning of the current repatriation drive. FATAs are administrative units of Pakistan, which are distinguished from the rest of the country for their legal status, a legacy of colonial times. FATAs enjoy a great degree of autonomy in respect to most Government of Pakistan (GoP) laws. Their territories are outside the jurisdiction of state police; each agency has its own *Kassadars* (tribal militia); fiscal rules do not apply; authority is exercised through tribal governance systems, with the figure of the Political Agent as the only link between domains thus administered and Islamabad, etc. Despite FATAs being separated by a border from the rest of Pakistan, in many aspects they seemed well integrated with adjacent territories.

The Agency border that I had the opportunity to observe most was the one uniting/separating Khyber Agency and/from Peshawar District. Hayatabad, originally an outpost used for colonial expeditions into the Frontier and simultaneously an initial defence line of the Settled District, is now an integral part of Peshawar, with modern housing and a number of facilities, an area with a very large Afghan population housed in refugee camps or in private houses, depending on economic status, with dozens of NGOs and self-help schools, home to the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CAR), etc. At the very end of Hayatabad the Khyber Agency begins; from Saddar, the bazaar in Peshawar's cantonment, it is only a 20-minute bus ride. Such demarcation is an administrative and legal one, but to me it by no means implied a neat separation, or a restriction on the movement of either people or goods. Kharkana (what the *Lonely Planet Guide* calls "Smuggler's Bazaar") straddles this ambivalent line. Buses transport workers and goods to and from various Peshawar city bazaars. Anybody travelling to Afghanistan through the Torkham frontier will find it necessary to cross from here.

Economic rationalities seemed a primary engine behind such cross-border movements. Other than bazaars and labour markets, tourists constitute a source of income for many 'tribals' and are source of bi-directional cross-Agency-border movement – or at least were, until the beginning of 2002 when visitors' numbers dropped dramatically (following Operation Enduring Freedom and the American invasion of Afghanistan). Baba Ji (and probably many others like him), an older gentleman with a perfect English accent famous among Japanese tourists, would come every morning to Saddar and poach travellers in Arbab Road. While offering them *kava* (Peshawari green tea), he would try to exchange the produce of his land for used tennis shoes or T-shirts. Asif, a Pakistani teen, would pretend to be an Afghan refugee selling Afghan knives (in reality made in Punjab) as a marketing strategy for European 'clients': "...they like to buy Afghan things". 'Tourist guides' would offer, in the streets or through hotel receptions, trips to Darra to shoot Kalashnikovs (AK-47 machine guns) or bazookas and visit the 'famous' arms factories, '4 or would invite people to their guest houses in Khyber where "you can do whatever you want: there is no police, you know..."

Further, the existence of different regimes (or, rather, the non-applicability of GoP laws in areas where tribal authority is the main source of legislative, judicial and executive power) can in itself be a significant cause of cross-Agency-border traffic. Tourists, staff of humanitarian agencies and University of Peshawar students (as recorded in my field notes, but probably other people too) would cross such a 'line' to buy alcohol, *charas* (cannabis resin), or magazines with scantily clad (if at all) women, and various types of pills to enhance virility. Kharkana, as almost every other bazaar I visited, encompasses products that are both "traditional"⁵ as well as products derived from contemporary global compulsions.

Many aspirant journalists or writers would cross the border to write a story: Afghanistan, as a field from which to mine a 'story', is in fact a cause of migration that follows the seasons of 'global' audiences.⁶ Peshawari residents would go (while wealthier car-owners would send their 'staff') to Landi Kotal to change their car tyres, cheaper because import duties are absent in FATA, but difficult to 'smuggle' into Peshawar District given their size. Conversely, several *bicyclewallas*, fast-pedalling between cars, would carry boxes from the Agency into Peshawar; I was told these were smuggled car parts and electric appliances, to be sold in various parts of the city or further 'smuggled' into Punjab.

The border between NWFP and Punjab, in fact, is another major crossing point and one that is heavily guarded, at least along the main Grand Trunk Road. Via Attock bridge, smuggled car parts and small appliances are carried inside refrigerators or washing machines; drugs are transported by bus, with transporters being tourists, teenagers looking for quick money, and women, because less likely to be searched; or transported in fast cars by what a perhaps jealous highway policeman described to me as "very, very good drivers". Once reaching their final destination, such goods need to find outlets in bazaars or be deposited in cargo holds of ships, in order to reach countries where drugs are consumed, and in turn, final consumers, etc. They need to cross other types of relatively porous boundaries, whose significance, in relation to the value of smuggling and the incentives it generates, is perhaps as important as that of the Durand Line. As suggested by a member of a Pushtun tribe settled 'across' the Line, cited in Glatzer's study of war and boundaries in Afghanistan: "What can Pakistan offer, what can Afghanistan offer, it is the border between them that we are living off" (2001, p. 6). This reflection seems an appropriate one for these 'internal' borders as well.

Economic rationalities on their own, however, cannot explain such cross-border movements since, despite these activities being open to anyone, including myself, not everybody is involved in them. I recall my personal interaction with that border and conflicting rationalities I faced. For foreigners, recognisable legally by the colour of their passport, and visually by that of their skin, that barrier indicates areas where the national government does not assume responsibility for personal safety, unless under police escort. The big sign at the end of Khyber Road, stating that foreigners must register and identify themselves, constituted for me, however, first and foremost a mental rather than a material barrier, given the facility with which I could have crossed it. I was tempted to get into Khyber Agency admittedly

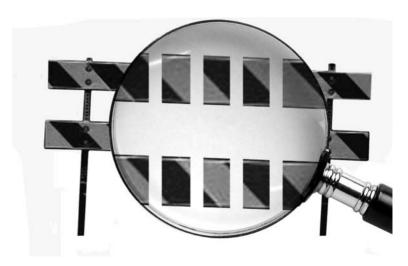
because of the 'excitement' caused by the possibility of crossing without authorisation, thus being able to wander without compulsory police escort, and because of the motivational effect of the thousand stories I had heard about those who, especially before 2002, had been able to wander across FATA and into Afghanistan almost without any problem.

While people like 'me' could trek from Kurram Agency into Afghanistan's Paktia Province, or from Bumboret (in the Kalash-inhabited valleys of Chitral) into Nuristan Province, the ongoing military campaign was preventing me from doing so. Clearly, the changed historical context had in turn changed, for some, the meaning of the border.

By the end of my field research, I had crossed that border three times. The first time, I 'accidentally' stayed on a bus when it crossed the Agency border, but disembarked after a few yards, gripped by fear of the unknown. A few weeks later I crossed it again, on foot, 'innocently' strolling through Kharkana, but felt intimidated and hurriedly crossed back. The third time, I capitulated to formal procedures and crossed the Khyber Pass with a police escort (for which I had to pay Rs 100) on my way to Kabul. My perception of constraints/opportunities within what I perceived as the 'context' of my research, as well as my status, physical appearance and personality, all defined the rationale that made me accept the border as a line of 'separation' – despite its porosity.

Through these field notes, I want to suggest the difference between the subjective (though structurally patterned) implications of crossing a border/traversing a regime, and the material experience of doing so, which varies from individual to individual.

Pre-existing structural conditions that may be geographical, social or political define the context in which border-crossing takes place. Fiscal, legal and governance regimes create heterogeneity in contiguous geographical areas, and in turn open up what might be termed "arbitrage opportunities", "competitive trade advantages", or "incentives", in financial, political economy or neo-institutionalist terms respectively. Contingent enabling conditions,



such as the ease of access and lack of comprehensive enforcement, or the size and type of product to be exchanged, may reinforce or constrain such opportunities. Subjective experience, further enhancing or constraining the possibility of taking advantage of opportunities at the individual level, is in turn dependent on economic status, gender, age, as well as personality, desires and motivations. The result is a complex, dynamic and socially flexible 'porosity' that simultaneously unites and divides cartographies, territories, people and goods.

Border-crossing blurs the distinction between one's conditioned perceptions and imaginings and embodied actual events; and it brings to the fore the overlapping nature of structural and subjective dimensions co-determining human activity. As fixed entities, borders neatly demarcate areas of sovereignty and citizenship: they distinguish between internal and external displacement, 'Refugee' and 'Internally Displaced Person', citizen and alien. Borders *define* a status.

However, borders are also dynamic social processes, sets of practices and discourses (Paasi, 1999); "political membranes and markers of the success of the state-building enterprise" (Goodhand, 2005, p. 192). Materially and motivationally affecting human settlement and displacement, they contextualise migration within wider historicogeographical processes. Borders produce social transformation.

Migration and mobility across the 'Frontier-Town' of Peshawar is a confirmation that boundaries are continually shaped by human activity, even as they shape it.

Notes

- This article is based on thoughts and encounters occurred during my field research in Peshawar, conducted at different times over the period 2002-04.
- A practice that is still alive: I accompanied one of 10 brothers (sons of one man and two wives) engaged in shoemaking and trading, on one of his trips collecting money for shoes he had delivered to various outlets in the Northern Areas some time before.
- It is interesting to note continuities in migratory patterns to this date. For example, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/not_in_website/syndication/monitoring/media_reports/1800572.stm. See also Rajaram Kumar and C. Gundy-Warr, "The Irregular Migrant as *Homo Sacer*: Migration and Detention in Australia, Malaysia and Thailand", in *International Migration*, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 33-64 (2004).
- 4. Almost every tourist I met had gone, or planned to go, to that town because, as most travellers told me, "It is something you must do while here it is in all guidebooks and stories about the wild Frontier..."
- Chakravarti (1976, pp. 37-38) presents a report of trade between British India and countries along its North West boundary in 1874. Charas figures as the fifth principal import from Kabul after silk, fruits and nuts, wood, and dyes other than indigo.
- 6. I encountered many journalists in Pakistan, as well as travellers keeping blogs (one of which mentions me, without my knowing that my conversations with them were part of their own research: see http://www.erwinvoogt.com/overland/opdrachten/opdr26.html); I also met several aspiring authors.

- 7. This and sections of earlier paragraphs draw upon my article "The Flexible Porosity of Borders", currently under revision, and scheduled for publication in *Political Geography* in 2008.
- 8. In drug smuggling, for instance, a fixed price is put on quantities and destinations: Rs X per kilo from source to Peshawar, Rs X+Y to Punjab, Rs X+Y+Z to Karachi, etc., regardless of who actually transports the goods from point to point.

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A Politics of Sensitivity:

Ambiguity and Exceptionality along the India-Bangladesh Border¹

Jason Cons

Borders are often spaces of secrecy and violence: locations where liberal normative notions such as 'security' and 'sovereignty' are nakedly exposed as processes of regulation and control. Yet what makes them so, and why are these heavily monitored places often as confusing and ambiguous for those living within them as for those from outside looking in?

In this essay, I reflect on what I call a 'politics of sensitivity' that circumscribe both the processes of researching borders and the lives of those living there. Sensitivity, I suggest, can best be understood as a political process that both regulates knowledge about sensitive spaces, and structures actions, behaviour, and possibilities within them. Sensitivity, as such, is best understood not as a descriptive term, but rather as a process that marks sensitive areas as somehow 'exceptional', or beyond the bounds of normal practice, in both discursive and concrete ways. This argument draws on my experience conducting research on *chitmahols*, a series of enclaves along the India/Bangladesh border. These enclaves are non-contiguous pieces of land that are, nonetheless, sovereign fragments of their 'home' states. These 'exceptional' spaces have been a source of intermittent tension, and constant confusion, for India and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) since the Partition of India in 1947.

Specifically, I focus on fieldwork in Angarpota-Dahagram (AGDH), two large Bangladeshi enclaves joined together as a Union Parishad within Upazila Patgram in the Lalmonirhat district of Bangladesh (see figure 1). AGDH is a loosely knit network of nine villages. The majority of its residents live in thatched houses, while some of the more wealthy residents reside in tin-roofed, and sometimes even brick-walled, homes. Covering approximately 4,600 acres, AGDH is largely fertile farmland. The majority of the residents make a living through small-scale agriculture, sharecropping, and forms of day labour. Primary crops in AGDH include wheat, corn, rice, peanuts, tobacco, potatoes and various other vegetables. Physically, it both resembles many other enclaves and, indeed, villages in Lalmonirhat, one of the most impoverished districts in Bangladesh.

However, AGDH is complex even within the scope of the already Byzantine history of the enclaves because of a long struggle over the opening of the Tin Bigha Corridor, a 'land bridge' through Indian territory connecting AGDH to the Bangladeshi 'mainland'. This Corridor, originally promised to Bangladesh by India in the 1974 Indira-Mujib Accords, was the focus of prolonged political debate by both countries, and the subject of fierce and occasionally violent political action by residents of both AGDH and the surrounding Mekhliganj Thana in India. Since 1992 the Tin Bigha Corridor has been opened and maintained by India's Border Security Force (BSF); and the BSF, the area, and its inhabitants are in turn monitored by Bangladesh's border security force, the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). While initially opened for only one hour a day, the Corridor is currently open from 6 am to 6 pm (Indian time).

While a complete history of this fraught area is beyond the scope of this essay, the argument does suggest that AGDH's 'exceptional' status within both Bangladeshi and Indian national and state imaginaries is produced through this vague discourse of sensitivity – not, as is commonly understood, the other way around. Here, exceptionality is an ill-defined state of simultaneous secrecy, compromised security, and ambiguity. It is mutually constituted with a constantly shifting ground of power, interest and overlapping sovereignties within the enclave itself. For residents of AGDH, this condition allows and facilitates particular forms of exploitation at the same time that it produces an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, insecurity and confusion.



Figure 1: Patgram Upazila²

Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the Bengali State

Sociologist Philip Abrams began his essay "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State" with a canny observation. Musing on the difficulty that so many researchers face in gaining access to state records, he remarks, "Any attempt to examine politically institutionalised power at close quarters is, in short, liable to bring to light the fact that an integral element of such power is the quite straightforward ability to withhold information, deny observation, and dictate the terms of knowledge"³. Abrams' point is not so much that the various trappings of state power work diligently to protect secret information vital to national security, but rather that they serve to develop the illusion that something truly critical to state security lies underneath the veil of official secrecy. In other words, their main purpose is to forge the veil itself.

Abrams' observation describes my own research experience, which has been hampered by any number of 'official' barriers, including impenetrable bureaucratic processes, visa woes, subtle and not-so-subtle obstructions by archival and other officials, paper-shuffling games in regional and national archives (where the physical location of things as basic as land records are mysteries), and 'official' inquiries. These complications are linked to my research topic's 'sensitivity', a vague and plastic term that implies, without directly identifying, threats to national security. From the outside looking in, the enclaves remain on the periphery of understanding: sensitive spaces that emerge for most Bangladeshis as unresolved questions, symbols of an incomplete Partition, and ongoing conflict with their larger neighbour. Indeed, upon describing my research to people living in Dhaka, many say, "Ah, so you work on security issues". The notion of these sensitive areas as simultaneously security issues and tenuous parts of the nation raises disturbing questions both about those living within them (and their status as citizens of Bangladesh), and about those seeking to learn more about them.

When I first began work in the National Archives in Dhaka, I was assured by one of the head archivists that I was unlikely to find anything of use there or anywhere else on the *chitmahols*. When I asked why not, he replied, "Because they are very... *sensitive* areas". "Sensitive" areas, of course, are abnormal, or exceptional, in their difference from 'everywhere else'. Yet this term, which had little meaning to me at the beginning of my research, quickly began to take shape when I pursued permission to photocopy documents from the same archivist. "How many pages do you need to copy?" he asked me. I told him that I wanted to copy perhaps as many as 100-200 pages that day. "Oh well, that's a problem. You are only allowed to copy 20 pages per day". Frustrated to hear this unwritten and seemingly arbitrary rule, I asked for clarification on archival procedures. The archivist told me, "You see, we always try to help foreign researchers. But, you do research on a *sensitive* topic. I am an archivist, but a citizen of Bangladesh first. I cannot provide you with access to anything that would threaten my country's security". When I countered that records of post-Partition border incidents did not seem "sensitive", he merely shrugged and said, "They are border areas". Frustrated by this circular logic, where border areas are

"sensitive" simply because they are border areas, I again asked about additional restrictions. "There are no restrictions", he replied, "You may copy 20 pages a day. As long as they are not secret".

"How do I determine if a document is secret?" I asked.

Smiling, he said, "I will decide".

Sensitivity, here, serves both as a barrier to information and an organising logic that dictates what *should* and *should not* be seen. Yet, if the border is a hazy, "sensitive" zone seen from Dhaka, these same politics produce bizarre information loops, discontinuities and paths through which information is transformed in fascinating, albeit frequently disturbing, ways. Moving from the archive to the enclave itself reveals the processes and struggles involved in working and living within sensitive spaces.

One day, as my research assistant and I passed through the Tin Bigha Corridor, we spotted a BSF *Jawan* with whom we had chatted a few days earlier. He flagged us down and with a scowl and said, "Why did you lie to me?" Puzzled, we assured him that we had not. He replied, "You told me that you are here to do research, but our informants inside the enclave tell us that you are here to buy eight *bighas* of land". We did our best to reassure him of our intentions, but he angrily continued, "What is there to research here? Living by the border there are only thieves, smugglers, and dacoits". Refraining from asking him the obvious question of why, in that case, we would want to purchase land there, we proceeded into the enclave and continued with our work.

It is common for researchers to become the subject of local speculation and gossip. But this particular rumour, which spread through AGDH and infiltrated the BSF and BDR camps, continued to have alarming results. The following day a plainclothes BDR liaison arrived at our guesthouse in Patgram. He informed us that I, as a foreigner, was required to inform the BDR when venturing into sensitive border areas. My research assistant and I assured him that we weren't aware of this procedure, but that we had spoken to at least 40 different individual BDR members at various checkposts in and outside of AGDH. Indeed, several of them had already taken our names and, we presumed, communicated our information back through official channels. He took our particulars and left.

That night a fully uniformed contingent of BDR *Jawans* and the Patgram BDR commander showed up, accompanied by the plainclothes 'security official', to learn more. Alarmed at having a paramilitary force arrive in my room late at night, I tried to explain myself. After an intimidating few minutes, during which my research assistant was berated for so cavalierly going near the border with a foreigner, and menacingly lectured on the complications he would face if I were to die while with him, tension eased. We promised to keep them informed of our future movements, and they eventually left. It is not clear exactly what was behind their late-night visit. The BDR may have been responding to a direct inquiry by the BSF, satisfying themselves about our story and purposes, or both. In either case, the introduction of a foreign researcher into "sensitive" zones seems to have raised official questions, suspicions and skepticism.

My point in calling attention to these experiences is not to express shock or outrage at impositions on my research. Indeed, any foreign researcher working in a "sensitive" area might and should expect similar things. Rather, I wish to shed light on the dynamics of 'sensitivity' and 'security' that structure the lives of enclave inhabitants in oppressive ways. Abrams suggests "the state is not the reality that stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents us from seeing political reality as it is"⁴. As such, the politics of sensitivity in the archive serve to obfuscate and misdirect, veiling documents and data that might not even be there. Such documents may or may not contain sensitive information on a sensitive topic. The concept of sensitivity draws power from this very ambiguity. Its ties to equally vague concepts of national 'security', however, forge implicit links with more concrete notions of citizenship, national pride and job security. These in turn structure relationships between, among others, archivists and researchers. Sensitivity is a self-policing and structuring concept based not only on tangible security threats but equally, if not more, on the possibility that they may exist. The discourse of sensitivity, as such, also defines sensitive spaces as exceptional: places outside the bounds of 'standard' political practice, places occupied by criminals and others who threaten state security, and places where knowledge must be regulated and limited for the good of the state. Thus, if 'sensitivity' is part of a mask that prevents us from seeing political practice as it really is, it is also a process that marks and produces spaces in particular ways.

This marking has tangible effects not just on researchers but, even more so, on security forces and citizens at the border. My encounter with the BDR hints at a number of different relationships at play within sensitive spaces: the dynamics of information and rumour between the BSF and its 'informants', the protective yet watchful relationship between the BDR and enclave residents, the relationship between the BSF and BDR in their antagonistic but mutual task of policing the border, and, of course, the presence of a researcher with seemingly ambiguous intentions, into a *sensitive* border area. Yet, the question of why these areas are 'sensitive' remains vague. AGDH is populated largely by poor farmers and landless labourers. It is a politically active area and cross-border smuggling certainly occurs, but my research suggests that these activities take place in no higher volume than elsewhere. The lands themselves are fertile, but AGDH's overall contribution to Bangladesh's economy is miniscule.

The seemingly careless identification of all border residents as thieves and smugglers seems, on first inspection, to be a cruel generalisation and my alleged intent to purchase land a laughable misinterpretation. Yet they also point to the ways that politics of sensitivity produce a space where everything is uncertain and unstable. The generalisation of criminal activity in the enclaves creates economic realities that frequently make 'criminal' activities, such as illegally crossing a border to get to market, critical for survival. The processes of securing the enclave produce insecurity for enclave residents. The jurisdictional ambiguities of the enclave create areas where multiple individuals and organisations claim sovereign control of both spaces and resources to their own benefit, without providing collateral services to their constituents.

Securities and Insecurities

One of my informants, a woman who grew up outside the enclave and married a resident of AGDH shortly after the Tin Bigha Corridor opened in 1992, described life in AGDH as a constant feeling of instability and transience. "For the first few days of our marriage", she said, "I would feel sort of breathless during the night. A sense of insecurity. What would happen if we were not allowed to cross the Corridor anymore? I would stand in the yard of my in-laws' house and look eastward towards where my parents' house lies". This sense of *in* security stands in stark relation to the intense monitoring by two state security apparatuses. AGDH is surrounded by BSF camps and watchtowers. This panoptic observation is punctuated by the heavily militarised passage into and out of AGDH through the Corridor, which involves crossing the paths of two BSF camps, two BDR checkposts, and an additional two BDR camps (see figure 2).

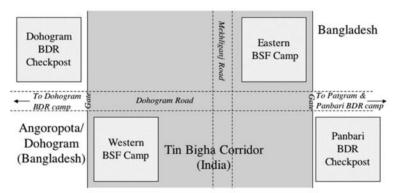


Figure 2: Tin Bigha Corridor (not to scale)

Rather than routinising and normalising life for AGDH residents, this attention and surveillance, combined with the border politics of the enclave, produces new sets of ambiguities at the same time that it allows various forms of spatial exploitation and corruption. Over the past 60 years, this has made cattle rustling (across the border in both directions), raids and thefts of property, kidnapping, random arrests, harassment by BSF officials, and forcible subscriptions during Hindu holidays and festivals everyday realities for AGDH residents.⁵ Yet it would be a mistake to understand such complications as simply coming from outside in. Rather, the complexities of these forms of spatial exploitation are always bound up with internal politics and individual strategies and tactics. During the summer of 2006, for example, the BSF announced that they were placing a 10-cow ceiling on the number of cattle that could be taken out of the enclave on *haat* (market) days. In a Union Parishad of approximately 16,000 people, many of whom possess few assets beyond their cattle, this placed a severe imposition on enclave residents' ability to raise cash to cover land purchases, dowries, production shortfalls or various other forms of asset shocks.

The BSF's stated reason for introducing such measures was to combat cattle smuggling. There is some truth to the claim that AGDH served as a conduit for cattle from India to Bangladesh. These cattle are illegally brought across the border both for use in agriculture and for slaughter. Many residents told me that it was (or had been) common practice for Indians from surrounding areas to enter AGDH with their cattle, strike an arrangement with a local broker, and wait for the broker to return with proceeds from sales. Indeed, particularly before the opening of the Corridor, such petty smuggling was a common and critical livelihood strategy for enclave residents. This profitable cattle trade became a key method for local elites to acquire wealth, and raised money for political campaigns. Indeed, the BSF's 10-cow ceiling was in direct response to a sharp increase in cattle passages. During the previous Union Parishad administration from 1997-2002, I was told that BSF records showed 7,000-8,000 cows passing through the Corridor. During the first three years of the current administration, however, as many as 18,000 were recorded.

If the BSF's strategy was to cut down on smuggling, their ceiling also served to centralise and enhance corrupt practices that paradoxically decrease the security of many AGDH residents. In fact, this particular exercise of sovereignty served not only to prevent residents from accessing markets to sell critical goods, it also placed the responsibility for deciding *who* could take cattle to market in the hands of the local political establishment, the individuals most accused of causing the ceiling in the first place. The cattle ceiling, as such, has created another layer of corruption, nepotism and favouritism, and afforded new powers to individuals who both create and exploit AGDH's 'exceptional' status.

Recent studies of sovereignty draw inspiration from political theorist Carl Schmitt's famous dictum that the "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"⁶. As Schmitt argues, "What characterises an exception is principally unlimited authority, which means the suspension of the entire existing order. In such a situation it is clear that the state remains, whereas law recedes. Because the exception is different from anarchy and chaos, order in the juristic sense still prevails even if it is not of the ordinary kind". Drawing on Abrams, one might ask what, indeed, constitutes order of an "ordinary" kind. However, the processes of sensitivity that I argue produce exceptionality in AGDH do facilitate confused yet rigid practices of ordering and control. Indeed, residents of a sensitive space seem to face an exceptional amount of ordering. This exceptionality in many ways mirrors Giorgio Agamben's now famous articulation of the exception as simultaneously forcibly included and excluded from political and social order – as that which "cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already a part "8. The ambiguity that emerges in sensitive spaces extends beyond the circumscription of access to knowledge. It both unsettles and regiments life within and around these spaces in a variety of ways, marking residents as outside the bounds of "ordinary" legal regimes, yet within a rigid system of observation and control.

Yet, what makes the sensitive space of AGDH so fraught, I suggest, is not a single "sovereign" exclusion, but rather the multiple complications and ambiguities of sovereignty

that are especially prevalent in such zones. While Schmitt, Agamben and those who draw on their work often think of the "sovereign" and his decision as singular, much of the complication of life in AGDH stems from the fact that its residents are the subject of multiple sovereigns – the BSF, the BDR, conservative religious institutions, rigidly patriarchal family structures, the local Union Council, the Thana and district level administrations, various different NGOs operating and not operating within AGDH, the civil administrations of both India and Bangladesh, and more. These sovereignties overlap in uneven and constantly shifting ways. What is notable about AGDH, then, is not a single sovereign power that marks it as exceptional, but rather a discourse of sensitivity that masks the fragmented and multiple individuals and organisations that rely on the ambiguities of rule in AGDH for personal, political, and organisational gain. There is no such thing as a unified 'state' at work within or on the boundaries of AGDH. Rather, there is what Abrams would refer to as a state system: loosely affiliated regulatory bodies, working with more or less communication, cooperation, and antagonism, to incompletely and unevenly administer this troublesomely sensitive area.

Despite the often heavy-handed forms of regulation and ordering, there remains a marked shortage of services that could improve the lives of individuals living in AGDH. Most residents complain of a lack of jobs and reliable political representation. Government relief programmes are prevalent, but rife with notorious corruption. There is a police investigative unit in AGDH, but it does little to serve the immediate needs of residents. Indeed, one informant quipped, "At times of [border] tension, girls will cross [the Tin Bigha] wearing police uniforms and the police will cross wearing *saris*". Residents often look to the BDR to address their problems and, indeed, most report that since the BDR entered the enclave in 1995, harassment by Indians and Indian officials has decreased markedly. Still, the BDR is limited in their ability to help residents by their mandate to work/negotiate with the BSF and their lack of jurisdiction in matters pertaining to the day-to-day lives of residents. At best, they play a mediating role.

This is particularly critical in the case of health care. The lack of facilities inside the enclave pose serious problems in the cases of medical emergencies that take place during the night, when the Corridor is closed, making the enclaves a particularly dangerous place for pregnant women and young children. A BDR officer in charge of handling frequent local negotiations with the BSF highlighted this issue: "Yesterday morning, just after the morning prayer [before dawn], my sentry knocked at my door to inform me that there was a critical patient with a baby who needed to go to Patgram. I ordered two *Jawans* to take her up to Tin Bigha and make a request to the BSF. They allowed her to pass. These sorts of necessities frequently occur and we have to play our part. The problem happens during the night. If it is 9 pm or later, the BSF has many formalities. They call here and there to their company headquarters or somewhere else. And these processes swallow one hour or more of time, which is critical for a patient or someone in medical emergency or labour pain". Even after crossing the Corridor, it is still over an hour by cycle-rickshaw to the nearest medical facilities in Patgram. There are no formalised processes that guarantee this

passage. The decision to cross ultimately lies with the BSF. Speaking with bitterness, the officer continued, "They dilly-dally and sometimes they just don't allow. They don't categorically deny passage because they may be condemned for violating international law. But they pretend to talk to other authorities, and after some time come out suggesting, 'Our company commander isn't available now, so we can't allow you..."

The uncertainties of life are further compounded by constant rumours about what will and will not happen with the precarious status of AGDH as a whole. While most agree that life has become more stable since the opening of the Corridor, residents constantly worry and hope for changes in status of the Tin Bigha. As a farmer told me, "We get everything like other people – the sun, rain, air. Still we cannot move like others. This Corridor is our main problem. It opens at 6:30 am and closes at 6:30 pm. Those who live in Dahagram are like chickens in a cage when the gate closes... The *chitmahol* is a poor area. There is uncertainty, always. What will happen and what will not? We are always occupied with the thought of how to live. We have no time to chat".

Though my informant's comment was meant to illustrate the immediacy of uncertainty in AGDH, and also to convey a particular message to a researcher of whose intentions he was not quite convinced, it is untrue that residents have no time to chat. Indeed, the outcomes of various different changes in power dynamics within and around the enclave, and speculation on their implications for those living there, is the central topic of discussion for tea-stall customers in AGDH. Currently a new rumour, linked to a series of recent meetings held in the Tin Bigha Corridor, is circulating throughout AGDH. After 15 years of opening the Tin Bigha for only part of the day, the BSF and BDR, this rumour claims, are negotiating to finally open the Corridor around the clock. Whether or not this rumour proves true, it is the latest stage in the ongoing ambiguous debate over sovereignty and sovereign control in this exceptional space. While a mood of cautious optimism can be felt in the enclave, many remain sceptical.

Sensitivity in AGDH is inexorably bound up in issues of security and insecurity, hope and fear, sovereignty and control. Ambiguity permeates everything about the enclave, from its internal political workings to its very status as a part of Bangladesh. The politics of sensitivity at play in the enclaves both constitute and are constituted by this ambiguity. The notion of "sensitive" areas regulates knowledge of and about AGDH and governs the lives, actions, and aspirations of its residents. At the same time, sensitivity complicates and facilitates the multiple overlapping of sovereignty and jurisdiction both within and linked to the enclave as a whole. As one of my informants put it, "AGDH folks are always in tension. They are concerned about what will happen next. Though maybe nothing will happen, in fact, but this sense of insecurity is really suffocating". The multiple ways that AGDH and its residents are marked as exceptions to normal political rule constitute the essence of this politics of sensitivity.

Notes

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- 2. Source: http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MP_0109.GIF
- 3. Philip Abrams. "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State". In *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1(1), pp. 58-88, at 62 (1988).
- 4. Ibid., p. 82.
- These complications did not stop altogether with the opening of the Corridor. However, the entry of the BDR into AGDH provided new formal processes for addressing and adjudicating complaints.
- Carl Schmitt [1922]. Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty. Trans. George Schwab (University of Chicago Press, 2005, Chicago), p. 5.
- 7. Ibid., p. 12.
- 8. Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.* Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998, Stanford), p. 25. Italics in original.

At That Insurmountable Border

SUCHARITA SENGUPTA

I.

The first time I saw the Wagah border was from the other side, on my first visit to Pakistan in 2005, for the Fourth Regional Dialogue on Peace and Youth Cooperation, organised by Bargad, an NGO based in Gujranwala in Pakistani Punjab. We drove in our friend's car from Lahore, along the canal that runs through the city. Huge mango trees shaded the roads, while young men jumped into the water to avoid the August heat. On the outskirts of the opulent modern city were villages. The roads were more potholes, less road. It was all too familiar. *Thelas* (handcarts) with succulent fruit and vegetables lined the road. We stopped to buy a few guavas, and munched on these till we reached 'Wagha', as the Pakistanis spell it. On either side of the road to India lay lush green fields. Tall crops swayed in the breeze. We parked the car and made ourselves at home in a *dhaba* (small eatery) selling tea, cold drinks and confections.

Of the two Indians and two Pakistanis who formed our group, it was easy to identify who was who from our clothes. Wearing jeans, Yours Truly and Male Colleague stood out like sore thumbs among *salwar-kameez* and *dupattas*. At the *dhaba* we picked up a mango drink, and one couldn't have told it from the 'Indian' Maaza or Slice, had the 'Pakistani' bottle not read Shezan.

The shopkeeper asked us which cities we belonged to, and we obliged with the requisite information.

"I'm from Chandigarh, it's the capital of..." I ventured. "Oh yes", he shot back. "I know. I watched the cricket match at Mohali. Bought a lot of *juttis* (leather footwear) and clothes". It was almost shocking that a *dhaba* owner in Pakistan would take the pains of coming to India for a cricket match. I'd thought only rich people did so. "I come from Dehradun", said my colleague. "I had relatives there", piped in a buddy of the shopkeeper's, who ran the neighbouring shop. We meandered over the subcontinent, each of us locating our pre-Partition history and connection somewhere on the other side. Lahore, Jalandhar, Kanpur, Multan, Peshawar, Taxila, Mumbai.

By this time we'd helped ourselves to tea as well, and had settled comfortably on the rickety benches, each mulling over our own thoughts.

"Beat that", my colleague grinned. "We walk ten minutes flat from here and we're back. Hassle-free." I could only give a weak smile, inwardly cringing at the memories of begging for a visa at the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi.

II.

The visit clearance that had come at the eleventh hour was, as I later discovered, the norm for India-Pakistan visits. To get the stamps on our passports, we had to carry a letter from the Interior Ministry of Pakistan. Our hosts in Pakistan were faxing the letter, and we lied to the fax machine operator – we told him we were to receive a fax from Bangladesh. Male Colleague whispered, "What if he finds out it is Pakistan, and refuses to receive the letter?"

I found it surprising that my colleague, who had been to Pakistan the previous year for the third round of the conference, should be so nervous. He had gone as part of a larger group, and the formalities had been taken care of by some influential journalists and publishers in Delhi. This time round there were only two of us, and we both were utterly lost with regard to the paperwork. To top it all, there was a huge chance that the clearance letter may not have come through from the Pakistani ministry at all.

My colleague's agitation was infectious. As he paced furiously on the gravel near the fax booth, I became a little irritated. By this time we had started snapping at each other. When I couldn't take the tension any more, I walked into an adjoining McDonald's in the hope that a burger would take my mind off this situation. After waiting for an hour, we sent text messages to our hosts in Pakistan. They replied that we should be receiving the letter anytime. We finally received it after waiting for another 90 minutes. Even as we heaved a sigh of relief, the fax-machine operator gave us a suspicious glance, remarking, "Yeh toh Pakistan se hai (But this is from Pakistan)". Before he could say any more, we quickly thrust money in his hands and moved off.

At 5 am the next morning we made our way to the High Commission to queue up at the visa counter. Long before us, people from distant villages across India had been waiting, sleeping on the footpath outside the embassy. Almost all belonged to poor Muslim families, with a couple of middle-class exceptions. All had relatives across the border, and some had not met their kin since 1947. They would undertake this pilgrimage to Delhi almost every year, collecting their hard-earned rupees, buying train tickets to the capital and back in the hope of getting that stamp, only to spend the rest of their savings on the long journey to Pakistan. It was almost a *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) of another kind. A few individuals had received wedding invitations from across the border and wanted to attend the celebrations; but most were there simply because they were longing to meet a relative married into a Pakistani family.

We immediately saw the chasm of class difference between the two of us and our compatriots. Everything pointed towards their helplessness and to our position of advantage. While we filled up our visa forms ourselves, they were at the mercy of the typists and touts manning makeshift desks outside the embassy walls. While we could negotiate the price for typing services, they had to pay whatever was demanded. Servile to us, the typists and touts were taking the liberty of shouting and misbehaving with the others. Male Colleague and I got into a discussion, pitying the souls who were being cheated right in front of our eyes. We were frequently using the words 'us' and 'them'. I realised that my colleague, an upper-class Muslim without any roots or relatives across the border, had very little in common with the other visa applicants, apart from religion.

The visa counters were yet to open, so we began talking to the people around us. A lady who had spread her mat on the footpath invited me to sit with her. As we got talking, I discovered that she had come all the way from her village in Gujarat. There was finality in her voice. "I have been praying, and I know this time I will get the visa..." She wanted to meet her sister who lived in a village across the border. Like the other unprivileged applicants, she hoped that her name would be among those called over a microphone through a small hole in the high walls.

Soon the announcements began in earnest. Each gravelly proclamation was accompanied by a whoop of joy or happy tears for some, and silent disappointment for others. Yet, those whom Chance had spurned joined in the happiness of those chosen by Luck. My lady from Gujarat did not get the visa.

Our turn at the 'Business Visa' counter came, and the Visa Officer chose to talk to me rather than to Male Colleague. He asked me whether I could speak Punjabi, being born in Ludhiana. I couldn't – not fluently, anyway – but at that critical hour all the broken Punjabi I had marshalled in my lifetime came tumbling out. For 45 minutes I told the gentleman about my family, the weather, my studies, the fertile lands and the jovial spirit of the Punjab, before he deigned to thump a stamp on the passports.

III.

The August sun was setting at Wagha/Wagah, and the air had begun to cool. Sarmad, our hostess Sabiha's brother and one of the key organisers of the conference, was pacing up and down the border post, frantically calling up his contacts in the Pakistan Army to somehow get permission for us to set foot on No Man's Land. This was a little strip of road, no longer than perhaps a kilometre, between the terrains of the two countries. There was a huge gate, some lookout structures and a customs post. Apart from these markers of the state, there were lush green fields on either side. From the *dhaba* where we stood buying refreshments, we couldn't see any barbed wire.

Observing the contiguity of the land, I mused at the stupidity of it all – history, politics, war... I also pragmatically considered that the farmers in that area must suffer the most,

from the continual policing and surveillance. Meanwhile, after several phone calls we understood that though Sarmad was well connected, his influence would regrettably not work in the stretch of limbo between the two countries.

There we were, the Indians and Pakistanis, making friends with each other and dreaming of hanging out together like any other set of buddies. The difficulty of doing something as simple as meeting over a meal, as friends do, made the four of us come up with bizarre ideas. Amid loud laughter that arose mostly from exasperation, Sidra suggested that we all come down to Wagha/Wagah, either side, during the change of guards, sit on the stands and wave to each other. Sarmad reasoned that it would be easier to see each other that way, at the border, rather than taking the trouble of travelling to each other's territories. And we could talk via SMS, @ Rs 5/- per message. Cold water was poured over this brilliant idea when we realised that mobile jammers are installed at the border. We laughed, at yet another subversive plan foiled. Earlier fantasies of a reunion had included dismantling the border, a la Berlin Wall.

A tall, strapping Pakistan Ranger stood guarding the entrance to the strip of No Man's Land. A stray dog happily walked through. We wondered if he had the visa and permission to cross on foot. We shamelessly pleaded with the Ranger. "Bas, paanch kadam andar (Just five steps inside)..." He smiled and nodded his refusal. We contented ourselves with getting photographs taken with him, and drove back to the city.



Image: Google Earth, 2005

My visit to the border from the Pakistan side made me recall the disappointing flight into Pakistan ten days earlier. I had really wanted to go by bus, but we had received our visas so late that the only option left was to take a flight to Lahore. By the time we boarded the aircraft, swallowed the bland, cardboard-dry Indian Airlines food and began sipping horrible watery coffee, the plane was landing at the Allama Iqbal International Airport, Lahore.

All this took a grand total of 35 minutes.

"Phooey", I scoffed, "never felt like we crossed a border. And why does our *domestic* airline fly there?"

IV.

In 2006, Bargad again invited the same delegates to Pakistan for the Fifth Regional Dialogue, mostly to maintain a sense of continuity. We were informed that we would be joined by three other delegates from Mumbai, who were to arrive directly in Karachi, the venue of the conference. For this second visit we booked seats on the Sada-e-Sarhad, the India-Pakistan bus service, well in advance.

At 3 am, braving the dark, we set off for Delhi's Ambedkar Terminus from where the bus departs. By 4 am, a sleepy crowd of passengers started streaming in. After depositing luggage for security checks, all passengers were ushered into a cramped room with uncomfortable seats. A television was tuned to a news channel. The small children present grew impatient and began playing among themselves, or wailed, or slept in their parents' laps. There were fewer seats than people, and the men chose to take turns standing to allow women and children to sit. Once again, amid the traditionally or *burqa*-clad passengers, my colleague and I were conspicuous in our T-shirts and track-bottoms.

Right before the departure at 6.30 am, the police officers manning the terminal growled at all the passengers to use the washroom, since the bus only had designated stops after longish periods. The golden Volvo had large comfortable seats, and was well airconditioned. We were handed bottles of water and newspapers before the bus began speeding towards Amritsar, accompanied by police jeeps sounding alarms of the kind one hears only when the PM's cavalcade is passing. The Z-Class security made me feel unusually smug, each time I looked at the poor unsuspecting suckers who were unceremoniously thrown off the road to make way for us.

I now saw the Wagah/Wagha border for the first time from India. There was a customs post, a few lookout structures and a huge gate. On either side were lush green fields. Unlike its counterpart, the Indian side of the border passage was hemmed with well-manicured flowerbeds. That, of course, did not take away one bit from the stringent customs checks, but perhaps because we were still in our own country, there was a sense of comfort.

That relaxed feeling was soon to get badly shaken, during the customs checks. The checking procedure made me nervous. I was not carrying any contraband, but felt nervous

as hell. What if they stop us here? What if they are speculating as to why two students are visiting the neighbouring country again?

It took a long time. On the other side of the passport-checking counter were computers that, to my utter shock, had a full e-dossier on each of us! For a moment I was simply stunned. All this while, they had kept an eye on us...! The polite men on duty, casually but neatly dressed, waving everyone through the ritual of customs clearance, were not clerks or ushers but intelligence agents, according to my colleague.

I squirmed in my seat and feverishly scoured my memory for anything I had done that might arouse their suspicion. What about my mild involvement in student politics at my predominantly left-wing university? Did they know that I had once cheated in a school exam? Did they know about my family? And worst of all, in the year between this and the earlier visit, had they intercepted the calls and text messages we had exchanged with our friends in Lahore?

Every irrational fear I could possibly entertain came rushing into my mind at that moment, and it took a few seconds to force them aside.

There were perhaps three Indians on the bus. Ours fears were belied once we were ushered in through customs in five minutes. The officials spent the rest of the three-and-a-half hours checking passengers from Pakistan. We sat on the benches outside, staring at the



Image: Google Earth, 2005

dogs, birds, fields, and coolies in electric-blue shirts. This is the first time I had seen coolies wearing this colour. At railway stations in India, without exception they all wear red. A man was selling cold drinks stuffed in a steel bucket, with good quantities of water and ice to keep the bottles cold, and a string of *bhujia* packets hanging from his arm. He offered us *lassi*, freshly made at the village nearby. Bored as we were, we took up offer with alacrity while waiting for our co-passengers. A white couple sauntered in from the Pakistan side on foot, wearing biking gear and pushing their machines. As if they were cycling into Delhi from Gurgaon.

The Indians, Pakistanis and coolies let out wry laughter. "As always, these *goras* (white foreigners) are free to come and go, and WE have to beg for visas..."

As we passed the political border, our Pakistani co-passengers heaved a sigh of relief at being able to re-enter their country – and we stiffened a bit. But the checks on the other side were quick, and there was high tea laid out. It was basic – untoasted sliced bread, butter, jam and eggs, with biscuits, tea and coffee. But it looked great after the three hours we had spent traversing a distance that takes just two minutes to actually negotiate.

٧.

A huge consignment of heroin was impounded a week later, at the same spot, on our way back from Lahore.

Dawn had come with a heavy downpour. Wet and chilled to the bone, the passengers made it to the bus depot at Gulbarg, Lahore. The depot was actually a large, drab and rundown house in a posh locality, surrounded by equally large but far more aesthetically decorated mansions. In the huge porch stood the Indian Volvo painted gold, the Sada-e-Sarhad, cheek-by-jowl with a parrot-green Pakistani bus of Chinese make. While passengers made vain attempts to dry themselves off, the baggage checks took place. Two men sitting behind two wooden tables asked us to open our suitcases and unzip our bags. They stuffed their hands into the luggage, felt around, pulled their arms out and thundered, "Okay, but open the CDs you're carrying back". Then, giving us sinister sidelong glances, they checked the CDs.

We would perhaps have got away with guns that day, but CDs? No way! Satisfied that we were only carrying pirated foreign films and not pornography, they let us go. The dark clouds cleared up and the bus made its way out of town, through the vibrant city centre, towards the border.

We had balked at the superfast manual checks at the Pakistani post that is housed in what looks like a colonial outhouse for a petty officer, the kind you find all over India. No X-ray machines, only a grim Ranger ploughing through my neatly packed luggage. I felt queasy at the thought of his hands shuffling my undergarments. However, I had no choice but to let it pass.

We got the Exit stamps on our passports and boarded the bus. And then, just as we had all settled in, we were all asked to get down.

It was a frightening moment. Our luggage was being whisked out and rechecked. I asked a few ladies what the commotion was about. My colleague answered instead: "Someone is smuggling drugs". This 'someone' had been caught, then stripped and searched in an adjoining room. The passenger in the seat next to him was also questioned and searched, but let off after being found innocent. I'd begun sweating by now, so it was a relief to go back into the bus. I obsessively kept thinking: what if the drugs had been hidden in our luggage...?

As we boarded, a jeep swished into the premises. A Pakistani intelligence officer got out, and was told, "Heroin khadi hai, sahib, ek crore ki (The heroin/e worth one crore awaits you, sir)". And all the men started guffawing. Overhearing them, safely inside the bus I began guffawing too.

This must be routine for them.

We crossed over, and within a minute my body felt free. The bus slowly rolled into India, divided from Pakistan by a kilometre, two minutes and many million blocked hearts and minds on either side...

Perfect balance, perfect sum of violence.

I'd enjoyed my time spent with our neighbours, who, after two visits and innumerable text messages, e-mails and phone calls, and some comfortable backslapping and cordial invective, could be legitimately called friends. But now I finally felt free to breathe in my *own* country, though the air was the same I had breathed in Pakistan.

I'd been careful of every movement just a kilometre away – how I dressed, how I spoke, my conduct. It was more than a little suffocating. So it was a joy to be back. Setting foot, or rather, tyres, on *my* soil, I stretched on my seat and looked with happiness at the expanse of fields. At customs, the officer was amused at my loot of *kajal* (collyrium) and Shan and National *masalas* (spices). Again we were let off in five minutes, while the Pakistani passengers were searched for almost two hours. Cute Labrador sniffer dogs were going over the guests' luggage. There were some children and several old people. And there was some mistake in the passports of one particular family. They looked harried.

What if I had been in their position?

In fact, I had been, on my first visit, circa 2005.

We had flown in to Lahore, and at the disembarkation counter at the airport, the official discovered that the year 2004, instead of 2005, had been stamped on my passport. I was immediately bombarded with looks of suspicion and doubt; and of course, I froze like the Arctic icecap. Funny, because my ears were hot, and flaming red. Terrifying thoughts collided in my head like frenzied atoms. The police will be called in, I shall be arrested, I shall be deported, I shall be sent back home on the next plane... Do they think I am a spy? Do I *look* like a spy in my black jeans and pink top? The tears were ready to fall, and a lump like a tumour had formed in the throat. The numbness was of a quality I had never experienced before. The mind had stopped working altogether. Male Colleague immediately went pale too.

It must have been divine intervention that the officer asked for the original visa form. The date on it was 2005, and he immediately acknowledged the error made at the Pakistan High Commission. Not without a reprimand, though. His soft but firm voice barked out, "You may proceed, but you ought to have checked. What if this got you into trouble?"

For the next half hour, I stayed in a kind of rigor from the experience. The memories of that time flooded in as I saw the weary and hapless elderly gentleman at the Wagha/Wagah post. He may have stood for hours, for days, even months, at the Indian High Commission in Pakistan. What if this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is squandered because of a clerical error? That is how high the stakes are.

It must have been an excruciating two hours, but eventually the Pakistani passengers were allowed to enter India.

VI.

The following year, 2007, our hosts tried to arrange a third visit. We'd sent in the paperwork to fly to Karachi, where we'd spent about three days on the second visit. Then the Samjhauta Express bomb blasts happened on 6 March near Panipat, and our chances of travelling to Pakistan vanished with the smoke from the detonations. Two days later, our hosts confirmed the same via email.

We were disappointed, but more than that, irritated – like when you've planned to meet up with your gang of close friends, and that very day your parents happen to invite a relative home. For the first time, we weren't hinging our disappointment on the politics between the two countries or the issues plaguing them. The matter of meeting one another had become intensely personal.

We had become accustomed to the annual visits to our friends in Pakistan. It was unbelievable, the things we'd done there – from eating ice cream at a small parlour in Karachi, to attending posh parties in Lahore. We also got our 15 seconds of fame in the thick of all the excitement – appearances on two television shows. This being a first for us was an exciting matter, and added to that was the fact that we would never have achieved this celebrity status in India.

Exaggeratedly nervous about our being asked uncomfortable questions, answering in a politically insensitive way, and being punished or deported, Sabiha's sister Salma, a dedicated Bargad hand, conspired with us to concoct answers in case any awkward queries were put to us from the eager anchor. We guffawed through the make-up sessions that seemed to be mandatory for any studio guest, making it hard for the make-up man to do his job. On the first show, the questions were coming in to us from Dubai. We couldn't understand them fully, partly because of poor audio quality and partly because they were framed in chaste Urdu. Our inability threatened to destroy the live programme. By the second question, we began hearing some English words, took wild guesses, and answered. Among all the garbled replies we offered that evening, Male Colleague's replies were unsurpassed. In a valiant effort to avoid using English he chose to speak Sanskritised Hindi,

using words such as "prajatantra" and "loktantra" (synonyms for democracy), confounding the anchor and disturbing the thrust of the show.

Perhaps our best interactions with Pakistanis had involved making jokes about each other's nations and their peculiarities through some of the more boring sessions of the conference we'd gone to attend. The class factor came into play, with the more urbane Pakistanis bonding with the metropolitan Indians, and the small-town Pakistani citizens forming their own groups.

Back in India, we missed Sarmad's wit, Noor's mischief, Abrar's wonderment, Sidra's passion for Patiala *salwars*, seven-month-old Nawwal's antics, the precocity of Asma the maidservant, Sabiha's grit, Salma's friendship and lqbal's wisdom. We missed answering questions about Balaji Telefilms' 'K' serials, discussing Indian and Pakistani politics, cricket and cinema. Even now, we laugh about the fact that on 14 August, Pakistan's Independence Day, our neighbours celebrate by cutting a cake and then sitting down to play *antakshari*, singing Hindi film songs.

So much for borders!

We've stayed in touch, mostly over email. The silliness of the transnational banter has been raised to mutually comfortable levels. As the number of ethnic and nationality jokes and jibes increase, we're opening up more to each other.

Every day, when our conversations include politically incorrect things about our respective governments and intelligence agencies, we fervently hope that Big Brother isn't watching us.

Noor yearns to visit Goa. He plans to kidnap Male Colleague and me, take us there, and enjoy hanging out till the police catch up with him. He has no qualms about an indefinite stay in an Indian jail thereafter.

Every day, via the internet, we are breaking the writ that makes us each other's enemies. We've found ways to do that.

Every day we are crossing and re-crossing that insurmountable border.

Noor, as always, has the last word: << If they don't let us meet each other here, we can always meet up in London >>

Wagah/Wagha: India Meets Pakistan Film Stills from *A Season Outside*

Amar Kanwar







Transit Visa: An Essay on Code

A.J. SOOD

[I]n the twenty-first century, the border is not just a line on the earth anymore. It's so much more than that. It's about status. It's about opportunity... the border is everywhere. The border... is in your mind.¹

This is an essay about a minor calamity that sometimes confronts passengers/travellers undertaking global journeys. This is an essay about getting caught in loopholes. This is an essay about rule and exception, about text, narrative and error, and reading the signs.

The words of this essay's epigraph are spoken by Guy Swift, a PR whizkid in Hari Kunzru's novel *Transmission* (2004) and the genius behind the European Border Authority's idea of Europe as an "exclusive", "upscale continent", "the world's VIP room". In a delicious twist of irony at the very end of the novel, after Swift finds himself stranded, thanks to a marauding virus, outside "Club Europa", excluded by the very walls he helped erect, 2 *Transmission* dissolves into a chaos of fragmented accounts, the textual deluge that follows in the wake of global disaster. In Kunzru's novel, then, disaster is rendered concrete at the end of a global narrative.

This essay reverses that fictive strategy, seeking to meld a coherent narrative from a multiplicity of accounts, from the proliferation of code.



Attempting Narrative in the Airport

We are no longer citizens with civic obligations, but passengers for whom all destinations are theoretically open... An easy camaraderie rules the departure lounges, along with the virtual abolition of nationality – whether we are Scots or Japanese is far less important than where we are going. I've long suspected that people are only truly happy and aware of a real purpose to their lives when they hand over their tickets at the check-in.³

The narrative begins in the imagined. Start with a passenger. Perhaps an exile, a refugee, a merchant, an artist, a student, a worker who calls home someplace half a world away, called to return urgently by a sickness, a festivity, a birth, a death, a wedding, an engagement, an interview, or two short weeks of annual vacation. Imagine the journey that has been braved many times – travelling miles/kilometres to an airport, waiting in multiple lines and lounges in order to be strapped into a pressurised cabin and delivered home. Consider the primary and secondary documentation that must be carried to prove eligibility to travel. Imagine the banality of waiting, imagine the handing over of tickets, imagine becoming aware, perhaps, in Ballard's words, of a "real purpose".

Finally, imagine the passenger being told that he or she cannot fly.

Leached of local colour and detail, emptied of nationality, race, sex, ethnicity, this fictive catastrophe still suggests the outline of a familiar story. The imagined passenger evokes a migrant, perhaps an immigrant, infected with third world origins. One preliminary lesson seems to be that the carefree cosmopolitan of Ballard's version and the tired travelling national of the third world do not co-exist in the same person. No matter how deep the third world traveller goes into the first, the passport can still incriminate.

To understand the nature of the transgression that closes off the passenger's possible destination, however, it becomes necessary to venture into the anti-narrative arena of code/space.

Code/Space

At its most fundamental, we define code to be an instruction or rule that has a single outcome determined by binary logic (yes/no).⁴

Geographers Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchin model aviation space, from the online purchase of a ticket, through the airport, and into the airplane, as 'code/space', i.e., space whose use and production is determined by code:

[C]ode and space are mutually constituted, wherein how the space is used and produced is predominantly mediated by code, and code and its data exist in order to produce the space and its attendant spatiality... [I]n code/space, code dominates the production of space.⁵

How precisely does narrative figure in code/space?

Consider the check-in line.

The Ceremony of Code

The check-in line is the first ceremony in code. To the passenger is assigned the work of waiting – in the airplane, at the gate, in the security line and at check-in. Wait here, the bold sign says, till your turn comes. Have your passport and travel documents ready for the desk agent.

Equally compelling is the subtext: Do not speak till you are spoken to. Be present, simultaneously alert and passive.

A game of trust-building, this waiting in airport and airspace, like the trust fall of corporate team-building exercises. Surrender one's agency, be caught and delivered. Wait for the call for your designation: "Next!"

Just as the airport has been called a non-place, the check-in desk agent may be counted as a non-person. In either case, function is definition. Eye contact is moot. Words are strictly optional. In rare cases, a nod may be offered, solely at the discretion of the desk agent.

At the counter, the passenger hands over for inspection the matrix of personhood, the proofs of identity and intent. The desk agent reads the code. The passenger's face is checked against the passport photo.

Believing this reading to be a confirmatory ceremony, with the outcome almost certain, not knowing the binary logic of code, the passenger waits to load the baggage of her journey onto the carousel.

The desk agent says, "Sorry, we cannot let you travel today".

The desk agent emerges from facelessness. This is when she becomes visible – the colour of her eyes gray, the color of her hair brown.

This is also when the passenger becomes *you*.

Mr Smith enters the airport and makes his way to the Swift Travel terminal. Along the way, he passes through standard terminals where long lines of travellers are queued at security checkpoints. To enter the Swift Travel terminal, Mr Smith walks down a long corridor. As he does, he undergoes multiple security checks – biological, biometric, radiological – conducted unobtrusively by systems imbedded in the corridor... His identity confirmed and his person deemed free of threat, Mr Smith reaches his gate... From the parking garage to his airplane seat, Mr Smith barely broke stride in his passage through the airport. Taking his complimentary drink from the flight attendant, Mr Smith raises a gratified toast to Swift Travel.⁷

Failing the Swift Travel of the future, perhaps you have a travelling companion to counsel you. Perhaps you are travelling alone to a family emergency. In either case, your use of British airport space requires a transit visa.

If you protest that your layover is no more than an hour, and that you have no plans to leave the airport, the desk agent will leaf through your passport to the US visa page and tap on the date. *Expired*.

If you argue that you are not trying to enter the United States, that you are trying to leave, she will say that she could have allowed you to pass through London's Heathrow airport even six months earlier when your US visa expiry was still within the six-month grace

period. As evidence, she will refer to a document on "Visa and Direct Airside Transit Visa (DATV) Nationals" and the exceptions contained therein.

If you try to read the fine print, try to find the loophole that proves her error, she will wait, purse-lipped, faceless, as if to say: emotion has no place in the pure ceremony of code.

There is only one way to defile the ceremony of which you, passenger, have already broken the rules. Only one way to disturb both the person and the function. Allege racial discrimination.

She will fetch her ethnically ambiguous check-in supervisor.

He will display the list of DATV countries – 48 in all, and 25% of all countries in the United Nations:

Afghanistan, Liberia, Albania, Macedonia, Algeria, Malawi, Angola, Moldova, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Belarus, Montenegro, Burma, Nepal, Burundi, Nigeria, Cameroon, Palestinian Authority, People's Republic of China, Pakistan, Colombia, Rwanda, Congo, Senegal, Democratic Republic of Serbia, Ecuador, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, Ethiopia (including documents issued by Eritrea), Sierra Leone, Gambia, Sudan, Ghana, Somalia, Guinea, Sri Lanka, Guinea-Bisau, Tanzania, India, Turkey, Iran, 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus', Iraq, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Vietnam, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Lebanon⁸

For your pains, he will book you on code/space, a flight two days later from an airport 330 kilometres and a ten-hour drive away. On your itinerary, hastily, he will scribble this URL: www.BritainUSA.com

You, passenger, embarrassed and undone by your errors, stranded in code/space, will need the following: an internet connection, access to a phone that does not need to be fed change, a ready usable credit card, a place to rest, and many hours to spare.

Read the rules in hypertext. Consider exemptions, and costs. Call travel agent, airline, and embassy. Anyone you know. Try not to get lost.





Terms and Conditions: We want you to know the details before purchasing your airline ticket...

6. The passenger is responsible for all travel documents and information, including but not limited to: Passports, Visas, Transit Visas, Immunizations required and/or recommended, Baggage limitations, State Department Warnings.9

Passports and Visas

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the correct travel documents for your journey. Entry and transit requirements are subject to change and you are advised to check the requirements with the Consulate or Embassy of all countries on your itinerary.¹⁰

Q. I need to travel quickly, but there are no appointments available. How can I get an expedited service?

A. The Consulate does not offer an expedited service. However you can apply through an independent courier service that does not require an appointment to submit an application on your behalf:11

An outsourced telephone enquiry service now handles all passport and visa enquiries made to British Government Offices (BGOs) in the US. This premium rate service (\$2.49 per minute) will be operated by our partners, ABTRAN, who aim to provide a professional and seamless service to our customers. This service complements the comprehensive information on visas for the UK and Overseas Territories already made available through this website. 12

In the crudely compressed space of acronym, ATV is code both for Action Television and Airside Transit Visa.





The Joker Flies to London

Earlier this week, Robert Coleman, 35, flew to London using his Joker ID card. Pictures of Coleman, standing in front of the Big Ben and 10 Downing Street, were posted in the forum of the popular Dutch blog Fok. However, on his way back he was forced to surrender his card to the authorities at Schiphol Airport. Coleman says he pulled the stunt to show that the regulations for passport photos are not watertight. He got his card by claiming he had to dress this way because of religious principles. He also managed to apply for a driver's licence picturing him with The Joker's white skin and dark hat.¹³

Coded Facts

A Federal District Court judge questioned the legality of State Department manuals that, apart from encouraging "special handling" of blacks, Arabs and others, provide a list of abbreviations to help sort applicants: "RK = rich kid, LP = looks poor, TP = talks poor, LR = looks rough, TC = take care". In the case in which the judge had provided his ruling, among the evidence submitted were rejected applications with notations like "Slimy-looking", "Wears jacket on shoulder w/earring", and "No way... poor, poor, poor, poor"¹⁴.

The following is a non-comprehensive list of states requiring airside transit visas: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States.

Travellers from the following countries are subjected to the airport transit visa requirement by all the above states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka.¹⁵

The IATA (International Air Transport Association)/Control Authorities Working Group (CAWG), members of which include the national carriers and immigration departments (sometimes supported by the civil aviation and border police) of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, provides these definitions in guidelines on streamlining ATV regimes:





Airside Transit Visa (ATV) means a document issued prior to arrival by a State that authorises citizens of certain nationalities to transit through the issuing State's territory en route to an international destination without leaving the Direct Transit Area

Direct Transit Area means the special area established in connection with an international airport, approved by the public authorities concerned and under their direct supervision, for accommodation of traffic that is pausing briefly in its passage through the State's territory. 16

Significantly, the IATA/CAWG issued these guidelines in August 2001, barely a month before the defining international disaster of this century. Also in August 2001, at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) along with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), noted with concern the dramatic spread of international visa and direct airside transit visa (DATV) regimes, cutting across traditional bilateral and sub-regional routes.¹⁷

Earlier, British Airways, in a memorandum on physical controls in UK ports of entry tabled before the House of Commons in April 2000, voiced dissatisfaction with the effect of the DATV regime, then restricted to 17 countries, on passengers transiting through London. 18 Even earlier, in February 1999, Mike O'Brien, then junior minister in the British Home Office, summed up the total number of DATVs granted during 1996 and 1997 as 23.200 and 29.000 respectively. 19

Viewed from the post-9/11 vantage point, after the debate was taken off the table, these discussions seem curiously prescient.²⁰ Like the coding of applicants on class and appearance in the State Department manual cited above, at stake is the control of the immigration flow, a matter of weeding out the undesirable, as Kunzru's Guy Swift might say. The DATV regime preceded Al Oaeda. By all indications, it will outlive Bin Laden and his progeny.





Accounts from Code/Space

Whose jurisdiction am I under when making a connection at a foreign airport?²¹

In code/space, meanwhile, the ripples multiply. Concealed in virtual space, dealing privately with the massive opacity of the system, each passenger confronts the possibility of expensive error. In the months and years following the implementation of newer, more comprehensive DATV regimes, before the exceptions are clearly defined and publicly disseminated, and before they are widely understood, informational chaos reigns. Bewilderment and contradictory accounts are defining symptoms.

Does an Indian passport holder need a 'Schengen' ATV to transit through Frankfurt en route from India to the US? No, not if s/he has a multiple-point entry visa to the US.

Does an Indian passport holder with an expired US entry visa need a 'Schengen' ATV to transit through Frankfurt en route from India to the US? Yes, but it is hardly ever checked.

In the multiplying accounts, and regurgitated jargon, each passenger must somehow find the rules applicable to his/her unique case. On online immigration discussion forums, strikingly most densely populated by Indian passport holders, the scenarios are rehashed, the same questions answered again and again, the answers often contradicting each other. On the website Rupnet.net, for instance, which offers "phone cards, fragrances, classifieds, astrology and \$5 web domains" in addition to immigration discussion forums, someone asks about travelling from Newark, New Jersey to Delhi via Paris on Air India without a visa but with visa authorisation. Multiple replies follow, often containing anecdotal advice.²²

Every so often, meanwhile, someone is travelling off the well-trodden path. Recognising the limitations of *desi* (indigenous) forums, this genus of traveller poses its questions on yahoolanswers.

Travelling Delhi-London-Lisbon or Islamabad-Paris-Oslo, there are fewer answers.

The set of rules that determine the code are thus an emergent category, inferred as much as understood through the unsettling chiaroscuro of passenger/migrant discourse. The fewest consolations, however, accrue to the realised catastrophe, the made mistake.





Yet these ghosts of frustrated journeys define the limits of conjecture. These are defining cases, where the code is rendered crystalline and visible, verifiable.

Someone's brother-in-law, for instance, an Indian citizen and American green card holder, lacking a transit visa, was denied passage from New York to India. Someone's aunt, American resident for 35 years, deprived of the right to fly without reference to visa guidelines, muddles the picture.²³

The errant would-be passenger, meanwhile, punished by the system, draws such personal conclusions as his/her case and temperament warrant. After the lodged complaint, after the damage control, after the re-booked itinerary, the personal rule often takes the form of private resolve to avoid such-and-such airline, such-and-such travel agent, and in extreme cases, such-and-such route.²⁴

While in many ways the most responsive to the forces of political economy that shape the code, the individual's boycott is also essentially a quixotic act, a symbolic tilting at the signifier of an ever-receding windmill. Minus a narrative, the account suffers for lack of generalising, communicative power. At best, it is the worst-case scenario, a cautionary tale for would-be passengers. At worst, it is hostage to the teller's idiosyncratic spelling, or punctuation, or delivery style, a moral/conclusion dangling in code/space.²⁵

Minus narrative, each question, each complaint, is locked into its own flight path. What might happen if the narrative was actually rendered, and not paradoxically present as an absence/lack?

Plane Passenger Tells Security Penis Pump Is Bomb

A passenger who rather ill-advisedly told security at Chicago's O'Hare Airport that part of his penis pump was a bomb faces possibly three years' jail on a felony/disorderly conduct rap, *The Chicago Sun-Times* reports.

Mardin Amin, 29, was en route to Turkey on 16 August with his dear old ma and two small children when a female security operative extracted a "small, black, squeezable





rubber object" from his backpack. Since he was standing next to his mum, Amin decided to whisper out of the corner of his mouth that it was a "pump". The guard misheard it as "bomb", with inevitable consequences.²⁶

Bold and Fine Print

The airport as text functions in bold visible print, a mapped and marked space of flows, built to facilitate directed mobility.

In the hyperlinked world,²⁷ on the other hand, getting lost is a legitimate option.

Code operates in fine print. In code/space, narrative dissolves into text, bits of information. It becomes the task of the reader, then, to rescue the narrative by decoding the text.

Simultaneously resistant to causality and hospitable to conclusion, the code offers the comfort of embedded rule. Do not fly airline X, avoid route Y. Ask the embassy. Obtain the transit visa in advance. For each individual case, from each account of error, a single, customised conclusion.

Narrative resists conclusion, offers no morals for easy scanning. Seeking to travel, it searches for points of connection, the synapses of the system where many lives touch. The most instructive narratives, like the most instructive accounts, end in disaster. Indeed, as Canadian writer Margaret Atwood shows in her story *Happy Endings*, to be at all interesting or instructive, the narrative must embrace disaster.²⁸

How then may the reader/rescuer construct an empowering narrative from the jetsam, the wreckage of a failed flight?

The touchstone is a theme, the strand that unites disparate accounts.

Consider the following newspaper report:

On a Monarch Airlines flight from Malaga to Manchester in August 2006, two men were removed, according to passenger accounts, for "acting a bit strange", for





moving from the front of the queue to the back, and most of all, for speaking Arabic. In the aftermath of the "Chinese Whispers", as one passenger described the floating accounts that followed this "strange behaviour", some passengers refused to board the flight, and others "deplaned". Spanish police subsequently boarded the plane, took the men's passports and removed them from the aircraft. They were questioned for several hours but later released.²⁹

Another report, this time closer to home, uncannily dating to the same month:

Ten Indian nationals, all men, all Muslim, were removed from Northwest Airline's Amsterdam-Mumbai NW-0042 flight, held for interrogation for several days by Dutch authorities, and finally released. Some passengers described the men as speaking Urdu; some with beards, and some in *salwar-kameez*... Nitin Patel of Boston, who sat behind the men, said... "I don't know how close we were, but my gut tells me these people wanted to hijack the airplane"30.

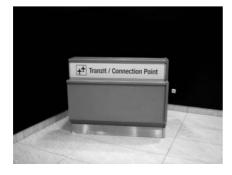
What connects the travellers in these reports with the ones stranded without a DATV, the ones that failed to pass through a security checkpoint? In this substratum, lies the seed of the narrative.

The difference between the passenger and the traveller is that acquiescence is not a requirement for the traveller. The traveller reads the fine print and knows where to plumb it for significance. The traveller is well informed on what questions to ask. The traveller can ask who wrote the code, and why. Perhaps even construct an anti-code, a counter-narrative.

Terminal Point

If flight paths are solitary, there is a clearing space for conversation in the train. The train narrative is a well-established tradition, from the stories of Tolstoy to Shama Futehally to Rohinton Mistry.

In second-class, third-class or first-class, body space is adjustable, a space of autonomy, self-defined, infinitely flexible. Adjustments are made, for a second, a third and





a fourth body. In code/space, on the other hand, personal room is a precisely calibrated thing, defined by armrests. You can come only so close, and go only so far.

In a departure lounge at Amsterdam's Schipol airport, a mother waits for her delayed flight. On the gray day, brightly orange-robed this mother, and very, very lost. Passengers come and go – girls of non-specific ethnicity wearing pink slacks; a *desi* family or two; blond-spiked young men – but the mother sits, with her arms crossed, sombre, and waiting, barely contained in her seat. This is her first time flying, all the way from Abuja, Nigeria, to Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

"Do you know it?" she asks, enunciating the foreign syllables with care; and it is difficult to say whether she refers to origin or destination. Her son is an engineer, a recent post-graduate from university. She is a mother travelling alone. Like yours might someday travel, in a new *salwaar-kameez*, seasoned, yet vulnerable, and ripe with motherly innocence.

All around the terminal there are clocks showing international time. But there is none that is close enough to indicate flight times. The mother asks you the local hour, and in turn, she offers an orange – juicy, and non-coded.

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A Strange Feeling of Familiarity

LAMIA JOREIGE



1. Beaufort Castle, South Lebanon (Still from A Journey, video, 41', 2006)

How many times have I wondered if 'this' was Israel or Lebanon? How was I to tell the difference?

When you don't see any Israeli settlements, now almost a trademark, on the landscape, the terrain looks exactly the same.

The first time a friend took me to the South Lebanese border was in 2000, after the Israelis withdrew from the South, or I shall say, after the South was liberated. We were on the road for a long time, and I was absorbed in our conversation when she suddenly stopped the car and said, "This is Israel". I was very shocked by the way she said it so naturally and without warning; shocked by the proximity and the banality of this frontier, which meant so much to me that it remained unimaginable even as I stood upon it. In all my life I had never been that far into the South (the border is a maximum of three hours from Beirut, the capital); the South was not accessible since it had been occupied for almost two decades by Israel.

This border not only represented the long and lasting war between Lebanon and Israel, and therefore the fact that I couldn't access a large part of my country; above all, it meant Palestine. Palestine was also, and still is, beyond my imagination. Palestine, the major political cause of the Arab world; Palestine the lost land, home of my grandmother; and Palestine intricately linked to the Lebanese civil war.

These issues were the thread for my documentary *A Journey* (video, 41', 2006), where I used archival images, written and filmed notes from 1999 to 2005, and in which I followed the journey of my grandmother Rose, as her personal story meets the collective history of our region.

In 1947, Yaffa, the most developed city of Palestine, should have remained Palestinian, according to the United Nations partition plan. But the campaign of terror led by the Irgun and the Haganah¹ forced its inhabitants into exile, and less than 4,000 out of a population of 70,000 were able to stay. Leaving everything or almost everything behind them, some went to Gaza, others to Jerusalem, Amman, and also Beirut. Among them were Teta Amale, Aunt Marie, her brothers and their families. They took refuge with Tati Rose, who had lived in Lebanon since 1930 with her husband Alfred...

- My name is Rose Kettaneh, I was born in Jerusalem, I was educated at the Dames de Sion, I got married in 1930, and since that year I live in Beirut, or I live in Lebanon.

Look, this is my father's tomb.

- Your father? In Yaffa?
- Who knows what it has become? We can't even go to see it.

The journey of my grandmother Rose through life parallels my journey to the just-liberated South, reflecting on the conflicts in our region, questioning my identity and political choices, and also reflecting on loss and disappearance.

- And tell me, mother, why have you never talked to us about Palestine, and never told us that you were originally Palestinian?
- I'm not originally Palestinian; I am Lebanese. I was born in Lebanon, of a Lebanese-born father. My mother was Palestinian, yes.
- So vou're half-Palestinian...
- Yes, my mother was... was Palestinian, yes.

I couldn't understand that my mother never felt Palestinian, not even slightly. I couldn't understand that my mother was not on the side of the leftist pro-Palestinians during the



2. The Channel at Jaffa, Palestine, 1940s (Still from A Journey, video, 41', 2006)



3. Wedding of Alfred and Rose Kettaneh, Beirut, 1930 (Still from *A Journey*, video, 41', 2006)



4. Road. South Lebanon



5. View of Israel Border Control Point, Fatima's Door, South Lebanon (Still from *A Journey*, video, 41', 2006)

Lebanese civil war. I felt she was betraying her origins and our cause. All this was confusing to me, and things were not as simple as they appeared.

... I may have been clumsy. Were my questions revealing my phantasm of Palestine, the phantasm of an origin, of a community, of a cause?

I wanted to understand. What was paradoxical to me wasn't so to my mother. Exiled from Palestine, her bourgeois and Christian family was easily integrated into Lebanese society.

It seems impossible for us to agree. It's a fact; this war wasn't the same for her as for me. When it started in 1975 I was only a child, then a teenager. What she may have seen, what she may have experienced, wasn't and will never be the same for her as for me...

Would I have had the same commitment as hers, would I have left to protect my children, would I have fought beside the Palestinians?

How would I know?



6. Fatima's Door, Border, South Lebanon (Still from A Journey, video, 41', 2006)

My grandmother often told me in a very casual way how she used to come to Beirut on weekends from Jerusalem just to buy a dress and meet her friends. My uncle recounted that it used to take him seven hours to go by car from Beirut to Jerusalem. My grandfather and greatuncles travelled by car for long periods of time for

reasons related to work, throughout the region. And I, for most of my life, couldn't even get close to this border.

This border was a real frontier to an unknown world. I was nostalgic for something I hadn't lived through, for a time without frontiers; and I worried about a future that didn't promise to be peaceful.

They travelled far away, for months, to Egypt, Iraq, Iran, not worrying about borders, it was all one territory to them (...) Of those days she evoked, through the occupation of Palestine and the exile of its population, upto the Lebanese war – what am I left with? An unattainable elsewhere? A fragmented territory, where past promises made way for an unbearable and irreversible reality?

Indeed our reality was irreversible and the loss unredeemable. Even more, things were to get much worse, and places in our region were destined to become more isolated, fragmented and controlled.

I had barely finished *A Journey* when another war was to start. On 11 July 2006, Hezbollah² kidnapped two Israeli soldiers on the border of South-Lebanon. On 12 July 2006, Israel took this operation as a pretext and attacked Lebanon, launching a war which lasted 33 days, killed 1190 civilians, displaced 1,000,000 Lebanese, destroyed the infrastructure of the country from North to South, and imposed a full blockade on the population. This war made me confront issues similar to those faced by my parents in 1975. They were in their thirties when the civil war started; they didn't know if it would last a month or a year. At that time, no one thought it would last.

Was this war also going to last for 15 years?

I could easily assert now what I had always believed: that in fact, 'the war' never really stopped. Today's conflict was simply a continuation of it, after a long pause. But then, how long would it last? Were we to look for peace at any price?

In *Nights and Days*, (video, 17', 2007) I used personal written notes and video recordings, both made during the war of 2006, to recount this experience in a personal way, reflecting on the passage of time, the awaiting, the fears as well as the transformations forced by this war.

You asked me to record the sound of



7. View of a Border Road in Israel from 'Aita el Cha'eb, South Lebanon



8. On the Road to South Lebanon (Still from *Nights and Days*, 17', 2007)

bombs, so that elsewhere they'll understand what is happening to us, here, in Lebanon. But that would mean waiting for a bomb to fall, almost wishing it to fall, to record its sound. No, that is not possible. But while filming day after day, a bomb, always unexpected and terrifying, might explode and its sound captured; then, I'll keep it for you.

The second part of *Nights and Days* is a journey to South Lebanon a few weeks after the area has been devastated. It reflects on the horror

that may be hidden behind beauty, alternating beautiful and peaceful landscapes with ruins and destruction, with only music for sound; for at that moment, no word could adequately express this devastation. Some villages and towns were almost 'erased': Khiam, Bint Jbeil, 'Aita el Chae'b, Markaba. I wondered: why destroy Khiam, a place of memory, the memory of the torture and abuse perpetrated there for decades by the occupying Israeli forces? Why destroy that prison camp and reduce it to rubble and stones, if not to erase the evidence of the pain inflicted there, if not to erase its trace?

Ironically, today there are rumours about Khiam prison camp being reconstructed exactly as it was before, in the name of memory and history.

At Markaba, I stopped at the main square. The town's centre was entirely destroyed. All was quiet; there was no activity, work or reconstruction. A strange aura of appeasement stemmed from that place. Have the inhabitants in the South become so familiar with the violence of their closest enemy? Is it a reality, a generalisation, or my own projection, to think that those who lost everything here in the South and whose home was destroyed,



9. On the Road to Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon (Still from Nights and Days, 17', 2007)

express relatively little anger with regard to the tragic events that they experienced? Is it that considered they violence part of their destiny: a fated outcome of the resistance against a very old enemy? They are habituated to the Israeli planes and tanks. It is understood that these battles may continue to be part of their life for decades...



10. Road, South Lebanon (Still from *Nights and Days*, 17', 2007)



11. Khiam Prison Camp, South Lebanon (Still from *Nights and Days*, 17', 2007)

A few months later I went back to the South and saw the devastation again. The landscape had changed. The main roads had been cleared and the debris of the bombing removed. You could interpret what had taken place only through absence. Houses, entire buildings, were 'missing', marked only by empty space. Had I not been there before, it wouldn't have struck me that a house had once stood 'there'.

In towns such as Bint Jbeil and 'Aita el Chae'b, you could still see the remnants of some neighbourhoods almost entirely destroyed. I thought to myself: my eyes are now used to destruction. I am now naturally attracted to vistas of desolation. Is it because the first time I picked up a video camera in 1991, I started by filming the ruins in Beirut's downtown district after it was devastated by civil war, and since then, across the rest of the city as well...?

While filming in the South, I was taken by a strange feeling of familiarity.

I recognised what I saw. I knew it even if it was not exactly the same elsewhere. I could film it the way one would film a *genre*: a still life, a couple in love, a view of the sea, a devastated neighbourhood.

The images had become so familiar and intimate, I felt almost at ease while viewing the dereliction.

When preparing my frame, I have my references, my preferences; some responses became reflexes, and some reflexes became normative. The landscape of war became a genre with its own specificities and significant details: the tree that grew from the midst of



12. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon (Still from Nights and Days, 17', 2007)

the rubble, the red flowers at the lower edge of the demolished door, a bedroom with a photograph of a man on the only wall that remains standing. A suspended room, threatening to fall at any moment; an entire wall torn down. An immense hole in the façade. A pile of stones, the rubble of rubble, the remains of remains, where no one can imagine what once existed intact in that place. The wreckage of a burnt car...

All these images are familiar, almost banal. How has this disturbing familiarity accustomed us to visions of ruin?

So many of us so easily imagine a house, a neighbourhood, even an entire town, being shelled and demolished by an enemy. Have we become insane? Those ruins – I recognise them, though they are different everywhere. When I first filmed Beirut's ravaged downtown district, the buildings had already been destroyed during the first years of the civil war and long abandoned by their residents. The ones I was looking at now still smelt of the death of those buried in the rubble. Sometimes a man or woman could be found next to a house, dazed and grieving, waiting to see their home rebuilt...

Author's Note

Timeline of the modern frontier conflict between Lebanon and Israel:

- > In the early 1970s, tension along the Israel-Lebanon border increased, especially after the relocation of Palestinian armed elements from Jordan to Lebanon.
- > 1978: On 11 March, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) claimed responsibility for a commando attack in Israel that resulted in many dead and wounded. On 15 March, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon, and in a few days occupied the entire southern part of the country, except for the city of Tyre and its surrounding area. The Lebanese government submitted a protest to the UN Security Council, stating that Lebanon had no connection with the Palestinian commando operation. On 19 March, the Council adopted Resolutions 425 and 426, in which it called upon Israel to immediately cease its military action and withdraw its forces from all Lebanese territory.
- > 1982: In June, after intense exchange of fire in southern Lebanon and across the Israel-Lebanon border, Israel invaded Lebanon again, reaching and surrounding Beirut, bombarding it heavily.



13. 'Aita el Cha'eb, South Lebanon



14. View of a Border Road in Israel, South Lebanon

- > 1985: Israel carried out a partial withdrawal, but kept control of an area in South Lebanon manned by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and the so-called South Lebanon Army (SLA).
- > 1996: On 18 April, Israel shelled a UN compound at Qana, Lebanon, killing 120 Lebanese civilians and wounding up to 2000. On 25 May, Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanon, except from the controversial 'Shebaa farms'. As of today, it is not officially specified if this territory is Lebanese or Syrian.
- > 2006: On 11 July, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers on the border of South Lebanon. On 12 July, Israel attacked Lebanon, launching a 33-day war that imposed a full blockade on the population.

Editors' Note

For a personal account of the conflict in Lebanon, see Walid Raad, "This Morning, This Evening: Beirut, 15 July 2006" in *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 450-53. For Reader online text, see http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader 06.html

Notes

1. The Haganah (in Hebrew, 'The Defence') was a Jewish paramilitary organisation in what was then the British Mandate of Palestine from 1920-1948. The Zionist leadership created the Haganah to protect the Jewish communities from attacks by Palestinian Arabs. Over the years it went from being an untrained militia to an army that mobilised 10,000 men along with 40,000 reservists in 1936. Although the British administration did not officially recognise the Haganah, the British security forces cooperated with it by forming the Jewish Settlement Police, Jewish Auxiliary Forces and Special Night Squads. Many Haganah fighters objected to the official policy of havlagah (restraint) that Jewish political leaders (who had become increasingly controlling of the Haganah) had imposed on the militia. Fighters had been instructed to only defend Jewish settlements and not initiate counter attacks against Arab gangs or their communities. This policy appeared defeatist to many, and in 1931 the most militant elements of the Haganah formed a splinter group, the Irgun Tsva'i-Leumi ('National Military Organisation'), better known as Irgun, that followed a policy of armed retaliation against the Arabs, and later against the British administration. In May 1948, shortly after the creation of the state of Israel, the provisional government created the Israeli Defence Forces that would succeed the Haganah. It also outlawed maintenance of any other armed force.



15. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon



16. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon

2. Hezbollah (in Arabic, 'Party of God') is a Shi'a Islamic political and paramilitary organisation based in Lebanon. It first emerged in 1982 as a militia of Shi'a followers of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, and was formed primarily to combat the Israeli occupation following the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah is a strong ally of Iran and Syria from which, it is widely believed, the organisation receives financial and political assistance, as well as weapons and training. Initially a small militia, Hezbollah now has seats in government, owns media, and implements programmes for social development. During the 1990s, Hezbollah militias became at least as powerful as the Lebanese national army in South Lebanon. In 1992, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah was chosen as the secretary-general of Hezbollah after Israeli forces assassinated Seyyed Abbas al-Musawi. Hezbollah joined the new government for the first time in 2005, winning 14 parliamentary seats that year. In November 2006, Hezbollah and their allies unsuccessfully demanded the establishment of a new government and staked a claim to one-third of the cabinet seats. Today they vigorously oppose the rule of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.



17. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon



18. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon



19. Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon

Abkhazia: A Broken Paradise

GEORGI DERLUGUIAN

The conventional explanations of the Abkhazian independence war against the Republic of Georgia invariably dwell on the combination of local ancient hatreds and Moscow's secret meddling. This explanation is both incorrect and politically harmful. After all, what can be done if the hatreds are so ancient, and Russia, as any state faced with similar problems, might predictably have no option but to continue 'meddling' in its complicated Caucasus underbelly? To reframe these inherently pessimistic assumptions, let us revisit the typical arguments or 'facts' one hears from the participants in the Abkhazia conflict. Such analysis is by no means a pedantic exercise. Abkhazia's troubles are structurally similar to other smouldering separatist conflicts all over the Caucasus and the Balkans. By getting the record straight with Abkhazia, we may gain a deeper understanding of the ethnic troubles in the post-Communist peripheries such as Karabagh, Chechnya and Kosovo as well.

The social processes and historical structures commonly understood as background to the conflict, as this essay seeks to demonstrate, are not at all 'background' factors. Rather, they form the historically complex trajectory which at certain points could ignite – and also defuse – conflicts which are then configured in ethnic terms, as presumably confrontations between the Georgian majority, Abkhaz minority and interventionist Russia. The usual 'ancient hatreds' or, in a more fashionable academic twist, historically path-dependent explanation for these tensions is about as correct as blaming the contemporary violence in Northern Ireland on the long-standing theological dispute between the two branches of Western Christianity.

Let me throw in some hard 'facts': the Georgians are Orthodox Christian and so are, of course, the Russians – at least, most of them believe so on the basis of their getting to the church for baptisms, weddings, funerals, and occasionally on Easter, which totals on average two-and-a-half times a year (Furman, 1999). The religious practices and beliefs of the Abkhazes should be described as agnostic-syncretist while (to put it more bluntly) basically pagan (Abdushelishvili, Arutyunov and Kaloyev, 1994). The politicised sector among the Chechens, who for a brief period in the early 1990s (though not earlier and no longer today) passionately considered themselves brethren to the Abkhaz people, by all accounts are more serious Sunni Muslims than the happily syncretist Abkhaz. This is mostly

because the Chechens, who over the last two centuries have regularly engaged in confrontations with the Russian imperial machinery, came to stress Islam as their anti-imperial identity (Zelkina, 2000). In the Caucasus wars of the 19th century, the Georgians (or rather the Georgian elites) usually sided with Russia not simply because they were Christians, but because their Orthodox Christian background had culturally facilitated the access to Russian imperial careers. Curiously, the three men who in 1944 ordered and oversaw the deportation of the entire Chechen nation were the ethnic Georgians highly positioned in Moscow: Colonel Mikhail Gvishiani of NKVD; chief of the Soviet secret police Lavrenti Beria; and Joseph Stalin (Lieven, 1998).

In order to stay on track in this political maze, let us follow the wisdom of great historian Fernand Braudel (1986) and begin with the fundamental structures, literally with the fabulous soil and climate of Abkhazia.

Geography

Abkhazia consists of about 250 kilometres of gorgeous winding beaches and densely green valleys climbing to the snowy peaks of the Caucasus that tower in the background. In the 20th century Abkhazia was transformed into one of best vacation spots on earth (Ascherson, 1995). The relic pine forests and the lush sub-tropical vegetation of the coastal strip remind one of northern California, except that the beaches of Abkhazia are washed by the balmy, moderately salty and tideless Black sea. After Stalin and Khrushchev chose to have their summer *dachas* here, some of the most important Soviet-era entities such as the Ministry of Defence, the *Pravda* newspaper and the Union of Writers built on Abkhazia's coast imposing vacation retreats for their more privileged personnel. Further, Abkhazia's sub-tropical climate endows it with outstanding conditions for cash-crop plantations that can produce everything from tea and tangerines to walnuts and, most recently, kiwis. The seaside real estate and the agricultural hinterland of Abkhazia in relative value was even more precious than California – within the immense confines of the USSR, after all, there were very few moderately humid sub-tropical locales.

Just as in California or Florida, the prized landscape is actually man-made and very recent. Earlier in history Abkhazia, like much of the Caucasus, consisted of roadless mountain slopes covered with impenetrable thorny forests and unhealthy swamps in the lowlands (Khodarkovsky, 2002; Kurtynova, 1995). The exotic palm trees and citrus orchards were planted by Russian colonial botanists in the 1900s, and the coast was finally freed from endemic malaria only in the 1930s-1950s, thanks to the extensive public works and the spread of eucalyptuses. The newly created real-estate value of Abkhazia brought the blessing of exceptional wealth during the 1950s-1980s, in the times of late Soviet prosperity. But conflict over the possession of this man-made paradise also inflicted the curse of seemingly perpetual devastation after the collapse of the Soviet order, post-1989.

Linguistics, Archaeology, Ethno-Genetics

Linguistically and anthropologically, the native Abkhazes belong to the North Caucasian group of peoples that also comprises the Adyghs (Adygeis, Circassians, Kabardins) and, more distantly, the Vainakhs (Chechens and Ingushes) and most Daghestanis (Abdushelishvili, Arutyunov and Kaloyev, 1994). To a considerable pride of its native speakers, the Abkhaz language is featured in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's hardest-sounding tongue. Indeed, it boasts more than sixty consonants to (depending on the dialect) just four, or even one, vowels. The verdict of patriotic Georgian scholars renders Abkhaz merely *patois*, a backward dialect of the Georgian language. Today, however, comparative linguists consider it proven that the languages of the North Caucasian group are entirely unrelated to any other language family in this part of the world, be it Indo-European, Afrasian (Semitic), Turkic or Kartvelian (a small endemic family that consists of Georgian proper, and the Svan, Mingrelian, and Laz languages).

An extravagant but apparently solid recent hypothesis claims to have discovered the traces of very distant (meta-family level) linguistic relation between the North Caucasian, Sino-Tibetan (Chinese, et al.) and the Na-Dene languages once spoken by California's natives (Diakonoff, 1999). But so far this newest scientific discovery has not been appropriated by the patriotic Abkhaz minds always looking out to claim additional allies in their struggles against Georgia. This could be just a matter of time, considering that Abkhazia's founding President, Dr. Vladislav Ardzinba, is himself a professional historical linguist who had once authored a respectable exploration of Hittite mythology.

The distant ancestors of North Caucasian peoples have inhabited the valleys of the North Caucasus apparently since the late Stone Age. The nationalists, of course, would take (or fiercely contest) this scholarly theory as a political argument directly related to the contemporary struggle for presumed historical rights (De Waal, 2003). Yet all it really says is that the mountain environment was so inaccessible and resource-poor that historical migrations and conquests bypassed the Caucasus ridge. This natural protected sanctuary preserved over centuries a mind-boggling variety of isolated languages and genetic pools.

Isolation apparently also explains the famous longevity of native Abkhazes, many of whom stay alive and healthy past the age of one hundred years. Between the 1970s and 1980s, the multi-disciplinary inquiry of Soviet and Western scholars into the Abkhaz gerontological phenomenon posited factors as diverse as the yogurt-based diet, climate, the low radiation produced by the local geological formations, or the special respect and social roles accorded by the Abkhaz culture to male and female elders (Hewitt, 1979). The most robust hypothesis suggests simply an advantageous genetic mutation that was sustained within a relatively small and durably contained population. (By curious coincidence, the other similar pool of highlander longevity genes is found in Karabagh.)



History

Another manifestation of durable isolation is the relaxed religious syncretism of the Abkhazes. For centuries, first the Byzantine and then the Ottoman empires claimed to dominate the Caucasus Black Sea coast, and thus to spread their respective religions. The imperial claims, however, were mostly nominal. Neither the empires nor the Abkhaz princes had coercive resources or convincing rationale behind their effort to establish credible authority over the self-governing highlander communities scattered over this poor and inaccessible periphery of the larger Mediterranean (Ascherson, 1995; King, 2004). In Abkhazia, as elsewhere in the Caucasus, the traditional social organisation rested on self-sufficient village communities interwoven in extensive kinship networks. The convoluted feudal politics of princely families, i.e., the very staple of historical monographs, for centuries remained mostly superfluous to the pattern of social organization centered on autonomous villages. By default the majority of Abkhazes remained oblivious of their distant imperial rulers, and essentially continued to be traditional pagan believers under the thin veneer of intermixed Christianity and Islam.

As recently as 2007, I observed that sacred groves are still frequented for the annual sacrificial feasts, and the dead are buried in the backyard after long periods of funerary rites, rather than in the cemeteries (for a wonderfully literary description, see Iskander, 1983). On many occasions I heard the Abkhazes ridiculing the Islamic fervour displayed by the volunteers

from Chechnya and the Middle East who in 1992 rushed to participate in Abkhazia's independence struggle against the Christian Georgians. After the quiet departure of the foreign volunteers, the mosques they had begun building stay abandoned today. Except for a few Russian priests and the Russian Orthodox churches, there is little Christian presence either.

According to textbooks, Abkhazia became part of the Russian empire in 1810 when a particular branch of Abkhaz princely lineage, called the 'Chachbas' in Abkhaz or the 'Shervashidzes' in Georgian, swore vassalage to the Tsar. Prince Sefer-bei Chachba/Shervashidze shed the Islam of previous pro-Ottoman orientation, his scions reinvented their Orthodox Christian identity and soon they adopted the culture of the much larger Georgian nobility at Russia's imperial service (Suny, 1994). The upper-class shifts of vassal allegiance and corresponding cultural conversions had a long tradition in this corner of the world. Modern Georgian nationalists seeking to prove their claims to Abkhazia on medieval precedents invoke the experience of the 11^{th} - 13^{th} centuries, when the feudal kingdom of Georgia was strong enough to pull the Abkhaz princes into its political and cultural orbit. We have no historical evidence to judge whether the medieval cultural bonds penetrated beyond the thin Abkhaz feudal elite. But the 19^{th} -century situation is sufficiently documented to make it clear that the Russian, and by proxy the Georgian, presence in Abkhazia was a squarely diplomatic fiction until the final military defeat of independent highlander communities of the Caucasus in 1864.

Demography and Empire

Until the last quarter of the 19th century, the population of Abkhazia – approximately 100,000; the actual number is difficult to estimate due to the complete absence of any state authority and thus a lack of censuses prior to the 1890s - consisted solely of ethnic native Abkhazes and a few other closely related peoples (such as the Ubykhs) who no longer exist. In 1864, the sweeping push of Russian armies towards the Black Sea provoked among the highlanders a panic that led to mass exodus across the sea into the Ottoman lands: the territories of modern Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and even Kosovo (Ascherson, 1995; Lieven, 1998). This panic of apocalyptic proportions swept the entire expanse from Daghestan and Chechnya in the east Caucasus to the Circassian lands and Abkhazia in the western parts. Since Abkhazia was situated right on the Black Sea coast. the emigration was particularly massive there. At least half or perhaps as many as threequarters of Abkhazes abandoned their native land in successive waves following the series of crushed rebellions between 1864 and 1878. Their neighbours to the north, the Ubykhs and Abadzekhs, left entirely. Most of them would assimilate in the Middle East. The majority of émigrés lost their languages, given the natural assimilation and the activist nationalist policies of Turkish Republic. The last speaker of the Ubykh language, a linguistic relative of the Abkhaz, died in Turkey in 1974. By bittersweet accident, the famous French folklorist Georges Dumezile himself married to an Ubykh woman, happened to be present to record the Ubykh language before it disappeared for good (King, 2004).

The anguish of exile instilled among the North Caucasian *muhajeers* (Muslim refugees fleeing from the threatening infidels) a pro-Turkish, militantly Islamic identity directed against the Russian conquerors. The recent ethnic wars in Abkhazia, Chechnya and in the former Yugoslavia forcefully revived these feelings. Today almost three million people in Turkey claim to be the descendants of Abkhazes, Circassians and Chechens. Meanwhile, the Abkhazes who remained in their homeland grew very pro-Russian, a fact which has more than bemused the *mujahideen*, the Chechen and Middle Eastern volunteers who rushed to the land of their ancestors to join the Abkhaz independence struggle against Georgia in 1992. Invariably, the diaspora nationalisms tend to presume their ethnic cradles a repository of untainted national culture. But in the last century Abkhazia underwent profound changes that made the Abkhazes an ethnic minority of 17%, whose special status in the face of the Georgian majority of about 45% could be secured only by the counterbalancing factor of Russian state interests (Beissinger, 2002).

Abkhaz popular memory downplays the effects of the Russian conquest and overlooks the relationship between the arrival of Georgian, Armenian, Greek, and even several hundred Estonian settlers and the policies of colonial development (Shnirelman, 2001). Before 1917, the Russian administration had two objectives in Abkhazia – to create the revenue base by encouraging the introduction of cash-crop plantations (citrines, tobacco, tea); and, in a related effort, to placate the restless peasantry of western Georgia with land grants in depopulated Abkhazia.

The contemporary demographic explosion in the Georgian countryside was due to the spread of substantially more productive American corn (which replaced the traditional millet) between the 17th and 18th centuries. This was followed by the imposition of Russian rule in the early 19th century, curbing the depredations of feudal warfare and slave trade. But the Russian rule in Georgia critically depended on the loyalty of the Georgian nobility (which at the time included the Abkhaz princes), whose numbers were multiplying even faster than the numbers of their serf peasants. At the time of the abolition of Georgian serfdom in the late 1860s, the Russian administration yielded to the native noblemen and gave the freed peasants even smaller land plots than in central Russia (Suny, 1994). Despite the land reclamation and resettlement into frontier territories such as Abkhazia, the rapid development of a monetised economy, cash-crop plantations and accelerating population growth by the beginning of the 20th century significantly worsened the plight of peasantry throughout the Caucasus.

When in 1905, and again in 1917, the Russian state experienced cataclysmic revolutionary breakdowns, social pressures erupted all over in the form of rural revolts, land seizures and banditry (for a classic statement of causality flowing from demographic pressure to revolutions, see Goldstone, 1991; specifically for the Russian Empire, see Suny, 1994, and Martin, 2001). In this multi-ethnic environment, the agrarian unrest evolved into numerous ethnic confrontations.

The complexities of demography, land tenure and revolutionary politics of the time became totally incomprehensible to the Caucasian men and women who grew up in the radically different atmosphere of Soviet times. The historical memory of Caucasian peoples, imperfectly preserved in family lore and eventually shaped by modern national intellectuals, could say about the dreadful events of 1905 and 1917-1921 only "They were killing us"; but, of course, this crude simplification was repeated with tremendous emotion till it crystallised into a collective belief. When the Soviet state began breaking down in the late 1980s, these powerfully repressed traumatic traces began to emerge, and were consciously reenacted in the new and quite different historical circumstances.

It is utterly wrong to subscribe to the theories of the local nationalists and their followers, however numerous and vociferous they might be, in claiming that the recent conflicts were just the re-emergence of age-old hatreds (for a crucial document in this regard written in the early 1920s but first published only decades later, see Lisitsian, 1992; also De Waal, 2003). To ascribe this root to inter-ethnic tensions is a gross generalisation. In actuality, the relationship consists of myriad daily connections, ranging from personal cooperation in the form of marriages, friendships and often corrupt collaborations, to occasional conflicts such as professional competition or drunken brawls. These are usually resolved through normal daily procedures, though in particularly dire instances the police may adjudicate (Mars and Altman, 1983; Ledeneva, 1998).

The erroneous impression of a mythologised narrative of inter-ethnic conflict repeating itself is produced by two factors: the culturally-driven rationalisation of all kinds of conflict along the lines of traumatic historical memory; and the powerful institutionalisation of ethnicity by modern national states. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, another communist-created federation, offer poignant examples of an originally quite successful institutionalisation of troublesome ethnicities within the framework of federal republics. This sort of ethno-territorial constitutional arrangement became unmanageable and destructive when the socialist states attempted limited liberalisation and market reforms (Bunce, 1998).

Politics

In 1918, as Russia was descending into the hell of civil war, Georgia became an independent state and rushed to impose its own administration over the ethnically problematic outlying dominions, including Abkhazia (Suny, 1994). The presumably irrational ethnic violence of those times is commonly blamed on the imperfections in character, class structures and institutions of East Europeans. We overlook the pivotal role of the League of Nations with its perfectly liberal and legalistic discourse in sponsoring the irruption of nationalist warfare upon the extensive ruins of the Hapsburg, Ottoman and Russian empires. In 1919, the Great Powers gathered in Versailles set the newly independent Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia three standard conditions to be met within one year, in preparation to receiving the full recognition as nation-states: a) historical rights; b) the cultural affiliation of the populations, if necessary, decided via plebiscites; and c) effective occupation (Kazem-zadeh, 1951). The first clause prompted the new regimes to create the committees of national historians and anthropologists whose patriotic findings to this day are supplying

ammunition to the nationalist propaganda. The second, and especially the third, condition – the demand of effective occupation, directly adopted from the 1885 Berlin Conference on the colonial partition of Africa – sent the aspiring national states scrambling to hoist their flags and install garrisons in as many contested areas as possible before the deadline and the looming plebiscites. To compensate for the severe shortage of regular troops, local militias and irregulars of all sorts were recruited and armed in the process. The results were expectedly bloody (Mann, 2005).

Everywhere, be it Karabagh, Adjaria, Southern Ossetia or Abkhazia, the arrival of nationalist armed forces exacerbated the local ethnically-colored agrarian conflicts and led to outright massacres. The Abkhaz village militias sought an alternative source of weapons – the Russian Bolsheviks, who in their turn counted on transforming the disparate rural resistances into organised Communist rebellions against the nationalist regimes (Tsutsiev, 1998). After finally taking Georgia in 1921, the Bolsheviks united it with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Abkhazia into the shortlived Transcaucasian Federation (Suny, 1994). This historical precedent, rooted in the constitutional experimentation of the early Soviet era, would be stressed by Abkhaz leaders in the late 1980s to claim that they had always been equal to Georgia in status, and therefore could equally invoke the right to separation that was once inscribed in the Soviet federal constitution.

It is an understatement to say that the convoluted Soviet system of national federalism could function only due to the central institution of the Communist Party supported by the ruthless agency of the secret police (Martin, 2001). The Soviet federal system functioned largely on the common understandings and personal networks running through the party apparat. From 1921-1936, the special and advantageous status of Abkhazia hinged on the personality of its hugely popular leader Nestor Lakoba, the semi-educated former honourable bandit of the 1905 generation, who by 1917 had spent years underground or in Tsarist prisons and became a Bolshevik convert with strong personal ties to Stalin (for a fictionalised account based on local folklore, see Iskander, 1983). For this reason, or perhaps more likely because Abkhazia was generally considered too backward and peripheral, Lakoba was able to postpone the collectivisation of Abkhaz peasantry. But in 1936 Lakoba died a strange sudden death several days after he had feasted with Lavrenti Beria, then the Communist leader of Georgia.

With Lakoba eliminated and posthumously declared an enemy of the people, Beria launched the 'Georgianisation' of Abkhazia with his trademark systematic vigour and ruthlessness. The 1936 USSR Constitution made Abkhazia an autonomous province subordinated to the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic rather than directly to Moscow. Large numbers of Georgian collective farmers and specialists were transferred to Abkhazia as part of a national campaign against backwardness (Viola, 1996). Meanwhile the Abkhaz language, that had only a decade earlier acquired its own alphabet, was replaced with the Georgian language in official usage. The nascent Abkhaz intelligentsia was decimated in Stalinist purges (Grant, 1995).

After 1953, the surviving Abkhaz intelligentsia (a few writers, historians and educators who had established themselves in their fields mostly in the earlier Soviet era) and the Abkhaz party cadres exploited the death of Stalin and the execution of Beria to reverse the tide. Ethnic demographics underwent an irreversible change. Without the Georgian and, to a lesser degree, the Armenian and the Russian labour force, the modern agriculture and the newly prominent resort sector of Abkhazia would have collapsed. But Abkhaz leaders successfully urged Khrushchev to revert to 'truly Leninist nationality policies', namely the state sponsorship of Abkhaz culture, affirmative action in university admissions, and administrative promotions favouring what the Soviet policy called 'titular nationality'. Not surprisingly, this provoked apprehension and resentment among the Georgians who during the reign of Stalin and Beria came to occupy crucial public positions in Abkhazia, ranging from government ministers to university instructors, collective farm managers and the police.

Normally such tensions were contained by bureaucratic procedures and the constraints imposed by official Soviet discourse on nationalities (Martin, 2001). In fact, after 1954 the bureaucratic containment of nationalist disruptions would become the norm for years to come, forcing the Georgian majority to adapt to these enforced protocols. But Georgia was one of the least compliant and quiescent Soviet republics in every respect (Beissinger, 2002). Georgia's history and agrarian social structures quite closely resembled those of Poland. Both countries boasted vibrant civil societies centred on bases of highly regarded artistic and professorial intelligentsia whose lineages reached back to the inordinately large and ambitious petty nobility of pre-socialist times (Bunce, 1998; King, 2001).

Since 1956, unruly Georgia no less than Poland has been a source of continuing tension for Moscow. Less prone to repression, the regimes of Khrushchev and Brezhnev were perennially apprehensive in the face of periodical outbursts of intelligentsia-led protests against central policies. Moscow typically responded with a mixed strategy of co-opting dissent where possible, and repressive measures against the nationalist intelligentsia. The latter approach inadvertently created more opportunities for further protest mobilisations (Suny, 1994). Moscow offered generous aid to the Georgian economy and promoted cultural institutions, while continuing to be blamed for every grievance. The Abkhaz population benefited even more, given that in this period its numbers stabilised at under 100,000, comprising 17% of Abkhazia's total population of approximately 450,000 citizens. The percentages of ethnic Russians, Armenians and Greeks were roughly comparable to Abkhaz (12-17% for each ethnic group), while the ethnic Georgians maintained a plurality of 40-46% (Suny, 1994; Grant, 1995). Each cycle of protest left in its wake newly actualised practices, ever-expanding networks and conciliatory political arrangements which ensured the recurrence of further protests. Both Georgian and Abkhaz protestors manoeuvred to select the issues and rhetoric that would resonate with national feelings, yet would avoid directly assaulting the core of Communist ideology and leave Moscow no alternative but respond harshly (Nodia, 2002).

As long as the Soviet state remained functioning in its post-1956 low-repression mode, the cycles of protest could offer a valuable bargaining opportunity for Georgian and Abkhaz officials, who were conniving almost openly with the dissidents and crowds. The recurrent cycles of protest focused on Abkhazia's political status took place every decade - in the late 1950s, 1968, in 1978-79, and again during spring and summer 1989, Each campaign served to embolden the protestors and wrangle substantial benefits intended to mollify seething collective passions. Ironically, it was at the pinnacle of Gorbachev's policy of democratisation that Moscow finally resolved to use coercion instead of the usual gratuitous pacification of ritualised Georgian-Abkhaz clashes (for the general theory of democratisation as a cause of ethnic violence, see Mann, 2005). In April 1989, Soviet paratroopers were sent to disperse the protesting crowds threatening to permanently occupy Tbilisi's central square (Beissinger, 2002). The paratroopers were armed with entrenching shovels as there was a shortage of batons, and apparently received no instruction in how to combat angry civilians. Nineteen protestors died in the clash, all of them women. Tbilisi's 'shovel massacre' initiated the first anti-Communist revolution of 1989. Over the events of a single tragic night the legitimacy of Georgia's Communist Party was destroyed, and the mercurial nationalist dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia suddenly became the likeliest contender for state power.

Revolution and War

Two typical stories from Abkhazia illustrate the turmoil precipitated by the events of 1989 (here I draw upon personal field notes, recorded in 2000):

An Abkhaz farmer meets his old Georgian friend for a drink, but instead of the usual conversation about soccer and the best plans for profitably selling the tangerine crops, the Georgian begins passionately asserting that Georgia is the most civilised ancient nation in the Caucasus long suffering from Russian domination. When the Abkhaz fails to match the emotions of his friend, the latter grimly proposes the toast to the death of all Abkhazes.

The sly and graciously charismatic Djaba loseliani, whose picturesque life history included a long prison term for bank robberies, a subsequent doctorate in art history, and several well-crafted novels, comes to recruit Abkhazia's Georgians into his nationalist paramilitary organisation, the National Rescue Squad (Mkhedrioni). loseliani enjoyed his biggest mobilising success in the cluster of ethnic Georgian villages near the prized resort town of Gagra. These villages emerged during Beria's resettlement campaign in the late 1930s, and this memory continued to cause uneasiness locally. loseliani forcefully insisted that Gagra was no less a Georgian land than any other, calling Abkhazes a backward subset of Georgians whose provincial ego was deliberately boosted by Moscow's attempt to dominate Georgia. He furthermore announced the pending privatisation of land and the resorts of Abkhazia under the post-socialist reforms of the independent Georgian state, and hinted that membership in his paramilitary movement would count a lot in the privatisation of Soviet-era assets. The emboldened villagers joined en masse, receiving Mkhedrioni badges, pre-authorised titles to property, and a few guns. Two years later these villages



would be burnt to ground by the joint Abkhaz and Chechen forces, led by then little-known Shamil Basayev (from 1995-2004 the mastermind of hostage-takings in the hospital of Budennovsk town, a Moscow theatre, and a school in Beslan).

The small Abkhaz population of less than 100,000 felt beleaguered at the prospect of Georgian independence. Their experience of living in the state based on local patronage (which we usually call 'corruption') quite rightly suggested the conclusions: the majority ethnic group would sweep aside the minorities in competitive elections, and those who came to own the political posts would also monopolise the privatisation of state properties (Holmes, 1993; Urban, 1989; Vaksberg, 1991; Volkov, 2002). Further, the senior Abkhaz Communist leaders found themselves irrelevant when Gorbachev's actions removed from power in Moscow the most senior political patrons of the Abkhaz elite (Zaslavsky, 1993). In the subsequent disarray, the work of organising Abkhaz countermobilisation fell to the upand-coming generation of local party apparatchiks. They pursued two goals: to preserve the Soviet-era ethnic quota system which prevented the local Georgians from scoring an automatic majority in the Abkhaz parliamentary elections; and to recruit external allies, Russian, Chechen, Armenian, or Middle Eastern, in order to counterbalance the overwhelming odds enjoyed by the Georgian majority.

The geographical compactness of the Abkhaz population made its political mobilisation relatively easy (see the impressive event-analysis database compiled by Beissinger, 2002). By contrast, the emerging political scene in Georgia was plagued by extreme fragmentation reminiscent of feudal patrimonial conflicts (excellent analyses of familial politics include Humphrey, 1991; Solnick, 1998; Hislope, 2002; Fisun, 2002; Ganev, 2006). During the Soviet times, with the Communist Party as a common opponent, the inherited culture of Georgian petty nobility embedded in the high-status networks of intelligentsia and professionals helped to maintain a colourful and vibrant civil society. However, with the collapse of Soviet rule, the 'good families' of Georgia quarrelled shamefully over political positions and the spoils of empire. Besides, their social skills and habits cultivated at intellectual salons and at the famous Georgian banquets, proved quite inadequate to the tasks of state-building and war-making. The first post-Communist president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, whose rise to power was largely due to his pedigree since he was the son of a famous national writer, was within a year overthrown by his erstwhile allies (Suny, 1994). Eduard Shevardnadze, a senior Soviet-era statesman of legendary cunning, was then called upon to sort out the ensuing chaos. Shevardnadze eventually achieved a degree of pacification, but not before Djaba loseliani and Tengiz Kitovani, the two warlords who raised him to power, disgraced themselves through the military defeat in Abkhazia in 1992-93.

The origins and the course of this war are shrouded in dirty mysteries. In 1991 the Abkhaz leadership managed to make a power-sharing deal with Gamsakhurdia, who probably sought to avoid simultaneous wars on multiple fronts. The Abkhaz ethnic minority managed to preserve its vastly disproportionate share in the provincial parliament and state administration. But after toppling the first Georgian president, Kitovani and loseliani apparently wanted to score another military success; or perhaps they needed to take on the role of occupiers and reward their troops via plundering the richest part of Georgian territory. Using the numerous and admittedly irresponsible proclamations of Abkhazia's parliament as a pretext, the Georgian warlords launched their blitzkrieg in August 1992. Their campaign almost immediately got bogged down – either due to the threat of Russian troops still stationed in Abkhazia or, as many witnesses suggest, because the Georgian paramilitaries began looting. It was most likely a combination of both factors. The Abkhaz forces thus acquired the necessary breathing space to organise their defences.

There can be no doubt that the Abkhazes were aided by the Russian military. Despite the romantic stories of Chechen and Kabardin volunteers valiantly crossing the mountains on foot to help their Abkhaz brethren, the majority of North Caucasus and Cossack volunteers were openly recruited on Russian territory, transported to the Abkhaz border by bus, trained and armed by the Russian officers. The Chechen detachment of Shamil Basayev received its training on the grounds of the former *dacha* of Khrushchev in Pitsunda, which still belongs to the Russian Presidential Administration. The motives and the institutional movers of Russian covert aid are less easily identifiable. Journalists have suggested reasons ranging from sophisticated geo-strategic calculations to purported revenge against Shevardnadze, whom Russian generals accused of selling East Germany to the NATO (De Waal, 2003).

With this as with all conspiracy theories, the major point of doubt is the assumption of a unified agency capable of long-term calculations under conditions of radical uncertainty, and the seamless execution of plans (for an elaboration of this critique, see Derluguian, 2001). The war in Abkhazia coincided with President Yeltsin's war on his parliament, where,

incidentally, the Abkhaz leaders had many friends among the anti-Yeltsin nationalists. Further, it is a normally neglected fact that in the summer and autumn of 1992, the Russian North Caucasus teetered on the brink of open rebellion against Moscow. The Autonomous Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria experienced a near-successful nationalist revolution modelled on the earlier Chechen example; North Ossetia fought a brief but extremely cruel border war with Ingushetia; the Adygeis on the Black Sea coast rallied for the restoration of their national enclave abolished in the mid-1950s; and despite these aggressive and obdurate communitarian fissures, the audacious project of a pan-Caucasian Mountain Republic did not seem too fantastic a scheme. Against this backdrop we must either presume that the acts of Moscow were guided by a secret genius enforcing a devilishly complicated plan, or deduce less hyperbolically that the events followed an inherently chaotic trajectory consisting of myriad contradictory acts and motivations that in the end benefited Moscow as still the most powerful player on the field.

The Abkhaz war of independence in 1992-93 consisted of sporadic inconclusive battles, protracted periods of stalemate, and peace agreements broken each time one or other side (or even an individual commander) saw a chance to score victory. It was accompanied by looting and atrocities against civilians by all combatants. In the rear of both armies, Georgian or Abkhaz civilians committed paranoid acts of arson, and executions by lynch mobs were directed against suspected spies, traitors or simply for the sake of symbolic revenge (Bourdieu, 1973) each time a dead soldier was brought home for his funeral. It must be acknowledged that after several generations of living side by side, the Abkhazes and the Georgians shared a common culture, common territory, common networks created through marriage and working together. It was normal practice to speak at least two, usually three, languages (Abkhaz, Georgian and Russian). Therefore the war-induced separation was profoundly traumatic, for in psychological terms it amounted to committing gruesome violence upon a part of oneself in the name of destroying one's 'other'. Political scientist Stathis Kalyvas (2006) has compellingly argued that such modes of apparent insanity in fact follow the logic of control in contested areas during civil wars.

These purportedly random atrocities became a central part of organised warfare towards the end of the war in September-October 1993, when the joint Abkhaz and external volunteer forces tricked the Georgian defences and rapidly captured the capital of Suhum and the rest of Abkhazia. Before the war, only 7% of Suhum's population was ethnic Abkhaz, while the richest agricultural district of Gali in southern Abkhazia was entirely Georgian (Nodia, 2002). Evidently, the Abkhaz war leaders calculated that given their limited manpower it would be impossible to control the areas of predominantly Georgian population; hence it was better that there be no population at all to control. Ethnic cleansing has its own perverse logic (Mann, 2005; Kalyvas, 2006). The atrocities must be visible and sadistic enough to produce the wave of panic that will compel large populations to flee before a small band of fighters who would not otherwise be able to prevent resistance in their rear. A brutally simple maximisation of return on effort, which results in another 'banality of evil' (Arendt, 1964).

Future Possibilities

Stating his vision of what social science must achieve, Arthur Stinchombe (1997) argues that the key lies in the ability to trace the social mechanisms and the resulting political and cultural paths by which societies emerge from their pasts into their futures. Where, given the preceding analysis, might we locate structural configurations that can embed the futures of Abkhazia?

My main contention is that the conflict in Abkhazia is akin to revolutions and civil wars. The conflict was 'frozen' by the military ability of Abkhaz forces and their Russian backers to defeat the Georgian forces, and by the diplomatic ability of Georgia, an internationally recognised sovereign state with a secure seat in the United Nations, to brand the Abkhaz rebellion separatist and illegitimate. The juxtaposition of military power and diplomatic norms produced one of several such 'frozen' conflicts that abounded in the former Soviet Caucasus. Since 1993, Abkhazia has existed as a *de facto* state (or as an unacknowledged protectorate of Russia) while being subjected to an international economic and political blockade because of Georgia's adamant refusal to recognise the Abkhazian secession.

Elsewhere, Stinchcombe (1999) suggests that revolutions come to an end when the degree of political uncertainty is reduced by building enough bargains into a structure of power that can sustain such bargains. It seems, then, that Abkhazia, like many similarly rebellious provinces in the former USSR (and in the former Yugoslavia) has not ended. In other words, 'frozen' conflict is civil war without conclusion.

Stinchcombe summarises the structures ending revolutions and civil wars as an analytical continuum, ranging from conservative authoritarianism ("Thermidor"), totalitarianism, *caudillismo*, occupation government, democracy, and national independence. Let us consider the likelihood of these options in turn, regarding Abkhazia.

Totalitarianism is not an option, for two major reasons. First, international norms that are strongly antithetical to totalitarian dictatorships seem today to be of secondary importance. After all, North Korea still exists; and a coercively unified Iraq would have existed if international norms were not manipulated by the American government. Second, it takes a *functioning* state to sustain a totalitarian regime. This is obviously not the case in Abkhazia or Georgia.

Ironically, democracy is not a realistic option either, for largely the same reason – this kind of regime also requires extensive state capacities if it is to be sustained. In the absence of strong state structures (Fisun, 2002; Ganev, 2005), the prevalent if not the sole form of government in the region is what Stinchcombe terms *caudillismo*: personalistic rule through the networks of loyalties glued by venality, mutual complicity, nepotism – and ethnicity in its most localised 'tribal' and regionalist forms. However, in the example of Abkhazia, *caudillismo* alone would not solve the conflict.

We are left with the suggested options of national independence and its obverse, foreign occupation. In another typical irony, what one side of the conflict would consider national

independence another would view as foreign occupation. Since the 2003 'Roses Revolution' in Georgia (the peaceful revolt that displaced President Eduard Shevardnadze), the new energetic president Mikheil Saakashvili has been betting on American aid and political patronage. For the visit of the American president, a central street in Georgia's capital of Tbilisi was renamed 'George W. Bush Avenue'. Indeed, today Georgian troops wear American uniforms and serve alongside their American comrades in Iraq. The Georgian expeditionary force of 2000 men now stands as the fourth-largest contribution to the US-led 'Coalition of the Willing' - after Britain and Australia. In a display of wry humour, the Pentagon entrusted the training of Georgian soldiers to the National Guard of the state of Georgia in the American south. Expectedly, Abkhazia and Russia viewed this build-up with extreme suspicion.

The constellation of political factors seems now downright threatening. Besides the personal ambition of Georgia's young new president who promised his domestic constituency a speedy re-unification of Georgian territory, the looming recognition of Kosovo's independence was the major factor in the 'un-freezing' of Abkhazia conflict. Moscow under President Putin has been increasingly nationalist and assertive internationally. The windfall of foreign earnings from Russian energy exports is not the cause; rather, it has been a vital resource in the policies of the Putin administration. The main reason is that Russian elites no longer subscribe to the vision of global integration. Instead, they have become overtly cynical regarding international norms that they now consider merely a front for American imperial ambitions. In the minds of the Russian political elite. American-led 'humanitarian interventions' in Kosovo and the invasion of Iraq have proven that the configurations of autonomy are scripted and shaped by the calculus of power, and that Moscow cannot expect a kind invitation to join the club of America's favoured allies. On his side, Georgia's President Saakashvili feels pressured by his own often bombastic declarations and promises of rapid integration into the structures of NATO and the European Union. Further, the looming departure of George W. Bush from the American presidency after 2008 adds special urgency to Saakashvili's plans, as he is understandably afraid of losing his major foreign patron.

Recently this newest reenactment of the Great Game was subject to yet another aggravating catalyst: the 2014 Winter Olympics, to be hosted by Russia. This symbolic victory took President Putin on a personal trip to Guatemala, where he charmed the International Olympic Committee by addressing them in English and French (acquired in addition to his well-known fluency in German that dates back to his days as a KGB operative during the Cold War). The supposedly unproblematic sporting extravaganza has direct relevance to the conflict over Abkhazia described in this essay, because the 2014 Winter Olympics will take place in the Russian resort town of Sochi, immediately bordering on Abkhazia. The Russian government has already pledged to invest the equivalent of \$12 billion in the 'development' of Sochi. Real-estate prices consequently have begun to escalate at shocking speed, and Russian developers and speculators have started assessing, with very pragmatic interest, the once semi-forgotten stretch of prized beaches that line Abkhazia. In the face of the investment boom associated with Olympic preparations, the

Abkhaz elites and many enterprising citizens are scrambling to secure their share of profits. They are torn between the fear of being colonised by the mighty Russian capitalists and the prospect of missing this great opportunity for financial benefit. Whatever the outcome of these new struggles for the possession of Abkhazia, the Olympic project would clearly ensure the integration of the separatist enclave with Russia. But first, it seems, there will be another war because Georgia cannot be expected to simply stand by and witness Abkhazia being further 'developed' into an extension of the Sochi tourist complex. Regardless of whoever finally regains control of this earthly paradise – Russia, Georgia or the indigenous Abkhazes – the feat will not be achieved without another cycle of fierce interethnic violence.

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Desire, Fear and Death...

SAMIR CHAKRABARTI

Desire, Fear and Death. I observe them with a sense of detachment.

These crushed cars offer a way to read the death wish of contemporary societies. With their polished surfaces, these symbols of speed and desire look like sanitised accidents, devoid of blood and pain. Even in their stages of violent collapse they present themselves as desirable objects. The catastrophe seems custom-made.

All witnesses, spectators, readers, listeners know that the goriest phenomena can appear revoltingly aesthetic when mediated through images and words.

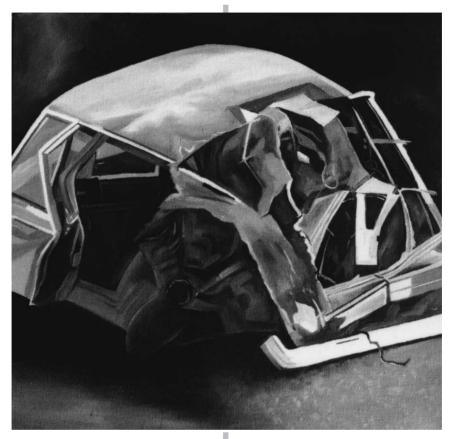
What happens when the human element is deliberately withdrawn from the representation of these accidents?

My desire is to make desire possible; so the element of agony is taken out, even if in the final count desire generates only agony.

Does the simulation, as a copy of a copy in its multiple mediations, itself become the direct object of our desire?









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UP CLOSE AND IMPERSONAL

Counterfeit Consciousness and the Joy of Abandonment

U. KALPAGAM



We will never defeat the system on the plane of the real... We must therefore displace everything onto the sphere of the symbolic where challenge, reversal, and overbidding are the law.

Jean Baudrillard

Newspaper reports in India recently declared that counterfeit Indian currency, supposedly produced in a government press in the Pakistani city of Quetta, is being funnelled into India in large quantities, both to fund terrorist activities and to destabilise the economy. We, as Indian citizens, are informed that banks have passed on the counterfeit notes to customers, as withdrawing the currency from circulation would involve significant losses for the banks. Unwitting customers sometimes even get counterfeit notes from bank ATM machines. A few months ago, I walked into a branch of the SBI bank in Chennai, one of the few branches to have installed counterfeit-currency detection machines, with a wad of Rs 500 notes to be deposited. The clerk at the counter passed each note through the counterfeit detector, a procedure that took nearly five minutes. Many anxious thoughts raced through my mind during those moments when I was under the scanner of government

suspicion as a potentially subversive citizen. What if there was one note in the pack that was counterfeit, and I was hauled up and asked to give explanations? As if to clear myself of non-existent guilt prior to the hypothetical indictment, I quickly volunteered the information that all the notes had been given to me by my bank in Allahabad, and that I had heard that counterfeit currency circulated there a good deal. The clerk gave an understanding smile and said this was a common phenomenon everywhere. A sense of relief came over me when it turned out that there was no counterfeit note in my pack.

At times I panic when a shopkeeper refuses to accept a 500-rupee note from me when I do not have notes of other denominations. The suspicion cast on me in such cases is

From permanent. the rudimentary understanding of Gresham's law, that bad money drives out good money, it seems that economists' models are these days including counterfeit money; and soon economists will flag off, if they have not already done so, an open economy macroeconomic model that includes counterfeit money from enemies: intended destabilise monev to macroeconomy even as the model grapples with macroeconomic stabilisation. Disorder is now being factored into analysis of systemic risks, and acknowledged not as an aberration but as a norm of everyday life in most postcolonial contexts. In fact, our current practice of electing representatives with criminal records and a history of criminal charges against them is a way of normalising disorder in India through democratic processes. The 'criminal representative' with simultaneous



presence and absence in law has come to represent the figure of the postcolonial subject/citizen who has realised that it is like going through a revolving door to cross the thresholds of inclusion and exclusion from law. A little effort or push by him/her can ensure entry into either zone.

Postcolonial Disorder

The standard juxtaposition of 'law' and 'order' is a matter of liberal faith which insists that where there is law there is order, and vice versa. However, in the postcolonial disorder of the Empire, disorder does not signify the absence of law (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006). Rather, as Agamben (2005) observes, it is a situation of law "being in force without significance". Some theorists have argued that law being in force without significance is perhaps on account of the illegibility of state writing, or on account of an insufficient

socialisation within the parameters of law, especially of those (non)citizens at the margins of the state (Das and Poole, 2004). That the signified, the concept that law expressed in the language of rules, rights and regulations *fails* to signify is not on account of an interpretative deficiency of the hermeneutic community from which law as the signifier emerges, and towards whom signification is directed. The originary condition of modern law within colonial disciplinary power itself created its counterfeit consciousness, as the serial significations of law spin the myth of modernity: a myth that refers to the possibility of realising the community of rights-bearing and reason-endowed self-governing individuals who believe in the telos of progress and material well-being.

Through colonial and postcolonial state power and force, modern law continually seeks to transform its counterfeit status, even as the myth of modernity renders it as forever counterfeit. The citizen-subjects of the postcolonial nation state are forever reconciling the troubled trace of memories of historical injustice buried deep in their collective consciousness, memories that convince them of the counterfeit status of the law that governs their conduct as citizens, even as they are constantly beckoned and ordered to its obedience in their making as citizens. Herein lies the conundrum of the constantly fluctuating borders between 'legality' and 'illegality' based on oppositional perspectives of the state and of those governed; and simultaneously, the powerful and equivocal longing to cross the borders, to claim the zone of illegality, to dwell outside the reach of sovereignty.

This may be read as the transposition of Michel Foucault's analytic of finitude and the doubling of man in the colonial/postcolonial context that Homi Bhabha has brilliantly elucidated in his essay on colonial "mimicry". Foucault shows how modern thought as the analytic of finitude produces the figure of man as an "empirical-transcendental doublet" an entity capable both of achieving objective self-knowledge in the causal and anthropologically-determined way, and of surpassing the bounds of such understanding to justify claims to autonomous selfhood and free-willed ethical or speculative thought. Foucault (1973) also asserted that the unveiling of the "Same" produces the "Double" as "other". Following this insight, Bhabha (1994) noted the critical potential of the space opened up in the recursive mirroring of the "Same" and the "Double". Observing that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 86), Bhabha noted that this ambivalence produces both "mimicry" and "mockery", "resemblance" and "menace", and fixes the subject as a "partial" presence. Mimicry, mockery and menace are similarly produced in the domain of modern law and the constitution of the legal "subject". The "subject" figures as a partial presence in law, and makes a mockery of the rule of law via its partial presence outside of law. The Hobbesian 'state of nature' as a pre-state condition prevails at the margins of the state - except that it is not 'nature', but very much a part of 'culture'.

Counterfeit consciousness is thus the *mode of being* of the postcolonial modern, who is constantly aware of both the counterfeit status of law and of his counterfeit status as partial presence. Bending a rule or finding a loophole in law is thus ingrained in the habitus of the postcolonial subject, for whom law or rule, 'legality' and 'illegality', are factors that

one could skilfully negotiate to one's advantage. For the postcolonial modern, the law-abiding position is equivalent to the vantage point of the loser. Socialisation in law is therefore always incomplete, and its processes always include 'how not to' and 'why not to' abide by the law. Therefore, even if state writing were fully legible, it would not only be read in different 'languages', but its performativity would also become context-dependent, and contingent upon subject positioning.

Postcolonial disorder is thus the congenital condition of our coming into being as the postcolonial citizen-subject, and embodying a difference as well as a *différance* relative to Western modernity; as Derrida claims, "*Différance*, the disappearance of any originary presence, is at once the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of truth. What is, is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it adds to itself the possibility of being repeated as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it... And there is no repetition possible without the graphics of supplementarity" (*Dissemination*, p. 168). Indeed, we increasingly acknowledge becoming a nation-state with a counterfeit imagination of the nation and an equally counterfeit imagination of Western modernity, as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has recently asserted. In the postcolonial disorder of the Empire, the pragmatic, resilient counterfeit has finally, fully, arrived.

Counterfeit Consciousness

If modernity, the imagined nation and modern law are marked as counterfeit, the contemporary is marked by a counterfeit consciousness. The condition of living in the realm of the counterfeit, and the joy of abandonment found therein, gives a new meaning to the idea of the 'sovereign consumer/citizen' of postcolonial disorder. Here we explore the varieties of counterfeit consciousness in the contemporary by drawing from an array of examples such as imitation jewellery, Chinese Rolex watches, fake labels of Levi's Jeans and Nike shoes etc., fake drugs, pirated software and DVDs, counterfeit legal tender, forged documents and passports, replicas of antiquities and art, counterfeit selves, and so on. What differentiates those living in abandonment from those within the embrace of law is explored in terms of the varieties of counterfeit consciousness and states of being that hover at the thresholds of duplicity and offer compelling possibilities of habitation.

Counterfeit consciousness marks the threshold between 'original' and 'fake'. The 'original' is marked as 'authentic' and the 'fake' is the counterfeit, the inauthentic. While the 'original' allegedly has the sanction of the legal and licit, 'fake' is consigned to being outside the legal, and inhabiting the domain of the illegal, the illicit and the exception. Counterfeit then becomes a way of mocking the rule of law. Authenticity is no doubt a concern of European-style modernity. Its association with individuality is linked with the historical processes of self-fashioning as a 'modern' individual, observed since the time of the European Renaissance. Bhabha has usefully highlighted the crucial difference in the constitution of man as 'doublet' in the European and colonial/postcolonial contexts. In the

former, the splitting of subjectivity into the empirical-transcendental doublet was to enable the modern European man to find ways to reconcile with his essence, his 'authentic' being. In the latter context, the splitting of colonial discourse articulated an interdictory 'otherness' that, along with processes of mimicry and performance of the 'other', foregrounds 'counterfeit-ness', thus rendering the search for authenticity an inherently dubious exercise.

Postcolonial counterfeit consciousness articulates the contemporary disorder of the repercussions of Empire through the subversion of globalisation, law and surveillance, articulated via subtle as well as overt strategies of counterfeiting. The fetish of the commodity induces in the postcolonial subject both *desire* and *shock*: the desire to possess the things the way he imagines the Western subject does, and the shock that is experienced upon realising that despite all attempts to mimic the Western subject, the postcolonial



subject is never able to achieve fulfilment through sufficient mastery; in other words, the shock of existing in a mode of lack. In his essay on Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin (1969b) discusses these two sensations, desire and shock, as intrinsic dimensions of the European experience of modernity. Drawing upon Freud, Benjamin suggests that in the effort to cope with these sensations, modern man seeks to protect himself from his intense fear and lack by creating an epistemic shield. This is the function of counterfeit consciousness for the postcolonial subject; it is also a defence against the power of state monopoly, of coercion. Baudrillard (1990) observes that when a 'savage' pounces on a watch or fountain pen, as a Western object, he "voraciously appropriates it in an infantile relation and as a phantasm of power" (p. 41). But it is not so with the postcolonial subject,

whose relation to things and the law becomes the ground for an elaborate and intricate staging of counterfeit consciousness in which desire, fear and duplicity constitute his complex ongoing experience of modernity.

Aura Destruction as Subversion

Some time ago, 'rolled gold' or 'covering jewellery', when worn at a social event such as a middle-class Tamil Brahmin wedding, would be noticed, but accepted as the requisitely decent form of entry into a gathering that had certain expectations of participants wearing gold jewellery; this was contingent upon the ornamentation being within limits, and the economic standing of the wearer being already known to the other participants. Duplicity

here is minimal, restrained and permissible. Over-ornamentation with 'covering jewellery' indicated one had cheap tastes and was limited to the expression of counterfeit desires. But at lower-caste and working-class weddings, where everyone wears 'covering jewellery'; there is no attempt to camouflage this fact, or or pretend to the rest of the group that it is real gold; there is no duplicity at all, even if the product is imitation gold. Unlike modern cultural goods produced and consumed in the West, these traditional cultural goods are not experienced "auratically". If an "aura", as Benjamin noted, consists of the associations that tend to cluster around the object of perception, then the aura of Western goods for the postcolonial Indian is that it signifies Western modernity, even if it is only a counterfeit modernity that is part of the postcolonial's *memoire involontaire*. The recent entry in India of high-end fashion brands in men's clothing such as Zegna, Dunhill and Canali, and women's accessories such as Louis Vuitton, Chanel and Gucci, is on account of the captivating power of 'brand' aura, and the thrill of becoming the 'global modern'. Protecting the aura is thus necessary for the successful signification of modernity, status and social distinction.

Equally, the destruction of the aura then becomes a strategy of subversion. Social distinction becomes a class-contested terrain with 'aura backers' and 'aura busters'. Levi's jeans for the youth of the urban upper class, the highly performative 'mimic' class, was till recently the ultimate symbol of being modern and Western. Aunts, uncles and siblings living in Western countries were routinely asked to bring one pair along so that its wearer could show off among their his/her college mates. Soon, even pavement stalls in big cities started selling jeans affixed with the Levi's label. Ironically, many youths who bought these had no attraction to the designer label, nor were they deceived into believing that the product was original; some were unaware of the Levi's aura altogether. In and of themselves, the jeans to these young consumers were a powerful and dominant symbol of being modern. The production of fake designer jeans is an example of the 'massification' or vulgarisation of 'haute' couture.

Many more examples from everyday utilitarian objects can be cited, such as cheap travel bags and suitcases labelled 'Samsonite' or 'American Tourister', with the manufacturer's address in some Indian small town. Most users of these products would not even know that an original with such a name exists in the US. Such vulgarisation is seen, in the West, as a way by which new forms/goods enter a culture, but one in which the value of the original would eventually be redeemed unscathed. Such is not the case in postcolonial societies in which counterfeit culture produces a fake modernity and a fake trajectory of globalisation that exists as a subversion of the imitation modernity of the contemporary mimic man, the global modern (Chang, 2004). Subversion here is the joyous possession of the fake and the production of the counterfeit.

Counterfeit Profits

Maintaining product and brand authenticity is, however, not just a struggle over aura and related social distinction. It is also a competition over market shares and profit. The 'logic of

capital', the 'logic of culture', and the 'logic of counterfeit' conjointly determine the fluid articulations of the regimes of value in the circuits of production and consumption of the real and the counterfeit (Jamieson, 1999). In "China, Biggest Source of Counterfeit Products" (*Hindu Businessline*, 15 November 2005), Ambrish Jha observes that 30% of the counterfeit products worldwide are being produced in China. Chinese Rolex watches are now as famous as the Swiss ones. India, though lagging behind China, has its hubs of counterfeit production. About 70% of Indian counterfeits are produced in Delhi, and FICCI (Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce) estimates a sizeable revenue loss to the exchequer of approximately Rs 10,000 million each year. The International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition estimates that in the US alone, trademark counterfeiting robs the country of \$200 billion a year. The loss to the EU from counterfeiting and piracy is reportedly £250 billion. Not so long ago, it was a pan-Indian joke to point to the *Made in USA* inscription on a fountain pen or similar object, and to be told that *USA* stands for *Ulhasnagar Sardar Association*. Today the counterfeiters are not only the *sardars* of Ulhasnagar, but also the innumerable small and big manufacturers spread in metropolitan cities and elsewhere.

According to Preeti Mehra in "Crusade against Counterfeit" (*Hindu Businessline*, 2 July 2001), counterfeits in India are reportedly rampant in the FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) sector, software, automobile, book publishing, music industry, movies, packaged water and garment sectors, as these report the highest number of IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) violations. In many village markets in India there is a complete absence of branded FMCG products such as soaps and detergents, and duplicates that are look-alikes or spell-alikes abound. Popular products used in almost every household, such as Lifebuoy soap and Vicks Vaporub, are equally familiar to illiterate and semi-literate rural folk by way of their appearance and function. This counterfeiting is not subversion via "aura" destruction as much as it is an appropriation of the value of a product that has become familiar and acceptable through usage. These are then used by their producers to grab a share of the market, whereas most rural consumers would not even know that they are being duped.

Some years ago, a Brand Protection Committee of MNC players in the FMCG sector, such as Proctor & Gamble, Hindustan Lever, Colgate, Marico, GlaxoSmithKline, Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Gillette, Britannia, etc., was apparently set up to deal with the problem of counterfeits. The companies preferred the legal option to curb the menace, but found themselves in a position of double jeopardy. First, it created negative publicity and consumers began to shun the products, thinking they might be spurious. Second, counterfeit producers were intractable, and when arrested could easily be released on bail as 'faking' is a non-cognisable offence, and resume their production after a temporary halt. Fake drugs are as common as *jhola-chaap* (quack) doctors, even as the 'real', near-identical versions of most drugs made by foreign drug companies are manufactured and sold by leading Indian pharmaceutical companies at much lower prices. Waiting for the patent-time to elapse for those patents held by foreign companies is to accept the trade-off between imperialist profits and third world deaths. In this instance, subversion through counterfeiting has a crucial ethical component that forces the law into retreat.

Authenticity and Ambiguity

'Counterfeit' and 'original' are not binary opposites, but involve a mode of continuity and heterogeneity wherein techniques and motives of camouflage are both within and outside of the law, and correspondingly, duplicity is both social and/or legal. Counterfeits could be outright fakes, non-functional look-alikes, functional but inferior items, and fully functional items illegally manufactured without paying copyright fees. Known variously as counterfeits, knock-offs, fakes, replicas, imitation, bootleg, etc., in appropriating the real, the culture of copying occasionally achieves the zenith of simulation, makes the fake *itself* into the real. "perfectly indistinguishable and doubly authentic", an original that is made to appear as a counterfeit, as in the case of Chinese Harry Potter fakes analysed by Henningsen (2006). It is increasingly being realised that while authenticity may be adequate and valid as a concern of cultural integrity in the West, it has only limited validity elsewhere (Vann, 2006). Near the city of Cologne in Germany is the Museum Plagiarius, dedicated to "innovation contra imitation", with the purpose of shaming those invested in counterfeit culture for profit, aesthetics or economic survival. Ironically, even as museum replicas, the 'exact replicas', become a collectors' fad and a money spinner in the West; 'counterfeit replicas' are sold by underprivileged ethnic minorities and immigrants on Manhattan's sidewalks; elsewhere, in the 'developing' world, the proliferating 'fake' entity becomes ubiquitous, and subversion both a fact of life and a celebration.

The counterfeit has now defiantly entered the zone of ambiguity, its negative associations subsumed within the global phenomenon of outsourcing. But interestingly, Chinese tourists are now wary of picking up outsourced souvenirs, even as Chinese producers continue to engage in rampant counterfeiting (Notar, 2006). A cartoon that evoked much interest last Christmas in the US was the figure of the 'outsourced' Santa in place of the 'real' one in traditional red garments, who, seated in his office in Bangalore, was taking orders from American children to dispatch to them stockings filled with Chinese toys. The place-affect of an object that marks its authenticity has once again been divested, much as mechanical reproduction detached art from its embeddedness in tradition and redesigned it for reproducibility (Benjamin 1969a). "Even the most perfect reproduction of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (ibid., p. 220). Through reproducibility, art prints and photographic prints became possible even without the original. Now, with image software such as Adobe Photoshop, a click of the mouse can effortlessly alter photographs to produce unblemished counterfeit images. Technology has also made possible the 'counterfeit person' or 'counterfeit self'. The art of impersonating a person is not anymore the exclusive privilege of a confidence trickster or an actor, but the mandatory self-refashioning of agents in call centres, now indispensable in global business, when every 12 hours a 'Sita' becomes a 'Cherrie' or a 'Claire'. Cosmetic and plastic surgery can redo a person's face, just as a photo image can be altered or touched up with the help of the computer.

It is in the realm of human cloning, though, that the ambiguous politics of counterfeiting meets its real challenge. The "empirical-transcendental doublet" now has to be rethought along two altogether different axes: gene politics, and the ethical limits of man's meddling capacities.

Living in the Joy of Law's Abandonment

As counterfeits and their possibilities multiply and reproduce in all domains of everyday life, some lawful and others unlawful, the postcolonial citizen-subject as consumer and producer develops a new mode of perceiving the world – through tactile appropriation, through a habit of knowing and willing, through understanding when to make his presence and absence within the terrain of law, when and how to live in the joy of law's abandonment, and when to be repressed in law's unyielding embrace. A person who would not buy fake drugs or would not use them if he knew them to be so would not hesitate to buy a counterfeit printer cartridge if it were a few hundred rupees cheaper than the original, and would look the other way when his co-passenger in a train bought fake bottled water. A counterfeit consciousness enables him to move back and forth between inclusion and exclusion by agents of state security; to manifest or to recede in the domain of law, or to rest content in the zone of indifference.

Through the same mode of tactile appropriation, the postcolonial citizen-subject knows the duplicitous face of the state as its double; understands how state sovereignty itself wields counterfeit power by producing the "homo sacer" (Agamben, 1998); by rendering bodies 'killable' even within the presence of law, as in the case of fake encounter killings of militants and Naxalites: or or deciding, in the case of certain bodies, to 'let die' through apathy. His counterfeit consciousness enables him to apprehend what Agamben (2005) notes as the "secret solidarity between anomie and law". It is this solidarity, so well understood by Indian citizens and their sovereign representatives, that quite recently made it possible for a series of wives/fiancées to join their 'illegal immigrant' husbands/fiancés and experience



the comforts of marital joy in distant lands by travelling there on forged documents and visas, faking themselves to be the family members of parliamentarians who enjoyed some diplomatic immunity from the law.

Counterfeit consciousness enables those at the margins of the state to move towards it, or equally, to move away from the centre. Moreover, these centrifugal and centripetal movements rendered possible by counterfeit consciousness could, in fact, also push the state *itself* to a margin. This raises the perennial hope and possibility of "a state of the world in which the world appears as a good that absolutely cannot be appropriated or made

juridical" (Benjamin, 1992, cited in Agamben, 2005). Agamben too observes, "One day humanity will play with law just as children play with disused objects, not in order to restore them to their canonical use but to free them from it for good" (ibid., p. 64). As 'Midnight's Children', we have learnt to play this game with counterfeit consciousness. The postcolonial disorder of the Empire is not as hopeless as it seems.

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... And Nothing but the Truth, So Help Me Science

LAWRENCE LIANG

Posters, placards, signs, symbols must be distributed, so that everyone may learn their significations. The publicity of punishment must not have the physical effect of terror; it must open up a book to be read...

Michel Foucault (1979)

Truth technologies at the service of law, from the lie detector to narco-analysis, have made a sudden reappearance in the world after 9/11. In the Indian context, high-profile cases (including those of Abu Salem and Telgi) have centred on clearly performative extractions of the truth. This essay attempts to provide a philosophical and cultural history of technologies of lie detection. It looks at the ways in which truth and lies were rendered technologically accessible, and how the body simultaneously becomes the archive of the soul and in turn produces a new regime of physiological truth; it also locates the remergence of lie detectors within the dynamics of secrets and lies in the hyper-mediatised world that we live in.

Whereas conventional lie detectors rely on changes in respiration, blood pressure and heart rate, the new devices depend on differences in blood flow and electrical activity within certain areas of the brain. While brain-imaging technologies such as FMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) and brain fingerprinting promise to exorcise the messy autonomic body foundational to the polygraph mechanism, both continue to rely on psychophysiological principles. They maintain that there is a connection between body and mind; that physiological changes are indicative of mental states and emotions; and that information about an individual's subjectivity and identity can be derived from these physiological and physiological measures of deception.

In the US, each advance that has replaced polygraph technology has proved it to be pseudo-science; but in India, with our different temporalities, we invoke all three tests just to make sure¹...

With regard to the application of the technologies, some key questions continue to assert themselves:

- > How did truth and the world of interiority become mechanically accessible?
- > In what ways is the question of access to interiority configured and realised?
- > How do technologies of physiological truth define the human body's boundaries, and shape our understanding of verifiable identity?
- > What is the role of popular culture and public discourse in construing these technologies as objects/techniques of science?

Nor can we ignore the current political interest in lie detection, including the proposed draft of a DNA profiling bill providing for an interface between law and forensic science.² For instance, as stated by Dr M.S. Rao, Chief Forensic Scientist, Government of India:

Forensic psychology plays a vital role in detecting terrorist cases. Narco-analysis and brainwave fingerprinting can reveal future plans of terrorists and can be deciphered to prevent terror activities... Preventive forensics will play a key role in countering terror acts. Forensic potentials must be harnessed to detect and nullify their plans. Traditional methods have proved to be a failure to handle them. Forensic facilities should be brought to the doorstep of the common man... Forensic activism is the solution for better crime management.³

Feminist scholar Melissa Littlefied argues that technologies of truth have always depended on a central paradox: that individuals can be represented through disembodied informational patterns, even as detection remains an embodied phenomenon detectable through physiological processes. The human body is somehow expected to function both as a measurable machine and as a fluctuating manifold of flesh, and the lie detector serves as a compelling case study of the "porous boundaries between bodies, minds, machines and the law"⁴.

The three primary lie-detection technologies⁵ may be usefully summed up here:

The lie detector test (polygraph) is an examination, conducted by various probes attached to the body of the person who is interrogated by an 'expert'. The heart rate and skin conductance is measured. The underlying theory is that when people lie, they also get nervous about lying: their heartbeat increases, blood pressure rises, breathing rhythm changes, perspiration intensifies, etc. A baseline for these physiological characteristics is established by asking the subject such questions whose answers the investigator knows. Deviation from the baseline for truthfulness is taken as a sign of a lie. Polygraph analysis may be sought to be rendered as evidence in court, if and when required.

The narco-analysis (truth serum) test is conducted by injecting 3 grams of sodium pentothal dissolved in 3000 millilitres of distilled water. This solution is administered intravenously along with a 10% solution of dextrose over a period of 3 hours, with the help of an anaesthetist. The rate of administration is so controlled as to push the suspect slowly into the state of hypnotic trance. Blood pressure and heart rate are monitored continuously throughout the testing procedure. Statements made during the hypnotic trance are recorded both on video and audio. The questions are designed carefully and repeated

persistently in order to reduce the ambiguities during such interrogation. The report prepared by 'experts' is seen as a useful item of evidence within the law.

The brain mapping/brain fingerprinting (P-300) test measures the activity of the brain while an individual is exposed to stimuli. Specifically, it relies on the P-300 brain wave, one that spikes 300-800 milliseconds after the subject recognises and processes an incoming stimulus that is significant or noteworthy. The suspect is first interviewed and interrogated to find out whether he is concealing any information. The activation of the brain with regard to the associated memory is carried out by presenting to the accused a list of words, images, phone numbers, locations or names. The response is acquired through a 32-channel Neuro Scan Recording system. The suspect is asked to sit down and close his eyes; the recording electrodes are placed directly on the scalp. No oral response is expected. Following the recording, 'experts' analyse the test results for possible evidence of suppressed information.

A judgement of the Bombay High Court, *Ramchandra Ram Reddy v. State of Maharashtra* (2004), upheld the validity of administering all three tests, arguing that they do not violate the right against self-incrimination provided in Article 20 (3) of the Constitution of India. This judgement asserts that "No person accused of any offence shall be compelled to be a witness against himself"; i.e., provides against testimonial compulsion.

The court raised a technical distinction between a statement and a testimony:

It will thus be seen that what is required to be made under compulsion by an accused is a statement... In our opinion, the tests of brain mapping and lie detector, in which the map of the brain is the result, or polygraph, then either cannot be said to be a statement. As we have seen from the description of the tests noted above and the end result of brain mapping tests, it is a map showing reactions of the brain to certain target questions, and the conclusion that can be drawn by an expert after such treatment is that the person undergoing the tests does possess certain knowledge of the crime, in relation to which target questions were put to the accused. In both these tests there is no way to find out what the lie is or what is the information stored in the brain of the person concerned. That being the end result of the tests, it cannot be said by any stretch of imagination that the end result is a statement made by the witness. At the most it can be called the information received or taken out from the witness. Whatever is the information, it has to be established that it is incriminating for the person who makes it, for invoking the protection under Article (20) 3. In our opinion therefore there is no reason why these two tests be not administered.6

The prehistory of the lie detector lies in the period 1907-1920 which saw the emergence of a whole series of different machines, each in their own way linked to the persona of the criminal. These were variously named "the soul machine", "machines for the cure of liars", "truth-compelling machines". But from the 1920s onwards, the lie detector emerged as a "discourse-object" which is a culmination of these various predecessor

technologies.⁷ Prior to this, Carl Jung had been experimenting with the idea of a "psychometer" which would be able to assist in the detection of the emotional state of individuals. While "indifferent words" produced no effect on the "finger of light" of the psychometer, others which struck "some emotional complex deep in the soul of the individual" would "light up the machine", and send the light along the scale "for a distance of one centimetre up to six, or eight, or more, in proportion to the intensity and actuality of the emotion". Another technology was created by psychologist Hugo Münsterberg, again with its roots in psychoanalysis. Accounts of both technologies were reported in the press.

However, the discourse soon began to move towards the possible uses of these technologies towards crime detection/forensics. The scholar Geoffrey Bunn demonstrates that the most significant shift that enabled the coming into being of the lie detector was not a matter or apparatus or technology; nor was it a change in the locus of guilt from the skin to the heart and lungs. It was, instead, a change in the *object of knowledge*. Rather than focusing on analysing the criminal, the technology was realigned towards the detection of the lie.⁹

This is also the period of the rise of statistics, and the emergence of the tyranny of numbers. Thus, the field of criminalistics, rooted in positivism and instrumental rationality, developed at great speed. The assumption was that emotions could also be reduced to a set of measurable principles. The body was seen as both empirically knowable and in need of externally imposed principles of order and control. Accordingly, forensic science was configured on the principles of transference, individuation, identification, association and reconstruction, which inform the intersection between information systems and embodiment.¹⁰

It is also worth noting another shift in thinking from the late 19th to early 20th century, with regard to the human mind, emotion and ideas of selfhood. These had been considered the domain of philosophers; but a newly emergent discipline, psychology, had now taken them as its central concern. Littlefield brilliantly traces the emergence of this 'new' or 'experimental' psychology which transformed emotional interiority into a visually present, quantifiable, controllable and rationalised object of knowledge; and the science of emotions signified the breakdown of the epistemic boundaries that separated inside from outside and subject from nature. As she puts it: "[...] it depended on the modernist mechanisation of the body, by defining interiority as the manifestation of the brain displayed via various verbal and instrumental examinations. According to this schema, character, personality, guilt, innocence and accountability are determined not by actions, but by reactions; not by intuition, but by methodology"¹¹.

The production and interpretation of these new scientific images of emotion resonated with and mediated broader historical, epistemological and cultural transformations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The latter include the predominance of the graphic method, the emergence of modern forms of knowledge, and in particular, changing definitions of objectivity and of the 'image' of objectivity. It also takes into account the modern appropriation of subjectivity, and the shifting representation of the body from a spiritualised Victorian to an emotionalised modern, and the shifting boundaries between art

and science within the broad frame of a late $19^{\text{th}}\text{-century}$ evidential paradigm. 12

Three basic techniques enabled the scientific rendering of emotional experience into visual images:

- > monitoring the body during emotion
- > sampling from the body during emotion
- > examining the 'post-emotional' body

Within this science, all the corporeal elements mapped themselves onto visual representations, including graphs, diagrams and charts, as emotional experience in its pure form. Once the somatic interventions were concluded, the technology disappeared and blood pressures, changing blood glucose levels and the undulating measures of blood lymphocytes revealed emotion as information. These representations relied on the creation of a new mode of seeing and a new language to support the visual data. Simultaneously, there was a reliance on familiar language of emotions and familiar emotional phenomena, such as the blush. Older signs were thus re-signified into new interpretative parameters. The patterns that had earlier indicated completely different processes came to be seen as representing emotion. For instance, the same physiological pattern of white blood cells that signified 'infection' could now be read as 'excitement'; cardiac sounds that signified valvular disease could now be read as 'apprehension'...¹3

While the experiments conducted through these "soul machines" configured themselves as raw scientific data, they also revealed a lot about contextual racial and administrative insecurities, and their status as cultural narratives. The Chinese were found to be more intellectually efficient than their Western counterparts; women more emotional than men; blacks more emotional than whites, etc.

Michel Foucault's work has shown how the desire to fix truth in objective and universally rational systems of thought, such as law, medicine and social sciences, extends the power of knowledge over the self. Lie-detection technologies were similarly providing the way for a new articulation of the self through technologies of visual representations. Private, machine-mediated dialogues with/of the self were now on public display, and transcriptions of subjectivity, thus materialised, promoted these narratives of the mind – the struggles between will and emotion; the self as an active and ontologically existing agent; and the mind as a space into which emotions intruded.

The experiments, which encased the subject in a system of knowledge, sanctioned a new form of public confession: not in the church or the clinic,





but in the laboratory or the public sphere. As stated by Foucault: "The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a fixed network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" ¹⁴.

In addition, the lie detector also intervened in the domain of moral life by promising to improve and substantially change the power and utility of ethics. William Marston, comic-book author, writer of essays in popular psychology, and creator of the systolic blood-pressure test used to detect deception, which became a key component of the modern polygraph, remarked poetically in 1938 that in the Garden of Eden, "God's method was wholly scientific. He observed the suspects' behaviour and reasoned logically that this behaviour was an outward, visible expression of hidden emotions and ideas of guilt that the man and woman were attempting to conceal. This was the true principle of lie detecting" 15.

In some senses, the subjectivity that is produced by the lie detector is the verbal equivalent of the panopticon – the idea of a certain will to truth as a result of being watched and scrutinised by technologies of truth-telling. As philosopher of science lan Hacking has reminded us, the emergence of modes of classifications produces new ways of thinking of the self, identity and memory. ¹⁶ This creates a looping effect, a form of labelling that has consequences for selfhood. As persons come to behave in accordance with the category, so the category changes.

The genesis of lie-detection technologies, as of other forensic technologies, was embedded in the world of public culture and popular science, particularly 19th-century detective fiction, in which the depiction of criminalistics blurred the divisions between literature and science. Arthur Conan Doyle's character Sherlock Holmes was a classic figure in this regard. The law-enforcement machine, the detective (literary hero) and the scientific discipline were all embedded in the same configuration of cultural needs and anxieties. As a technology, the lie detector had to be legitimised in science and popular culture long before it was accepted in courts of law.¹⁷ In 1923, William Münsterberg tried admitting the results of a polygraph test as admissible evidence in a court of law, but it was refused. A disappointed Münsterberg noted: "...it therefore seems necessary not to rely simply on the technical statements of scholarly treatises, but to carry the discussion in the most popular form possible before the wider tribunal of the general reader..." ¹⁸

According to Melissa Littlefield, the technology also relied on a mode of performance: "the meeting of the Latourian laboratory and the Foucauldian examination" in an acutely "ritualised" domain that contained "the ceremony of power, the form of the experiment, the deployment of

force and the establishment of truth". In this context, as claimed by Latour, "reality cannot be used to explain why a statement becomes a fact, since it is only after it has become a fact that the effect of reality is obtained..."19

Each development in the field has attempted to legitimise itself by proving the preceding one to be a pseudo science. Thus the movement from the polygraph to telepathic energy; and the current pride of place goes to advanced 'scientific' brain mapping or brain fingerprinting technology.

In *The Truth Machine* (1996), novelist James Halperin predicted that an altruistic child prodigy would design a foolproof and widely deployable lie detector by 2024. The Armstrong Cerebral Image Processor (ACIP) will be based on a "combination of physiologically enhanced MRI (magnetic resonance Imaging) and cerebral image reconstruction". This "Truth Machine" would be a far cry, technologically speaking, from traditional polygraphs that detect deception by monitoring various physiological processes (including heart rate, blood pressure and respiration) and equating changes in these processes to emotional stress and therefore deception.

This futuristic projection has come true in the contemporary, via the development of brain-mapping technologies. Instead of relying on changes in autonomic function and their inferred emotional correlates, this method uses both MRI and brain fingerprinting to measure activity in the brain, the organ that is *actually* doing the lying. Rather than moving beyond the mind-body divide, brain mapping mirrors contemporary neurophysiology, which feminist scientist Elizabeth Wilson alleges "rescues only the central nervous system from Cartesianism; the rest of the body is readily abandoned to brute, non-cognitive mechanisation"²⁰.

In the 1940s and '50s, the portable lie detector was used to screen 'security risks' to the US, and included Senator Eugene McCarthy's attempts at screening those suspected to be 'anti-national', particularly Communist sympathisers and homosexuals. The latest lie detection technology is predictably being mobilised in the name of the global war against terror. But the latest technology is also being mobilised as something that is finally 'trustworthy', and predictably also sets out to prove the pseudo-science of earlier technologies such as the polygraph.

Lawrence Farwell, the inventor of brain-mapping technologies, argues that that brain fingerprinting has nothing to do with lie detection. His claim is that a person's brain responds unconsciously to sounds, images or words that it recognises. Since this takes place at the unconscious level, a person cannot control any response to a stimulus, and hence the technology cannot be manipulated in the way a polygraph test might be. Littlefield, however, argues that despite these claims of difference, both polygraphy and brain-based techniques share crucial aspects. Polygraphy assumes a correspondence between physiology and emotion, while brain-based techniques rely on the localist assumption that the brain behaves mechanistically; that there is a one-to-one mapping between human thinking and the computation of a machine.

In other words, brain fingerprinting enables scientific access to unseen information 'stored' in a subject's brain.

According to a 2001 statement by Seattle-based Brain Fingerprinting Laboratories,²¹ the technology can be utilised to:

- > aid in the determination of who has participated in terrorist acts, directly or indirectly
- > aid in identifying trained terrorists with the potential to commit future terrorist acts, even if they are in a 'sleeper' cell and have not been active for years
- > help to identify people who have knowledge/training in banking, finance or communications, and who are associated with terrorist teams/acts
- > help to determine which individual is in a leadership role within a terrorist organisation

Farwell states that that a trained terrorist posing as an innocent Afghani student *will* have information regarding terrorist training, procedures, contacts, operations and plans stored in his brain; the technology of brain fingerprinting can detect the presence or absence of this information, and thus distinguish the terrorist from the innocent person.

This statement indicates a significant shift in focus – i.e., brain fingerprinting tests no longer merely *detect knowledge*; they *assess activity*, and even *potential* actions. The move from latent to active knowledge is, in part, fuelled by our post-9/11 'risk society'.²² Farwell's technique not only describes knowledges, intentions and activities, but also helps to produce and name them by redefining terrorism as perpetually latent, as physiologically measurable.

The ability to distinguish between knowledges becomes a crucial element in the war on terrorism, not because knowledge is a new hazard in and of itself, but because it is a new – and ostensibly productive – risk indicator.

This is illustrated in parallel rhetoric by state forensic expert Dr M. S. Rao:

The human brain stores all information acquired through experience as well as other forms of learning. Knowledge of crime perpetuated by the individual is also stored in the brain of the perpetrator. Though the perpetrator usually denies his involvement in the crime, he is aware of his action of participation in the act. By presenting appropriate probes, the awareness about the experience can be activated. This activation gets reflected in the electrical oscillation in the brain. The oscillation associated with the retrieved awareness of the experience may be considered as a signature of the experience in the brain. There would be no such associated response or signature if the person has not committed the act in question and hence does not have experiential knowledge of the act, as the individual under investigation has not in reality participated in the crime in the act under investigation. The presence of electrical activation of specific changes in electrical oscillation patterns of the brain, in this context, indicates the presence of experiential knowledge in a person about a crime or incident under investigation.²³

Moreover, in his keynote address at the Forensic Science Forum at the National Police Academy, Dr Rao stated:

This technique of using electromagnetic radiation can control the mind of the suicide bomber and make him leave his target place silently without making any effort to explode the bomb at the given area. We don't have this technique available right now. We have to adopt the technology. It will show the effect on the brain. Nowadays, suicide attacks by terrorist outfits demand innovative planning and rethinking on forensic research. A suicide bomber has to be tackled properly by detecting explosives from safe, stand-off distances...²⁴

Francis Galton, who helped bring fingerprinting from colonial India to Scotland Yard in 1901, argued that these ridged markings are unique indicators of an individual's identity, which neither fade nor change over time. Similarly, Farwell's premise is that each brain contains unique information that is attached to different memories; thus, the term "brain fingerprinting" implies that each brain represents a unique map of life experiences – including any crimes or wrongdoings committed.²⁵

Brain-based detection promises to quantify and more accurately record the secret interiority and intentionality of individuals by bypassing the body. Littlefield argues that this mode "abandons the autonomic body of traditional polygraphy to focus only on brain-asmind, or the 'biological mind' – a hybrid of physiology and psychology, a mass of quantifiable data, a fleshy and obliging organ that is compatible with techniques of scientific measurement; it is the final fragment of matter between science and subjectivity. In other words, brain-based detection has shifted the site of access to consciousness without reevaluating the body-mind-brain hierarchy"²⁶.

Moreover, there was a distinct difference between the 1920s when popular discourse was created around the lie detector, and the contemporary cultural response to 'truthenabling' technologies. Today the performative space of the laboratory extends via the media, and *everyone* is an expert at decoding the results. The perfect ally of the lie detector is global media – the greatest lie-producing machine that produces a regime of 'truth' from which there is little escape.

Roland Barthes' 1957 essay "The Brain of Einstein"²⁷ meditates on how the great scientist's brain became a focus of fetishistic display and marvel after his death – on the one hand, it had once been the repository of a most brilliant mind; and on the other, it was simply organic material the size of a walnut. Einstein's brain was a *mythic* object, a machine of genius, symbolising the power of thought and embodying the most contradictory dreams; Einstein was simultaneously magician and machine, eternal researcher and unfulfilled discoverer...

Einstein's brain subscribes to all the conditions of myth, which is indifferent to contradictions as long as it is able to establish a mode of euphoric security. Unleashing the best and the worst, brain and conscience, this mythic object reconciles the infinite power of man over nature with the fatality of the sacrosanct, which man cannot yet do without...

Lie detection is a similarly mythic and ambivalent enterprise, a manifestation of apparently contradictory notions such as science and magic, freedom and coercion – all of which remain in blissful support of the 'euphoric security' that it provides.

Editors' Note

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Notes

- The year 2006 witnessed the flourishing of lie-detection technologies in India, and almost every accused in cases from stamp-paper scams to terrorist attacks were subject to the deadly threesome of the polygraph, narco-analysis and brain mapping.
- The Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics at the National Academy of Legal and Juridical Sciences in Hyderabad have proposed a DNA profiling bill, providing for an interface between law and forensic science.
- 3. Keynote address given to the 93rd Indian Science Congress. See http://mindjustice.org/india2-06.htm
- Melissa Monique Littlefield. "Technologies of Truth: The Embodiment of Deception Detection". Doctoral dissertation, p. 3, Pennsylvania State University (2005). My argument in this essay relies on the excellent work done in this area by scholars Melissa Littlefield, Geoffrey Bunn and Tal Golan.
- Summarised in Ramchandra Ram Reddy v. State of Maharashtra, MANU/MH/0067/2004. See also Supriya Rai, "Narcoanalysis Tests and Constitutional Imperatives", http://symlaw.ac.in/doc/supriya_rai.pdf
- 6. See Para 18 of Ramchandra Ram Reddy v. State of Maharashtra, op. cit.
- 7. Geoffrey Bunn. "The Hazards of the Will to Truth". Doctoral dissertation, York University (1997).
- 8. Ibid., p. 30.
- 9. Ibid., p. 69.
- 10. Ian Hacking. The Taming for Chance (Cambridge University Press, 1990, Cambridge).
- 11. Melissa Littlefield, op. cit., p. 3.
- 12. Tal Golan. Laws of Man and Laws of Nature: A History of Scientific Expert Testimony in England and America (Harvard University Press, 2004, Cambridge).
- 13. Otinel Dror. "The Scientific Images of Emotion: Experience and Technologies of Inscription". In *Configurations* 7(3), pp. 35-41 (1999).
- Michel Foucault. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books Inc., 1995, New York).
- 15. William Marston. "The Lie Detector Test". Quoted in Geoffrey Bunn, op. cit., p. 192.
- 16. See for instance Ian Hacking, Rewriting the Soul (Princeton University. Press, 1998, Princeton).

- 17. Ronald Thomas. *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1999, Cambridge).
- 18. Quoted in Melissa Littlefield, op. cit., p. 39.
- 19. Ibid., p. 75.
- 20. Elizabeth Wilson. Neural Geographies. Quoted in Melissa Littlefield, op. cit., p. 159.
- See Report of Brain Fingerprinting Laboratories, available at: http://www.brainwavescience.com/ExecutiveSummary.php
- 22. To describe the emergence of lie-detection technologies in the contemporary, Littlefield invokes Ulrich Beck's idea of a risk society as one that creates, defines (through various scientific media) and works to mitigate various hazards in a perpetual cycle that ultimately maintains risk production by affirming "the scientific monopoly on rationalisation".
- 23. http://mindjustice.org/india2-06.htm
- 24. http://mindjustice.org/raokeynote.htm
- 25. Simon Cole. Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification (Harvard University Press, 2001, Cambridge).
- 26. Melissa Littlefield, op. cit., p. 175.
- 27. Roland Barthes. Mythologies (Noonday Press, 1957, New York).

Unofficial Secrets Act:The Administration of Certainty and Ambiguity

SHUDDHABRATA SENGUPTA

Secrecy is the very substance of statecraft, and it is not for nothing that the ritual of appointment to a government position, whether by virtue of election or official recruitment or promotion, involves an oath of secrecy. Official matters, by and large, are secret matters, protected by laws that are usually called Official Secrets Acts.

In India, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) has been on the statute books since 1923, and performs a delicate tango with the more recent Right to Information Act (RTI), which should perhaps have more accurately been called the Right to Selective Information Act. Its actual function is to ensure that you cannot know anything about things that really matter, such as the way decisions of defence and the notion of national security affect our daily lives. So that if a person 'disappears' in the course of yet another exercise of 'national security' under, for instance, the Armed Forces Special Protection Act (AFSPA) in Kashmir or India's Northeast, the RTI cannot be invoked to reveal the circumstances and the official stances pertaining to that disappearance.

These two pieces of legislative technology, the OSA and the RTI, build a firewall around government out of the incendiary masonry of the security and integrity of the state, public order, the honour and dignity of the courts, relations with friendly powers. They constitute, in some ways, the obverse face of surveillance – if surveillance is a mechanism of rendering people transparent to power, then official secrecy is a method of rendering power opaque to people.

My interest in the subject of contemporary information politics is not to investigate things locked up and filed away as official secrets, but to explore the shadowy world of unofficial secrets – the kind of things that are done *without* a memo or jotting in a file. In other words, how unofficial secrets 'act' under the shadow of the Official Secrets Act.

This interest in the unofficial secret had many sources, but one of the earliest was a curious report by journalist Swati Chaturvedi about the innocuous Indian pastime of writing 'Letters to the Editor', in the *Indian Express* newspaper (25 July 1997):

IB Plays Impostor, Writes Letters Using Your Name

When you open the newspaper in the morning, be ready for a surprise. You may see your name and address below a letter to the Editor, carrying an opinion that's certainly not yours. If you're lucky, you may see only your address and a name that doesn't exist.

The Intelligence Bureau (IB), the government's dirty tricks department, has employed a bunch of officers whose job is to ensure that editorial pages of newspapers carry what is perceived to be the government's point of view. To ensure credibility and variety, they regularly use real names or real addresses, sometimes both.

The suspicion – and investigation – began when letters to the editor began arriving at two private fax numbers at the *Indian Express*. First came the letters. Then a string of reminders. The tone and tenor of the letters were strikingly similar and, more important, they were on select issues such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, nuclear opinion and Pakistan. There have been similar persuasive letters and reminders in the mail too. And in all the letters, the content was identical, often backed by facts only specialists usually have access to.

The *Indian Express* decided to unravel the mystery and trace the authors. As for the letters sent by fax, the task was easy. In one case the fax number that the letter was sent from figures in an internal directory at the IB office in RK Puram.

Express sent out letters to some of these 'writers', inviting them to write opinion pieces for the newspaper. These letters were sent by courier and registered post. Here's what we found:

1. Name: Jesse Kochar. Address: 421 Victorian Avenue, 13th 6 D Main Nagar, HAL, Bangalore - 8.

Letter: "In every country letters going out and coming in are read. I would guess there is no other method except this to find out if the post is not being used for hanky-panky".

Status when investigated: Person exists, address is correct, but he never wrote the letter.

A puzzled Jesse Kochar of Bangalore wrote back: "While I do not remember writing to you, I would love to write for the paper".

2. Name: Colonel Ram Singh. Address: 1/4 Preet Vihar, Nainital, Uttar Pradesh.

Letter: "That you should publish the article after the Indian veto at the ad hoc Nuclear Test Ban Committee reflects poorly on your editorial standards and your apparent willingness to bend backwards to accommodate non-proliferation pedagogues".

Status when investigated: Wrong address and incomplete, since there is no Preet Vihar in Nainital.

3. Name: Dr S.S. Srinavasan. Address: DEE Rm 12, Indian Institute of Technology, Hauz Khas. New Delhi.

Letter: "It is regrettable that the *Indian Express* should continue to allow American non-proliferation fanatics to use its columns to disseminate their propaganda".

Status when investigated: The address exists, but no such person. "This is not me", writes Dr Murthy, actual occupant of DEE Rm. 12, IIT, to the institute's despatch section.

4. Though our letter addressed to S.P. Rajan of Rajouri Garden, Delhi, came back saying "No such person at given address", this correspondent went to the spot to confirm. After spending four hours in Rajouri Garden trying to trace S.P. Rajan, the address (G-19/2) was finally located. An irate middle-aged lady who had been woken up from her siesta said, "Kya baat hai? Yahan par koi is naam ka nahi hai (What is the matter? There is no one by this name here)!" The family, she said, doesn't buy this newspaper and nobody has ever written a letter to the editor.

So, where do these ghost letters come from?

Investigations show that these letters are written by a shadowy cell of the IB, headed by a joint-director. It keeps an eye on what it calls 'media trends' and steps in to correct wrong perceptions. The cell employs Deputy Central Intelligence Officers (DCIOs) and Assistant Central Intelligence Officers (ACIOs). But when it is a case of writing letters to the media, officials of other cells will step in and write letters trying to correct 'peacenik' and 'Pakistan-friendly perceptions'.

This is a telling instance of how unofficial secrets do 'act': sometimes with hilariously whimsical consequences, sometimes with deadly precision; they act with great effect also because they are, by and large, *absences in the record*.

Their existence can only be inferred from anomalies and the recurrence of inexplicable patterns, and from the measures that become necessary for the sake of credibility and variety. Walking ambiguities, unresolved suspicions: these measures are spectres that haunt and patrol the territory of certainty, armed with their own ephemeral nature. Like the sophisticated forms of torture that leave no mark on their victims, unofficial secrets act without leaving traces in files.

We know they exist, we sometimes experience the agony or the uncanny sense of *déjà vu* that they cause, but our knowledge is of no real consequence because we cannot hold anyone accountable for them. This is typical of the functioning of what is today known as the 'deep state'.

This entity – in Turkish, *derin devlet* – is generally defined as an influential and informal coalition cutting across political ideologies, that lies at the heart of the Turkish political system. In some ways, it is analogous to what has been called the 'military-industrial complex' (or more recently, the 'military-industrial-entertainment complex' in the US), since the deep state is composed of elements within the Turkish military and intelligence communities, the judiciary, the media and key leaders of organised crime.

There is, however, a crucial distinction between the 'deep state' hypothesis and 'conspiracy theory', an apparently similar construct. *Conspiracies are episodes; the deep state is an enduring condition.* Conspiracies involve the conscious coming together of

specific people for specific covert purposes. The deep state, on the other hand, is part of the political unconscious; it does not have to rely on individuals and their particular agendas or self-interest.

The deep state is an effect of a certain technology of governance, particularly in situations where there is a semblance of formal democracy, which creates a suspension, deep within the heart of the political system, of the limitations of constitutionality and political accountability.

It is a fascinating paradox that a totalitarian state does not actually need a deep state. The permissible arbitrariness of state action in totalitarian systems does not require any comprehensive camouflage. The secret police is at most a very public secret. However, in societies where totalitarian and repressive tendencies lurk as enclaves at the core of apparently open political systems, for instance in Turkey, Israel, Iran, India, Russia, the US and the UK, the mechanisms of the deep state are regularly utilised.

Its characteristics include:

- > an overarching fealty to nationalism (transcending, as in India, the ideological divides between left/right, secularists/communalists, liberals/conservatives)
- > similar loyalty to the interests of the 'security' and 'integrity' of the state; this may come occasionally into conflict with what is called the 'rule of law'
- > covert deployment of strategies of coercion, disinformation, performance, information management, 'discreet' influence and outright violence, to manipulate and sometimes assist political and economic elites
- > realisation of specific state objectives with great velocity, within an apparently democratic, rule-bound framework
- > the state holding in abeyance its own constitution
- > enactment of legislation such as the AFPSA, mentioned earlier, and the now-repealed Prevention of Terrorism Act, which effectively annul the question of due political process or legality
- > building fluid coalitions between state and non-state actors from the street level of the *havaldar* (police constable) and the *mukhbir* (informer), to the special operations counter-insurgent/surrendered militant, mandarin, senior journalist or media baron
- > enabling a systematic pattern of exchange between formal and informal processes of repression and information management
- > creating durable ties between the intelligence community and the criminal underworld

The deep state is that aspect of the state that does not have to obey the laws that bind the lives of its citizens, or which can act according to the laws that annul what is otherwise called the rule of law. It is the crystallisation of the state of exception, of the originary moment of violence that transcends and takes precedence over the limitations of legality, on which the authority and the fear of the state is built. The deep state is the secret agent

who lurks in the depths of the terror network, and the terrorist nested deep within the structures of power.

The production of terrorism is not something that happens *sui generis*. In almost every society, this phenomenon is also a production of *images* of terror. The fear that terrorism generally induces is not so much by way of the actual violence but by way of a circulation/amplification of images and their effects. Even more or less arbitrary calendrical notations such as 9/11, 12/13 or 7/7 become indexical images of terror. Encountering these particular alphanumeric arrangements stimulates at least a reflexive twinge of the recognition of fear.

If the production of terrorism is so interlaced with the production of images, it can also be claimed that the production of certain images is also linked to a particular climate, one that gives credibility to the production of a certain set of seemingly self-evident truths about terrorism. For instance, as seen in the following media accounts.

The first is from *The Hindustan Times* of 19 August 2005:

Deoband in J&K Terror Frame

By Vasistha Bhardwaj

Muzaffarnagar: It was just another film roll, until it was developed. The roll contained 32 snaps – all of terrorists brandishing AK-47 rifles and wireless sets. The dress of the terrorists and the hilly backdrop suggest the snaps were taken somewhere in J&K or PoK.

The roll also lends credence to Home Minister Shivraj Patil's recent admission in the Rajya Sabha about the connection between western UP and various terrorist organisations.

Sources say a girl, who identified herself as Vandana and had come with a child, had given the roll to Gitanjali Photo Studio and Colour Lab in Deoband for developing on 17 August. The Deoband studio had, as per its arrangement with another studio, handed it over to Maan Colour Lab in Muzaffarnagar for developing the same day. The girl was supposed to take delivery on Thursday.

The studio owner in Muzaffarnagar was in for a shock when he developed the roll. He immediately informed the police, who only messed things up. Instead of laying a trap for the girl, they took into custody the owners of Maan Colour Lab, Pradeep and Ambarish Tyagi. Word spread and no one turned up to claim the snaps. The owner of the Deoband studio, Atul, has also been taken into custody.

As per the description given by Atul, the police are getting a sketch of the girl made. The matter has been brought to the notice of the SSP, DIG and IG.

The police have also sent the snaps to the J&K police to ascertain the spot where they were taken and identify the terrorists if possible. Investigations are in progress to ascertain the possible links and hideouts of terrorists in Uttar Pradesh, Principal

Secretary (Home), Alok Sinha, told reporters in Lucknow. Sinha too said the snaps were taken somewhere in the Kashmir Valley.

The UP government has issued a statewide alert asking officials to step up vigil in all the districts. Sinha, however, refused to name the sensitive districts.

Meanwhile, police officials in Kashmir agreed that the hilly backdrop in the snaps strikingly resembles the hilly areas of J&K and PoK. "The Kashmir connection is clearly visible from the snaps", a senior officer told *HT*.

The second is from *The Indian Express* of 20 August 2005:

Story behind J-K Photos: Only Cops in Disguise

New Delhi: An embarrassed Army today admitted that photographs seized from a studio in Muzaffarnagar district two days ago were of undercover special police officers and village defence council (VDC) members disguised as militants for counterinsurgency operations.

On suspicion that men shown as carrying weapons and radio sets in the 36 photographs were militants, UP police had yesterday sealed the Muzaffarnagar studio and arrested its owner Pradeep Tyagi and his associate Ambarish.

The Army confirmed that photos reached the studio because of an oversight by Major Amit Agarwal, adjutant of the 27 Rashtriya Rifles battalion, deployed in Poonch district. The roll was dropped off at a photolab in Deoband by Major Agarwal's sister.

Confirming that there was an "administrative lapse and a human error" on part of the investigating agencies, DIG (Meerut Range) R.K. Vishwakarma told the *Indian Express* that last evening, he received a call from a senior Army officer, a colonel based in Poonch, informing him that the pictures in question were taken a few months back in Surankote.

"He categorically told us that these pictures were in custody of Major Amit Agarwal, a *dandapal* in the Rashtriya Rifles, and that he had inadvertently left the film roll in Deoband, at his ancestral house".

The police had, meanwhile, prepared a sketch of the girl on the basis of the description provided by Neetu Tyagi, the studio owner, and had released the sketch of the girl late last night. A massive hunt for the girl had begun late last night and the police had questioned several people in this regard, Saharanpur SSP Prashant Kumar said.

The men in the photographs, from a village in Surankote, were under the supervision of the 27 RR battalion in Poonch in July. "They were on a routine operation when the SPOs and VDCs decided to click photographs at a scenic location in the mountains", an Army official said. The roll they had used to click "casual photographs" was confiscated by a junior commissioned officer and handed over to Major Amit Agarwal.

Agarwal had inadvertently carried the roll to his house in Deoband; his sister left the roll at the studio.

The performativity of fancy dress, when transposed onto the indexicality of the photographic image in this case, makes for the peculiar layering of ambiguity and certitude that is the hallmark of the information strategy of the deep state. And so, the dead bodies of terrorists on a suicide mission, as in the case of the 13 December attack on the Indian parliament in 2001, always carry identity cards with photographs, diaries with names and addresses, maps and mobile phones with the phone numbers of their contacts. The contacts and co-conspirators, like Mohammad Afzal Guru, the man sentenced to death in the Parliament Attack case, are inevitably found by accident in a truck in Srinagar, with a laptop that contains every operational detail – from the image file of the fake home ministry car sticker that was used to enable entry into the parliament precincts, to photographs of the environs of the site of attack itself.

Dead and arrested terrorists, whose every prior move is revealed to us *post factum*, as if they were always under surveillance – including right up to the point when they set about their acts of violence, and not excluding details of the meals they ate, their last phone conversations to their mothers, and the Hindi film songs they listened to on the night before their mission – overwhelm us with particularities. Some patterns stand out, such as the recurrence of the figure of Rs 22 lakh, which is the Delhi Police Special Cell's favourite amount for any transaction entered into by any anti-national element...

There is a definite relationship between the 'reality' effect of certain technologies of representation and a desired economy of truth. Mobile phone interceptions, or biometric indices, by virtue of their 'technological' character, carry with them an aura of facticity, far beyond their evidentiary function – more so if the transcripts are degraded, or if the mobile phone IMEI identification numbers or call records are inconsistent, as with the Parliament Attack case. The mere fact that these exist has the public function of demonstrating, through the performative tropes of forensic science, the aura of technologically mediated truth. Similarly, identity cards have a certain 'truth value'; and those found on the bodies of dead terrorists take on a definite credibility. As members of the public, we assume that terrorist organisations such as the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad surely equip their mujahideen with identity cards – how else would we know that these dead men were terrorists?

How do we respond to the ambivalent identity of the cadaver that was exhibited as the now-dead Ghazi Baba, one of the masterminds of the Parliament Attack case and the

WALKING AMBIGUITIES, UNRESOLVED SUSPICIONS: THESE MEASURES ARE SPECTRES THAT HAUNT AND PATROL THE TERRITORY OF CERTAINTY, ARMED WITH THEIR OWN EPHEMERAL NATURE. LIKE THE SOPHISTICATED FORMS OF TORTURE THAT LEAVE NO MARK ON THEIR VICTIMS, UNOFFICIAL SECRETS ACT WITHOUT LEAVING TRACES IN FILES

mentor of Mohammad Afzal Guru, the prime accused? All doubts about the body disappeared with the manifestation of a convenient Jaish-e-Mohammad ID card. Who knows, perhaps terrorist groups *do* actually issue identity cards these days, because no one quite knows who is who in Kashmir; and because some Special Task Force commandos grow their hair and beards in order to appear as 'militants', it might actually have become necessary for a 'genuine' terrorist to carry a 'terrorist identity card'.

Either way, we can never be sure. Is a dead militant a dead soldier costumed as a dead militant and tagged with a 'terrorist identity card'? Or is the corpse a dead militant, who when alive carried a 'militant' card, so as to prove that he is not a soldier in *jihadi* drag?

Is a card a forgery designed to adorn a real identity, or is an identity forged in order to effect an epistemic adjustment to a real card?

The case of Ghazi Baba, for instance, is marked by several profound anomalies. Praveen Swami, a journalist writing for the newsmagazine *Frontline*, from what might be called the 'intelligence bureau (IB) perspective', reported in detail about the cadaver identified as Ghazi Baba. Swami stated that Ghazi Baba had disguised himself by growing a beard, and was bearded when the encounter with the security forces took place. But the corpse triumphantly displayed as the dead Ghazi Baba, accompanying the account of his own demise in *Frontline*, has a clean-shaven face with the faint hint of nine-o'-clock shadow. A bearded man is shot to death, a clean-shaven corpse is photographed... It is important that the photograph be of a clean-shaven man, because Ghazi Baba when not in disguise did not have facial hair. However, Ghazi Baba in disguise, the one who was shot, *had* a beard. Was the dead man (who should have had a beard when he died) then shaved by a counter-insurgent barber for a photo opportunity? For the sake of 'credibility'? If so, when was he shaved? How long after the encounter? How long did it take for the ghost of stubble to begin to show on a dead man?

Swami does not answer these questions, but he does reiterates in many of his reports that what we *really* need is an identity card to solve these problems, so that we can predict, by looking at the ID card in a Galtonian manner, whether a person is or is not likely to be a terrorist.

Once everyone has an identity card, you have a win-win situation with regard to dead terrorists. If they *really* are dead terrorists, you win. Because they too will carry their own kind of ID cards, to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population; or they will carry fake ID cards, to pretend to be like anyone else. Either way, the truth of the matter will be enshrined only in the ID document. And these can be made to speak far louder than even human beings subjected to third-degree torture.

The Parliament Attack case too is similarly fraught with rampant anomalies. On 13 December 2001, five (or was it six, no one seems to be sure) men entered the grounds of

CONSPIRACIES ARE EPISODES; THE DEEP STATE IS AN ENDURING CONDITION

the Indian parliament on a suicide mission. Those five men were killed in a gun battle witnessed live on television, in a stunning piece of political theatre. The dead 'terrorists' were carrying mobile phones and diaries with contact information about other Kashmiri men, who were then detained in Delhi and Srinagar for their role in what was rapidly processed as a conspiracy by the media. The armies of India and Pakistan mobilised in huge numbers along the border. A draconian preventive detention anti-terrorism ordinance was passed as law following the attack on parliament, much as the passage of the Patriot Act in the US had required the occurrence of 9/11. In August 2005, S.A.R. Geelani, one of the accused in the case who had been sentenced to death by the lower courts, was acquitted because the evidence against him (based on phone surveillance and mistranslated transcripts of his phone conversations) was found to have been manipulated by the prosecution. Afzal Guru, one of the other co-accused, was sentenced to death.

Afzal Guru, who had inadequate legal representation, has consistently held that he, a surrendered militant, had often been coerced into acting on behalf of the Special Task Force (STF), a dreaded unit attached to the Jammu & Kashmir police, which acts under direct orders from the Intelligence Bureau. Afzal has named a certain Davinder Singh of the STF as being the officer who had tortured him and compelled him to escort a man to Delhi, a man who happened to be one of the 'terrorists' who stormed parliament.

Afzal has also insisted that if he was considered a suspect on the basis of his phone records, which showed that he was in contact with the dead 'terrorists', those same phone records would also show that he was in contact with his STF handlers.

But this fact has never been paid much attention, either by the court or the media. Perhaps too much would have unravelled. The President of India has received clemency petitions from citizens' groups, asking that Afzal's death sentence be commuted; this has compelled the state to invest in a certain level of information management in the case.

And so, unofficial secrets begin to act. A prominent news channel aired a sensational exclusive – a hidden-camera sting operation, in which Davinder Singh and Afzal's two brothers Aijaz and Hilal speak at length about the fact that Afzal was a dreaded Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist, and close to the deceased Ghazi Baba. Davinder Singh admitted to having tortured Afzal at great length and on more than one occasion, but said that he let him go; Singh denied ever having introduced Afzal to anyone in the STF net of suspects, some of who obdurately turned up a few months later as dead bodies in the precincts of the parliament.

THE DEEP STATE... IS THE CRYSTALLISATION OF THE STATE OF EXCEPTION, OF THE ORIGINARY MOMENT OF VIOLENCE THAT TRANSCENDS AND TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER THE LIMITATIONS OF LEGALITY, ON WHICH THE AUTHORITY AND THE FEAR OF THE STATE IS BUILT

What compels a functionary of the deep state to suddenly expose his vulnerability to a hidden camera, as a confessional? Singh talks extensively to a person outside the frame, to his right. The camera is filming to his left. Evidently, there are at least two other people in the room. These two people have managed to enter this space without being bodily searched or their 'hidden' camera detected. Just as a carload of five 'terrorists' armed with guns entered the parliament grounds in full daylight, under the gaze of security cameras and several manned checkposts...

The two people outside the 'hidden' camera frame then talk at length with Singh, who admits to a few crucial things, such as the fact of knowing and torturing Afzal a few months before the 'suicide attack' on parliament. So a certain degree of careful, calibrated disclosure occurs.

One of the brothers arrested with Afzal insists in another segment of this 'confessional' that no laptop, on which so much evidence depended, was seized. So a degraded piece of evidence, on which the entire 'circumstantial evidence' is based, is thus rejected.

But the brother says Afzal was a 'terrorist'. So does Singh.

This *must* be true, because they say this on 'hidden camera'. And the 'hidden camera', like 'narco-analysis' and 'truth serums', only produces truth, because those filmed on 'hidden cameras' do not know, ostensibly, that they are being filmed – so they reveal everything.

In this instance, stealth meets stealth and produces truth.

When the deep state encounters a crisis, it reveals some of its depths; a few unofficial secrets then act, only to ensure that our momentary disorientation as a result of these revelations actually prevents us from looking any further. Does the discourse of transparency, of rights to information, actually have any purchase when it comes to the operations of the deep state?

The demand for transparency can only be made to an entity that records all its own moves, which is typical for totalitarian societies; the demand is made successfully when a totalitarian state collapses, and the records of its atrocities come tumbling out of the archives. But the sophisticated informality of covert state action in societies with totalising enclaves within apparently more open political frameworks requires other analytical strategies and interpretive frames.

Editors' Note

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Dead Man Walking:Sovereignty and the Supreme Court in the Age of Terror

MAYUR SURESH

Terrorism has become the most worrying feature of contemporary life... Though violent behaviour is not new, the present day 'terrorism' in its full incarnation has obtained a different character and poses extraordinary challenges to the civilised world. The basic edifices of a modern state, such as democracy, state security, rule of law, sovereignty and integrity, basic human rights, etc., are under the attack of terrorism. Though the phenomenon of terrorism is complex, a terrorist act is easily identifiable when it does occur. The core meaning of the term is clear even if its exact frontiers are not...

Justice Rajendra Babu in People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) v. Union of India, 2004

We have in recent times been assaulted by many 'necessary' violent state actions given sanction by the Supreme Court of India. Encroachments on public lands, i.e., 'slums', are demolished, commercial establishments are sealed by municipal authorities, and people accused of violating national security are sentenced to death. While undertaking these, the Court continually invokes the logic of necessity, according to which slum dwellers, owners of 'illegal' shops, and terrorists, are figures whose presence foretells the collapse of society, the destruction of the city and the erosion of the rule of law. Hence something must be done about these particular citizens and outlaws. It's a matter of necessity.

The logic of 'necessity' refers to something that is lacking in the present moment, or a new problem that requires attention. Hence, the statement 'something must be done' is often preceded by an anxiety over government apathy or inaction, or a gap in the law, or the emergence of a new situation, an extraordinary event such as a suicide bombing or armed attack by terrorists, which the existing order cannot handle. And as the current debates surrounding terror legislation show us, the 'ordinary' strategy is no longer sufficient in dealing with the disturbing new situation. Thus necessity spawns 'exceptional' inventions, laws and technologies of power.

As the violent consequences of the Supreme Court's order indicate, the law's 'other' is not violence – instead, law and violence are immediately implicated *in* each other. As asserted by legal scholar Robert Cover:

Legal interpretation takes place in a field of pain and death. This is true in several senses. Legal interpretive acts signal and occasion the imposition of violence upon others: A judge articulates her understanding of a text, and as a result, somebody loses his freedom, his property, his children, even his life. Interpretations in law also constitute justifications for violence which has already occurred or which is about to occur. When interpreters have finished their work, they frequently leave behind victims whose lives have been torn apart by these organised, social practices of violence. Neither legal interpretation nor the violence it occasions may be properly understood apart from one another.¹

In other words, violence is not exceptional to the law, but is essential to it.

If violence and law cannot be properly understood apart from each other, how are we to understand the violence that is unleashed by the pronouncements of the Supreme Court?

We could argue, like many good constitutionalists, that the Supreme Court is crossing the boundaries set by the Constitution and is not paying attention to the separation of powers doctrine. Instead of restricting itself to looking into questions of interpretation and the validity of laws, it has entered into the domain of creating and executing the law. These arguments elide over the violence that follows Supreme Court pronouncements, and are confined to the sterile debate of whether these actions are valid under the Constitution.

Or we could challenge the monopoly of the Supreme Court to speak in the language of the law, much like the Delhi state legislator who broke open the shops sealed at the order of the Supreme Court, declaring: "As a people's representative I owed a duty to protect their interests. I know your [the Supreme Court's] order is illegal and not good for the people. So I broke open the seals"².

Taking the argument further, we could even allege that the actions of the Supreme Court violate the fundamental rights of citizens. I argue here that the actions of the Supreme Court can be understood as *biopolitical*, as theorised by Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1984) and developed by Agamben (1993). According to Foucault, this form of control occurred through the development of the disciplines of the body and the

regulation of the population. The first of these focused on the individual human body, increasing its usefulness and economic integration through "the optimisation of its capabilities"; the second focused on the collective body: "births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity" and the environmental variables that controlled them. The result was that the animal life of man, far from being irrelevant to politics, now became its subject through the most sophisticated political techniques.³

The first part of my essay posits that the language of rights, often invoked to protect citizens against actions of the state, in fact allows the Supreme Court to determine which lives have rights and which have none; that the ability to uphold the Right to Life gives the court the power over death. In the Age of Terrorism, when the spectre of people who wage war against the sovereign People (as in the Constitution's "We the People"), the Supreme Court must tease out the difference between loyal, legally-inscribed, legitimate citizens and those 'others' who wage war upon these citizens and the state – namely, terrorists. Given the uncertain terrain upon which citizenship in India rests, the Supreme Court's efforts to support the state erasure of terrorists can be understood as a commitment to ensuring that a more perfect citizenship can emerge.

Rites of Life and the Power of Death

Prior to popular sovereignty emerging as a mode of governance, sovereignty was juridically and politically located in the figure of the 'Sovereign'. Giorgio Agamben (1998) argues that law has traditionally had the power to actively separate "political" beings (citizens) from "bare life" (bodies). Bare life, in this conception of politics, is that which must be transformed, via the state, into the "good life" – i.e., bare life is that which is supposedly excluded from the higher aims of the state, yet is included precisely so that it may be transformed into this "good life". Sovereignty, then, is conceived from ancient times as a "state of exception". According to Agamben, biopower (the state's regulation of its subjects through numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations), which takes the bare lives of the citizens into its political calculations, may be more marked in the modern state. Within this framing, the Sovereign is the one who decides the exception, and re-includes within the law precisely what had been excluded from it. Since sovereignty is exhaustively defined by its ability to decide the exception, it follows that "the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power"⁴.

The Sovereign, as Agamben observes, had two bodies – the juridical and the physical. Such a division finds place in the rhetoric of the colonial Penal Code as well, in which certain offences explicitly qualified as attacks against sovereignty. As noted by the High Court of Nagpur in 1946:

There are two kinds of levying war: one against the person of the King, to imprison, to dethrone, or to kill him; or to make him change measures, or remove

counsellors; the other, which is said to be levied against the majesty of the King, or, in other words, against him in his regal capacity; as when a multitude rise and assemble to attain by force and violence any object of a general public nature; that is levying war against the majesty of the King; and most reasonably so held, because it tends to dissolve all the bonds of society, to destroy property, and to overturn government; and by force of arms, to restrain the King from reigning, according to law.⁵

Thus the "bare life" of the Sovereign, his physical body, was immediately political.

The inscription of the life of the Sovereign in the realm of politics continued after India gained independence in 1947, but in a different form. Since India was described in the Constitution as a "sovereign democratic republic", sovereignty could no longer be located in the body of a single person, the King or Queen, but was dispersed amongst all the citizens of the new nation, the 'People'. The movement from princely sovereignty to popular sovereignty is caused not merely by the abolition of the Prince, but also with the investment of rights in the newly created citizen. The Right to Life thus represents the immediate politicisation of the life of the sovereign People.

Since Article 21 of the Constitution of India states that "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law", existential interpretations of "life" have consistently been offered and contested in the courts and have found place in judgments. For instance, in the case of Kartar Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh, the Supreme Court stated:

By the term 'life' as here used something more is meant than mere animal existence. The inhibition against its deprivation extends to all these limits and faculties by which life is enjoyed. The provision equally prohibits the mutilation of the body or amputation of an arm or leg or the putting out of an eye or the destruction of any other organ of the body through which the soul communicates with the outer world. By the term 'liberty' as used in the provision, something more is meant than mere freedom from physical restraint or the bonds of a prison.⁶

In other cases, the Supreme Court has held that "life" means the right to live with human dignity, and would include all those aspects of existence that go to make human life meaningful, complete and worth living – tradition, culture, heritage; it also implies the right to food, water, a safe and clean environment, medical care and shelter.

In *Homo Sacer* (1998),⁷ Agamben examines in detail the two Greek words for 'life'. *Zoë* denoted the simple fact of living, common to all living beings; *bios* denoted a form or way of living proper to an individual or group. In ancient Greece, the proper place of *bios* was in the city/*polis*, whereas *zoë* was confined to the reproductive sphere of the home.

The Supreme Court in contemporary India, much like the ancient Greeks, gestures towards defining a proper way of living. In telling us that the Right to Life is not about supporting "mere animal existence", and that this right includes all that which gives meaning

to human life and makes it worth living, the Supreme Court approximates what is implied in *bios*. Therefore, implicitly excluded from the juridical meaning of "life" is life as "mere animal existence" – in other words, as "bare life".

Foucault (1984) declares that with modernity, the simple fact of 'bare' living, which was once excluded from the city, comes to be what is at stake in politics:

For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question.⁸

In modernity, a nation's health and biological life become a problem for sovereign power:

For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention. Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings and the mastery it would be able to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, even more than the threat of death, that gave power its access to even the body.⁹

And hence, modern 'life' is inscribed into the political through a number of rituals – the filling out of a birth certificate, being vaccinated against disease, counted in a census, and documenting noticeable marks on our bodies.

Agamben analyses the various ways in which bare life has been/is scripted into the political. He finds it interesting that habeas corpus is a presentation of the physical body (*corpus*), not of the person (*homo*). He goes on to argue that the declaration of rights, which are held out to be the strongest defence against the might of the sovereign, and which declare that man by reason of his birth possesses these rights, represents the inscription of the birth, a fact of *natural* life, into the realm of the *political*.

The declaration of rights is viewed as the rite of passage by which the transformation of divinely authorised royal sovereignty to national sovereignty is accomplished; and the simple fact of birth is projected as the bearer of sovereignty. By virtue of his birth, the *subject* becomes the *citizen*, and it is at this point that *zoë* and *bios* are indistinguishable.

If modernity thus collapses the distinction between zoë and bios, and if the Right to Life, which human rights activists hold out as the shield that protects life, represents the inscription of bare life into the political, then the ability to decide what constitutes proper life also represents the power over death. Simply put, if a decision can be made on the value of a life and what makes life worth living, it implies that decisions can also be taken to establish which life can be seen as valueless/not worth living. Hence, as Agamben argues, in the classical world the sovereign who decides on the state of exception has the power to decide the point at which life may be destroyed without this act being seen as homicide; while in the age of biopolitics this power is transformed into the power to decide

the point at which life ceases to become politically relevant. Life, invested with the principal of sovereignty through the declaration of rights, now becomes the place of the sovereign decision on the exception.

In this regard, when we consider the hagiographies of the Supreme Court, we are told of the immense value of its judgments affirming the various meanings of the Right to Life, and various ways that the Right to Life can be performed. Human rights activists and lawyers hold out this Right to Life as *the* greatest protection against the violence of the state. Yet at the same time, we fail to see the violence that is *caused* by its orders, and the extinction that is then visited upon life.

We should not see this merely as a contradiction or as hypocrisy, or as a discerning application of law. We must, instead, see that the biopolitical consequence of the Right to Life is in fact the power over death.

Law's Confessional: "I Am Violence"

Exceptional times call for extraordinary laws. One such instance is the extraordinary feature of Section 32 in the now-repealed Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), that was signed into law in 2002. Unlike the ordinary law contained in Section 25 of the Indian Evidence Act, which states that "No confession made to a police officer shall be proved as against a person accused of any offence", this section allows a confession to be recorded by a police officer not below a certain rank.



Opponents argued that it violated principles of fair trial and allowed the police to use methods of torture towards securing a conviction. For instance, a report by the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) argues:

Under the Evidence Act ordinarily applicable, it is a central tenet that confessions to the police are not admissible as evidence because they can be easily extracted by torture. Similarly under the ordinary legal procedure, telephone interception may not be produced as primary evidence against an accused... confessions before a police officer being admissible as evidence, even if they are later retracted or denied, generates immense possibility of torture and abuse.¹⁰

In both the PUCL case¹¹ in which the constitutionality of POTA was challenged, and in the earlier cited Kartar Singh case in which the provisions of the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 (TADA) were challenged, the sections relating to confessions were attacked on the basis that they undermined the rule of law, and more particularly, that they violated the accused's fundamental rights. The Supreme Court in response held that in both these cases the provisions were constitutionally valid, as they did not offend the principle of the rule of law and did not violate fundamental rights. While the Supreme Court upheld the provisions in both these cases, a high level of anxiety remained over the impact of these provisions in undermining the rule of law, on the right to fair trial, or on enabling the violation of the Right to Life by effectively allowing torture and abuse of prisoners.

We are thus confronted with a paradoxical situation where a duly enacted and constitutionally valid *law* is opposed on the basis that it violates the *rule of law*.

Other exceptional laws also evoke a similar anxiety For example, Section 4 (a) of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA) gives the power to an army officer of a particular rank the power to fire upon, to the extent of causing death, any person who is acting in contravention of certain prohibitory orders. A PUCL report on the AFSPA highlights the 'extra-judicial' killings, and documents instances of abuse and torture at the hands of the armed forces. The report then argues, "[...] the strength of any country claiming itself as 'democratic' lies in upholding the supremacy of the judiciary and primacy of the rule of law. It requires putting in place effective criminal-law provisions to deter the commission of offences against the innocents, and punishment for breaches of such provisions while exercising executive powers; and not in providing the arbitrary powers to the law enforcement personnel to be law unto themselves"12. Here again, we are confronted with the stark fact that the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the entire Act. It not only stated that the Act was procedurally valid, i.e., Parliament was competent to enact this legislation, but also that the provisions of the statute were substantively valid, in that they did not violate any fundamental rights. Both sides of the debate on the validity of these extraordinary laws claim that their position is the constitutionally valid one; they both claim the authority for their interpretation of the meaning of the 'rule of law'.

The tension between the two positions exposes a deeper concern over violence and the law. In his study of martial law in the British colonial state, Nasser Hussain argues that there was a constant tussle between those who believed that the only state that could be established in the colony was a more civilised despotism with scope for large executive discretion, meaning latitude for violence by the state, and those who argued for a system of rule of law. Hussain asserts that the colonial state used martial law to establish the rule of law, a system with which the native population was thought to be unfamiliar. He also posits that martial law produced a high level of associated anxiety because such a regime exposed the *originary* violence of the state, and threatened to reveal it as based on the violence of conquest. The anxiety is rooted in a perception that an emergency/exception not only requires a special law, but also reveals something threateningly elemental about the nature of law itself – that law is not sufficient to restore the order of the state; and only violence, or the brute power of the sovereign, can impose and maintain the rule of law. The overt violence of the law provokes further anxiety that the violent imposition of the law will actually be visible, and hence real.¹³

The link between law, violence and sovereignty can be understood by once again considering what Agamben famously calls the "state of exception", and its relation to a 'normal' situation. He directs us towards what he terms the *paradox* of sovereignty. Beginning with jurist/political theorist Carl Schmitt's concept of the Sovereign being the one who decides the exception, Agamben declares:

If the Sovereign is truly the one to whom the juridical order grants the power proclaiming the state of exception, therefore suspending the order's own validity, then the Sovereign stands outside the juridical order but nevertheless belongs to it, since it is up to him to decide if the constitution is to be suspended.¹⁴

Agamben attempts to resolve this by stating that the sovereign is neither inside nor outside of the law. Instead, the sovereign sphere resides at the point of *indistinction* between the rule of law and the state of exception.

In his "Critique of Violence" (1921), Walter Benjamin identifies a crucial issue, believing that it "would remain open whether violence, as a principle, could be a moral means even to just ends". He claims that violence occurs where exception and rule become indistinguishable, and terms the link between violence and right "naked/mere life (bloßes Leben)". Naked life is thus the element that, in a state of exception, holds the most intimate relation to sovereignty. Taking his cue from Benjamin's theses that violence posits the law and preserves the law ("rechtserhaltende Gewalt", a law-preserving violence, i.e., violence that is not the result of law but rather is given with the very form of law), Agamben declares:

The violence exercised in the state of exception neither simply posits law, but rather conserves it in suspending it and posits it in excepting itself from it... Sovereign violence opens up a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and the law. 15

Thus, the contestation over whether these 'exceptional' laws violate the principle of rule of law masks the anxiety over the inability to distinguish between violence and the law, and lays bare the law as violence. This concern is alluded to in the Parliament Attack case:

The ground realities cannot be ignored. It is an undeniable fact that the police in our country still resort to crude methods of investigation... Complaints of violation of human rights by resorting to dubious methods of investigation... are being heard day in and day out. Even many amongst the public tacitly endorse the use of violence by police against the criminals. In this scenario, we have serious doubts whether it would be safe to concede the power of recording confessions to the police officers to be used in evidence against the accused making the confession and the co-accused. 16

Extraordinary laws lead to such anxiety not merely because they lead to an erosion of the rule of law, or merely because torture undermines a regime of rights. Instead, the fear of abuse and torture as a result of these laws not only blurs the distinction between law and violence, but also exposes that law and violence are imbricated in one another even in 'unexceptional' states and times. Such laws put into full view the fact that law *is* the originary violence of the state, and that concepts such as 'rule of law' only serve to disguise this violence.

On Frontiers of War

On 31 December 2006, the Indian Army released a document interestingly titled "Doctrine of Sub-Conventional Operations". Its opening passage reads:

Total war as an instrument of state policy has become less relevant than ever before... However, this has given further impetus to sub-conventional operations as the predominant form of warfare. Sub-conventional warfare is a generic term encompassing all armed conflicts that are above the level of peaceful coexistence amongst states and below the threshold of war. It includes militancy, insurgency, proxy war and terrorism that may be employed as a means in an insurrectionist movement or undertaken independently.¹⁷

The Doctrine then states that a distinctive feature of this sub-conventional warfare is the blurring of lines between the "Front and the Rear; Strategic and Tactical Actions; and Combatants and Non-combatants".

Thus, according to this document, war today has no frontier; it is being waged everywhere, and the line between friend and enemy is no longer clear. The Doctrine further recommends that in this new situation, there needs to be a "change in the soldier's mindset from fighting the enemy in a conventional conflict, for which he is trained, to fighting his own people".

The only other figure who fights his own people is the terrorist. Indeed attacking 'people' is the defining characteristic of a terrorist. For example, Section 3(1) of POTA reads:

Whoever with intent to threaten the unity, integrity, security or sovereignty of India or to strike terror in the people or any section of the people does any act or thing

by using bombs... or by any other means whatsoever, in such a manner as to cause, or likely to cause, death of, or injuries to any person or persons or loss of, or damage to, or destruction of, property or disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community.¹⁸

Killing people, or harming the life of the community thus makes one a 'terrorist'.

The soldier on the frontiers of this new war therefore is duty-bound to destroy terrorists, some of whom may be "his own people". In turn, the terrorist is characterised by the fact that he kills the sovereign People/citizens. If, as the Doctrine states, the line between combatant and non-combatant is blurred, then to distinguish between terrorists on the one hand, and the sovereign People on the other, becomes a paramount biopolitical imperative.

Jaya Kasibhatla argues that in postcolonial states the category of the citizen is something that does not exist, but is something that is yet to be attained and is in the process of being created:

In traditional contract theory, it is assumed that the parties who enter into an agreement have no reason to enter the contract unless they have something to gain. The postcolonial constitution was framed as a contract that promoted liberal equality through the recognition of historical inequality... the Indian Constitution frames itself in a moment of historical inequality in order to make the ideal contractual moment possible in the future, if not suggesting outright that such a moment can only be fictional.¹⁹

Moreover, Kasibhatla points out that in the drafting of the emergency provisions of the Indian Constitution, the rights-bearing citizen was the figure that was invoked in justifying the abrogation of rights in an emergency – that if emergent citizens were allowed to exercise their rights during an emergency, then the needs of the state to combat the emergency would be compromised. A condition of emergency activates the idea that the body of the citizen is dangerous and intractable, and that the 'rights' that adhere to the citizen function as loaded weapons, cocked and ready to be used against the state. The emergent citizen, much like the terrorist, is thus the figure that threatens to shatter the sovereign order.

Here citizen and terrorist appear as similar figures, their functionality blended. But if in modernity the politicisation and preservation of the sovereign life of citizens is the crucial biopolitical task, a frontier *must* be erected between citizen and terrorist.

The Parliament Attack case presents us with the way in which citizen and terrorist come to be cast as oppositional figures. The court justifies the imposition of the death sentence upon Mohammed Afzal, the prime accused, thus:

In the instant case, there can be no doubt that the most appropriate punishment is death sentence... The present case, which has no parallel in the history of Indian Republic, presents us in crystal clear terms, a spectacle of rarest of rare cases. The very idea of attacking and overpowering a sovereign democratic institution by using powerful arms and explosives and imperilling the safety of a multitude of

peoples' representatives, constitutional functionaries and officials of Government of India and engaging into a combat with security forces is a terrorist act of gravest severity... The gravity of the crime conceived by the conspirators with the potential of causing enormous casualties and dislocating the functioning of the Government, as well as disrupting normal life of the people of India, is something that cannot be described in words. The incident, which resulted in heavy casualties, had shaken the entire nation and the collective conscience of society will only be satisfied if capital punishment is awarded to the offender. The challenge to the unity, integrity and sovereignty of India by these acts of terrorists and conspirators, can only be compensated by giving the maximum punishment to the person who is proved to be the conspirator in this treacherous act. The appellant, who is a surrendered militant and who was bent upon repeating the acts of treason against the nation, is a menace to society and his life should become extinct. Accordingly, we uphold the death sentence.²⁰

Here the body of the nation comes to stand in for the body of those who perished in the attack on Parliament. The physical attack on the "people's" representatives thus becomes an attack on the sovereign body of the nation itself. However, an attack on this body of the Sovereign People simultaneously produces its subversive foil, the terrorist – thus enabling Afzal to be described as "a menace to society", and one whose "life should become extinct".

He is not to be 'killed', or 'murdered', but to "become extinct".

The imbrication of the body of the sovereign people into the body of parliament is not merely allegorical, or a trope necessary to the argument of the prosecution. It is *fundamental* to the biopolitical task of the Supreme Court. Thus, Mohammed Afzal's case exposes a fundamental biopolitical fracture that liberal constitutionalism seeks to hide with the manufacture of a mythical unified 'People'. According to Agamben:

It is as if what we call people were in reality not a unitary subject but a dialectical oscillation between two poles: on the one hand, the set of the People as a whole political body and on the other, the subset of the people as a fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies; or again on the one hand, an inclusion that claims to be total, and on the other, an exclusion that is clearly hopeless; at one extreme the total state of integrated and sovereign citizens, and at the other the preserve of the wretched, the oppressed and the defeated.²¹

If the 'people' are at war with the 'People', then one of them is the repository of sovereignty, and the other is transformed into an uneasy presence, its existence an unbearable disgrace. And if in the postcolony citizenship is an emergent process, the Supreme Court's biopolitical task of producing true, undivided and sovereign citizens may be achieved through the strategic marginalisation of "the wretched, the oppressed and the defeated". The project of making the poor classes succumb to powerful capitalist forces of 'development', through court orders for the demolition of slums or the sealing of

commercial establishments in the interest of civic 'improvement', reproduces notions of a "people" rendered "extinct" via subtle and overt forms of state coercion.

Editors' Note

For other accounts of 'legal' torture, see Warisha Farasat, "Locating Torture in Jammu and Kashmir" and Pramod K. Nayar, "Borderline Bodies", pp. 187-198 and 199-210 in this volume. Also see A. Bimol Akoijam, "Another 9/11, Another Act of Terror: The 'Embedded Disorder' of the AFSPA", in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 481-91. Reader 05 online text: http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader_05.html

Notes

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- 3. As cited in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Standford University Press, 1998, Stanford).
- 4. Ibid.
- 5. Maganlal Radhakrishnan v. Emperor (AIR 1946 Nag 173). Hence Section 121 of the Penal Code punished any act seen as waging war against the King i.e., also including anyone who waged war against the King's forces, or arrayed an army against the King's army or attacked sovereign institutions such as the police, or government buildings. Section 124, on the other hand, protected the physical body of the King against physical harm.
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The 'Law' of the Police

Anui Bhuwania

The 'law' of the police really marks the point in which the state, whether from impotence or because of the immanent connections within any legal system, can no longer guarantee through the legal system the empirical ends that it desires at any price to attain.

Walter Benjamin

What matters for the reality of legal life is he who decides. Carl Schmitt

In this essay I will try to glean the aporetic nature of policing in the critiques of law offered by Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, as later commented upon directly by Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben, and as it connects in a more lateral manner with Michel Foucault's writings on discipline and biopower, through a selective reading of some of their key texts. This uncanny mirror held to modern law by the impossibility of confining policing within legal boundaries is first signalled in Benjamin's exasperation at the dissolution, with the emergence of the modern police, of his carefully carved distinction between law-preserving and law-making violence. It reappears when Schmitt insists on locating his apotheosis of the decision independent of the norm on which it is ostensibly based, firmly within the confines of the juridical realm; he limits his searing analysis to the constitutional centralised sovereign authority alone and does not seek to apply it to everyday policing. Derrida and Agamben have effectively underlined these dilemmas in their readings of these two key authors of the Weimar period, but it is Foucault's lack of interest in law in his characterisation of the modern disciplinary and governmental norm that I argue provides the key to understanding modern policing and its extraordinary (non-)legal character.

In his 1921 essay "Critique of Violence" (henceforth in this essay CV), Walter Benjamin provides a critique of the use of authoritative violence¹ as a means. He begins by dwelling upon the approach that the two principal juridical schools – Natural Law and Legal Positivism – have taken to this question. Natural law ends up justifying all violence for any just ends, thus not really addressing the issue of violence as a means but only passing judgment on the justness of its ends. On the other hand, positive law is only interested in

the legality of the (violent) means that guarantees the justness of the ends. Benjamin wants to question the neat equations in both schools of thought, that just ends can be attained by justified violent means. While Benjamin finds the onus of justiciability² of violence completely elided in natural law by its sole focus on justness of ends, he takes as his point of departure the tenets of positive law and its central distinction between sanctioned violence and unsanctioned violence. Benjamin tries to explore what this Weberian "monopoly of violence" says about the nature of violence itself. Individual violence cannot be tolerated by any state – not because the state is threatened by the specific aims of such non-legal violence, but because it is threatened by the very existence of such violence. What is feared is the ability of violence to found and modify legal conditions, i.e., the inherently lawmaking character of such violence, an ability to exceed its characterisation as a mere means. His examples of the violence of the great criminal, the general strike and the war that culminates in a peace agreement point to the fact that the foundations of all law eventually draw from such lawmaking violence.

In addition to this *law-making* function of violence is its *law-preserving* function as instantiated in conscription, modern policing and the debate around the death penalty – all modern questions. Benjamin calls this form of legal violence a threatening violence. Contrary to common theoretical claims, this violence is not intended as a deterrent plainly because it always lacks certainty.³ As a result, this uncertain legal threat is experienced as *fate*. This 'fated' legal violence is a non-mediate violence that does not really fit into the justified violent means/just ends logic of legal theory. Benjamin relates it to "the fundamental undecidability of all legal problems" because it is not reason but "fate-imposed violence" and "God" that decide the justification of means and justness of ends respectively (CV, p. 294). This follows from the impossibility of generalising and applying an always inherently indeterminate legal norm in any two different situations in accordance with justice, a routine hermeneutical exercise in modern law. The experience of legal violence as fate is further exacerbated with the pragmatic principle of *ignorantia juris non excusat* (Latin, lit. 'ignorance of the law does not excuse').

All of these issues play out clearly with regard to the modern police, which as Benjamin points out, breaks down the distinction between the two forms of violence – law-making and law-preserving – and in which both can be found in a "spectral mixture". The modern police have wide discretionary powers and they can intervene "for security reasons"... "where no legal situation exists" (CV, p. 287). Benjamin almost prefigures Foucault when he says that the police accompany "the citizen as a brutal encumbrance through a life regulated by ordinances, or simply supervising him" (ibid.). While the legally adjudicated "decision" determined by place and time, chronotope has a "metaphysical category" capable of a "critical evaluation"; there is no essence at all to the police institution, thus making it a "ghostly presence in the life of civilised states".

I now move to Derrida's reading of "Critique of Violence", in which he demonstrates how Benjamin first proposes some key binaries for his analysis and then eventually deconstructs them himself. Of particular relevance here is Benjamin's distinction between law-making and law-preserving violence and Derrida's discussion of his spectacular dissolution of it in the figure of policing. As Derrida claims in "Force of Law" (henceforth in this essay FL), the law-making violence, which confers upon the "great criminal" an enormous romantic as well as dangerous stature, does not arrive from outside law.⁴ In fact, it is the "mystical foundation of authority" – it is the violence that might offend justice but is always justified retrospectively by the "law to come" (FL, p. 991). Derrida asserts in his essay that "this founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of *non-law.*⁵ But it is also the whole history of law. This moment always takes place and never takes place in a presence. Derrida compares a successful foundational revolution to a felicitious performative speech act that produces "proper interpretative models" conferring legitimacy and meaning to the violence.

However, as opposed to Benjamin's attempt to sever this non-law at the heart of the fundamental law-making violence from the everyday practices of law-preserving violence, Derrida locates the former as always already enveloping the latter and calling for its own repetition. The origins of law constantly need to be re-established by the violence needed for the self-conservation of law. This inscription of "iterability in originality" (FL, p. 1003) makes impossible any precise difference between lawmaking and law-preserving violence, and thus contaminates any difference the two might have had. The non-law that remains at the heart of any such violence, as revealed in the death penalty, for instance, makes Benjamin find "something rotten in law" itself (ibid., p. 286).

It is, however, in the modern institution of the police that Benjamin himself finds the two forms of violence most explicitly and "ignominiously" haunted by each other. For Derrida, there is in Benjamin's discussion of the police a deconstruction of "the distinction between the two kinds of violence that nevertheless structure the discourse that Benjamin calls a new critique of violence" (FL, p. 1007). In this discussion, Derrida finds a "strange exposition" of a text where a "demonstration ruins the distinctions it proposes", undone by "the paradox of iterability" that "requires the origin to repeat itself originarily, to alter itself so as to have the value of origin, that is, to conserve itself" (ibid., pp. 1007-09). The police, after all, not only enforce the law but also legislate. And "by definition, the police are present or represented everywhere that there is force of law" (ibid., p. 1009). The problem with the police is that theirs is "a violence without a form" (ibid., p. 1011). According to Benjamin, this "spirit" of the police is less "devastating" in an absolute monarchy than in a modern democracy, because in a monarchy, with the legislative and executive powers under a unitary authority, police violence is normal and in keeping with its spirit. In a democracy the police are not supposed to have such wide powers, but enjoy them anyway through a core dissimulation. Derrida finds in this condition a correspondence with the Schmittian criticism of parliamentary democracy that is "powerless to control the police violence that substitutes itself for it" (ibid., p. 1015).

Derrida's comment allows us to segue into Carl Schmitt's discussion of the legal form in his book *Political Theology* (1922; henceforth in this essay *PT*) which tries to give a

systematic legal-logical basis to his famous definition of sovereignty, "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception". The exception is normally elided and relegated to insignificance in modern jurisprudence. But for Schmitt it goes to the heart of the matter because of the nature of the legal norm.⁶ Contrary to the liberal view of his principal interlocutor, the renowned jurist Hans Kelsen, Schmitt argues that this sovereign decision regarding the exception cannot be derived entirely from the content of the norm, but always exceeds it. The decision that a real exception exists can never "be circumscribed factually and made to conform to a preformed law" (*PT*, p. 6). In actual application it always depends on who decides whether a "situation of conflict" exists, or whether other standard provisos such as "public safety," "interest of the state" or "public interest" are really threatened (ibid.). He defines the exception as "that which cannot be subsumed; it defies general codification, but it simultaneously reveals a specifically juristic element – the decision in absolute purity" (ibid., p. 13).

For Schmitt, two distinct elements make up the juristic – norm and decision. The legal order rests on a *decision*, not on a *norm*. Schmitt concedes that in the normal situation, there is very little autonomy that the decision enjoys; when it comes to the exception, the norm is destroyed. The general norms can only be factually applied in a "normal, everyday frame of life", but it is always the sovereign authority who decides that such a normal situation actually exists (*PT*, p. 13). According to Schmitt, there remains a possible separation between the everyday law and that under emergency, and conditions such as the latter obtain only under a Constitutionally declared circumstance and not otherwise.

Schmitt's principal move is to bring the question of sovereignty right back to the heart of Constitutional debates, and challenge Kelsen's liberal attempt to construct a pure normative jurisprudence and "radically repress" the question of emergency powers under the Weimar Constitution. Drawing inspiration from Hobbes, he demolishes the fundamental liberal tenet that there has been a move in modernity from the authority of persons to the rule of law, and that the legislature is the sole source of this law. Taking on what he calls the "confusions" caused by Max Weber's classic account of the modern move from substantive to formally rational law, Schmitt analyses the legal form as proposed by Weber, for whom the formal qualities grow from codification, the professional training of lawyers, and judges being made civil servants. These respectively conferred on the legal form juridical recognition, evenness with regularity and calculability and a "rationalistic technical" refinement" (PT, pp. 27-28). According to Schmitt, this analysis has led some to compare the legal form to the technical form. However, the technical form is more like what is applicable to the military command, which is goal-oriented, impersonal and oriented to action, and by its very nature free from any deliberation. On the other hand, "the legal form is governed by the legal idea and by the necessity of applying legal thought to a factual situation" (ibid., p. 28).

Additionally, the legal idea is not self-realising: it needs the form of positive law, and an organisation to apply the norm. This has led theorists such as Kelsen to postulate an objectivist account of the legal form by "avoiding everything personalistic and tracing the legal order back to the impersonal validity of the impersonal norm", in an attempt to efface

all traces of personality, treating them as traces of absolute monarchy (*PT*, p. 29-30). Schmitt, on the other hand, argues that the legal decision can never be made purely from the content of the legal idea or from the norm to be applied, and indeed has to be at least partially indifferent to it, because "the circumstance that requires a decision remains an independently determining moment" (ibid., p. 30). This makes the specific decision *an act of poesis* in a sense, radically alienated from the content of the underlying norm.

This approximates Derrida's suggestion: "The law is transcendent and theological, and so always to come, always promised, because it is immanent, finite and so already past" (FL, p. 993). Indeed, Schmitt even says, "Looked at normatively, *the decision emanates from nothingness*" (ibid., pp. 31-32).

Hinging on this question of the presence of the normative in a legal decision, Schmitt categorises a whole school of jurisprudence in which he places himself and that he calls *Decisionist*, which follows from Hobbes and rejects "all attempts to substitute an abstractly valid order for a concrete sovereignty of the state" (*PT*, p. 33). Schmitt concludes this discussion with a radical assertion of Hobbesian 'personalism': "In the contrast between the subject and the content of a decision and in the proper meaning of the subject lies the problem of the juristic form" (ibid., pp. 34-35).

While Schmitt posits that there "exists no norm that is applicable to chaos" (*PT*, p. 13), he simultaneously insists that the "exception is different from anarchy and chaos" (ibid., p. 12) so that he can continue to argue that even in this state of exception, "order in the juristic sense still prevails even if it is not of the ordinary kind" (ibid.). He decries any move to relegate the question regarding the decision to "sociology", and instead retains the norm alone within jurisprudence, because for him the "pure" decision continues to be juristic even if it has nothing to do with the norm. Indeed, he has to do so because it only "remains a juristic problem as long as the exception is distinguishable from a juristic chaos, from any kind of anarchy" (*PT*, p. 14). He therefore goes to great lengths to keep this pure decision somehow within the domain of the legal, and does not allow it to enter the realm which for Derrida was "non-law", and for Benjamin was far enough from law, that it could only be called law within quotation marks (as in this essay's first epigraph).

In his book *State of Exception* (2005), much of which takes its inspiration from the texts discussed above, especially *Political Theology*, Giorgio Agamben presents a schematic account of the use of emergency provisions in the Constitutions of the principal North Atlantic powers, in contexts ranging from the French Revolution to the Iraq War, and convincingly shows how endemic and closely related these states of exception have been to the naked assertions of sovereignty in modern times. His is a contemporary reiteration of Schmitt's challenge to Constitutional law and its attempts to "repress sovereignty". My interest here is to examine how the insights about the indeterminacy of the legal form, which bear so closely on these constitutional debates about modern sovereignty, apply as much to the everyday experience of policing. An explicit connection along these lines is made by Agamben in an earlier essay where, based on Benjamin's "Critique of Violence", he argues that "the

rationales of 'public order' and 'security' on which the police have to decide on a case-by-case basis define an area of indistinction between violence and right that is exactly symmetrical to that of sovereignty". One can now see how closely related the questions of policing and sovereignty are – for instance, with regard to the key concept of necessity that Agamben provides a history of, and that he posits as the basis of the state of exception; going by the Latin adage *necessitas legem non habet* (necessity has no law), which could either mean "necessity does not recognise any law", or "necessity creates its own law".

The Constitutional conundrum this causes is thus effectively summarised by Agamben: "[...] the *status necessitates* appears as an ambiguous and uncertain zone in which *de facto* proceedings, which are in themselves extra- or anti-juridical, pass over into law, and juridical norms blur into mere fact – that is, a threshold where fact and law seem to become undecidable" (*Means without End*, henceforth in this essay *ME*, p. 29). Agamben critically analyses the telos of legality that Schmitt manages to find even in this indeterminate void zone.

Agamben compares Schmitt's separation of the legal norm and the decision in law to the Saussurean division between *langue* and *parole* in the domain of theoretical linguistics. ¹⁰ The norm, like *langue*, exists but can only be manifested in a decision or *parole*. Just as actual linguistic activity is made understandable by assuming that something structural on the lines of a language exists, the norm can continue to be the reference point for a decision even when it is departed from (*ME*, pp. 36-37).

However, this question of applying a norm to a concrete situation is not an example of deriving a particular instance that is already contained in a given general rule. In other words, just like the passage from langue to parole, it is not a logical operation but a practical activity. It involves "the passage from a generic proposition endowed with a merely virtual reference to a concrete reference to a segment of reality" (ME, p. 39). The question of the actual relation between the legal norm and its application is analogous to that between language and the world, because in both instances, "there is no internal nexus that allows one to be derived immediately from the other" (ibid., p. 40). Agamben here compares Benveniste's enunciative function¹¹ that involves the assumption and implementation of langue by speaking subjects, with Schmitt's 'Decisionism' theorisation with its programmatic declaration: "What matters for the reality of legal life is he who decides". What emerges for Agamben, therefore, is "a pure violence without logos", because it is impossible to weld norm and reality together except by presupposing their nexus, and thus constituting a normal sphere, as the very application of a norm creates an exception (ibid.). Schmitt, however, still could not accept the state of exception completely fusing its frontier with the rule. Agamben finds all theorising that attempts to place the state of exception within law, including Schmitt's indirect attempt to do so, fallacious because the 'state of exception' has no law, but is a space without law - a consequence of the force of law being placed under the Derridean erasure.

We have seen how Schmitt dodges the radical implications of his own argument by insisting on locating this anomic violence within the juridical realm – indeed, maintaining that

it is included within law by its very exclusion. He is unable to deal with the complete breakdown of difference between the rule and the exception. And that is precisely what Benjamin does in his challenge to all theorising of the state of exception in his justly famous lines: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight" ¹². Benjamin thus unmasks any attempt to give juridical form to the anomic violence of the state of exception. All that remains is pure violence without any relation to law. And policing is its archetypal form.

Michel Foucault's theories about the formation of the juridical subject appear to come closest to Benjamin's crucial insight. In his Collége de France lectures of 1976, Foucault recognises the co-existence of sovereignty and discipline in modern power, but constantly de-emphasises the role of the great state legislations, focusing instead on micro-agents, such as the police. As stated in his famous exposition of modern biopower in the last chapter of The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: "We have entered a phase of juridical regression in comparison with the pre-seventeenth-century societies we are acquainted with: we should not be deceived by all the Constitutions framed throughout the world since the French Revolution, the codes written and revised, a whole continual and clamorous legislative activity: these were the forms that made an essentially normalising power acceptable" (p. 144). This is exactly the first methodological move he clarifies in his 1976 Collége de France lectures (Society Must Be Defended, henceforth in this essay SMBD) of placing less emphasis on the sole central institution of power with its basis in either monarchical or democratic sovereignty. His focus is more on the "extremities" of power as embodied in local, regional and material forms and institutions, "especially at the points where this power transgresses the rules of right that organise and delineate it" (SMBD, p. 27), and where "its exercise becomes less and less juridical" (ibid., p. 28). An example of such a study can be found in Foucault's Discipline and Punish, (henceforth in this essay DP), where he claims that the powers of the prison warder have from the beginning allowed him an "arbitrariness" in administering a penalty. Practices such as the excessive or "useless" acts of violence perpetrated by the warder are implicitly anticipated and made possible by his acknowledged right to act as the "sovereign in the prison" (DP, pp. 246-48). While the penalty itself continues to be based on a juridical decision, it is the prison warder who enjoys an absolute autonomy in modulating, individualising and administering this punishment.

Foucault discusses how the emergence of the disciplinary power in modernity should have logically led to the disappearance of the juridical edifice of sovereignty, being radically heterogeneous. However this does not happen – in fact, sovereignty gets a renewed status as an "ideology of right" with the passage of the great juridical codes in 19^{th_c}century Europe, after the Napoleonic Codes. Foucault asserts that these Codes helped to "superimpose on the mechanism of discipline a system of right that concealed its mechanisms and erased the element of domination and the techniques of domination involved in discipline" (*SMBD*, p. 37). While these Codes enabled a democratisation of sovereignty, it was severely undermined by disciplinary mechanisms. These two modalities

of power continued to co-exist, although always in tension with each other because "the discourse of discipline is alien to that of the law; it is alien to the discourse that makes rules a product of the will of the Sovereign"; and because discipline goes by the "code of normalisation" produced by the human sciences and not by the code of law (ibid., p. 38).

Besides, the techniques of discipline have invaded and found place in law. A concrete instance of this kind of change could be found in the process by which the concept of the "Dangerous Individual" becomes central to penology. ¹³ Foucault analyses the fundamental move from *Homo Penalis* to *Homo Criminalis* – i.e., from the Beccarian or Benthamite model of legal sanction based on what one has *done*, to the criminological idea of "Social Defence" based on what one *is* – but emphasises how throughout this process, the codes are not explicitly changed. Indeed, Foucault concludes that a new kind of "law" emerged with the carceral institutions of disciplinary power: the *norm* that is "a mixture of legality and nature" (*DP*, p. 304). This norm, he later affirmed in his Collége de France lectures, actually circulates and intersects through both discipline and biopower, acting on their respective axes – the individual body and the population as a whole (*SMBD*, pp. 252-53).

For such a modern normalising power to exercise the old sovereign right to kill, it had to become racist (*SMBD*, p. 256). The *ur*-case of such a racist power examined by Foucault is the Nazi regime. While the Nazi state exercised rigorous disciplinary power and biological controls over life, it also gave the power to kill to a very large body of individuals from a plethora of security apparatus. In fact, according to Agamben, the entire 'Final Solution' "was conceived from the beginning to the end exclusively as a police operation. It is well known that not a single document has ever been found that recognises the genocide as a decision made by a sovereign organ", except for one "that gathered middle-level and lower-level police officers", and included Adolf Eichmann.¹⁴

I began this essay with Benjamin's discussion of the "law" of the police. I will end with Foucault's reflections (*DP*, p. 283) on the archetypal figure of Vidocq, the ex-criminal and informer who rose up to be the mythical chief of police in early 19th-century France, and who is credited to have introduced ballistics and record-keeping to policing: "A figure had haunted earlier times, that of the monstrous king, the source of all justice and yet besmirched with crime; another fear now appeared, that of some dark, secret understanding between those who enforced the law and those who violated it. The Shakespearian age when sovereignty confronted abomination in a single character had gone; the everyday melodrama of police and of the complicities that crime formed with power was soon to begin".

Notes

1. The German term used by Benjamin, Gewalt, has been translated simply as "Violence", but it also signifies

- legitimate power or justified authority.
- As signalled by Benjamin in the famous first line of this essay: "The task of a critique of violence can be summarised as that of expounding its relation to law and justice".
- 3. For a recent anthropological treatment of the "uncertainty of legal rules", see essays by Veena Das and Talal Asad in (eds.) Veena Das and Deborah Poole, Anthropology in the Margins of the State (School of American Research Press, 2004). Asad points out that the acts of a state functionary routinely require abstracting from one context and applying it to another a decision that "is always, in a sense, uncertain" (p. 283). As he explains, the everyday form it takes is the series of questions that a bureaucrat asks: "whether a particular rule applies to a particular case, and if so, how should it be applied to practice? Does the rule conflict with other rules, and if so, how can they be reconciled? Where does the authority of laws lie?" (p. 287). Asad gives an unambiguous answer: that the authority always lies beyond the written rules. This alien authority, and not the written rules, would therefore, for him, be the law of the state.
- 4. "That which threatens law already belongs to it... to the origin of law" (p. 989).
- 5. Italics mine.
- Schmitt here echoes Søren Kierkagaard's argument from Repetition: "The exception explains the general
 and itself. And if one wants to study the general correctly, one only needs to look around for a true
 exception. It reveals everything more clearly than does the general" (p. 15).
- As summed up by Pierre Bourdieu: "The predictability and calculability that Weber imputed to 'rational law'
 doubtless arise more than anything else from the consistency and homogeneity of the *legal habitus*". See
 "The Force of Law: Toward a Sociology of the Juridical Field", *Hastings Law Review*, p. 833 (July 1987).
- 8. Italics mine.
- Giorgio Agamben. "Sovereign Police". In Means without End, p. 103. He also notes an "embarrassing contiguity between sovereignty and police function" as "expressed in the intangible sacredness that, according to the ancient codes, the figure of the sovereign and the figure of the executioner have in common" (p. 104).
- 10. See Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics (McGraw Hill, 1959, New York). In French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's methodology, langue denotes the abstract systematic principles of a language, without which no meaningful utterance (parole) would be possible. Langue represents the "work of a collective intelligence", which is both internal to each individual and each collective, in so far as it is beyond the will of any individual to change. Parole, on the other hand, designates individual acts, statements and utterances, events of language use manifesting each time as a speaker's ephemeral individual will through his combination of concepts and his "phonation" the formal aspects of the utterance. The study of parole would be entirely focused on individual utterances, using all the available resources of formal and empirical study to analyse actual statements, usually within a specific language. The study of langue would be focused instead on generally applicable conditions of possibility. There would be no coherent and meaningful utterance without the institution of norms that Saussure calls langue.
 - See http://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=662
- 11. See Emile Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics (University of Miami Press, 1973, Miami). The French linguist Emile Benveniste emphasises the need to make a distinction between what he calls the subject of the énoncé and subject of the énunciation. He focuses on the role and implications of the ubiquitous first person pronoun (and its reciprocal second person), used at least implicitly in every language known to humans. In his essay "On the Nature of Pronouns" he notes that the first person, "I",

operates in a way guite unlike other pronouns because it is essentially linked to the exercise of language. The sign / links Saussure's two dimensions of language, the collective intelligence of langue and the ephemeral individual acts of parole: "[...] it is this property that establishes the basis for individual discourse, in which each speaker takes over all the resources of language for his own behalf". I and you are instances of signs empty of meaning, lacking even the possibility of material reference. These signs "do not assert anything; they are not subject to the condition of truth, and escape all denial". For Benveniste, "Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast... I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a you in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of person, for it implies that reciprocally I becomes you in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as I".

See http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elliwp/enunciation.htm

- 12. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", In *Illuminations*, p. 257.
- 13. Michel Foucault. "About the Concept of the 'Dangerous Individual' in Nineteenth-Century Legal Psychiatry". In (ed.) James Faubion, Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol. 3), pp. 176-200. See also Pasquale Pasquino, "Criminology: the Birth of a Special Knowledge", in (eds.) Burchell Graham, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, The Foucault Effect, pp. 235-50.
- 14. Giorgio Agamben, op. cit., p. 105.

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The Fuzzy Logic of National Frontiers or a Frontier Nation:

Reflections on the Multi-Purpose National Identity Card Scheme in India



"The present day 'terrorist' is a man who thinks. He is a planner. No one knows his name or his past. When and where does he come from? No one knows...

"He could be anyone or no one. He could be the one sitting beside you in a theatre or a local train, or be a bank teller or a cigarette/tobacco vendor. He is intelligent and dangerous...

"He has to be found".

Fanna1

This dialogue from the highly popular Hindi film Fanna (2006) provides a compelling entry point for an inquiry into the ideas of frontiers and borders, nations and nation states:

- > In what ways does a modern nation state grapple with issues of visibility and invisibility, identity and anonymity?
- > What tropes of political and bureaucratic rhetoric does the state mobilise to assert its claim for initiating processes of visibility?

- > How do existing social conditions change in the face of such processes?
- > What sort of transformations do these processes of visibility inaugurate, especially those transacted between the state and the individual?
- > What strategies are mobilised by individuals as a response to these transformations?

This essay explores these questions specifically with regard to the introduction of the proposed Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MNIC) in India. The MNIC would be the first of its kind in terms of a citizenship document in the country. For this purpose, a proposal to prepare a national register of citizens, a national register of non-citizens and a national register of residency is being put forth by the state.

In this context, it has become important to observe the developments happening in the Indian context. In April 2003, the Government of India initiated a pilot project for the introduction of the Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MNIC) in select districts. Depending upon its feasibility, this new document would go for a national rollout.

The pilot project was completed in April 2007. On 26 May 2007, the Registrar General of India, D.K. Sikri, who is also the Registrar General of Citizens Registration, handed over the first MNIC Card to Mishro, a middle-aged female resident of Pooth Khurd village of Narela district in the National Capital Region of Delhi. This document, like national identity cards elsewhere, has the following characteristics:

- > Bearer's fingerprint biometrics
- > Photograph
- > Digital memory
- > Standard identity signifiers such as name, age, address, etc.

The MNIC is a 'smart card'. Smart cards are embedded with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chips. RFID is a system of data carriers and base stations. A data carrier can be any label, tag or transponder. It consists of an RFID die, an antenna and packaging. The carrier can then be formatted into any plastic ticket. The base station acts as a reader that contains an antenna, a RF receiver or transceiver, and a microcontroller or a computer. The station can be set up as a desktop, wall mount, or as a portal.²

RFID usually means a passive RFID. The transponder contains no battery; it is powered by an RF signal. The reader transmits the RF to the transponder. The transponder cannot be activated unless it is near the reader. Depending upon the frequency band, the reader can communicate with the transponder within a range of 20-1000 centimeters.³

The card's memory is a SCOSTA-based chip⁴ with storage capacity of 16 kilobytes. In an active RFID, the transponder is powered by battery or fuel cells. The reader and transponders are basically radios that can detect each other within a distance of a kilometre.⁵

The MNIC will be fitted with a passive RFID. In this sense the card would be a departure from earlier kinds of 'identity documents'. The transformation from manual and mechanical inscriptions of identity signifiers to that of the digital would shift the idea of a document to

a plane straddling the border of heterogeneity and homogeneity. All data at its root would be composed of Boolean binaries, homogeneous in a way, yet distinct from each other by the operation of a number. Individual personhood would be signified as an objective mark – an inscription that could be stored, transmitted, linked, accessed, manipulated, shared and retrieved through the precise science of a software programme.

In his influential work *Trust in Numbers*, historian of science Theodore M. Porter asserts: "[...] when 'philosophers' speak of (the) objectivity of science, they generally mean its ability to know things as they really are" (1996, p. 3). Likewise, an 'objective' individual identity of a person – as he/she really is – may be a function of "a body, a memory, and rights and responsibility" (Lyon, 2001, p. 294), together with locatability, social categorisation, symbols of eligibility/non eligibility, etc. (Marx, 2001, p. 312). In this respect the number as an encryption mechanism becomes most useful, as it first further deconstructs individuals made up of many various partial identities, and then reconstitutes these into a singular and totally transparent being. The excessive scopophilia of the state, to borrow an oft-used word from film studies, which avidly commits to the ideal of complete transparency, results in a desire for the complete enumeration of its subjects, now amounting to over a billion.

At this juncture it would be useful to return to the dialogue in this essay's epigraph. The lines are from a scene where Agent Tyagi, a surveillance expert, is called in to assist an Anti-Terrorist' Unit in tracking down an alleged 'terrorist'. She explains to a colleague from the Ministry of Defence the different ways in which the Unit could come to learn more about the alleged 'terrorist', who they refer to as "mastermind". Throughout the sequence, anxieties about not knowing the "mastermind's" name, his location and history are repeatedly voiced. Tyagi keeps reiterating that "no one knows" who he is. Of course, by the term "no one" Tyagi is paradoxically implying the state. Unable to deal with the anonymity of the alleged 'terrorist', she conflates it with a generic assumption: "He could be anyone or no one". The film's narrative, especially after this particular sequence, revolves almost entirely around determining the identity and personhood of the "mastermind". As Tyagi insists, "He has to be found". The pertinent question here would be how this particular presence, who/which is also an absence, who could be "anyone" or "no one", is actually to be found.

By way of a classical parallel, it can be noted that the epic poem *Ramayana* narrates an instance when Prince Rama's brother Laxmana is fatally wounded by Indrajeet, the son of Rama's rival King Ravana. Laxmana could only be saved by *sanjivani*, a particular medicinal herb. The valiant monkey-god Hanuman is sent to fetch this from the distant Dronagiri mountains. Now, Hanuman had no knowledge of herbs. Unable to select the right one, he uses his divine strength to lift the entire range and transport it to the battlefield.⁶

Agent Tyagi's contemporary dilemma is essentially similar to Hanuman's: that of correct deduction-identification-selection. Against all odds, a 'terrorist', who is imagined as a 'deviant' personality type as opposed to a 'normal' or 'average' law-abiding citizen, "has to be found". Here, the word 'normal' derives from the idea of 'norm' as advocated by Emile

Durkheim. In *Empire of Chance* (1990, p. 172), philosopher of science lan Hacking, reflecting on Durkheim, remarks:

A moral fact is normal for a determined social type when it is observed in the average of the species, it is pathological in antithetical... It is no surprise that media coverage of stories of 'national importance' in India are consistently marked by narratives of the 'disruption of normal life', and followed by the rhetoric of the 'restoration of normalcy'. This is accompanied by the usual sorting out of 'anomalies'. In this regard, Michel Foucault's burgeoning list of excavations concerning the mad, the recidivist, the insane and the sick, might easily incorporate further notable additions in the name of the 'terrorist', the 'suspicious-looking' person, and the 'alien'.

For instance, the Delhi Police, which underpins its public presence through an endearing though unconvincing punchline – FOR YOU, WITH YOU, ALWAYS – launched a media campaign in the wake of an alleged 'terrorist' attack on the Red Fort in December 2000. The police campaign, optimistically titled 'Let's Fight Terror Together', ran simultaneously with a massive tenant verification drive to register all tenants residing in the city. The seeming logic was that since the alleged 'terrorists' were outsiders to Delhi and had lived in the city for months prior to the attack, it was possible that some of them could still be present among the millions who rent. The media campaign on the other hand ran as an advisory, exhorting the citizen to stay alert and be on the lookout for/report potential 'terrorists' to the police who, of course, were 'WITH' and 'FOR' the responsible citizen, 'ALWAYS'.

In a country like India, where information superhighways coexist with potholed alleys of misinformation and uncertainty, any such advisory tends to result in a situation where the auditory starts competing with the visual to calibrate seditious whispers. Much like the treacherous frisson described by novelist Ismail Kadare in *The File on H* (2006, pp. 26-27): "[...]the ear never rests, for people always want to talk and to whisper; what is said and especially what is muttered is always... much more dangerous to the State then what can be seen".

One year later after the 'terrorist' attack on the Red Fort, in a classic case of tinnitus in December 2001 the Delhi police arrested a Delhi University professor of Arabic, on charges of waging war against the state. It was claimed that he had a hand in the conspiracy to attack the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001.⁷ On this eventful day, five alleged 'militants' drove a car into the Parliament compound and started firing indiscriminately. What exactly happened is still not very clear, but the parliament's CCTV and TV cameras recorded an exchange of fire between the police forces/security personnel and these men. All the supposed 'militants' were killed in the shootout, following which six people were arrested.⁸

It was alleged that these 'militants' attacked the Indian Parliament as a response to the state's not granting 'freedom' to the state of Kashmir. The professor was awarded a death sentence by a High Court; in 2003, after two years on death row, he was acquitted by the Supreme Court of India and absolved of all charges. The sole 'evidence' (which was later

proved faulty) for his arrest consisted of transcripts of a 136-second long-distance telephone conversation he had with his 18-year-old half-brother in Kashmir. The 13 December attack was termed by the government and media as 'an attack on the heart of Indian democracy'. So far, out of the six main accused, two have been acquitted for 'lack of evidence'; one is on death row, but there is a sustained campaign for a 'fair trial'. Materially, what we have are five dead bodies, and a surreal 'event' that continues to confound the rational mind. Following close on the heels of 9/11, the 13 December attack facilitated the passing of draconian anti-terror laws such as the Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA), since repealed.

Returning to the confined logic of the 'Let's Fight Terror Together'9 campaign, a 'terrorist' could be any person acting 'suspiciously' – specifically if he is wearing clothes unsuited for the season of the year; or if he is conspicuously trying to blend in, via clothes and behaviour, with the surroundings. In other words, as proclaimed by Agent Tyagi, he could be "anyone or no one". This rhetoric of ambiguity tends to produce a situation where on one level the idea of normality becomes a performance, of that which is *imagined* as 'normal'; and on the other, creates a perceptional filter of what sociologist Gary Marx terms "categorical suspicion" ¹⁰.

As Hacking declares, "[...] few of us fancy being pathological, so 'most of us' try to make ourselves normal, which in turn affects what is normal" (1990, p. 2). How can one differentiate 'normal' from 'suspicious' behaviour? What are 'normal' clothes? What does one mean when one is talking about 'blending in' with the surroundings? What contingent notions of 'normality' does this give rise to?

The case of a national identity card stretches the idea of 'suspicion' further. By this logic, in order to affirm or confirm one's trust in the state, one needs to not only be aware of one's personhood, or possess a document that can indubitably vouch for one's claim to oneself, but one 'should' have a document containing a *fingerprint* – what Giorgio Agamben calls "the most private and incommunicable aspect of subjectivity... the body's biological life"¹¹ – that can be not only enumerated, but recalled and verified in an instant. The state will only recognise any person as him/herself if the memory of his/her personhood as contained in his/her token is an *exact* match with a copy of his/her memory of personhood as indexed by the state archive of names. The link between the name, the person and his/her memory of personhood would of course be constituted by a number. With the MNIC card, a 15-digit National Identity Number (NIN) would be allotted to each citizen.¹²

The NIN would become mandatory for a range of transactions. Travelling, school admission, registration of property, obtaining a driving licence, opening a bank account: for all such transactions the card-carrying citizen would have to fill a form and quote his NIN. According to an official estimate, the Government of India currently has more than 100,000 different forms pertaining to various departments. Because of increasing pressure by different private lobby groups, the Government has given its nod to mid- and large-sized software companies to actively participate in and share the burden of processing this 'national' information.¹³

Incorporating these parameters, the MNIC card may precariously waver towards, as some scholars argue, the 'demeaning' of the identity of an individual. The identity in this sense is composed of political and personal characteristics. As policy analyst Richard Sobel, for instance, states: "[...] NIDS demeans political and personal identity by transforming personhood from an intrinsic quality inhering in individuals into a quantity designated by numbers, represented by physical cards, and recorded in computer databanks"¹⁴.

However, any identity document clearly supplies 'meaning', sometimes copious, sometimes fragmented, when an individual's identity is documented. The urge to acquire identity cards underlines some fundamental assumptions in relation to citizenship. One such assumption is the right to legitimately claim state benefits, irrespective of whether or not one can rightfully locate oneself within the category of 'legible' people. However, it is not just the issue of crucial 'benefits', since the euphoria of citizens with regard to the functioning of the

welfare state has long since dissipated. Not to he recognised by the state - or in other words, to be stateless is an extremely disturbing, even dangerous, condition and not one that many would desire. The perennial queues outside government offices for ration cards, voter ID cards, etc., corroborate our continual need 'acknowledged' by the state.

The coming together of public and private on the MNIC project entailing the sharing of information marks another first. For the first time, the Indian state will allow its memory to be



accessed by non-state players. 'G to B (Government to Business)'¹⁵ has emerged as the newest mantra in the rhetoric of e-governance. The state would, of course, draw a lot of benefit if this works out. Instead of a multitudinous array of identity documents bearing different identification numbers, ranging from Voter ID card to Permanent Account Number (PAN) card, to driving licences and credit cards, it will have to manage only *one* document with just *one* identity number that produces the 'legible' and legitimate citizen.

In All the Names (1999), Portuguese novelist José Saramago offers a riveting account of the disappointments, delusions and frustrations of Senhor José, a clerk who lives in a single room attached to an agency called the Registry of Births, Marriages and Deaths. The

narrative is set in a city which, to borrow Agent Tyagi's rhetoric, could be anywhere or nowhere. Senhor José describes Senhor José's activities thus: he works in the Registry during the day, and "by night, he ferrets for facts about the famous, compiling his own archive of births, deaths and marriages. One day he chances upon an index card of an ordinary woman whose details hold as much fascination for him as any celebrity's... José starts to track the woman down"16. After much trial and tribulation he concludes that the woman had committed suicide, but this inference proves to be an error after he pays a visit to her grave (p. 243):

I walked through the general cemetery to the section for suicides, I went to sleep under an olive tree, and the following morning when I woke up, I was in a middle of a flock of sheep, and then I found that the Shepherd amuses himself by swapping around the numbers on the graves before the tombstones are put in place.

The metaphor is exquisite; but literature follows a different rationale from that of the historical desire of a nation state to accompany an individual from cradle to grave through the agency of an identity document. With the emergence of the digitally enabled national identity card we are moving towards the paradoxical spectre of an opacity that rides on transparency – i.e., as the citizen is becoming more and more transparent to the eyes of the state, the latter is receding behind a plethora of alphanumeric archives and databases. For instance, future Public Distribution System (PDS) shops would have electronic kiosks instead of personnel from the Food and Civil Supplies ministry who were, till now, sourced locally. The operation and maintenance of the PDS shops would be subcontracted to various private vendors. Only those citizens eligible for the category of BPL (Below Poverty Line) would have access to subsidised food. Their claim would, of course, have to be validated through the smart card.

The concept of a fabricated image of a person, together with other alphanumeric signifiers, contained in a digitally rewritable, retrievable memory pressed between two plastic sheets, embossed with a national emblem and laminated with a transparent cover, suggests that the MNIC card will work exactly like a double-sided key that allows both the state and the citizen to enter into each other's realms.

However, there is a caveat in this meta-narrative, reminiscent of poet-philosopher Gaston Bachelard's compelling assertion that "the lock doesn't exist that could resist absolute violence, and all locks are an invitation to thieves" (1994, p. 81).

How will the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion play itself out in the case of the MNIC?

We live in a world surrounded by a plethora of 'fakes', but fascinatingly, the effective presence of the counterfeit provides legitimacy to the existence and desire for 'real' documents...

A notch gives an outline to a key. It lies on the periphery of a key. A notch forms a firm boundary to a key. The National Identification Number (NIN) would similarly act as a crafted notch or groove to this key known as the MNIC. A unique sequence of numbers will

distinguish between the standardised memories of personhood, which acquire a legal currency by being valid, and other memories which are too personal, too complex and too layered to be grouped into any category of time and space or sorted into any form of document, but nevertheless form the basis of who we are.

The NIN, according to the proponents of the MNIC, will act as a virtual border between state machinery and citizens – a border where any act of transgression would be immediately noticed, where no stealth or subterfuge could be practiced, where all acts of masquerade, mimicry and simulation would be exposed, to reveal the identity that lies hidden behind 'other', concealed identities. Quite unlike the *real* frontier – characterised by razor-wire fencing and checkposts, where the idea of territory is contested by security forces on a day-to-day basis, and where people may have lived and traversed an everchanging line for years, where the terrain is marked by negotiated crossings, dealings with middlemen, farewells and promises of return, sometimes kept and sometimes broken...

The physical frontier becomes the space where the state confronts its biggest dilemma. How are individuals to be categorised? How to decide who is who? How to ascertain the truth claim of an identity? How to gauge if the *lungi* ¹⁷-clad person is from this side or that?

Perhaps the answer is being sought in the MNIC.

In case of Indian borders, the problem is compounded by the fuzzy frontier between the definition of an 'alien' and a 'citizen'. Border posts are places where identity documents assume hyper-significance: where a heightened state of alertness is the 'norm'. Where 'anyone' from 'anywhere' can be asked to prove his/her identity, and where the lack of an identity document quickly transforms the assumption of innocence into presumption of guilt.

India shares a border of 2,912 kilometres with Pakistan, a border of 4,053 kilometres with Bangladesh, a border of 1,690 kilometres with Nepa and a border of 3,380 kilometres with China. There are ongoing border disputes with Pakistan, China and Bangladesh. There have been three wars with Pakistan and one with China.

Chapter V – "Border Management" – of a highly influential report on national security titled *Reforming the National Security System: Recommendations of the Group of Ministers*, unequivocally declares: "In fact, barring Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Delhi and Haryana, all other States in the country have one or more international borders or a coastline and can be regarded as frontline states from the point of view of border management" 19. Quantitatively speaking, according to this report, out of a total of 28 states and 7 Union Territories, barring just 5 states the rest of India, for all purposes, administrative and political, is to be regarded and managed as a "border". This may well transform to a situation where most citizens may thus be seen as potential immigrants (read 'aliens') by the state. With an internal collapse of the periphery, the idea of the hinterland merges with notion of the border, and the self-sustaining myth of inside and outside gets engulfed in its wake. Particular ethnic, religious and political identities are overtaken by a singular, affective national identity, a supposedly infallible document.

Further, the Report claims: "Illegal migration has assumed serious proportions. There should be compulsory registration of citizens and non-citizens living in India. This will facilitate preparation of a national register of citizens. All citizens should be given a Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MPNIC) and non-citizens should be issued identity cards of a different colour and design" 19. For the illegal immigrant to be marked and verified, the citizen has to be stabilised; and vice versa. For all purposes, unless the not-so-apparent dichotomy between the legal citizen and the illegal immigrant is sorted out, the state is likely to find itself sinking deep in self-demarcated tautological quicksand.



Given the complex internal haemorrhage that the MNIC seems to have initiated between the fringe and core, it is interesting to note how subtle changes in the syntactic structure of this minutely calibrated grandiloguence has helped push the dreams of mobility bevond national boundaries. Trouble with the code, for instance, was evident in its misreading by the people of Pooth Khurd, a village northwest of Delhi earmarked for the pilot project of the MNIC scheme. The erstwhile farmlands of this village have been transformed into urban clusters following the rapid expansion of Delhi and the absorption of the frontline rural/semi-urban areas

into the metropolis. Malls, multiplexes and high-rise apartment blocks have appeared. Compensation money for the displaced farmers was seemingly 'adequate', but when I visited this village in 2006, the dominant narrative was one of lack of livelihood. Former agriculturalists were finding it difficult to move into newer occupations, and it was equally difficult for them to assimilate new work cultures.

I conducted a series of interviews with a group of men from this village. One of them complained: "We don't have work, but this does not mean we are poor". This was obvious from the range of new cars parked along the yet-to-be-paved roads of the village.

When I asked my subjects about the MNIC, their faces lit up. They all remembered the day when the Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) came to their village and told them about a "Hara Card (Green Card)". Quite a few of my subjects described how they would take foreign tours; some also said that their long-cherished dream of settling abroad would finally come true in the near future. This odd but optimistic projection was a recurrent theme in all my

conversations during subsequent visits to Pooth Khurd. I kept wondering what the MNIC had to do with going abroad, but I couldn't figure it out.

Many visits later, one day while listening to an illiterate farmer talking about places he would visit in England, I chanced upon the possible link. I was admiring the jute bag presented to him by the SDM on account of his role as responsible community elder. The farmer had mobilised over 50 people to share their biometric and other personal information with the officials of the state. The letters "MNIC" were inscribed on either side of the jute bag in English and Hindi. "MNIC" in Hindi translates as "Bahu-Uddeshya Rashtriya Pehechan Patra" or "Multi-Purpose National Identity Card" – but was (mis)read by the people of Pooth Khurd as "Bahu-Deshya Rashtriya Pehechan Patra" or "Multi-Nation National Identity Card". Phonetically, the only difference between Bahu Deshye and Bahu Uddeshye is an elision of vowels. But semantically, this inverts the very idea of a national identity card with its notions of fixed citizenship and singular national identities.

Much has happened since that particular visit to Pooth Khurd. A whole range of smart cards – biometric passports, smart health cards and smart cards for subsidised foodgrains under the Public Distribution System – have surfaced. There is talk that an Integrated Smart Card will be introduced, which will collapse all these other cards into MNIC. And according to a Planning Commission Report of January 2007, recommendations are being put forth to bring children under the smart card project.

"How to take children into account?" This is the current predicament the Indian government seems to be grappling with. Its report *Entitlement Reform for Empowering the Poor: The Integrated Smart Card* deals specifically with problems pertaining to distribution of benefits under various governmental schemes. A peculiar quandary has arisen, as the MNIC would only be given to persons who are 15 years or older, thus depriving millions of young children. The report recommends that "the biometric information of all family members needs to be in-built into the smart card" 21.

On the question of citizenship status, the report suggests, "The creation of a database of residents and assignment of a unique ID to each resident is much easier than the creation of a database of citizens, because of the difficulty of authentication of citizenship and the legal implications that it may have"²².

The idea of the MNIC began as an attempt to mark all citizens permanently and accord them with formal national membership – a membership which would surpass other memberships denoted by filial relations, region, religion, language, gender, caste, community, locality, etc., and result in the creation of a homogenous category of legible and legitimate citizens. Significantly though, the project failed to take into account the complex praxis that exists between the idea of an individual identity as *imagined* by the state, and an identity as *lived* by those who constitute it and whom it constitutes. To complicate matters further, the Planning Commission Report (January 2007) makes it abundantly clear that the government is tinkering with the idea of collapsing individual identities into group identities. This move would create new membership pools within a larger sea of already existing sets of memberships.

In a country with a documented history of mass internal migration, a national register of residency would facilitate the manifestation of hitherto unimagined demographic nodes – unimagined because these will tend to push valid citizens without a formal residency status towards the brink of illegality, while on the other hand, genuinely 'illegal' immigrants would try to mask their existence by acquiring all available tokens of legitimate identification. The creation of newer sets of membership would offer fresh categories for identification. Together with existent categories, the emergent categories will tend towards an amorphous idea of national group membership, where at least some of the members will neither be totally inclusive nor exclusive to the group.

In the absence of distinct forms of identification, the ongoing experimentation is producing a somewhat 'fuzzy logic' of national identity. According to mathematician Lotfi Zadeh,²³ "fuzzy truth" is something which represents membership in vaguely defined "sets", and not as a result of an event or condition. Fuzzy logic allows for "set membership" to range from 'Slightly' to 'Quite' to 'Very'.

A national identity card would create a "universal set" of Indians, but as the Planning Commission Report (January 2007) gestures, this "set" may have a lot of "subsets". For instance, the state of Kerala has its smart cards for commercial sex workers, the Indian Army is considering a proposal to issue health smart cards for HIV-positive soldiers, and car drivers have their smart driving licences. Subsets around occupation, health and transport are just a few of the many that may come up. The fuzzy logic of the MNIC will make 'Indianness' an attribute dependent not just on the document, but also on one's projected image of being a 'normal' Indian. The contestations for claims to national membership through the MNIC card will arise in the domain of truth claims. It will be marked by attempts to look like or furnish proof of evidence of 'Indianness', which would make one 'Slightly' Indian or 'Quite' Indian or 'Very' Indian. Depending on this, a person would get a Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MNIC) or a Multi-Purpose Residency Card (MRR).

The parameters of fuzzy logic become apparent in the relatively obscure case of 400 Iranian immigrants in the small town of Murshidabad in the state of West Bengal. This community settled in Murshidabad 80 years ago,²⁴ long before the formation of the independent Indian nation state. The MNIC survey team failed to accord a single member of this community Indian citizenship status. So what are they: Persian-speaking Indians or Bengali-speaking Iranians? Are they 'Slightly', 'Quite', or 'Very' Indian?

The 16 categorical questions in the Government Proforma for the MNIC must be answered not with a tick or a cross but by giving information supported by *evidence*. This evidence is then turned over to a verification team headed by a supervisor.²⁵ The verification team will ascertain the citizenship status of each individual. In case of unavailability of evidence, the decision of the verification team and the local SDM would be crucial with regard to granting citizenship to a hitherto undocumented individual.

Thus by its very nature the MNIC questionnaire generates slippages within categories. In order to be verified correctly, an individual seeking legitimacy must either produce evidence – or have the good fortune to be in appearance 'Very' Indian...

Cases such as the abovementioned Iranian migrants (with their 'Slightly' Indian features) elude the bureaucratic pincers that shape an individual into a citizen. In order to claim a legitimate place in/belong to a nation, an individual must conform to categories anchored by questionnaires, certificates, oaths and affirmations. Those who do not fit the established categories are assigned new ones that then produce their own detailed narratives of illegality and suspicion.

Thus, 'categorical suspicion' by the state is supported by the desire for 'categorical affirmation' on the part of the majority of Indians, who see 'legible' identity documents as their only really useful vehicle for socio-economic mobility and negotiations with the state. Meanwhile, far from the declared goal of a scenario of total surveillance and encrypted subjectivity, the ongoing Indian experiment with identity documents instead finds itself paradoxically committed to the fuzzy truth of ambiguous citizenship.

Author's Note

MNIC Timeline

- > 26 May 1999: Kargil War with Pakistan begins.
- > 26 July 1999: Kargil War ends.
- > 29 July 1999: Government of India appoints Kargil Review Committee (KRC) through Order No. 361/6/4/99-TS.
- > 7 January 2000: Kargil Review Committee (KRC) submits a 228-page report to the Prime Minister. A key recommendation of the report is to take steps "to issue ID Cards to border villagers in certain vulnerable areas on a priority basis, pending its extension to other or all parts of the State".
- > 17 April 2000: On the advice of the KRC, the government forms the Group of Ministers (GoM) through Order No. 141/2/1/2000-TS.
- > 22 December 2000: The Red Fort in Delhi attacked by alleged 'terrorists'.
- > January 2001: Delhi Police launches its 'Tenant Verification Drive' the first-ever compilation of data on 'tenants' in Delhi.
- > 26 February 2001: The GoM submits its report to the Prime Minister. A paragraph in Chapter V of the Report, "Border Management", reads: "There should be compulsory registration of citizens and non-citizens living in India. This will facilitate preparation of a national register of citizens. All citizens should be given a Multi-Purpose National Identity Card (MPNIC) and non-citizens should be issued identity cards of a different colour and design".
- > 23 April 2003: Pilot project on Multi-Purpose National Identity Card initiated.

Editors' Note

Some ideas in this essay were presented by the author at 'Sensor-Census-Censor: Investigating Regimes of Information, Registering Changes of State', an international colloquium on information, society, history and politics, held at Sarai from 30 November – 2 December 2006. The colloquium was organised by the initiative

Towards A Culture Of Open Networks (Sarai-CSDS, Delhi; Waag Society, Amsterdam; t0, Vienna), and supported by the EU-India Economic and Cross-Cultural Programme under its Media, Communication and Culture dimension. These ideas were also presented at the National Identity Cards Systems Research Workshop held on 8 June 2007 at Oueen's University. Kingston. Canada.

Notes

- 1. Fanna (2006). Directed by Kunal Kolhi; produced by Yash Raj Films.
- Workshop Reader, p. 7. Proceedings of Technical Workshop on RFID Technology, Smart Card Expo, New Delhi, 5 September 2006.
- 3. Ibid., p. 14.
- Smart Card Operating Software for Transport Application. Press release of the Office of the Registrar General of India, 1 August 2005. http://www.censusindia.net/mnic.html
- 5. Workshop Reader, op. cit., p. 6.
- See Ralph, T.H. and M.A. Griffith, Rámáyan of Válmíki, Book VI, Canto CII: 'Lakshman Healed' [E. J. Lazarus and Co., Banaras, 1870-1874] (Trübner & Co., London).
- 13 December 2001: Suicide attack on Indian parliament. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/13/newsid_3695000/3695057.stm
- 14 December 2001: Six picked up in Parliament attack case. http://www.rediff.com/news/2001/dec/14parl22.htm
- 9. Police advertisements. See http://www.delhipolice.nic.in/home/pressrel.htm
- Gary Marx. "Seeing Hazily, but Not Darkly, through the Lens: Some Recent Empirical Studies of Surveillance Technologies". In Law and Social Inquiry, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring 2005).
 Online text at http://web.mit.edu/gtmarx/www/hazily.html
- Giorgio Agamben. "No to Bio-Political Tattooing". In Le Monde, 10 January 2004. http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/totalControl.html
- See Central Mission Mode Projects National Citizen Database (NCD/MNIC)/ UNIQUE ID (UID) http://www.mit.gov.in/default.aspx?id=859
- 13. Ibid.
- Richard Sobel. "The Demeaning of Identity and Personhood in National Identification Systems". In Harvard Journal of Law & Technology, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2002).
- See Department of Information and Technology, Ministry of Communications, Information and Technology, Government of India, National E-Governance Plan, Components, Core and Support Infrastructure Investment Details, at http://www.mit.gov.in/default.aspx?id=825
- 16. José Saramago. All the Names (Harver Panther, 1999), jacket copy.
- 17. A sarong-like lower garment worn by men in India.
- Reforming the National Security System: Recommendations of the Group of Ministers, Chapter V, "Border Management", p. 58. For Report pdf, see http://mod.nic.in/newadditions/welcome.html

- 19. Ibid., p. 85, para 10.
- "Entitlement Reform for Empowering the Poor: The Integrated Smart Card". Chapter 2, Multi-Application Smart Card; 2.5 Application of Unique ID to Government Schemes, pp. 8-9 http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/11wrkgindx.htm
- 21. Ibid., p. 9.
- 22. Ibid., Chapter 1, Multi-Application Smart Card; Introduction Module, Identification Modules, p. 5. http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/11wrkgindx.htm
- 23. The concept of 'Fuzzy Logic' was first put forward by mathematician Lotfi Zadeh in a paper published in 1965 ("Fuzzy Sets", *Information and Control* 8:3, pp. 338-53), which provided the theoretical basis for fuzzy computer chips that appeared 20 years later. Unlike traditional or classical logic, which attempts to categorise information into binary patterns such as black/white, true/false, yes/no, or all/nothing, fuzzy logic pays attention to the "excluded middle" and tries to account for the "greys", the partially true and partially false situations which make up 99.9% of human reasoning in everyday life. It builds upon the assumption that everything consists of degrees on a sliding scale truth, age, beauty, wealth, colour, race or anything else that is affected by the dynamic nature of human behaviour and perception.

In addition to consumer applications, especially in Japanese electronics, fuzzy logic is being used in the fields of biomedicine, finances, geography, philosophy, ecology, agricultural processes, water treatment, satellite remote sensing, handwriting analysis, nuclear science, weather forecasting and stock market analysis, to name a few.

Zadeh remarks, "The question really isn't whether I'm American, Russian, Iranian, Azerbaijani, or anything else; I've been shaped by all these people and cultures and I feel quite comfortable among all of them". He adds, "When the only tool you have is a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail..." (http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/24_folder/24_articles/24_fuzzywhat.html)

 Devadeep Purohit. "Report Taking Shape amid Infiltration Buzz". In *The Telegraph*, 23 August 2005. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050823/asp/nation/story_5136259.asp

See also Devadeep Purohit, "Iran to India, Stateless: Small Community of Immigrants Denied Citizenship Right", *The Telegraph*, 18 August 2005.

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050819/asp/frontpage/story_5131296.asp

 See eCENSUSIndia, Issue 17 (2003). Project Review Multipurpose National Identity Card. http://www.censusindia.net/results/eci17.pdf

The initial NRIC will be built from the initial Local Register of Indian Citizens (LRIC), which will be based on a census-type exercise to be conducted throughout the country during a specified period. The baseline exercise would involve a systematic listing of houses and households followed by canvassing of the schedule for preparation of a Population Register. This data would be printed on a pre-formatted verification form and handed over to the verification team through the supervisor. The main responsibility of the verification team will be to ascertain the citizenship status of each individual by following a prescribed procedure. The adult individual will sign the verification form certifying that her/his personal details and the photograph are correct. In case of dependents, it will be the responsibility of the head of the family to sign the verification form. The verification team would give a recommendation regarding the

citizenship status of the individual. The final decision in this regard would be taken by the sub-divisional magistrate.

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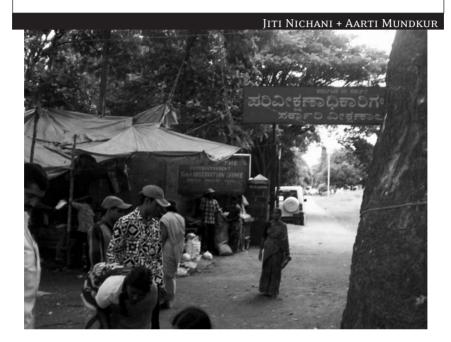
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SCALING WALLS, Breaking Fences, Crossing Gates

All in All, It's Just Another Hole in the Wall...



The inner wall of the detention centre is the outer wall of the city. Raqs Media Collective

Our story begins on the afternoon of 29 January 2007, when 46 juveniles detained at the Observation Home in Bangalore broke out of its guarded boundary. The juveniles had escaped from a discreet hole created by patiently scraping through the grille-encased ceiling above the bathroom, and dislodging three bricks from the wall. Climbing one on top of another and pulling one another out on the other side, they squeezed their way onto the branch of a nearby tree which functioned as a bridge to the parapet of the Home's wall. They then leapt down and dispersed into the bustling suburb of Madiwala. The work of carefully digging the hole was done over many days, and the material removed was hidden inside their clothes.

According to Satish, the oldest juvenile escapee, he and four other boys hatched the plan almost three months in advance of the actual escape. It was decided that the best time to flee the Home would be between 5 and 6 pm, during officially allotted 'play time'. As the mastermind, Satish summoned a meeting to discuss the *modus operandi*. Before inviting all boys to join him in the escape, he threatened each of them with dire consequences if they informed the authorities of his intention. He also arranged for friends to meet him outside with clothes and money after his escape. In keeping with this plan, it took the boys ten days to slowly grate through the chosen segment of the formidable wall that separated the inner wall of the detention centre from the outer wall of the city. With precision and planning, the boys made their great escape by passing through the inconspicuous yet significant hole in the wall.

The Observation Home is located between the IT Park on one side and jumbo shopping malls on the other. It is carefully tucked away in the middle of a colourful and bustling wholesale *sabzi mandi* (vegetable market) that runs along the entire length of the road, more or less obscuring the entrance of the Home, which is indicated by an indistinct bleached board. As a result, though situated at the heart of the city, it remains an urban 'non-space', disconnected from the everyday of the modern metropolis.

While the regular rhythm of the city beats around the lack of infrastructure, the invitation for bigger investment in the BPO sector and the escalating stories of crime, the sudden appearance of the hole in the wall protecting the city from the Home caused an acute disruption in the usual pattern of stories that the city narrates about itself. Accounts of the "great escape" by the juveniles captured the headlines of every newspaper and news channel in the city. The Observation Home becomes the focal point of scrutiny and curiosity. The attention of the city's inhabitants is forcefully drawn to this sudden act of defiance; those for whom the home previously did not exist, are now rudely awoken from their undisturbed sleep, and so notice the presence of an uninvited guest – the *denizen* – amongst them.

For three days following the escape, the media bombarded the public with photographs and commentary on the catastrophe, making sure that the inhabitants of the city were well aware of its illegal citizens suddenly on the loose. Before this story slowly receded into oblivion, the absconding juveniles were described as "murderers, dacoits, Naxalites, Maoists, undertrials and convicts"³. The language adopted to narrate the incident blurs the supposedly neat lines between the adult offender and the young denizen, not to mention violating the privacy of the juveniles. In fact, it was almost as if the danger posed by the escapees was so grave that "five teams of police officers" needed to be constituted to "nab the kids"⁴. The newspapers proceeded to further suggest, "... Since most of them had been arrested in connection with crimes such as murder, dacioty and rape, they were unable to get bail"⁵. At the Home, the immediate emphasis fell on the lack of adequate security, along with the inefficiency of the administration, completely undermining the *raison d'etre* of the escape. A diagnosis offered was the fact that the walls of the Home were not high enough, and there was an urgent need to increase their height.

Ironically, the media that cries itself hoarse over the importance of freedom of speech, and the IT industry that pushes the idea of free trade, seemed to entirely miss the fact that the escape was eventually an act of *freedom*. A freedom whose ultimate price would be measured by additional layers of bricks to further fortify the now not-so-formidable wall. The language of the law has always had a curious obsession with the metaphor of walls and fences – an obsession that naturalises distinctions of the legal from the illegal; the inside from the outside; the citizen from the denizen; and the inner wall of the detention centre from the outer wall of the city. Some walls are torn apart by acts of brutal force, others decay slowly over periods of time, while others appear to stand tall and strong, and yet do not remain the same as they carefully mask their powerlessness only till an act of rebellion exposes the fragile bravado that sustained them in the first place. Just as the rest of the wall is rendered hypervisible by the appearance of a hole, the parameters of the rule of law become obvious when they are breached.

In the ordinary language of material physics, a hole would be just a hollow space in a solid body or surface. But a hole in *this* wall represents a different space altogether: a void which nonetheless challenges the larger, critical distinctions of inside/outside, and allows for a brief respite from the well-rehearsed separations between the city and its detention centres. While it appears that a city can only make sense of itself through processes of legitimised segregation, the narrative enacted behind the walls reveals the uneven story of the rule of law, citizenship and identity. The powerful irony is that but for the hole in the wall, the city would not have been alerted to the walls that exist within it, as well as the walls surrounding it.

Operational within the spatial logic of such walls are the codes embedded within the state's formation of what constitutes the good citizen, or the *adarsh balak* (ideal child) – those who didn't quite make it past the walls of schools.

Although the art and science of designing and constructing buildings follows the purpose it intends to serve, the architecture of the juvenile home falls outside the spatial logic of this intention. Bearing a close resemblance to the austere entrance of a prison, the barred porch of the Observation Home in Bangalore is heavily guarded by the members of the duty staff. A tight lock-and-key system welcomes only known entrants to the inside of the observation Home, while restricting the contact the juvenile has with family and friends, marking the distinct boundaries of the 'outside' and 'inside' worlds.

According to sociologist Erving Goffman, the "all-encompassing or total character is symbolised by the barrier to social intercourse with the outside and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire, cliffs, water, forests or moors". The Observation Home acts as the 'total' institution that creates an exceptional world of the 'inside' – governed by rules and procedures that dictate every aspect of the subject's movement, and curtail body autonomy.

Within the apparatus of correction, the juvenile is confined to the pale inner walls of his 'new home', considered to be a 'safe abode' for reflection, introspection and reparation.

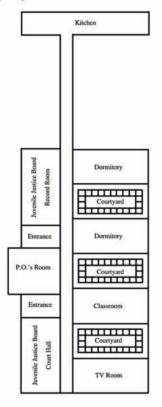
These inner walls symbolically offer didactic uplifting quotes, along with pictures of various deities, tendering the quintessence of Virtue that will somehow, subliminally, infiltrate the consciousness of the alleged 'criminal'. At the Home in Bangalore, the most prominent of these reads: "Training of a child is like painting of a masterpiece". This is reminiscent of Michel Foucault's observation that "[...] The entire para-penal institution, which is created in order not to be a prison, culminates in the cell, on the walls of which are written in black letters: 'God sees you'''⁷. Such a lack of temptation within this spiritually caged environment is meant to therapeutically cure the inmate of the Home of all the evil that has entered his body. Willingly or unwillingly he submits himself to the pedagogic fantasies of the state acting as *parens patrae* – a notion that allows the state to treat the child in 'a manner' supposedly in his/her best interest.

The inner wall of the detention centre acts as a site for multiple contestations – not just representing the denial of physical interaction with the outside, but also raising questions about the limited understanding behind the prescribed type of reformation process for children, and the obscure language of the pedagogic fantasies of the law.

Not satisfied with just the spatial confinement of the juvenile, these warped projections take on a temporal aspect as well, through controlling each waking moment of the juvenile. The manual of the Observation Home, for instance, dictates the following schedule (this list draws upon information provided by dozens of children interviewed):

- 5:30 6:00 am: The juvenile delinquent must rise.
- 6:00 6:30 am: He must wash up before the day begins.
- 6:30 7:30 am: A mandatory session of prayers and yoga.
- 7:30 8:30 am: Cleaning duties sweeping and swabbing of the community and dormitory areas.
- 8:30 9:00 am: Must bathe and get dressed.
- 9:00 10:00 am: Breakfast. Three boys help with the cooking on a rotational basis.
- 10:00 am 1:00 pm: School. Juveniles receive non-formal instruction that includes training in painting, drawing, moral education and alpha-numeral literacy.
- 1:00 2:00 pm: Afternoon meal.
- 2:00 5:00 pm: Recreation. Vocational training in drama, tailoring, electronics repair as and when resource persons are available. Prayer.
- 5:00 6:00 pm: Play. Games such as carrom and chess are played within a fenced courtyard.
- 6:00 6:30 pm: Tea and a fruit.
- 6:30 7:30 pm: Evening prayers. The hymns are led by the juveniles themselves.

Rough Layout of the Observation Home Building



7:30 - 8:30 pm: Dinner.

8:30 – 9:30 pm: Juveniles are allowed supervised viewing of television.

9:30 pm: Lights-out, as order and silence is ensured.

While children enter schools as future citizens. the iuvenile enters the Observation Home as a denizen. Unlike other sites of cultivation such as the school or camp that hide behind their walls, there is a collapse of temporal understanding in the Observation Home. The inmates are prevented from freely crossing its boundary for an indefinite period of time; and within the walls they are subjected to a disciplined routine, in the same place, amongst the same set of people, day after day. It is assumed that this set of activities is 'best suited' for his development. The law believes in correcting the behaviour of a young errant to match the perfectly calibrated settings of a 'worthy citizen'.

The language of the law often masks the concept of subjugation and unfreedom in its extensively maintained

argument of protection. Although the juvenile is not subjected to the force of the iron hand, he nonetheless is reduced to a state of bare existence, in order to rewrite the coveted notion of ideal citizen on his body. As Foucault declares:

In our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body: even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission. Punishment, if I may put it, should strike the soul rather than the body.⁸

Interestingly, today behind the inner walls of the guarded Observation Home in Bangalore, the juvenile mechanically performs the chores of a general code which closely resembles the House rules 'of the young prisoners in Paris' of 1837. Like a prisoner, the

juvenile is stripped of his identity. He surrenders all personal belongings before he poses as a 'criminal' for his 'rowdy-sheet' photograph. Along with the formal identity of '*Qaidi* No. XXX', he is also assigned a new name by his dormitory mates, while he slowly learns the nuances of the Home rules and regulations.

Further, to effectively render the denizen as an 'ethical citizen-subject', a host of duties are mapped against this objective – a project of cultivation behind the closed doors of the Home. Through this disciplined drill he is forced to inculcate the pragmatic virtues of cleanliness, punctuality, morality, helpfulness and unselfishness, amongst others – an important step in the making of the good citizen, and which purportedly help in forging and regulating the identity of the *adarsh balak*, the subject who is otherwise moulded within the walls of the school.

It is worth recalling a moment in popular culture where a wall emerges as the deeply symbolic space between public memory and private struggle. In Yash Chopra's blockbuster Hindi film, *Deewar* (Wall, 1975), after the heroine and her two children are forced into the city, they find shelter under a bridge. One morning the mother wakes to find her younger son Ravi missing, and she goes out to look for him with her older son Vijay. They find Ravi outside the walls of a school, standing by the gate and looking longingly into the compound, while the patriotic tune of *Saare Jahaan se Accha* plays as the poignant accompaniment to his yearning for self-improvement. Vijay offers to work so that his brother may study; their paths diverge, and they meet many years later – below the same proverbial bridge, where the only witness to the split between the figure of the contractual law-abiding citizen and its subterranean 'other' is the *deewar*/wall between them.¹⁰

Acts of resistance are often articulated via metaphorical and dramatic excess and the use of words such as 'revolutionary', 'explosive', etc., to describe efforts of emancipation. The "great escape" of Bangalore reminds us that it is sometimes useful to pay attention to the ways in which fiercely motivated people 'scrape' or 'dig' their ways out of confinement; how a space of anonymity, oblivion and neglect can be converted into a zone of significance; how a hole can suddenly and dramatically reveal the citizen's shadow on the other side of the wall, inhabited now by the denizen – who finds himself in a temporary state of aporia where he is simultaneously present and absent, is legible and illegible, and is inscribed and erased.

Notes

- Section 8 (1), The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000: "Any State Government
 may establish and maintain either by itself or under an agreement with voluntary organisations, observation
 homes in every district or group of districts, as may be required for the temporary reception of any juvenile
 in conflict with law during the pendency of any inquiry regarding them under this Act".
- Times News Network. "Wanted: Judicial Probe into 'Great Escape". In The Times of India, 31 January 2007 (Bangalore edition).

- 3. "Nobody's Children". Editorial, Deccan Herald, 30 January 2007 (Bangalore edition).
- 4. Times News Network, op. cit.
- ———. "46 Undertrials Flee Bangalore Remand Home". In *The Times of India*, 29 January 2007 (Bangalore edition).
- Erving Goffman. Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Anchor Books, 1961, New York), p. 4.
- 7. Michel Foucault. Discipline and Punish. Trans. Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995, New York), p. 294.
- 8. ——, op. cit., p. 16
- 9. ———, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
- Lawrence Liang. "Cinematic Citizenship and the Illegal Citizen". In Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 6, p. 376 (2005).

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An Interview in the Emergency Room: A Cure in Three Stages

Aman Sethi

Stage I: The Interview

The old man adjusts the bandage on his head, looks about and beams widely at all present. To his left, a middle-aged man uses a large cotton swab to staunch the blood that gushes from a large hole in his throat, while simultaneously trying to calm his hysterical wife. To his right, male nurses strip a plump 80-year-old down to his underwear, rub his arms, feet and chest with conductive gel and stick him full of electrodes. Somewhere down the hall, an elderly lady suddenly keels over and goes into a faint. "This, Doctor, this! This is what we were talking about..." her swarm of relatives babbles incoherently, unsettled by her sudden loss of consciousness, yet relieved that the old lady has communicated her symptoms in so unmistakable a fashion at so appropriate a time.

"Move back! Give her air. The nurse will handle this". The middle-aged doctor nervously scratches the bald patch on his head. Scribbling down a rash of prescriptions, he moves to the next bed, to the 80-year-old now sprouting electrodes.

"Symptoms?"

"Sharp pain in the chest, sweating, breathlessness. Possible cardiac arrest".

The doctor scans the readings, stares closely at the man's face. He reaches out and checks his pulse, examines his pupils and asks the patient to say a few words. A few nervous scratches, and he is ready with his diagnosis. "Acute indigestion! Stomach pump, and overnight observation". A few hurried assurances later, the doctor is ready to move on.

"A round of dressing for patient on Bed Two – recurrent post-operative bleeding...

"Bed four, oxygen. Bed twelve, saline drip. Bed Seven, refer to X-ray room".

Onward ploughs the doctor, wading through a sea of broken bones, bleeding noses, and sunstrokes, until he finally arrives at the old man with the bandage on his head.

"Yes?"

"Doctor, for the past few days, I have been troubled by incessant itching all over my body. I cannot sleep, my mind is in turmoil. I must be admitted at once!"

"Don't worry, Uncle-ji, skin rashes don't require admission. I will, however, prescribe an appropriate skin tonic and a sedative to help you sleep better".

"No, Doctor, it is a matter of life and death. I must be admitted at once".

The doctor draws a deep breath and reaches down to that last reserve of patience saved up for a rainy day. "Do you have any other trouble?"

The old man thinks for a moment, his beaming visage now replaced by one of extreme pain. "I have no sensation in my legs," he proclaims. "I feel dizzy, I need to be admitted at once".

"Sir, I understand you are unwell, but we have an admission policy..."

"No, Doctor, you don't understand. I refuse to go home".

In the emergency room on the fourth floor of Bara Hindu Rao Hospital in Malkaganj, a harried doctor and a now-nervous old man stare fixedly at each other, each contemplating the twist of fate that has brought them face-to-face. Bara Hindu Rao is no ordinary hospital. It is a survivor of a fast-dying breed – the *sarkari* (government) hospital.

"Most of the charitable hospitals are no more charitable", notes the Justice A.S. Quereshi report forlornly. "For some years their free medical services to the suffering humanity continued and did truly commendable service... But now very few of them are genuinely charitable social service institutions, such as Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Batra Hospital etc. The successors to those noble souls have become selfish, greedy and exploitative".

The Quereshi Committee was set up in December 2005 to examine the provision of free beds for the 'poor' and 'needy' in privately owned charitable hospitals. A long-standing policy of the Delhi Government had provided subsidised land to private hospitals on the condition they provide 25% of their beds for free. Unsurprisingly, very few ever did. Apollo Hospital, the first of the super-specialty hospitals to set up operations in Delhi, proved to be a cause for particular consternation to Justice Quereshi. Noting that Apollo hospital had been allotted 15 acres of prime land in south Delhi by the Delhi government in 1988 for a token rent of Re 1,



the Committee observed that only about 20 out of a possible 140 free beds were ever occupied. The reason was that while Apollo provided the beds for free, the hospital insisted that patients pay for medicines and medical consumables that often ran into thousands of rupees. "The position of the Delhi government", lamented the report, "is that of a person who has invested large amounts in cash and kind to buy an expensive cow, of which it is holding the horns while others are milking it and the government is watching it helplessly".

Bara Hindu Rao Hospital at Malkaganj, like Rajan Babu Tuberculosis Hospital down the road at Kingsway Camp, is not an expensive cow. In fact, it is not even a charitable hospital. It is a good old *sarkari* hospital built on acres of green, leafy *sarkari* land – a collection of large boxy buildings sectioned into small pokey rooms.

Free healthcare in India is read in the context of Article 21 of the Constitution of India – Protection of Life – and Article 47 that directs the state to improve the nutritional standards of the population and improve public health. However, a series of studies, including a 2007 WHO survey, point to a severe shortage of hospital beds.²

This shortage has forced hospitals like Bara Hindu Rao and RBTB to evolve what doctors call 'a discretionary policy of admission', and an interview technique to separate the really, truly, sick from the sort of, maybe, sick.

The doctor at the Casualty ward of Bara Hindu Rao peers closely at the man's bloated stomach, and looks down at the patient registration card.

Name: Anish Khan, s/o Azghar Khan, said the clerk's scrawl on the pink card. Address: Phoot Path, Bara Tooti Chowk.

Motioning the patient to come closer, the doctor extends one elongated index finger, pressing and prodding the distended stomach in an exploratory fashion.

"Daaru peete ho (Do you drink often)?"

Anish shuffles his feet nervously and nods his assent.

"Tatti aati hai (Do you get the shits)?"

"Yes, yes". Now on surer ground, Anish nods vigorously.

"Ultrasound and X-ray required, alcohol abuse culminating in liver lesions," notes the doctor. "Admission and observation for a period of five days".

Anish Khan, s/o of Azghar Khan, sighs in relief and looks heavenwards in praise of the Almighty, and his earthly agent – the doctor – who has granted him five days of rest.

Up the road from Bara Hindu Rao, the interviews are not going quite as well. Rajan Babu Tuberculosis Hospital (or RBTB) is Delhi's premier tuberculosis treatment centre. Established in 1935 to commemorate the silver jubilee of the coronation of King George V, the Silver Jubilee TB Hospital was renamed 'Rajan Babu TB Hospital' shortly after Independence, and is a tertiary referral hospital as part of the *sarkari* Directly Observed Treatment (DOT) programme. In spite of being the largest hospital of its kind in Asia,³ with 1155 beds spread over 78 acres, the continued growth of tuberculosis across the country and the hospital's designation as a referral hospital implies that admission is far from easy.

Each morning a panel of doctors sits behind a long table – some with surgical masks partially covering their faces – while an attendant calls patients in one by one and directs them to a wooden bench placed approximately six feet away from the table. The patient is asked to place a handkerchief in front of his face, and look away while coughing. Once the patient is settled, the stage is set for a prolonged negotiation of admission.

The first step is an appraisal of documents. As a tertiary health centre, RBTB only admits patients via referral from primary DOT centres. Hence, the first five minutes of every interview are consumed in a ruffling of papers as document after document is pulled out of a large plastic bag. From this makeshift archive of illness emerge blurry chest X-rays, faded medical prescriptions, brown DOT cards and dubious test results, accompanied by an animated report regarding the progress of the illness. By the time they reach RBTB, most patients are too weak to move unattended. They sit silently – occasionally coughing to prove the authenticity of their illness – while a member of their family cajoles, coaxes, pleads and harangues the doctors into consenting to admission. The doctors for their part sit mostly silent – wincing occasionally when relatives detail the distances and difficulties they have overcome in their quest to reach RBTB. Very few patients actually have referral letters from their DOT centres – most arrive when they simply became too ill to continue living in their houses.

Once a perusal of the documents is complete, the doctors occasionally ask patients their symptoms. However, such questions are few and far between, because, as one doctor remarked, "The problem is that everyone who comes to RBTB has already been told to say that they regularly cough up blood in their sputum..." For their part, doctors urge the patients to return to their DOT centres; the hospital provides admission only in the most dire situations. Regulation-bound to only accept those patients with referral letters, doctors occasionally play out a Kafkaesque script by referring the patient to a DOT centre with an informal note asking the centre to refer the patient back to RBTB. The role of the enforcer is usually subcontracted out to the attendant – and when a patient's pleas become too much to bear, the head doctor motions wordlessly to the attendant who bundles out the patient, documents and all, and calls out the next number on the list.

The *sarkari* hospital thus functions as a warp in the fabric of the city; a quiet autonomous zone which every morning witnesses a pantomime of containment and cure.

Stage II: The Perimeter

According to estimates provided by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, tuberculosis is one of the leading causes of mortality in India, with more than 300,000 mortalities every year. WHO estimates suggest that India is also home to 30% of the total cases reported globally.

The DOT programme was launched across the country in 1997, and is hinged on setting up primary DOT centres across every city, with systematic lists of patients. The acronym comes from the method of treatment, i.e., Directly Observed Treatment, wherein each patient is assigned his/her own separate box of medication, and is required to come to the DOT centre three times a week to take his/her medication in front of the health worker, to ensure compliance with the programme.

The emphasis on course completion may be seen in the context of the rise of MDR (multi-drug resistant) tuberculosis, attributed by some to poorly designed previous programmes in which a significant number of patients failed to complete the course. The

DOT programme aims to check the rate of failure by erecting a floating frontier of surveillance around the patients.

"Each health worker maintains a list of phone numbers of the patient and their family members", remarks a doctor at a DOT centre, speaking on condition of anonymity. "This helps the health worker keep track of patients and follow up in case of default". DOT centres also engage community volunteers from settlements near habitual defaulters; they are paid Rs 250 per case to check on patients unable to visit the DOT centre.

Each centre also has a 'Defaulter Tracing Programme' wherein, once declared a defaulter, the patient is visited by a slew of representatives of the DOT programme – beginning with the TBHV (TB Health Visitor), followed by the STS (Senior TB Supervisor), the MO (Medical Officer), and finally the DTO (District TB Officer) – each urging the patient to continue with his course of medication for the benefit of his health and the health of those around him.

Perhaps it is the nature of the disease, or the devastating scale of its manifestation, or the rise in MDR-TB – but the DOT programme treats TB not just at a personal level, where it urges the sufferer to avail of treatment; it also views TB as a societal or national problem, in which it is a patient's moral responsibility to society to get treatment as soon as possible, and not default on his treatment. "TB is spread through the air by a person suffering from TB", notes the Ministry of Health website. "A single patient can infect 10 or more people in a year". Thus the DOT programme seems to exist not only to protect patients from TB, but also to protect society from TB patients. An outpatient mode of treatment necessarily requires strict boundary controls and monitoring – precisely what the programme seeks to do.

But there are always those who slip through even the finest of filters.

Three times a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, a large white van donated by the Rotary Club rolls into Chandni Chowk at 7 am and parks right opposite Mashoor Jalebi Wallah. From the vehicle emerges Dr Neeraj of the Delhi TB Association. Dr Neeraj and the group he works for have been running a 'pavement DOT' programme for the last few years, with mixed results. Targeted primarily at rickshaw pullers and daily-wage labourers, the pavement DOT programme delivers medicines to those of 'no fixed address'.

Lanky, slightly awkward and seemingly devoted to his work, Dr Neeraj clearly takes his

role in enforcing the perimeter rather seriously. "These people are everywhere", he states in his matter-of-fact manner. "TB can strike anyone at anytime, but it is generally known as the poor man's disease". A significant number of pavement DOT patrons work as waiters, cooks and helpers on a daily-wage basis with a number of wedding contractors and caterers. "You may not know it, but you could go for a wedding tomorrow where one of these people could be serving you drinks and small eats, or chopping your vegetables or cooking your food". However, Dr Neeraj is also



aware that a number of his patients routinely default on their treatment. Which is why the pavement DOT treatment has been slightly modified. "Two particular drugs have been replaced, to prevent the spread of MDR-TB". Dr Neeraj agrees that in ideal circumstances, most of his patients should either be in a hospital such as RBTB or at a regular DOT centre. However, the DOT programme's insistence on high rates of success has meant that health workers at DOT centres often turn away patients they feel are likely to default and hence 'spoil their figures'. Hospitals on the other hand are very reluctant to admit them, as most *janta* (general) wards prefer the patient to be admitted along with a 'helper'.

Stage III: The Refuge

To:

The Medical Superintendent Rajan Babu TB Hospital

Dear Sir.

This is to state that Satish Kumar, s/o of Lallan Singh, is a pavement dweller and *lawaris* (without kin). Due to his illness he has been unable to work for some months now, and is poor and destitute. Hence, it is requested that his meals be provided free of cost for the duration of his stay at RBTB Hospital.

Sincerely Signed xyz

While treatment is undeniably a part of life at the general ward of the hospital, a significant number of patients admit themselves to escape the *dhakka mukki* (push and shove) of everyday life in this hard city of searing summers, freezing winters and uncompromising monsoons. Prolonged energy-sapping illnesses are the hardest to deal with, especially for those who must work every day to eat every night. Common wisdom, at Bara Tooti Chowk, Choona Mandi



Chowk, Khoya Mandi and other countless crossings where *lawarises* and *phoot path* residents spend their nights, suggests that even a couple of weeks at the hospital, with regular meals and prolonged rest, will cure the body faster than most medicines. However, a few days in the general ward prove so powerful a tonic that most leave as soon as the pain recedes, the fever subsides, or the plaster cast hardens.

For those unfortunate enough to not have a relative staying on to fill water from the cooler on the fourth floor, or to escort them from X-ray room on the second floor to the ultrasound room on the ground floor to the ward doctor on the third floor, the hours at RBTB pass painfully. The monotony is broken only once a day by the arrival of Bhagwan Das.

"Bolo bhai, mein hoon Bhagwan Das Naayi; aaj kis kis ne nahin banayi (Speak up, I am Bhagwan Das the barber; which of you has not shaved today)?" The unmistakable opening couplet is repeated day after day, week after week, in ward after ward. In shuffles Bhagwan Das Naayi, dispeller of gloom, arch-nemesis of boredom and, most importantly, barber extraordinaire. Undeterred by the precautionary signs hanging in every ward, unworried by the very real dangers of TB contagion, Bhagwan Das sweeps through the room, trimming, lathering and shaving his customers. Gently he coaxes their reluctant heads into the right position, simultaneously keeping up an incessant chatter of the latest news and gossip from the outside world.

The son of a well-known barber, and inheritor of Punjab Hair Dressers in the east Delhi locality of Shahdara, Bhagwan Das turned his back on his progenitor's craft at an early age and began to drive an autorickshaw for a living. Unfortunately, his promising career as an autorickshaw driver was cruelly cut short when he was run over by a mini-van in late 1999. For a year Bhagwan Das lay in the general ward of GTB hospital, nursing a disfigured foot and a ruptured urinary bladder, eating a strictly regulated diet and pissing through a plastic tube. It was during this time, he says, that he found his thoughts turning to the spiritual side of life. He also discovered his morbid fear of open vehicles.

When he was discharged in 2000, Bhagwan Das stepped out a transformed man, one who felt he had been given a new lease of life – a life he decided to dedicate to 'seva', the selfless devotion to one's fellow beings through work. The path he chose was that of his forefathers. On 17 November 2001, Bhagwan Das picked up his old shaving kit and scissors and stepped into RBTB hospital with a prayer on his lips and a handkerchief tied tightly about his face.

The hospital had been pointed out to him by a fellow inmate at the GTB hospital. The aim was noble – to shave, trim and spruce up those who even family members refused to touch. The money held promise as well: 10 wards, at least 30 people per ward, a minimum of 80 shaves a day at Rs 10 per shave...

"The first few days were hard, but then I devised a system..." Each morning Bhagwan Das wakes by six and follows the three-fold path that has all the rigidity of a ritual:

- > Never visit the wards on an empty stomach. Bhagwan Das' breakfast consists of two *rotis* to give him energy, vegetables, a quarter *chakki* of butter, and a bowl of curd every morning; and a quart of whisky and three cigarettes every Tuesday.
- > Keep a separate set of clothes for the hospital. In the absence of a uniform he is not an employee of the hospital Bhagwan Das has three sets of plain white shirts and trousers that he only wears to the hospital. These are washed everyday in a solution of Dettol, water and detergent.

> Wash carefully at the end of every shift. One round of 10 male wards takes Bhagwan Das almost six hours. At the end of his shift, he washes his hands with separate soaps – one antiseptic and one Neem – kept especially for this purpose.

A chance conversation with a doctor at the hospital suggests that Bhagwan Das' routine might actually be the most pragmatic approach to dealing with the disease. "Masks are useless", he points out. "The physical dimensions of the bacillus are far smaller than the pores of our filters, and the risk of infection from non-pulmonary contact is marginal".

Of course, there are special masks that are designed to screen out bacilli like the ones that cause TB, but these are expensive and hard to source. The best defence is to keep one's immunity up, and a meal rich in carbohydrates and protein provides the fill-up that the human body needs when entering a 'contaminated area'.

But do the doctors wear masks?

"Well, the new recruits do", he laughs. "But that's more psychological than anything else. Most discard them by the end of their first year here".

In the last six years, Bhagwan Das claims that a combination of safety and *seva* has protected him from a disease that is highly infectious, and painful to cure. Swathed in his cocoon of confidence, there is just one further layer of protection that he ardently desires: an identity card.

"In the strange times we live in, it shall soon be essential for every man to carry verification papers. In such times, it is important for a man to have control over his identity – preferably in the form of card that one can show at to a *chowkidar* (watchman), or the policeman at a checkpoint. A card confirming that I am a private, self-employed man who comes to this hospital to make his living. A card that lets me walks through these gates with the ease of a man in uniform..."

The last time I visited RBTB Hospital was to look in on a friend of mine. Satish Kumar had been assigned Bed No. 53 in Ward M-III three months ago when he was diagnosed with severe bronchial tuberculosis. The doctors said he was responding well to treatment; the nurses said that the yellow pigment under his nails and his progressive deafness were no cause for concern. The ward boy assured me that the hospital would keep him for at least another two months.

But when I visited RBTB, Satish was gone.

The nurses said he recovered and left for his village; the ward boy told me he was summarily discharged to free up the bed for another patient. The social worker from a nearby ashram told me he died on the way to the ashram. The funeral was conducted at the electric crematorium at Raighat. He was 24 years old.

I sat staring at the empty bed, scrutinising the yellowed sheets. They had probably been changed, but I thought I detected the outline of a human form, a man-sized sweat-stain

darkening the length of the bedsheet – the trailing after-image of a thousand coughing, sweating, retching bodies, each exiled to a bed in a ward in large sprawling hospital in the heart of north Delhi.

Notes

- Justice A. S. Quereshi Report, Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
- 2. WHO World Health Statistics, 2007. In fact, the survey points out that India has a grand total of 7 beds per 10,000 population. Full text online at http://www.who.int/whosis/en/
- 3. www.mcdonline.gov.in



El Siluetazo (The Silhouette): On the Border between Art and Politics



The realisation of silhouettes is the most memorable of the artistic-political practices that lent a potent visuality to the public space of Buenos Aires and many other cities **of** the country on the demands of the human rights movements in the early 1980s. This consists of a simple design in the form of the outline of a man-sized body on paper, later pasted on the city walls as a way of representing the "presence of an absence" of the thousands of prisoners who disappeared during the last military dictatorship.

Between 1976 and 1983, state terrorism imposed in Argentina the figure of the *desaparecido* (disappeared) as its most repressive and ominous systematic modality, a systematic technology of the instituted power with its institutional correlative – the concentration and extermination camps. About 340 camps in the entire country were reported

(a majority of them functioning clandestinely in the centre of the cities in police or army buildings), which 20-30,000 illegally detained people passed through, and who for the most part ended up being killed without any trace. "Disappearance is not a euphemism but a political allusion: a person who at a specific moment [that of his kidnapping in the street, in his own house or at his workplace] disappears, fades away in such a way that there remains not a trace of his life nor of his death. There is no body of the victim nor of the crime".

The high point and at the same time the decisive turnabout of a long history of the fragility of democratic institutionality, weakened by continuous eruptions of military power, the repressive strategy of the last dictatorship managed to take apart and defeat the revolutionary political projects, based on the annihilation of a generation of opponents (not only militants of various groups that led armed struggle but also thousands of worker representatives, student activists, their families and friends). But the effectiveness of their action resulted in the dispersion of what in her clear analysis Pilar Calveiro (herself a survivor of the concentration camp) calls the "concentrationist and disappearist" power. The imprecise limits of the camps disseminated terror in society and paralysed any understanding of what had occurred.

The concentration camp, by its physical proximity, by the fact of being in the midst of society 'from the other side of the wall', can only exist in the midst of a society that chooses not to see, through its own impotence: a 'disappeared' society, as stunned as the kidnapped themselves.²

The 'outside' of the concentration camp is a concentrationary city that runs a permanent danger of turning into a concentration camp in the strictest sense of the word: *all* citizens are potential missing people, and like them, invite erasure.

"Bodies without matter" is what Calveiro calls the missing people who were kidnapped, tortured and killed in the concentration camps.³ The missing is neither alive nor dead and his existence is denied by the state that causes the disappearance. "It is a body – and not a corpse that is no longer a body – reduced to a biological life, medium of a neutralised subject (not singularised, not ethical, not political)"⁴.

If "the terror [...] disbanded barbarically the representations that mediate between life and death"⁵, the silhouettes articulate a visual mechanism that returns the representation to the unrepresentable, the hopeless, the concealed, the missing.

Eduardo Grüner thinks of the silhouettes as "attempts at representing the missing: that is to say not just the 'absent' – given that by definition the *entire* representation is of an absent object – but that of the intentionally *absented*, those who were made to disappear through some form of material or symbolic violence; in our case, the representation of *bodies* missing due to a systematic polity or a conscious strategy"⁶. The logic in play is, he concludes, that of the *restitution* of the image as a *substitution* of an absented body.

With the production of the silhouettes, Santiago García Navarro postulates, the self is restored to the body – although it may be another self, because the project actually dealt

with a self that was much broader, more cohesioned and multiple at the same time: that of the multitude congregated for the Third Resistance March called for by the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, an organisation of the mothers of the missing persons.

Although certain previous antecedents do exist, the start of this practice of silhouettes can be traced to 21 September 1983, Students' Day, yet still within the times of dictatorship during which – due to the importance and enormity that the practice gained – it is known as *Siluetazo* (Silhouette). The procedure was an initiative of three visual artists (Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel) and its realisation received the support of the Mothers, the Grandmothers (who continue to look for hundreds of appropriated grandchildren, many of whom were born in captivity), other human rights organisations and political militants. And from thereon the making of the silhouettes became a forceful 'public' visual resource whose use expanded spontaneously.

The *Siluetazo* signals one of those exceptional moments in history in which an artistic initiative coincides with a demand of the social movements, and gains form by the impulse of the masses. It involved the participation, in an improvised and immense open-air workshop that lasted well past midnight, of hundreds of demonstrators who painted and *put their bodies* for the sketching of the silhouettes and later pasted these on walls, monuments and trees, despite the threat of police action.

In the middle of a hostile and repressive city, a (temporary) space was liberated due to a collective creation that can be thought of as a redefinition of artistic and political practice.

In this essay I will examine an entire account of the *Siluetazo* that is made up of a mosaic of interpretations, many times in conflict with the 'artistic' condition of this practice and the powers attributed to this image in the construction of the collective memory of genocide in Argentina.

In the beginning of 1982 a private foundation (Esso Foundation) convenes an Exhibition of Objects and Experiences that is later suspended due to the Falklands War, the conflict between Argentina and Great Britain for the control of two islands in the South Atlantic. The three artists mentioned earlier – who were involved in the workshop – decide to participate in this with a work that alludes to the disappearance of people from their quantitative dimensions, the physical space that would be occupied by all those bodies violently snatched from our midst. They say, "The original intention was to produce a collective work of large dimensions [...] The first objective was to generate visualisation (the dimensioning) of the physical space that 30,000 detained-missing persons would occupy".

The trigger for this idea was a work by the Polish artist Jerzy Skapski, reproduced in the UNESCO magazine *The Post* in October 1978. It was a poster of 24 four rows of tiny silhouettes of women, men and children, followed by a text: "In Auschwitz everyday 2370 people died, the exact number that is reproduced here. The Auschwitz concentration camp lasted 1688 days and that is the exact number of prints taken of this poster. In all, about a quarter of a million human beings perished in the camp".

Thirty thousand missing: in this range the quantities no longer speak of people, of concrete lives. To visualise the quantity – overwhelming – of victims and to represent them one by one: that is Skapski's method the Argentine artists take up, to be made man-sized. They project variants of this initial idea: to print silhouettes on a large cloth makes it impossible for the work to be incorporated in the exhibition hall, and it is therefore displayed in its surroundings, enveloping them; or better still, to make a paper labyrinth on whose internal walls the 30,000 figures could be pasted.

They realised that to make these numbers of silhouettes required about 20 groups to work and about 300 helpers who would make about 100 silhouettes each. What made the group accept its non-viability was the dimension (it would take up about 60,000 square metres), the impossibility of taking charge of such a mammoth task and the cost of producing and putting it up.

On the suggestion of an old militant, they decided to approach the Mothers with their idea, three days before the march that had for the last three years been capturing the Plaza for 24 hours. They decided that it would be the demonstrators who would concretise the idea. This transition is crucial to the process I am talking about. They pass from a proposal that although political – and also dangerous in the time of dictatorship – would restrict its circulation and its impact, to the artistic ambit to generate a social event within ever increasing anti-dictatorial mobilisation. The artists' initial proposal does not speak of "art" but of "creating a graphic act that would strike out by its physical magnitude and the rarity



of its achievements and would renew the attention of the press". To leave the silhouettes pasted on the walls once the mobilisation had dispersed would give them a public presence "for as long as it takes for the dictatorship to make them disappear once again".

The initial idea was accepted and reformulated by the Mothers, and put into effect by the gathering that swiftly adapted the process and transformed it into an act. "In the beginning the project had thought of personalising each silhouette with details of clothing, physical characteristics, sex and age by making use of the techniques of collage, colour and portraits". It was planned that a silhouette each of every missing person would be made. The Mothers pointed out the difficulties, as the available lists of the victims of repression were incomplete (they continue to be so); and thus the group decided that all the silhouettes would be identical and without any inscriptions.

The artists took with them to the Plaza "innumerable rolls of wood paper, all kinds of paints and aerosols, paint brushes and rollers" and some 1500 prepared silhouettes. They also took stencils to generate a uniform image. And from there, the Plaza turned into an improvised and gigantic workshop for the production of silhouettes till past midnight. It was the Grandmothers who pointed out that children and pregnant women should also be represented. Kexel tied a pillow to his stomach and his body profile was sketched for the silhouette. His daughter served as a model for the silhouette of a child. Babies were drawn freehand.

The process of collective production changed whatever intention there was of uniformity. Aguerreberry remembered the spontaneous and massive participation of the demonstrators that very soon made the artists "dispensable". One of them recalls, "I think within half an hour of reaching there we could have left the Plaza because we were not needed for anything". Despite their decision that the silhouettes would not have any identification marks, the people spontaneously wrote the names of their 'missing' and the date on which they had disappeared, or covered them with slogans. Concrete demands came up to differentiate or individualise, to give a precise identity, personal features (noses, mouths, eyes), or a condition. That amongst the multitude of silhouettes, this is my father's silhouette, my mother's, or my child's, or that of my missing friend. A child comes up to somebody sketching a silhouette and says, "Draw my papa, please". "And what does your papa look like?" He is given a beard, moustache. "Figures of couples, of mothers and children, a group of factory workers are drawn [...] the many 'sketchers' go on representing what is asked of them in a process of collective construction" 10.

A demonstrator overawed by what is being created returns to the march with red paper hearts that he pastes onto the silhouettes around the Plaza.

Apart from the stencils the demonstrators used their own bodies as models. "As the paper rolls were laid out on the grass or the pavements, some youngsters lay down on the paper and the others drew their body shape with pencils, that were then painted" 11. In this way the silhouette changes into a mark of the absent body, he who lent his body for sketching the outline and – by transfer – the body of a missing person, thereby reconstructing the "broken lines of solidarity in an act symbolic of a strong emotivity" 12. The

action of 'putting' the body carries with it an ambiguity: to occupy the space of an absentee is to accept that anyone of those present could have been in the place of the disappeared and had the same sinister run of bad luck. At the same time it means to give it a life, return its corporeal nature – and a life – even though ephemeral. The body of the demonstrator in place of the missing person as a live support in the making of the silhouette helps in accepting it as a "a print that breathes" 13. In every silhouette a missing person came alive, testifies Nora Cortiñas, a Mother.

The first *Siluetazo* implied *appropriation*¹⁴ or *occupation* of the centric – and central in the scheme for political and economic power, symbolic of the city or the country – Plaza de Mayo and its surroundings. ¹⁵ Amigo evaluates this event in terms of the "capture of the Plaza", not only politically but also an "aesthetic capture" An offensive in the appropriation of the urban space.

In the following months two new *Siluetazos* take place in Obelisco, another crucial point in the city, linked not as much to political power as to youth mobilisation in the festive months of the beginning of democracy.

The *Siluetazo* produced a notable impact not only on those involved in its production but also because of the effect caused by its silent screams from the walls of the centric buildings the following morning. The press pointed put that pedestrians were discomforted or amazed by the look given to them by of these faceless figures. One journalist wrote that the silhouettes "seemed to point from the walls at those responsible for their disappearance and silently demand justice. Through a visual play, for the first time family, friends, people who were reacting and those who were missing seemed to be together" 17.

The silhouettes were demonstrating what public opinion ignored or chose to ignore, breaking the pact of silence put into force in society during the dictatorship regarding the effects of repression and its source; and that can be summarised in a self-justifying commonsense expression: "We did not know".

The silhouettes are usually understood as a visual rendering of the slogan "Apparition with Life", raised by the Mothers since 1980 (a slogan off repeated in the demonstrations would be, "Alive they were taken, alive we want them"). This was a response to the rumours and conjectures circulating that the repressive state apparatus kept the detainees alive in clandestine camps. This minimal hope that some of the missing persons were alive began to fade away with the passage of time, the discovery of mass graves and the testimonies of the very few survivors about the cruel methods of extermination. Pilar Calveiro reflects on the social difficulty of processing the frightening truth that the survivors enunciated. They did not speak of the missing persons but of the dead, of bodies systematically demolished.\(^{18}\) Even then the slogan, "Apparition with Life" continued to be central in the Mothers' discourse for a long time, appealing not to the immediate policy but more to an ethical dimension, or maybe also to redeem its invocation.

On this point there are various interpretations of the silhouettes. Robert Amigo points out that the silhouettes "made the absence of the bodies present in a scenic representation

of state terror", while Buntinx thinks that they ratify the hope of "life" that the Mothers have. "Not a mere artistic illustration of a slogan but its lively fulfillment", he affirms. Proposing an inverse reading, Grüner opines that in the silhouettes there is something that "startles those who gaze at them: they reproduce the habitual resource of the police which draws with chalk the outline of a cadaver retrieved from a crime scene". This could be read as "a political gesture that wrenches from the enemy – called the 'order force' – its method of investigation, generating contiguity, as if to say, 'It was you'". But it also deals with an "unconscious gesture that admits, at times contradictory to its own discourse that prefers to continue speaking of the 'disappeared', that these silhouettes represent cadavers. Therefore the intention (conscious or otherwise) of representing the disappearance is carried out as promoting the death of the material body".

To completely avoid the temptation of associating the silhouettes with death, apart from this contiguity with the police procedure the Mothers removed from the artists' project the possibility of pasting the silhouettes on the ground (which was one of the options) and made it clear to the participants the necessity of having the silhouettes standing up straight, never



lying down. As a result, the demonstrators themselves went around pasting them on the buildings adjacent to the Plaza, respectful of the condition that the silhouettes were to have according to the Mothers. Despite these preventions, the reading that Grüner suggests in the late 1990s had already been prefigured in the Third Resistance March, in the counterpoint between the white erect silhouettes and another silhouette inscribed on the pavement that explicitly confronts the slogan "Apparition with Life" with another slogan that says "The Whole Truth". In between thousands of silhouettes on the walls, their makers (members of CAPATACO/Group of Common Tariff Participative Art, a Trotskyist group linked to the socialist movement) sketch a different silhouette on the ground in the exact place where a death had taken place: that of Dalmiro Flores, a worker assassinated on 16 December 1982 by paramilitary forces during a protest march at the Plaza de Mayo.

The silhouette on the ground alludes to, and now undoubtedly, the police procedure by which a place is marked where a person has been knocked down and before the body is removed. Therefore a specific victim of repression is chosen whose sad end is known for sure. In contrast with the other silhouettes this one induces "an immediate association: all the missing persons are dead, like Dalmiro Flores".

What aspects of the *Siluetazo* am I referring to when I say that it redefines artistic practice? Although it may have been transitory, for its dynamics of collective and participative creation the *Siluetazo* implied the effective socialisation of the means of production and artistic circulation in the sense in which the protestor is incorporated as a producer. The visual action "is an act by everyone and belongs to everyone" 19. The proposal clearly states that there is no need for "special drawing knowledge" 20. This radical participative practice manifests itself in the socialisation of an idea or concept, forms and artistic techniques that are simple but forceful in the repetition of an image and in the act of creating it.

For Buntinx, the effective socialisation of the means of artistic production that the *Siluetazo* implies is "a radical liquidation of the modern category of art as a pure-object-of-contemplation, separated-from-life-agency, and also the recuperation for art of a magico-religious dimension that modernity had deprived it of"²¹, reinstating to the image its popular character and its magical and prodigious value. He is not the only author who proposes a reading of the silhouettes in terms of restoration of aura. Grüner points out that "the idea of an objective form that contains a void that *looks at us* is linked, (at least *can be* linked) to the concept of popular or auratic art given by Benjamin, to the point that for the Jewish-German philosopher this is defined by "the expectation that what one looks at also looks back and that creates an aura"²². Buntinx takes more risk in the same line of interpretation, "The capture of the Plaza certainly has a political and aesthetic dimension but at the same time also *ritual*, in the most loaded and anthropological sense of the term. It does not only deal with generating an awareness about genocide but also of *reverting* it: to recover for a new life loved ones felled on the phantasgoric borders of death [...] A messianic-political

experience where resurrection and insurrection mix with each other [...] It is a matter of making art an acting force in a concrete reality. But also a magical gesture in this direction. To oppose the renewed political power of the empire, an unsuspected mythical power: the ritual pact with the dead"²³.

If it were so, if the *Siluetazo* reactivated the ritualistic dimension attributed to the image (as with cave paintings and religious icons), is it legitimate to place the *Siluetazo* within the autonomous sphere that modernity calls "art"?

Amigo thinks that the demonstrators who make the silhouettes – except the small nucleus of artists who initiated the project – aesthetically transform reality within a political objective without having "any artistic conscience behind their action, giving precedence to protest and a political fight". In order to avoid speaking of "actions of art", he proposes to define the *Siluetazo* and other initiatives of similar nature as "aesthetic actions of political praxis".

Artist Leon Ferrari insists on the same with similar arguments: "The *Siluetazo* was a culminating work, formidable not only politically but also aesthetically. The number of elements that went into play: an idea proposed by artists, carried out by the masses *without any artistic intention*. It's not as if we got together for a performance, no. We were not representing anything. It was a production of what everybody felt, whose material was inside the people. *It did not matter if it was art or not* "²⁴.

Maybe the debate could be redirected not so much in terms of defining whether the *Siluetazo* was understood in its times as an artistic act or not, but in thinking how a vanguardist project of reintegrating art and life is carried out, how the "artistic" resources and procedures used acquire here an unheard-of social dimension. It does not deal with aestheticising the political praxis nor introducing in art a political theme or intention"²⁵. The *Siluetazo* dilutes the artistic specificity by socialising the production, by looking for a distinct insertion in the restricted artistic circuits, by repositioning its scopes in "the intention of resetting a *social territoriality*"²⁶.

Therefore, the *Siluetazo* can be thought of as being inscribed on the border space between art and politics. It is an artists' initiative that is articulated by a social movement in the fight for radical re-appropriation of public space captured by the dictatorship. It is a collective action whose development dilutes its "artistic" origin (as far as to forget it), in so much as the resources that the group of artists puts at the disposal of the masses is appropriate and meaningful. Its distance or slip from preconceived forms to what should be committed political art is evident, and thus enters into a confrontation with the realist representation tradition of the extreme left. On the other hand it shows a link with the artistic production of the centre that does not renege on contemporary international trends. It does not adapt to this baggage peaceably, but – in any case – it expropriates it and subverts it. It manages a participation of hundreds of anonymous collaborators (artistic or otherwise) in its creation and dispersion; and rearticulates popular art and culture not in terms of a thematic reference or in the aestheticisation of a specific material but, above all, in the installation of its productions in the streets and mass communication circuits.

In its conscious lack of definition of the "artistic" condition of this practice, the *Siluetazo* brings us face to face with the spillover of the autonomous condition of art, a radical redefinition of the modern category of art as a practice as separate from daily life and incapable of exercising any type of transforming effect on our existence. Perhaps this question will be the most significant and disquieting dimension of its legacy.

Translated from the Spanish by Maneesha Taneja

Notes

- 1. Pilar Calveiro. Poder y Desaparición [Power and Disappearance] (Colihue, 1998, Buenos Aires), p. 26.
- 2 Ihid
- 3. Ibid.
- Santiago García Navarro. "Como el Fuego que se Desparrama por un Tanque de Nafta [Like a Fire That Spreads over a Petrol Tank]". In A. Longoni and G. Bruzzone, El Siluetazo (Adriana Hidalgo, Buenos Aires, forthcoming).
- "Las Maquinarias de la Memoria en la Argentina [The Machinery of Memory in Argentina]". In Pensamiento de los Confines, No. 9-10, p. 31 (2001).
- 6. Eduardo Grüner. "La Invisibilidad Estratégica, o la Redención Política de los Vivos: Violencia Política y Representación Estética en el Siglo de las Desapariciones [The Strategic Invisibility or the Political Rendition of the Alive: Political Violence and Aesthetic Representation in the Century of the Disappeared]". In Longoni and Bruzzone, op. cit. A revised and expanded version of these reflections can be found in Eduardo Grüner, "El Sitio de la Mirada: Secretos de la Imagen y Silencios del Arte [The Place of the Look: Secrets of the Image and Silences of Art]", in Norma (2001).
- Carlos López Iglesias. "Entrevista al Grupo Realizador [Interview with the Organising Group]". In Longoni and Bruzzone, op. cit.
- 8. Hernán Ameijeiras. "A Diez Años del Siluetazo [Ten Years of the Siluetazo]". In La Maga, 31 March 1993.
- 9. Victoria Azurduy. "Haceme a Mi Papá [Draw My Papá]". In Crisis (1984).
- 10. Carlo López Iglesias, op. cit.
- 11. Aguerreberry, rodolfo, Julio Flores and Guillermo Kexel. "Siluetas". In Longoni and Bruzzone, op. cit.
- 12. Roberto Amigo Cerisola. "Aparición con Vida: Las Siluetas de Detenidos-Desaparecidos [Apparition with Life: The Silhouettes of the Detained-Disappeared]". In Arte y Violencia [Art and Violence], (UNAM, 1995, México), p. 275. Also see his article "La Plaza de Mayo, Plaza de las Madres: Estética y Lucha de Clases en el Espacio Urbano [The May Plaza, the Mothers' Plaza: Aesthetics and Class Conflict in the Urban Space]". In AA.W., Ciudad/Campo en las Artes en Argentina y Latinoamérica (CAIA, 1991, Buenos Aires), pp. 89-99.
- Gustavo Buntinx. "Desapariciones Forzadas/Resurrecciones Míticas [Forced Disappearances/Mythical Resurrections]". In AA.VV., Arte y Poder [Art and Power] (CAIA, 1993, Buenos Aires), pp. 236-55.

- 14. This term is applied by Bedoya and Emei, in "Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Un Espacio Alternativo para los Artistas Plásticos [Mothers of the May Plaza: An Alternative Space for the Plastic Artists]", in Longoni and Bruzzone, op. cit.
- 15. The Plaza de Mayo occupies a central space of power in the urban imagery of Buenos Aires. Surrounded by crucial buildings of political and economic importance (la Casa Rosada, the Cathedral, el Cabildo), it was here that the rebellion against Spanish domination was declared in 1810. Today the offices of the national government, the city government, various ministries, the National Bank (and head offices of various other banks) are located here. Connected to the Plaza Congreso (where the National Congress is situated) by the Avenida de Mayo (May Street), this path is the chosen one for the majority of protests, gatherings and demonstrations.
- 16. Roberto Amigo Cerisola, op. cit., p. 265.
- 17. Paz y Justicia, Buenos Aires, September 1983.
- 18. Pilar Calveiro, op. cit.
- 19. Bedoya and Emei, op. cit.
- "Propuesta de Aguerreberry, Kexel y Flores a las Madres [Aguerreberry, Kexel and Flores' Proposal to the Mothers]". In Longoni and Bruzzone, op. cit.
- 21. Gustavo Buntinx, op. cit.
- 22. Eduardo Grüner, op. cit.
- 23. Ibid.
- 24. León Ferrari. Interview with the author, Buenos Aires, 24 May 2005.
- 25. Roberto Amigo Cerisola, op. cit.
- Juan Carlos Marín proposes this concept in Los Hechos Armados [The Armed Acts] (Ediciones PICASO/La Rosa Blindada, 2003, Buenos Aires).

Locating Torture in Jammu and Kashmir¹



Armed with a smile and an 'Operation Sadbhavana (Harmony)' brochure, sitting across the desk from us was the 'human face' of the Indian Army in Kashmir. The glossy pages of the brochure, bordered with imprints of *chinar* leaves, revealed among other things one-sided historical facts about the genesis of the militancy and ethnic conflict, padded with accounts of the various developmental initiatives of the army in the region. Obviously, the widespread torture and human rights abuses being committed by the security forces in the region did not find any mention here.

We had arranged to meet with the Public Relations Officer of the army at the Badami Bagh Camp in Srinagar. After undergoing a thorough search at the entrance, we were driven in a Gypsy to his office. Driving through the enormous campus was a stark reminder of the magnitude of army operations in the state.

Recently published descriptions of human rights violations in Kashmir, including the report by Human Rights Watch,² have concluded yet again that there were widespread and drastic infringements by both state and non-state actors; and further, that the impunity with which these were committed was deeply entrenched. Strands of discussion in the current

debate on human rights violations have focused primarily on enforced disappearances, custodial killings and massacres. The silence around the issue of torture is disturbing. Post-9/11, the regime of torture unleashed by the US coalition forces in the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and the US bases in Afghanistan steered the world's attention to torture, as well as to 'renditions', i.e., the US government's practice of 'outsourcing' torture and third-degree interrogation methods to other 'third country' allies such as Jordan, Egypt and Pakistan, by using transit facilities granted by willing 'second countries' such as Poland. Surprisingly, very little focus was directed towards the practice of torture in South Asia, where it is steadily practiced in prisons against individuals accused of everyday criminal offences. It would be naïve to doubt its extensive use in civil or ethnic conflicts or against terrorism suspects.

This essay explores the violence propounded under the guise of counterinsurgency operations in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. It extrapolates from first-hand testimonies of survivors of torture, and underscores their exclusion from the human rights and peace discourses in the state, as well as the continued lack of effective legal and compensatory redress for the victims.

The Prohibition against Torture

Article 1(1) of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, that came into effect in 1987, defines torture as:

Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

Absolute prohibition on torture is enshrined in Article 2 of the Convention Against Torture (CAT):

No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat or war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.³

Principles enshrined in various national and international instruments render the legal and moral justifications of torture indefensible. Prohibition on torture is not merely another rule in the book, but a legal archetype that represents unwavering commitment to non-brutality in our legal systems.⁴

Norm-setting and related legislation in itself has done little to combat torture. Why has an absolute prohibition failed to counter the torture endemic to regimes and political conflicts in South Asia?

Locating torture in the South Asian context is a prerequisite to understanding its applications in the specific situation of an armed conflict, such as prevails in Jammu and Kashmir. The use of torture is illegal under most domestic laws in the region. The majority of South Asian states have ratified the Convention against Torture, though it has not been ratified by India, and has neither been ratified nor signed by Pakistan. It is no secret, however, that across the region the police and armed forces routinely indulge in the torture and brutalisation of detainees. Similarly, non-state actors have mercilessly crushed ideological dissent by resorting to torture and inhuman treatment of civilians.

Latin America provides a useful comparison. In this region, the Inter American Court of Human Rights was instrumental in consolidating norms against torture in the last two decades. Expanding the ambit of human rights jurisprudence from the prescriptive understanding of what constituted torture to instances of inhuman, cruel and degrading punishment, the court ruled on detention incommunicado, lack of medical attention and mental torture.⁵

However, South Asia is devoid of a comprehensive regional human rights mechanism. It is primarily dependant on domestic judicial systems, and to a lesser extent on each country's National Human Rights Commission or equivalent agencies. These bodies have failed to either meaningfully challenge the acceptability of torture in our societies or prescribe punitive and compensatory redress for torture victims. Processes and legal guidelines that provide access to independent groups to inspect prisons and interrogation centres have not been institutionalised. The criminal justice systems have only peripherally engaged with the issue of torture. Criminal justice⁶ and police commission reports have identified problems of torture and custodial killings, but have not succeeded in introducing and implementing reforms.

Torture in South Asia

South Asian populations accept as a fact that coercive methods to obtain information are routinely employed in police stations and interrogation centres. These include incessant beating, isolation, electric shocks, detention incommunicado, waterboarding, stripping and sleep deprivation. Examining the use of these brutal practices in different countries demonstrates the nature of torture in the region.⁷

In Bangladesh, torture is routinely used by the army and police personnel, especially against the population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is synonymous with arbitrary arrests and torture.

Under the existing Torture Compensation Act in Nepal, torture is not defined as a crime. Subsequent to the takeover by the king, the security forces tortured detainees for

extracting information. They were forcibly made to confess to crimes they had not committed. The Peace Agreement signed on 8 November 2006 between the Maoists and the SPA-led government paved the way for drafting the interim constitution and conducting elections for a Constituent Assembly. Given the history of human rights violations in Nepal and the evolution of international jurisprudence against torture, it is significant that Article 26 of the Interim Constitution establishes a right against torture.⁸

Pakistan bans torture under its criminal and Sharia laws. However, it has made minimal effort to rein the armed and police forces' arbitrary use of excessive force. In a particularly gruesome case, the lips of an undertrial were sewn together by the jail authorities to prevent his speaking out against the torture he was put through. Torture is widely prevalent against suspects detained in the ongoing 'war against terror' by the Pakistani authorities.

Torture against ethnic Tamils and others suspected of affiliation with the separatist LTTE has continued unabated in Sri Lanka. In addition to noting atrocities by the Sri Lankan army and police, human rights groups have blamed the Sri Lankan navy for torturing Tamil fishermen who accidentally cross into Sri Lankan waters.¹⁰

Rulings against Torture in India

Patterns of torture in India are similar to those in other parts of South Asia. In India, the jurisprudence on torture has developed gradually through enunciations of the Supreme Court. Giving its judgement in the case *Nilabati Behera v. State*, MANU/SC/0307/1993, the Supreme Court held that the defence of sovereign immunity was *not* available to the state for established violations of fundamental rights granted under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. In *D. K. Basu v. State of West Bengal* (AIR 1997, SC 610), the Supreme Court ruled on the liability of the state in instances of deprivation of liberty and life of individuals. A letter by the executive director of Legal Aid Services, West Bengal, alleging widespread custodial violence in police lock-ups, was treated by the Supreme Court as a writ petition under public interest litigation. It prescribed procedural safeguards for arrest and detention that would protect detainees from abuse and coercion by the police and other agencies during interrogation. This judgment initiated protocols for providing compensation under the public law jurisdiction, over and above the civic damages:

Any form of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment would fall within the inhibition of Article 21 of the Constitution, whether it occurs during investigation, interrogation or otherwise... Section 330, therefore directly makes torture during interrogation and investigation punishable under the Indian Penal Code. These statutory provisions are however inadequate to repair the wrong done to the citizen. Prosecution of the offender is an obligation of the State in case of every crime but the victim of crime needs to be compensated monetarily also. 11

Even though the judgment mentioned compensation for victims of torture, there were two inadequacies. First, the thrust of providing compensation was for victims of torture who were eventually killed in custody. There was no provision for the survivors of torture.

Second, it failed to expound on the criminal liability of the officers involved in torture. The discussion on torture in Jammu and Kashmir must be located in this context.

The Continued Use of Torture in Jammu and Kashmir

What is that case...? Yes, yes, that D.K. Basu one... Do you think that it is practical for the police, army or the Special Operations Group to follow the guidelines of that case? It cannot happen. Next they will tell us to offer cups of tea to the accused during interrogation.

Police officer, Special Operations Group, Jammu & Kashmir

As discussed earlier, the prohibition against torture is a legal archetype, but has been deviated from time and again. When the central purpose of interrogation is to collect intelligence and extract information about the structure of militant organisations, it is inevitable that innocent civilians and others will suffer torture and abuse. The harvest of information through these means is usually referred to as 'Human Intelligence'. From available legal definitions of torture, this is an act committed by a public official or persons acting in an official capacity. In situations of conflict, non-state actors also indulge in similar atrocities, with the intention of information gathering or crushing dissent. The scope of the discussion in this essay is mostly restricted to acts that constitute violations under the convention against torture by the state.

Much has been written about the special laws promulgated for India's northeast and Jammu and Kashmir. Various legislations such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, Public Safety Act, etc., bestow the armed forces, state paramilitaries and police with extraordinary powers of arrest, detention and legal immunities. In Jammu and Kashmir, Joint Interrogation Centres (JICs), controlled collaboratively by the police, intelligence services and armed forces, have institutionalised torture. Interrogation centres such as PAPA I and II became symbols of extreme brutalisation by the custodians of the law. In order to collect evidence of torture within these spaces, activists have to rely either on the testimony of those who have experienced torture and might be afraid to speak out for fear of further reprisals, or on 'official' archival records of 'investigations', which in all probability are next to impossible to access.

A 1992 report jointly issued by Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, documented widespread use of techniques such as severe beatings, electric shock, suspending detainees by feet or hands, stretching the legs apart, burning with heated objects, sexual violence, and the use of wooden rollers. Systematically crushing the leg muscles with a heavy roller releases toxins from the damaged tissue, which may result in acute kidney failure.

As stated by an inspector of the Jammu & Kashmir police, who formerly served with the Special Operations Group:

We use various interrogation techniques, sometimes even third degree, but we ensure that the person *does not die*. If they don't talk, we use rollers on them. While

using rollers we take care that their legs don't fracture. So we make the torture extremely painful. Another method we use is that of passing current. We don't use electricity but batteries. Sometimes we have to use current in their private parts. What can we do? These persons are highly motivated terrorists!¹⁴ The army personnel are unaware of the rules of interrogation. They just know how to kill. They torture people, and then bring them to us. Sometimes even civilians get tortured because they do not know who is a militant and who is not.¹⁵

Accounts of Survivors of Torture

To probe these questions further, we conducted a series of interviews with the survivors of torture and their families. With the assistance of local Kashmiri human rights groups and journalists, we identified torture victims in different districts of the region, earmarking areas that had reported multiple incidents of human rights violations over the past few years. Since there were widespread allegations of torture and inhuman treatment from nearly all districts, selecting representative cases for this essay was a difficult task. We finally settled on Sopore/Baramullah, where the highest incidence of torture had been reported. Additionally, over a three-month period we collected testimonies on human rights violations (ranging from disappearances to extra-judicial killings of victims and their families) in eight other districts.

Victim accounts of torture were consistent with the police versions. Common threads ran through the victims' narratives. Most survivors stated that the authorities tortured them severely but ensured that they didn't die. The torture stopped short of killing them. Certain torture techniques would not leave permanent marks on the body, but were extremely painful. One technique used was the 'rat method', in which the detainee's trousers were tightly tied near the ankles and rats were then introduced. Seeking to escape but finding no outlet, they savaged the detainee from hip to foot. Another technique was sleep deprivation. As stated by one interrogator, "We have four officers who rotate shifts and keep the detainee awake. Sometimes we don't let them sleep for almost 10 days"¹⁶.

Fear was pervasive amongst the torture victims. During the interview process, it was crucial to repeatedly assure them that their personal information would be kept strictly confidential. In 2005, Aamir¹⁷, a shopkeeper of Sopore town in north Kashmir, was arbitrarily picked up by Rashtriya Rifle (RR) personnel and taken to the nearby Singhpora army camp for interrogation. He was stripped naked and tortured for four days. In his words, "I kept telling them that I didn't possess grenades or Kalashnikovs, but they removed the skin from my right leg with a *plas* (pliers). I was given *roti* (food) after three days. I still have marks of torture on my body"¹⁸. Ironically, Aamir's name was provided to the army by his neighbour Salim¹⁹, also taken into army custody. When Aamir confronted Salim in the camp, the latter stated that he was well aware of Aamir's innocence. However, he was himself tortured so brutally that he wanted it to stop at any cost. The first name that came to his mind at the time of his 'interrogation' was that of Aamir.

Empirical studies from different countries (Israel, Turkey, etc.) illustrate that there is no correlation between the use of torture and the reliability of evidence gained from it.²⁰ Torture does not produce the 'truth'; it produces what the perpetrator *wants to hear*. Sometimes when the pain becomes too excruciating, innocent detainees have no choice but to falsely confess so that their ordeal can come to an end. As victims frequently explain, when the torture becomes unbearable and the mind and body have no sense left, one wants to just say anything to stop it, even the lie that one is not innocent.

The exclusionary rule, which prohibits the use of evidence extracted under torture, has been codified in CAT's Article 15:

Each State Party shall ensure that any statement which is established to have been made as a result of torture shall not be invoked as evidence in any proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made.²¹

In Jammu and Kashmir, torture has been used to extract confessions that have led to the discovery of arms and ammunition. However, in the words of a police officer: "These discoveries are often fabricated"²². The detainee is taken to the site where he has allegedly hidden weapons. In most cases, the detainee does not return to the interrogation centre. The police claim that during the discovery the detainee tried to escape custody, and that he was therefore shot dead. Aamir was fortunate because his arrest resulted in widespread protests and the local police (JKP) supported his release. Within a few days of his arrest he was released from the army camp. The other detainees were not.

Asif²³ joined the militancy in Kashmir when he was just 16 years old. He was apprehended during a search operation. He was shifted from one interrogation centre to another for months, with no legal recourse or access to family members. Visible scars do not allow the camouflage of years of deep humiliation and sexual torture. Reflecting on that phase of his life, he says, "I joined militancy in Class 10. I literally wrote my chemistry exam in the morning, and in the evening left home to join the militancy. We were not hardcore trained militants, we were young boys"²⁴. He adds, "In detention, we were often kept naked in our cells. Occasionally the authorities would sweep and place lights in some of the cells, so that if human rights groups came to inspect the prisons it would appear that we lived in clean conditions. We know the truth of what happened behind those closed doors, because we suffered"²⁵. Even after his release, Asif and other ex-militants are required to report to the local army camp every Sunday. They are prohibited from leaving the town premises without prior permission from the army.

Broken windows, confused graffiti and sketches of guns on the wall mark the room of Adil, ²⁶ who was tortured in 1992 by the army and has since lost his mental balance. In Jammu and Kashmir in the early 1990s, most young men with beards were suspected to be militants. One day when there was a search operation in his locality, Adil decided to shave his beard to avoid unnecessary suspicion. He was not linked to any militant group. The personnel conducting the operation dragged him out of the house and rounded him up with

the other suspects. They were then moved to a civilian house in the area and brutally beaten up. One officer held Adil by his hair and banged his head hard against the wall. The officer continued to kick him with his boots even after Adil lost consciousness. This changed Adil's life forever. For the last 15 years he has been wandering in the town, unable to work due to his unstable mental condition. He was twice admitted to a mental health asylum, but escaped. His father sombrely points to the patch of land that his 35-year-old son digs up every morning, claiming it to be a trench from which he would attack the army.

Ghulam Nabi Rishu, an erstwhile education officer from Jammu, lost an eye and suffered grave injuries when he was tortured by army personnel in the winter of 1995. The army killed Rishu's young neighbour Bilal, and then asked him to identify the body. Rishu had known the boy since childhood. Horrified at the state of the corpse, he grimaced. This annoyed the army officer, who beat him up brutally. A family member who witnessed the violence stated, "When I saw the *buzurg's* (elder's) blood on the snow, I wanted to go across the border and become a militant to avenge him"²⁷.

A recent report published in 2006 by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) deduced that sustained violence or threat of violence has had extremely adverse effects on the mental health of Kashmiris. Given the silence around torture and lack of credible data, it is difficult to trace the contours of torture in Jammu and Kashmir. In the survey conducted by MSF, most interviewees reiterated that they had been legally and illegally detained by the security forces and militant groups since the start of the conflict in 1989. Approximately 20% of the total number interviewed indicated that they had been personally tortured during detention. Almost 66.9% stated that they had witnessed torture.²⁸

Militants employed arbitrary use of torture to crush dissent, and for purposes of extortion and to ensure adherence of civilians to the insurgents'moral and religious codes of conduct. In one such instance of militant brutality:

A person from Kupwara came to our district, Sopore. The army persons stopped him en route and asked him to fetch for them chicken from the market. The militants thought that he was an informer and picked him up. They tortured him brutally, cut off an earlobe and drew a nail through his nose to make an example of him. He was completely innocent. If the army person with a gun asks you to do something for him you can't refuse.²⁹

In another incident of militant abuse in the Jammu region, neighbours painfully narrated the grisly details:

The militants took out both his eyes, and left the dead body on the road. They killed his uncle, burnt his house and then burnt everything. All they said was that this was his punishment for working for the security forces. Even the Deputy Inspector General of police told us not to report such incidents.³⁰

With the denial that torture is practiced in police stations, prisons and interrogation centres, there are few realistic legal remedies available to the victims. In many cases the suspects were in police custody for 10 or more days before they were charged under the

Public Safety Act. If the dossiers for arrest and detention under the Public Safety Act were submitted immediately after arrest, the medical examination report would show that the detainees were tortured. This strategy of deferring charges indicates how easily procedural safeguards are circumvented by the authorities. Article 14 of CAT requires states to ensure that victims of torture are able to obtain redress and fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible. If the victim should die, his or her heirs have a right to compensation. Article 14 rights provide not only for civil remedies for torture victims, but, according to this case, a right to "restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation of the victim", as well as a guarantee of non-repetition of the relevant violations, and punishment of perpetrators found guilty.

The courts have also failed in preventing the routine use of torture. The Jammu & Kashmir Bar Association conducts visits to prisons in the state. Their reports are submitted to the High Court and include cases of torture. No action has been taken on the findings of these reports.

Epilogue

These testimonies underscore the complete abdication of responsibility by the state towards torture victims. The state provides survivors of torture with little or no psychosocial support. Coping mechanisms for most individuals entails the support provided by their families. *No* compensation has been granted to *any* torture victim in the state. Justice is even more evasive. The inquiries have focused on killings and disappearances, and the issue of torture has been neglected. Torture victims and their families have resigned themselves to the fact that since the killers of innocent people have gone unpunished so far, it is unlikely that the perpetrators of torture will ever be brought to justice. Police refuse to file First Information Reports (FIRs) for torture victims. In addition, families often choose not to pursue torture cases, and feel they are very lucky to have got their kin back alive.

In 1995, the then UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings and Arbitrary Executions was denied an official request to visit India. After assuming office in 2003, the current Rapporteur, Philip Alston, submitted a fresh request to the Indian government. His request is still pending. As per the Memorandum of Understanding with the Indian government, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) is allowed to visit pre-identified prisons and detention centres. However, their mandate is very limited in the region.

The peace talks between the Indian state and political groups have failed to incorporate the varying needs of victims of human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir. The dialogue is bereft of issues of accountability, and of the rehabilitation of victims of torture and their families. Consensus between state and non-state actors on the unacceptability of torture, as well as the state's responsibility with regard to reparation efforts, is imperative in order to achieve sustainable peace.

Editors' Note

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958) is a legislation enacted by the Indian parliament into law after the President of India signed his assent to it on 11 September 1958. The law was based on a similar British law used in the region. It remains in force (in a much more extensive form) today. The AFSPA, first implemented in Assam and Manipur in the northeast of India, has in the course of the last 49 years been deployed in Punjab in the 1980s and in Jammu & Kashmir since the early 1990s.

The AFSPA allows the "use of armed forces" defined as "military forces, the air forces operating as land forces" and "any other forces" of the Union (Section 3) within the nation, in domestic space. For the AFSPA to come into force, all that is required is that a territory (a state of the Indian Union, a centrally administered territory or any part of) be described as "disturbed". Once an area is thus declared, the personnel of the armed forces simultaneously acquire powers to use "force as may be necessary", based on their "opinion" and "suspicion", to effect "arrest without warrant:, or "fire upon or otherwise use force, even to causing death..." These powers can also be exercised for acts that are "likely to be made", or even "about to [be] commit[ted]" (Section 4). Unlike the assumption of innocence of an 'accused' or a 'suspect' (until he/she is proven guilty) in normal criminal law, a significant measure that protects a citizen, it is taken for granted that that intention of the inhabitants of the space that is rendered 'disturbed' by the simple fact of the declaration of the AFSPA, *is* hostile towards military personnel.

In all other Indian laws, including various preventive detention and anti-terrorist legislations (National Security Act, Terrorist and Disturbed Areas Act, Prevention of Terrorism Act, etc.), the forces of law and order can (or could) at the most detain without trial, for varying lengths of time. However, the AFSPA gives the armed forces personnel additional power to shoot to kill, or destroy property, on the basis of a mere suspicion. The Act empowers the armed forces to do away with the legal fiction of the 'encounter' killing, and to act as judge, prosecutor and executioner all at once, and often in the course of an instant.

Hence, attacks by 'insurgents' are 'retaliated' with indiscriminate firing and killing of civilians, including women and children, by the security forces. These noncombatant casualties can then be seen as 'collateral damage'. Therefore, the numerous cases of massacres in the so-called 'crossfire' or 'exercises' of the army are not examples of the 'abuse' of, but the 'use' of, the AFSPA.

Acts committed under the ambit of the AFSPA cannot be challenged by those who bear the brunt of its implementation. "No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act" (Section 6). In effect, Section 6 brings to bear one legal regime for the people in the states and territories affected by the AFSPA, and another for the rest of India.

See A. Bimol Akoijam, "Another 9/11, Another Act of Terror: The 'Embedded Disorder' of the AFSPA", in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 481-91. For Reader 05 online text, see http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader_05.html

See also the CIA torture and interrogation manuals used in training at the infamous US Army 'School of the Americas', currently known as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. The declassified manuals, obtained as a result of a 'Freedom of Information' request made by the newspaper *The Baltimore Sun* in 1997, can be accessed as pdf files at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB122/index.htm.

Notes

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- Human Rights Watch. "Impunity Fuels Conflict in Jammu and Kashmir" (September 2006). Online text at http://hrw.org/reports/2006/india0906/.
- 3. "Concluding Observations on the US", UN doc. CAT/C/USA/CO/2, § 14, (2006). The US had argued that in times of armed conflict CAT did not apply, as the situation was exclusively covered by international humanitarian law. In recent "Concluding Observations on the US", the CAT Committee confirmed that CAT "applies at all times, whether in peace, war or armed conflict... without prejudice to any other international instrument".
- Jeremy Waldron. "Torture and Positive Law: Jurisprudence for the White House". In Columbia Law Review 105, pp. 1681 (2005).
- 5. See cases of Godinez Cruz, Suarez Rosero, Loayza Tamayo and Cantoral Benavides:
 - Godinez Cruz: Judgement of 20 January 1989, Inter American Ct. H.R. (Ser. C) No. 5 (1989). http://www.corteidh.or.cr/seriec_ing/index.html
 - Suarez Rosero: Judgement of 12 November 1997, Inter American Ct. H.R. (Ser C) No. 35 (1997). http://www.corteidh.or.cr/seriec_ing/index.html
 - Loayza Tamayo: Judgement of 17 September 1997, Inter American Ct. H.R. (Ser C) No. 33 (1997). http://www.corteidh.or.cr/seriec_ing/index.html
 - Cantoral Benavides: Judgment of 18 August 2000, Inter American Ct. H.R. (Ser C) No. 69 (2000). http://www.corteidh.or.cr/seriec_ing/index.html
- Amnesty International India. "Malimath Committee on Reforms of Criminal Justice System: Premises, Politics and Implications for Human Rights" (September 2003).
- 7. For this section, see Asia Centre for Human Rights, SAARC Human Rights Report (2006).
- 8. Ibid.
- 9. Ibid.
- 10. Ibid.
- 11. The court further stated: "The Court, where the infringement of the fundamental right is established, therefore, cannot stop by giving a mere declaration. It must proceed further and give compensatory relief, not by way of damages as in a civil action but by way of compensation under the public law jurisdiction for the wrong done, due to breach of public duty by the State of not protecting the fundamental right to life of the citizen".
- Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights. "Human Rights Crisis in Kashmir: A Pattern of Impunity" (March 1993). Online text at http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/report-1993kashmirimpunity.html
- Ibid. See also Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, "The Crackdown in Kashmir: Torture of Detainees and Assaults on the Medical Community" (1993).

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- 14. Interview, senior police officer, Jammu & Kashmir Police, Sopore, 5 December 2006.
- 15. Ibid.
- 16. Ibid.
- 17. Name changed.
- 18. Interview, torture victim #1, Sopore, Baramullah, 10 December 2006.
- 19. Name changed.
- 20. See (eds.) Kenneth Roth and Minky Worden, Torture (The New Press, 2005, New York).
- 21. Article 15, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987). http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/cat.htm.
- 22. Interview, police officer, Special Operations Group, Srinagar, 15 December 2006.
- 23. Name changed.
- 24. Interview, torture victim #2, Sopore, Baramullah, 10 December 2006.
- 25. Ibid
- 26. Name changed.
- 27. Interview, family member, Jammu, 10 November 2005.
- Médecins Sans Frontières. "Kashmir Violence and Health: A Quantitative Assessment on Violence, the Psychological and General Health Status of the Indian Kashmiri Population" (November 2006).
- 29. Interview, torture victim #3, Sopore, Baramullah, 10 December 2006.
- 30. Interview, headman, Khabber village, Kalakot, Rajouri, 13 November 2005.

Borderless Bodies

PRAMOD K. NAYAR

The body is the self's border with the world. But the body is also a field that is subject to border restrictions, invasions and transgressions – from immigration lines, to surgery that penetrates the body's borders, to form-and-function-altering technologies such as nanomedicine, where not only the shape and appearance but also the capacities, abilities and functions of the body and its organs are radically altered.

This essay explores the dimensions of three bodies whose borders have today been rendered porous as never before. It analyses not only the *acts* of border crossing, but also the *discourses* that validate body/border crossings. The choice of bodies is based on the assumption that, arguably, these are sites where border crossings have been most intensely experienced in the last decades of the 20^{th} and initial years of the 21^{st} century.

I. THE BODY OF TORTURE

Literary/cultural theorist Elaine Scarry (1985) has argued that a vast distance separates the body of the tortured from that of the torturer, a distance computed in terms of pain suffered (by the tortured body) and the absence of pain (by the torturer). In the case of the sadism reported from the prisons of Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, it is the deliberate situating of the body at or beyond a border that first opens up this terrifying distance. Or, going by what happens, it is by *locating the body at or beyond a particular kind of threshold, as we shall see, that pain is sanctioned.*

The border therefore functions as the measure or location on which the body's pain may be predicated.

In Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, the processes of *discursively* locating the detainee's body at specific borders paved the way for the *act* of torture.

Borders of the Body, and the Body Politic: Six Theses

A memorandum (dated 28-12-2001) from Patrick Philbin and John Yoo, Deputy Assistant Attorney Generals, to William Hayes II, General Counsel, Department of Defense, began by

citing a US Supreme Court ruling: "An alien held outside the United States cannot seek the writ of habeas corpus". The memo stated: "... the same reasoning applies to GBC [Guantanamo Bay, Cuba] because it is outside the sovereign territory of the United States" (*The Torture Papers*, pp. 30-31; hereafter in this essay, *TP*). And continues: "We are aware of no basis on which a federal court would grant different litigant rights to a habeas petitioner simply because he is an enemy alien, other than to deny him habeas jurisdiction in the first place" (*TP*, p. 36).

Now, the declared logic of habeas corpus invokes the centrality of the body in the evidentiary dimension of legal matters: it asks that the body of the prisoner/accused be physically presented. The body cannot be kept hidden away, out of the sight of those who can demand (to see it) it as their right. In the above memo, the justice department officials perform a rhetorical sleight-of-hand that has clearly to do with the body as frontier and boundary.

First, it argues that a body situated outside the "sovereign territory" (or body politic) of the US cannot demand habeas corpus as a legal right.

THESIS ONE: THE BODY IS OUTSIDE THE BORDER, AS IT WERE, AND THEREFORE HAS NO RIGHT TO BE 'PRESENTED'

Further, it also proposes that physically non-presentable bodies (of prisoners) mark the border between the US laws and any other laws. On the one hand, the habeas corpus 'present the body' laws do not apply to bodies outside the US territory. To add one more layer of complexity, the description of the non-presentable body as 'alien' identifies it as a body from the outside.

THESIS TWO: THE VERY ABSENCE OF THE LEGAL RIGHT TO PRESENTABILITY MARKS THE BORDER BETWEEN THE US AND OTHER TERRITORIES

A later memo (dated 9-01-2002) from John Yoo and Robert Delabunty, Special Counsel to William Hayes II, argues that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to the Al Qaeda detainees at Guantanamo for various reasons. These reasons also carry subtexts relating to the border. According to the US government, the Taliban – and here Al Qaeda is coded as Taliban and vice versa, a reflexive blurring of borders, so to speak – was not a government but more of a "non-governmental organization that used military force to pursue its religious and political ideology". Moreover, and significantly, Afghanistan is a "failed state" (*TP*, pp. 38-39). Hence, the US argues, the Prisoner of War (POW)

IN GUANTANAMO BAY AND ABU GHRAIB, THE PROCESSES OF *DISCURSIVELY* LOCATING THE DETAINEE'S BODY AT SPECIFIC BORDERS PAVED THE WAY FOR THE *ACT* OF TORTURE

conventions do not apply to Taliban detainees. The detainees do not belong to a recognised country served by a recognised government; hence they fall into the category of *persona non grata*. The particular non-recognition of the Taliban and of Afghanistan by the US reduced the detainees' bodies to "bare life", exemplifying the figure of Giorgio Agamben's *homo sacer*: a body that can be killed but not sacrificed (1998; 2005, pp. 3-4). Political legitimacy and/or its lack is inscribed onto and collapsed into the bodies of the Guantanamo detainees.²

THESIS THREE: THE BORDER BETWEEN A BODY POLITIC AND A BODY IS COLLAPSED

A draft memo (dated 19-03-2004) to Alberto Gonzales, Counsel to the US President, from the Assistant Attorney General, argues that the US may "relocate 'protected persons' (whether they are illegal aliens or not) from Iraq to another country to facilitate interrogation" (*TP*, pp. 367-68, 374-80).³ These threatening bodies will be taken across borders so that US borders can stay protected from future invasions.

THESIS FOUR: THE SUSPECT BODY BECOMES THE SUBJECT OF INTERROGATION/TORTURE PROCEDURES WHEN THE BORDERS BETWEEN NATIONS ARE CROSSED

Afghan and, as it turns out, Iraqi bodies are outside the purview of human rights, POW conventions and the habeas corpus rationale because their former 'non-government' lies outside the definition of 'government' or nation state. The two bodies (body and body politic) are therefore interchangeable: both occupy the transgressive space of equivocal (il)legality.

THESIS FIVE: GEOPOLITICAL BORDERS CONSIGN BODIES TO THIS OR THAT SIDE OF RIGHTS AND HUMANE TREATMENT

The detainee's body is now located at the border between the US and Taliban armies; between the legitimate POW and the 'unlawful combatant'; between US laws and other laws. It is interesting that a body suspected of terrorist activity can be prosecuted irrespective of where the alleged activities took place, under the USA Patriot Act, Pub. L. No. 107-56, 115 Stat.272 (2001), amended section 2340A (popularly known as the Torture Convention).

THESIS SIX: ANY BODY SUSPECTED OF BEING A TERRORIST BODY, IN ANY LOCATION, I.E., EVEN THOSE ACROSS US BORDERS, CAN BE PROSECUTED

The body, through these six (hypo)theses, is now cleared for torture.

The Tortured Body and the Political Frontiers of Suffering

Once the body has been made ready for torture, the arguments are shaped to revolve around the frontiers of the body's endurance.

The procedures begin fairly innocuously, with an enquiry about what the body can endure. If, as Scarry argues, pain marks the border between the tortured and the torturer, the detainees and American soldiers inside Abu Ghraib are indeed divided into those who experience pain and those who inflict it. The sense of the body-as-frontier is used to describe the state of the tortured in, for instance, an account by philosophical essayist Jean Améry, who underwent torture by the Nazis following his arrest in Belgium in 1943. Améry writes: "[...] the other person, opposite whom I exist physically in the world and with whom I can exist only as long as he does not touch my skin surface as border, forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow... a mechanism is set in motion that enables me to rectify the border violation by the other person" (Sussman, 2006, p. 227).

Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee's memo (dated 01-08-2002) to Alberto Gonzales, Counsel to the President, defined torture as something that "must inflict pain that is difficult to endure. Physical pain amounting to torture must be equivalent in intensity to the pain accompanying serious physical injury, such as organ failure, impairment of bodily function, or even death. For purely mental pain to amount to torture... it must result in significant psychological harm of significant duration, e.g., lasting for months or even years" (*TP*, p. 172). Hence by this logic, torture was only that which induced pain so severe that it was difficult for the victim to endure. Here torture is the political frontier of suffering: how much can the (American) torturer inflict, and how much can the (Afghan 'terrorist') detainee endure? The index of pain is what separates the two kinds of politicised and racialised bodies here; and the governmental memos treat the question as one of pushing pain, inflicted by one kind of body and endured by another, to a certain physical limit.

But by what mechanism exactly can we measure the *degree* of pain that accompanies organ failure?

The question of endurance is of course linked to the *limits* of the body – how much can a body take? This is not a query from the interrogating officers alone. It is an issue of debate for the higher echelons of the military bureaucracy itself. A memo (dated 11-27-2002) from William Hayes II, General Counsel, to Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, mentions that part of the interrogation technique includes making the detainee stand for four hours. Rumsfeld's response, handwritten at the end of the memo, reads: "However, I stand for 8-10 hours a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours?" (*TP*, p. 237). Rumsfeld's response is really a question about the body's limits and carefully ignores the completely different circumstances under which the two bodies (his and the detainee's) stand. What separates the two bodies is a frontier of suffering: one voluntary, controlled (Rumsfeld's) and one forced and uncontrolled. The fact that the difference in bodies is also *racial* strengthens the case for a *political frontier of suffering*.⁴

A memo (dated 12-10-2002) from Michael Dunlavey, Commander, Joint Task Force 170, Guantanamo Bay, to the Department of Defense sought permission to "approve the interrogation techniques" (*TP*, pp. 225-28). In an earlier memo (dated 11-10-2002) Dunlavey had argued in favour of the techniques (ibid.). A Category III technique mentioned in Dunlavey's memo included "the use of scenarios designed to convince the detainee that death or severely painful consequences are imminent for him and/or his family (*TP*, p. 228).

Central to the question of the detainee's body as border is a constellation of pain-inducing modes. On the one hand, these test the limits of the body's endurance (as we have seen above, torture's definition is predicated on the limits of pain a body can endure). On the other, they *locate the detainee's body at the border of the danger/safety of their families* – that is, the detainee's body stands metaphorically *between* the prison wardens and their own families.

This particular torture technique's emphasis on the detainee's family means that the threat of pain and death is *extended beyond the border* of the detainee's body to that of his kin and brethren. It takes away the singularity of the detainee's pain by implying that everybody in his family can be subject to the same treatment. In one case, a detainee's sworn statement recorded on 16 January 2004 asserts that he is threatened with the rape of his wife (*TP*, p. 522). The inflicting of pain is made imminent, or augmented, to encompass other bodies, thus expanding the frontier.

One mode of identifying an act as torture is based on the effect it produces. A Working Group Report on Detainee Interrogation in the Global War on Terrorism (6-03-2003) cites earlier judgements where an act can be categorised as a threat by examining whether a "reasonable person in the same circumstances would conclude that a threat had been made" (*TP*, pp. 249-50). This idea of the recognisability of a threat by a "reasonable person" as the criterion for judging a detainee's response to threat sets up another body-limit: that of "reason". It shifts the experience of threat/torture from the detainee's body on to another, "reasonable" one, while ignoring the irreducible difference in contexts.

Later, the Taguba Report of March 2004 listed the various modes of torture used inside Abu Ghraib (*TP*, pp. 416-17). The annexures include sworn statements of detainees in which the torture they experienced is described in detail (*TP*, pp. 472-527). The statements make it very clear that the bodies were made to experience pain well beyond limits, and the Taguba report indicts the personnel in charge of Abu Ghraib for this. Significant to the thinking of the torturers is the intensely racialised awareness that the sadistically violated detained bodies are all non-white.

A MEMO TO DONALD RUMSFELD, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, MENTIONS THAT PART OF THE INTERROGATION TECHNIQUE INCLUDES MAKING THE DETAINEE STAND FOR FOUR HOURS. RUMSFELD'S RESPONSE, HANDWRITTEN AT THE END OF THE MEMO, READS: "HOWEVER, I STAND FOR 8-10 HOURS A DAY. WHY IS STANDING LIMITED TO 4 HOURS?"

II. THE BODY OF INFORMATION

In this day of bio-informatics and computational biology, the body is viewed as a set of data coded into computers to be transmitted and maybe reassembled elsewhere. The bio-informational body is also one whose frontiers have been altered significantly.

Digital Humans and Their Borders

Two kinds of digital humans can be discerned today, and both call into question the body border.

First, digital enterprises such as the Visible Human Project [VHP] (www.nlm.nih.gov) or the Centre for Human Simulation Project [CHS] (www.uchsc.edu/sm/chs): both render the body into code.

Digitised and rendered into jpg images or real video, these bodies know no borders except one: copyright laws. That a person's dataset - the first digital human atlas was made from real cadavers - should be copyrighted for use gestures at the border between body as a usable set of tools and a body as a marketable set of infinitely iterable information. On the website of National the Library (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible gallerv.html), a body is writ large in cyberspace, to be radically altered, edited, frozen. Unlike cinematic or televised bodies, these digital forms allow us to change our focus: we can choose to 'fly through' the Visible Human Project's dataset. The digital body does not have a border, anyone can traverse it, manipulate it, see it differently or get a closer look.

In this digitised form the human body is ethereal, taking the shape of the programme that runs it and the sensibilities of the viewer who clicks on it. While in a sense it does have a fixed 'form' – there is only so much manipulation possible with CHS models – the technology still enables us to see the body very differently. In fact, we see bones and skin dissolving as we click – another border has been crossed here when the bone seems to turn ghostly. The "digital uncanny", as Catherine Waldby (1997) termed it, is this absence of borders, where the spectral body slips across one's screen, now familiar, now unique. It is a body that can be accessed from across any border.

Second, the live body that is hijacked into the cyberspace network and diffracts into a series of information flows.

The signals of circuits and the energies of users combine, and are traversed by impulses, photons, scripts and signifiers, so that we have a mammoth user-body whose borders cannot be precisely located. Katherine Hayles (1999) described the posthuman as one whose identity is dispersed throughout the cybernetic circuit. This 'cyborg' body has merged seamlessly with the hardware and electronic data flows.⁵ The relentless electronic dispersal opens up bodies to inputs from the system. Inside and outside merge, as one is integrated into some other space or body.

Literature and popular culture have both been fascinated by this proliferating interface of borderless bodies. Cyberpunk novelist William Gibson effectively describes such a borderless, a-geographic body wired into the network. In *Neuromancer* (1984), Case sees through Molly's body as they are wired together: "the abrupt jolt into other flesh" (p. 56). In *Pattern Recognition* (2003), the website becomes Cayce Pollard's home, "like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (p. 4). In *Idoru* (1997), there is no space outside the "home" of cyberspace: "there was no there there" (p. 43). The body here has no border, just as the digital space there has no borders. In the work of contemporary artists such as Eduardo Kac and Alexis Rockman (www.genomicart.org) and the Pig Wings project (www.tca.uwa.edu.au/pig), the borders of human and animal bodies are blurred, reflecting recent advances in genetic engineering where DNA from various species can be mixed and matched to create new, perhaps "monstrous" forms (Nayar, 2007). Merging with machines, data and other 'avatars', digital and networked humans abandon their bodies as they enter virtual worlds...

The Borders of Bio-Informatic Bodies

To shift conceptual attention from the amalgam of digitised and networked bodies to the genetic body requires an unsettling inward turn.

The Human Genome Project (http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome) transcodes (i.e., translates data into another format) the human body into numbers to be recovered at another time and place, on a screen. Cultural theorist Eugene Thacker calls the body in such conditions "biomedia", where the body is the medium and the media themselves cannot be distinguished from the human body – thus marking the collapse of the border between biological substrate (the body) and the medium (2004, p. 13).

The body here is body-in-code, whose very borders have been embedded in technics. The body is increasingly made available in the form of data. The data are compiled *from* and *through* the body, which is wired into data processing machines (that range from the ECG machine to DNA testing units). The information flows from the body into the machine. The 'cyborg' is located somewhere *between the body and the machine's datasets...*

There are many frontiers here. The genetic code lies inside the body, as its DNA. Though the body cannot be treated as reducible to its genetic code – genetic determinism ignores other factors such as environment, socialisation and class in the making of a human (Nayar, 2006) – the border/container of the body has been radically altered. Part of its secret code that was *once inside us is now locked up in an external dataset accessible from outside*. The mystery of our material being is offered outside of itself.

THE "DIGITAL UNCANNY" IS THIS ABSENCE OF BORDERS, WHERE THE SPECTRAL BODY SLIPS ACROSS ONE'S SCREEN, NOW FAMILIAR, NOW UNIQUE. IT IS A BODY THAT CAN BE ACCESSED FROM ACROSS ANY BORDER.

Paradoxically, even as the information flows through the body's borders into databases, the technology infiltrates deeper and deeper into the body. While scans cover the body's visible surface and penetrate through rays/radiation, genetic engineering knows no borders. A set of molecules and atoms becomes the code of life through an act of interpretation. Chromosomes become the new hieroglyphs of a very ancient language, a borderless 'body-text' of very high 'resolution': the investigation penetrates dermis, membrane, helical strands, to enter the sanctum that is both existential and ineffable, decrypting the persistent secrets of individual character, physiognomy and health.

The programme *moves across borders*: skin to bone to tissue to cytoplasm and back, each matrix reflecting and informing the other.

The HGP describes its project as "one of the great feats of exploration in history – an inward voyage of discovery rather than an outward exploration of the planet or the cosmos". It continually reinforces this rhetoric of expansion and exploration – even producing a Genome Atlas (http://wishart.biology.ualberta.ca/BacMap/) – through invoking the motif of the frontier. For instance.

The Age of Discovery was the age of da Gama, Columbus, and Magellan, an era when European civilization reached out to the Far East and thus filled many of the voids in its map of the world... The Human Genome Project is thus the next stage in an epic voyage of discovery...

(http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human Genome)

In addition, the Human Genome Project "can be compared to the Apollo programme bringing humanity to the moon", according to the website. The recurrent use of tropes of discovery and expansion echoes earlier colonial discourses, wherein borders were *meant to be shifted outward* as part of the processes of subjugation. Now the genetic code is the new border, one that demarcates peoples and ethnicities.

This new border must also be brought under the purview of science – more specifically, Euro-American science that generates information that could be sold to private corporations; this is declared on the website as one of HGP's own stated goals ("transfer related technologies to the private sector"). Ethnic groups can no longer protect their cultural and genetic borders, as databases code them into numbers to be retrieved at any given moment by anyone able to afford the fee.

III. THE TECHNOLOGISED BODY

Technology has turned inwards. The tools of the trade can now be implanted in a form of endo-technologising. Increasingly, bodies can be seamlessly sutured to machines on an everyday basis, and not only as scientific projects.

Technology, Inc.(orporated)

Australian artist Stelarc wired his body into the World Wide Web so that people keying in commands from elsewhere could get his body to move. He swallowed a camera and filmed his insides. He attached extra arms and an extra ear (www.stelarc.va.com.au). In a highly publicised series of research projects, professor of cybernetics Kevin Warwick had electronic chips implanted within his body in order to operate doors and appliances in his surroundings, had his nervous system wired to the internet, and also had a smaller array implanted in his wife in order to communicate with her 'telepathically'. Both Stelarc and Warwick are cases of how somatic integration with machines radically alters the frontiers of the body's autonomy and *expands the horizons of the body's borders*. Everything is within one's grasp and reach; borders are limited only by the extent of the electromagnetic signal, not the length of the arm. Machines that once lay outside the body's borders have shifted within.

Our machines: our selves, now...

Cosmetic Borders

Orlan is a French artist who performs cosmetic surgery on her face and telecasts it live, as an expression of 'carnal art'. She has altered her face so much that she intends to ask for a whole new identity. In one exhibit, Orlan took the features of various 'models' of beauty, including Botticelli's Venus and da Vinci's Mona Lisa. She then put in two horns, and the largest nose possible for her face (see www.orlan.net). "Skin is deceiving", she quotes from the psychoanalyst Eugenie Lemone-Lucioni.

Orlan alters her first border, her first home: her skin. She inhabits a new 'inside' (of the border/skin) with each alteration. Skin is also, medically speaking, the largest organ in the human body. It is what we first encounter when we meet anyone; it is the first border we cross when we touch. Orlan draws attention to the fact that so much of *our social interaction relies upon the recognition of this border*. personal space, attraction or its opposite, aesthetics, texture. By deliberately invoking classic models of beauty from earlier eras, Orlan also calls into question our constructions of beauty and their social interpretations, as the body border may evaluated, respected, rejected, validated by the community.

The entire pathology of racism is based on one potent and direct signifier: the colour of one's body-border. And as a pragmatic strategy we consider "improving" our looks, in order to facilitate the necessary crossing of social borders into the terrain of acceptance and affirmation...

Borderless Body Geographies

The body's borders are also being altered significantly in less spectacular ways. Take for instance the now ubiquitous mobile phone. Research in various countries has shown that people are rarely more than a metre away from their mobiles (Srivastava, 2006). An entirely new geography emerges through the extension of the body's borders via personal

communication technology. Nokia's claim to be foremost with regard to 'connecting people' is not simply about the technology: it is about the erasing of borders between bodies in a virtual world.

Further, another kind of body border is crossed: your intimate conversations are now subject to 'enforced eavesdropping' when you speak into the mobile in public. The mobile phone alters the *boundaries* between public and private when the body behaves 'inappropriately' in either/both spaces. Nokia, announcing its 9300i with internet connectivity, asks us to "make the world your office" (Nokia flier, 2006), thus proposing a radical shift of body geographies. Restaurants, movie theatres, the bus stop and the supermarket are transformed from public spaces into semi-private ones when your body, holding the mobile phone, converses with another body elsewhere, a conversation that does *not* fit your body's present location or your supposed task within that space.

Mobile phones, like most technologies of communication, are about *distance*. Distances, near or far, become irrelevant when suitable modes of communication are available. Mobile phones particularly fit into this ongoing discourse of distance, since all companies and services and their advertisements urge us, with suitable emotion, to 'be in touch' with family, friends and colleagues via the mobile. What is surely ironic is the metaphor of 'touch' that all communications technologies use: touch is a *proximate* sense that erases but is conscious of body borders – the touch of the other's hand on my skinborder. All touch requires physical contact and sharing of space. The use of the metaphor in the rhetoric of communications suggests an obsession with the device-enabled obliteration of distance. However, technology inverts the meaning: it offers reliable communication, correspondence and connectivity – across distances.

With personal communication technologies practically moulded to our hands, ears, skins, yet another body border has perhaps irreversibly collapsed.

Geopolitics, medical and informational technologies, even art: today, these fields include a focus on the anatomical and physiological possibilities, impossibilities and borders of the body. Human borders with the world, dependent thus far upon the sanctity of the somatic frontier, are increasingly called into question. This essay has discussed only three categories of bodies/borders, their contours invaded, altered, shifted outward and inward, through torture, genetics and digital circuitry But even this limited analysis might legitimately push the assertion that in the new millennium, whether we like it or not, our most intimately claimed borders are being more and more 'substantially' embodied.

Editors' Note

For accounts of the relational dynamics and aesthetics of "bio-informational" bodies, see Deb Kamal Ganguly, "Pixels of Memory on the Hypertextualised 'I'", *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 140-49; and Andreas Broekmann, "Playing Wild!", ibid., pp. 150-59.

Reader 06 online text: http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html

Notes

- 1. A memo (01-22-2002) to Alberto Gonzales from Jay Bybee, the Assistant Attorney General, argued that the Taliban did not have a recognisable hierarchic command-and-control structure, did not wear distinctive uniforms, operated in the open with their weapons visible, and did not always follow the rules of war (*TP*, pp. 110-11). This is also emphasised in a follow-up memo from Bybee to Gonzales (ibid., pp. 136-38). It is important to note here that the *bodies* of Taliban soldiers determine the future situation of their compatriots detained in Guantanamo Bay. In his memo (dated 02-07-2002) to the Vice-President, Secretary of State and other senior functionaries, President George Bush accepted these conclusions, but added: "[...] Our values as a nation, values that we share with many nations in the world, call for us to treat detainees humanely, including those who are not legally entitled to such treatment" (*TP*, pp. 134-35). The memo explicitly locates the detainees outside legal entitlements, and brings in other non-legal norms ("values as a nation"), thereby once again crossing borders between enforceable laws and abstract moral-ethical ones.
- 2. The debates about the legality of torture procedures were about Afghan detainees in Guantanamo Bay. And yet, as Karen Greenberg (one of the editors of TP) points out, these procedures were applied to prisoners in Iraq as well (TP, xviii). This is another instance of body-related procedures that cross borders, where every imprisoned body lies outside the law, and marks the limits of the law (in this case the Geneva Conventions). Anybody arrested as an 'enemy alien', irrespective of the site of incarceration (Iraq's Abu Ghraib or Cuba's Guantanamo Bay), lies outside this border.
- "Protected persons", in these memos, may be those "accused of offences" or those who have not been accused (*TP*, pp. 374-80).
- 4. In his extensively documented and pathbreaking work on Nazi masculinities, Klaus Theweleit argues that in torture the victim gradually disappears altogether. Theweleit shifts the focus to the body of the torturer, suggesting that torture enables the torturer to define himself: "... the torturer only calls a halt when the victim's loss of contours has allowed his own body to gain definition" (Male Fantasies, Vol. II, pp. 304-5).
- 5. See Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (1991). Haraway calls the late 20th century a "mythic" time, when we are all "cyborgs": theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism. This cyborg gives us our politics; it is a condensed image of imagination and reality. The cyborg is irreverent, oppositional, ironic, impartial and completely without innocence.

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New Cartographies/ Old Boundaries

From Music to Painting: The Strange Yet Not-So-Strange Tales of Pardhaans

Udayan Vaipeyi

I.

All transformations give materiality to the otherwise immaterial thing called time. This time lives in tales. Perhaps we may claim that the point of all tales is to underline one or other kind of transformation.

The one I am going to talk about is no different. It is about an extremely strange transformation that took place not long ago. It is about Pardhaans, a sub-community of the Gonds, one of the largest 'tribes' of central India, and one that has ruled portions of that region for centuries, both before and after Mughal rule. I must express my reservations about the use of the word 'tribal' in the Indian context, because I feel those who are called 'tribal' in the modern discourses about India are in fact various castes; their complementarity to each other, like that of castes in various localities, is one of the reasons why this is so. I believe that they were conceptually and practically segregated from other communities living in India, to serve the purposes of colonial rule – even though their lifestyles were in continuity with those of other communities. But that is a different story, which will have to wait for some more time if it wants to be told in greater detail and with authenticity.

So then, I keep my reservation with me and tell you the story of the pardhaans. Let me begin by quoting two of their folk tales.¹

The first tale is about birth of the *mahua* tree. The wine made from its flowers is used in almost all rituals of almost all tribes of Central India.

The Wine of Mahua Flowers

One day, Shiva the god thought about us, human beings. He wondered how we would offer wine to the gods and goddesses, after having made sacrifices of goats and chickens to them. Without *mahua* trees, how would the ceremony of offering wine be performed?

He called over the parrot, the tiger and the boar, and said to them, "Become *mahua* trees". "Very well. We shall become *mahua* trees", the three said. In the month of Chait (around March), flowers blossomed in the *mahua* trees. Flocks of tiny birds

came to the three trees. They pecked at the flowers and ate them. After eating no more than two or three flowers, they began calling out loudly, "Cheep chirp cheep, cheep chirp cheep cheep..." They raised a din.

People thought, "There definitely is some intoxicant in these flowers, or else the birds wouldn't make this noise after eating them". The people now began making wine from the same flowers, and they began using the brew in all festivals and ceremonies.

If a man drinks a tiny quantity of *mahua* wine, he becomes like a parrot and says the same thing over and over again. If he drinks a little more, he becomes like a lion. He doesn't speak, he roars. And if he drinks still more, he becomes a boar. He lolls on the ground.

The other is a long tale about the dog, the fox and their daughter. I will quote only a segment:

Dog Father. Fox Mother

When a girl was born to the fox and the dog, the dog thought, "The two of us get by with scraps of food foraged here and there, but this human daughter born to us, how will we feed (her)?" The dog was the girl's father, after all. His worries were understandable. He went into the *basti* (settlement), stole into a house left open by the owners who were away, and grabbed a *roti*. He gave it to the girl. For years together he fed the girl thus, with food grabbed from homes in the *basti*. The girl grew.

The growing girl made the dog worried again. "We are born dogs and foxes, after all, what have we to do with clothes? But this girl of human form has to have clothes. How can she be without them?" An idea came to him. He said to the fox, "'Powder my tail with ash". She did so. Powdered thus, he went to the bazaar and sneaked into a shop selling clothes, and ornaments of gold and silver. The dog wagged his tail furiously. Ash spread all over the shop. Ash went into the shopkeeper's eyes too, blinding him. This was his chance: the dog grabbed a heap of clothes and all the ornaments he could, and ran back into the jungle. He gave the clothes and ornaments to the girl and asked her to wear them.

The girl grew still bigger. The dog fell into worry again. "Where am I to give this girl in marriage? Where do we go to settle an alliance for her, we that are born dog and fox?" One day the dog wandered away from the jungle. Fields stretched far and wide. Many people were at work in the fields. He looked carefully at the men farming the fields, studied them and their ways.

And so the tale continues.

It is evident is that in both tales the transformations take place and are dramatised with equal ease. It is as if these shifts of imagination are naturally embedded in the awareness of the people who exchange such tales. And perhaps that's why when a major change was

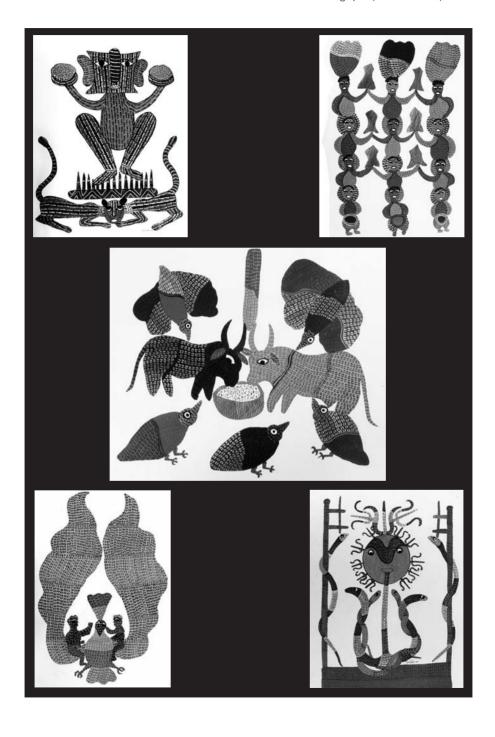
demanded from their own lives, they faced it with patience and understanding – they negotiated that literal transformation with the customary attitude they maintained towards the symbolic transformations present in their tales, in their music.

II.

Pardhaans are the musicians, genealogists and storytellers of the Gonds. This story about their origin appears in Sheikh Gulab's *The Gond*:

The Gonds were seven brothers. They sowed jute in the fields. In a few days, the jute began to grow. One day they saw a handsome young man galloping on his horse right through their field. The hooves were trampling the jute saplings. They pounced on the young man with their paitharis (spears). The youngest brother was so scared that his stomach got upset. He went to the nearby *nullah* (ditch) to relieve himself. The other six brothers chased the horseman. The field was guite big. At the edge of it was a saja tree. Seeing the Gond brothers chasing him, the horseman rode upto the saja tree and disappeared into it along with his horse. The Gonds saw him vanish into the tree. They instantly understood... "This is our Bada Dev (Big Lord) who came riding through our field on his white horse. How unfortunate we are that we could not recognise him... Now he is angry with us. He has disappeared into the saja tree. How should we placate him?" Together they began to reflect on this. They erected a platform under the saja tree. They offered rar lentils. Sacrificed a white rooster. Sprinkled wine made from mahua. Folded their hands in prayer. Went on pleading... But Bada Dev was angry. He did not come out of the saia tree... At this point the youngest brother turned up from the direction of the *nullah*. He found out what had happened... He said, "I'll find a way. It might please Bada Dev..." He went and felled a bough from a khirsani tree. He made a one-stringed instrument from the wood and playing on it, began to sing. The notes began to resound in the woods. In the song he started to sing praises of the glory of Bada Dev. Listening to the song, Bada Dev was pleased. He made an appearance in the trunk of the saia tree. He blessed the youngest brother by placing his hand on his head. "Whenever you sing my song playing this instrument, I'll make an appearance. This instrument of yours will be called bana". Bada Dev accepted everybody's offerings and once again vanished into the saja tree...

Pardhaans used to go to the house of their *yajmaan* ² every third year and sing stories about their deity Bada Dev, about the valour of great Gond kings, and many other stories. Their songs were and are accompanied by the music played on the *bana*. There is also an extremely interesting story about playing the *bana*. When the Pardhaan made the *bana* from the wood of the *khirsani* tree, he had no idea about how to play it. He kept thinking, but could not imagine the way to play it. After some time he found himself looking at a *kasanger* bird in the sky. She would rise like an arrow but would descend in the rhythm of waves. This was her style of flying. The Pardhaan immediate understood that this was how he should move his bow on the string of the *bana*.



At the *yajmaan's* house, the Pardhaan would also perform other rituals, particularly those relating to death. The spirit of those Gonds who have died in the *yajmaan's* house after the last visit of the Pardhaan are supposed to wait for his arrival so that he can merge them into the spirit of Bada Dev. Something very similar to the Hindu practice of going to Gaya after the death of their kin, an act they believe unites the departed spirits with Brahman, the absolute reality. Each Pardhaan singer normally had 50-60 *yajmaans*. He would go there every third year in the brighter half of the month of Vaisakha (April-May). He received his grain, oil, clothes, utensils, etc., from his *yajmaan*. Pardhaans were not supposed to earn their living through farming. They lived amongst farmers, but were seen as performers and were supposed to sing and narrate, and evoke the collective memory of their people. In fact, if someone died at the *yajmaan's* house half of his or her belongings, including jewellery, etc., were given to the genealogist Pardhaan. And rightly so: after all, he was the one who would enable the dead person's spirit to be subsumed into that of Bada Dev. He was, as stated in the Guru Granth Sahib:

... one who merges each singular light with the Universal Light ...

I am writing about Pardhaan singers who 'were', i.e., in the past tense. This may cause some confusion. It is a fact that the position that the Pardhaans had a century or two ago is no longer existent, but in a lot of Gond-Pardhaan villages, we can still find pardhaans evoking Bada Dev or praising the valour of past Gond kings, accompanying themselves on the bana. This can still be witnessed in number of villages of Dindori or Mandala districts of Central India. But the social texture that gave resonance and spiritual authenticity to the Pardhaans' performances has weakened. The centuries have played their different roles in contributing to this decline. The complex mechanism of social patronage is today fragmented. Pardhaans might still be going to their yajmaan's houses, but yajmaans are no longer able to support their genealogist-musicians. As a result, Pardhaans are forced to do farming or manual labour in their own villages or in small towns or cities nearby. The inherited and nurtured self-image of being valued performers lies buried within, awaiting the chance to materialise. The sad situation that the Pardhaans are in is evidence of the way a social support system had taken care of artistic activities in India, and how its erosion led to the difficulties that the artists now have to suffer.

III.

As is true for many other pagan traditions, the Gond-Pardhaan society also lives with a number of gods and goddesses. They are everywhere. In fact, these gods and goddesses mediate all possible relations between man and nature. Sensed as somewhere between the two, they bequeath a divine aura to nature, and bestow upon man a sense of being a part of divinity. Members of the community experience this connection at almost every moment of their lives, whether they are going to the forest or crossing the border of their village or cooking meals or putting a child into the cradle. Here the deities are not yet distilled into an abstract idea; through them, the sensuous and the spiritual manifest together.

IV.

Jangarh Singh Shyam was a Pardhaan boy from the village of Patangarh of Dindori district of Madhya Pradesh. He, like his ancestors, loved music; but unlike them, had almost no possibility of carrying on the tradition of music and storytelling. He was born when the system of social patronage had become ineffective. From his childhood onwards he was forced to do manual labour to support his extremely poor family. Only at night, when he was alone, he would play his flute as if to console the Pardhaan musical tradition flowing silently within him, as if to tell himself that he though he was not in a position to perform for the Gond *yajmaans*, he could at least keep the music alive for himself.

It so happened that at that time a major art centre was being built in Bhopal. The person in charge of the subject area of plastic arts was the well-known modern painter and thinker Jagdish Swaminathan. He wanted to create a gallery of contemporary art in which both urban and rural, so-called 'modern', folk and tribal arts were to be displayed. He was very clear about the notion of the 'contemporary' in the arts; he thought societies that were technologically backward need not be artistically feeble, and did not live in bygone times. For Swaminathan, all forms of social organisations that existed in a particular time, whatever their technological status, were 'contemporary'. He sent groups of young artists to many villages of central India to collect folk and tribal paintings, sculpture, etc.

In a particular village, one such group found some interesting paintings on the wall of a house. There was not a single painting anywhere else in the village. They asked for the painter, and found that the work was by a boy called Jangarh Singh Shyam. They requested him to come with them to Bhopal. He obliged. Swaminathan provided painting materials to the boy and asked him to create whatever he felt like. The restless musician waiting in the folds of Jangarh's mind saw a new possibility and means to express himself: painting.

٧.

The 5th-century Sanskrit text *Vishnudarmottarpuran* narrates a revealing dialogue between King Vajra and the venerable sage Muni Markandeya. The account is known as the *Chitrasutra*:³

The king wanted to build a temple and install an icon within it. He asked Markandeya how the icon was to be sculpted. The sage replied that one who did not know about *chitra* (painting) would not be able to sculpt. The king asked him as to how a painting is rendered. The sage replied that one who did not know about dance couldn't make a painting. The king asked about dance, and the sage replied that one who did not know instrumental music could not possibly understand dance. The king asked about instrumental music. The sage asserted that for understanding instrumental music, it was necessary to understand singing. The king asked about singing. The sage replied that one who did not understand the way a poem is written or read (*geeta shastra*) could not possibly understand singing. The king asked about *geeta shastra*. The sage instructed him with regard to the nature of

language and poetry; and then told him about singing, then about instrumental music, dance, painting, and finally how an icon could be sculpted.

VI.

The opportunity to paint and, to an extent sculpt, led to a strange transformation in Jangarh Singh Shyam: he started painting feverishly. Painting most wonderfully. Painting in a style which was uniquely his own and yet seemed to be rooted in tradition, a tradition not of painting but of his own tradition of music. In a way, his skills catalysed the metamorphosis of music into painting. Or, transposing Muni Markandey's astute logic from the *Vishnudarmottarpuran*, the painting which was inherent in the Pardhaan's music⁴ was given a chance to unfold itself directly on paper and canvas.

Something miraculous has happened. And yet the possibility of such a happening was already foretold in the conversation of King Vajra and Muni Markandeya...

Bada Dev, Mahrilin Devi⁵ and numerous other gods and goddesses, strange birds, flying snakes, animals, beautiful trees and several other entities who inhabited the songs of the Pardhaans, who had existed as notes of music, started manifesting on the canvas in various colours, and in a unique, distinctive style. It was the first time that the Gond pantheon was being actualised in images. Mostly orally transmitted, Gond iconography was now taking a visual form. These icons were extremely alluring versions of those gods and goddesses embedded in Pardhaan narratives. Within a few years of Jangarh's endeavour, many Pardhaans began painting in that distinct style which Jangarh discovered. More and more Pardhaans would come to Bhopal to participate in this newly found mode of creative self-actualisation. Many of them very happily turned away from their farming to take up painting. This new genre provided a livelihood to Pardhaan women as well as men. It was as if the flow of creativity which had been obstructed for many historical reasons found a new release. And this aesthetic/symbolic shift came very naturally to most Pardhaans. The moment they were offered and accepted the possibility, they immersed in it with as much ease as their immersion in their music.

VII.

I will not go into greater details of the Pardhaan painting style, but will only say that it is highly musical in its composition, in the interrelationship of its elements. It is also musical in the way it treats narrative and the various configurations of temporalities. I only wish to emphasise that when such an event took place in the lives of Pardhaans, they accepted it with open hands and hearts. The Jangarh phenomenon happened less than three decades ago, and already more than a few hundred Pardhaans have started painting, in a broad and recognisable style with its own distinct visual vocabulary. They were all painting in the same manner, and yet each painter individuated in a particular way. This style of painting has been called by various names: Jangarh Kalam, Pardhaan painting, Gond painting, etc. I prefer Jangarh Kalam, where 'Kalam' means 'style'.

It is true that Jangarh Kalam is the art of a community, an art practiced by artists still strongly rooted to their community, who are not spiritually alienated from their communal lives. But since this style was first created by that boy who came from the little village of Patangarh, it is named Jangarh Kalam.⁶ A number of Jangarh Kalam painters now live in Bhopal, as well as in Gond-Pardhaan villages. They have yet another common denominator: they are giving visual form to their deities, but at the same time, through this act they are trying to protect them from the very real danger of oblivion. Their new life in cities is also making the Pardhaan painters' task of symbolic retrieval a little more urgent. These are works of great excitement because their creators have found a new genre for self- and community expression; but they are simultaneously works of great longing, as the artists are becoming increasingly alienated in space and time from their home...

The Hindi word for 'longing/yearning' is 'utkanthaa'; literally, 'raising one's neck in order to see'. Perhaps this is the situation the Pardhaan painters find themselves in: one of anticipation and expectation, but a constant recollection of the deities and the landscapes of the village.

VIII.

This newly found creative genre of the Pardhaans is already under threat. The artists are living in stressful conditions in cities,⁷ but do not want to return to their villages because of the almost complete absence of patronage, and an equal lack of work opportunities, even as manual labourers. They also do not wish to leave because the cities have bred hope in them: hope in some distant or not-so-distant future. This is how almost all modern cities function – as the breeding grounds of hope, because they exist in more or less purely linear time, their trajectory always pointing towards a kind of betterment. Purely at the notional level, the figure of 'a brighter tomorrow' has a much better chance of surviving in cities than in villages. Most Pardhaan painters in cities also experience pressures on their creativity. Earlier, when their ancestors were practicing and performing music in their villages, no *yajmaan* would put any pressure on them to sing any so-called 'new' themes. The themes were made new, if at all, by the singers themselves, and not under any external coercion. They were primarily evoking the intimate world of their audience; their form was not representative but evocative.

But in cities, the rootless middle class is pressurising the Pardhaans to paint themes that have nothing to do with these painters' lives or memories. The populist forces are attempting to displace the folk world from folk⁸ paintings. They are attempting to hollow out the style of Jangarh, i.e., Jangarh Kalam. More and more, the once ingrained sense of community⁹ is becoming remote for Pardhaans. This is the challenge they now face. Only the future can tell which will prevail – fidelity to collective consciousness, or the stranglehold of economic survival.

Or do we already know the result? Perhaps not. Who knows how many transformations are waiting to manifest in the Pardhaan's lives, as in their narratives...

Notes

- I heard these tales, along with many others, from Pardhaan men and women in their native language, Chhattisgarhi – a dialect, so to speak, of Hindi. I rewrote these tales in Hindi without altering a single detail.
 For this essay I have used Delhi-based writer Raji Narasimhan's English translation of my Hindi version.
- 2. The term used by Pardhaans for the person in whose house the singing and storytelling is performed. This word comes from the terminology of Vedic rituals where yajmaan refers to the person who regularly does the yajna (broadly translated as 'sacrifice'); and also the one who invites the purohit (in general translated as 'priest'; here, the one who performs the ritual) for the yajna. The reach of this word, yajmaan, extends far beyond the Vedic rituals. It has a defined place and similar connotation in the sociological setup of India. For instance, a barber calls his client, whose house he regularly visits as a servitor for the work of cutting hair, his yajmaan. In earlier times, and even today, the yajmaan would not pay for each visit/service, but support the barber through his entire livelihood. The same relationship exists between the clients of potters, carpenters, etc., and these artisans. This system and its terminology suggest that according to this traditional logic, society is seen as a continuous, yajna-performing body. Coincidently, Pardhaans call themselves the purohits of the Gonds. Another genealogist community, the Charans, also call themselves purohits of the Rajput community, of whom they are the genealogists and family-poets.
- 3. *Chitra* translates as 'painting', and *sutra* as 'aphorism'. Therefore *chitrasutra* would essentially translate as 'axioms on painting'. But here the word *chitra* (painting) is used metonymically for all arts.
- 4. Pardhaans are genealogists and storytellers. They narrate through singing, which in any case has come into being through recitation. Therefore many genealogists of various castes and locations in India are musicians: the Charans of Rajasthan and Gujarat, Bhaats of Rajasthan, Patiyas of Bundelkhand, etc. The word 'Charan' derives etymologically from the Hindi word *ucchaaran*, lit. 'enunciation'.
- 5. One of the four goddesses who protect the borders of the Gond village.
- 6. 'Jangarh Kalam' was coined by my painter friend Akhilesh, in the long obituary of Jangarh he wrote a few years ago. Jangarh died tragically young in Japan, in suspicious circumstances. He was painting for a gallery of traditional Indian arts. It is said that he was under enormous pressure there to paint more. He wanted to come back home but was unable to do so. He found a strange way of escaping that alleged pressure: he committed suicide. 'Kalam' is used traditionally to name a style of painting, such as Bundeli Kalam for a style of painting that originates in Bundelkhand.
- Those living in villages also have to come to cities to sell their works. There are no yajmaans in their present situation.
- 8. 'Folk' would translate as *lok* in Sanskrit a term suggesting a terrain/domain/environment that includes plants and animals as well as humans.
- 9. The loss of a sense of community and the parallel birth of an alienated individual is most useful for the modern nation state (and now for the market). Without fragmenting communities into individuals, the nation state cannot present itself as a repository of collective wisdom and ethics, a function conventionally attributed to the community, its leaders, its legends, etc.

Ancient Geographies - New Frontiers

ANTHONY ACCIAVATTI

The Gangetic plains and the river Ganga in north India have held an unequalled place within the history of cartography, human colonisation and mythology. Imagined as the end of the earth or the original site of the Garden of Eden, the river and its environs played an active role in the maps being compiled of the known world. However, the vast majority of these attributes were projected onto this environment, and not received from direct interaction. The oldest Hindu texts of religion and mythology, the Vedas, refer to this region and river as some of the most revered places on the earth. Consequently, the river has inherited countless origins, directions and orientations throughout its venerable history.

Unsurprisingly, the Gangetic plains continue to be topographically deceptive today. The ways in which water, soil, agriculture, infrastructure and cultural mores format the ground continue to percolate with little regard for their anxious, pictorial surrogates - maps. Steeped within the mythological and historic, at present there appear very few speculations on the fertile, dynamic qualities of the terrain and the changes taking place in terms of its urbanism. Ground has performed distinct tasks within the Gangetic plains, both as a series of physical conditions and as a metaphoric channel for social and cultural traditions. These histories came into being through various acts of discovery and occupation. Ground has constituted a dynamic play across terrestrial and symbolic-celestial networks, ranging from the meteorological to the mythopoetic, religious and mercantile. Each successive group of occupants traversing this tract of land developed explanations, theories and instruments to signify and format ground as distinct sites of meaning and reference. This essay will focus on the changing conditions of cities and ground in the Gangetic plains and the particular representations of their created/contested natures in particular, the text looks at the ways in which ground is cartographically archived and 'dried'; the creation of terra incognita and changes of state; and the construction of a contemporary 'Dynamic Atlas'.

The practices used today in drawing site and territory are in many instances inherited from the Enlightenment discourse on the archive as a cartographic metaphor, which was used by the British Empire to codify the Indian subcontinent. Every observation was to be catalogued and located in its proper *place*. Within this system, abnormalities were to be corrected and not permitted to distort the whole. This form of authoritative imagination rarely

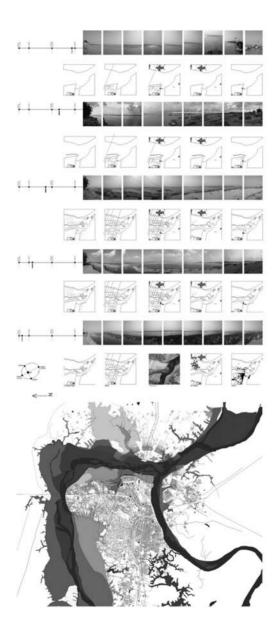


Figure 1 Terrestrial and Celestial Networks: Allahabad (Prayag) (90 cm x 182 cm)

Measures the ways in which the Ganga and Jamuna rivers expand and contract around Allahabad throughout the year. Events at the Triveni Sangam are mapped and diagrammed as they relate to these changes of state. Lunar and solar cycles are used to measure the rates of change in the river's edge.

reflects conditions on the ground, and emphasises discipline over speculation. Historically, mapmakers, architects and designers demonstrate an obdurate dependence upon fixed forms and relationships.² Even today they are far more comfortable with drawings and discourse that rely on artefacts, as opposed to processes of material change. 'Site' within this context is often reduced to a self-contained, hermetic figure, and rarely thought of as sites within a site. Immediate adjacencies are drawn as mute geometries, with little reference to networks that may operate across different scales and materials. Not to mention adjacencies and pressures that may be subterranean, such as water table levels and subsoil conditions. The vestiges of the Enlightenment ideals of mapping and codifying continue to exhale the same fixed relationships between site and context. These closed, self-contained drawings promote a rural-urban archipelago, with few connections to the larger networks that they participate in.

Within the archive, constructing ground involved cartographically 'drying' it, in order to define it as *terra firma*. As an intellectual exercise for clarity, drying ground resulted in the removal of the visceral, animate nature of the land – namely, water. The process of drying ground allowed for territories to be defined and circumscribed within the archive, isolated like an island. Changes in shape, texture and course did not fit well within this system of prescribed order and discipline. Water exacerbates this process, as it dilutes and transforms the shape of terrain with ease, networking between sky and ground through processes of weather. Water nags at both the farmer and urban dweller, as there is often too much moisture, or too little, and never just enough. This irritant is most acutely felt in the Gangetic plains due to the faint curvature of a topography that permits flash floods and extreme droughts, as there are few catchments. The aforementioned systems serve as a further subterfuge to the act of drying ground.

Attempts to harness and discipline the land and its levels of moisture and variability have resulted in indelible striations, pockmarks and discolorations etched across the Gangetic plains. Large canals, countless wells and numerous *bunds* (embankments) have been deployed to regulate and offset the shaping and settlement of the land. Many of these instruments have been used to counter climatic extremes and to forcibly format the ground, in order to increase the amount of surface area available for arable land and increase its productivity. Such disfiguring devices typically ran parallel to events in the sky, and to the seasons.

Deeply embroiled within this stagnant state of drawing, the tract of land between two major cities of the Gangetic plains, Allahabad (Prayag) and Varanasi (Banaras), exemplifies the varied states of urban, riparian and agrarian space permeating across this alluvial corridor. Allahabad, one of the most sacred sites within Hindu geography, is revered as the *teerth raj*, 'king of holy sites'. The city is located at the tip of the *doab*, 'land between two rivers', where the rivers Ganga, Jamuna and the mythical Saraswati converge. The confluence is known as the Triveni Sangam, and bathing here is believed to confer blessings and catalyse the dissolution of terrestrial sins.³ This site is believed to have a direct connection with celestial forces and networks. Allahabad is also strategically placed at the centre of the Gangetic plains, and has been an important site of distribution by river, road,

and rail.⁴ Further downstream along the Ganga is the city of Varanasi, which also plays an important role as a religious and economic locus within the Hindu faith and as an important point of distribution within the Gangetic plains. Amongst the most ancient and contested geographies, these two cities and the area between them have not been adequately scanned in terms of their extreme urban dynamics. Ground within this tract of land vacillates between parched and brittle to moist and gelatinous. However, these changes of state and their spatial attributes never take shape in the drawings of the region.

Terra Incognita - Figures without Lines

This particular belt in the Gangetic plains occupies a number of soluble states, as it is at once water, mud, dirt, dust, deity and atmosphere. The term 'state' not only refers to changes of state - molecular transformations - from solid to liquid to gas, but also changes of state – the altered functioning – of a cultural and political body: the city. Physical changes of state induced by weather and climate often are synchronous with urban events and festivals. In Allahabad, the Magh Mela festival takes places every year during the month of Magh (January-February) at the Sangam. This period is regarded as an auspicious time to make a pilgrimage to the confluence and have a ritual bath there. This generally coincides with seasonal changes in the water level of the river. During Magh Mela, the sand islands dotting the river are used for encampments and numerous festivities. After the celebration, the lines of streets and the former footprints of building serve as markers for the agricultural parcels that are harvested between April and June with the rabi crop. Similarly, in Varanasi, the festival of Durga Puja in October-November often coincides with phases of the waters of the Ganga slowly receding. Many large tracts of land along the Ganga are used for agriculture and grazing when the river is extremely low and barely active (April to mid-June). In addition, pontoon bridges are set afloat when the river is low, so as to allow more traffic to cross back and forth from one side of the river to another. Markets and temporary housing accumulate around these pontoon bridges during this time of year as well, taking advantage of the increase in traffic.

The role that agrarian, riparian, and urban conventions play in the region is tied to its development in terms of economy and social practices. In large part, this is due to the ways in which localities have assembled along networks of mobility to form urban agglomerations. Urbanism and agriculture were not set apart from one another, and the life of the communities involved in both were contingent upon the presence and pace of mobile networks, i.e., on foot, by bullock-cart, by boat, and eventually by rail and truck. Further, the lack of land and mobility of the population dissuaded people and institutions from concentrating wealth inside city walls. Attracting labour and capital to particular places was an integral political activity, as the relationship between the two constituted the site's urbanity. Today, when one views an aerial satellite image of the Gangetic plains or travels by car, rail or boat, one immediately notices the dispersed nature of settlements across the ground. Many of the scattered accumulations of human settlement are relatively dense in their internal structure, even while spread out

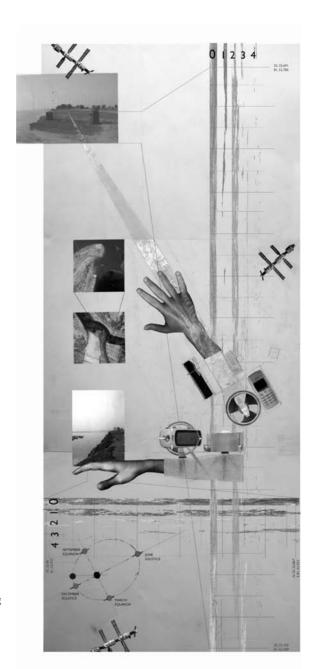


Figure 2 Surface Accumulation Sleeve (76 cm x 152 cm)
A wearable device, constructed by the author, to measure ground and its composition along the Ganga and Jamuna rivers.
The device triangulates points using a GPS system and measures ground at a 1:1 scale.

along the transport networks. The sources of attraction are often tied to how ground is formatted in terms of adjacencies to these networks of trade. The tract of land between Allahabad and Varanasi is no exception to this condition.

The character of the networks along which we find this mode of diffused urbanism changes from that of lines and striations (such as canals, roads, rivers, drains, agricultural rows, houses and buildings, and rail lines) to blotches, smudges and discolorations of the ground (such as rivers, tanks, lakes, canals, drains, and human encampments). Both sets of active ground are present in the daily lives of millions of people throughout this vast alluvial plain. Historically, the formatting of ground in terms of use and parcel structure has largely been dependent upon how infrastructure is able to temper the lacking or abundant conditions of wetness or dryness to provide for particular types of agriculture and pasture. Until recently, infrastructures manipulated water as a thin surface that could be channelled into tanks, ponds, and canals, or contained and collected over long periods of time in wells. Settlement was generally attracted to areas that were adjacent to rich soils, along trade routes, and/or adequate access to water. Canals, tanks and wells were used to further extend and control how ground was formatted in relationship to the seemingly capricious nature of weather. The infiltration and vagaries of water continue to undermine the cartographic processes of drying ground. Even though considerable mapping and analysis has been made of this region over the course of hundreds of years, the equivocal effects and states of water continue to render this region terra incognita. The fluctuating figures that the variables of water, weather, climate and settlement engender are without orientation or presence in the drawn artefacts and historically coded, conventional signifiers of this enduring topos.

Today, with the introduction of the tubewell, large underground reservoirs provide a seemingly endless supply of water. Whereas the previous infrastructures were visibly running parallel to rainfall patterns and agrarian calendars, and limited human settlement to particular adjacencies of surface water networks, the tubewell and other water mechanisms provide enough water to broaden settlement and agriculture into previously inhospitable environs. This in turn has encouraged an increasingly dispersed, isolated urbanism where there is a greater scarcity of land than water.

This new twist in formatting the ground and existing infrastructures continues to invalidate many of the ossified drawings of cities and landscape. It only compounds the synthetic relationships of ground, weather, city and technology, as well as human and non-human settlement into distinct sites. The tubewell, like the canal, and the well prior to that, is not meant to be an objective and quantifiable advance, such as increased crop yields or potable drinking water. It is instead regarded as a greater substitute for 'nature'; it is meant to supply what nature cannot provide. The networks supporting these sub-ground networks still remain remote within the consciousness of those tapping into them, also within the schemas of cartographic space.

We are witnessing not only how cartography has remained empirically aloof and rendered this space terra incognita, but also how it has participated in excluding the

physical and metaphoric states of ground. Drawings are needed that not only document the human and environmental pressures of the region, but also engage these pressures as points of departure for fresh design. Maps must be layered to picture these physical and cultural affects as animate, diverse, and reciprocal. If these living urban, agrarian, and riparian axes are not inscribed, we will continue to suffer the effects of sight without sufficient insight.

'Dynamic Atlas' - Engendering the Wet

The atlas, an archiving system first formalised in the 1570s by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator in relation to a geographic context, was meant to collate all of the information and maps of the 'known world' into a single volume. Today, there is no formal, disciplinary synthesis that brings the cultural, physical, terrestrial and celestial layers of the Gangetic region into one picture plane. An atlas that combines these distinct, interrelated conditions may provide a more agile method of representation and design. The full title of Mercator's atlas was "Atlas, or cosmographical meditations upon the creation of the universe, and the universe as created". This title not only defines the scope of the atlas, but also the deeply embedded role of the mapmaker in constructing a given terrain or site. In contrast to this resonant conceptualisation and effort at concrete projection, today there is a dearth of imagination as to how these changes of state might be represented and appreciated for their immense spatial qualities.

As this region continues to witness an unprecedented growth in population, density, and degradation of resources, maps are urgently needed that not only recognise the attributes of the ground and those human and non-human bodies populating it, but also engender speculation about its potential spatial qualities. The various species of infrastructures developed to mediate the dramatic changes of state have lead to different configurations and striations of settlement and networking. They may also provide areas for continued speculation and constructive misuse. Just because something is designed to do one thing does not preclude it from serving in other, unanticipated uses.

Drawing is also associated with many of the same ambivalences as other modes of picturing and representation, in terms of what a medium should *do*, as opposed to what it *is*. For example, the American photographer and critic Alan Sekula explores issues regarding the unacknowledged maritime space within the global economy in his six-year work (or as he states, "work-in-progress"), *Fish Story* (1995). The ocean and its boundaries are depicted as not only as a visual space but also as a socio-economic one. *Fish Story* was Sekula's third project in a related cycle of works that deal with the imaginary and actual geography of the advanced capitalistic world. Art historian Benjamin H. D. Buchloh comments that Sekula "constructs what one would call a rhetoric of the photographic: his accounts of the instability of photographic meaning continuously oscillate between a conception of photography as contextual (i.e., as a discursively and institutionally determined fiction) and a conception of photography as referential (i.e., as an actual record of complex material conditions)"⁷. This anxiety splintering the matrices of both the

contextual and the referential also permeates the entire field of drawing as well as the discipline of design.

The 'Dynamic Atlas' is an ongoing project assembled by the author over the past two years, and that addresses the nature of urbanism and its visual representation. It adopts another way of entering this ancient geography of the Gangetic plains by engaging the extreme material and symbolic gesticulation of this tract of land as an impetus for more empathetic design. The atlas engages the variables of water within this territory as an unexplored frontier within the making of urbanism and urbanity. If ground – as simultaneously a modern 'development' imperative and a locus of unbroken religio-cultural tradition thousands of years old – continues to inhabit a cartographic no man's land, it will neither encourage doubt nor avidity about how it actually affirms and sustains itself across this vast alluvial corridor.

Notes

- 1. Matthew H. Edney. Mapping an Empire (University of Chicago Press, 1990, Chicago), p. 50.
- 2. Here I am thinking of the role that ocular-centric vision has played as described by Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity", in (ed.) Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality* (Bay Press, 1988, Seattle).
- 3. See "Agnipurana", in Puranas, trans. N. Gangadharan (Motilal Banarsidas, 1984-87, Delhi), p. 329.
- Kama Maclean. "Conflicting Spaces: The Kumbh Mela and the Fort of Allahabad". In South Asia, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, p. 144 (2001).
- David Ludden. New Cambridge History of India: An Agrarian History of South India (Cambridge University Press, 1999, Cambridge), p. 148.
- 6. John Noble Whitford. *The Mapmakers* (Vintage Books, 1981, New York), p. 85.
- Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. "Between Discourse and Document: Fish Story, Alan Sekula" (Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, 1995, Rotterdam), p. 195.

The Folly of Maps

IEREMY HIGHT

IDEA: origin late Middle English, via Latin, from Greek idea, 'form, pattern', from the base of idein, 'to see'

MAP: origin early 16th century, from Latin mappa mundi, lit. 'sheet of the world'

FOLLY: origin late Middle Ages, from Old French folie, 'madness'

Oxford Dictionary of English, Second Edition

There are parallel trails in the history of borders drawn to exclude and isolate, and the historical rejection of and disdain for the new ideas that arise in every age. The status quo of measure, possibility, and what is known, has been shaken up many, many times in history by the emergence of new paradigms, perspectives, richness of comprehension flying in the face of the familiar. Sometimes this leads to discovery, sometimes even to what will later be accepted and then pushed further again.

But sometimes the measure, distrust and commerce of new thought have led to the death of an idea, or its author, or both.

The 'frontier' is often defined as the space just ahead of the known edge and limit, and where it may be pushed out deeper into the previously unknown. The frontier in the world of ideas is not the warm comfort of what has been long assimilated; and the frontier in the landscape is not of maps, but of places beyond and before them...

The border along what has been claimed is not only that of maps – it is of concepts, functions, inventions and related emergent industries. Ideas and innovations are like the cloud shape that briefly forms around a jet breaking the sound barrier, tangible yet not fully mapped into measure. It is when things are nailed down into specific entities, calibrated and assessed, that the dangers may inflict themselves – greed, competition, imitation, anger, jealously, a provincial sense of ownership either possessed or demanded.

A professor in graduate school told us about how just across the California/Arizona border, rusted out alone in the desert, you can see the very last, farthest westward metric sign, where this unfamiliar system died. The border between accepting new ideas

and shunning them for their newness is the death of possibility. This is mapped by patterns of oblivion, the whittling away of its traces, that is also the final unspooling of its initial pure momentum.

Ironically, I am writing this in a language (English) comprised partially of layers of decontextualised phrases and concepts from the popular culture, iconography and common speech of other times, along with many roots derived from other languages. Etymology seduces through the flash of discovery of the long-lost direct meanings and signifiers of so many English words. These, in greatly diminished specificity and weight, now float like dead jellyfish in the ocean – solid yet translucent, and adrift where they once actively swam...

Physical maps are aligned along spaces exposed by retreating glaciers, the beat of waves, erosion over vast spans of time, frictive winds along soils and sands, magma erupting and cooling in jets and flows – and yet, it is as though the artifice of man is what we need as our omnipresent frame of measure.

The hurricane knows no latitude and longitude; the jet stream knows no politics or history; a flood knows no place names, only to surge along its course...

Human maps are ephemeral. Their lines are arbitrary, and often drawn from ego and its stealth, rage and stubborn compromises.

There are many outmoded globes of dead delineations, with old identities, colonisations, topographies, boundaries, politics – inscribed through ignorance of what lay beyond...

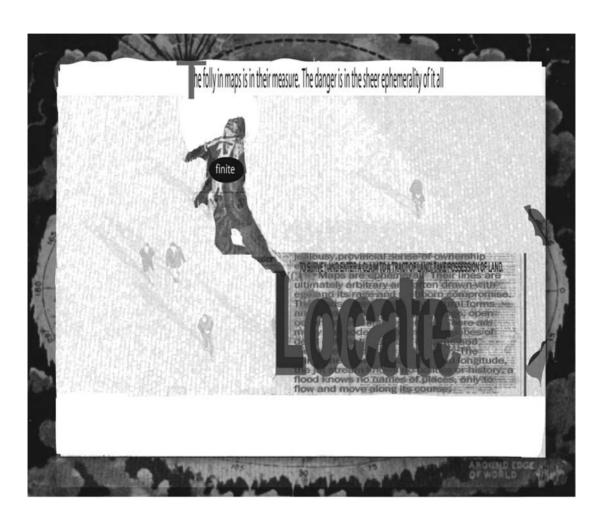
'Nature' is not *formed* by measure – only noticed, prescribed, translated, extrapolated from what otherwise would simply be wilderness. Territories were not *created* – they were only *found* by explorers. New ideas (that involve radical risk through a rupture of accepted convention) are just like the soils of lands before claims to them are staked – they exist, but have not yet been co-opted and commodified by measure.

The danger of measure is in its *quantification*, in the destructive and self-destructive compulsions this can release in humans.

We created categories of time not just for convenience, but also for measure, for genealogies and taxonomies, naming and codification. Just as we created categories of morality – as much in order to stratify as to lay blame.

Is it possible to re-map the ancient cartographies of our hunger for power, our profligacies, our prejudices?

Don't epiphanic new ideas rise more like breath: a form manifesting out of nothing, not yet fully defined by cold, precise measure?



Smart Borders

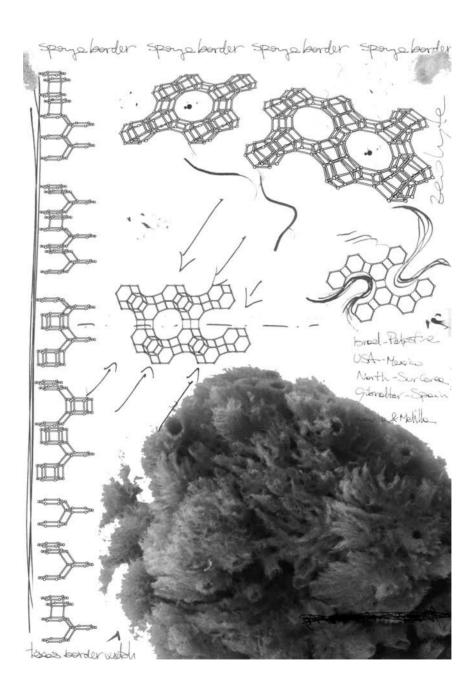
GUIDO CIMADOMO + PILAR MARTÍNEZ PONCE

Borders, as we know them today, have historically been created mostly in times of war, 1 and sustained as a useful mechanism in case of a possible invasion. Only with the arrival of globalisation, which we can say coincided with the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, 2 and with the development of different supranational entities invested in controlling world trade, have borders acquired another strategic function – the control of different flows, especially the economic and the migratory.

If we think about the different flows generated around borders, we will see that the physical elements of a frontier are not really that significant, other than in those problematic cases that relate to migration.³

In the great majority of these cases, walls of concrete (Berlin, Palestine) or 'simple' double or triple fences (for instance, the enclaves of Ceuta and Mellila in Spain, and the US-Mexico border that spans several American states) create frontiers where the authorities dedicated to their control try to eradicate any feeling of belonging, thus turning these zones into wastelands. In this context it is interesting to mention the notably successful monthlong experiment⁴ 'Texas Border Watch'. It allowed internet users to participate in the control of a section of the border through setting up a surveillance mechanism whereby vigilant American locals could inform authorities if any transgression of the border was sighted. Such projects usually generate among citizens the feeling of being fortunate, entitled and patriotic.

To recover Heidegger's observation: dividing elements do not define where a thing ends, but indicate the condition that furthers the thing's presence. Take into account some phenomena that can be considered relatively positive, such as the *maquiladoras* (transnational assembly plants) in the border city of Tijuana (the second-highest source of revenue after oil for the Mexican economy). And the recent creation of two inter-Korea railway connections (Munsan to Kaesong and Jejin to Kumgang), strengthening the potential of Kaesong's Special Economic Zone where hundreds of South Korean companies have located their plants.



We want to propose borders as porous systems, three-dimensional and technological, configured as bridges between different, and perhaps historically estranged, shores. Such borders are antennae that not only attract and catch the signals of the realities on both sides, but also transmit, all around, the cultures and traditions of those who live there.

We want to return to the old concept of the great bazaar, a place where persons from both sides of the border can meet, generating a new place of cultural and economic interchange...

We think about the utilisation of zeolites,⁷ or smart sponges, as a metaphor of the functioning of these spaces: microporous solids with the aptitude to store selectively and then to return heat, water, gas... or even people and their dreams...

Notes

- D. Van der Velden, T. Clausmeyer, V. Kruk and A. Mellegers. "The Discovery of the Fifth World". In Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 96-110.
- 2. Joaquín Estefanía. "La era de la globalización". In El País, sec. Negocios, pp. 8-9.
- G. Cimadomo and P. Martínez Ponce. "Ceuta and Melilla Fences: A Defensive System?" In Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 336-41.
- 4. "The Texas Border Watch Test Site Is Now Closed". See http://www. texasborderwatch.com/. Accessed 14 May 2007. See also an official statement by Texas governor Rick Perry declaring that with "voluntary participation" of private landowners, "Texas will use \$5 million to begin placing hundreds of surveillance cameras along criminal hotspots and common routes used to enter this country". The cameras will cover vast stretches of farm and ranchland located directly on the border where "criminal activity" is known to occur, and "not the neighborhoods where families will continue to enjoy their privacy... We will make the video feed available to state, local and federal law enforcement agencies so they can respond swiftly and appropriately... The video will be available 24 hours a day and cameras will be equipped with night vision capabilities". See
 - http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/pressreleases/PressRelease.2006-06-01.1612.
- In Poetry, Language, Thought (trans. Albert Hofstadter; Harper & Row, 1971, New York), Heidegger invokes a concept of "difference" while commenting on the poem Ein Winterabend (A Winter Evening) by the Austrian poet Georg Trakl:
 - "For world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other. Thus the two traverse a middle. In it, they are at one. Thus at one, they are intimate. The middle of the two is intimacy in Latin, *inter*. The corresponding German word is *unter*, the English *inter*. The intimacy of world and thing is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate world and thing divides itself cleanly and remains separated. In the midst of the two... in their *inter*, division prevails a difference (*unterschied*)". According to Heidegger, this differentiation "is unique"; "of itself, it holds apart the middle in and through which world and things are at one with each other... Whatever goes out and goes in... is found in the

between's dependability... The dependability of the middle must never yield either way... The settling of the between needs something that can endure..." Heidegger concludes, "When the difference gathers world and things into the simple one fold of the pain of intimacy, it bids the two to come into their very nature" (pp. 202, 204, 207).

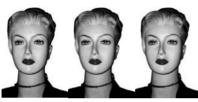
- 6. See Sergio De La Torre, "Paisajes", in Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence, op. cit., pp. 333-35. "Maquiladoras assemble filters, batteries, cassettes, flybacks and other electronic parts, Yugo automobiles, oxygen masks, clothes, toys, keyboards, household implements, etc. The first maquiladoras were built in the 1960s on the outskirts of Tijuana. This was initially an industrial zone, but today it is also residential, since Tijuana expands at the rate of two acres per day..."
- 7. Emanuele Ricci. "Zeolites (Smart Sponges)". In *Domus*, No. 898, p. 134 (December 2006). Zeolites (from the Greek *zein*, 'to boil', and *lithos*, 'stone') are the aluminosilicate members of the family of microporous solids known as 'molecular sieves'. These have the ability to selectively sort molecules based primarily on a size exclusion process. The framework structure of tetrahydra, ordered in beautiful formations, may contain linked cages, cavities and chambers of the right size to allow small molecules to enter. The maximum size of the molecules or ionic species that can enter the pores of a zeolite is controlled by the diameters of the tunnels. Chemical species with a kinetic diameter that makes them too large to pass through a zeolite pore are effectively 'sieved'.

Adsorption based on molecular sieving is usually reversible in practice. This allows the zeolite, which can separate molecules based on size, shape, polarity and degree of unsaturation, to be used many times.

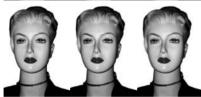
Naturally occurring zeolites, formed where volcanic rocks and ash layers react with alkaline groundwater, are rarely pure and are contaminated to various degrees by other minerals, metals, quartz or other zeolites. The combination of many properties – including the uniform pore dimensions, the ion exchange capacities, the ability to develop internal acidity, the high thermal stability, the high internal surface area – make zeolites unique among inorganic oxides.

Glamour as a Form of Culture in Post-Soviet Russia

KETI CHUKHROV







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In the last five years, the word 'glamour' has arisen more and more frequently in the frame of Russian mass media, culture, and even politics. In pop culture and mass media, this notion connotes the spheres of glossy surfaces, representing glory, beauty and success.

However, in Russia 'glamour' has transformed itself into an omnipresent style, decorating Russian capitalism and its turbulent development as well as the media images of the state. Initially, Russia drew upon the models of the American culture of glamour, which has long been a global mass-media commodity. Now it seems that Russian glamour has surpassed the source that it imitates, and has become an

almost ontologised component of society. In contrast, for the Western European way of life glamour preserves its charm only as an *accompaniment* to actual 'living', and is sustained chiefly by the mass media. In the zone of extreme prosperity, the seductive lustre of glamour is blunted by the history of particular tastes and the norms of civil society, as well as by the fact of bourgeois consciousness in general being at a more developed stage.

The interface of the contemporary post-industrial European bourgeois lifestyle doesn't accept ostensible and direct images of glamour.

It should also be noted that there is a marked difference between capitalism and bourgeois consciousness. Despite the fact that in Western Europe the bourgeoisie has been developing alongside the development of capitalism (while in Russia, capitalism even up to the contemporary moment can quite easily do without the bourgeoisie), bourgeois consciousness cannot be reduced to the amount of property. Rather, it presupposes an

elaborate and sophisticated subjective taste as its chief value, as theorised by Kant and inherited as a philosophical legacy by the bourgeois Western citizen-subject.

If the categorical imperative keeps civil society within the bounds of general social rules, 'sublimity' as defined by Kant is realised by through the transgression of these rules.

The Kantian principles of aesthetic judgement enable cultural continuity on the one hand, and on the other, catalyse innovations in art and technologies. All these together mould the lifestyle of Western European upper-middle class.

Therefore the sphere of entertainment, which in fact is the sphere of desires, can saturate itself with more cognitive objects than are apparent through the act of simply consuming mass-media products and succumbing to the images projected through advertising.

It is not the evidence of capital that matters, but cultivated taste, the capacity for aesthetic differentiation and the tools to reinforce this capacity, acquired through ensuring that capital circulates in particular ways in the cultural domain. In fact, this discriminative aesthetic is the most expensive commodity today.

As a matter of fact, the formal archetypes of such space are the private spaces of high taste and innovations, where a bourgeois subject is a mini-sovereign in his private aspiration towards gnoseological perfection and privileged self-reflection.

In the bourgeois milieu, glamour is exclusive, something for private consumption, but the attributes of subtle glitz coalesce to augment the pleasures of connoisseurship.

II. Glamour as Equality

In Russia, 'glamour', as a particular external attribute or aura of style, has a specific origin, which will be discussed later in this essay.

Soviet rationale was theoretically based on the principle of equality – applied not only in the context of jurisdiction and civil society but also in relation to material and immaterial values, as well as in relation to the public domain. This enabled, on the one hand, the collectivisation of all individual achievements; and on the other, enabled the projection of the idea that individuals could access these collectivised images and objects. If there was anything that underwent radical transformation during the 70 years of Soviet power, it was the apparently complete ousting of bourgeois consciousness (seen as a mechanism claiming the territory of the 'private') from the Soviet ideology.

Today, despite the growth of capital and the decline of the socialist regime in Russia, the ousted/suppressed bourgeoisie has not yet appeared, though there are in place the prerequisites for its re-emergence. This is because capital in Russia has not yet created the social layer capable of sorting out and hierarchically arranging desires, according to categories and costs.

Meanwhile, we should also remember that 'glamour' is not the same thing as 'luxury'. Rather, it is the *sign* of luxury, acquiring its specific attributes as a signifier through the schema of mass-media distribution.

Due to the residual ideology of equality, as well as to the reflexive inability to reshape behaviour according to new patterns of social hierarchy, glamour (although proclaimed as the mode of eligibility) is consumed with the help of mass-media in the regime of availability to all. Obsession with consumption, often to abusive limits, is characteristic of the upper and middle classes, as well as the extremely poor, and including the provincial populations who live in precarious conditions.

The absence of bourgeois consciousness in post-Soviet Russia is an indication that differentiation in terms of values and culture between the different social strata – the former proletariat, the residents of remote provinces, the 'cognitariat' that forms the labour pool producing immaterial goods for the digital economy, as well as the privileged representatives of the new Russian mode of capital – has not yet taken place.

There is a somewhat inexact supposition that the schizophrenic obsession with glamour and the images that embody this attribute, even within the milieux that by definition cannot afford to participate in the 'glamorous', can be explained by the restricted right to private property that was mandated during the Soviet regime.

The true reason for the current obsession with glamour should in fact be sought, on the one hand, in the fact that most citizens in post-Soviet Russia are unable to decondition themselves of the reflex that claims all citizens have equal opportunities and can stake equal claims; and on the other hand, the fact that state economics is massively dependent upon natural resources. In order to manage, process and sell the commodities manufactured from these resources, one only needs a few influential social types. The most successful of these are the politician, the businessman, the pop star, the model. The rest of the population functions as an abundant human resource pool, in general required predominantly as potential customers, or specifically required as an electorate every four years. Thus, there are two approaches to what is offered by the omnipresent sign 'glamour'. Either one rejects what the mass media constructs and projects as 'reality' – since in actuality one is unable to access or consume the images of economic paradise; or one plunges into simulacra, trying to mimic the images of success, prosperity and beauty as faithfully as possible, within one's limited means.

The 1990s were the period of liberalisation at all levels in Russia – in politics, art, economics, means of production, trade. This liberalisation bore a capitalistic inscription. Social 'justice' was interpreted as the individual right to become prosperous; efforts in this direction were seen as 'just' and deserving. The problem now lay in the fact that the logic of equal freedoms in the market, and freedom to acquire and thus privatise public property, came along with the undeclared creation of a powerful financial elite of secret investors and proprietors.

In the contemporary moment, everything that is not representative of large-scale capital is considered, in public opinion, to be the opposite of that glamorous surface – i.e., trash, affliction, the characteristics (in this opinion) of many Russian provinces. According to this opinion, escape from such poverty and stagnation is possible only through the cheap imitation of valorised signifiers of glamour.

Thus, today we observe the collision between two paradigms – the persistent, unconscious fixation on the idea of equality/equal access asserted by the Soviet regime, and its complete absence in the current post-Soviet political and social framework. Glamour thus represents the dose of equality that is possible to experience for the majority of citizens, within the radical and expanding rupture in the post-Soviet *socium*.² Glamour and its vehicles – mass show business and the mass media in general – are the communicative strands between stratified social layers that cannot otherwise be united, through either contemporary events, culture or politics, except for the residual unconscious memory of egalitarianism from the Soviet past.

The remedy against succumbing to debilitating socioeconomic conditions, against feeling abject and abjected, is to identify with virtual images signifying either glamour or power. The concept of equality is thus transposed onto different coordinates in a context where citizens have not yet internalised the existential fact of inequality, even while they live it – for they simultaneously inhabit the phantasmic world of equality promised and constituted by glamorous images.

Of course it is predominantly for 'The Poor' that glamour turns out to be the unconscious reflex of equality. Television is the main source of entertainment they can actually afford. Through this medium, they automatically find themselves in the commodity-saturated realm of gloss, elitist propaganda and kitsch.

On the one hand, glamour in the zone of poverty is evidence of the colonisation of this territory with fantastic, inaccessible images of dreams, encouraging their imitation and consumption. But since the consumption *itself* is something inaccessible, being often a fantastic desire, achievement of this imaginary ideal becomes an almost heroic attempt. The bricolage beauty objects composed from the Chinese and Vietnamese handicraft copies of glitz images are obtained through enormous efforts engaging belief, struggle and creativity. The expense at which these glamorous images are obtained by the residents of remote Russian provinces make the perception of and craving for such images fundamentally different from their consumption by nouveau-riche proprietors. For the poor, the media images of glamour – as well as the objects constituting the language of glamour and the desired possibility of consuming them – acquire an ontological dimension. The glamorous image becomes the *ideal* image, the image of beauty in a quasi-Platonic sense.

In contrast to glamour as strategy for the protagonists of its representation and production, glamour for the poor is thus the embodiment of the Ideal *regardless* of the aesthetic particulars of style or form. Such strife to obtain the beautiful is not aware of the imperatives of taste, and is not amenable to the logic of Kantian aesthetics. Within bourgeois logic, such exclusion of taste may be explained as the absence not only of financial means, but also of knowledge and education.

In his play *Black Milk* (2004), outstanding Russian playwright Vassily Sigarev offers a good example of the symbolic value of an inaccessible commodity that should at all costs be obtained, or else substituted by some counterfeit. The protagonists of the play are a



married couple travelling through Russian provincial villages to sell defective toasters made in Taiwan. One village they come to consists mainly of alcoholics. There is neither any production there, nor agricultural activity; life is confined to the survival of residents through the selling and buying of vodka. The toasters cost 300 roubles (\$ 12) each, a very large sum for the village residents; some families spend all they have to buy this unnecessary gadget that contributes nothing to their lives. Nevertheless, in the end everybody has bought the object...

It may at first seem that what makes the sale so successful is marketing and advertising knowhow that works like propaganda; the newcomers seduce the villagers into purchasing the toasters. But in fact this is not the case. A toaster, an alien object, infiltrates the villagers' reality via television from its source in mass-media virtual projections. Although mass media is now regularly haunting even this remote area through TV screens, its images are still experienced as a completely unreal. When such images present themselves, the objects they signify, despite or perhaps due to being alien, immediately become so intensely real within the receiving consciousness that there is a powerful and inevitable urge to approximate and even to own them.

It should also be noted that all this happens in the conditions of the minimum of property among the village residents – i.e., they own practically no private property, and this is the only fact ensuring equal status among the villagers. Even so, this mode of survival-based equality doesn't presuppose any form of democratic communication among the residents; such communication is possible only when residents mutually subscribe to a shared value system. A toaster – a glamorous object of the imaginary reality – now having received embodiment as a desired consumer item – brings equality to the point of represented commonality, albeit a counterfeit one.

Thus we observe an illusory leap from the literal absence of private property to the symbolic presence of the impossible ideal object. This leap enables one to see 'glamour for the poor' as potentiality, as signification that paradoxically remains empty even as it imposes a strong material/emotional effect; leaving out and overlooking bourgeois consciousness without even making an attempt to understand what it might be. In this disturbing gap between the non-possession of property and the media-fuelled compulsion



to grasp the ideal object glimmers the possibility of equality – that ignores the differentiated values of bourgeois connoisseurship and refuses to wait until the emissaries of culture, good taste and state policy come to educate or upgrade people. The schizophrenic strategies of capitalism and its resilient mass-media interface are experienced here as the ontology of hope.

III. Glamour for the 'Chosen'

Why should one show off something that one can't afford? People buy prestigious things hoping that nobody notices the absence of their status...

Ksenia Sobchak³ [on the practice of wearing cheap diamond fakes]

The new rich, meanwhile, are now experiencing as everyday reality the glamour-laden commodities that in the early 1990s were only present in the imagination of this class. With the materialisation of these dreams of a glamorous life, it is to be expected that such privilege will be discursively confirmed in cultural domains.

Thus, a new prosperous layer of Russian society (the result of accumulated capital) gradually discloses within itself the demand not only for the commodities of fast consumption, but also reclaims its interest in culture and art. Until recent times there has been no open demand of this kind on behalf of the middle- and upper-proto-bourgeoisie. As soon as such a demand manifested, the new galleries and art foundations began to appear. This new proto-bourgeoisie is still unable to produce any expert judgement, being short of information on contemporary art and having very modest knowledge about culture.

Naturally, the already existing actual artistic spheres were obliged to react at some point to such a challenge. Many artists began to cooperate with the 'glamour' galleries and foundations, and also began to produce works that imaged the aspirations of the new 'elite'.

The aspirations of the new elite are quite eclectic. Let's track what follows the imaging of expensive commodities, travel and interiors. Today, it cannot be a symbolic intervention or political critique through signification, as was possible and practiced in the mid-1990s. What remains is a mixture of mysticism, fantasy, esoterics, often the elements of trash

(since there is so much of it around), and images of the decadent abuse of luxury – some kind of exclusive trip through the spaces of individualist, egocentric divinity. If there is no knowledge about art, if drugs do not catalyse inspired states, and if self-education does not seem that attractive, the further stage of 'enrichment' can only be the struggle to articulate one's own charismatic exclusiveness, projecting oneself till one becomes a conspicuous protagonist in the new elitist arena – the terrain of contemporary art. In other words, to run an exclusive boutique of 'art', or that constituted by solipsistic self-assertion.

In February 2007, well-known Russian artist and former actionist Oleg Kulik curated the exhibition titled *I BELIEVE* at the Moscow Biennale.⁴ Kulik claimed a new artistic trend and defined it as a mode of religiosity. The project was supported and produced by the Ministry of Culture and the Mayorate. Despite numerous prognoses, the exhibition did not become the panegyric of state power or official Orthodox values, but was rather curated as a show enabling the viewer to experience the hallucinatory and the supra-normal, using images characteristically associated with psychedelic drugs and the acid night-club spaces of the early 1990s. Kulik repeated that he wanted to represent the deepest core of each artist, to show how an artist's esoteric and mystical states could be translated into an artwork; the project was about the 'purification' of the artist's soul through its 'demonstration' (this is today actually possible only in the realm of mass media; it is the pop star who publicly bares the 'soul').

The space chosen for the exhibition itself – a former wine-factory, which offered something between a dark atmospheric cellar and the strident intimacy of an acid rock club – claimed to be an alternative to the sanitised gallery interiors of Western contemporary-art venues. However, the point here is not the questioning of positive or negative attitude to esoterics. The issue is to locate, identify and describe the consumer of such a product.

A large segment of the 1990s generation – *Generation "P"*, according to writer Viktor Pelevin⁵ (the "*P"* in the title of this novel stands for "Pepsi" as well as "PR"/"*Potreblenie"*, which translates as "consumption" in Russian) – in the conditions of the post-Soviet market economy had to move away from artistic and intellectual projects and focus instead on making money.

In today's era of oil-centred economies, the money of this generation has acquired a relative stability and is functioning in different spheres – politics, big business and culture. This is evident in contemporary Russian cinema: advertising companies are now making films with the help of new oil money, and such films usually overflow with conventional glamour images.

The glamorous signifiers of prosperity, supposedly equally accessible to all, are not sufficient for this social layer. They yearn for the chance to express their creative potential, and nurture a nostalgia for the artistic milieu of the early 1990s – bohemian underground elitism, backed by the liberal intelligentsia, the class that was actually the bearer of the demand for the Western mode of prosperity during the Soviet regime. Such an audience resents the actionist phase of the 1990s as well as conceptual criticism that dominated the

middle of that decade; they relate to that art of 1990s which formed the bohemian entertainment of decadent intelligentsia, and desire its resurgence.

Instead, the cultural terrain hosts the projection of alternative esoterics, purchased with laundered money. This moment is marked by the fact of the financial elite, or sponsors of art, being increasingly prepared to assimilate bourgeois standards in the interest of establishing a cultural interface, accompanied by its own set of critics. The 'expert' community which already exists, and which was successful in the 1990s, is not satisfactory for the new proto-bourgeois audience of today, because of its intellectualised, politicised and leftist orientation.

It is the same zone – of 'glamour for the chosen' – that Viktor Pelevin describes in his latest book, $Empire\ V(2006)$. In this narrative, the elite are no longer humans but vampires. Exploiting people's yearning for success, prosperity and glamour, these 'chosen', divine vampires suck from people the substance called bablos, an essence received from money circulation. During this process, esoteric mysteries are revealed to them and they ascend further in terms of spiritual perfection. Their means of such ascension is not any sacrificial or meditative procedure – it is a metaphysical equivalent of money. Here, Pelevin's vision of dystopia paradoxically corresponds to the transcendentalist impulse of bourgeois consciousness.

In Pelevin's meta-narrative, the concept of cosmic and metaphysical infinity, the idea of God and of divinity, are illusory: their function is to stimulate humans into aspiring for self-affirmation. All speculation about metaphysical realia and God, and abstract thinking as such, is just an instrument to calibrate the increases in the amount of money made. And according to Pelevin, glamour is a form of "prestigious consumption taking place to show off in the realm of spirit".



When Pelevin's 'chosen' – the vampires – imbibe *bablos* from human bodies, they feel like gods. The analogue is obvious: money and the aura of glamour can transform one into the Divine, the Chosen. In addition, Pelevin's account most interestingly presents God as a collateral effect of preying upon people for *bablos*, an existential activity that provides the chosen with the sublime sensation of being God-like. The mode of absolute self-realisation is therefore equivalent to a subjective state of individual sovereignty, which is given the name "God". (At the *vernissage* of the *I Believe* exhibit, curator Oleg Kulik claimed that he, as a human, has experienced the sensation of feeling God-like.)

IV. State 'Glamo-Modernism'

Along with these two phenomena (glamour as a mode of equality/glamour for the poor, and glamour as a mode of transcendence/glamour for the elite), there exists another project competing for space in the cultural domain – a kind of 'state formalism'. Or in other words, the project of so-called 'sovereign democracy', in which the state tries to appropriate large-scale business as well as culture, to be financed by the new bourgeoisie, under state supervision.

In this undertaking, the bourgeoisie as a class will not be able, unlike Kulik, for instance, in the *I Believe* exhibition, rely on quasi-bohemian *jouissance*, on the struggle for totalised and autonomous sovereignty, but will have to – together with the representatives of culture, science and art – visualise dominant signifiers of the nation state and develop these into a sponsored iconography.

In many state-supported institutions, the issues of criteria in art, literature and culture are already on the agenda. These projects seem to be quasi-academic: for instance, 'Territory', the festival of contemporary poetry and contemporary music; the Moscow Biennale, quite a number of editorial programmes; lecture series by internationally renowned philosophers Slavoj Žižek and Giorgio Agamben on the invitation of the government. The ideological thrust seems to be directed at confining the radical potential of the discourse of hitherto subversive political technologies within the parameters of academic convention.

In other words, all those images that spring from the phantasms of individual sovereignty – the show-business star, the artist, the oligarch, the politician, even the President – are thus subordinated to the charismatic image of the state itself, in a new formulation. The state becomes the principal source of growth in economics, business, religion, art, the source of resuscitation in morals, the saviour who will offset entropy, and the bearer of the idea of non-xenophobic, thus 'civilised', nationalism.

Accordingly, the signifiers of luxury, entertainment and glamour are all directed to serve this new entity, the ideological synthesis of all material and ideal values – *state* glamour.

Thus, before our eyes, subversive postmodern methodologies are being reconverted, as part of state policy, into the 'modernist' paradigm.

Why do we associate these 'national' cultural strategies with modernism?

In order to answer this question, it may be necessary to ask another one: What is important in modernist art?

Answer: The art *itself*, its autonomy, its self-preservation through the over-emphasis on aspects of form.

Take the case of the major exhibition of contemporary Russian art held in Miami in 2007, designed within the conceptual territory of modernist formalism. Eugenia Kikodze, a curator of the Miami show, later adopted the category of 'Urban Formalism' for works exhibited at the Moscow Biennale. Or take the latest formalist works by artist Anatoly Osmolovsky, which proclaim the tautology of form and transmute quotidian objects (bread, walnuts, tanks) into abstract shapes by means of format variations. These are instances of the drastic shift from Osmolovsky's boldly political avant-garde art of the 1990s to the museum- and gallery-oriented cultural products of the contemporary moment, draped in their quasi-modernist framings.

A modernist artist may be nauseated by reality, but he/she doesn't revolt against it: instead, he/she articulates it as form only, without or with minimal content.⁶ Let's imagine, for instance, that there was explosion on top of a hill, with soldiers killed there; but if one commits to a purely objective aesthetic logic, one may see the devastated hill as the potential form of a sculpture, abstracted from the harrowing reality.⁷ What matters here is the *immanence of form* in relation to itself. But the strict minimalism of this act takes place due to form being inflated to become the equivalent of everything. Likewise, those aspects that 'mean' in glamour imagery are not the luxury objects in themselves, but their effects and aura; the *signs* of luxury, referring to themselves as proofs of the total accomplishment of glamorous aspiration. This manifestation of glamour can be defined as the over-determination of the material object, the deliberate apotheosis of its form (through depth and surface collapsing into each other).

In the Greek myth of the Golden Fleece,⁸ the pelt of a ram, covered with gold sand, symbolises wealth, divinity and the power of the state. The object is not actually made of gold, but is completely clad in the *sign* of gold appropriated in order to project the effect of substance. Images of glamour seduce because they refract and radiate lustre as if it were emanating from *within*, as the essence of a commodity, while it may just be dispersed on the surface.

A similar over-determination characterises the political concept of 'sovereign democracy', which may be defined as democracy plus its unacknowledged potential for manipulation. On the one hand it is an oxymoron; on the other, it may well manifest as a valid political reality. Namely, democracy should *not be* sovereign, but everybody knows that it often *happens to be* sovereign. In such cases, sovereignty becomes the superimposed attribute, the self-referential and 'glamorous' *sign* of democracy that, due to its open declaration of this negative component, confirms the 'genuine' form of democracy – which, however, is sovereignty, rather than democracy; the signifier, rather than what it signifies.

Form plus something other than form – that will only turn out to be emptiness and refer back to this very form, thereby proving any interpretation around the form to be *tautological*. Quite a concept of modernism. To understand the state as a diktat of empty form that moulds any political content in its own 'glamorous' image enables us to direct all the references to such empty form.

But what purpose does such state modernism serve?

It may be that the exaggerated function of the state is the supporting and disguising surface for the further moulding of a positive image of the future bourgeoisie. In other words, the political project of the form-obsessed 'modernising' state is a device for the smooth and painless configuration of a collective culture of *voluntary inequality* – one that apparently enables the bourgeoisie, for whom glamour is a mode of subjective transcendence, to meld their tastes with those of the poor, for whom glamour is a way of deflecting the squalor that is their existential reality. The glamo-modernist cultural policies of the state should achieve this 'democratic' goal much more successfully than either mass media or individual bohemian producers of postmodern images of glamour.

Notes

- 1. In his Critique of Judgement (1790), Kant investigates the sublime, stating: "We call that sublime which is absolutely great". He distinguishes between the "remarkable differences" of the beautiful and the sublime, noting that beauty "is connected with the form of the object", having "boundaries", while the sublime "is to be found in a formless object", represented by a "boundlessness". He considers both the beautiful and the sublime as "indefinite" concepts, but whereas beauty relates to the "Understanding", sublimity is a concept belonging to "Reason", and "shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of Sense". A "supersensible substrate", underlying both nature and thought, is where true sublimity is located. For Kant, morality can be summed up in one, ultimate commandment of reason, or imperative, from which all duties and obligations derive. He defined an imperative as any proposition that declares a certain action (or inaction) to be necessary. A hypothetical imperative would compel action in a given circumstance. A categorical imperative would denote an absolute, unconditional requirement that exerts its authority in all circumstances, both required and justified as an end in itself. It is best known in its first formulation: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law". See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critique_of_Judgement
- 2. See, for instance, "The Individual in Post-Soviet Socium", in Social Sciences, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2000), where historian German Diligensky argues: "It is customary to define the society of 'real socialism' with its institutional, cultural and socio-psychological specifics as 'collectivist'. Many have been writing about the collectivist character of the Soviet socium both critics and apologists of socialism. In recent years, however, a tendency has been gaining momentum to interpret Russian collectivism not as a heritage of socialism but as an inherent and stable feature of the national character and culture; and to describe it, correspondingly, not by 'foreign' (Marxist) terms but by words borrowed from the archaic Russian vocabulary, such as obschina (commune), sobornost (conciliarism), etc. Not only national-patriotic and communist ideologists, but also the authors of some academic treatises see the obschina principle as the

fundamental constant of Russian mentality, which makes it incompatible with the individualist values and way of life of Western 'market' society. In modern political and cultural discourse, juxtaposition of 'individualist' (Western) and 'collectivist' (socialist or, generally, 'Eastern') societies has acquired the status of a quasi-axiomatic truth". Diligensky adds, "At the same time, in modern sociological literature this hackneyed juxtaposition of collectivism and individualism as basic characteristics of social and cultural systems has been under much fire..." See http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/socsci/socsci_00dig01.html

3. Ksenia Sobchak, also known as 'Kremlin's cover girl' and the 'Russian Paris Hilton', is the daughter of a former governor of St. Petersburg who was one of the fiercest critics of the Soviet Union in Gorbachev's times. A wealthy socialite heiress, she hosts *Dom-2*, Russia's most successful reality TV show. She recently launched Vse Svobodny (All Are Free), a youth movement.

See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/main.jhtml?xml=/fashion/2006/07/23/stksenia23.xml

4. According to the Moscow Biennale website:

"One of the tasks the organisers of the *I BELIEVE* project wish to accomplish is to persuade artists to get away from the vanities of daily pursuits and search their hearts. It is high time for us to take a look at man and the world not from the perspective of the latest fashionable philosophy, but through the eyes of someone who believes in life in all its manifestations, which is a radical departure from the conventional outlook of modern art. Let us dust off our ideals.

"What is the mystery of being?

"What in this world strikes you with awe?

"What is the locus of the Inconceivable and Ineffable, which leaves you speechless when you meet with it? "What foundations do your spirit and soul rest upon?

"This exhibition should be a step toward changing the status of modern art in society, an attempt to move away from elitism toward direct emotional contact with everyone, whether an artist or a viewer. This contact will not be based on abstract ideas but on the perceived presence of something extraordinary and unknown, which unites all of us. living creatures".

See http://2nd.moscowbiennale.ru/en/special_projects/67/

5. Contemporary Russian author Viktor Pelevin's works use the language of Western postmodernism and science fiction as well as pop-Buddhism, Eastern mysticism, Japanese Manga comics and ironic-nostalgic socialist-realist parody, while acknowledging the tradition of Nikolai Gogol and the 1920s avant-garde. The publication history and reception of Pelevin's work epitomises the shift in Russian literary culture from a journal- and critic-led process to a consumer-led market.

Interviewed in 2002 by Leo Kropywiansky, Pelevin comments: "The evil magic of any totalitarian regime is based on its presumed capability to embrace and explain all the phenomena, their entire totality, because explanation is control. Hence the term *totalitarian*. So if there's a book that takes you out of this totality of things explained and understood, it liberates you because it breaks the continuity of explanation and thus dispels the charms. It allows you to look in a different direction for a moment, but this moment is enough to understand that everything you saw before was a hallucination..."

See http://www.bombmagazine.com/pelevin/pelevin.html

- An avant-garde artist in this case is not just reworking existent forms, but also moulds new forms for the world's future.
- This episode is quoted in the war diary of 23-year-old Anri Gaudier-Brjeshka, a French sculptor and close friend of Ezra Pound. Recruited by the French army, he was killed in World War 1.

8. In Greek mythology, the golden fleece is that of the winged ram Chrysomallos. It is a central image in the tale of Jason and his band of Argonauts, who set out on a quest for the fleece in order to place Jason rightfully on the throne of lolcus in Thessaly. According to the legend, Athamas, king of the city of Orchomenus, took as his first wife the cloud goddess Nephele by whom he had two children, the boy Phrixus and the girl Helle. Later he married Ino, the daughter of Cadmus. Ino was jealous of her stepchildren and plotted their deaths. Nephele's spirit appeared to the children with a winged ram whose fleece was of gold. Riding on the ram, the children escaped over the sea; Helle fell off and drowned, but the ram took Phrixus safely on to distant Colchis. Phrixus then sacrificed the ram and hung its fleece on a tree in a grove sacred to Ares, where it was guarded by a dragon; it remained there until taken by Jason. The ram became the constellation Aries.

One Biennial, Two Triennials, Three Interventions and Research for a Retrospective

RUTH SACKS



Italy I Venice I Outside the Arsenale in Venice during the $52^{\rm nd}$ International Art Exhibition Biennial I 2007





Angola I Luanda I Studio of Paulo Jazz in Elinga (billed to be demolished in 2007) I 2005



Angola I Luanda I Tiles on the walls at the old Portugese Fortress of S. Miguel de Luanda, a possible exhibition venue for the 'Trienal de Luanda' I 2005



Italy I Turin I Graffitti on a wall poster I 2005



Italy I Turin I Street scene during T1, Turin's inaugural triennial I 2005



South Africa I Cape Town I Performance piece with Sophie Calle by Anna Geering and Jo Dunkel projected from slum block called Senator Park on Long Street



Johannesburg street scene during research trip for Kendell Geers' 'Irretropektiv' I 2007

THE EDGE OF THE FRAME

The "Frontier" Revisited

CÉDRIC VINCENT READS LAWRENCE ALLOWAY

British Art critic Lawrence Alloway (1926-1990) will certainly remain in art-historical memory as the coiner of the notion of 'Pop Art' – a term that first appeared in his essay "The Arts and the Mass Media".¹ It should be remembered, however, that at the time 'Pop Art' referred more to popular culture's visual products and artefacts than to the artistic practice that was inspired by it. Moreover, Alloway prefers to posit an "aesthetics of plenty", a notion based on style diversity and consumer affluence, including two elements that available aesthetics theories tended to treat separately: fine arts and the mass media. For through advocating a "fine art/pop art continuum", Alloway meant in both anthropological and egalitarian terms to undo entrenched hierarchies and therefore to counter art critics Clement Greenberg's and Herbert Read's defence of an isolated art at the apex of the pyramid of cultural tastes and values – a mode based on what Alloway terms the "aesthetics of scarcity".

Alloway first tested and formulated his radically inclusive cultural theory during the meetings of London's Independent Group – gathering together young artists, architects, designers and social theorists – which soon found a practical outcome in the famous exhibition *This is Tomorrow* (London, ICA, 1956). As early as the 1950s, he clearly aimed for an expanded critical approach to the arts, and considered art to be an integral part of a "communication network" that includes movies, advertising, graphic design and fashion.² From this perspective, Alloway wrote pioneering pieces about the interactions of the fine arts with commercial art, science fiction, cybernetics, mass media and urban structures. Throughout his career he maintained an inclusive, democratic view of art – one that encompassed popular culture, systemic abstract painting, realism, environmental art, women's art, the complex issues surrounding mechanical reproduction,³ the distribution of information and power in the art world, and the politics of cultural institutions. The difficulty of systematising his wide-ranging thought is no doubt a further reason why his critical ideas are today less known than his name.

When Alloway published his article "Whatever Happened to the Frontier?" in *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, he was just beginning his career in the United States. In 1961, he moved from Great Britain to the US to teach at Bennington College, and then to become senior curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (where he remained until 1966).

"Can the art of the twentieth century usefully be treated geographically?" Thus began Alloway's essay, in which he outlined a geographical approach to art.³ The reply should be self-evident, since art history traditionally classifies works of art by country as well as period - but political borders and cultural boundaries are highly complex and fluid. Geography itself cannot be taken as a given.⁴ The use of a central trope from geography provided Alloway with a method of critical analysis regarding the value of art, and enabled him to privilege features such as expansiveness in scope. This is particularly interesting, and perhaps inevitable, considering that his move to the US was also a shift from the periphery of the art scene to its centre. Europe was either statically confined to its pre-war memories or divided by post-war antagonisms. This sense of isolation, both geographic and generational, in post-war England led to the founding of the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1947 in London, and the later appearance of Independent Group. Ironically, this move also represented the fulfillment, in geographical terms, of Alloway's enthusiastic decade-long commitment to American visual culture, as the British intelligentsia accused Alloway and the Independent Group of 'Americanisation'. However, when he theorised the term "aesthetics of plenty", "plenty" was a way of referring to abundance, the European forms of which could never be confused with American standards.5 For an "aesthetics of plenty", with its energetic multiplicity of styles and undaunted consumer mobility, is appropriate to a "non-depressive-based culture".

Alloway's essay is astonishingly contemporary in its purview and could gain a new currency. Substitute the names of artist and locations, and the text would be completely relevant to the art scene today. It begins with the problem of a peripheral biennale, then develops topics that have gained prominence via the rhetoric of the 1990s art world: internationalisation-globalisation, grey areas, identity, biennale culture, etc. However, this paradigmatic text is no doubt more relevant thanks to the path-breaking issues that are raised, than how it resolves them. In substance, Alloway's essay could be read as a prescient alternative to the postcolonialist critics of the art world running in the 1990s. With reason, these have contested the validity of the art world's Eurocentric claims, asserting the truths of hybridity, multiculturalism, cross-cultural transfer, diaspora.

But this project is dependent on a territorialised binary structure: the West contained within a centre called Euro-America, and its 'Other', the periphery, that is the Rest-Of-The-World. If the deconstruction of Eurocentrism – with Europe understood as the repository of the universal and good – still seems an increasingly complicated political and sociological project, such a project perhaps can or should be conducted within another framework. It would be preferable to demonstrate in what manner a very defined space – for instance, Euro-America – is organised into a hierarchy, and so is itself bound within the dialectic of centre and periphery. Alloway's essay demonstrates that there are peripheral artistic scenes within what the supporters of postcolonialism have identified as the 'centre'. In this sense, this text provides a way to challenge the culturalist North vs. South view; and the outcome would be the mise en abîme of the centre-periphery scheme. No doubt Alloway would rather insist: "[...] when town mouse and country mouse receive day-to-day, month-to-month

information at the same rate, it is impossible to maintain the former etiquette of priority – centre and periphery lose their distinctive character in an efficient aesthetics of plenty".

Whatever Happened to the Frontier?8

By Lawrence Alloway

Can the art of the twentieth century usefully be treated geographically? For example, is there a quality that separates art produced in Minnesota from art produced, say, on the West Coast of America? Is American art, as such, different from European art and, if so, are those differences embodied equally in the art of Minnesota and New York? There are various possibilities of geographical ranking which can be listed in terms of diminishing area: 1) international art, global, pervasive, and encompassing; 2) continental or national art, the limits of which coincide with tariff boundaries and the rights of citizenship; and 3) local and regional styles, within countries. The Minnesota Biennale presents an occasion to raise questions about the relation between regional, national, and international art – a topic close to present attempts to locate specifically American properties in recent American art.

The main influence on geo-cultural art criticism is the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner who developed, in the late nineteenth century, a theory of the influence of the frontier on American character and institutions. "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier", he wrote, and argued that the frontier experience produced a "practical inventive turn of mind", "restless nervous energy", and "dominant individualism". The idea of Turner's that "the West, at bottom, is a form of Society, rather than an area", that the West is you and me, is influential, still. Consider the following quotation from William Carlos Williams: "For Boone, at least, was not a romantic, losing himself in the 'mystery' of the forest. He was a technical genius of the woods". Williams is using Daniel Boone to define *the* American quality. The use of the Coonskinner as a model for the behaviour of American artists by Harold Rosenberg continues the frontier image, as does John W. McCoubrey's declaration: "Our art is possessed by the spaciousness and emptiness of the land itself". His proposal is that the big country produces big pictures. (Will the addition of Hawaii and Alaska compensate for the shrinking effect of efficient communications across the continent?)

The definition of America in terms of geographical metaphors is usually accompanied by a fixed image of Europe, one that can be summed up by a (European) poet's line: "Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets". Much of the dialogue between the two continents, as conduced in literary and art criticism, depends on some such polar imagery. Europe is identified with Rimbaud's ancient parapets, a stationary position to be defended, and the United States is identified with a mobile frontier (the East, the mid-West, the Pacific, Outer Space).

However, what of the supposed universality of art? Is this replaced by the concept of antithetical continental styles, one old, one new, one a response to the wilderness, the other a response to cultural overcrowding (i.e., Europe's many monuments)? Works of art do not

need to be translated; they are always perceived in the original. Even a reproduction has more one-to-one references to its original than the best verbal translation. The presentational immediacy of the work of art as an organised, visible pattern is inescapable. It is true that the work may be hard to decipher, but it is not in a foreign language, even though other social customs and assumptions may have contributed to its formation. Even if we doubt the universality of art, it is demonstrably international in scope. Art is, at least, mobile.

It is true that Japanese, Italian and American art, for example, reveal considerable differences from one another. However, the differences are the result not so much of national characteristics, insinuating themselves into the actions of men, as of different choices and interests. These are shaped by the present state of information about art in each country and by the personal use made by the artist of the common store of knowledge. It is true that the experience of the artist is affected by his national and regional experiences, but these appear as objective historical influences, rather than as manifestations of pervasive hidden moods and patterns.

Because of the efficiency of our communications, art circulates immediately: the Japanese knew of Franz Kline's painting, and were discussing its relation to calligraphy by 1952, when it was only three years old, for instance. Cases of such prompt cultural crossovers are continual today. Instant diffusion is at least as old as Seurat's Neo-Impressionism which, centred in Paris, collected Italian, Danish, American followers in no time flat. Similarly, pre-World War I Futurism moved with the mails and the passenger trains. Even primitive Sunday painters, from different countries, reveal, when put together, shared formal characteristics (such as linear outlines, enumerative handling of details, etc.). Thus, knowingly aimed for, or naïvely arrived at, shared patterns emerge; an international art seems unavoidable. All that is needed is enough artists doing a certain kind of art for a stylistic character to appear statistically, even if not by intention.

An exhibition like the Minnesota Biennale would not, if I am right, be likely to reveal a regional style of much intensity, unless, as with the American Scene Painters of the thirties, it was consciously willed and sought. The individuality of the works of art will be attributable to the uniqueness of the artist, rather than to topography or the *genius loci*. They will be connectable to other works of art, both as echoes and modifications of international style and as parallels to other artists with a similar relation to the central body of art. The important elements in any assessment of artists, then, are the artist as a unique human being, and the work of art in relation to the broad lines of international art. A unifying factor is that art is basically an urban activity, and never more so than since the nineteenth century has it been centred on the big cities. Even artists who work in the country draw on urban traditions of style and depend on urban distribution centres for their art. Thus, national and regional style is dependent, art least, partially, on the urban and international style-outlines. This priority of the cities, however, is not tyrannical or conformity-inducing, since diversity is part of the essential condition of urban art. Variety of choice operates in art, as in entertainment and other services.

The American frontier, then, in answer to enquiries about what happened to it, got eroded by the same internationalism and by the same communications revolution that exploded national boundaries in the arts of Europe. Frontier theory is as nostalgic today as any national revival theories. It is as prone to irony as, say, Sir Herbert Read who once wrote, apropos the Dutch painter Appel, that Holland was the country of Van Gogh. Personally, when I look at Appel I can't help thinking that Holland was the country of Mondrian. And so on.

Author's Note

Lawrence Alloway (1926-1990) was an art critic and curator who worked first in London as an early member of the groundbreaking Independent Group, and was associated with ICA from 1954-60. After moving to the US, he worked for a period as Curator at the Guggenheim Museum, and wrote for *Artforum* and *The Nation*. His principal essays are anthologised in (ed.) Richard Kalina, Imagining the Present: Context, Content and the Role of the Critic (Routledge, 2006, New York).

Acknowledgements

Quotations by Frederick Jackson Turner are from *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1893) and *The Problem of the West* (1896); by William Carlos Williams from *America and Alfred Stieglitz* (1934); and by John McCoubrey from *American Tradition in Painting* (1963). For "Coonskinners", see Harold Rosenberg's *The Tradition of the New* (1959). I thank Georges Braziller for allowing me to see an advance copy of Mr McCoubrey's book.

Notes

- Lawrence Alloway. "The Arts and the Mass Media". In Architectural Design 28, pp. 84-85 (1958). By 'Pop Art' he means the productions of the mass media understood as "one of the most remarkable and characteristic achievements of industrial society".
- See for instance Network: Art in the Complex Present (University of Michigan Research Press, 1984, Ann Arbor)
- In that way we could read "Network: The Art World Described as a System" (Artforum, pp. 27-31, 1972)
 as a fortunate reply to Walter Benjamin's influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical
 Reproduction" (1936).
- 4. For further, and different, amplifications on the topic of the "geohistory of art", see Thomas Dacosta Kaufmann's Toward a Geography of Art (2004). Invoking Erwin Panofsky's essays on methodology, Kaufmann reminds us that space-time conceptualisations within the discipline of art history have usually claimed that stylistic changes are as inherently linked to region/location as to relative chronology.
- 5. The phrase "aesthetics of plenty" comes from Alloway's essay "The Long Front of Culture", in Cambridge Opinion 17 (1959); reprinted in Modern Dreams: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Pop (The Clocktower Gallery, MIT Press, 1988), pp. 31-33. For a retrospective account, see (ed.) David Robbins, The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty (MIT Press, 1990, Cambridge/London), pp. 49-54.

- 6. The term *mise* en abîme is originally from the French, and translates as 'placing into into infinity' or 'placing into the abyss'. In common usage, it describes the visual experience of standing between two mirrors, seeing an infinite proliferation of one's image. In Western art, *mise* en abîme is a formal technique in which an image contains a smaller copy of itself, the sequence appearing to recur infinitely. In film, the meaning of term *mise* en abîme is similar to the artistic definition, but also includes the idea of a 'dream within a dream'. For example, a character awakens from a dream and later discovers that he/she is still dreaming. Activities similar to dreaming, such as unconsciousness and virtual reality, are also described as *mise* en abîme. In literary criticism, *mise* en abîme is a type of frame story, in which the main narrative can be used to organise or encapsulate some aspects of shorter inset/embedded tales. In deconstruction, *mise* en abîme is used as a paradigm of intertextuality, asserting that language never quite reaches the foundation of reality because it refers in a frame-within-a-frame way to another language, which refers to another language, etc. The ability of computers to repeat a task infinitely has led to digital forms of *mise* en abîme: screensaver images that fragment and fly through cyberspace, interminably looping and coiling recursions, and so on.
- Lawrence Alloway. "The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty". In (ed.) David Robbins. op. cit., p. 52.
- 8. First published in *The Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin*, Vol. 52, No. 2, pp. 54-56 (1963).
- 9. The art critic Harold Rosenberg, a major advocate of Abstract Expressionism, asserted with regard to American painting that artists should maintain familiarity with the phenomenological elements of their field; should avoid developing fixed styles that then become new schools; and should continue to extend and transform the ideas that seem to have led to success. His "Parable of American Painting", Chapter 1 in his *The Tradition of the New* (1959), posits "Redcoatism" the tendency to "continue a previous style in a new location" as a problem for the 'new' man in America, and suggests: "[...] painting in this country has behaved as if it were elsewhere..."

As a counter to Redcoatism, Rosenberg's text offers "Coonskinnism", embodied in the 'new' heroes, the 'real' Americans who had adopted the anti-formal fighting style of the individual frontiersman/sharpshooter. Historically, "Redcoat soldiers were defeated by Indians and coonskinned trappers who, from behind the rocks and trees in their home ground of the wilderness, could easily pick off the Redcoats, who marched as if they were on a parade ground or on the meadows of a classical European battlefield... What defeated them was their skill... their too-perfected technique forbade them to acknowledge the chance topological phenomena..." For Rosenberg, "Coonskin doggedness is a major characteristic of America's most meaningful painters. There is not one – Copley, Audubon, Eakins, Ryder, Homer, Marin, Stuart Davis, de Kooning – in whom this quality is not predominant". The Coonskinner of the post-war period was the action painter who 'fought' improvisationally, within a canvas that became an 'arena' in which to act. The struggle of this encounter resulted in an image that had not been envisioned before the painting was complete. Rosenberg also indicates that when Coonskinners are successful and have secured their territory, they tend to transform into Redcoats and become less adaptive, trapped in their own brand of orthodoxy.

Up for Auction: A Devoted Communist's Labour of Love

ABHISHEK HAZRA

ebayaday (www.ebayaday.com) was a month-long serial exhibit, that used eBay (www.ebay.com) as a site – literally as well as conceptually. The project was initiated at 9 am PST (Pacific Standard Time) on 1 December 2006 and was closed on 1 January 2007. Though it is not possible to bid on the artworks anymore, one can still view them and their respective bidding histories on eBay or on the project website.

Curated by Rebekah Modrak, Aaron Ahuvia and Zackery Denfeld, ebayaday invited 25 artists to produce work that would respond to the spaces and practices of eBay. For many of the artists, eBay became the very material of the work that actively deployed the format of the eBay listing – item for sale, descriptive text and imagery, and placement within chosen categories – for its conceptual traction. The attempt was to challenge the idea that online auctions are primarily for the exchange of money for goods, and to figure out ways in which the space of the auction could be opened up for further dialogue, debate and perhaps even resistance.

One of the works that I offered was titled "Bengali Manuscript of Marx and Engel's *The Communist Manifesto*". The title gave a fair description of the actual work, as it was indeed a bound notebook in which someone had copied out by hand the entire Bengali translation of the text. The identity of this 'someone' was, however, kept hidden (or rather, unresolved); and I as an artist framed this handwritten artefact almost as a found object. Perhaps I had actually ferreted out this object from my network of Communist acquaintances – who, of course, shall remain unnamed.

By way of explanation, this is what I had provided under the header "Description" on my eBay page:

This is a handwritten manuscript of the Bengali translation of *The Communist Manifesto* authored by Marx and Engels. The author of this handwritten copy has expressed the desire to remain anonymous. However, he wishes to inform everyone that he remains steadfast in his complete dedication to the Communist cause.

The Bengali text from which this manuscript has been copied by hand is a translation from the version published by Progress Publishers, Moscow. The Bengali

copy has been done in a slim bound volume of the kind that is also popular among impecunious high school students in certain parts of India. The Bengali translation of *The Communist Manifesto* can be obtained very easily and at surprisingly low prices in West Bengal, India.

Bengal has had a democratically elected Communist government since 1977, although prior to that there has always been an important leftist, Marxist presence in the state. However, it is not the question of availability that had prompted the author to copy the entire manifesto by hand. It was a labour of love. He also wanted to anoint eBay with the holy presence of that great seer who actually spoke more about capitalism than about Communism.

I know that the practice of 'finding objects' has been fundamentally liberating for artists. It has been so for me too, but somehow for this particular object I was besieged by deep guilt for putting up for auction something that was not mine. I tried to console myself with conceptual lullabies, tried reminding myself that it was the gesture here that was important. And anyway the price was ridiculously low, at Rs 875. No one could accuse me of profit.

However, thanks to the low price and the inexorable capitalist logic of auctions, a couple of bids did happen. But, because the world is still a sphere and most of the trajectories traced on its surface are circular, the winning bidder eventually turned out to be a fellow artist from Bangalore. It was a very different scenario with the winning bidder for my other work in the ebayaday project – the one where I sold my own voice. For that work, there was an actual movement across geographies and contexts (http://www.ebayaday.com/12_22/12_22.htm)...

But anyway, let us return to the manifesto.

Soon after the auction went live, I received a number of e-mails requesting a meeting with the writer/copier of my manifesto. I had no other option but to plead complete ignorance in this particular matter of personal identity. At that point, I was not willing to share whatever information I had. Perhaps I was anxious to assert my authorial presence and wanted to underscore the fact that even though the act of copying out an entire book by hand was a commendable feat of endurance, what was important here was not endurance but art...

However, almost five months later as I write about this work again, although in a different context, I am willing to share whatever else I know of this anonymous copier of Communist manifestos. First of all, I don't know him personally, and his manifesto reached me through a long sequence of fortuitous encounters. All I know for sure is that he is somewhere in the business of teaching and training. When I got hold of the manifesto, I came across a URL, thinly pencilled onto the last page of his copied text. The URL turned out to be a blog. Since that blog is no longer active, I am sharing below what I have managed to salvage from some screenshots of the blog. Apart from this, I am also sharing some of the random comments that our copyist has scribbled in the margins of the manifesto. More than a subjective gloss on Marx and Engels' text, these comments deal

with the sinews of his own labour – his labour of love. These comments were originally in Bengali, which I have translated to the best of my ability.

In Lieu of a Name 01:

Six Avant-Garde Hats: Excerpts from a Pedagogue's Blog

18th November I 2005

Chance Dance

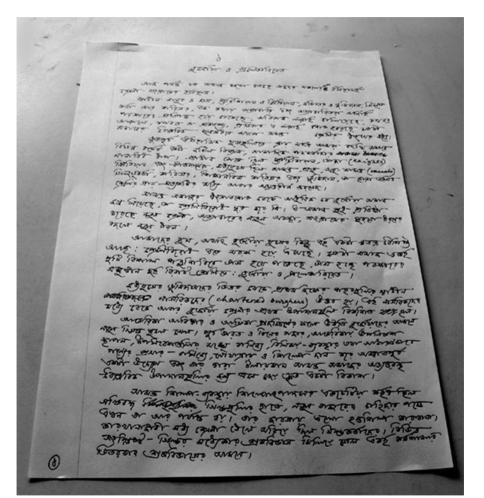
A very warm thank you to everyone who attended the Innovative Innovation course. It has been an extremely rewarding experience for us. We look forward to offering this course again in the next semester. This blog, however, will continue to be active. We will end this post with a quote from the brilliant essay that Kampankan Gupta turned in for his final assignment.

"Never underestimate the value of chance encounters in precipitating massively bottomline boosting innovations. In fact, one of my key learnings from this course has been that
chance encounters are too important to be left to chance alone. One has to go out of one's
way to programme and engineer the possibility of these chance encounters. How could
someone like Maxim Asymptotsky maintain his avant-garde status till the very end of his
long and successful career as a visual artist? By constantly reinventing his own innovation
process cycle. And how did he manage to do that? Simply by replenishing his idea database
with memes borrowed from the widest possible spectrum of people, places and things.
When he was struggling with his crisis as a mid-career artist, with allegations of elitism
flying thick and fast, with whom did he spend an entire summer? Not an art dealer or a
museum director or a fellow artist but with a hydrologist who specialised in ground water
prospecting. The hydrologist taught him to pick out clues from Fracture Trace Analysis of
stereo-aerial photographs. However, within a fortnight Maxim could predict better than the
photographs by simply pressing his ear to the ground. The popular turn in Maxim's practice
happened soon after."

7th November I 2005

Vanishing Presence

Backed up by her precocious forays into the world of optics, Mashimako Bankahashi was able to figure out that unlike the protagonist in Wells' novel, a truly invisible man would also have to be blind. Human vision implies refraction of the light at one's retina, while on the other hand, invisibility implies that one's material body offers an unimpeded passage of light, *sans* refraction. A number of artists picked up this concept from Bankahashi's



curatorial note and went on to collaborate on a large work that played on the notion of visibility. Electrically powered and composed of an array of rotating parts, *Large Disc* was a giant assemblage that slowly made itself invisible once it was switched on. *Large Disc* went on to become one of the most influential works of the century. Architects were particularly inspired by it and built entire housing complexes that made themselves visible only to their own inhabitants.

2nd November I 2005

It Is Not Only about Ghosts

Our last session seems to have generated a lot of confusion. We introduced planchette sessions with dead avant-garde artists as one among a range of activities designed to supplement the main reading material. While we agree that the planchette as a method of communion with the dead has remained a controversial technology, a thorough scientific refutation of it has also never been achieved. Even if we withhold our final verdict on the effectiveness of planchette methodology, you will perhaps agree with us that it works quite powerfully as a simulation strategy that convinces someone with regard to inhabiting the subjectivity of a 'historical' person. And as some of you had pointed out, the ghosts were also invoked to help you guys wean off trading in futures: while it is true that the coveted IPO (Initial Public Offering) will happen in the future, it can never happen if you continue to exist only in the future.

25th September I 2005

Innovative Innovation: Learning from Looking Elsewhere

Course Name: INVIL 101

Welcome to the informal blog for Innovative Innovation, the new course offered as part of the larger Expanding Business Practice programme at the OvenGrist School of Business (OSB). In this course we will try learning from successful innovation models in a domain that is generally considered to be quite removed from the worlds of software and retail: the world of avant-garde visual artists. Since we all recognise the impending catastrophe that is global warming, you will perhaps also realise that over-exploitation of our natural resources is a sure recipe for disaster. Now, to stretch the analogy a little further: we really need to stop mining the Google success story as the holy grail of corporate innovation, and be more innovative in our search for innovation.

In Lieu of a Name_02:

Labour and Love

Every morning before the distractions of the day set in, I try to copy at least two pages of the manifesto. I clear my table, position the original manifesto against the adjacent wall and begin copying. I know it might sound strange, but it was really difficult to get hold of a copy of the Bengali translation. Perhaps if I was in Kolkata, it might have been easier. Anyway, when I called up the College Street branch of People's Publishing, they said it was out of stock. I tried some of their other outlets – same story. I then thought of asking my parents to pick up a copy and courier it to me. On second thoughts, discarded the idea: didn't want to put them under any risk. Well, eventually the internet comes to the rescue. Some of the *juktakshars* (compound letters) are split in this online version, but it's okay.

Copying speed seems to be inversely proportional to hand-eye coordination. At least for me. The moment I try to copy a little faster, the sequence of words starts getting all mixed up. Suppose I am on the fifth word of the seventh line, which has a total of eight words. If I now try to speed up, my gaze will somehow slip onto a different line – say the fourth word of the ninth line. And only after copying out four or five words from the ninth line will the error register in mind. Now, if I am actually reading the text while copying, then why this lag in registering the error? Perhaps one shouldn't read while copying. Because as you are reading, your mind and your hand travel at markedly different speeds: so even as your mind is still processing the full import of the first five words in a sentence, your hand has already moved onto the sixth or seventh word.

When will this get over? Perhaps I don't want this to get over. Perhaps I want to go on copying. After the manifesto I could take up some Engels. I can never get over these classic Communist texts. And I have never enjoyed reading them in English. Somehow for me, the Bengali text sounds and feels more real, more powerful. It's almost as if I can hear Marx's voice. Or is this some form of cheap nostalgia? Because Bengali was the language in which I first read them. I remember, after my Standard VIII exams, I noticed a book on Dialectical Materialism with Badal-sir, my maths tuition teacher, and I had immediately borrowed it from him. Just the magical ring of those sonorous words – *Dwandamulak Bastubad* – was enough to get me hooked.

Why am I doing this in the first place? Because I like doing it — it is my own small way of paying respects to this great, transformative text of the 20th century. But it is also to teach them a lesson. Just because I happen to be in the business of corporate training, they cannot simply assume that I do not read Marx anymore. Soon after I started copying, I suddenly remembered Gobardhan-da after many years. In the small town that I grew up in, Gobardhan-da was the local artist. He was also a committed party worker. For some reason, when we were in Standard IV, he was suspended from the party. No one knew why. However, it was rumoured that the party bosses were not happy with his enthusiasm for a kind of 'degenerate' painting that basically involved chucking paint onto the canvas. Gobardhan-da was deeply distressed at this decision. But he soon figured out an innovative way to atone for his alleged sins.

Now, it was widely known that local party supremo was a big fan of the pioneering 19th. century reformer and educationist, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. His enthusiasm for Vidyasagar was, however, a bit parochial, as he also happened to hail from the same village as Vidyasagar. Gobardhan-da decided to use Vidyasagar as his comeback strategy. He deployed the full force of his considerable skills in portraiture to come up with a portrait of Marx that immediately reminded one of Vidyasagar. To appreciate the enormity of this achievement, just bear in mind the fact that Vidyasagar was clean-shaven, and though not exactly bald, his high forehead extended well into middle section of his head. The best part about Gobardhan-da's portrait was that it didn't look like a parody; and somehow, through the resolute features nesting within the dense thicket of Marx's beard, he had successfully managed to channel Vidyasagar's characteristic gaze. Gobardhan-da then made a long list of all the party sympathisers in town and worked out a daily ritual. Every morning he would make a fresh copy of his Marx-Vidyasagar portrait and deliver it personally to one or other sympathiser's house. He would then request the sympathiser to put the portrait up in his drawing room. In exchange, he always offered his artistic services, completely free of charge. Sometimes, if the sympathiser happened to have a school-going kid, Gobardhan-da would readily help the kid with biology drawings, as a token of gratitude. After almost two years of this daily ritual. Gobardhan-da was readmitted into the party.

I have to admit that this last comment about Gobardhan-da really took me by surprise: the small industrial township where I grew up had a drawing teacher quite like Gobardhan-da. And like Gobardhan-da, he too was forced to leave the party after a bitter quarrel over cultural policy. In fact, so strong was my response to the Gobardhan-da incident that I became quite desperate to meet this fascinating copyist, this 'someone' who remains steadfast in his complete dedication to the Communist cause in spite of being a corporate trainer...

However, the data streams had unfortunately all run dry. Refusing to get tied down by the imperatives of mere information gathering, I started to analyse my copyist's handwriting – the only data set that was happily more than abundant. I still maintain a strong suspicion

of dubious subjects like graphology, but you should understand, dear reader, that in this particular instance I had no other option. Not that I bothered myself with so-called graphological procedures. I devised my own investigation methodology.

Essentially, this consisted of close observation. I photographed the pages of the manifesto in great detail. Remembering the copyist's own daily routine, I too photographed the pages in the early hours of the morning. This activity was a true pleasure, as I was completely drawn into the dialectical oscillation of text and texture. Even though I am familiar with the kind of lavish granular detail that the macro mode in recent cameras is capable of capturing, I was completely taken aback by the rich terrain of sinuous shapes that opened up before me. This was writing made material in an almost elementally palpable manner – a complex conversation between ink, paper and pressure, articulated through an almost endless array of fascinating forms.

There were all these minute tendrils of ink seeping out of letterforms that demanded just a slightly more intense pressure – for example, the point in the letter *kaw*, where the left diagonal changes direction into an upright vertical... And there was also this fine patina of paper hair that was spread all over the writing surface... One could clearly see how the moving pen had to ruthlessly flatten that downy fibrillation in its onward textual trajectory. In fact, on an even closer examination, I soon realised that this flattened paper hair was actually quite a faithful record of the varying levels of pressure unique to a particular handwriting.

It was like watching someone write.

In thus locating presence within the hidden folds of a technology that has historically been seen as the very embodiment of absence, I knew I had set myself up on a trajectory of presence-making: I had no option but to start copying my copyist's handwriting.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, it didn't take me that long to master his hand. But what use is an empty hand if the words written are merely my own?

I had to think like him too.

Undeterred by the paucity of my resources, I went back to his blog posts and marginalia. Obdurately mining the reluctant interstices of that text, I was eventually successful in coaxing out some wisps of authorial vapour: I started getting a better sense of his theoretical position on Marxism. I realised for instance, that his extremely significant comment about how for him Bengali translations of Marxist texts have been more powerful and real than the English versions has to be read as an indicator of his engagement with the larger critical project of 'provincialising' European Marxism.

I had to know more from him. What did he think of Marx's writings on India, for example?

I decided to write him a letter. Of course, I had to address it to myself – I scribbled my office address on the pale blue rectangle of the inland letter form. I asked him to reply to my home address. And sure enough, after a week, a densely scribbled inland letter was waiting for me on my doorstep. It was a detailed response on the dangers of a naïve

provincialising project that disbands the historical figure of Marx in order to excavate latent forms of Marxism in all sorts of petty local subaltern mutinies.

I had multiple points of disagreement with his formulation, and wrote back to him immediately.

The conversation still continues, albeit intermittently... And I have rediscovered the joys of the inland letter: limited space does indeed compel one to organise and structure one's thoughts more efficiently.

A postscript: I am really sorry I couldn't share the more detailed photographs of the manifesto with the readers of this Reader. Perhaps I am being silly, but those images are to me just a bit too personal.

Do accept my apologies...

action things werens care meets were and more tempor or own outsise wants , of cracking contains and soft granters come after single and cool was a wanter all also tends at make Toronfor one greek (trees defent a marines) severe covers or sustain source (source source (some subar) arous Commen onto your one ever uner magazia or wayar success that she promount was some wie gone. ago set Beauth mondrate tes seasing se game. ONE SERVE CONFOR CARBON SERVER SERVER LESSER LESSERVERS Trogro no unanimoro - madrifico esta la grana eresto सिर्मित से मार्थिय अविवृत्त अवितृत्व अवितृ जात्र और सुर्मित । जार्ड्स suffe muse anything our was signer topics arrang and a Described alge aleus and Alabertarente "schor samp mas langual desen avent state i agein total transf their tentre to absorbe young 3 मिर्कारमा माम कार की मार्ग है। देन मार्ग केर मान किरा with ough the and shoustone promites anche on you that creat मामायार कार्यात कार्यात कार्यात मामाया कराय क्षेत्र मार्थिक स्वाप्त मार्थिक accuse the one locate con astering who to market somere year am sin Relati versite an zamenio segio actualism' con of Bonk 3 Events orsular mais allo dille si aling The ME MELLEN SETTER SPRETE SUBJECT LINE MENENGE when stock of dolgans bygging duly and - nage agent ! sen, saw a sixtyler raisones and to talky dely SM) 343 stem day sence 421 yant anout anyes tall

Frontier's Virgule/Virgule's Frontier

K. Narayana Chandran

/1/

24 April 2007. 10.15 am. Examination Hall. Room 42, New Humanities Building, The University of Hyderabad. Twenty-seven fourth-semester graduate students write a four-hour examination for a six-credit course titled 'EN 540: New Literatures in English'. A small group in absolute captivity, whose forbearance could make angels weep. Isn't there a respectable word for what I am supposed to be doing — invigilate/proctor/mind an exam? I turn a virgule/solidus among students bending over answer-books, writing essays on politics/history, the native/other, nature/culture, Ariel/Prospero... I look over a pair of diligently hunched shoulders and read a sentence beginning: "While her looks are scanned by powerful computer graphic [sic], an electronic validation of reality/presence..." Nearly every examinee in this room has been busy scoring lines between roots and stems, concepts aseptically distanced from what they might mean, involving an *either* and *or*. Virgules all over the place.

/2/

Knowledge can be terribly isolating. Nothing like Common Knowledge. The more you know, the more isolated you become. There may be fewer people to talk to. Inside an exam hall there is absolutely no talking. Another frontier for students, perhaps the ultimate one for the most studious, where Pass/Fail, Entrance/Exit, Knowledge/Ignorance, Ease/Tension often obtain, paired and virguled. There you wish you could pass through mirrors. No one passes the same exam twice, a Herakleitosian thought that neither depresses nor elevates. For the same questions, the evaluators prize different answers. Hence the paper-setters' unyielding imperatives that precede the text of the questions: Consider/Argue/Elaborate/Explain/Discuss/Adumbrate... *Consider*, I learn from an unabridged Dictionary at hand, really means "see stars together as constellations, in relation to one another". Consider using that word again in a question paper. Are our students here seeing stars?

/3/

What is a virgule? Why does it surface at lines and thresholds, the frontiers it makes and guards? The New Frontier Thesis appears in nearly all contemporary Style Manuals. I quote from *Oxford Guide to Style* by R. M. Ritter (OUP, 2002):

5.12.1 Solidus

This symbol (/) is known by many terms, such as the *slash*, *stroke*, *oblique*, *virgule*, *diagonal*, and *shilling mark*. [Mr. Ritter missed here a big opportunity in showing his clientele how the virgule works: slash/stroke/oblique/virgule/diagonal/shilling mark.] Although, like the bracket not a true mark of punctuation, it is in general used like a dash to express a relationship between two or more things, and similarly is set close up to the matter it relates to on either side. The most common use of the solidus is as a shorthand to denote alternatives, as in *either/or*, *his/her*, *on/off*, *masculine/feminine/neutral*; consequently *the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut area* signifies the area of either New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut, rather than their combined area. Solidi are much abused, however, and are sometimes misused for *and* rather than *or*; hence it is normally best in text to spell out the alternatives explicitly (*his or her*, *the New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut area*).

/4/

The hyphen used to be good enough some 30 years ago. To divide, at least, was not to take away. Contrasts, distinctions and exclusions were as circumspectly made then as they apparently are today. The only virgules I recall from those days belonged to datelines (11/5/1973 or some such). Quite frankly, we hadn't heard of 'binaries' *manqué*. Postmodern discourses discovered the beauty of the virgule when it helped hold at bay the modernist threat of inadvertent mergers and flows. In strict discursive terms, when either...or claims cannot be settled amicably at/across frontiers, the virgule offers a forthe-nonce, inexpensive, out-of-court settlement. Contested spaces are ever on the increase: Israel-Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, Cyprus, Sri Lanka – and within India, several regions and rivers, districts, towns, villages, even families. We are not free from the passions we assail.

/5/

A Theo Angelopoulos masterstroke of such unsettled frontiers is *The Suspended Step of the Stork* (1991, colour, 126 min.). A young reporter stationed at a border village populated by refugees meets a Greek politician. It's nobody's village. Frontiers, one fancies, must be like that. Two countries are evidently at war, but unlike our Kashmir, there are no proprietary claims by either country, or the inhabitants there. The politician, who lives among them *incognito*, has made a home of his unknown whereabouts. No one cares, either. He loves to imagine himself as a stork, standing with one leg suspended in air (a virgule par excellence) on the border, perched between life and death.

/6/

Preferences are often virguled: coffee/tea; 2-/3-bedroomed apartments; 4-/5-star hotels... You could choose, if you have the resources. Frontiers are there for you to cross. You could make or unmake them, once or many times. Reversibility is the equivalent of choice. So is the return. From the inside to the outside. The virgule lets you imagine the frontier as adjacency – *that* is adjacent to *this*. The horizontal dash used to suggest this, perhaps, but the virgule could mark the vertical plane better. At the frontier, *up*s and *down*s had better be known as such. The right-leaning forward virgule mimes the onward march more comfortingly for the reader than dashes that break the flow parenthetically – as here – and suggest back-and-forth movement: <—>>. The virgule, like the resolute staff gripped by the Mahatma on the march to Dandi, always fares forward, and promises a determined stride across textual frontiers.

/7/

At a little height of thought, is the virgule a divider absolute? Not really. Look at how smart poets outsource metaphors to do the work of words they routinely underpay. When worked into prose, lines from poems are marked by virgules, but in poems virgules don't appear – they hover unseen between/among line-endings, eternally open frontiers that let lines run on/off to a finish. Samuel Menashe calls this poem *Eyes* for no other reason:

Eyes have their day Before the tongue That slips to say What they see at once Without word play, Betraying no one

Be deaf, dumb, a dunce With cleft palate Bereft of speech – Open eyes possess That wilderness No tongue can breach.

The tongue is preempted from being the virgule it is, for the eyes have already spliced words and images, shared essences that bespeak the fatuousness of all speech at frontiers, tying the virgule-tongue to order. Since borders order disorder, the eyes are privileged with information the tongue can't process that readily. (The exercise in our classes is another matter: *Read* Eyes *aloud*. Reading aloud/reading allowed, thanks to the tongue.). Maybe there *aren't* frontiers, any at all, in ocular metaphorics. An enabling thought Janet Lewis provides by writing *Early Morning*, a splendid frontier poem to my mind:

The path
The spider makes through the air,
Invisible,
Until the light touches it.

The path
The light takes through the air,
Invisible,
Until it finds the spider's web.

Before such mutuality, all frontiers bow in absolute reverence. Who might stand athwart this light for life?

/8/

Unwarily, writers sometimes get in the way of this light, and rue for life. Gertrude Stein, for one, was indefatigably pushing of the frontiers of her self to see which life was indeed hers. Averse to writing her life/autobiography, she wrote The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (1932), a classic and unique instance in literary history of frontier-barging in which a friend's territorial life and manners were so brazenly invaded and colonised. Alice Toklas, Stein's spouse for the many years they lived in Paris, was also her stenographer/social secretary/housekeeper/cook/gardener/and sometimes a veterinarian for Stein's dogs. Now Stein believed, and famously said: "You are you because your little dog knows you..." If that were so, why did Stein have to draw upon Alice Toklas's life in order to write her own? For someone who cared more than most writers of her generation about self/identity, the conclusion of *The Autobiography* sounds puckishly disingenuous: "About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were going to write autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you". And that became Stein's life, with some Toklas in it. Stein/Toklas is a classic literal and textual coupling whose propositional virgule first declared the death of the author/authorised biography/autobiography.

/9/

The next in line, again famously, was Jorge Luis Borges. The public/private frontier in the case of his short story *Borges y Yo/*Borges and I (English trans. 1969) is the hardest to cross because Borges insists on splitting the lark and listening to its song.

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to... I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me... I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. Little by little, I am giving over everything to him... It is

no effort for me to confess that he has achieved some valid pages, but those pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to him, but rather to the language and to tradition. Besides, years ago I tried to free myself from him and went from the mythologies of the suburbs to the games with time and infinity, but those games belong to Borges now and I shall have to imagine other things. Thus my life is a flight and I lose everything and everything belongs to oblivion, or to him...

The *I* of *Borges and I* is a classic virgule – forward-slanting/backward looking, and forging toward a new confusion of his understanding, and a new understanding of our confusion; the text concludes: "*I cannot tell which one of us is writing this page*". From Borges, however, we learn that a frontier is always *provisional*, implying futurity (*pro-vision* = looking ahead) as well as tentativeness. Who isn't provisional at crossings? Paul Giamatti playing Harvey Pekar in *American Splendor* (2003) walks the crisscrossing frontier lines of Cleveland, assuring no one that he is playing a part or living a life. Those who learn nothing from crossing are condemned to repeat it. Pretty much like the apocryphal painter who used to leave his paintings unsigned, and eventually composed a painting made up entirely of his signatures.

/10/

"Man-woman relationship", a mournful banality in submitted term papers, got no better through the year, despite a teacher telling a class of 27 students, two of them married before their postgraduate prime, that there are more things to coupled relationships than meets the early adult eye. They feel a loss, as the teacher surely had felt, from "knowledge and experience", as if words fell out of language, intimacy, private grace. But that's no real help when students quote endless scenes from texts in which relationships just begin to bloom and promise to bear fruit. And then, on a day otherwise unremarkable for anything half as brilliant, a smart 21-year-old discovered the virgule: Man/Woman relationship. The teacher suddenly sat up to appreciate this entelechic move. The commonplace now elevated to the nobility of a new-world thought reverberates like footfalls in a great space. Muriel Rukeyser's Myth (1935) retells how:

Long after, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx.

Oedipus said, "I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognise my mother?" "You gave the wrong answer", said the Sphinx.

"But that was what made everything possible", said Oedipus.

"No", she said. "When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman".

"When you say Man", said Oedipus, "you include women too. Everyone knows that".

She said, "That's what you think".

Would it please the Sphinx to see a virgule in the answer to its riddle about the legs? It's odd to have got so far, says the student, and *not* know.

/11/

Anything thrown into Rushdie becomes Rushdiean; and so has the old fable of the Simurgh or divine phoenix, a Sufi symbol of the death of the old self and resurrection of the new. immortalised in Fariduddin Attar's Mantig at-Tayr/ The Conference of the Birds, published in 1177. Rushdie's Tanner Lecture on Human Values, delivered at Yale in 2002, was titled "Step Across This Line" – his longest piece thus far on frontiers, what they are, how and why one must cross them, and what great stories still await telling. While most birds decline the Simurgh's invitation to a gathering on Mount Oáf, some 30 birds brave various hazards and reach the peak, only to discover that there was no one there, no conference, no welcome. "The Simurgh wasn't there. After all they had endured, this was a displeasing discovery. They made their feelings known to the hoopoe who had started the whole thing off; whereupon the hoopoe explained to them the punning etymology which revealed their journey's secret meaning. The name of the god broke down into two parts: 'si', meaning 'thirty' and 'murgh', which is to say, 'birds'. By crossing those frontiers, conquering those terrors and reaching their goal, they themselves were now what they were looking for. They had become the god they sought". Rushdie was standing before a distinguished audience who needed hardly any assurance at all that no virgule (si/murgh) was necessary to participate in the experience of unity within the domain of parable, unlike our current mode of transmission and reception, fragmented in the manner of mobile text messages across a million potholes of incomprehension. That small lesson in etymology nevertheless is for life. At frontiers, lessons are no shame. Everyone learns, everyone has a decent backlog.

/12/

1.45 pm. Style accommodated to subject, means to ends, idiom to intention, answers fill pages, the scripts secured by twine pile up one by one on my desk. The hall is now practically empty. Three diehards remain. (I announce the last 15 minutes.) The last three examinees aren't so much writing as scribbling up corrections, straightening things out... The last frontier reached, nearly crossed, they're giving a once-over to what has been crossed/out – might as well, for what they will turn away from for good is a *past*, no buyback policy. A good respite, for now, from all metaphorics/allegorics, codings/decodings... who knows, perhaps for all life to come? Amid the hall's mild clatter and thud, the flicking, push-back screeches of chairs, deep breaths, the slow shuffling of feet, and the rising flurry

of the corridor, I recall Mark Strand's *Keeping Things Whole* (1980) a poem on/of moment/movement (both from Latin *moveo*, 'to move'):

In a field
I am the absence
Of field.
This is
always the case.
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

We all have reasons for moving. I move to keep things whole.

Let's rename this *A Song of the Virgule*. Strange, isn't it, that Strand echoes the Gita, apparently standing before a U-Haul truck? But then, did not the Gita make the first binaries popular – the slayer/slain, foretelling the rule of the virgule in the coloniser/colonised? You cannot keep things whole by punctuating yourself so inexorably. You have reasons for moving. But first let I/the ego pass. Look at it again. Sanskrit, first person, singular: *Aham*. Incredible. We should have done well to shed *that* virgule right at the frontier.

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No one slips by or through the frontier of *aham/*I. The self-deluded are the first to learn this, unless mechanisms of denial overpower them. For the self believes in its gifts, enormous in the reckonings of imagination, against every piece of real and reasonable evidence that it has none.

The *Mahimandala Gita*, Chapter 66, by Arakkhita Das: Notes towards a Translation

SAILEN ROUTRAY

Introduction

Arakkhita Das occupies a unique place in Orissa's rich tradition of saint-poets. He was born into the ruling family of the big *zamindari* (estates) of Badakhemundi in Ganjam district of coastal Orissa towards the end of the 18th century. Various sources place his year of birth between 1780 and 1788, more likely towards the later date. He grew up in tumultuous times, when the British were finally gaining ascendancy in Orissa; and perhaps his renunciation from his privileged context took place at about the same time as the British conquest of Orissa in 1803. But he seems to have left home and taken formal *sanyas* (permanent renunciation of worldly life and the status of a householder) after the death of his father in a battle with the British, and his uncle's subsequent ascent to the throne. He wandered around coastal Orissa for some time before settling on the Olasuni hill in Kendrapada district; he never left it again (Das, 2004).

Das left behind no disciples and no sect. Very few details about his life are available. He stands at an odd angle to the spiritual tradition of Orissa, and simultaneously symbolises a bridge as well as a rupture from the tradition. On one hand, his work marks the apogee of the tradition of saint-poets whose members include such stalwarts such as Jagannatha Das (who translated the Shrimad Bhagabat Puranam into Oriya) and Balaram Das (who translated the Ramayana into Oriya). This tradition represents a synthesis of extant spiritual systems, as well as a conscious reformulation of the sacral in the idiom of the 'vernacular' that parallels other so-called 'bhakti' traditions elsewhere in India during in the same period. Yet perhaps the most distinctive aspect of this tradition was its absorption of bairayana (a popular form of Tantrik Buddhism which flourished in Orissa) symbolism and 'mysticism' into a predominantly Hindu formulation surrounding Lord Jagannatha (the deity at Puri, coastal Orissa), and not Hindu-Islamic syncretism as is generally formulated. Arakkhita Das' work foreshadows the later radical work of Bhima Bhoi (1855-1895), the author of texts such as Stuti Chintanani, Nirbeda Sadhana and Brahma Nirupana Gita. The most prominent disciple of Mahima Gosain (the founder of the Mahima religion popular among the subaltern groups of western Orissa and Chhatishgarh), Bhoi breaks with the extant Hindu spiritual traditions of Orissa through a complete negation of the authority of the Vedas.

However, Das makes a few greater 'transgressions' as well; for example, he denies the very existence of something like the transmigrating *atman* (soul or indestructible essence), as evidenced by this line from the translation of his work later in this essay: "...once a form dissolves it never returns, there is no birth after death..." He also denies the necessity of any conventional spiritual 'practice', and posits instead the necessity of a direct and almost childlike perception into the nature of reality.

Das left behind quite a voluminous amount of poetry that is yet to be properly catalogued and published in its entirety. His most popular work is titled *Mahimandala Gita* (The Gita of the Earth). It is quite a remarkable text for many reasons, the most important perhaps being the fact that within it we catch glimpses of Arakkhita Das as a person grappling with the same set of mundane and yet not-so-mundane existential problems that all humans have to confront, but ultimately managing to soar above them.

For me, though, the significance of this text lies tucked within the brief confines of Chapter 66. Most intriguingly, it includes three pages written in the tradition of Oriya 'prose' texts such as the *Chatura Binoda*, most probably written in the last quarter of the 18th century by Brajanatha Badajena (1730-1800), and the *Rudra Sudhanidhi* by Abadhuta Swami, written in the latter half of the 15th century.

From a vantage point within the tradition of 'modern' Oriya literature of the early 21st century, these texts are not written in prose at all; they are curious hybrids, wayward mongrels, creatures of the badlands of the frontier, that defy categorisation and refuse to be slotted as either prose or poetry. But if one compares these texts with the comparatively voluminous prose produced in Oriya in the latter half of the 19th century, one is struck by the lucidity and lightness of touch of the former when compared to the rigidity and staidness of the more 'modern' prose of the latter period.

This comparison has to be contextualised within a history in which the very syntax of Oriya prose was shaped by the activities of missionaries who attempted to standardise Oriya prose. The standardisation was attempted via the imitation of English models, and the process of imitation continued for quite a while. For instance, the word *prabandha* that in the pre-colonial period denoted a composition (sometimes in 'prose' but, more often than not, in 'poetry') came to mean that most European of all prose artefacts – the essay. In fact, these linguistic efforts involved a process of *translation* – not only of texts themselves, such as the Bible and other works crucial to the evangelical domain, but also of literary genres, forms and syntax.

Till very recently the debates in translation studies have been framed around the questions of meaning, authenticity and fidelity, and have ignored questions of power and history in the context of colonialism. Theorists such as Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) have tried to problematise this discourse by positing translation as a political act; this is done by expanding the notion of translation to include questions of language, representation and power in a very broad sense, and by attempts at liberating the practice of translation from the fidelity/betrayal binary.

But such a reading of translation both as discourse and process is hedged from the beginning by the limited historical horizon that it chooses to work under. Translation as a practice is not a colonial/Western invention. Most modern Indian languages have had a very strong tradition of translation; in fact, it may be argued that most modern Indian languages were configured as contemporary entities through sustained acts of translation. In the case of Oriya, two texts assume salience - a translation of the Mahabharata in the second half of the 15th century by Sarala Das (the pen name of Siddheswara Parida), and a translation of the Shrimad Bhagabata Puranam by Jagannatha Das (1490-1550). The former is the first substantial literary work in the language, whereas the latter work 'standardised' Oriya – it created a style so powerful, and asserted a reach so pervasive, that the language of the Bhagabata became the standard Oriva: and it so successfully appropriated a Sanskritic idiom and vocabulary in order to create a formal structure of linguistic usage, that most later writers were seduced into using it (Das, 1995). This translation was completely in verse and can be located as poetry, whereas the translation of the Mahabharata was in a metrical form called the dândi brutta that, despite being a verse form, enables a text written in it to be read as either prose or poetry. Later, Balarama Das used the same metrical form to translate the Ramayana into Oriya (Das, 2004).

Therefore, such processes of 'translation' were central to the formation of Oriya as a literary language; this can perhaps be tentatively generalised for other modern South Asian languages as well. It seems to be central to what can perhaps be termed as the 'translation effect' through which modern South Asian languages were standardised. This fact is glossed over in the perceptive discussion by the eminent American Sanskritist/South Asia scholar Sheldon Pollock on the formation of the 'cosmopolitan vernacular' towards the middle of the second millennium of the Christian era. Pollock offers the case of Kannada, and argues that from the beginnings of the last millennium on, regional kingdoms started to claim the political place earlier occupied by supra-regional empires. Sanskrit was the language of the empires, whereas the newly emergent regional kingdoms were characterised by well-developed vernacular literatures. Following this key observation, Pollock does not further theorise the relationship between language and power. He rightly points out that current interpretations are rooted in the context of capitalist modernity, and scholars may be accused of anachronism if contemporary discursive frames are imposed upon pre-modern phenomena. Pollock also astutely debunks the hypothesis that posits a correlation between the 'vernacularisation' of South Asia and the growing use of modern Indian languages by the emergent Bhakti/Sufi (popular Hindu/Muslim devotional) movements that supposedly challenged what is commonly known as Brahminism, and its fiercely entrenched liturgical and social orthodoxies (Pollock, 1998).

This is also borne out by the fact that despite the importance of the saint-poets, the most voluminous and classically 'literary' work (here it is pertinent to keep in mind the kavya/shastra dichotomy, texts that entertain versus texts that educate or instruct) was produced in Orissa in the pre-colonial period by the regional elites, who wrote kavyas in imitation of the Sanskrit models, yet precisely in opposition to the "Sanskrit Cosmopolis"

(Pollock's term for the manner in which Sanskrit was imbricated as a dominant aesthetic-political language across South and South-east Asia through its association with a family of political and social practices such as temple-building, etc., for nearly 10 centuries, starting with the third century of the first millennium; the "cosmopolis" is used as a counterpoise to the concept of empire for describing certain types of socio-political formations). In a bid to outperform the virtuosity and complexity of Sanskrit *kavyas*, local litterateurs produced ornate pieces that often dealt with heavily eroticised themes. The prose forged in the aftermath of the colonial encounter seems to have been a reaction to this corpus – and was, therefore, perhaps more amenable to fulfilling the task imitating contemporary English prose forms and genres, rather than drawing upon the extant tradition of Oriya 'prose'.

Thus, Chapter 66 of the *Mahimandala Gita* by Arakhitta Das lies in the twilight zone of the 'modern' division between prose and poetry, and functions as an exemplar by which to challenge the boundaries of such formal categories in literature. This particular example of Oriya 'prose' also lies towards the end of the tradition of which it is a part. Henceforth, we get prose that is as self-confessedly 'virile' as the English models that it tried to successfully imitate.

What follows is an *anuvada* (translation) of the three prose pages of Chapter 66. The original text is a palm-leaf manuscript; the rendition in the book I have translated from is a single extended paragraph, and I have more or less followed the sequence of the lines. I have translated the word *Brahman* as 'that', with italicisation and emphasis, in the interest of fluency as well as to avoid imposing the conceptual weight of monism that the word, which connotes a metaphysical absolute, is generally made to carry. This is also in consonance with the general Upanishadic practice of referring to *Brahman* as *tat*, commonly translated as 'that'. I have amended the syntax in order to try and build a mantra-like tonality and sustain an incantatory effect.

Anuvada

If one sees what can/should not be seen, if one builds/lifts what can/should not be built/lifted, if one does what can/should not be done, if one eats what can/should not be eaten, if one says repeatedly what can/should not be repeatedly said, if one, therefore, masters what can/should not be mastered; if one is able to do all this, then one may know that, through the filter of one's own experiences. Let us tell you what one does after one has known that through the filter of one's own experiences — one does not bother about what one eats and where one sleeps; one does not bother about the eye, the nose, the face, the ears and the organs for excretion, the five aspects of the psyche and the twenty-five prakritis, the eleven indriyas, the six great enemies and the three gunas; one does not bother about sickness, one does not bother about sin, non-sin, merit, non-merit, dharma, non-dharma, heaven, hell, the auspicious, and the inauspicious, truth, non-truth, greed, nongreed, kama, non-kama, the virtuous and the non-virtuous, gain, non-gain, essence, nonessence, vikaara and non-vikaara, jaati and non-jaati, the masculine and the non-masculine, the feminine and the non-feminine, the living and the non-living, the chanted and the un-

chanted. Listen! Having known that through the filter of one's own experiences, one never bothers with all these ever again. The embodied being, and the ultimate, Chandra, Surya, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Indra, Sachi, Yama, Kubera, Varuna, Nairuta, Brihaspati, the ten Dikpalas, the constellations, the clouds, the heavens, the earth and the nether worlds; water, fire, air, and the sky: listen, oh mind, one never bothers with any of these. The four Vedas, Yoganta, Vedanta, Siddhanta, Naganta; listen, O mind, one never practices any of these. Only if one knows *that* one does not bother with chanting, contemplation, worship, reflection, meditation, mantras, yogasutras, pilgrimage, austerities, and fasting. One does not bother with the numerous places of pilgrimage, the numerous fasts, the numerous styles of yoga, knowledge, meditations, devotions, contemplations, chantings, offerings, mantras, markings, substances, gods, chandis, ghosts and witches; listen, oh mind, one does not practice anything related to any of them, one does not fear them nor does one worship them; one sees them all as equals, and realises that there is nothing in the world apart from me; I am spread throughout the world; I am that, realising thus, one sees all as equal, the numerous trees, flowers, fruit, soils, stones, birds, animals, insects, fish, flies, horseflies, cows, buffaloes, boar, deer, horses, elephants, goats, sheep, pigs, cats, dogs; the many forms of rats, snakes, smaller animals, ants, termites, lizards, scorpions, humans, gods, rakshasas, weapons, texts, Puranas, Gitas, musical instruments, debates, Vedas, jyotishas, indulgences, maladies, dances, songs, musical instruments, clothes, cuisines, the six rasas, the eight metals, the nine gems, the six seasons, the static and the dynamic; the ones that fly and the ones that swim, the numerous varieties of insects and flies, all the fifty-six crore species of creatures from all the four directions; one sees them as equals and in doing so, one sees them as that. If one finds such a person, then one can rest assured that such a person abides in that. Such a one does not drown in water; even Agni does not burn him, the strongest of the winds do not make him fly, swords do not hurt him: even if the earth decays, his being does not decay, it becomes the heavens, the earth, the nether worlds, it seeps into the fifty-six crore species of creatures and can attain varied forms intermittently; the seven worlds become like grass to him; Brahma, Indra, Chandra, Surya, none equal him, the thirty-three crore gods, humans, rakshasas, the earth, water, Teja, Vayu, Akash, nothing equals his essence. Therefore, O mind, listen to the grace of devotion; one who has an empty mind knows that, knows nothing apart from that, knows the world to be that, wanders alone and shuns company, has that for company, feels only that, has no fears and knows nothing apart from that, so that one knows only that and doing so meditates in that, sleeps in that, sings in that; therefore, O mind, listen to what you wanted to hear. Such a person knows that which is singular in form, how can anyone else know that; in fact, no one can know that, as that does not have colour, eyes, face, ears, nose, eyes, hands, legs, heart, belly, waist, back, head or skin, form, marks, blood, flesh; being beyond sight, speech, colour, air, form and repetition; listen, oh mind, no one sees that without devotion. All the jivas are eroded out of that and on death go back to rest in that. In death lies birth: now let us explicate with an analogy: if we take a pot with some sweetened water in it to a pond, and then empty the pot into the pond, and fill the pot with water from the pond, then does the water in the pot taste sweet? Likewise, once a form dissolves it never returns; there is no birth after death, once this body goes, it is never to be had again; therefore only if you abide in the body, then you can know *that* which is singular in form. Listen, O mind, feel everything with equanimity and abide in the singular in form without any *vikaara*, for *that* is unrecognisable for a mind with an iota of *vikaara*...

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Glossary

Agni: The fire god of the Hindu pantheon

Akash: One of the five constitutive elements of the Hindu, more accurately Samkhya, universe

Brahma: The Creator, in the Hindu trinity of the most powerful male gods (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva)

Brihaspati: The teacher (guru) of the gods

Chandi: a class of minor female Hindu deities that express the most powerful aspects of the sacred feminine

Chandra: The moon god

Dharma: This complex philosophical concept can be interpreted as the underlying principles that order the universe and render it intelligible, as well as the fundamental properties and functions of any entity. In ordinary usage it can imply the duties of an individual as a member of a class/group, such as a caste or sect; it also

connotes a stage of life. In Buddhism, *dharma* means the body of practices and theories propounded by Gautama Buddha.

Dikpalas: The ten deities in charge of the ten directions

Guna: Generally translated as qualities, it can also mean properties or elements

Indra: The god of created beings, in early Vedic religious practice

Indriya: generally translated as sense organs; also connotes faculties linked to the organs

Jaati: Most often translated as caste; a more accurate term would be 'a class of things'

Jiva: life; also anything possessing life

Jvotisha: Indian astrology

Kama: desire; also the god of desire

Kubera: The god of wealth

Nairuta: The south-western direction

Prakritis: According to Samkhya philosophy, components of the primordial matter. Prakriti is often translated as 'nature' and connotes the environment/natural world

Puranas: Numerous Hindu and Jain epics that deal with the genealogies of gods and mythical kings, and also provide descriptions of cosmology and philosophy. They were primarily composed between the 3^{rd} and 17^{th} centuries AD

Rasa: A fundamental concept in the Indian worldview and classical aesthetics, rasa connotes the defining characteristic of an object or activity (a work of art, a performance, food, etc.) that gives it individuality evokes particular emotional responses.

Rakshasa: a class of mythological beings traditionally depicted as demonic, and opposed to the gods

Sachi: The wife of Indra

Shiva: The Destroyer, in the Hindu trinity

Six great enemies: Those aspects of the mind that prevent us from seeing beyond the illusion of the manifest world: *kama* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride) and *matsarya* (jealousy)

Surya: The sun god

Teja: The god of effulgence, or the sun's rays

Varuna: An early Vedic god traditionally associated with water and the sea

Vayu: The god of wind/air

Vikaara: In Vedanta, vikaara refers to a modification/differentiation of the supreme/Absolute, or a modification from any natural state. It generally has a negative connotation and can signify deterioration. Samkhya philosophy posits vikaara as the outcome of a process of transformation of an entity from its origin, i.e., prakriti. In Buddhist formulations, vikaara implies the characteristic condition of material qualities

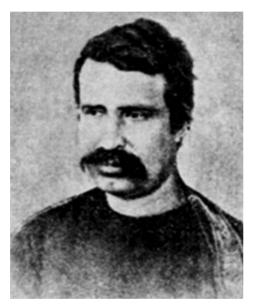
Vishnu: The Preserver, in the Hindu trinity

Yama: The god of death

Yogasutra: A classical genre. The most famous yogasutra is understood to be the aphoristic canon authored by the sage Patanjali. In the context of this essay it refers to any set of codified spiritual practices.

Bhudev's Uchronia: The Temporal Exile of the Colonised

RITWIK BHATTACHARIO



The word 'frontier' presumably means two different things. On the one hand, it is presented as a border that divides. Here it would manifest as something that lies in between. But a frontier can also stand for a boundary that restricts the extent of a certain totality; thereby playing the role of the perimeter of a given thing, and functioning as an index of a certain limit. Dealing primarily with the latter, this essay is about a certain colonial experience of temporality that leaves the colonised beyond a time that they can call their own. It is an experience of a politically implemented mode of temporal dispossession. One may legitimately claim that this fact is germane to any discussion of colonial subjection/subjectivation.

But how and why are the frontier and the border important as concepts within this scheme? This would have to do with certain moves that Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827-1894), an educationist, thinker and one of the first authors of nationalist discourse in Bengal, undertakes to come to terms with the fact of the colonised being dispossessed of temporality. Bhudev's production of an uchronia, *Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas* (History of India as Revealed in a Dream), ¹ might draw out a certain significance of the word 'uchronia' that is most certainly overlooked in the European context where it had been coined and first used. Charles Renouvier (1815-1903), a well-known 19th-century neo-Kantian philosopher, is said to have coined the term for the first time in 1857. The subtitle of Renouvier's French work *Uchronia* is *Utopia in History*; and the book itself gives us an alternate history of Europe as it might have been. ² This notion of uchronia is a transposition of the notion of the utopic to the textual ground of a historical narrative. It answers the question: 'What if history had developed differently?' ³ A trail of divergence therefore can be

laid from a given history to answer this 'what if' question. However, while Bhudev's text itself bears the marks of an alternate history, it is not comparable thereby to the numerous allohistories (a synonym for alternate history) produced by the West. A certain colonial experience of time contributed to Bhudev's allohistorical production.

Bhudev has been characterised as a "proud Brahmin" whose "orthodoxy was not blind and had nothing in common with the vulgarities of the Hindu reaction" to the colonial project of social reforms (see below). However, he is said to have seen in the reformist efforts "a slavish acceptance of British views on Indian society". His benign critique of the reformist milieu, effected in a rather original and theoretical way, has earned him the epithet of being "the only social theorist that the celebrated age of the Bengal Renaissance produced". In spite of his skepticism regarding both colonial modernity and reformist efforts, his "aspiration as an official in the colonial bureaucracy" has been somewhat remarkable. Tapan Raychaudhari, one of the first historians to have studied Bhudev's life and oeuvre, describes this aspect of Bhudev's life in detail:

The proud Brahmin was bent on making a success of his career in service and starting as a teacher in the Calcutta Madrassa (after a brief spell in non-government schools), he went about as high as any Indian could hope to go in his days – ending his career as a Class I inspector of schools, an office held by members of the civil service from time to time. In cash terms the transition was from Rs 50 to Rs 1500 per month, the latter a very considerable income in those days.⁴

This story of improvement under the colonial aegis stands in contrast to the usual accounts of the educated native's complicated resolve to keep a traditional identity intact within colonised parameters. This apparent dichotomy in fact resonates well with the tenor of Bhudev's oeuvre, which was largely about constructing a "Hindu historical sociology of European modernity" (ibid.). It was the production of the knowledge of modernity from an indigenous perspective, which was more like bracing up for a confrontation often perceived as hostile and disempowering, and strategising to avoid the humiliation that might thereby be incurred.

Bhudev and History

Sudipta Kaviraj, the historian who has discussed Bhudev's work as a "project of indigenist social theory", still finds *Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas* (hereafter in this essay, *SBI*) a most bewildering text. According to him, it is "difficult even to say what sort of writing it is". Its "intriguingly paradoxical" form, which has been touted as an extension of Bhudev's enterprise in social theory, is remarkable in its resistance to simple classification. Kaviraj begins his observations on Bhudev with references to *SBI*, and ends his essay thus:

In this paper, I have analysed only one of Bhudev's texts, the *Samajik Prabandha*, partly because it is the principal site of his social theorising. But his intellectual portrait cannot be complete without a supplement, a study of his other, more quizzical work, *Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihas*. That text describes a most

extraordinary dream, in which the content entirely violates the customary expectations one has of a dream narrative. In a dream of astonishing clarity and consistency, he describes in great, often tiring detail, the social constitution of India under an imagined un-British rule, twisting the line of Indian history away from what had actually happened. This shows the insistence of his social thinking; even in his dreams he is constantly constructing social and political forms.⁵

Even if one provisionally accepts that *SBI* was a certain continuation of Bhudev's earlier concerns, one would still end up with the paradox implicit in its form. This may take us to the interesting observations on history as a form, or the empty formalism of history, made by Bhudev himself in *Samajik Prabandha*. Bhudev is acutely aware that history as a Western science has every possibility of being deployed as an instrument for propagating the idiom of a certain racial superiority. History is not something that is readily accepted, as it is surpassed and superseded by accounts committed to the description of national glory. He observes:

... [The rules (*sutra*) of the new historical science that are used in India (*Bhàratavarsha*) are of another variety. All these rules are meant for criticizing the Indians... The historical science of Europe is still in its infancy. It only has a few imprecise rules which aid the European authors, learned in Greek, to delineate their respective national glories (*jatigaurab*)... By History Europeans tend to understand the history of the Greeks and their followers, the Romans; and since it is regarded as their religious literature the Jewish texts are left unmarked by dates. The Greeks and the Romans were deeply patriotic. Patriotism was a part of their fundamental nature. Accordingly they have produced their histories with considerable skill. But their only aim was to declare the glories of their country and their nation.⁶

History, and perhaps truth itself, is reducible to a problem of form. This kind of assertion is made to defend India's Puranic literature against the attempts of colonial scholars to deny it the status of history. Some commentators of Bhudev's milieu take *purana* as a genre that represents poetic compositions on nature and the spiritual world, in contrast to the descriptions of actual history. But Bhudev thinks otherwise. He writes that "although the natural world and natural forces are imparted liveliness and endowed with anthropic ideas, the inspiration for such poetic acts is derived from the historical events themselves". The poets, having experienced actual humans, objects and events, transform them through various tropes (*upama*, *atyukti*, *rupakadi alankare bhushito o sharash hoia...*) into a mode of poetic history.

The claim of the Puranas to being a part of history is facilitated here through the legitimisation of a certain *literary* operation effected on the *real* raw material that happens to transpose the factual into the imagined. If history poses a threat to the Puranic tradition through the former's greater claim to truth, Bhudev will find a ready defence in the lack of consensus amongst the various historians of Europe on the competing truth claims of this or that historical account in the intra-disciplinary debates. Now, for once, history is made subject to the kind of scepticism that its disciplinary rules consider legitimate. It is here that

one encounters Bhudev's stubborn argument on truth in history as being primarily not about a set of inviolable facts, but about a certain *form* that supposedly *looks* like truth. To Bhudev, the success of history in transcending national frontiers is therefore questionable. By this re-signifying of history's function as a vehicle for human ideation, he enables a celebration of the mass of Puranic literature as a nationalist narrative of the Indian past.

Bhudev's abiding anxiety about the colonial appropriation of the symbolic and actual past of the colonised is seen in his attempts to salvage a certain archive (Puranic texts) from dismissal by the colonial historiographic operation as material not amenable to being ordered through discursive architectures. This effort to assert the truth claims of 'indigenous' narratives as valid history is undoubtedly one of the earliest nationalist engagements with the question of what constituted history. In the context of Bhudev's discussions of 'history' in *Samajik Prabandha*, one may wonder how to approach Bhudev's alternate paradigm. Was the assertion of Puranic ontology in fact a celebration of historical discourse through the inscription of a new, effective form, an act that rendered the colonised autonomous and capable of imagining a non-/post-colonial future?

SBI certainly doesn't offer us an easy response to that question. In the given situation, the status of alternate history in the colony presumably remains a decisive issue.

Alternate History in the Colonial Setting

Bhudev's engagement with history was not to end within the body of his indigenist sociology found in *Samajik Prabandha*. It was to return to him in *SBI* more like a *supplement*. *SBI* might seem to be an innocuous addition to Bhudev's extant works; moreover, it also seems to stand by itself as something powerfully idiosyncratic, and *not* subsumed within his 'Hindu' sociology. *SBI* represents the sheer force of a form as it appears in a dream, and taken to be empowering by instituting the autonomy of the colonised. History, one might say, comes back with a vengeance, but only as an object of dream. The imagined event of the institution of autonomy of the colonised dons the cloak of historical discourse. In Bhudev's conceptualisation, history, which had failed to empower the colonised in their state of submission, lends its form to the colonised dreaming of autonomy.

This was somewhat inescapable for the two conjoined operations of historical discourse in the colonial era. History within colonialism was not just an account of the past, but also a subjectivity and agency shaping the future. Not only did it appraise the past of the colonised in a manner that justified colonialism, it also denied the ideal of historical agency to the colonised. History is what the colonised *lacked*; it was therefore also the thing that they most coveted. The colonial rendering of a particular history as a valued discourse was definitely influential to a great extent. Bhudev does nothing in *SBI* to controvert the conventions of a historical prose – and yet the event of Maratha dominance described in his text is an event that a historical discourse committed to producing the 'true' rendition of the past cannot accept as valid. In Bhudev's dream, the desire to inhabit history

adheres to its discursive form while remaining unable to accept the event of colonisation inscribed in its content.

Bhudev's alternate history will be radically different from similar such works produced in the modern West. Alternate history had been written in Europe since the early 19th century, and has by now made a place for itself in contemporary Western popular culture as well, whereas the mode has not found acceptance in modern India. It is worth examining the difference between Bhudev's project and 19th-century Western alternative histories, keeping in mind that the colonisers and the colonised clearly have different experiences of temporality and the historical continuum as well as historical fractures. In order to fully understand the experience of temporality by the colonised, the Western subject is arguably required to suspend his/her normative interpretation of history; and also required to scrutinise the discursive forms in which it is embodied, and through which it is transmitted.

Historian Reinhart Kosseleck's exposition of the emergence of modern historical temporality is instructive here. Koselleck plots the emergence of modern temporality – a temporality that also founds history as a separate order of knowledge – in the temporality of prognostications, as opposed to the notion of time that was implicit in apocalyptic prophecies. Prognosis is a "conscious element of political action" which steers away from a certain sacral time – the enunciation of futures that form teleological prophetic statements:

Prognosis produces the time within which and out of which it weaves, whereas apocalyptic prophecy destroys time through its fixation on the End. From the point of view of prophecy, events are merely symbols of that which is already known. A disappointed prophet cannot doubt the truth of his own predictions. Since these are variable, they can be renewed at any time. Moreover, with every disappointment, the certainty of approaching fulfilment increases. An erroneous prognosis by contrast, cannot even be repeated as an error, remaining... conditioned by specific assumptions.⁷

With prognosis, the age of Enlightenment desacralises time and opens up the future as a sphere of autonomous human intervention. The present becomes thick with speculations on future events, and history emerges as a domain of human freedom.

Alternate history or allohistory works through the principles of prognosis and weaves the narrative of other possible futures – those that formed the speculative horizon of any given present. The present of which alternative futures are narrated is the locus of the point of divergence from where the alternate concatenations begin. In these instances, allohistory is nothing other than celebrating the subject (both in the sense of subjectivity within an order of knowledge and in the sense of political agency) of history that the West would produce.

Bhudev's alternate history cannot be affiliated with such an enterprise. Far from articulating a speculative freedom, *SBI* is marked by an acute weight of temporal subjection. Alternate history happens to be here quite the reverse of what it would have meant to 19th-century Europeans. It is characterised by an ingrained despondency rooted

in the sense of not having an autonomous account of the collective/civilisational self. Colonial policies were designed and undertaken along the axes of this logic and its pathological repercussions. Colonial prognosis became the art of denying the colonised not just agency but also an autonomous experience of time.

SBI begins with a description of the context in which it was written. Apparently, a relative of Bhudev is writing a book on Indian history. Bhudev is asked to review the text, but while he is reading the account of the Third Battle of Panipat, he falls seriously ill and cannot bear the event of the Maratha defeat. It is important to reiterate here that the event of Maratha victory could well have obviated a colonial intervention amidst the chaos and instability of the 18th century. Bhudev, unable to accept the erstwhile historical narration of the events leading to the colonial subjection of India, sets out to perform in his uchronia what Marathas themselves failed to perform in the world of 'real' history.

Prima facie, there is nothing unique about Bhudev's imagination of the Maratha victory that would make a comparison to other allohistories worthwhile. The critical difference lies in the two senses in which the term 'alternate' can be used. In the 19th-century European context, it might well have meant exploring how any given event is fraught with different possible outcomes. But *SBI* was an alternate history in the sense of history (of autonomy) being unavailable otherwise. It was a response generated from a sense of a certain profound and profoundly experienced *lack* that was very much a product of colonial rule; or more precisely, a product of the colonial operations in the complex realm of temporality. Bhudev did attempt to save the past of the colonised from being appropriated and disparaged as ahistorical. But another acute concern for the colonised was that the future too was subject to the colonial extrapolations from which the colonised 'citizen' was excluded, owing to once again an inexorable rationale and dialectic of domination and submission.

For instance, Lord Macaulay's speech in the English House of Commons (delivered on 10 July 1833) is worth citing in detail. This was a moment when the empire's scandalous beginnings in India were being palliated through the relentless deployment of the self-serving logic of colonial historiography, a discourse which explains away the progression of the colonial endeavour as a process inexorably destined:

[...] The calamities through which that country passed during the interval between the fall of the Mogul power and the establishment of the English supremacy were sufficient to throw the people back whole centuries... The people were ground down to the dust by the oppressor without and the oppressor within, by the robber from whom the Nabob was unable to protect them, by the Nabob who took whatever the robber had left to them. All the evils of despotism, and all the evils of anarchy, pressed at once on that miserable race.⁸

Through the consistent rhetorical staging of such a desolate spectacle, it was easy to argue in favour of a supposedly paternal despotism as an effective strategy of political governance. A certain historiography was mobilised to legitimate the British subjection of India, prodding the coloniser to create 'citizens' out of 'slaves' and vindicating the

colonising/civilising mission. The 'patron' coloniser waits for the 'proudest day' when his protégé becomes self-sufficient, allowing him to finally end his rule. Macaulay continues:

To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.⁹

And as critic Ramchandra Guha astutely remarks in relation to SBI:

The great Bengali writer, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, once published a marvellous alternate history of India... which speculated on what might have been if the British had not conquered the subcontinent. Bhudev assumed that in such an eventuality, Indians would have ruled themselves. In truth, there was no earthly chance of this happening. The choice was between the French, the Dutch, the Portuguese and the British.¹⁰

There are indications in *Samajik Prabandha* that Bhudev would have agreed completely with Guha. At the very beginning of his text, Bhudev clarifies to his Irish interlocutor that "[...] We don't want independence from the colonial authorities at least for some time to come"¹¹. This is a grudging admission of the time of colonial tutelage, and no alternative is being brought forth here. The pathology of existing and functioning as the colonial protégé was something that had been clearly introjected by the colonised by the time Bhudev was writing, and many of his contemporaries had similar perceptions of their future. The colonised had already submitted to this vision; and from its inception, the colonial historiographic project had been given to a certain production of the time of tutelage, making such submission by its 'citizens' possible. William Jones' pronouncements in the famous 10th Anniversary Discourse of the Asiatic Society can be considered a case in point:

He (one who reads history) could not but remark the constant effect of despotism in benumbing and debasing all those faculties which distinguish men from the herd that grazes; and to that cause he would impute the decided inferiority of the most *Asiatic* nations, ancient and modern, to those in Europe who are blest with happier governments... In these *Indian* territories, which Providence has thrown into the arms of Britain for their protection and welfare, the religion, manners, and laws of the natives preclude the idea of political freedom; but their histories may possibly suggest hints of prosperity, while our country derives essential benefit from the diligence of a placid and submissive people"...¹²

A historical explanation had to be given for the "inferiority" of the Asiatic "herd", a quality that suits their being appropriated submissively into the role of protégé to those effecting the colonising mission. The project of colonial historiography is essentially directed to the purpose of recovering a past that the colonised themselves supposedly *cannot* recuperate. This act of particular inscription functions as an instrument for the legitimising of colonial rule. The agent who recovers the past is also the agent who rules over the future of the colonised. Colonial authority straddles both temporal planes of the colonised, the future as well as the past, while the present is the harrowing moment of literal and epistemic subjection.

Mired between the colonial extrapolations of a future of tutelage and the colonial appropriation of the Indian past, the colonial subject invents a dream, an uchronia. This uchronia is not just a dream of autonomy; it is also a place to which the colonised had been exiled by the concerted effort of colonial ideologues.

The effort to invent an uchronia therefore stands testimony to a certain larger trend in the colonial-nationalist politics of time. In colonial elaborations of temporality, the present was a tangible zone of subjection; a prolonged future was given to the time of tutelage of the colonised under the coloniser's supervision; and the past was often a disparaged fiction, a product of 'ungoverned imaginings'. Bhudev's uchronia, the imagination of a nonexistent time, is an audacious reworking of this expulsion from the temporal through the rendering of a simple reversal of a historical event. The Marathas manifest in the text as the founders of the Indian nation, and the event of colonial subjection is obviated by the Maratha initiative at nation building. This paradoxical reversal attempts to erase the fact of colonial subjection from Indian history, and avoids confronting the colonial delineation of the temporal subjection of the colonised. A significant act of evasion emerges here as a deeply despondent admission that the symbolic manipulation of time (the historical past, the present as well as future) is all that one can offer in terms of a concrete claim to true agency, authentic citizenship, actual sovereignty. Upon this oneiric foundation of desired autonomy, the colonised's actual exile from time (which in the colonial context is mostly synonymous to history) is writ large.

Afterword

The term 'uchronia', first used in the European context merely as what today would be considered as a synonym for alternate history, assumes a significantly different sense when used to characterise *SBI*. Uchronia, taken in its literal sense, is more a somewhat poignant term for the temporal experience of the colonised, than a utilitarian strategy for demarcating the horizon of alternate history, i.e., a past that did not occur. This 'past' is certainly discernible in Bhudev's text. But *SBI* is more than simply an alternate history. As a text created in response to the colonial act of deporting the colonised from the territory of time, Bhudev's uchronia is equivalent to the excruciating infiltration of the colonised into the domain of exile beyond the temporal frontier. Denied time, yet compelled into the production of autonomy through the only means available – uchronia – the colonised cannot escape the condition of their subjection, even if they have somehow retained the capacity to narrate themselves into history through the mode of visionary dream.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- (Ed.) Pramathanath Bishi. Bhudev Rachanasambhar [The Collected Works of Bhudev] (Mitra and Ghosh, B.S.1375, 1968, Kolkata), pp. 341-74. All Bhudev quotes in this essay are from his text "Samajika Prabandha" in Bishi's compilation.
- Charles Renouvier. Uchronie: l'utopie dans l'histoire, esquisse historique apocryphe du développement de la civilisation européenne tel qu'il n'a pas été, tel qu'il aurait pu être (Bureau de la Critique Philosophique, 1876, Paris).
- 3. For an account of alternate history as a genre, see Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If'? Reflections on the Function of Alternate History", in *History and Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 4, theme issue on Unconventional History, pp. 90-103 (December 2002). For an account of Renouvier's work and similar 19^{th_century} European-language texts, see Paul Alkon, *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (Georgia University Press, 1987, Athens), pp. 115-18.
- Tapan Raychaudhuri. Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal (Oxford University Press, 1988, New Delhi), pp. 54-55.
- Sudipta Kaviraj. "The Reversal of Orientalism: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and the Project of Indigenist Social Theory". In (eds.) Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity (Sage, 1995, New Delhi), pp. 278-79.
- 6. (Ed.) Pramathanath Bishi, op. cit., pp. 22-23, 40-41.
- Reinhart Koselleck. Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time (MIT. Press, 1985, Cambridge), pp. 10-11.
- 8. Thomas Babington Macaulay. Speeches, Vol. 1 (Redfield, 1853, New York), pp. 260-61, 280-81.
- Ibid.
- Ramachandra Guha. "Confessions of a Coconut: Even If the British Were Philistines, They Were Gentlemen". The Telegraph, 21 February 2004.
- 11. (Ed.) Pramathanath Bishi, op. cit., p. 4.
- 12. William Jones. In (ed.) Sibdas Chaudhuri, *Proceedings of The Asiatic Society*, Vol. 1 (The Asiatic Society, 1980, Calcutta), pp. 206-07.

"It's Raining Aliens!"

Coloured Rain in Kerala and the Fuzzy Frontiers of Science¹

SHIIU SAM VARUGHESE

This essay discusses the 'boundary problem' in science – how the demarcation of 'science' from 'non-science', and 'rational' from 'irrational', is determined and maintained in modern science. Or, to put it differently, how do the boundaries of science, being determined at a point of time, purge all the 'impurities' from science and maintain a coherent internal content? Boundaries purportedly demarcate a pristine, transparent and coherently unified 'internal' against an impure 'external'. Such a process of boundary-making is central to the project of modern science.

The pre-Kuhnian philosophers and historians of science were self-appointed watchdogs of modern science; by looking at science normatively, and by presenting knowledge production as a *social* cognitive enterprise, they successfully maintained an essentialist picture of science. They were thus engaged in delineating the boundaries of science by treating scientific disciplines as homogenous and coherent (Gieryn, 1995). Kuhn himself radically extended the analysis of scientific perception and methodologies. However, the post-Kuhnian turn in social studies of science was a constructivist twist that looked at the actual sites of knowledge production and the everyday practices of science from an anthropological point of view,² to understand how social factors actually shape science in the making. This sociological turn, and a philosophy and history informed by it, thus presented a new image of science, developing fresh insights into the internal ambivalences and fluidity of scientific knowledge production.

The boundary-making impulse in science helps us to understand the hidden power relations and sociological processes involved in knowledge production. Borders are always maintained between disciplines and subcultures in science. There are borders between science and non-science too, as mentioned above. However these frontiers are not permanently fixed, but are constantly being challenged and remapped (Nader, 1996). It can be seen that beyond all positivist assumptions of science as a monolithic and homogeneous truth-seeking enterprise, a close look at the frontiers of science reveals the ambiguities immanent in knowledge production and the internal 'disunity of science' (Galison and Stump, 1996). As asserted by Gieryn (1995, p. 440), the "[e]xamination of how and why people do boundary-work – how they define 'science' by attributing characteristics that spatially

segregate it from other territories in the culturescape – could be the first step toward a cultural interpretation of historically changing allocations of power, authority, control, credibility, expertise, prestige and material resources among groups and occupations". The frontiers of science are sites of power struggles and negotiations, ambivalences and equivocations, as well as impurity, hybridity and contagion.

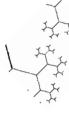
The complex ways in which the notion of science has been fixed and subverted when scientists *do* science will be demonstrated in this essay through a case study: scientific analyses of the unusual phenomenon of 'coloured rain' that occurred in Kerala, India's southernmost state, from July to September 2001. This 'rain' invited much attention nationally and internationally, because scientists were not able to satisfactorily interpret the phenomenon for a long time. They are yet to reach a consensus in this regard, though one group of scientists offered a credible explanation at a later stage of the investigation.

Coloured Rain in Kerala

The phenomenon of coloured rain was the last episode of a long trail of events in Kerala. A chain of unusual geological events occurred in the region in the wake of a series of low-intensity tremors, the first of these occurring on 12 December 2000. Many tremors of lower intensity continued striking the region from then on; and as a possible aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake on 26 January 2001, several extraordinary geophysical events started to manifest in the region, including well collapses, oscillation and rise in water levels, well water changing colour, cracks in buildings, appearance of ground fissures, and unseasonal leaf fall. Scientists from different institutional associations and disciplinary backgrounds attempted to explain the phenomena, and this led to a situation where several scientific explanations were proposed and contested.

The rain was first reported from Changanacherry, a small town in Kottayam district. The inhabitants of the locality of Morkulangar witnessed a peculiar 'red rain' on the morning of 25 July 2001. Two scientists from CESS, ³ Dr V. Sasi Kumar and Dr S. Sampath, arrived at Changanacherry the next day and made preliminary investigations. Following the Changanacherry incident, 'red' and later 'yellow', 'green', 'blue' and 'black' rain was reported from all over Kerala, raising hue and cry among the public. On 30 July 2001, CESS published its preliminary report on the red rain phenomenon in Changanacherry, declaring a meteor explosion above the town as causative.⁴ According to the report, about 1000 kilograms of ash from the burnt-out meteor dispersed through the atmosphere and were washed down by the rain that followed. Thus, the rain was red because it contained a large amount of meteor ash. The scientists contended that the unusually dramatic thunder and lightning witnessed by locals was provoked by the meteor explosion.

The 'meteor hypothesis' was challenged after a few days: a group of scientists with another institutional and disciplinary affiliation came up with a new theory. Dr K.C. John, director of the School of Applied Life Sciences (SALS) of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, 5 declared that certain biological cells in the rainwater added colour to it, as



observed in samples studied under an electron microscope.⁶ Three different types of cells were identified: translucent, yellow, and brick-coloured. There was also evidence of rudimentary cell division. It was suggested that the cells were of either algal or fungal origin, or deriving from pollen grains.

The controversy escalated the next day, with more scientists and scientific institutions showing interest in the phenomenon. The biological cell theory has been substantiated by scientists from the Central Plantation Crop Research Institute (CPCRI). Scientists supporting the meteor theory proposed that the colour was caused by the Delta Aquarids meteor shower that passed close over the earth.8 Challenging the two major explanations of the coloured rain phenomenon offered by CESS and SALS scientists, many alternative theories were also offered at this juncture, from scientists of different disciplinary backgrounds and expertise. Dr Sainudeen Pattazhy, president of the Kerala Environment Researchers' Association, suggested that coloured rain was linked to well collapses and landslides. Another interpretation was that water molecules clustered together around the minute crystals of micro-pollutants in the air, and thereby formed coloured raindrops.⁹ Another scientist¹⁰ suggested the presence of either chemicals such as metal oxides, nitrates and chlorides, or biological materials from algae, fungi and lichens, as initiating coloured rain (Pillai, 2001). Dr K.J. Joseph, former director of the Meteorological Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, argued that the phenomenon was the aftermath of industrial pollution (Joseph, 2001). Scientists at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Thiruvananthapuram, linked the phenomenon to the fine particles of dust that reached Kerala from the Arabian desert (Jacob, 2006).

Such an outburst of alternative explanations, along with criticism of the meteor theory from a wider circle of scientists, however, urged the CESS scientists to conduct a fresh investigation on the matter, taking into consideration new cases of coloured rain. Since their earlier explanation was not satisfactory, scientists from the institute therefore visited various places where coloured rain had occurred; water samples were collected and further observations made. After a few days, CESS researchers declared that their preliminary inference was wrong, as no meteor components could be identified in the samples during chemical analysis. Biological tests were conducted in the microbiology laboratory of the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute (TBGRI) at Palode, and CESS in its final, report refuted the meteoric origin of the phenomenon. "The colour was found to be due to the presence of a large amount of spores of a lichen-forming alga belonging to the genus Trentepohlia" (Sampath et al., 2001, p. 5). However, CESS also declared that further, research would be carried out in association with TBGRI to identify the reasons behind the presence of spores en masse in the atmosphere, as well as its possible connections with other unusual geological phenomena (ibid.). The reasons behind the sustained appearance of coloured rain all over Kerala also continued as a public mystery. There were also several unresolved problems regarding the red rain in Changanacherry. 11 Thus, competing theories were deadlocked, with no theory proving satisfactory enough to resolve the issue.

It's Raining Aliens!

However, Dr L. Godfrey Louis and his student Dr Santhosh Kumar of the School of Pure and Applied Research (SPAL) of Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, continued with their analysis in 2001. Louis was specialising in experimental solid-state physics, electronic instrumentation and computer-based instrumentation, while Kumar was completing his doctoral research in solid-state physics. Louis had actively participated in the debate on the phenomena since the beginning, supporting the meteor theory and explaining the characteristics of the meteor that allegedly caused red rain. Right from the start he had hinted towards the possibly extraterrestrial origin of the cells present in the water samples. Louis and Kumar faced silence from CESS in this regard, as well as ridicule from the scientific community.

Although they were being totally lampooned by fellow scientists. Louis and Kumar continued their research along this track, and with great difficulty were able to publish their findings in an online archive of astrophysics in October 2003. 15 They proposed that the red cells found in the coloured rain samples collected from various localities were of extraterrestrial origin. Their study indicated that the red colour of the rain was not due to fungal or algal spores. They pointed out that coloured rain occurred all of a sudden at a specific locality, while the rain in neighbouring localities was normal (Louis and Kumar, 2003a). Their study revealed that most of the coloured rain concentrated in central Kerala, and a sum total of 124 incidents occurred in the region (ibid.). They also suggested that the sound of the explosion heard by many people just before the first incident of red rain in Changanacherry was the 'sonic boom', a loud explosive noise caused by the shock wave from an aircraft or object travelling faster than the speed of sound. According to the researchers, the red cells of the meteor spread all over the atmosphere after the explosion and eventually reached the rain clouds. As the blazing meteor moved southeast, it fragmented; shattered chunks separated from the main body, causing coloured rain in various places as meteor particles slowly disintegrated in the earth's atmosphere. Data also confirmed that 85% of the coloured rain in Kerala occurred within 10 days of the Changanacherry incident.

Louis and Kumar analysed rainwater samples using the laboratory facilities at their university and the Sree Chithira Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology at Thiruvananthapuram. With the help of laboratory studies they proved that the biological cells in the samples were devoid of DNA or any other known genetic material, although cell division was observed. They also found that these cells could withstand high temperatures, and observed germination at even 300°C (Louis and Kumar, 2003b). The cells survived for over two-and-a-half years at room temperature. Chemical analysis of the cells revealed the presence of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen – all elements found in abundance in comets and interstellar clouds – but found that elements such as phosphorous, critical for terrestrial life, were *not* essential for the survival of these cells (ibid.). Based on this evidence, the scientists argued that the red cells could be a strange

form of life from outer space, and that further research would prove that these biological cells with unknown genetic material were in fact extraterrestrial.

When Louis and Kumar's research paper appeared in the online archive, it attracted a small international community of astrobiologists who had been working on theories of the extraterrestrial origin of life. The researchers were invited to present their findings at a conference on the theme of 'Astrobiological Problems for Physicists', conducted by NORDITA (Nordic Institute for Theoretical Physics) in Copenhagen from 8-10 January 2004.¹⁷ The researchers have thus been introduced to internationally acclaimed scientists who work on the theory of 'Panspermia' (in Greek, lit. "seeds everywhere"), a hypothesis proposed by astronomers Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe in the 1970s.¹⁸ Modern Panspermia theory (which is not accepted by mainstream science) suggests that life began on earth when 'seeds of life' reached the earth from elsewhere via the vehicles of comets or meteors.

By careful spectroscopic observation and analysis of light from distant stars, Hoyle and Wickramasinghe found new evidence, traces of life, in the intervening dust. They also proposed that comets, which are largely made of water-ice, carry bacterial life across galaxies and protect it from radiation damage along the way. Hoyle and Wickramasinghe also broadened or generalised Panspermia to include a new understanding of evolution. While accepting the fact that life on Earth evolved over the course of about four billion years, they say that the genetic programmes for higher evolution cannot be explained by random mutation and recombination among genes for single-celled organisms, even in that long a time: the programmes must come from somewhere beyond earth. This expanded theory, which incorporates the original panspermia theory the way General Relativity incorporates Special Relativity, is also termed 'strong' panspermia.

The international community of scientists who work on the Panspermia theory considered the researchers' findings about coloured rains as strong evidence of the extraterrestrial origin of life.

Louis and Kumar have consequently been absorbed into the research network of astrobiology. Dr Wickramasinghe also got in touch with the researchers, and his host institution in the UK, the Cardiff Centre of Astrobiology, 19 offered them research facilities. Consequently, the international scientific press also found their findings interesting. Eventually their study appeared as cover stories in reputed scientific journals published in the West, including *New Scientist* and *Popular Science*. This further legitimised and facilitated their work. Such a warm reception at the international level brought Louis and Kumar to affirmative public notice in India as well. Many national dailies and magazines featured their research thereafter.

Dr Wickramasinghe visited Kerala at the end of May 2006, and delivered a lecture at the Mahatma Gandhi University at Kottayam on the phenomenon of coloured rain and its connection with the Panspermia theory; his presentation was followed by a press conference (Jacob, 2006). A BBC crew visited the researchers at that time and made a television

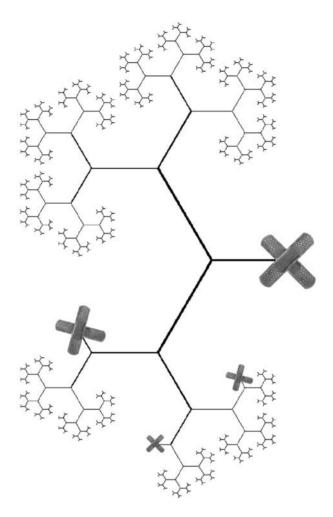
documentary on them.²⁰ A scientific paper by Louis and Kumar has recently been published in the international journal *Astrophysics and Space Science*, which gave them further validity and increased confidence to continue with their research.²¹ By the year 2006, their findings emerged as a 'potential', if not legitimate, scientific theory, well accepted and discussed. Notably, there was not much opposition to this novel proposition in Kerala from fellow scientists with different disciplinary backgrounds, who were working towards a better explanation of the phenomena of coloured rain. There were disagreements among the regional scientific community, but apparently most of them maintained a stoic silence.²²

This unanimous victory achieved by Godfrey and Santhosh was an accomplishment gained with great difficulty, through a careful manoeuvering of the ambiguities and hybridity at the frontier of science. In spite of the plenitude of scientific opinion, each struggling to achieve legitimacy as the most authentic and convincing account of the phenomenon, none of the proponents could actually explain it satisfactorily. Even after the proposition of major hypotheses such as the meteor theory and algal spores theory, most of the basic questions raised about the phenomena remained unanswered. At this juncture, Louis and Kumar successfully elucidated the cause and mechanisms of coloured rain; they also explained coloured rain as a future possibility, 23 since meteors and cometary fragments enter earth's atmosphere guite often.²⁴ The researchers successfully drew elements from mutually contending accounts and adeptly incorporated fragments of these into their own explanation. Both the meteor theory and the biological cells theory proposed by two different groups of scientists thus neatly fit into the extraterrestrial cell 'seeds' theory. Even the novel component, i.e., the non-earthly matrix of the cells, was de facto not new. The researchers inoculated their argument by neatly situating it as strong evidence for the Panspermia theory, in which the concept of 'alien' cells had already been developed.

Frontiers Revisited

The equivocal narrative of coloured rain in Kerala is an exemplary instance of the boundary-making process in science. It demonstrates how an explanation, once lacking scientific legitimacy and discarded as non-scientific and farcical, slowly achieved legitimacy among the scientific community and emerged as a valid scientific theory. This inward percolation of 'things' and 'ideas' *into* the precincts of science from the 'non-scientific' and 'chaotic' *outside* clearly indicates the porous nature of the frontiers of science. It also shows that the inner core of science, considered to be of 'pure' essence by the gatekeepers of science, is actually an admixture of ideas from different terrains – other civilisations, knowledge systems, or subcultures of modern science itself. Such a process reconfigures disciplinary boundaries as well. However, although the border allows infiltration, it is only semi-permeable. The frontier necessarily repels certain ideas and things, and as a result there is always tension along its contentious verges.

The CESS scientists who posited the meteor explosion theory failed in their endeavour to convince the scientific community and the public because they did not manage their



resources skillfully. Their strict association with an institution devoted to earth science studies, and their attempt to understand the phenomenon from the narrow purview of this discipline, contributed to the delegitimisation of their theory from the very outset. The SALS scientists who proposed the biological cell theory were able to provide a more satisfactory explanation using the strong theoretical support of biology as a scientific discipline. They could also gather empirical evidence in support of their argument through the use of a powerful scientific apparatus such as the electron microscope; but their perspective was

also limited to the approaches offered by their field. In this context Louis and Kumar, two scientists without any prior expertise in the field of astrobiology and related areas, started from the point where the other scientists gave up. They developed fresh expertise in disciplines such as biology, genetics and astrobiology.²⁵ They also collaborated with a wide range of scientific institutions and laboratories. By straddling different methodologies and thereby dissolving the disciplinary borders, they audaciously approached the inexplicable phenomenon from a fresh angle.

The case study of coloured rain thus illustrates how even while there is a strongly existent boundary-making practice in science, the frontiers remain contingent and fuzzy. They may *appear* as distinctly marked and permanently fixed, but a close examination reveals their often unexpected vulnerability and violability. Frontiers are contact zones where the inside of science meets its outside, where the 'rational' engages with the 'irrational' – and through this fraught engagement between science and non-science, the contours of science are remapped, and the content of science itself is redefined.

Author's Note

In 1962, the American physicist/philosopher-historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) published his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The main thesis of this remarkably influential – and controversial – book is that the development of science is driven, in normal periods of science, by adherence to what Kuhn called a 'paradigm'. The function of a paradigm is to supply puzzles for scientists to solve, and to provide the tools for their solution. A crisis in science arises when confidence is lost in the ability of the paradigm to solve particularly worrying puzzles called 'anomalies'. Crisis is followed by a scientific revolution, should the existing paradigm be displaced by a rival theory.

Kuhn claimed that science guided by one paradigm would be 'incommensurable' with science developed under a different paradigm, by which is meant that there is *no common measure* of the different scientific theories. Thus, Kuhn asserts that a Galilean and an Aristotelian, when both looking at a pendulum, will see different things: "In a sense I am unable to explicate further, the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. One contains constrained bodies that fall slowly, the other pendulums that repeat their motions again and again. In one, solutions are compounds; in the other, mixtures. One is embedded in a flat, the other in a curved, matrix of space. Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction..."

Methodological incommensurability denies there are universal methods for making inferences from the data. Moreover, the theory-dependence of observation (i.e., rejecting the role of observation as a theory-neutral arbiter among theories) means that even if there were agreed methods of inference and interpretation, incommensurability could still arise since scientists might disagree on the nature of the observational data themselves...

Thus, we may distinguish between the world-in-itself and the 'world' of our perceptual and related experiences (the phenomenal world). This corresponds to the Kantian distinction between the *noumena* and the *phenomena*; but the important difference between Kant and Kuhn is that the latter regards the general form of the

phenomena to be not fixed, but *changeable*. A shift in paradigm can lead, via the theory-dependence of observation, to a difference in one's experiences of things, and thus to a change in one's phenomenal world. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thomas-kuhn/

Notes

- "It's Raining Aliens!" is adopted from the title of a news report on the allegedly extraterrestrial origin of the coloured rain phenomenon in Kerala. http://:www.tmcnet.com.
- Laboratory studies are crucial part of the sociology of scientific knowledge. The works of Bruno Latour and Karin Knorr Cetina have greatly influenced the discipline. The researchers used theoretical insights from anthropology to investigate the daily behaviour of scientists in their laboratories, in the manner that anthropologists study the behaviour of members of a tribe within their specific context.
- 3. They are affiliated with the Department of Physics and Meteorology at the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS). This autonomous research centre in Akkulam, Thiruvananthapuram, was instituted by the Kerala government in 1978. The centre carries out research in different areas of earth systems studies from a multidisciplinary perspective, including studies on paleomagnetism, natural hazards, coastal zone management and use of resource studies for local planning.
- 4. See Deshabhimani, 31 July 2001, p. 1, and Malayala Manorama (31 July 2001), p. 1
- 5. Dr A. Chandran also assisted Dr K.C. John in the investigation.
- See Mathrubhumi, 31 July 2001, p. 1. However, their sample was collected from another incident of red rain in Valanchuzhi, near Pathanamthitta where the institute is located.
- 7. Deshabhimani, 1 August 2001, p. 7.
- 8. Op. cit., 4 August 2001, p. 1. This argument was raised by S. R. Prabhakaran Nair, Professor of Astrophysics, Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram.
- Propounded by Dr N. G. K. Nair, the former head of the Resource Analysis Wing of CESS. See Malayala Manorama, 2 August 2001, p. 8.
- 10. Dr Suresh C. Pillai, Department of Chemistry, University of Dublin.
- 11. If the red rain in Changanacherry was due to algal spores, how it appeared *en masse*, and the origin of the 'explosion' people heard just before the red rain, etc., remained some of the unanswered questions.
- Dr Godfrey Louis is currently a faculty member at the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT).
- 13. See Dr Godfrey's personal website for more information: http://www.education.vsnl.com/godfrey/.
- 14. My personal interviews with a wider range of scientists working on the unusual geophysical phenomena substantiate this. All the scientists I interviewed discarded the 'extraterrestrial origin of cells' hypothesis as non-scientific.
- 15. See list of references.
- 16. From the biological point of view, cell division (both mitosis and meiosis) is possible only if genetic material (DNA or RNA) is present in the cell.

- 17. For details of conference, see http://www.nordita.dk/conference/AstroBio2004/
- 18. For details of their pathbreaking study, see http://www.astrobiology.cf.ac.uk/aimsA.html; see also http://www.astrobiology.cf.ac.uk/fredhoyle.html
- 9. Dr Chandra Wickramasinghe was Director of the Centre as well as Professor of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at Cardiff University (http://www.astrobiology.cf.ac.uk/staff.html). The Cardiff Centre for Astrobiology is a comparatively new institute started in November 2000 by Cardiff University in collaboration with University of Wales College of Medicine (http://www.astrobiology.cf.ac.uk/aimsA.html).
- 20. See Malayala Manorama (27 May 2006) p. 22.
- 21. See Louis and Kumar (2006), op. cit.
- 22. Dr Sainudeen Pattazhy consistently opposed the findings, but could not gain much public attention. Dr K. C. John openly criticised the findings and alleged that the researchers had ulterior motives. See *Mathrubhumi*, 7 June 2006, p. 10. Many scientists I interviewed were of the same opinion. However all of them either were silent earlier, or never got a chance to speak out in public.
- 23. Even the yellow rain that has occurred of late in some places was well explained. The researchers opined that the colour could have been formed when burnt organic material from the meteor dissolved in rainwater. However, they also stressed the need for further investigation. Personal interview with Godfrey and Santhosh. 23 June 2006.
- 24. Ibid. They also pointed out that coloured rain is reported from different parts of the world, but scientists often attribute these to environmental pollution.
- 25. Ibid.

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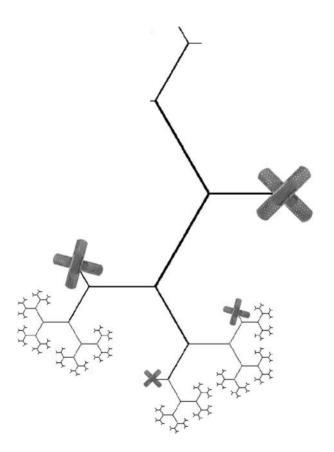
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Walking for Nandigram

Moinak Biswas

This text, posted on the Sarai Reader-list on 16 November 2007, is an account of a peaceful and spontaneous citizens' march, the 'Dhikkar Micchil (Gathering of Shame)' that took place in Kolkata on 14 November 2007, to protest against the latest wave of violence unleashed by armed cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) against the protesting peasants of Nandigram in West Bengal's East Medinipur district in early November this year.

The people of Nandigram have steadfastly resisted repeated attempts to make them acquiesce to the proposed moves by agencies of the state government to acquire their land on patently unfair terms, for the setting up of a 'Chemical Hub' to be operated by the Indonesia-based multinational corporation Salim Group of Industries. The Salim Group, closely associated with the cronyism and corruption of the authoritarian Soeharto regime in Indonesia, has expanding interests in West Bengal.

Nandigram (like Singur in the state of Orissa in the recent past) has become synonymous with unrest and discontent over the threat of land acquisition in West Bengal today. The politics of land acquisition here, and across many other sites in India under the aegis of the colonial Land Acquisition Act of 1894, is directly linked to the process of the formation of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as bridgeheads of global capitalism all over Asia. SEZs are spaces where hard-won protections for labour and the environment can be held in abeyance through special governmental fiat. They operate as states of exception, as the frontiers of a ruthless, advanced form of capitalism gradually spreading power and influence over a bewildered hinterland.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led 'Left Front' government, which has ruled West Bengal for more than three decades, is currently acting as a chief facilitator of this mode of rapacious capitalist control over land and other resources through the formation of SEZs. This 'facilitation' has been sought to be achieved in Nandigram through a virtually year-long campaign of state-backed terror orchestrated by armed squads of 'party cadres'. This year, 14 March saw armed state police and a 'cadre' raiding party fire on a peaceful crowd of protesting villagers in Nandigram. Official casualty figures are said to have

included 14 dead bodies brought to the local morgue. Local inhabitants dispute this, claiming that many more have been killed and disposed of in mass graves, and that dozens of people are missing. Investigations are continuing.

Following the violence, supporters of the CPI(M) in Nandigram left the region and took shelter in camps which were used as bases for retaliatory raids. The protesting villagers of Nandigram, organised under the aegis of the Bhoomi Ucched Pratirodh Committee (Platform for Resistance to Eviction from Land), a ragtag coalition of widely disparate political formations, also used violence to defend their positions. This led to a significant increase in tension in the area over the past several months.

Recently, the CPI(M) initiated a set of manoeuvres to 'retake' Nandigram, including a final assault by party 'cadres' on 6 November. The violence and intimidation that this campaign has involved, coupled with a growing skepticism towards the state government's SEZ policy, has turned a large section of the population of West Bengal, traditionally inclined towards different shades of leftist politics, resolutely against the CPI(M). The 'Gathering of Shame' of 14 November in Kolkata that this post refers to is an embodiment of a rising tide of left-wing and democratic discontent against the sclerotic grip of the CPI(M)'s Market Stalinist policies in West Bengal.

Subject: Reader-list Walking for Nandigram, 14 November

From: moinak biswas <moinakb@yahoo.com>

Date: 4:00 am 11/16/07 **To:** reader-list@sarai.net

The organisers were obviously not prepared for the size of the turnout. That it would be big they must have known, as the outrage had reached a boiling point since the second offensive against Nandigram villagers started on 6 November 2007. But no one could have anticipated the multitudes that would render numbers obscure on the streets yesterday. The organisers didn't even bring enough of those little badges that just said "Dhikkar (Shame)!"

But then, who were the organisers? Some familiar faces were using a loudspeaker to issue basic instructions – "Please do not carry organisational banners; do not shout slogans; our route will be..."

No one was leading. Many people did not know who gave the call for the rally; they still do not know. No parties joined, no trucks and trains carrying obedient supporters; 100,000 people on the streets, smiling in the early winter sun – the smile of release from inaction, from silence. They had been asking constantly over the last few days: Is there somewhere we can go? Do you know if there is something we could do?

I saw my cousins, schoolmates, neighbours – many of whom admitted that this was the first time in their lives they had joined a procession. We exchanged looks across the street, from one row to the other; they smiled and said, "Could not stay home..."

Commuters, stranded by the endless human stream, often joined in. Someone shouted from an immobilised tram: "March on, we are with you!" Flower petals came raining down on the marchers from an old house near Wellington Square. On Nirmal Chandra Street, a group of locals stood by, displaying words of mourning and anger on small placards. I was near the Calcutta Medical College when Sibaji-da and Suman Mukhopadhyay called from Dharamtala, our destination, to say they had reached.

"Reached! But we have only just started here! And how many are still following...?" No one had a clear idea how many; but someone from the back reported that the tail was moving near Hedua, a kilometre behind us.

Calls were coming in from all points along the massive meandering stream. "Where are you? How long will you take?" As if one was still receiving calls to leave home and join. You could just inhabit these old central districts of the city and wait for the march to pass through you, making you a part of its open torso.

I felt like telling the first-timers that we were also doing this after a long, long time. A call came from Bankura: Dwaipayan Bhattacharya, missing the rally sorely, shouted, "When did you last see such a *michhil* (gathering)?"

I passed the question on to Sourin Bhattacharya, 70, walking in front of me. "When did we last see something like this, sir?"

"After Ayodhyaya", he says.

"After Gujarat", he then adds.

"But the CPM (Communist Party [Marxist]) and the other Left in power joined those rallies in droves... When did one last see a mass of this size *without* political parties?"

The question is passed on, the students wait for us to remember; we look to our dadas (lit. 'older brothers'/seniors), the quiet, grey brigade walking with us.

"Maybe the hunger marches of '66?"

But even then, they add, there were party workers.

Some bystanders are found managing the lines. No one asks who they are, the most irrelevant question on 14 November. We look around and find almost every face familiar, but the wonder is we didn't know so many faces would appear familiar. That's where numbers become obscure.

We arrived at Dharamtala at a quarter to four. The tail end was to come and mix into the sea 45 minutes later. The protean mass in Dharamatala, standing, squatting

on the main thoroughfare, drifting about and chatting, reuniting with friends, forming circles, cheering one another, singing, collecting relief for the affected in Nandigram, created a perfect picture of a rally without a centre, or rather, without the familiar centering. People weren't even sure for a while if there was to be the customary dais around which we should finally gather. Someone suggested that the little truck leading the silent procession with the sole loudspeaker be made the dais – but Medha Patkar was already seen addressing the ground from a makeshift stage.

Let us have one stage then, the truck people quickly decided. But it was impossible to go near the spot. The space, recently christened 'Metro Channel' by antigovernment protestors, was not meant for such a massive gathering. Indistinct voices came drifting in from there, but it was not designated as a focus for the eddying movements over the stretch between Lenin Sarani and S.N. Banerjee Road.

Was Mahasweta Devi speaking, or Sankha Ghosh? Aparna Sen or Joy Goswami? Was it Pratul Mukhopadhyay singing?

Anjan Mitra materialised beside us with Gautam Ghosh, who was asking anxiously if Nabaneeta Dev Sen had been spotted. "She is ill", Gautam said. "We asked her not to come, but she has sneaked out of home".

The stage had its own little circle, like innumerable other circles of students, actors, office workers, little-magazine-*wallas*, bespectacled teachers, journalists, holding intense transactions of information, and wisecracks. The circles opened and closed to allow for a shifting membership, meged into one another. One could not see the neat police circle around the gathering, though, like those found in the aftermath of 14 March – why, we were asking ourselves. The fairly modest gathering outside the Kolkata Film Festival on 11 March had drawn an excessive display of force from the police, who arrested 68 of a crowd singing songs. On 10 March, they arrested stray people walking away from Medha's fast. Bodhisattva Kar, who has earned the distinction of getting arrested on both occasions, must have been wondering too: where were the cordons, the neatly-lined-up law-keepers? The police looked scattered and vaguely distributed over Dharamtala. Were they mirroring the formless discipline of the crowd, a mass that was swelling and flowing on all sides, not tied up into a bunch by a single thread of harangue?

Before people dispersed with companions in tow, looking forward to an *adda* (informal gathering place/conversation) where the narratives would start, they were asking – what next…? A sequence of rallies and meetings, writing, image-making, arguments? But what about a "project", something that was more sustainable, as Sourin-*babu* kept on saying?

If one tried, one could read many lips in the crowd uttering the same interrogative. The questions were no doubt carried over to the *addas* that followed.

Organising the streets of 14 November into a legible sequence, a story, will perhaps

be the small next step in the direction of formulating the "project". One hopes the story does not forget, though, that there was no one to pass a single thread of yarn from the beginning to the end of the *michhil* yesterday.

Moinak Biswas Kolkata, 15 November 2007

Editors' Note

For more information on Nandigram, see www.sanhati.com

Grassroots activist Medha Patkar founded the Narmada Bachao Andolan, which began as a fight for information about the Narmada Valley development projects and continued as a fight for just rehabilitation for the lakhs of tribals and farmers to be ousted by the Sardar Sarovar Dam and other large dams along the Narmada river in the state of Gujarat. Eventually when it became clear that the magnitude of the project precluded accurate assessment of damages and losses, and that rehabilitation was impossible, the movement challenged the very basis of the project and questioned its claim to 'development'. Patkar is a Convener of the National Alliance of People's Movements – a non-electoral, secular political alliance that opposes globalisation/liberalisation-based economic policy, and supports alternative development paradigms and plans. She received numerous awards, including the Human Rights Defender's Award from Amnesty International.

Mahasweta Devi, Sankha Ghosh, Joy Goswami and Nabaneeta Dev Sen are prominent Bengali writers. Pratul Mukhopadhyay is a famous singer Anjan Dutt is a popular musician and actor. Gautam Ghose is a filmmaker. Aparna Sen is an actor and film director. Sourin Bhattacharya is an economist. Dwaipayan Bhattacharya is a political theorist. Sibaji-da (Sibaji Bandopadhyay) is a literary theorist. Suman Mukhopadhyay is a theatre director and filmmaker. Bodhisattva Kar is a historian and a former Sarai-CSDS research fellow.



"We Want No Flats...!" Bauwagen Culture and the 'Desired' Urban

STEFAN CANHAM

In the autumn of 2002, police evicted Bambule, one of Hamburg's alternative trailer parks, which for eight years had been tolerated on a centrally situated plot of wasteland owned by the city. In the months that followed, the inhabitants and supporters of this experiment in anarchic, cheap and free communal living organised weekly protest marches through Hamburg. The city attempted to keep these demonstrations out of the main shopping area, allegedly for fear of vandalism. The shopkeepers' association pleaded for a ban on inner city demonstrations during the Christmas season in order to safeguard commerce on Saturday afternoons. Media coverage was intense, but disappointing; newspapers carried only the usual pictures of police and demonstrators, failing to represent the vibrant cultural and architectural contributions made by the inhabitants of the trailers.

Starting out on a three-year photographic project in the aftermath of the Bambule eviction, it was my intention to document aspects that had been ignored by the mainstream media: the visually unique world of Germany's mobile squatter settlements.

Bambule was part of a nationwide phenomenon. In the 1980s, people began to use circus wagons, lorries, busses and *Bauwagen* (oblong trailers about 2 metres wide and 3-10 metres long, with a curved roof); these were originally produced to accommodate workers on building sites and to occupy disused plots of inner-city land. The changing practice of local authorities at this time had made squatting in empty houses increasingly difficult. Long-term squats were legalised by rent contracts, and new squats were largely prevented by immediate evictions. To bring one's own house – in the form of a trailer – to squat on urban wasteland was not only an alternative, but offered the possibility for an even more open, self-defined way of living. Today there are about 100 *Bauwagen* sites in German towns and cities, from Flensburg up on the Danish border down to Tuebingen and Munich.² There may be as many as 10,000 people living in disused wagons, trailers, buses and trucks, recycling and modifying them into highly unique, mobile, low-cost, permanent living spaces (Kropp and Ulferts, 1997).

Individual motivations for moving out of a flat and into a trailer are quite diverse. As one *Bauwagen* owner, Rolf, tells the story of Hamburg's Wendebecken site, which was evicted in 2004:

People were coming out of the squatter scene, like me, but also out of the ecological movement. There were punks who were drunk all day every day, students with a taste for the extravagant, and hippies. We were inspired by friends who were already living on sites, by a longing for a collective way of life and the wish to reduce costs in order to have to work less. It's hard to explain what I liked about it. I liked the communal spaces, the freedom to improvise, to create something. I liked to live in the open. The economic factor was important, too. I simply don't like selling my labour...

Philipp, another Bauwagen owner, stresses the point:

I consider it madness having to pay hundreds of euros every month just to be allowed to be and live somewhere. When I came back from a year in Spain, I parked my truck next to one lone *Bauwagen* on some parking lot and just lived there. I still had a flat rented under my name and sub-let to someone else, but I had no desire to move back in. It feels different. The flat would have meant little light, a narrow staircase, noise from the neighbours – and the financial burden of having to pay a monthly rent of 300 or 400 German marks. No, I lived in the truck, and in a cellar where we also made music. Eventually that parking lot grew into a large *Bauwagen* site, with up to 50 people living in trucks, trailers and self-built houses – it was utterly wild, because there was no one there to decide anything.

Reducing the cost of everyday life is a major argument for most of the mobile squatters. Surplus time, energy and money afforded by this lifestyle allow new ideas to spring up. Some *Bauwagen* inhabitants run small businesses related to the music and media scene and consider themselves merely temporary users of these undefined urban spaces. Others emphasise the wish to live within a group of people who share their outlook on life and political beliefs. Near Bremen there is a site occupied by ATTAC³ activists, while the Schwarzer Kanal in Berlin define themselves as a community of women, lesbians and transgender people. On the other hand, there are sites where activists live alongside people who have fallen through every social net and could not make it anywhere else.

The kind of self-determined, communal lifestyle that *Bauwagen* dwellers envision for themselves would be impossible to realise within the usual economic, social and architectural constraints of the inner city. Challenging the notion that centrally situated urban plots of land are to be defined first and foremost in terms of monetary value, they claim the right to settle in disused areas and set up self-organised micro-communities in which all building activities respond to the exact needs of the inhabitants.

In Hanover, *Bauwagen* dweller Christian founded Trebe e.V., a charitable organisation for homeless children. Next to the trailer he lives in are his kitchen shed, a second trailer serving as a communal space, and an additional shed divided in two that acts as a functioning office and homeless shelter. For seven years, his site was the first and only homeless initiative in Hanover that would accommodate guests anonymously. The city eventually followed his example with its own Bed By Night⁴ institution. Trebe e.V. has

counted up to 450 overnight stays per year, the communal trailer serving as a second shelter during high occupancy times. As Christian says:

...We had squatted a house with a large garden and people came to stay there with their trailers for a few days or weeks. So when I moved into my first trailer I didn't think about it too much; it was something that was already being done. I had a chassis and there were a lot of building materials left over from the construction of Hanover's underground. They were bringing us truckloads of untreated wood for which they had no further use. From this I built the trailer and a shed. This place here used to be a parking lot. There is still concrete underneath the soil. The squatters next door dug holes into the concrete and planted all the trees. Some of the soil I fetched with a wheelbarrow from another construction site down the road. And then it turned out the squatters had a cellar full of earth from when they had begun to dig an escape tunnel leading from their house to the next. That's where the rest of the soil came from...

To be 'on Trebe' is another expression for being homeless, for being a tramp. Jurisdiction at the time was such that Hanover's institutions could not provide shelter for homeless minors. We developed our concept and coordinated it with the official in charge of the safety of children and youths in the city. Kids and young adults came to us who had run away from home, fed up, or from an institution, saying, "The teacher hit me", things like that. Here they could just be for a while, without feeling they were being interrogated. We would give them a chance to calm down for a few days, and then try to clarify their situation. "Don't you want to phone your mother, she'll be anxious to hear from you? No way? Then how do you want to live? You can't go on stealing..." By and by we would try and establish contact with the parents or the authorities, to find a solution. Where can he go if he doesn't want to go back to where he came from?

Some *Bauwagen* sites developed gradually in places where no one seemed to mind a growing number of trailers. More often, these settlements are the result of prior planning. Their process involves systematically roaming the city in search of suitable pieces of wasteland, briefly occupying – and being evicted from – numerous plots in order to emphasise the need for a place to live, and garnering support of local politicians (especially valuable if the city owns the land in question). Rolf, who was active in all the squattings that preceded the establishment of Hamburg's Wendebecken site, notes:

We decided on a district and established contact with citizen's initiatives, cultural centres, people who were active in any kind of grassroots organisation and who might be able to support us by their presence. One by one and over a period of a few days, we moved the trailers to that district, in order not to attract too much attention. We mobilised people, tractors, wrote flyers, got in contact with the press and some lawyers.

Then the actual squatting, at five in the morning. That was how the first squatting was done. Later it was much reduced, roaming a district by bike, looking for suitable plots, using political contacts to find out who owned them, taking a vote within the group, and then go!

In the beginning we used 10 trailers for the squattings, which constituted an enormous logistic effort. Later on we only took 3 trailers, which was much easier because we had three tractors for as long as we needed them. We used to stay between one and five days, until the police came to evict us. At the last minute we would obediently tow the trailers from the site and move on to the next. It was somewhat absurd. This went on for three months, with a largish demonstration now and then, and always a lot of press coverage.

Then we refused to move from the empty lot next to the autonomous cultural centre Flora. We were evicted by force, which was quite rough. The district authorities towed our kitchen trailer onto a parking lot belonging to the local football team, where a few homeless people were living in trailers and self-built houses. We took this as an invitation and moved there with 12 trailers. One-and-a-half years later we were again evicted and squatted ten more sites, in vain. Eventually another *Bauwagen* group was offered the Wendebecken site, and we just went and stayed there too.

Once established, all *Bauwagen* sites set up their own infrastructure. As long as they have no contract with the city and are merely tolerated, compost toilets must be built. Electricity is generated through solar panels and stored in truck batteries. A supply for drinking water must be found in the neighbourhood, perhaps at a gas station, or a public building. The Wendebecken was the first *Bauwagen* site in Hamburg to obtain a lease from the local district, which obliged the squatters to pay modest sums for electricity, water and connection to the district's sewer. Most sites hold a weekly plenary, where residents debate questions concerning the community. Space for trailers is limited, so new arrivals are decided on collectively. Often a *Volksküche* or communal kitchen is set up, to which visitors are welcome. Concerts, workshops, demonstrations and other events are organised. The trailers are constantly being reworked with discarded materials like wood left over from building sites, old window frames from condemned houses, pallets, styrofoam, metal sheeting, plastic foil and tar. Second storeys and winter gardens are added to the wagons, sheds and huts are built onto them, and some have gradually been transformed into houses in which the original trailers have been all but completely obscured.⁵

Although *Bauwagen* sites are politically controversial, a number of them have been legalised through contracts with the city or local district. In Hamburg and Bremen, legislation introduced in the 1950s still treats the self-constructed homes and settlements as if they were the undesirable result of poverty in the bombed-out cities after the war (Schulz, 2002). Politicians and the public alike find it hard to accept that *Bauwagen* sites are the physical manifestation of a conscious decision to live differently. Today, people living in trailers may still have to carry their drinking water in canisters, but most of them

emphasise the fact that they actually save a lot of water because of this. They may have to chop wood to heat their trailers in the winter, but they are fully equipped with mobile phones, computers, and high-speed internet access. Time and again, *Bauwagen* dwellers have rejected moving into flats offered to them by local administrations. Flats just cannot be modified as quickly and as radically as *Bauwagen*, nor can they be towed from one site or city to the next. Flats are not easily turned into a visible political statement. Most importantly, flats cannot be grouped together at will to claim space and form a community.

The *Bauwagen* settlements raise important questions about the ways in which a city's inhabitants may use, shape and negotiate their surroundings. Should commercial interests determine how urban space is used, or should localities preserve it as self-determined living space? The city of Hamburg recently sold a huge part of its harbour area to a consortium of private investors. Here, the so-called HafenCity or 'harbour city' is being built, one of the largest urban-planning projects underway in Europe. The consortium promises to develop "playful, lively, maritime and humane" public spaces where visitors may enjoy the "intense experience of the water" (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH 2004: 01) and which will be "permanently open to everybody" (HafenCity Hamburg GmbH 2000: 01).

However, as the local Green Party (GAL) points out, right-of-way lies not with the city, but with the consortium. Whereas traditionally Hamburg's streets have been defined by law as, "spaces for exchanging information and opinions, as well as the cultivation of human interaction", in the contract between city and consortium, the streets of the HafenCity have been reduced to the sole function of enabling locomotion (Strenge, 1998, p. 305). The decision to permit or forbid "begging, street music, loitering, sleeping, protesting, handing out flyers, collecting signatures, setting up information booths, etc." will lie in the hands of the owners. As the Green Party website aptly notes (GAL Bürgerschaftsfraktion, 2005):

... In that place where the city stages itself in front of the world it will no longer be public and free, but private and subject to the rights of householders. Even if the design of the projected urban development is pleasing, in the end it will create but a simulation of life, a simulation of urban pluralism... The senate has not only sold property in the city, but a piece of the city itself and the freedom of its citizens with it.

In the shadows of landmark projects like the HafenCity, which aim primarily at enhancing the city's attractiveness to investors and tourists, Hamburg's *Bauwagen* sites become but endangered pockets of resistance against the "craved excesses of modern life" (Nakazato, 2000). Residents willingly sacrifice commodities such as central heating, spacious living quarters and private bathrooms in favour of low-cost mobile architecture, easily adaptable to a person's changing needs. When the Wendebecken was evicted after its contract had expired in the autumn of 2004, the site issued one last communiqué: "There is space enough! Self-determination instead of the logic of commerce! For more substandard living! We want no flats!"























Author's Note

The inhabitants of the *Bauwagen* – just as many women as men – are students, apprentices, pupils, musicians, actors, Tai Chi teachers, gardeners, punks, hippies, etc.; a very heterogeneous group, who nevertheless define themselves as a community through their mode of living. Accordingly, the interior designs are extremely varied. I photograph them from a central point of view: in these images you can compare the possible variations within a severely limited set-up. In order to place the viewer in the midst of the self-built environment with nothing to distract his or her perception of the space, I chose not to portrait the owners of the wagons. It later turned out this was probably the only way to carry out the project: although the owners are generally proud of their trailers, a lot of them are reluctant to being photographed – a direct result of the very adverse press coverage of their ideologies and practices.

Photographing the exteriors was much more difficult. *Bauwagen* are not positioned according to picturesque considerations, but according to necessity and practicality. Since they lack an attic or basement, the surrounding wasteland is turned into storage space. They look untidy. They always seem to face north, or to lie in the deep shadow of a building towering over them. The clash of the improvised trailers with the surrounding city challenges the notion of the well-made, 'composed' picture. One has to accept the fact that a community which rejects the representative use of architecture to "commemorate power and wealth" might look very different from the steel, glass and stone structures surrounding it (Rudofsky, 1965). Some viewers have criticised my representing the exteriors in graphic black and white, fearing that this would add to the negative image of the phenomenon. Yet it is not so much the pictures that challenge our notion of beauty: it is the *Bauwagen* themselves that question our preconceptions of what is 'desirable' within our urban environment.

Notes

- In Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, people occupied abandoned houses (this act was known as 'squatting') for a number of reasons: to live cheaply, to escape regional housing shortages and homelessness, or to protest against property speculation. Often squatters would renovate houses that had been condemned, winning the sympathy of neighbours. Clashes with police and authorities were frequent.
- According to a list in Vogelfrai (2003), a newspaper published for use only within the Bauwagen scene. Each issue is edited by a different site in turn.
- Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens. A worldwide network of "local groups involved in national and international campaigns whose aim is to propose concrete alternatives to neoliberal orthodoxy, based on solidarity" (www.attac.org).
- 4. Bed By Night offers shelter, food and counselling to homeless children. Admittance is on a voluntary basis, with a minimum of formalities. The institution is based in an ensemble of shipping containers, modified by Hanover University's Faculty of Architecture to provide ten beds, showers, toilets, a kitchen and a dayroom.
- The Bauwagen site at the Aubrook in Kiel has by now been transformed almost completely into a settlement of self-built houses. High-quality clay is available at the site, and only has to be dug up and mixed with sand to be used for building purposes.

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BETWEEN, ACROSS, BELOW, WITHIN, OUTSIDE

Notes on the Frontiers and Borders of the Postcolony

Angela Mitropoulos

On 22 June 2007, the Australian Prime Minister declared a de facto state of emergency over remote indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The overt reason given for this extraordinary move was the protection of children from abuse – or, more specifically, its occasion was the release of the report by the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse in the Northern Territory. There have been countless other reports on the conditions, often described as "Fourth World", that many indigenous peoples endure, particularly in remote areas. There are more than enough indicators deaths in police custody, highly disproportionate imprisonment, awful rates of life expectancy and infant mortality and, not least, extreme destitution. But it is important to note that this most recent report into child abuse was anecdotal, and did not find that child abuse was any more or less 'endemic' than in the rest of Australia. Nevertheless, the measures so far announced under this state of emergency proffer a rather dubious theory of the causes of child abuse, suggesting that the principal question being posed (and answered) here is not, in fact, that of how to stop children from being abused. Those measures include the banning of alcohol and x-rated pornography, the attachment of normative conditions to welfare payments, and the suspension of (what is currently in some cases) communal titles over indigenous land and local controls over the movement through them.

Indeed, numerous indigenous commentators have suggested that the government has used the scandal of child abuse to "to justify the weakening of Aboriginal communal rights to land under the guise of economic development" (Phillips, 2007).

One could remark here that the report's title – *Little Children Are Sacred* – already speaks volumes about the restoration of a centuries-long coincidence between governmental "Aboriginal Protection" agencies and Church missions that had – prior to the more recent transfer of land titles to some indigenous communities from the 1970s – assumed the task of the "protection" and conversion of indigenous peoples into hardworking Christians. Appearing toward the end of a period of wars of colonisation and the removal of indigenous peoples from their lands, the doctrine of protection emerged upon claims of an impending 'extinction' and through the institutional practice of removing children (in many cases, those deemed to be 'half-caste'). Many of those children were then

removed to missions. But this often tragic history – and the widespread abuse that occurred in missions until very recently is also well-documented – cannot fully explain the revival of a missionary approach in these times. Just as the Australian government has increasingly subcontracted health and welfare functions to Church organisations in recent years, so too has the US government, and on a global scale; going so far as to refuse funding to, for instance, HIV/AIDS organisations in Africa and Asia that distribute condoms and seek harm reduction. The obvious question being posed here is why, after cutting health and welfare services to indigenous communities, it has required a paramilitary intervention to, purportedly, ensure the health and welfare of those same communities.

One could, moreover, easily point to the parallels with the events around the *Tampa*, the military seizure and interdiction in 2001, by the Australian government, of the Norwegian freighter that had rescued over 300 undocumented migrants from drowning. Not to mention the allegation by government ministers some time later, since exposed as a lie but generally believed as plausible at the time, that undocumented migrants were 'throwing their children overboard'. The Tampa 'events' preceded an election the government was widely expected to lose, as does this declaration of a state of emergency in the Northern Territory. In both these instances, what have been ongoing and widely-reported occurrences (undocumented boat arrivals and child abuse) were reconstructed as singularly alarming events providing the pretext for authoritarian displays of sovereignty – that is, declarations of an exceptional situation demanding, without question, the suspension of the normal functioning of the law so as to restore the presumed integrity of the Australian body politic.

One could also recall here the sense in which Giorgio Agamben's analyses of "homo sacer" – "the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereign" (1998, p. 84) – and the "exception" have resonated in Australia, well beyond a philosophical idiom or the supposedly temporary or recent 'exceptions' enacted in response to the ongoing global 'War on Terror'. Here, much of Agamben's work was translated as the stark question of a persistent fracture within and of the postcolony. Most recently and notably, Australia's was the first Western government to introduce the automatic and indefinite internment of undocumented migrants, the extra-territorialisation of detention camps to the Pacific, and the excision of parts of Australia from the 'migration zone' for the purposes of evading habeas corpus and the functioning of asylum laws and conventions. Much of this rests firmly on Australia's history as a penal colony, and is attested to in its record as a mostly anxious outpost of imperial power.

It might be noted that this latter aspect is evident in the recent occupation of countries in the Asia-Pacific by Australian military and police. Such exercises are presently conducted under the rhetoric of 'failed states' and 'humanitarian intervention' – with little, if any, opposition voiced against such from within Australia, so deeply seductive is this disposition of benevolence. And it might also be remarked that this most recent declared emergency in the northern parts of Australia closely resembles this discourse of 'failed states' and its practices – though this time as an 'internal' re-colonisation. Indeed, the person previously

responsible for the administration of the Australian police presence in the Solomon Islands has been appointed to the taskforce that will oversee the current 'emergency' in Australia.

Agamben's eloquent accounts of the sovereign exception and 'bare life' are helpful, but insufficient to explain what is transpiring *in the detail*, as a process. To understand much of what has been occurring here, it is crucial to re-pose the question of the frontier – and of the relation between border and frontier – as a question of *the scalable techniques of the contract*.

Before elaborating on this, let me turn to the frontier (and the border) as these are understood according to a Euro-American perspective. This is less to propose that such a view remains applicable *in* Europe or the US than that it emerges in the context of a modernist dialectic of a figural Europe and a European idea of America. This dialectic – even as it re-acquires a certain purchase due to technics (encompassing questions of art and of labour, in relation to questions of the human and non-human), and various ambassadorial manoeuvrings around so-called US unilateralism – is a *partial* understanding of the world and, for that matter, of the conditions and conflicts that increasingly obtain in Europe and the US. It is, to put it another way, a perfectly Hegelian dialectic, proclaiming the inexorable movement of the European Spirit through a world delineated by zones in which there is history, norm and contractual peace (i.e., mutually agreed-upon borders), and frontier regions, those marked by perpetual war, deemed to be a natural state (what in Social Contract theory is presented as the "state of nature", and in Hegel as the absence of history, historical change and epochality).

In these latter zones, the seeming perpetuity of misery is oftentimes explained in racialising terms as the *inherent* condition of groups of people, or as anomalous or foreign to the norm. I will come back to this, but let me note that this is in no way to argue for an impartial perspective. On the contrary, it is to suggest that the perspective from the *other side* of the frontier becomes crucial to challenging the re-inscription of colonial forms of governance in metropolitan spaces (such as the internment camps; and the recourse, during the riots in the *banlieues*, to the 1955 law that allowed French colonial authorities to impose curfews in Algeria). As Mezzadra and Rahola (2003) have astutely remarked, these measures derive from the conduct of 'total war' in the colonies, as well as from the (re)colonisation of spaces on the grounds of their depiction, whether utopically or dystopically, as frontier spaces. This involves a transformation not only of the very sense of the frontier (not least as it becomes deployed in prominent analyses of technics, labour, war and the exception) but also the border.

Put another way: the distinction between frontier spaces and bordered realms correlates with the distinction – in Social Contract theories – between the 'state of nature' and 'society' that, in turn, are the ideal-typical placeholders for the 'West' and the colonies. Pessimism and optimism are, here, two sides of the same coin – a process of coinage, if you will – in which the measure of capital and its values are applied to land, bodies and life. In other words, if the pessimistic – which is to say, Hobbesian – view of frontier spaces regards them as sites of desolation and suffering whose causes are intrinsic (as an

expression of, say, barbarism), in its utopic dimensions the frontier is often horizon approached as possibility. And it is this latter which has informed prominent understandings of exodus and empire and, I would argue, has led to a political and theoretical impasse.

In a brief, though at times ambiguous discussion on exodus, Virno distinguishes frontier from border in this way: "The border is a line at which one stops; the frontier is an indefinite area in which to proceed. The border is stable and fixed, the frontier mobile and uncertain. One is obstacle; the other is chance". He nevertheless adds, almost in passing, that the frontier is "the presence of a boundless territory to colonise" (2005, pp. 20-21). Hardt and Negri, however, are far less ambivalent. For them, the distinction between border and frontier – and the ascription of the latter with a positive political value: the "boundless frontier of freedom" and "frontier of liberty" (2004, pp. 406, 169) – is pivotal to the presentation of "absolute democracy" as a desirable, if not entirely radical, political strategy.

And yet, it is clear from Virno's account that while the frontier is so often conceived as a space of expansion without limit, it is also – in its paradigmatic, European sense – the rolling out of limits in the form of the proliferation of borders. That is, unlike the border against which it is so often defined, and as this delineation arises in the contract between an 'old Europe' and a 'new America', the frontier is that space into which people carry those borders with them as they might their own personal possessions.

In the final pages of the first volume of Marx's *Capital*, which Virno refers to, the significant differences between European and American class struggles lie in the "constant transformation of the wage-labourers into independent producers", in view of a relative absence of surplus labourers (as distinct from a superfluous population) and the availability of 'free land' in the colonies. By this logic, the possibility of land ownership and a 'labour shortage' opens up the chance of escaping the condition of wage labour – but, importantly, that 'escape' takes the (largely idealised) form of becoming a small property owner. Marx cites Edward G. Wakefield, a theorist of colonisation and a principal founder of New Zealand, who complained of a "parcelling-out of the means of production among innumerable owners" that, Marx adds, "annihilates, along with the centralisation of capital, all the foundations of a combined labour" (1978, pp. 720-21). The historian F.J. Turner would present the frontier as the very thesis of American exceptionalism (1961), in terms not entirely dissimilar to Marx. For Turner, the frontier is productive of individualism and therefore of a democracy and egalitarianism grounded in the diffusion and perpetual expansion of property in land.

Thus, the utopic version of the frontier does not imply escape so much as escape whose sense is exhausted by and as individuation – and individuation in some very precise terms: as self-possession, sovereignty, the ability to enter into contractual relations, to see oneself (one's body, one's labour, one's relations) as a question of property ownership and propriety.

In other words, the frontier is also a way of depicting, as Turner puts it, "the outer edge of the wave – the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (1961, p. 38). The sense of 'chance', from the 'European' side of that encounter, is reminiscent of Machiavelli's famous

advice to the Prince to violently take command of Fortuna, "to keep her down, to beat her" (1979, p. 162). In other words, what the optimistic version of the frontier elides is the violence that is inherent to the definitions of freedom, escape and selfhood as self-possession, individuation, and so on. Moreover, here the Machiavellian understanding of chance – of gambling and its measures of success – joins with Lockean notions of rights, property and enclosure to produce not (as Marx suggested) the annihilation of class, but its naturalisation in the form of individuated, meritocratic explanations of any 'failure' to 'succeed'.

However, from the perspective of the colonial side of the frontier, the encounter was not a tale of individuated self-mastery and freedom, but an experience of dispossession, carried out through (often extreme) violence. Behind the concept of 'free land' is the process of colonisation; behind estimates of 'labour shortage' is the existence of populations deemed unassimilable or superfluous to the conditions of the wage contract and productivity. All of this requires borders. But, contra the understanding of borders as closed that derives from the figural opposition between the ideas of Europe and America, borders are in fact porous, selectively inclusive (and exclusive).

The measures announced under the recent state of emergency in Australia are not merely sovereign judgements of an exception, but technologies that seek to filter. They do not all seek to apply punitive measures against an entire community, as with the wholesale bans on pornography and alcohol which function to imply that indigenous peoples cannot, in these instances, 'control themselves'. Rather, many of the measures are directed toward contractual individuation, as in applying punitive measures (such as cutting welfare payments) where there is deemed to be a failure of individual compliance with certain norms; shifting land tenure arrangements from communal holdings to private real estate; and so on. It is evident that the national government is seeking to squeeze those who live in remote communities into the model of the ideal property-owning, proper bourgeois subject.

Impossible to fulfill (since it is impossible, for instance, to send one's child to a non-existent school, even when threatened with welfare cuts), such measures impose an abstract equality that, in its real-world application, produces and cements inequalities. The border, in this sense, is that which filters between those zones deemed to be frontier spaces (and in which the law of exception is applied), and the ostensibly peaceful domain of the contract. To be sure, peace here does not mean the absence of conflict but a normative status accorded to the conflict of competition. And, in overtly defining the contract as the voluntary association of equivalent, accomplished and willing subjects, it is simultaneously presented as the condition of 'society' and functions as the depoliticisation of its conditions. In this depoliticisation, there are no longer any questions; only moral imperatives for actions that cannot be questioned. To put this another way: the contract is the means by which 'society' – and the political – seeks to immunise itself – but perhaps less from some mythical state of nature (persistently relegated to the frontier) to which it becomes possible to transfer and ascribe all manner of presumable deviations – than from politics. In this sense, the contract is the 'internal border' par excellence.

But there is more at stake in exploring this ambivalent nexus between border and frontier than its appearance during the state of emergency declared against indigenous people in Australia. It is also a question of the concepts and traditions of radical analysis that have come to shape the problematic of current theoretical endeavours and debates. As Virno asserts, the frontier has been a significant theoretical point of departure – for Marx, perhaps - but also for those readings of Marx that would go on to emphasise 'desertion, refusal and exodus'. This set of concepts has been pivotal to the traditions of radical protest that characterised Operaismo, Autonomia and so-called Autonomist Marxism. But the resurgence of the concept of the frontier is not simply a question of theoretical traditions. It is also a matter of technics and its utopian regard, the sense that changes to the form and character of work brought about by technics occurs in a progressive manner. As J.J. King has suggested: "the Internet became constituted in the popular mind of the last decade as a 'new frontier', a 'wild west', a 'place' in which exploration, innovation, self-fulfilment, self-realisation and wanton speculation were, as on the original imaginary frontier, the rule: the grand narrative of the American Idea played out over this novel information network..."

Internet-as-cyberspace-as-frontier is still a powerful formulation today. Beyond its resonance in the re-composition of the conditions of labour (and of life), it is also a question of the coincidences of *techné* and war; of 'development' which assumes the character of war; of forms of sociality (such as 'social software') which disavow their eco-technical condition in war (notable in the internet's origins in military innovation); and, not least, war as the literal re-inscription of borders. Moreover, one should not understate the ways in which the armed export of democracy and the militaristic humanitarianism of the past two decades is also a part of this 'grand narrative' in which the *jus bellum* ('just war') is understood as the means to forcibly 'civilise' frontier spaces.

What, given this and more, does it mean to grant a paradigmatic status to a concept that is inseparable from a colonial trajectory? Or, to put it another way, what does it mean to apply that concept indifferently, without a sense of the material specificities of, most notably, the experience of coloniality?

At stake here is the question of difference in understandings of exodus, desertion and refusal. While this set of concepts has been crucial in emphasising the ways in which struggle does not always, or even necessarily, occur on the side of integration, inclusion or participation and, not least, has been significant in challenging the sense of the political in the movements of migration, there is nevertheless a residual Eurocentrism (in, say, the understanding of subjectivity) that will have to be reckoned with. Approached from one side of the frontier, these concepts become not a way to sense difference – the differences of colonial encounters, among other things – and hence to practice politics, but a means through which the classical political subject of contractarian politics re-acquires political advantage by association and in the neutralisation of differences. Here, one might note the prominence of 'eco-tourism' in its many, sometimes progressive aspects – and hence of a

certain version and trajectory of escape – in the propositions of indigenous, entrepreneurial 'development' that have accompanied the proclamation of the 'state of emergency', posited as a result of the failure to 'develop'.

One could also refer to certain understandings of concepts that simultaneously serve as declarations of a new epoch and function as attempts to retrieve what has been deemed lost. What comes to mind, most notably, is the concept of precarity tendered as a lament for security; or that of cognitive labour as the recuperation of ontological or analytical primacy in the midst of its crisis. While discourses of precarity sometimes speak of the longstanding precariousness of, for instance, women and of labour in the colonies, and while those of cognitive labour insist that intellectuality is a form of labour and therefore subject to exploitation as is the case with other forms of work, all too often this representation of differences merely serves to ennoble what remain relatively privileged strata in the service of 'intra-class' hegemonic projects.

In any case, this convolution between exodus and frontier is the problematic that shadows current thinking and functions *as its horizon*. This is the line that distinguishes the (legal) commons from the undercommons, the demand for recognition from the refusal of abstract right, and the redistribution of sovereignty from its desertion. If one accepts, for instance, that net-related work (or digital networking) is indeed a form of labour, then it follows that it involves particular forms of exploitation and subjection that can shape the ways in which those workers conceive politics. In the realm of immaterial labour, visibility, recognition and rights have a purchase that is both affective and economic. In itself, this is a matter of interest – but, in relation to other forms of existence and of work, such as that of undocumented migrants, it becomes debatable whether strategies that seek visibility are of any use or, for that matter, might result in deportation or internment.

From the deliberations of Hardt and Negri on absolute democracy (2004), to the debates over Web 2.0, the question of whether frontiers will continue to be visualised according to a specifically Euro-American provenance is also a question of the extent to which declarations of a frontier are but an inducement or prelude to colonisation; whether they are the advance, in highly individuated and intimate form, of would-be property owners – or citizens – through 'savage' spaces. What is at stake, then, is the foreclosure of subjectivity in a colonial demeanour – whether this occurs in relation to the indigenous peoples of Australia, on the net, or in the delimitation of the very sense of what it means to relate to others, *as* others. The disposition toward appropriation assumes many aspects, sometimes ostensibly progressive, or even helpful, ones. But what has become more than clear, in the declaration and conduct of the 'emergency' in Australia's Northern Territory, is that even the most benevolent of appropriative demeanours can easily transform into a clamour for the application of paramilitary force when the universality of acquisitive subjectivity is refused.

Editors' Note

For an account of state policies and the implications of being "unAustralian", see Linda Carroli, "Be Offended, Be Very Offended", in *Sarai Reader 06: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 376-87. Reader 06 online text: http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader 06.html

See also Francesca da Rimini, "Lepers, Witches and Infidels & It's a Bug's Life", in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 26-38. Reader 05 online text: http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader_05.html

Note

1. As Marx ironically notes in Das Kapital, Volume 1, Chapter 33: "Wakefield discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines, and other means of production, does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative – the wage-worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will. He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things. Mr. Peel, he moans, took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 3,000 persons of the working-class, men, women, and children. Once arrived at his destination, 'Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.' Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!"

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Across (B)order and Back: The Everyday Reality of Kolkata's "Flyings"

SWATI GHOSH

City-Body-Text

The lush green swathe of the Kolkata Maidan, encircled by roads on all sides, is sprinkled with a few dark spots in the evening. When one approaches near, they turn out to be small clusters of young and not-so-young women. As dusk falls they recede like ghosts, taking up positions at a distance from one another. Swiftly they change from sari-clad suburban housewives to 'sexy' cosmopolitan women in gaudy make-up, junk jewellery and revealing outfits. Then they wait in silence until total darkness, anticipating the arrival of their customers. Men arrive in ones and twos, and negotiate a price. Darkness canopies their furtive carnality.

She is the "flying",¹ as she calls herself: one of a community whose numbers are escalating in the city today. She is no more the stereotypical streetwalker to be seen waiting for a client under a lamppost at night. She can be seen anywhere, anytime, in the metropolis – around cinema halls, below flyovers, near railway stations, at busy crossroads, in secluded residential areas. She is not a permanent city-dweller, but keeps plying from her rural home to the urban workplace in alternate turns. All places are workplaces for her, and any time is work time.

In the local Bangla dialect she is known as the "half-gerasta" – a hybrid term to denote her precarious condition. The term literally translates as "less than domestic", the English word "half" added to the colloquial form of *grihasta* (householder) to convey a social scorn for the besmirched sanctity of a virtuous housewife.

She, however, rejects this and *chooses* to refer to herself as the "flying" – an objective term that bestows neutrality upon the description of her work and categorically ignores the stigma associated with her position. A hitherto unknown English word that denotes unfettered movement becomes a repository for her identity. Framed within the self-conferred appellation, she thus stays discernable to herself *on her own terms*.

Consequently, housewives withdraw to a safe distance from her as she is a blemish on the tradition of chaste domesticity; and prostitutes reject her for not being audacious enough to disregard the norms of family. She is a housewife engaged in part-time prostitution under economic compulsion, and also a sex worker who has a family to tend and a house to keep. Instead of loyally subscribing to a specific identity assigned to a prostitute or a housewife, she inhabits a volatile space that involves quick flights from one position to another. Her work is stigmatised for commercialising affective sex – which is to be performed monogamously, at home, naturally and out of love.

(Con)Fusion of Roles

A flying woman shuttles between the roles of prostitute-at-work and housewife-at-home. She is both, one and the other at the same time. Occupying the hazy terrain of this undefined overlap, she belongs to neither the household nor the brothel. Plying between the home and the street, she walks a tightrope across the borders of social sanction and moral offence. Surprisingly, she manoeuvres this slide from productive to reproductive role smoothly and efficiently, without a hitch, day in and day out.

As a housewife situated within the bonds of marriage and family, she performs the domestic chores of cleaning, cooking and looking after children. This daily running of the household is managed single-handedly, with little or no help from her spouse. Her sexuality is related to procreation; and as per the family code of conduct, the role of a wife and mother is prioritised as her 'natural' place.

Her productive role begins as soon as she takes to the streets for a living. When her male partner, the usual breadwinner of the family, is rejected by the job market as inefficient or when he is incapable of earning enough, the flying woman steps into the street in order that the family may be fed. Other than those required for home-making, she has no special skills – so she has no choice but to use her body for sex work. Her work-shifts closely follow her home-shifts.

Cityspace, Workplace

In the past, the flying woman could be located around the brothels, waiting for customers in the tropical midday sun while the line girls dozed off after a busy night and a lousy morning. In the evenings she could be spotted at urban arcades of the city that line girls would not prefer to visit, performing at a price they would hate to accept.

The central part of the city had its own landmarks where flyings were seen. Nocturnal soliciting continued in and around the Park Street junction of Jawaharlal Nehru Road and near the numerous bars, restaurants and opera houses located in the area. From early evening onwards, flyings from the Maidan and Park Street areas would rent rooms for short periods in order to service clients. The other preserve of the flyings was the Babughat area. The shadowy nooks in the gardens or taxi rides through the heart of the city were the usual places where these women served their more moneyed clients.

To these familiar spots more sites are being added almost everyday. Along with the changing skyline, the increase in shopping malls and high-rises, bridges and flyovers, came

demographic transformation as well. Perhaps a change in patterns of 'public' sex, a preference for 'quick' satisfactions, can be deduced from the increased presence of the flyings all over the city.

The new zones where flyings operate are not identified by old landmarks. These new locales are not isolated social spaces; and they transgress the *moral* borders that existed previously. The city's immensely crowded central spots, usually chosen for political meetings or public demonstrations, become the most active place for solicitation, specially during peak hours.² The traditional place of worship in the city, the Kalighat temple that already had a brothel from very early days, becomes a profitable zone for the flyings, who extend their activities well into residential areas and those areas surrounding metro rail entrances, the by-lanes along the western side of the canal, and in the relatively secluded road towards the National Library.³

What is remarkable with respect to the flying is that she has emerged as an important phenomenon of the metropolis in recent years. She is not a clandestine extension of the brothels any more but is to be seen at every familiar and not-so-familiar corner of the city, in remote and crowded, public and private places, during odd and regular working hours alike. No man seeking sex can escape her. She cannot afford to let one.

Sites/Counter-Sites

This robust flying activity is destabilising the once-sharp divide between public and private, with intimate acts unfolding routinely in commonly traversed areas. Normative civic zones are being redefined as nodes where affective scenarios can be performed with ease. These sites render illusory the neat partitioning of human life.

The flyings have not only altered the contours of having sex in public, they have caused the times and hours set aside for personal pleasure to change as well. The wholesomeness of purpose preserved in the performance of civic functions designated for each public place becomes contested. Family and social space, cultural and useful space, leisure and work – all juxtapose with one another in the context of the flying. Sexual satisfaction is now readily available, as and when desired. Moreover, flying activity does not secretly bypass the civic codes but overtly violates them. The work-leisure binary is destabilised too. Leisure is no longer separate from work. Possibilities of sexual pleasure emerge amidst work hours and at the work place. And the proportion of such events is not to be dismissed as inconsequential.

The sites where flyings ply are often marked by instantaneous temporality, as in a cab or a boat rented for a fleeting sexual encounter. These mobile spaces are not places: they are *heterotopias*, each a "floating piece of space that exists by itself yet is the reserve of footloose fantasies"⁴, as Foucault puts it – providing the aspect of a room without being a room, a makeshift enclosure that also hides sex-acts from the public gaze, and leaves no traces. Similarly, the seats of cinema halls and booths of small restaurants are sometimes

converted to tenuous corners of physical intimacy. The theatre's chiaroscuro, the fiction being projected to the real audience, provides a charged setting and atmosphere. Curtains create a precarious privacy for cubicles within dingy hotel eateries. The pleasure spots of hotels or resorts a few hours from the city, shelter the illicitness of purchased sex and offer a freedom not found elsewhere. These spaces are not a new discovery, but the flyings have lent new meanings to the usage; the sexual transgressions alter the norms for entry to restricted realms, and force the spaces open.

The gender-inscribed territoriality of work in the city is altered as well. The flying can infringe on both sides of social space equivocally marked as dangerous or safe for respectable women to traverse. Her very being also disorders the concept of working hours considered 'proper' for women. When work for a woman is constituted by sexual defiance and autonomy, the fear and risks of violating the norms of decency no longer prevail. The categories of moral/immoral, procreation/pleasure, private/public, do not play against each other; rather, they lose their edges and lean into mutual dissolves as the flying traverses each site/counter-site.

The Economics of Abundance

Why is the city suddenly flooded with women from the suburbs participating in these public sexual transactions? One reason is the peripheral economy where many flyings have their roots. The closure of factories, dismissal of labour, rampant unemployment and the rendering casual of permanent jobs have forced working-class housewives to stake a claim in the urban labour market. For the first time in the city's history, large numbers of married women are crossing the thresholds of their homes in order to earn a living from sexual activity in public.

Flying women are not the young girls who top the demand list of male clients. Nor are they brothel entertainers accomplished in the erotic arts. They are usually between 25 and 35 years old, the daughters-in-law of traditional households; most of them have at least two children. They are from rustic backgrounds and lack urban exposure. Yet they are able to satisfy urban men. The supply of willing female bodies brings down the price, only to be matched by clients' purchasing power. The flyings' need for quick money corresponds to their clients' need for quick sex.

Sex work is perhaps the only economic option for this group. Independent participation in the labour market is socially prohibited for housewives of the rural hinterland. Domestic service is often the first option, but in the immediate neighbourhood these jobs are few and the wages low. Without specialised skills, training or contacts, the struggling housewife is rejected outright in a competitive world where even skilled male workers are frequently laid off. She can survive only as a flying.

The line (and thus the definition of morality) etched between work and sex work gets further blurred, as those women who cannot enter the labour market try to make a living

through petty trade (selling vegetables, rice, etc. on the pavement), in addition to selling sex. The younger women who manage to get jobs on construction sites or as casual labour in informal manufacturing discover that giving sexual favours to employers is the tacit clause for getting work. They are paid less, and assigned less strenuous work; they try to augment their earnings through sex work at any odd hour. Single women with children and women deserted by their husbands are forced to sexually oblige contractors or senior skilled workers on demand.

Vulnerability Explored

The position of the flying is not that of an 'in-between' possessing the characteristics of both the stigmatised whore and the sanctified mother. The intersecting meanings mesh into an elusive, susceptible identity. For women in conventional careers who also perform domestic chores at home, one role does not negate the other. The role of the mother and wife is sacrosanct and her participation in productive activity is praiseworthy. A prostitute is marked by a precise libidinal identity, but in spite of her morals being condemned, she is recognised as a professional. In the case of the flying, her wages are accepted but her work is *unrecognised* within family and community.

Moreover, the flying woman's position is *doubly* precarious. Her family tries to keep secret the fact that they live off earnings that come through a socially 'immoral' act, while the community wants to discipline the element of promiscuity that violates the prescribed purity of family norms. The social denial of her work and earning power compels her exclusion even from the category of marginal worker.

These erasures render her imperceptible to the civic administration; thus, she has to function within an *undetectable space* and remain *unacknowledged* as a worker in the public domain. The law-making/imposing authority and the law-abiding citizenry take advantage of this dubious position. The law does not consider her a subject that citizens should be protected from; nor considers that she should be compensated for the sexual violence she may experience at the hands of citizens. Her abusers can escape charges of violence on the grounds that prostitution is illegal, hence it is *she* who is breaking the law. Thus, it is *she* who has to pay for violating civic/moral codes and soliciting in public. In addition, the fear of losing money and the anxiety of not finding a customer are also *her* burdens.

Her economic struggle epitomises a complex labour process.⁵ Neither classified as sex worker nor working woman, she is an *invisible* worker, a worker without a working status; and ironically, the onus is on *her* to prove that she is *not* doing a job that she actually *is*. This ambivalent rendering of her job as simultaneously an absence and a presence erases her own image as a worker to herself.

The flying becomes the manifestation of several paradoxically convergent yet incommensurable positions. Her gendered identity of housewife contradicts her class identity as a worker; her class identity of a non-professional providing sexual service

clashes with that of the prostitute; and her identity as a member of the extended community of sex workers stands in contrast to her identity of a woman of the family. She is excluded from the solidarity shared by the working class across race, gender and caste. She continually walks along a narrow edge with bits and pieces of common ground to share with different communities, most of whom are at odds with her stigmatised self.

Victim-Rebel and Elusive Other

Straddling two realms that continuously support yet negate each other, does the flying woman find herself the victim of the economic and cultural order? Or is she a symbol of subversion, realigning the matrix of male domination in her role as breadwinner?

On the street she learns how to speak out, use her body to her advantage, deal with the police, constantly cope with the public gaze. The amenable image of the demure housewife disappears in her tough handling of unknown aggressive clients least concerned about her well-being. She soon learns the rules of the market. She names her price, sets the terms of the transaction and learns to level the obstacles over payment. Aware that hers is a service to an anonymous client, she even learns to violate the terms of contract as and when possible, and becomes competent to rob, cheat, deceive and betray.

At home, the notion of the passive and dutiful housewife undergoes changes as well. The division of labour with respect to household chores remains largely the same. But personal relations between the flying woman and her husband acquire a new intensity, rooted in her street experiences that redefine the prescribed conjugal norms she had assimilated as a housewife.

The intersection of space and power is reconstituted with respect to her work. The contours of the social space change radically too. It is through her work that the peripheral economy comes in direct interaction with the centre. Plying from the suburban home to the metropolis, the flying connects the regional and the urban, the domestic and the civic, the core and the margin. She is at once at the inside and the outside of these discursive boundaries, and yet elsewhere. This fact of spaces being both connected and separate helps to acknowledge the power of transgression and the possibility of resistance woven together. This alignment along an axis that is simultaneously inside, outside and *elsewhere* is marked by "radical openness". The structured norms of power and patriarchy fail to appropriate this unique position of *victim-rebel* in absolute terms, thus continually opening up possibilities of subversion.

The links that she manipulates between social space, sexuality and power are both oppressive and enabling for the flying. She is subjected *by* her work, yet emerges *as* a subject *through* her work. Her work produces her as a social being even as she produces her work as a social act.

Belonging, in her case, is always deferred. Pulverising rigid boundaries, fulfilling both her legitimate and illegitimate roles in discrete succession, she represents an elusive otherness within the category 'woman'.

The "flying"... is an inimitable position, a spatial body-writing beyond the familiar and the settled, a mode *en-passant*. Living on the border and also outside, she offers herself as an embodiment of discontinuity, uninterrupted and always.

Notes

- I do not propose the term "flying" as a name, attribute or translation. The part-time prostitutes of Kolkata
 refer to themselves through this naming. The current NGO variant on the term is "floating prostitutes", to
 differentiate these women from those based in brothels. I prefer the term "flying" and use it in my study
 of the community. Genealogical differences in the terminology 'prostitute', 'sex worker', 'flying' have
 not been taken into account in this essay.
- Areas noticeable for flying activity include the Dharamtala crossing from afternoon onwards, the Dharamtala mosque junction, all along the tram tracks near Fort William, and the vicinity near Chitpur Road crossing.
- Recently, increased flying activity has been observed at the crowded Ultadanga Mor, Rajabazar crossing, residential and shopping areas of Rash Behari Avenue, the congested end of Tollygunge Metro station, and bus stops on the Eastern Metropolitan bypass.
- 4. Michel Foucault. Of Other Times. Trans. Jay Miskowiec. In Diacritics 16 (1), pp. 23.
- 5. For a Marxist-feminist perspective on the complex labour processes of flying women, see my analysis in *Hecate*. Vol. 29. No. 2 (2003).
- I invoke the idea of marginality as a space of repression and resistance. See bell hooks, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness", in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (South End Press, 1990, Boston).

Between Queer Ethics and Sexual Morality¹

NAISARGI N. DAVE

The story behind this essay begins in January 2003, on the inaugural day of the Asia Social Forum (ASF) in Hyderabad. A Delhi-based NGO was hosting a seminar on sexuality, one result of the immense effort that queer and allied groups had put into ensuring that the politics of sexuality were given a stage at this forum that had traditionally excluded those politics. Appropriately enough, the seminar focused on the marginalisation of sexual rights movements by mainstream human rights groups. Approximately two dozen ASF participants gathered in a small tent for the seminar. The first person to speak on the main theme – the marginalisation of sexual rights – lauded how lesbianism poses a threat to the social order. Another speaker talked of the problems and processes of identity politics. The third speaker was a male activist from Andhra Pradesh, who stood up and said proudly and almost combatively, "I'm going to talk about sex workers' rights as human rights!" He seemed to be challenging us to counter him.

However, he could not have been speaking to a more sympathetic audience; we were unanimous in our support. Smashing her fist into her palm for emphasis, one woman said, "Sex work is a totally legitimate form of work!" Another person nodded vigorously, adding, "Sex work is about pleasure and choice!" Then Tarunabh, another activist, commented seriously: "We are side-stepping a moral issue here. Sex work is a form of labour under capitalism. And aren't all forms of labour under capitalism exploitative and morally problematic?"

People nodded hesitantly, wondering where this would lead. Tarunabh's point was uncommon and vital. He was arguing that we must articulate a moral stance with regard to our politics. It is not just enough to celebrate and defend, for example, what is condemned by those who oppose us. That "they" say sex work is morally wrong does not require us to say that sex work is morally right. According to Tarunabh, the point of activism is critique and the creation of a *new*, not just a reversed, morality.

This was a powerful moment for me. As I listened to this conversation I recalled with startling coherence dozens of conversations that I had sustained over the past several months. These once disparate, though dutifully noted, fragments were now suddenly given shape through Tarunabh's remarks on sex work and morality. In the activist groups I had

been working with, everyone had been talking about the relationship between means and ends; whether to accept funding and the compromises that inhere in doing so; the kinds of symbolic violence and the pragmatic advantages of consciously opting for identity-based politics; whether to strike strategic alliances with groups whose politics were suspect. There were also assertions that the ways in which we as queer people care for and relate to another in our everyday lives are as significant to our politics as any public, collective organising. Listening to the speakers that morning in Hyderabad – and particularly to Tarunabh – it became clear to me that the activism I had been witnessing and documenting for the past year was centrally about the search for and cultivation of *ethics*.

This was not the project that I had initially envisioned and set out to do. My first preliminary research trip to India was in the summer of 1999, six months into the heady aftermath of the BJP-led² violent political furore over commercial screenings of the film *Fire* (1996, dir. Deepa Mehta) that depicted a sexual relationship between two married sistersin-law living in the same household. In July 1999, CALERI (Campaign for Lesbian Rights), a group that emerged out of the *Fire* counter-protests, was in the final stages of editing their manifesto titled "Lesbian Emergence". I spent several evenings with them, listening and tentatively participating as they vociferously debated the finest points of language and strategy. I eventually decided to do a research project comparing CALERI, a non-funded, radical collective, with Sangini, an internationally funded helpline-cum-support group that resisted public engagement in order to protect those Indian women who accessed its services but could not risk being out, or could not risk being associated with a group that might be publicly identified as queer.

However, when I returned to India to do my fieldwork I found that CALERI had gone defunct – two of its central founding members had gone to the US for graduate studies while others had dropped out due to the strains and conflicts endemic to political organising. In CALERI's place, however, had arisen a new Delhi-based collective called PRISM, or People for the Rights of Indian Sexual Minorities. PRISM was another resolutely non-funded collective comprised of men, women, transsexuals, straight, queer, and non-identifying, all united in the cause of public queer advocacy and equal rights. I found myself at the home of two of PRISM's co-founders, a lesbian couple I had become friends with over previous summers. I would come to spend many days and nights with them outside of organisational meetings, basking in their exceptional hospitality. And their home was an exceptional place – something of a queer halfway house and a cooperative where friends from across the country and abroad would come and go, seeking solace from heartache, marriage pressure, suicide pacts, distant or abusive families, and all forms of loneliness.

As these people passed through, they would inevitably, if with some initial reluctance, become active participants in the political debates that formed the centre of our lives there: funding imperatives, the limitations and possibilities of identity-based politics; whether the 'Indian' in People for the Rights of Indian Sexual Minorities was too much of an appeal to nation and culture during a time when the BJP was on the ascendant; and whether the term

'sexual minorities' indicated that PRISM's vision extended only to gays and lesbians, rather than to social transformation on a wider scale.

All of these committed and sometimes accidental activists would become for me and for one another something similar to what anthropologist Kath Weston calls a "chosen family" – queer parents, brothers, sisters and daily companions. It was a responsibility to ethical engagement, a tireless grappling with the central question – how might we live, as queer Indians, socially unacknowledged and unschooled – that served as the moral foundation for the political life of that collective. My responsibility as an ethnographer was to grapple with an additional question – to understand and convey the complexities at stake in being a queer activist in India at this moment in time.

I thus began asking different questions from the ones I had originally formulated. Instead of analysing how one organisation functions in a particular political field, or how the strategies of one group compare with those of another, I began asking about the activists themselves: Why do activists do what they do? Why are activists, activists?

The answers I came to were within the realm of the ethical. People are drawn to activism because they have an ethical orientation to the world. They act because they nurture ethical ideals of what the world *ought* to look like. They act out of conflicted beliefs in the possibility of justice. They act in part because they desire the practice of new freedoms that they can only yet imagine, but still strive to enable. But the political institutions that activists must engage in order to effect these transformations are far from conducive to the cultivation of such radical imaginings.

I framed my research as an ethnography of precisely this tension – between the ethical and affective ideals that animate (in this case) queer activism in India, and the moral and political hegemonies in the postcolonial democratic nation-state that work to subsume that potential and render "unremarkable" and commensurate the most radical aspects of this emergent world.⁴

That constitutive tension, in other words, is between the embryonic and the ossified, between what might be and what must be.

Or in other words, between the ethical and the moral.

For this reading of the concept of ethics, and of the distinction between the ethical and the moral, I draw upon the later work of Foucault, a period I mark with the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* (*The Use of Pleasure*) (1985). Foucault's 'ethical turn' between the first and second volumes of *The History of Sexuality* was read by many critics as a radical, unsettling departure. His work on governmentality and modern discipline had demonstrated the ever-widening circulation and deeper penetration of power, such that subjects so formed come to exercise limits upon themselves within the space of ostensible freedom. The critique of this work, before Foucault's 'ethical turn', was that the relentless omnipresence of power left no space for resistance and hope. But given that it was Foucault who pointed out that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance"⁵, it was precisely his

recognition of the depth of power's penetration that led to a recognition of the depth of possibilities for transgression, critique and creativity.⁶ This depth of radical imaginary possibility within the workings of power is the space of the ethical. For a study such as mine, this understanding of ethics – of how people act within and against socially prescribed and enforced limits – has immense potential.

One of the problems, however, of arguing for the centrality of 'ethics' to subaltern activisms relates to the conflation of 'ethics' and 'morality', in which the latter is (and thus both are) seen as the province of the unenlightened powerful – a system of codes, norms and rules, aspiring to universality and rooted in religiosity and positivism. Among the critical conceptual interventions in Foucault's later work is precisely his distinction between 'ethics' and 'morality'. Morality is here understood as a system of codes and norms, the space of the institutional and juridical, which mandates what *must* be done rather than what *could* be done. Ethics for Foucault, on the other hand, are those practices and techniques that we perform on ourselves to *become* moral subjects and (in an Aristotelian vein) to achieve happiness, brilliance and a full life. This "aesthetics of existence" involves an emphasis on invention, creativity and becoming that results from a profound recognition of the limits placed upon, and enforced through, the processes by which we come to understand ourselves as subjects.

The concept of the ethical as a process of becoming was central to Foucault's later work and also to his increasingly programmatic views on contemporary gay politics. In a 1977 interview he argued that "[i]t's up to us to advance in to a homosexual ascesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent (I don't say discover) a manner of being that is still improbable". This "homosexual ascesis" was not a form of identity politics or a call to embrace a new code of what (homo)sexuality is and must be. Rather, Foucault understood homosexual ascesis as "the work that one performs" 10 – the "work at *becoming* homosexuals" rather than to "be obstinate in recognising that we are" 11.

We are still left to ask: What precisely is this "becoming"? What is this "work"? And how does it relate to gueer activism in India?

Philosopher and Foucault scholar Arnold Davidson points out that the "work" of "ascesis" requires, foremost, a form of philosophical labour. ¹² Davidson refers to the first chapter of *The Use of Pleasure*, in which Foucault defines philosophy as "an 'ascesis'... an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought" and "the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known" Davidson argues that this linking of ascesis with philosophical exercise is nowhere more vibrantly brought out than in Foucault's discussions of the radical potential of contemporary gay practice. ¹⁴

Foucault's comments in a 1981 interview exemplify Davidson's view (1985, p. 135): Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of "Who am !?" and "What is the secret of my desire?" Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, "What relations, through homosexuality, can be

established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships.

This succinct articulation of a homosexual ascesis or, as I prefer to term it, a 'radical ethic', raises three issues that pertain directly to Indian queer activisms. First, a commitment to philosophical exercise, to "think differently", to ask new questions of oneself in order to analyse (and surpass) the limits upon what can be said and done. Foucault refers to this aspect of ethical practice as "problematisation", or a critical reflection upon norms. Second, an emphasis not on liberation from power or on a reversal of its existing structures, but on the imaginative labour of *inventing* formerly unimaginable possibilities. Third, the inherently relational quality of this radical ethic – an inhabiting of one's *distance* from moral norms such that the very remove from institutional power serves as the *condition of possibility* for the creative practice of new, and multiple, affective relational forms.

This triumvirate of affective exercise, I argue, constitutes the often under-analysed ethical center of any activism that seeks to transform and multiply existing social relations. Lesbian and gay activism in India is a case in point; and to demonstrate this claim, I briefly invoke the story with which I began this essay. We can recall Tarunabh's passionate *problematisation* of the discursive norms by which either one mode of political speech or its opposite is intelligible – the language of for/against, right/wrong, moral/immoral, which militates against understanding the nuances of our subjections. Similarly, we can remember Tarunabh's call to not only reverse existing moral codes of proper behavior, but to *invent* an ethical language more closely approximating the hope for social justice, and not only for social power. Lastly, we can place ourselves back in the activist household described earlier in this essay – a space of invention in which the enforced remove from the morally disciplining centers of family, law and nation serve as the necessitating factor, as well as the *condition of possibility*, for the creative practice of new forms of affiliation and relationship.

These are not modes of simple "resistance", but of radical invention.

The triumvirate of affective exercise I posit as the ethical is distinct from moralism. I understand 'morality' as a system of imposed codes and norms, legitimised through texts, scriptures and custom, and deployed in order to maintain social stability and the reification of already existing relations of power. Morality is not just one, but is multiply manifested. My research examines the various moralities that queer activists engage: the disciplining thrust of community; the imperative of sexual identity; the global feminist concept of third world women as sexual victims, and not as sexually aspiring; the discursive hegemony of the nation and of 'Indian culture'; and the dualistic language of law. These and other moral discourses are characterised by normalising effects, by which I mean a narrowing of human possibilities.

'Ethics', however, I interpret as that which emerges from *within* subjections as a creative, disruptive response to the drive to normalisation. My central question, then, is: How do radical ethics – constituted by the problematisation of norms, the imaginative invention of alternatives to those norms, and the practice of new relational possibilities – emerge from,

and confront, the normalising processes that work to render the ethical impulse of activism commensurate with existing moral codes? How do we understand, in other words, the struggle activism presents between imaginative possibility and moral imperative?

My larger written work on this research is organised through the analysis of the abovementioned series of moral discourses and their normalising, and *productive*, relationship to the ethical possibilities of queer activist practice in India. Through these analyses, my attempt also is to critique an encompassing moral premise of activist labour: i.e., that the value of social engagement is rooted in any actor's ability to penetrate further and larger fields of influence. I thus move from lesbian women's creation of imagined and then local communities to the burgeoning desire to form institutions and organisations, to the mandatory forging of alliances between lesbian collectives and other more established movements, to the imperative of visibility and rights-claims in the public sphere, to engagement with legal reform and the state.

I regard this teleology of activism as *itself* a moral norm that imposes certain limits on what can be said and imagined.

In addressing the confrontation between potentiality and norms, one of my central narratives concerns the founding of Sakhi and the movement from 'imagined' to 'real' lesbian communities in the early 1990s. My narrative features a series of letters given to me by the activist/writer Giti Thadani who started Sakhi in 1991. One of Sakhi's most enduring services was the creation of a correspondence network among same-sex-desiring women. They wrote to Sakhi in many languages and from all over the country and the Indian diaspora. Interestingly, the woman who wrote back on behalf of Sakhi was a British expatriate based in India and committed to local activism here. Many writers expressed that this cherished point of contact with her and Sakhi, often made with difficulty and from a place of near-isolation, had literally saved their lives. This circulation of letters and hope was an instance of the invention of a new form of relationality, based on the nascent availability of 'lesbian' subjectivity. Significantly, the women writing to Sakhi called themselves "lesbian" without obvious tension regarding what was essentially a foreign or previously unknown word to many of them. They were relieved to simply be able to connect through these letters, and to know that on the other side of the words were women 'just like' them. This hopeful creative practice enabled the beginnings of the formation of an imagined Indian lesbian community.

Meanwhile, groups of lesbian women began locally trying to transform those imagined relations into 'real' face-to-face communities. Paradoxically, as the community began to coalesce, and as the politics around identity and sexuality intensified, the discursive terms of connection began to be policed. Significantly, in these policing practices the word 'lesbian' was variously rejected, the argument being that it was not an indigenous term and hence not valid to 'Indian' experience. In place of the word 'lesbian' new vernacular phrases were sought out and insisted upon. In addition to the regulation of language, foreign and non-resident Indian women who identified as lesbian were actively excluded from these nascent communities, in the supposed interest of protecting 'Indian' lesbians from the imposition of

'Western' politics and language. What I examine here is precisely this dynamic between the possibilities catalysed by the unexpected circulation of the word 'lesbian', and its regulation by laws that would begin to emerge around what 'lesbian' *could not*, and yet *must*, be.

Just as the move from imagined to 'real' communities entailed the normalisation of radical imaginings, so did the institutionalisation of 'face-to-face' communities into formal organisations. A central contestation among these groups was whether they should practice a 'Western' mode of lesbian identity politics such as Sakhi's, or focus on formulating a more culturally 'authentic' framework for same-sex desire in 'Indian' women. As this emergent community moved steadily and unexpectedly towards wider societal recognition, the drive to authenticate lesbianism – to render it intelligible within and to the nation – became a high-stakes proposition. But this push for authentication was exacerbated and in fact partly produced by international funders interested in supporting a diversity of niche causes across the globe. Consequently, the premium international funders place on the danger, solitude, and invisibility of being lesbian in the developing world cultivates a moral discourse of cultural victimhood and cultural incarceration that is experienced as antithetical to the ethical aspirations of lesbian activism.

My final example here of the play between possibility and norms relates to the moral discourse of law. During the two years of my fieldwork, queer activists in India were hotly debating the merits of two legal reform measures with potentially serious consequences for queer politics and lives. One was a judicial effort led by Naz Foundation, a Delhi-based NGO involved in HIV/AIDS outreach work. Their public interest litigation aimed to decriminalise same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults in 'private' by limiting the reach of India's anti-sodomy statute, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, instituted by the colonial administration. The second was a primarily legislative effort spearheaded by Sakshi, a Delhi-based women's group, seeking to make sexual assault laws gender-neutral, thus potentially bringing same-sex sexual assault within the ambit of the law.

One interesting aspect of the confluence of these two struggles is the problem posed for queer theorisations of the relationship between law and society. Activists who opposed the Section 377 litigation did so on the basis that it vested too much power in the law to change ground realities of queer marginalisation. Most of those same activists also opposed the gender neutrality legislation, but for a radically different reason: here they argued that the law is *too mighty* a thing to play dreams with; and that since Indian society is still not gender-neutral, the law must not be gender-neutral either. A close reading of these linked debates reveals the constitutive ethical problematics of legal activism: first, the manner in which a person's perceived vulnerability to a law then determines a larger political philosophy about the efficacy of that law; and, second, the relationship between the new, often risky, imagined practices of justice that radical politics seek to effect, and the moral fixity of legal discourse that brings order to aspiration.¹⁶

All these questions work together in my analysis of the primary tension between the ethical and affective ideals that animate, in this case, queer activism in India, and the

normalising processes of political engagement that work to subtly absorb that potential, rendering commensurate that which is most radical about this new social world. And though moments of fraught commensuration do make up the bulk of that narrative, its spirit is derived from those many moments of radical possibility – those moments in which we do not yet know in advance the limits of what might be.

Editors' Note

This essay is an edited transcript of a presentation by the author as part of a discussion on activism relating to queer issues and sexuality, held at the Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore, on 11 June 2007.

For other perspectives on queer activism in India, see Siddharth Narrain, "The Queer Case of Section 377" in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, Delhi, 2005), pp. 466-69.

Reader 05 online text: http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader_05.html

See also Gautam Bhan, "Seeking Chaos: The Birth and Intentions of Queer Politics" in *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 401-06.

Reader 06 online text: < http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html>

Notes

- For an elaboration of the ideas in this essay, see Naisargi N. Dave, Between Queer Ethics and Sexual Morality: Lesbian and Gay Activism in New Delhi, India (UMI ProQuest, 2006).
- 2. Bharatiya Janata Party, associated with right-wing and Hindu nationalist politics.
- 3. Kath Weston. Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship (Columbia University Press, 1991, New York).
- Elizabeth A. Povinelli. "Radical Worlds: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability". In Annual Review of Anthropology 30, pp. 319-34 (2001).
- 5. Michel Foucault [1978]. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1 (Vintage, 1990, New York), p. 95.
- James W. Bernauer and Michael Mahon. "Michel Foucault's Ethical Imagination". In (ed.) G. Gutting, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Second Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 2005, Cambridge), pp. 149-75. See also Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought", ibid., pp. 123-48.
- 7. Zygmunt Bauman. Postmodern Ethics (Blackwell, 1993, Cambridge).
- 8. Michel Foucault. The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2 (Penguin, 1985, London).
- 9. ————. "Power and Sex". In (ed.) L. Kritzman, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (Routledge, 1988, London), p. 116.
- "Friendship as a Way of Life". In (ed.) Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth, Vol. 1 (New Press, 1994, New York), p. 137.
- 11 Ibid., p. 136, emphasis added.
- 12. Arnold I. Davidson, in Bernauer and Mahon, op. cit., p. 131.

- 13. Michel Foucault (1985), op. cit., p. 9.
- 14. Arnold I. Davidson, in Bernauer and Mahon, op. cit., p. 133.
- 15. James D. Faubion. "Toward an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis". In *Representations* 74, pp. 83-104 (2001).
- 16. This is elaborated upon in Dave (2006), op. cit. See also the author's essay "Ordering Justice, Fixing Dreams: An Ethnography of Queer Legal Activism", in (eds.) Arvind Narrain and Alok Gupta (Yoda Press, forthcoming).

South Asian "Adda" in Barcelona

SAMEER RAWAL

Manpreet Singh was born in Gurdaspur, India. His family paid Rs 7 lakhs to an agent and to another Indian based in Barcelona, Spain, to give him an 'offer' of a job in his company. With this 'offer', he was issued the initial visa to come to Barcelona by the Embassy of Spain in New Delhi. For the last two years he has been switching jobs, from construction, farming and other fields requiring hard manual labour to his current work as an attendant in a shop selling mobile phones and other electronic items. The shop-owner is from Ludhiana and the shop has an ambience that reminds one of the Bhagirath Palace electronic market in front of the Red Fort in Old Delhi.

Warren comes from Dhaka, Bangladesh. His brothers are in the UK, but he somehow managed to come to Barcelona. Two years ago, when the Zapatero government announced its 'normalisation' process to regularise illegal immigrants, he applied and got the necessary documents that would ensure a decent pay with social security benefits. He currently works as a waiter in an expensive tapas bar.

Saleem Khan, a.k.a. "Jim", belongs to Lahore, Pakistan, and boasts of it, albeit only in front of his own countrymen. He is illegally in Barcelona, works 10 hours a day, 7 days a week, and gets paid a pittance. He does not have social security, and has a wife with two kids back home to support. Presently he manages the cyber café of a fairly established Pakistani family that runs a chain of grocery stores and cyber cafés.

Kavita from Ambala came to Barcelona five years ago. She has recently filed a complaint with the Spanish police of continuous beatings by her Indian husband; she is now separated from him and lives with her two children, somehow managing to survive.

Rajesh came from Pokhara, Nepal, about 15 years ago, when the entry to Spain was relatively easy. He has a Nepali restaurant. It was only two years ago that he got his family to Barcelona from Nepal, after complicated paperwork and deliberations that consumed time and money.

The South Asian community in Barcelona consists of diverse groups of people belonging to India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. For most of these groups, the 'West' is generally identified as a cluster of countries where English is spoken. On the other

hand, for quite a lot of Spanish residents, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka are all cemented into the matrix of a homogenous time-space continuum, somewhere 'over there' in the East, the 'oriente', distant and exotic. For many locals, the South Asians they see serve as the living 'reference' for the unknown South Asia constructed in their imaginaries. The conventional image of the 'other' is usually an epistemic formation based on a wide number of cultural inputs compiled from different sources in an individual's life, and also from a collective, shared source.

What associations, echoes, images, does Spain and its culture evoke in the minds of South Asians?

Practically speaking, none at all. The few South Asians to whom Spain means something are interested in the country and its culture because of personal connections, higher education opportunities, tourism and fashion – and now, with technology rendering more information available globally with each click of the mouse, interest in Spain is being generated through the widening network of multinational corporations and universal brands. Visits of the Spanish Prime Minister go unnoticed by the main sections of the Indian media, even in this superfast media age. So for the average South Asian who comes to reside legally or illegally in Spain, the local culture is a big unknown, something that does not fit into the mental framework: it is a realistic yet fundamentally alien entity. In addition, the linguistic barrier makes the understanding of the host culture far more difficult. South Asians are almost never taught Spanish in their native countries; those who come here hardly speak English well, and those who do also have a problem because the locals do not speak English, and a good number actually have a deep dislike for and are somewhat anti-English, as a sign of protest against what they consider 'neo-imperialist' powers...

Considering the relatively young history of South Asian immigration in Spain, the 'strangeness' which results due to mutual ignorance of cultures, ideologies and histories is understandable, and quite logical. It is nevertheless interesting to note the layered confluence of two culturally different peoples in such circumstances, and the formation of specific 'places' where the South Asian community recreates itself and extends itself, surrounded by a radically different sort of environment. These meeting places/addas tell their own stories, invent their own fantasies, weave their own patterns and at the same time, quite surprisingly, are enmeshed in the day-to-day workings of the city.

When I first came to Barcelona in 2002 to do research in literary translation and interculturality at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, I didn't know about the existence of a South Asian community living there. I had neither heard nor read about it anywhere. A week or so after my arrival, after becoming a bit familiar with my surroundings I ventured out to the city centre. I reached the street of la Rambla, the main promenade of Barcelona, and made my way into the by-lanes of the locality of Raval (incidentally, 'Raval' means the outskirts of the main fortified city; la Rambla was a water canal which separated the Gothic central city and the Raval in medieval times). I entered Sant Pau street and... Old Delhi! Yes, for a very brief moment those were the only words that flashed in my mind. Men in Pathani

salwar-kurtas, women in saris with children, youngsters in Western clothes, but very desi ² in appearance; everyone with big smiles; and a few people greeting, hugging each other, proclaiming "Mubarak! Mubarak!"

Where was I? In Spain, a predominantly Catholic country with a history of 800 years of Moorish domination, or in a typical *mohalla* in an Indian city?

I looked around, saw the Gothic buildings and obvious signs of 'Spanish-ness', or to be more exact, 'Catalanness' (Barcelona is the capital of Catalonia, an autonomous region of Spain, with a different cultural, historical and political identity claimed strongly by the Catalans themselves, and rejected/discriminated against quite visibly by the Spanish 'democratic' regime). As I turned around, I saw white Spanish people, as well as some Catalan locals, plus the usual mix of other Europeans, a common sight in any large European city today. I caught some words in Spanish and Catalan. At the same time I noticed I was standing in front of a cyber café, closed of course, with something written on the sign in Urdu. Across the street was a grocery store with a sign inscribed in Punjabi.

I immediately inferred that it was the morning of Eid. And as I walked on, I also intuited that this particular journey of mine was going to be very engrossing, to say the least. Spain and South Asia: is there any meeting point, anything in common, any spiritual or material connection? Five years later I am still standing on the same street, and I see both the cultures in the same way; the main street full of Spanish and Catalan people, walking briskly, talking briskly, living as one lives in one's own city; and a side road, marginalised, leading to another world, one of 'other' stories and 'other' lives – and I ponder, when, where, shall the twain meet...?

I am a Hispanist, trained in the Spanish language; I have been immersed in Hispanic culture for over a decade; and of course, I am also a 'regular' Indian, born and raised in Delhi. It is a distinct advantage to be able to translate and interpret the South Asian community to the Spanish locals, and the latter to the former. Ease with linguistic and cultural codes enabled me to penetrate the inner logic of both communities in some depth. I was privileged to view the different realities from that unique angle, from where I could comprehensively see both. You can see where they hide, where they disclose, where they attack, and where they reconcile. You know something about one that the other does not know, on both sides.

For a lot of Indians and Pakistanis, Spanish culture is not worth assimilating or integrating with, in social terms. They remain imprinted with and vigilant about the conservative, 'family' values that they followed back home. They will, when they finally have a decent income and house, marry a girl from back home. And until then they might have relationships with local Western girls who dress informally and have a relaxed attitude, and therefore seem 'free' and 'emancipated'. These girls might be in turn be attracted by the myth of the famous oriental 'virility' of South Asian men – a myth resulting from the popularity of the *Kama Sutra* and other classical literature understood to be the source of Westerners' image of erotic/exotic as well as 'spiritual' aspects of South Asian civilisation.

Yes, the West in general and the Spanish in particular have many 'ideas' about India and South Asia, in the same way that we have corresponding 'ideas' about them. I remember being introduced to an adolescent Spanish girl. When she was told that I was an Indian, the very next question she asked was: "Can you levitate?" I answered her with a very strong "-Qué dices!" – literally, "What are you saying!" And figuratively, "Do you have any idea of what are you talking about? What kind of question is this?" which naturally extinguished the possibility of further talk. Bollywood too has its influence on intercultural perceptions. Most Spaniards who see these movies believe that Indians live like characters in the Indian films that easily reach Spain via UK-based enthusiasts or Spanish Indophiles trying to get a grip on Indian culture.

This profound misreading is inevitable, given the lack of authentic communication between the two cultures. The mutually-delusive 'ideas' are formed based on indirectly available, accessible translations of the culture, provided by sources who in theory have had direct communicative dialogue with India and vice versa. The misperceptions are reinforced because there is no actual – or psychological – space where things can be seen in their accurate dimensions, and where processes of direct dialogue can be initiated and sustained So for many South Asians in Spain, the host country is just a part of the 'West' portrayed as fundamentally alien in Hindi movies such as the contemporary *Namaste London*, or the earlier classic *Purab aur Paschim*, or even the blockbuster Oscar nominee *Lagaan*. For most groups of South Asians, the distinctive cuisine of each region of Spain, the different ethnicities and dialects, mentalities, ideologies, histories, etc., are often deeply confusing. For the Spanish, on the other hand, South Asia is contained and represented basically in the English language, literature and media that reach here in translation.

The situation takes the form of 'us and them': living in the same country, same city, same locality, same building and same floor, but divided. Take the case of the Pakistani father who comes to know that someone had said something offensive to his son in school, but that it is his son who has been suspended (the 13-year-old, who had come from Pakistan only six months earlier, had decoded the 'insult' from the tone of voice of his tormentor, as he did not know Spanish very well). The father pushes his way into the office of the school's director and, raising his voice, threatens to physically take revenge on the offender. All the while he has not understood a single word the director was saying to him; he had never made an effort to study Spanish even after having lived six years in Barcelona; he only knew as much basic Spanish as was required at his job as a helper in a restaurant.

The local government does its best to let the immigrant communities 'integrate' into the local population. In theory, cultural associations can be formed, religious structures can be established, and any activity not institutionally 'detrimental' to local society can be undertaken, in theory. But can the authorities really help in creating a deeper shade of genuine mutuality?

Experiencing the lack of a supportive environment and social ease, the community is making a strenuous effort to 'unite' whenever a chance arises. So please do not be shocked

if, should you respond in a friendly way to the *desi*-looking guy who wants to sell you a rose for the girl you are having an evening coffee with in a terrace cafeteria, he offers a wide initial smile that converts to a barrage of questions, answers, handshakes and hugs in the end. And finally you might indeed have to buy a rose for that girlfriend of yours. Or when you go to an Indian/Pakistani restaurant and the owner might want to exchange a few cordial words with you. The subtext: *Glad to meet you, another one like us, India/Pakistan/Nepal – all is same, what do you do, how do you manage, you must be legal, can you help me with papers and more earnings, we are the same, these locals are what they are, these girls, look at them, Spain is not like UK or Germany (in terms of earnings)...*

You are invited to *desi* homes, where you might observe rooms where five to ten people Ishare the sleeping space by rotation, as they work in shifts. They would surely have a TV and DVD player with all the latest Bollywood films stacked up, or compilations of Hindi film songs by their favourite singers, Mohammad Rafi or Kishore Kumar. None of the inhabitants has Spanish friends. On Sundays they go to *gurdwaras and masjids* and meet their fellow countrymen as if fulfilling another prescribed ritual at these places of worship. They behave exactly as they would in their native places. They are 'grafted' here directly, it seems...

Do they have any idea of the values and ideologies of the place they live in? Are they aware that, theoretically speaking (and bypassing cynicism), they have more institutional and human rights in Spain than in their native places? Are they willing to change, mould themselves in accordance with the host culture?

The answer to these questions is for most of the cases, a resounding and sad NO. The host culture is seen as an invasion (this is true reciprocally as well), and immigrants defend themselves against this as subtly and successfully as they can. They have different notions of democracy, of political protest, of equality; and different perceptions about patterns of social and sexual relating. But some reach a curious balance between their native culture and the host. The graft in these cases is natural and spontaneous, and not grotesque. For instance, Afridi Sahib has lived here for the last 30 years. He has learnt to be himself, notwithstanding cultural pressures from his past or present. He has married a Catalan woman and has two daughters with her. In his free time he writes poetry and is one of the main organisers of the *mushairas* (poetry recitations) the Pakistani community regularly holds in the city. He seems to have resolved his conflicts through a philosophical outlook, giving priority to the understanding of our basic human nature, our commonalities that endure irrespective of our particular cultures and histories. Does this mean Afridi Sahib does not belong anywhere?

Illiterate Sagari Begum from a *pind* (village) in either the Indian or Pakistani Punjab treats everything according to the viewpoint provided by her husband, who in turn relies on his intuition to extrapolate from the foreign culture that envelops them both, and also relies on external sources: people on the street, employers, the media, fellow countrymen who narrate their diasporic scripts when they meet for *namaaz* (community prayers) in the

masjid. He can take membership in some cultural association established by his displaced, and in some instances dispossessed, countrymen, and interested locals; but this mode of enforced socialisation and participation is not the one he is accustomed to. He is left alone then, with his wife performing all her typical domestic duties and children who have teething problems in the local schools. They inhabit a sort of anxious shell which stunts and cripples their vision and confidence. The locals do not approach these tradition-oriented aliens; and the latter do not allow themselves the 'modern' privilege of autonomy.

During the last five years I have seen many people living compartmentalised lives such as these. I am not sure if this is a passing step in their personal evolution or a punishment for trying to expand their existential horizons. These are 'grafted' lives, and the whole picture seems out of proportion. It is surreal when, for instance during the interpretation process you witness how the Spanish participant mistakenly 'constructs' a South Asian identity, and on the other hand the South Asian also 'constructs' a Spanish identity. There is no way to stop this – it is a subtle process and one has to endeavour to stay vigilant in this regard oneself. The contemporary situation in the world is increasingly characterised by ceaseless border-crossings, clashes between different ethnicities, growing contempt for immigrants who allegedly deprive locals of jobs, crowd all available urban space and deplete existing resources. We have to interpret the 'Other' in a balanced way, look on the 'Other' with a perspective that is valid, safe, and most importantly, dynamic. Without committed efforts at empathetic dialogue we are bound to lose all our real *addas*, places where we could possibly meet and communicate harmoniously...

... Antes de terminarse
LA Visión se disipa:
ESTOY EN LA MITAD,
COLGADO EN UNA JAULA,
COLGADO EN UNA IMAGEN.
EL ORIGEN SE ALEJA,
EL FIN SE DESVANECE.
NO HAY FIN NI PRINCIPIO:
ESTOY EN LA PAUSA,
NO ACABO NI COMIENZO,
LO QUE DIGO
NO TIENE PIES NI CABEZA.
DOY VUELTAS EN MÍ MISMO
Y SIEMPRE ENCUENTRO
LOS MISMOS NOMBRES.

LOS MISMO ROSTROS,
Y A MÍ MISMO NO ME ENCUENTRO.
MI HISTORIA NO ES MÍA,
SÍLABA DE ESA FRASE ROTA
QUE EN SU DELIRIO CIRCULAR
REPITE LA CIUDAD, REPITE...4

(... THE VISION SCATTERS

BEFORE ENDING:

I AM IN THE MIDDLE,

SUSPENDED IN A CAGE,

SUSPENDED IN AN IMAGE.

THE ORIGIN GOES AWAY,

THE END FADES.

THERE IS NEITHER END NOR BEGINNING:

I AM IN THE PAUSE,

I NEITHER FINISH NOR START,

WHAT I SAY

HAS NEITHER HEAD NOR TAIL.

I MOVE AROUND WITHIN MYSELF

AND ALWAYS FIND

THE SAME NAMES,

THE SAME FACES,

AND MY OWN SELF I DO NOT FIND.

MY STORY IS NOT MINE,

A SYLLABLE OF THE FRACTURED SENTENCE

THAT THE CITY IN ITS CYCLICAL DELIRIUM

REPEATS AND REPEATS...)

Notes

- Adda is a generic popular term in various Indian languages, connoting animated informal conversation/ discussions with friends and intimates. It also means the location of such activities – gathering place, hangout, den, etc.
- 2. Deriving from the Hindi word desh (country/nation); hence desi implies indigenous/native.
- 3. In cases of consciously undertaken plant grafting, one plant (the 'stock') is selected for its roots; the other plant (the 'scion') is selected for its stems, leaves, flowers or fruit. For successful grafting, the vascular cambium tissues of the stock and scion plants must be placed in contact with one another. Both tissues must be kept alive till the graft has 'taken', i.e., till there is successful fusion on the vascular level. A physical weak point often still occurs at the graft, because the structural tissue of the two distinct plants may not fuse. Occasionally, a so-called 'graft hybrid' or 'chimera' can occur where the tissues of the stock continue to grow within the scion; such a plant can produce flowers and foliage typical of both its sources, as well as shoots intermediate between the two.
- From "A la Mitad de Esta Frase (In the Middle of This Sentence)" in (ed.) Eliot Weinberger, The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz, 1957-1987 (New Directions, 1991, New York), p. 375. Translation in this essay by Sameer Rawal.

Long-Distance Nationalism: Constructing 'Indianness' in American Kitchens

EKTA OHRI



When I first became the user of an American suburban apartment kitchen in California, I was completely struck by the uniformity of its design. Complete with a range of modern, efficient, labour-saving appliances such dishwasher, this kitchen design had become a ubiquitous American reality after World War II. The design of my kitchen from the colour of the walls to the types of appliances and the overall plan - was identical to that of my friends' kitchens in California, as well as in other regions of the country.

I was aware that the invention of standard modern kitchen equipment coincided with the historical moment in which the United States Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated immigration guotas.

and thus encouraged a vast number of Indians to emigrate from India to America. More intriguing, however, was my somewhat uncomfortable realisation that this standardised design *imposed* on its Indian immigrant users certain uniform rules of behavior.

Structured around a series of biographical narratives comparing domestic kitchens in India and the US, this essay explores how Indians from disparate regional and socioeconomic backgrounds alter their ethnic identities in response to the spatial

environment of American domestic life. It examines the complex strategies of adoption, adaptation and invention that operate in Indian immigrants' construction of transcultural identities. Through these strategies, Indian immigrants transcend the rigid boundaries of cultural difference (gender, class, caste, regional and religious) that define them in their home country. Being different in a new society actually *erases* the conventional differences among Indian immigrants, allowing them to create a singular national Indian community in the US and identify with the notion of 'Indianness', a concept that Indians living in India rarely experience. The concept of transculturalism not only illuminates the affinity between two different cultures, and relationships based on shared cultural values, but also new

parameters of identity, such as longdistance nationalism.

Perhaps it is true after all, that "[...] To see things plainly you have to

cross a frontier"1.

Today, approximately one million Indian immigrants of diverse religious and regional backgrounds reside in urban and suburban apartment houses across the United States, Adaptation to the modern kitchen design of their American domestic spaces has become one of the primary factors binding these immigrants together in order to support their need to form an exclusive social group within America's multicultural society.2 For instance, most Indian families living in apartments in the US, especially in situations in which both men and women are working, modify and adapt their cooking styles to the microwave oven. This is a result of their



fast-paced lives in the US, and the lack of domestic help for kitchen-related activities. In India, even the families who purchase a microwave rarely use it except for warming food, because they believe that Indian meals cooked in this manner do not taste good.

This seemingly inconsequential behavioral change, along with other assimilationist efforts of Indian immigrants to adapt to the American domestic environment, illustrates the larger cultural phenomenon postcolonial theorists³ refer to as "transculturalism". Since Indian immigrants' adaptation to modern American kitchens is accompanied by their simultaneous desire to maintain their local Indian customs and behavior, the concept of transculturalism helps to explain Indian immigrants' desire to "transcend their initial culture, in order to examine and infiltrate foreign cultures"⁴, and simultaneously to preserve their local native

distinctiveness. In such transcultural scenarios, neither globalism nor localism dominates; rather, a two-way situation of global localism prevails.

Indian immigrants to the US encounter a condition that Homi K. Bhabha describes as "unhomeliness", which should not be mistaken for the state of being without a home. Rather, it represents a condition of *displacement* where "borders between home and world become confused, and private and public become a part of each other"⁵. In this context the domestic kitchen, a private area in immigrants' homes in India, increases in significance because it becomes a *social* space in their American apartments. The communal bonding that occurs everyday in this space is much more powerful than the bonding that normally happens in Indian homes only on special occasions, and not necessarily in kitchens. Although women hold conversations or assist other women in kitchens in India, they rarely cook meals together unless they are a part of the same family. In the kitchens of Indians in America, however, the bonding happens regularly, and not just on special occasions. In addition, the family bonds with guests while working together on a common task such as cooking, rather than bonding by simply conversing with guests, as is the typically the case in India. This practice allows many people in the US to get know each other quickly.

Enclosed by walls on four sides, kitchens in India are cut off from the rest of the residential space. This closed planning serves to isolate the individuals working in these spaces from the other activities of the house. Visitors in other activity areas also normally do not enter the kitchen because the heat, fumes, and odours cause extreme discomfort in these spaces that are often under-ventilated. Consequently, in India, the users prefer to spend a minimum amount of time in their kitchens.

The open plan (elimination of walls, low partitions) of the apartment kitchens in the US, on the other hand, provides easy accessibility and visual openness toward other activity areas (entrance foyer, living room and dining room). In this scenario, the kitchen not only becomes an extension of other living spaces of the house but also serves as a potential spillover area during large gatherings. Despite their busy work schedules and hectic lives in the US, Indian immigrants spend a significant amount of time in their kitchens, cooking and socialising with their families and friends. The Indian users respond positively to this open design because it does not isolate them from the rest of the activities of the house. They can watch television or interact with other family members or friends over the low counter wall.

Liberated from the isolation of the Indian kitchen, Indian immigrants, especially women, develop a new interest in this open-planned cooking space and its related activities, despite the few social disadvantages such as the absence of a private space where these women can easily hold personal conversations with their other female family members.

Inspired by the functionalist models of the 1920s and 1930s, the open design of the modern American kitchen features built-in cabinets and modern appliances flush with each other and the walls. This provides a uniform visual aesthetic characteristic of contemporary suburban apartment kitchens everywhere in the US.⁶ In the interiors of these spaces, turning in any direction, one encounters the same spatiality, with each activity area clearly

demarcated and incorporating fixed modern machines. In India, apartment dwellers and homeowners purchase their own appliances, which are neither fixed nor flush with the cabinets, and customise their kitchens according to their personal needs. In America, the kitchen, of all the domestic spaces, is most 'foreign' to Indian immigrants in terms of both its planning and design. Indian immigrants have to adapt, not only to the openness and centrality, but also to the high-tech appliances and the overall standardisation of their apartment kitchen designs. In many suburban American apartments, electric stoves replace the direct gas stoves, dishwashers substitute for the sinks where utensils are washed by hand, and electric exhausts replace the window-mounted exhausts of Indian kitchens.

Confronted by such a profound cultural, aesthetic and technological difference, Indian immigrants become more aware of their own differences from the 'locals'. For instance Ria, one of my subjects who had never done any kitchen work or cleaning in her Indian home because her upper-class family had full-time domestic help, now performs all the household chores considered menial and performed for the most part only by servants in Indian society. At the same time, she has internalised the fact that Americans do not consider this mode of work to be below one's dignity.

An example of difference in space utility can be seen in the fact that most Americans use the low counters in their kitchens as breakfast or dining tables. Unaccustomed to eating their meals on such narrow counters, Indians rarely use these for dining. Rather, the counters are used for displaying decorative objects such as photo frames, or as a place for more functional things such as key stands and letter holders.

Inspired by American cooking shows, one of my subjects had organised all her daily cooking ingredients in a basket next to the stove in her American kitchen. To store and pour oil she now uses a fancy glass container. She has learned to display her regular cooking ladles in a jar and her spices in glass containers in a stand placed next to the cooking range, in order to facilitate her cooking process. In her Indian kitchen, she placed all the cooking implements in a drawer to prevent accumulation of clutter on the counters, and put spices in a steel box inside a drawer.

Another subject covered the counters of her kitchen with brown contact paper to prevent spices such as turmeric from staining the white surfaces. Accustomed to the easy-to-clean granite counters in her Indian kitchen and unwilling to compromise on her cooking ingredients, this was one of the first adaptive measures she took in her American kitchen.

Since an electric stove does not facilitate the proper making of *chapatis*, a staple food, many Indians place a griddle on top of the heated coil so that it becomes possible to make this item. Similarly, even after learning to use the dishwasher efficiently, many Indians clean bigger utensils such as pressure cookers by hand, as is the practice in India.

The conflict that arises out of this awareness concerns alternative strategies of adaptation: should the Indian families adapt American kitchens to their Indian style of living, or should they instead adapt their 'Indian practices' to those spaces? By adopting American cultural practices while simultaneously adapting their typically Indian practices to American

kitchens, and thus inventing new, "hybrid" practices, Indian immigrants redefine the use of these spaces and construct a flexible social behavior that enables them to resolve the conflict of adaptation; it is a resolution that manifests itself in the formation of their transcultural identity.

The flexible, adaptive behavior of the Indian users of American kitchens in the US is also formed and informed by the performance of roles that transcend the rigid boundaries of gender, class, caste, regional and religious identities that exist in their home country. One distinguishing feature of Indian society as a whole is that it is a conglomeration of various units that emphasise particularity. While there are pockets of fusion and syncretism, by and



large the individual groups keep their separate cultural identities. Many of these cultural differences manifest themselves in spaces. For domestic example, class differences are communicated through the types of furniture placed in the bedroom and the living room, while in the room housing the altar, the fact of religious difference becomes more evident. However, it is the kitchen where the principal axes of cultural differentiation

become apparent simultaneously.

To demonstrate how these differences operate among Indian immigrants in the US, I chose subjects from diverse cultural backgrounds. Sociological, class and religious differences serve as lenses for the scrutiny of specific "transcultural" behaviour in relation to specific "transcultural" kitchens.

One Step In or Out of Modernity? Reinventing Class Status and Religious Traditions

Ria and Ajay are an example of an Indian couple compelled to reinvent both their class status and religious traditions in response to their move to America. Ria moved to the US after marrying Ajay, who emigrated from India in 2003 to work as a business manager in a cigarette company in Richmond, Virginia. Ria and Ajay are both Hindus from upper-class backgrounds, and theirs was a love marriage, not an arranged one as is typically the case throughout much of India.

Excited about decorating their new home in the US, Ria brought decorative objects with

her from India on her very first visit to America. A wind chime suspended from the ceiling adds colour to the dull interiors of their American apartment kitchen. A bronze art object composed of Ganesha symbols and tinkling bells dangles down the narrow wall that defines the entrance of their open kitchen, expressing the couple's Indian heritage. None of these objects however, reflects the couple's privileged backgrounds. In fact, one significant factor in Ria and Ajay's immigration to America is their involuntary shedding of the economic status conferred upon them by virtue of their class.⁸

Ria's affluent family lives in Jaipur, in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan. Several elements in the kitchen of Ria's three-storey house in India signify the wealth and high status

of the family. A kitchen island opposite the range contains a sink that facilitates faster cooking, and an exhaust built into the storage cabinets above the gas stove indicates that the kitchen has been remodelled according to the latest Indian kitchen design. Most of the construction materials and equipment, from red galaxy granite stone for flooring. polished Udaipur green marble counters, golden-vellow glazed ceramic tiles used both above and below the counters, and solid teak wood storage cabinets, to the double-door refrigerator, are expensive choices that only privileged families can afford in India.

Although Ria's family members own a microwave, they never really use it except



for warming food. According to Ria, upper-class status in India demands levels of consumption and practices that are in tune with the times and maintain a higher standard of living. An important reason that household goods like microwaves have become 'requirements', even when many families hardly use them, is that status competition demands that the family own such possessions.⁹

Further expensive and stylish objects, for example, the silver trays hanging on the kitchen walls and the traditional brass equipment, are signifiers of the family's high status. ¹⁰ In formal gatherings, Ria's family honours its guests by serving their meals in brass

kitchenware, which is unavailable in local markets. According to behavioral scientist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and sociologist Eugene Rochberg-Halton, such status symbols (objects that are rare and expensive) are "a global measure of the owner's standing in the community" 11, and become an integral part of self (the person one feels oneself to be in relation to one's community) as well as the means by which people derive their identities. In Ria's home in Jaipur, the expensive material possessions in the kitchen become one of the means of self-actualisation through which the family exhibits its affluent status and derives a part of its identity.

In contrast, when Ria and Ajay moved to the US they brought no antiques from India, nor did they buy expensive household goods and decorative items once they were here. Instead, like other Indians in the US, Ajay and Ria buy bargain goods or shop from outlets such as IKEA, which markets mass-produced household goods at comparatively reasonable prices. This shift in status is even clearer when looking at Ria and Ajay's American kitchen, which is not very different in terms of its planning, design materials, and basic equipment from the apartment kitchens of several other Indian immigrants (who belong to different economic classes in India). Ria has no choice but to adapt to the materials in her modern American kitchen. The white plastic laminated counter surfaces contrast sharply with the easy-to-clean dark green marble counters in her Indian kitchen. While chopping vegetables in her American kitchen she places newspapers on the counter, which expedites her cleanup process and prevents scratches. In Ria's Indian kitchen, the domestic help cleans the red granite floor twice a day. In her American kitchen, Ria has placed a rug on the white vinyl floor in order to keep it clean longer. Ria comments,

Out here, it does not matter which class background you belonged to, how rich you were or whether you had two or ten servants in India. Everyone, including people like me, who did not even clean the kitchen counters in India, are now down on our knees cleaning up our domestic spaces.

Ria, who is accustomed to working barefoot in the kitchen because of her Indian religious beliefs, explains that the rug also protects her feet from dirt and the cold. To maintain hygiene in their Indian kitchen, Ria and her Hindu Marwari¹³ family forbid anyone, including one another, to enter their kitchen wearing shoes. During winter, when the kitchen floor becomes very cold because of the extreme climate of Jaipur, the family wears socks or special indoor slippers (not permitted to be worn outside). Many Hindu Marwari families do not allow shoes in the kitchen because they consider it to be a sanctified place. In addition, families offer their bounty first to God before serving it to others or eating it themselves. The couple explains, "Similar to many upper-class families in India, our families are modern in outlook; however, they still conform to their particular Hindu Marwari religious practices every day".

Religion is another arena in which the move to America has forced Ria and Ajay to substantially tailor their traditional practices. For example, in India, Ria used to sit and pray in the traditional Hindu style in front of her altar on a regular basis. Like many Hindu families who position their altars in private rooms or in semi-private spaces, Ria's family has set up

its altar in a special furniture cabinet in one corner of the lobby, isolated from the other living spaces of the house.¹⁴

In contrast, in their American apartment Ria and Ajay pray in a public space, standing in front of a built-in kitchen cabinet in which they have placed items necessary to render it a religious shrine. Living in the constricted space of a one-bedroom modern American suburban apartment has inspired these immigrants to invent a new use for their kitchen cabinet, and to invent a new place and new style of worship that dissolves the conventional boundaries between the secular and the sacred. They have become flexible not only in relation to American kitchen design by using a kitchen cabinet to meet their cultural needs (as Indians) to worship, but also in relation to their religious cultural traditions by worshipping a shrine embedded in a kitchen cabinet. The couple explains, "We have already moved twice in the past one year. Buying a separate piece of furniture for the altar is not a practical decision".

Despite the presence of an altar in their kitchen, Ajay and Ria, who are extremely fond of buying shoes, have mounted their big shoe rack behind the door of the laundry space attached to their American kitchen. They comment, "We could not find any other place for this shoe rack in our apartment and do not like the idea of seeing shoes while spending private moments with each other in our bedroom" Ria further defends their choice: "We always keep the door to the laundry closed because we do not need to enter the laundry space on a regular basis". Unlike other Indians who use the laundry space in their kitchen to store dry goods, she has consciously stored all her food items in the built-in cabinets in her kitchen. However, the presence of a dustpan, some kitchenware on top of the dryer in the laundry room and the basic ingredients of Indian meals – such as onions, which Ria uses regularly – indicate her pragmatic negotiations of available space in the interest of convenience and utility.

By inventing a new use for the laundry space attached to their kitchen, the couple has defied two of their traditional religious beliefs: first, of bringing shoes into a sacred space; and second, of storing them in a space where food is cooked and kept. In addition, they have violated their specific Marwari tradition of not wearing shoes in the kitchen. Although Ria is habituated to working barefoot in the kitchen, it is does not imply that she conforms to her religious belief. She and Ajay often put on their shoes in the kitchen itself when they have to go out.

In fact, since moving to the US, the couple does not abide by many of the religious customs or traditions observed by their Hindu Marwari family in India. Living away from their families and the cultural and traditional environment of their home country gives Ria and Ajay relative freedom to live life on their own terms. For example, according to Marwari customs, the family does not sit down to eat until they have ladled food onto the plate of each guest. In their American apartment, Ria and Ajay do not even set the table formally – instead, their guests help themselves to food directly from the kitchen.

Nevertheless, all these transformations do not necessarily result in a decrease in

religious observance and practice. Praying in a standing position in front of their kitchen cabinet does not make Ria and Ajay less religious than other Hindus living in India, who sit and pray in a specifically furnished separate altar room. In fact, Ria took special pains to bring heavy accessories (lamps, idols) from India for her altar space in America. She strategically placed her altar in a storage cabinet next to a power switch to light up the space with electric bulbs embedded in an ethnic lamp. Similarly, many Indian immigrants living in America pray regularly in their homes or visit temples (or other religious places) but do not tend to consider their religion as a set of strict dogmas and proscriptions. By becoming flexible in their specific religious traditions in the US, Ria and Ajay identify themselves as Indians rather than as Hindu Marwaris.



This does not imply that Indians who are non-religious and do not observe traditional customs are *less* Indian. As long as they identify with other Indians on the basis of a common behavioural trait (not necessarily religious or cultural), or unite with the community for common purposes, they would be considered as Indians. At the

same time, Indians who conform to American cultural practices are not less Indian, as long they do not culturally differentiate or discriminate against other Indians on the basis of those practices.

Other than providing symbolic value, and raising questions about the 'authentic' self, one crucial effect of "hybrid" rituals is that they make Indian immigrants more consciously aware of their original culture. The previously unspoken cultural norms of 'home' are suddenly absent, and cannot be reflexively reproduced in the new space; ingrained habits now require careful scrutiny before expression. The kind of mimesis demanded by transcultural assimilation processes may push the subject to a point when he/she realises that the rupture and distance from the 'pure' source is now permanent; that he/she is now irreversibly "hybrid". And once such a radical divestiture is accomplished, can the signifiers be re-aggregated to produce the same, or a different composite of 'India/Indianness'?

Cultural historian and theorist Raymond Williams, in describing the universalising trends that are underway among Indian immigrants in America, notes:

The strength and growth of sectarian and regional forms of Hinduism and the secularisation of the Asian-Indian community are threats from opposite sides... What results from the tension will be a redefinition of what 'Hindu' means in the United States and the redefinition of boundaries through the manipulation of

symbols and the expansion of their cultural contextualisation, so as to include as many Asian Indians as possible under a single religious identity.¹⁷

Hinduism, a religion practiced by the majority in India, is just one minority faith amongst others in America. This awareness of 'religious pluralism' has affected the way Indians from diverse religious backgrounds practice their religious beliefs in the US. Instead of conforming to the everyday practices associated with their particular religious faith in their domestic spaces, many immigrants pursue their specific religious traditions only during festivals or the ceremonials of births, marriages and deaths. In India, Ria and Ajay would not allow people to enter their Indian kitchen wearing shoes, a fact that makes them easily

identifiable as Hindu Marwaris. In the US, they are identified as Hindu Marwaris only if they perform their particular religious ceremonies at the temple.

This identification with an overall 'Indianness', rather than with a specific caste/branch of canonical Hinduism or other religious sects. differentiates what it means to be an 'Indian' in the US from what it means in India. In India, 'Indianness' as a category does not actually exist. It is inseparable from the expression of religion and culture. Practicing one's particular religious, social and cultural customs is an integral part of daily life in India. In their daily lives, Indians living in India negotiate their identity through a volatile mix of cultural influences, and identify themselves more with their particular subculture than with any



national catgory. The notion of Indianness or a unified Indian culture emerges only at the time of national crisis when citizens from different regions unite for a common cause, or on special occasions such as national holidays or victories in international sports.

Paradoxically, it is only upon leaving their home country for a foreign nation like America, where Indian immigrants modify their specific caste, class, regional, and religious beliefs and traditions in order to more easily connect with Indians from different cultural backgrounds, that they begin to identify with the notion of 'Indianness'. Constructing and performing 'Indianness' everyday in America has the potential to make these immigrants

even more 'Indian', because they suppress their cultural distinctions in order to form a singular national Indian community. 18

It is not enough to recognise that these religious and other cultural boundaries no longer exist between Indian immigrants. One must also examine the circumstances under which such boundaries are ignored. In contemporary Indian society, attempts by the government to diminish the gap between different cultural groups have resulted in an increase of tension and conflict between them. ¹⁹ On the contrary, in America there has actually been a decrease in tension and conflict between Indian immigrants because their cultural differences have diminished in response to their strategies of assimilation within a demanding and new cultural and spatial environment.

Living as 'Indians' in the US, these immigrants construct their identity through the influence of both Indian and American culture. Despite Western influences, and even while these immigrants reinvent their Indian traditions, the sense of 'Indianness' remains strong. It no longer exists merely at psychological levels or comes into existence only at the time of national crises or on national holidays. Rather, it is manifest in the practices that Indian immigrants construct every day in their domestic spaces. In his description of the process of identity construction, sociologist Don Slater notes, "The membership of a particular social order or identity as a member of a specific culture is produced and reproduced through culturally specific consumption"²⁰. The habits, customs and social practices enacted in the American suburban apartment kitchens around cultural issues such as gender, class, caste, and religion are first redefined and then codified into 'Indianness' or 'Indian identity' in the US.

The creation of Indianness in America, however, suggests more than long-distance nationalism. It proposes that our ethnic identity need not be our totalising identity; and that our identity could be situationally reconstructed. One respondent of my study comments, "I am an Indian here, but essentially I am a Hindu Brahmin because I was born into a Brahmin family". Though many Indian immigrants anchor the parameters of their identity to an originary locus within the subcontinent, their circumstantial construction of a transcultural 'Indian' identity in the US has challenged this notion. In this sense Indianness becomes transnational, as it refutes the limits of nationalist geography. Both India-born Indians who have *created* an Indianness upon moving to the US, and America-born Indians who practice this 'Indianness' everyday in their domestic spaces, can perform this transnational identity – which is accomplished not only by the material crossing of national borders, but also by the resilience and innovative will of the person performing the self.

Notes

- 1. Salman Rushdie. Imaginary Homelands (Granta Books, 1992, London), p. 124.
- 2. Indian immigrants' creation of a singular Indian community that overrides their ethnic differences helps to

- keep them from becoming further marginalised in multicultural America, and is essential in their struggle to avoid being racialised as non-white Americans.
- Renowned postcolonial theorists who have formulated the concept of transculturalism include Homi K. Bhabha and Sneia Gunew.
- 4. Claude Grunitzky (ed.). *Transculturalism: How the World is Coming Together* (True Agency, Inc., 2004, New York). p. 25.
- 5. Homi K. Bhabha. The Location of Culture (Routledge, 1994, London), p. 9.
- Mass-produced housing, with its standard interior design, became a cost-effective design solution during
 the post-war years. This led to the creation of communities with virtually identical kitchen designs
 throughout the United States. See Avi Friedman, "The Evolution of Design Characteristics during the PostSecond World War Housing Boom", Journal of Design History, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 750 (1995).
- According to Homi Bhabha (op. cit., p. 2), authorised power in a hybrid culture "does not depend on the
 persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through conditions of
 contingency and contradictoriness".
- 8. Class in India is determined solely by finances, and not by birth, inheritance or ownership of property, as in the LIS
- Ria Sharma, personal interview with the author, 27 December 2004, Richmond, Virginia. All quotes in this essay are from the same interview.
- 10. Commenting on the idea that real function of goods is to signify status, Jean Baudrillard asserts that people no longer consume things but signs. See Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, (ed.) Mark Poster (Stanford University Press, 1998, Stanford). Similarly, sociologist Don Slater argues, "...People buy the most expensive version of a product not because it possesses more use-value than a cheaper version but because it signifies status and exclusivity". See Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997, Oxford), p. 158.
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton. The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self (Cambridge University Press, 1981, New York), p. 31.
- 12. Many Indians such as Ajay and Ria, who are in their mid-twenties, migrate to the US soon after college with the intention of earning their own money rather than relying on the wealth of their families in India. Once in America, they lose their privileged status and have to put in years of committed work in order to reach their former level of economic security.
- 13. The four original castes of the Hindu religion have been subdivided over many centuries, each region having its own distinct sub-castes and groups, defined by profession and fixed by custom. 'Marwaris' refer to the merchant and traders communities originating from Marwar, an old state of Jodhpur in Rajasthan. Many Marwari families originally come from the districts of Jhunjhunu and Shekhawati in Rajasthan and are now settled in Calcutta and other cities in eastern India.
- 14. In India, 'lobby' is an architectural term that refers to a semi-private common area ideally designed as a family meeting room.
- 15. In urban Indian homes, shoes are considered unsightly because they are carry dirt; in more orthodox

- settings they are considered polluting. They are usually kept in closed cabinets, closets, or corners obscured by furniture
- 16. Illuminating the altar space is a tradition followed by Hindus and some Christian sects in India.
- 17. R.B. Williams. *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in American Tapestry* (Cambridge University Press, 1988, Cambridge), p. 54.
- 18. See note 2 above.
- 19. For example, Harijans (often referred to as 'untouchables' in Indian society) were discriminated against by all four Hindu caste groups and segregated from many areas of social life. Today, discrimination on the basis of caste is against the law, and Harijans (now known as 'Dalits'/'backward' or 'scheduled' castes and tribes) are taking opportunities to organise themselves politically. However, doing so has resulted in violent confrontations with many sections of upper castes, who still do not willingly accept them as equals.
- 20. Don Slater, op. cit. (note 10), p. 132.

i

Following the Black Block: Pragmatic Depression, Action and Aftermath

SAM GOULD

Two days ago marked four years in Iraq. Demonstrations were planned for American cities and towns countrywide. One week ago today I fucked up my foot pretty badly. Going up for a jumper against a friend during our weekly basketball game, I came down on top of his foot; my ankle rolled, and everyone on the court stopped as they heard a loud crack and pop. I stumbled around, hoping it wasn't anything too serious. It isn't really, but I'm still limping around, and my foot is black and blue and yellow. As well, adding insult to my injury, I missed the shot.

I haven't been able to exercise in way too long, and now I am feeling fat and lazy. In this mood, on Sunday, 18 March 2007, as people gathered in downtown Portland and elsewhere around the country to protest our unending, and unwitting, involvement in this war, I was slowly limping my way up Broadway with Laura, dragging my bad right foot behind us, on our way to the spot designated for the protesters to gather. As we passed Pioneer Square, across the street, a woman shouted nonstop to anyone who would listen. Angered by the thought of the protests set to occur that day, she yelled as Laura and I passed her by, "My son is in Iraq! Don't bend over for the enemy!"

"Is this supposed to be 'folk' music?" I asked Laura as we arrived at the park. Outside our city's half-assed Art Museum a warmed-over neo-folky sang a song about the troops: sons, daughters, mothers and fathers. A fair amount of people were scattered around. We arrived at the park at the bottom of a rise, and I wasn't able to get a great take on the numbers in attendance. Four years and a few days earlier, uninjured, Laura and I had walked the streets of Portland protesting the impending start of this war that we have become so complacent towards in the intervening years. We walked the streets with ten of thousands of others. For months leading up to that day, with regularity, people had taken to the streets, blocked traffic, bridges. We walked with those tens of thousands of others and I thought something might actually happen, that the sheer number of those in attendance might affect our government's approach, and diplomacy might prevail. A few days after those protests four years ago, I stood in the Jockey Club, the bar attached to the first apartment I had lived in after moving to Portland in 1999 from Brooklyn, New York. Drinking a 75¢ can of Pabst, I saw helicopters hover over protesters blocking traffic on the Morrison

Bridge, the police beating them, and I began to realise that the years we had in store for us were going to be just as bad as I had imagined in the back of my mind.

Instead, they have been worse because I have stopped seeing those images: no more people in the streets, no more helicopters circling over groups of concerned citizens as they were pepper-sprayed, wrists bound with zip-ties. Silenced. The Jockey Club with its leaning façade, its walls you could feel the breeze through, is now also gone.

My foot beginning to ache a little, having to skirt around people, Laura and I wound our way through the crowd getting closer to the bandstand that had been erected for the gathering. We kept walking, trying to get a bead on the scope of the day's event, wanting to see how many people were there. "What are the numbers like?" Even as the thought went through my head, I couldn't help but consider, "But what does it matter how many people are here?" I wondered how many others thought the same, and stayed away. Or came anyway, quietly, secretly disheartened like I was. Earl Blumenauer - one of our Senators spoke, as did our Mayor, Tom Potter - the former Police Chief. I was both pleased and confused by their presence, thinking maybe their being there was a sign that the tide was turning. From the stage Potter said, "In the late 1960s, during Vietnam, I lived in Portland, and I stayed silent. Today, I say to you, I will stay silent no more". The local president of the ALF-CIO got up on the bandstand and spoke out against the war. All well and good, but Blumenauer had voted against the war every chance he could, and Potter, very early on, voiced his complaints against the FBI and their hubris under the Patriot Act within their work in Portland. Were these the figureheads taking risks we really needed? What risks were they taking, as they had already shown their spark?

The march slowly began, and it was near silent. I said to Laura, "Where is everyone our age?" The crowd around us all looked either older, or much younger, college-age kids. As we crept along, the energy, the possibilities inherent in the day, slowly but surely dissipated. So many present, quite literally, kept silent. In a little over 40 minutes we had circled back around on our prescribed route worked out between the march's organisers and the city.

We ran into Gabriel, and Laura took off to get a few hours in at work. Gabriel had just gotten off work, and immediately biked across the Burnside Bridge to the march. I saw him up the road as we approached him, leaning on his bicycle, taking it all in. He seemed a little dazed as he stared at the people slowly passing by. Leaving Laura to walk to her office, Gabriel and I followed the rest of the marchers back up to the park, took a seat and began to talk about the day. I voiced my uneasiness about the proceedings. "What were marches good for?" I asked. An antiquated system that worked in the past, yet only in great numbers. And numbers alone are a questionable factor in those histories. What good does it do with an administration that openly comes out and says that public opinion means nothing to them and their 'resolve'? Those were Bush's sentiments after marches in the days before the war began. What would their reaction be now?

Still – even still – I couldn't help but think it mattered, no matter how seemingly futile. Getting up to keep looking around, we walked down Park Avenue south towards Burnside.

We watched the various groups mingling around: men on stilts dressed in spandex and sparkles, elderly women in sweatshirts emblazoned with doves, earnest college kids in baseball caps, sporting school colours. We wove our way through the crowds, sidewalk to street, and back again. We passed a group of red-and-black anarchist kids trying to form a counter-march. Standing on the street corner, one kid repeatedly shouted, "Whose streets? Our streets!" The designated flag-bearer waved around the black flag, large and dense, fastened to a thick and sturdy stick.

Suddenly a scream comes from the crowd of Black Blockers, "It's happening down there! Now!" They rush down the street, and I can't help for an instant admire their zeal as I see (and hear!) the large black cloth of their flag snap and crack as it follows them, whipping through the wind.

Gabriel and I briskly follow. Arriving to find a phalanx of bike cops, dressed in yellow and black, attempting to corral the red-and-black faction of anarchist kids. The cops throw their bikes down on the street and attempt to form a velocipedel barricade between the various factions gathering on all sides. An officer blasts a healthy dose of pepper spray pointblank into the face of a man yelling at him. Shouts of "Tell me what a police state looks like? This is what a police state looks like!" rise above the din. An anarchist biker with a trailer equipped with speakers provides a backbeat to the proceedings. As I see the riot cops lining up on the road – black helmets, Kevlar heel to scalp, big black clubs and menacing automatic rifles – the bike cops reconnoitre, and circle around the protesters on all sides of them, waiting for backup. The mounted police come in. The horses clumsily attempt to hop over the tires of the bike cops. Dressed in a striped sweater and a collar, khaki pants and a winter hat, I situate myself in the middle of the street. Horses, bicycles and the police move about me; the bike cops, now using their bicycles as battering rams, pushing the bystanders to the sidewalk. No one touches me. I am invisible.

As other protesters - 10, 20 feet away, in various directions - are pushed, pulled and pepper-sprayed, I stand and watch. Nothing happens to me: camouflaged, I throw down my middle-class colours in a haze of normality, in dark contrast to the scuffle As the riot cops begin to circle, and I find myself surrounded by them on all sides, I decide that it is best to quit the street for the sidewalk.

Standing there, behind a police line of yellow bike shorts and bicycles, I can't help but resurrect the same feelings that I had felt further up the street. What's the point of this confrontation? I am elated by the energy, and action, but the misguided sense of purpose makes me think it is all for naught. No matter how full of life – a fullness that has been so often missing in the last few years – what is to be achieved here? A girl in nothing but baggy cotton men's underwear, with electrical tape over her nipples, repeats the rallying cry as she sits atop someone's shoulders, "Tell me what a police state looks like? This is what a police state looks like!" I want to be here, present, and available. I want to be part of the living, and this carries all the outer hallmarks of life with it – shouting, hustle, selflessness and spirit – but what for? Where to?

Soon, bored and not wanting to admit it, Gabriel and I walk around to try and find better vantage points for observing the action. After a while we walk over to Pioneer Square. I look for the woman from earlier, but she's nowhere to be found.

I can't shake the feeling of uselessness the day blanketed me in: the uselessness in old forms, and the overarching fear in not following them. What is our moment right now? I cannot tell if I am moving forward or backward. So often I do not feel discernable movement at all, though I am moving as much as I think I can. Where does the energy go? So much energy is exerted, nationwide, yet each day it seems to begin anew, even though its battery is busted and uncharged. As Ginsberg wrote, "America, I have given you my all and now I am nothing". But I know that this cannot be the case. Am I correct, America? I agree with the college kids, and the elderly grandmothers sporting the dove sweatshirts. I am in solidarity with the man in the sparkles and spandex, towering over me, 10 feet tall on his stilts. I envy the energy of the black flag. But still, we are not united, even when we are in agreement. We are a nation steeped in dark nothingness: in oppression overlooked, in corporate slaughters and grandfather-clause racism. That is, until we turn that nothing inside out, recognising that we, ourselves, and our country alike, are here for this world, and not the next. This cyclical energy has re-circulated through generations again and again. We dress as Indians and commit acts of beatific treason, throwing our tea overboard into the harbour, as often as we put on white sheets to hide our acts of hideous racist violence. We rise up against child labour, we rise up against war, we rise up against police violence and fixed elections, we rise up against mistreatment of our veterans, we rise up against the murder of innocents, we rise up, again and again, against racism and bigotry. We place flowers in the guns of our own soldiers, and make the Pentagon levitate off its foundation. When the occasion calls for it we refuse to rise up. Instead we sit, and continue to ask for a meal, for service, for a seat in the front of the bus. We go limp as they drag us out of the door to be booked. Though we are sometimes slow to act, we always listen and respond, with vigour. We have, time and again, acted.

But the *waiting* ! I am so impatient. I cannot wait any longer, and I am so confused. For seven years each day has stretched, and I feel so complicit within this game, as our government pushes us further towards the edge. Each day I wonder if I am looking the other way. Do you feel this way too, America? Do you worry that you too are a secret killer in the night, sleepwalking through history? Or are we equally awake, both of us, but equally afraid to act?

Gagged by economics, by race, by religion and sex, are we afraid to be friendless at home, at the expense of being the foe of the many abroad? I want to harness the energy of the Black Block and hear the snap of the flag as I stand by the side of grandmothers in dove-emblazoned sweatshirts while they dance in the streets with the anarchist girls in the red-and-black formation. I want to live in an America once again, suddenly, born into the realisation that *all* informed action is protest. That protest equals positivity and progression, not regression. I desire protest partying, protest shopping, protest eating, protest fucking,

protest walking, building, driving, lifting, stretching, pulling, reading, listening, watching, documenting. I want it. I am selfish for action, and energy. Selfish for progress. I want to move – and America, I know you know how to dance. You've danced so beautifully in the past. You have the moves.

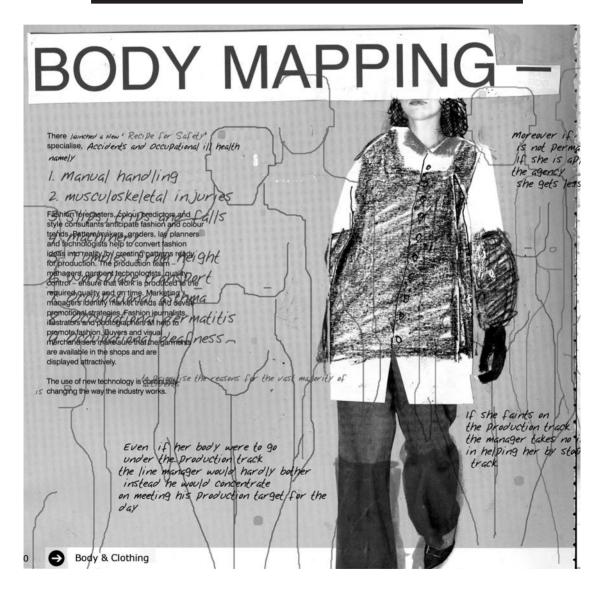
We are not a nation of wallflowers. Come out of your shell, America, I want to dance with you.

Note

1. In order to limit the number of black votes, Southern states typically created a number of hurdles to be cleared before citizens could vote. These typically included certain taxes, property ownership qualifications, and educational or literacy tests. Since the imposition of these requirements could also have an impact on the number of poor whites voting, Southern legislatures introduced the 'grandfather clause', which exempted voters from the restrictions if their grandfathers had voted. This clearly eliminated the blacks. It was not till 1915 that the grandfather clauses were voided by the Supreme Court as a violation of the 15th Amendment, which states: "The rights of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, colour or previous condition of servitude". See http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h426.html

The Logbook

SREEJATA ROY





Make-up as.

The rules of a food factory in Midlands (UK), determines a particular dress code for the workers. It extends right from the head to the tip of the toes.

Everyone has to wear two caps - a shower cap, with a net of it to hold the hair tightly in place. Not a single strand sho The body is covered with a long white coat to the knees. There are three layers of Plastic aprons over the coat.

The upper and lower arms are covered with plastic sleeves.

Knee-high boots cover the legs.

While togged up in uniform we have to frequently wash our hands, especially before putting on the mandatory pair of plastic gloves; and cotton ones over these

Finally, we are in complete armour. The body weighs heavy, wrapped to that only the face is exposed. We move to the finishing area, which may be wait to begin our day's work of our respective stations. We cast strange glances at one another. Even if we fancy be achieved through wishing anyone "Good morning", we hesitate because often we cannot recognise who is who, within our funny uniforms?

FOODWORKER

The conveyor belts revolve fast, to speed up production. The workers do not get any time to warm up to their tasks or to adjust to their individual spaces. They have to work rapidly right from the beginning. The body remains static, and the hands are in constant motion, keeping up with the machines. The faster the machine, the higher the production, and the larger the increment added to one's pay

While working in the factory, I notice that most of the women workers invariably, regularly, have thick make-up on Outlined eyes, lips, declare themselves in strident relief; skin tones

Occupational therap

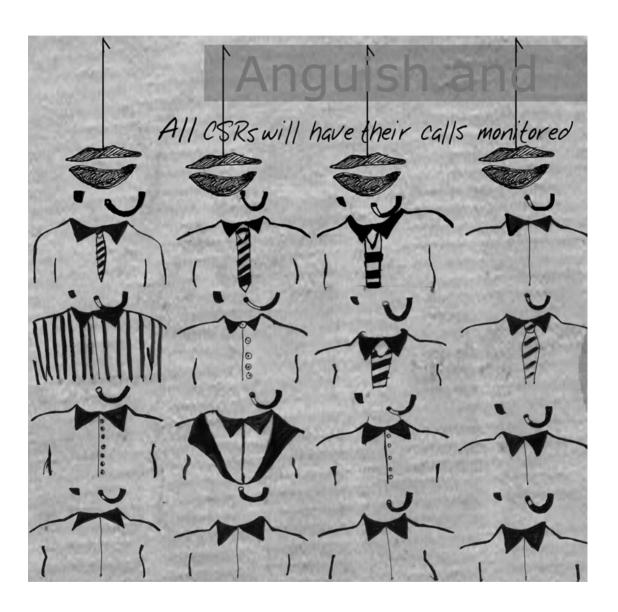
recede, pause nervously on the caked verges of blush and foundation. Initially the practice seems bizarre to me. Gradually I realise that this jazzy masking of one's features is a way to break the monotony of the surroundings and the drudgery of repetitive, stressful work Here, CCTV cameras monitor us round the clock. There is no chance of stopping one's actions for a moment, or turning one's face towards that of an exhausted comrade in a gesture of solidarity.

For us, bold make-up functions as therapy. It is the only means of forgetting the obdurate husk of plastic and cotton swaddling the body, and the only gesture of self-assertion that allows us to somehow remain confident enough to communicate with the line manager.

During breaks, in the canteen the women workers talk only about how Avon or L' Oreal suits or doesn't suit their complexions.

The topic of make-up somehow wipes away all our distress.

Then one is able to pass the day without tension while positioning cherries or sprinkling cocoa powder upon row after rown efficiency chocolate truffles, or operating the cream machine with one foot.



Abuse in Call Centre

by the Quality Team

on daily basis, so remember to cover all your CORE items. For further info on how to achieve the best Quality results please contact your Duty Manager.

Don't Forget

6452
Phonetics
Web
Salutation
Reciept sending
Reciept number
Register call
Call control
Further assistance
Advance payment
Loose call
Keep to correct

Break times

Keep personals to a minimum
In doubt ask duty manager for advice

Weekly Score Card

SERVICE SERVICE SERVICE		I DESCRIPTION
Name	Calls	Av.
Anju Nandhu	3	30
Anjum Bains	4	73
Balvinder Chadha	4	48
Dennis Brown	4	70
David Barker	2	25
Deborah Web	6	63
Gurdeep Bains	Not Monitored	
Hannah Knights	4	55
Harry Atkinsons	3	57
Imran Khan	Not Monitored	
John Yeadon	7	39
Jane Stephney	4	53
Ketty Sennette	4	48
Kiran Bhandara	4	33
Kuldeep Bains	4	78
Marlyn Chauhan	Not Monitored	
Mohammed A	3	27
Neeli Joshi	Not Monitored	
Nadia M	Not Monitored	
Paula Rai	4	70
Raechel Trolly	10	83
Rimi Chawla	7	71
Robert Braford	4	40
Roma Singh	7	66
Sarah Davison	4	53
Sharon Abbas	4	45
Shamsher Begum	1	50
Sonia Conneely	4	65
Sreya Rai	4	75
Stacy Wallace	3	64
Sukvinder Singh	3	63
Su Slater	4	60

Place: A call centre in the Midlands (UK)

Time: Peak hours

Number of calls queued: 200

Number of Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) on shift: 32

CSR: Welcome to Sorry to keep you waiting. My name is Rupita. How may I help

Customer: I want to pay the charge, please. What is the charge for a day?

CSR: It's £5 a day, sir, if you are travelling in the restricted zone from 6 am - 6 pm excluding the weekends, as they are free.

Customer: Okay, thanks,

CSR: Vehicle number?

Customer: LC02551. CSR: Make?

Customer: Jaguar. CSR: Model?

Customer: XJ EXECUTIVE AUTO.

CSR: So you want to pay for today only...? Customer: No, I want to pay for yesterday.

CSR: I am afraid, sir, then you have to pay £40 as penalty charges.

Customer: Why?

CSR: As you know, £5 is the charge from 6 am - 6 pm on the day you are travelling in the city, and you can pay till 10 pm the same night. After 10 pm the charge increases to £10 till midnight, then it goes up to £40 as penalty for not paying.

Customer: But I did not know that!

CSR: I am sorry, sir...

Customer: I don't live in London! I don't come very often to the city, and by mistake I was in that zone. Moreover I was not informed about this extra charge!

CSR: Sorry! I can understand your situation, but I cannot help...

Customer: Why can't you help me?

CSR: Sir! This is the rule.

Customer: What do you mean by rule?

Sometimes we go beyond our body, gender, cultural, social and who or what we are. In suspension, there we inhabit the state of our assigned identities, our fixed selves.

Customer: What do you mean by rule? Ask your supervisor to help you out here.

I am sure I don't have to pay any penalty

CSP, Sorry, sir! There is no supervisor here, and I have told you that this is the

CSR: Sorry, sir! There is no supervisor here; and I have told you that this is the system we follow...

Customer: But I can't pay £40 as penalty charges! I was unaware about this information. I came to know from one of my friends...

CSR: Sir, since you have travelled and did not pay the charges the same day, you have to pay the penalty the next day.

Customer: I think you are talking shit! Call your supervisor, I want to speak to him!

CSR: Sorry, sir! I told you there is no supervisor at present; you need to pay £40...

Customer: You are getting on my nerves now! Tell me, where is this call centre based? Is it in Mumbai?

CSR: No sir! It is in the Midlands.

Customer: But your accent sounds Indian and you speak weird English! Where are you from?

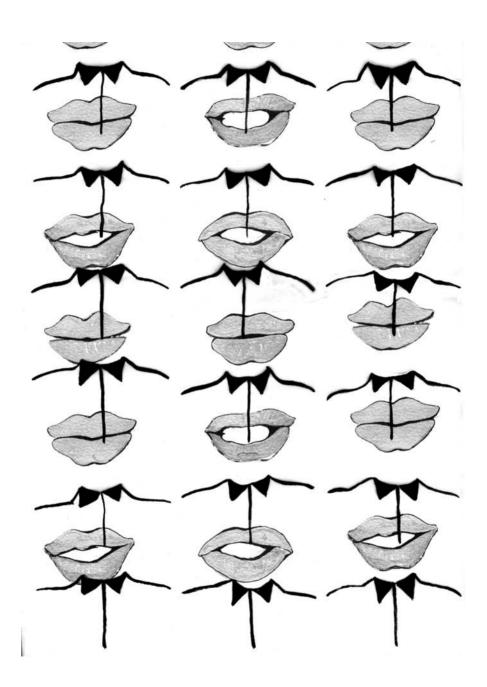
CSR: India, sir!

Customer: I don't know why the hell on earth you have to come to our country and work!

CSR: Yes sir! By the way, would you like to pay the £40 now or later?
Customer: I won't pay a single penny! What's your name? I am going to write a
complaint against you and send it to the mayor! You are not qualified to serve
our country. First of all you need to learn proper English, and then learn our
English customs. And you should also learn to not harass an innocent person!
CSR: Okay sir!

As soon as the customer disconnected the call, I had to take the next one that had been on hold for over a minute. The duty manager had been monitoring my conversation with the abusive customer. When the second call ended he came over and gave me a warning, since the earlier call had taken close to five minutes.

d personal boundaries to a place where we don't recognise of mind/mode of being that in turn inhabits us as we perform



THE URBAN FRONTIER

Ghevra Diaries

Cybermohalla Practitioners



http://wikimapia.org/863905/

SLUM & JJ DEPARTMENT INVITES TENDERS

For developing plots in Squatter Re-settlement Scheme at Ghevra Sawda Village Ph-II, towards:

- 1 : Supply and Lowering of 3H.P. single phase sub.p/set in JSC Block 'P', Block 'R', Block 'M', Block 'N', Block 'O', Block 'R', Block Q.
- 2 : Providing Internal Electrification and Supply and Fixing of electrical accessories in JSC Block 'M', Block P, Block 'N, Block Q.
- 3: P/L of Sub.P/set newly boring for Shishu Vatika in JJC 'E' Block New Seema Puri.
- 4: Providing Internal Loop Connection in 6 nos. JSC in Ph-II.
- 5 : Repairing and Rewinding of 3 Phase Sub.P/set, 6.0 H.P. and Supply and fixing of allied accessories in JSC Sambhav Camp Mandi Pahari, JSC C-9, Vasant Kunj, JSC Rangpuri Pahari Nallan.
- 6 : S/F of Metal clad board i/c safety measures accessories and wiring at pump house.
- [A] (1) Near Maszid (2) Near Murga Market (3) Site Office Ph-I (4) P.P. House No.-11
- (5) Near JSC No. 8.
- [B] (1) Near Police Chowki (2) Next to Police Chowki (3) Near Kali Mandir (4) Near Barat Ghar (5) Near JSC No.-3 Ph-II
- 7: Repairing and Rewinding of 3 Phase Sub.P/set 6H.P. stage and supply and fixing of allied accessories in JSC at Bapu Camp, Mandi Pahari.
- 8 : Providing temporary street lighting in Ghevra Sawda Block 'G H' Phase-I.

Last date of receipt of application for purchase of tender papers: 4.00 P.M. on 12.09.07

Last date and time for issue of tender papers: 4.00 P.M. on 13.09.07

Last date and time for receipt of tender papers: 3.00 P.M. on 14.09.07

Date and time for opening of tender papers: 3.30 P.M. on 14.09.07

Closer to the Destination

Rakesh Khairalia

I felt uneasy, like an outsider to that which I was witnessing.

Before my eyes, the foundation of a new neighbourhood was being laid alongside the erasure of one that was 30 years old. Today the demolition of Nangla leapt closer to its destined conclusion.

The state was issuing receipts for land in exchange for the life in Nangla. Today's date will jar in the timeline of the school, which became a site for this historical moment. Hands clutched the gates of the only school in the locality. People stood in lines with their ration cards, tokens of identity they have received from the state. Identities they have been frozen in, identities that they don't desire, identities that they tussle with, and yet struggle for. Everyone carried these identities in the form of documents today, pressed against their bodies. Men and women sat, heads covered for protection from the sun, restless eyes shifting, faces contorting with an insatiable hunger. Shadows flickered in the intense heat that surrounded them. Voices, sounds, ricocheted; they had no destination. After living in their past for so many days, a route out had opened itself for hundreds in Nangla. Getting a house. Getting an opportunity to be able to build again a neighbourhood, a web of social relations to reside in. Wasn't it to reach this destination that so much had been put at stake these last few days?

Sawda-Ghevra was but a faint, distant shadow here. What could be seen was only a desire to emerge from time that had passed.

The Corners of a City

Shamsher Ali

In the thousands of corners in the city, there will surely be one that holds space that is destined for me. "City": the word holds this meaning that everyone shares an understanding about. People come to the city with this stubborn thought in their hearts, searching for their corner. Unstable routines become their identities, with which they enter the city, beginning once again to plant their feet.

There is a reason to reach the city, but there is no destination to reach in the city.

The thought that the world is very big and that everyone will surely find a place in it becomes a force with which the search for a location begins. The wheels of time keep moving, and the person who came to the city recently soon becomes a city-dweller who has been here for 10 years. He participates in and becomes tied to the time and the crests and troughs of the space he is in.

An invalidated licence. Everyone finds one so as to stay in one of the infinite informal spaces in the city. Desires find shade to rest in. That is why, when a young child runs away from

home, the hope of his return remains. This hope stays tied to spaces even when a long time has elapsed. It is these spaces that evictions and demolitions are threatening today.

People whose houses were marked 'Post-98' in Nangla, and who have not been allotted a plot in Ghevra, have also reached Ghevra. Their certainty that there is a corner in the city for everyone is intact. They are sure there is that wall in Ghevra for them, where they and their families can rest their backs. And why not! This is a city, after all.

Entering Ghevra

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

Long, broad, levelled land. There is no settlement in sight till far. No sound can be heard. There are footprints and marks of bicycles and tractors that have passed on the unpaved, turning lanes. This land, in the shape of fields, has soaked up all water.

Standing here, amidst land that stretches for miles, eyes search the city, search for distant mounds that would indicate houses. Ears strain to hear a fragment of a sound interlaced with the sounds of the city. But there is nothing here.

Just a huge power plant, and the government office of the JJ resettlement colony.

The city is far away from here, at the fringes.

Even the black line of a road that joins this place to the city seems to be breaking away from this space, moving away from it. To reach here, one has to leave this road and turn in. This road is not a route for any bus yet. The roughly three-kilometre stretch that brings you here has to be covered on foot. By the time you reach here, the mind forgets it is still in the city of Delhi. This is Ghevra, the new corner of Delhi.

Ghevra through the Eyes of My Father

Surai Rai

When someone abides by a place, he earns the regard of others. This regard brings a value to the space. It is in exchange for the 30 years that people have given to Nangla that they are being given plots of 12 and 18 square metres in Ghevra.

In LNJP, where I live, different decisions – from the structures of the houses, to how the lanes turn, to which houses can lie together – have been ours. Where will we make our home? In which direction will doors open? Who do we want to include in our neighbourhood, and who do we keep out? We have decided these things ourselves, here in this place in which we live. We are the ones who thought of making the temple underneath the *peepal* tree. Maybe our contributions to this place developing the way it has have been within our limited means; but the decisions about how the space evolves have been ours; the place has been shaped by *our* will. In Ghevra, this gets immediately subtracted from our lives. And it pinches. There are

no words for this, and so everyone is losing themselves in talk about loss of comfort and lack of amenities. But the unhappiness is really that of having lost power.

Is it possible that everyone is happy with his neighbourhood? It's not possible. There are days when one feels like escaping from here. Relations can be forged in two minutes; bread may be offered by anyone who happens to be sitting next to you. But still, we are all lamenting the loss of relations and neighbourhood. There is something that we are hiding.

Forming Maps

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

Many five-foot pillars of cement stand in a row. Some have numbers inscribed on them – **36A**, **36AF**. Many are blank. The pillars are dividing up the place into portions, making frames in which the paintings of new lives will be hung. The colours of the paintings are not yet certain.

Around the pillars, in a radius of about four feet, small pieces of wood, painted red, have been hammered into the ground. Along these, lines have been drawn by sprinkling white DDT powder. Each frame is divided into many parts. Was this place inhabited by people before this?

At the edges, wire nets have been hung with the pillars as pegs; the expanse of the space has been contained. A hot wind is blowing; the borders have come alive, they are shivering. This is the border between Delhi and Haryana.

A faint map of the lane is emerging from the red pieces of wood and the DDT powder. Measured plots peer out from behind them.

Some distance away, a lake has dried up and is fixed, unstirring, into the ground.

On Returning from Ghevra

Neelofar

On returning from Ghevra, when I enter my home, I can't see anything. I sit on one side and slowly wait for things to make themselves visible, for them to reacquaint themselves with me. Sometimes Ma keeps to herself, lost in her work; at other times she asks me, "You're back very early today?"

I go to the toilet, then come back and drink water, and lie down. My mind revisits the morning I spent in Ghevra. Today Ghevra's journey to becoming a colony doesn't seem immeasurable, but I don't seem to be able to cover it. I feel my mother's past time is in that place somewhere. When I ask her, she says, "How can I recount my days in Mustafabad? Neither water not electricity; houses far away from each other, ground of sand and dust..."

To reach Ghevra you travel beyond Shakarpur and the big shopping malls and clubs, beyond the stretch of road where huge construction work continues. The journey challenges and asks us, "Where are you in all this?"

Token

Suraj Rai

Last night, as I looked inside the trunk, I saw a square piece of metal, layered with chalk dust. I had no memory to associate with it. I picked it up and removed the dust from it. It was an aluminium plate. It bore a number: 4-1-5. I recognised the number. Our ration card bears the same number. The metal plate was embossed with a sign. The issuing authority's, I thought to myself. Within this sign, or logo, was a stamp of time: 1987. On seeing the year, an image flashed in my mind. A day from my childhood when I saw two men standing on the other side of the threshold of my house, one of them painting this number with a brush onto the wall. The number stayed on the wall through my childhood.

I asked my mother what the square piece of aluminium was. She said it was a token. It bore the token number of our house. Our ration card and election I-card have both been issued on the basis of this token. VP Singh [a politician] had got it made. All the poor people who lived here got one. The purpose was to assist us in getting kerosene for stoves and sugar at lower costs. Our colony got its name when these tokens were issued. Today it is called LNJP colony, but then it was named T-Wood Market. My mother told me to put it back in the trunk, to return it to where I had pulled it out from. She said it would help us later in life.

As I put it back in its place I thought to myself: that which has no relation to my memories of my family is a strong token of my family's identity in the city.

Ghevra Is at a Distance of 75 Kilometres from Dakshinpuri

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

The kilometres don't feel as if they have been traversed, on reaching Ghevra. Instead, they seemed to keep rolling on in the spread of Ghevra.

Ghevra is discussed often in Dakshinpuri. How can it be otherwise? When a settlement in the city is faced with demolition and there is talk of its relocation to another place, a resettlement colony like Dakshinpuri begins to reminisce. Images and memories from its own past emerge and begin to be narrated. The tension unfolding elsewhere in the city becomes proximal.

The difference between Dakshinpuri and Ghevra seems to be that with the passage of time Dakshinpuri has reclaimed its place in the city, whereas Ghevra has just begun this journey. "Where have they brought and left us, so far!" When I hear someone in Ghevra saying this,

I feel the distance between Dakshinpuri and Ghevra has amplified and become infinite. It seems then that Ghevra is not only distant from the present moment of Dakhshinpuri, but also from the imagination of the emerging city.

Construction Has Begun

Rakesh Khairalia

Countless people are being cast onto the land of Sawda-Ghevra.

Those lives, which had once before transformed barren terrain by infusing it with life-force and embellishing it, have now begun to descend on the land of Ghevra, to once again take on the challenge. Another struggle to give direction to the wayward lines of time has begun. The process of rehabilitation of settlements from Lakshmi Nagar and Shahdara has begun.

One man has driven four to six bamboo sticks into the ground to create a frame; tied ropes around the frame and created a canopy by draping blankets and sheets over them.

The afternoon sun shoots rays like arrows to the ground. In the fields, each grain of sand seethes like lava.

Construction has begun in Ghevra.

The Form of a House

Azra Tabassum

A gap, where a small wooden bench can fit, had been left before the entrance to the house. The *kuccha* (unpaved) floor had been freshly plastered with a paste of mud. Opposite the entrance, on the wall of matted bamboo, hung a calendar from the year 2006.

The entrance was to the left. The door and the wall were made with the same material. Yellow, rolled-up bamboo mats had been straightened out, framed with narrow poles of bamboo, tied together at the edges with ropes to make a room. The door was a mat framed with thicker bamboo poles.

Sunlight took new shapes in the small portion of space on the other side of the door. It filtered in through the wall across the room and fell on the wall with the door, making it shine. Then scattered itself like many diamonds on the floor. Moonlight will also enter in streams and fragments and spread itself here this way.

There was something behind the wall at the far end of the house. Light didn't find a path in from there. On these freshly made walls, even a mild light seemed acute. The house is empty at the moment. When people begin to live in the house, what kind of relations will the light be bound into?

There was a section in the house where someone could sit and read without needing a bulb.

Four steps ahead, another space, which seemed as if it was created as an afterthought. No light entered here. It was right in the middle of the house. It was smaller than the space that lay ahead of it.

Further inside, a space that was in complete darkness. As if it was night.

There had been an attempt to tie the 12.5 square metres of space together in different ways. The shape and form of the house will surely change with time. But I feel people who will live in it will maintain the openness it contains at the moment.

Everyone Is an Artisan

Tripan Kumar

Two men sat on the dusty ground, making a thatched roof. There was a big needle in their hands. They tightened bamboo poles to a bamboo mat with twine they had strung through the needle. When after standing near them for a while I sat down beside them, they glanced towards me. I asked, "Are you making your own home, or are you artisans?" They replied enthusiastically, "In today's world, who isn't an artisan! Everyone is an artisan, some less, some more than others".

Anand Halder is 60 years old. His son Ashish is 35 and grandson Raju is 22; they hail from Murshidabad district in Bengal. In Ghevra, they are working on making houses using woven mats of bamboo.

Anand Halder said, halting his work as he spoke, "We take Rs 1000 to make one house, and it takes two days to make one".

Each bamboo mat costs Rs 15, and bamboo poles are priced at Rs 60, 65, 80, according to their strength. All the material to make a house is purchased by the person whose house is to be made. The mats are made in Nainital and can be bought from the market in Shahdara.

"How long have you been doing this work?"

"This is not the only thing we can do. We know all kinds of work..."

"... Yes, we can do anything. We started this work recently, since this place began to take shape".

Ashish's voice emerged from inside, "Incidentally, we are fishermen. That's our familial occupation. We supply markets with fish from the Jamuna, from Garhganga, Ghaziabad and other places. But this is not the season for that work, so we have had to seek other jobs".

The three of them continued talking among themselves. Alongside, work continued. Now they cut a bamboo pole with a knife, now they tied the mats to the poles. I sat near them, watching them as they worked.

The Shop Is Ready

Lakhmi Chand Kohli

A narrow opening – the slight wall of woven material has been cut open, the flap raised and kept in place with the support of a bamboo stick. This marks the house as being different from others. One can tell no one will stay here after 11 at night.

The floor is cool with the fresh smear of mud and cowdung.

Just as one can sense there is an urgency in everyone to get their own land, a haste to make a home on it, one can also tell that making a shop on the plot assigned to one's name is very important here.

What kind of a life will a shop in the middle of the lane have? Will it be able to become a hub for different kinds of transactions, in the manner of a market?

But these questions are untimely right now. It seems what is important to the owner is that some kind of a start be made, that the shop become a presence in people's lives from the beginning...

In the lane a few plots still lie vacant, without anything built on them. Other than on these, work is being carried out with a kind of immediacy.

The Making of the First Concrete House

Shamsher Ali

The afternoon glare reached the low wall of bricks; the wall hastily soaked up water being sprinkled on it. The sum total of the first two days' work had been a foundation with an elevation of two feet. It takes one week and one day to make an entire house.

But how will this calculation account for the day preceding this one week and a day?

Both individuals had their own understanding about the small piece of land. The man in the cap was marking a map; the woman was conjuring an image of her home.

Those hands held nothing very special – just a thin, long thread and a big inch-tape. They were formulating a shape for the tall grass and unlevelled land – a shape before the land is settled on.

A small group of people noisily followed the man, their eyes fixed on the inch-tape. But the woman's voice carried a force; it drew the entire scene to her. "O *bhaiyya* (brother), measure our plot. My sons are old enough, they will start building from tomorrow".

It had been heard that plots were being measured against receipt of Rs 100 and a box of sweets. Maybe the government servant in the cap had already received his sweets. He measured the plot and compared the plot number with his map, then made some marks with his pen.

The woman's voice and the work of the man with the cap stretch the 12.5 square metre

plot along two different axes. With measuring it, the man in the cap had finished his job. But the woman's hands will keep working her entire life, decorating and building her home.

The Making of a Home

Yashoda Singh

Our home remains the same today as it was at the time when the foundations of houses were beginning to be laid in LNJP. Today the lane is two feet above our floor. The paving of the lanes has slowly raised the lanes, causing several houses to become lakes each time it rains. Our house is one such. The frame of the door is so low that it greets those who enter our home by saluting them on their foreheads. Sometimes Mother gets frustrated by this and in her anger says, "I will break this threshold! I am the one who cemented it to the wall..."

Whenever someone bumps into the doorframe, the time when it was made mutters its way onto Mother's tongue. She still remembers the moment when the foundations of the first houses were being laid in the settlement. Objects were being collected from different places to make a home.

The broad wooden plank in our doorframe has receded from view because of layers of whitewash over the years. But Mother had brought it with a lot of affection, choosing it from among the piles of wooden things that had been discarded by the residents of the yellow quarters where she worked, cleaning it and, drenched in sweat, carrying it home. At that time *rickshawalas* didn't charge too much, but still, Mother had not hired a *ricksha*. Today when she says in frustration that she will break it, the entire house seems to dissolve into its layers, and the cementing of bygone dreams begins again.

Papa often says in response to Mother's frustration, "If the doorframe were to break, how will we scrape up the money for a new one?" Then Mother says, "You be quiet! What has your contribution to this been, anyway! You had just picked up your silver box and started out. But I am the one who has made this home liveable". When Mother says this, my eyes become sensitive to time seeping from the mud-plastered walls.

Each year, the repair of these walls begins a week before Diwali. The crevices in the walls and the burrows of rats are filled in with slaked lime. The crust of the unpaved floor cracks each time someone's heavy boots graze it. This may embarrass those who do not make things with their own hands, but for those who make things, such crusts are repositories of pride, which only gets stronger each year.

Eight Days

Rakesh Khairalia

"It takes eight days to make a house".

"Can't you do it in less time? The sooner it gets done, the better. There will be a roof over our heads and a place to rest. Then one will not feel reluctant to return home everyday..."

"It's a 12-square-metre plot; I am a mason. My hands and feet are not machines. It would be good for me too if the job could get completed less time – I could then move on to my next job".

Eyes are trying to calibrate the measured plot of land from behind a veil. "Mistry-ji, how many bricks should I order?"

The mason paused, looked upwards, turned his head from left to right, studied the four corners of the plot. His lips moved slowly.

"It will take 4000 bricks. If more are needed, then we will see".

"And what about the roof?"

"You tell me how you want the roof".

"We have cement sheets from earlier: let's make do with them".

"Then consider your house made".

Turning her head towards her husband Rajkumar, who was standing quietly on one side, she said. "Arre, what about red sand and cement which will be needed?!"

The mason detailed the expenses and left.

"What do we care if someone gets theirs made or not, or if they take an entire year to make theirs. You get ours made quickly", she said definitively to her husband.

It was morning. A truck advanced through the dusty, unpaved road; it was laden with bricks. It stopped at one side of the mouth of the lane. Rajkumar gestured to the truck driver to drive in. The truck moved through the lane. The husband and wife smiled as they watched the approaching truck. They supervised the unloading of the bricks.

Then a tempo brought bags of cement. They were unloaded quickly.

Now they are waiting for the mason.

"You are late by half an hour, *mistry-ji* ..." The mason had brought a bricklayer with him. He carried a bag with a trowel, an iron vessel for mixing, a gouge, a hammer. There was an inch-tape in his shirt pocket. A hoe rested on the bricklayer's shoulder, and he held a spade in his hand.

Rajkumar gave each a glass of water to drink. Then they both stepped into the mat house and began to work out how deep they must dig to lay the foundation.

The first strike of the hoe was near the door.

From behind the veil, held in place between her teeth, those eyes began to visualise the

completion of the construction of the walls, the windows, the roof. It was almost as if the house had already been made.

Where Do We Go Tonight?

Jaanu Nagar

Now his eyes were going to ask me where we would spend this night. It was not difficult for me to make out the unsaid in his lowered eyelids. Such were the times...

The route we were taking was familiar to me; but my father was a stranger to it. With a parched throat and pursed lips he said, "Let's go, son". Today I was not returning to my own room but was going to sleep in someone else's house, a little distance away. We had been given shelter there. Leaving behind our now broken corner in the city, the two of us set out, to make and decorate a new place. Cutting through the breaking Nangla, we reached the main road. Police had set up a checkpost here. Even buses had changed their routes. I was perplexed with the effort of trying to make sense of these by-ways that had become strangers to me.

Papa asked, "Where are we going?"

Halting, I replied, "Shashi Garden".

"Then let's walk till Khatta Mod".

While walking, I tried to recollect the numbers of the buses that would go to Shashi Garden, but I couldn't remember the routes that would take us to our destination today. Just then a three-wheeler stopped next to us. "Will you go to Shashi Garden?" I asked him.

"Yes".

"Will you go by the meter?"

"No, it's not working".

"Then how much will you charge?"

"Rs 40".

Hearing this, I thought our destination was far. Papa said, "All right". We got in.

The three-wheeler took us past the Yamuna, crossed one turn, and stopped on the second one. The driver said, "Get off". Recognising the place, I got off and moved towards a lane that looked familiar. My eyes scanned the forms of the houses, to locate what I wanted. When would I reach the house which had stones on its exterior and which would have a white car bearing a Haryana number plate?

When I saw the car, I moved towards the house, trailing my hand over the vehicle. A woman appeared; I didn't know her. She gestured to us to stop. I immediately smiled and introduced myself, "My name is Jaanu. We are the tenants from yesterday". Papa remained quiet.

The woman said, "Son, we have filled water for you". She climbed the stairs ahead of us.

Opening the door, she said, "Spend one more night here; in the morning you will get your room". Then she started down the stairs, saying, "You must have brought your food with you". We lied and said we had.

I pulled down the cot and asked Papa to sit. I gave him water in a small pot and took off his shoes. This house wasn't ours; nothing had a designated place. I kept the shoes beneath the cot. Papa took off his shirt and put it on the cot.

The light outside was dwindling; the milky radiance of the tubelight filled the room. Papa said, "Leave behind what has happened in Nangla. Now let's look towards a new life. Let's see what turn it leaves us at next". Then, thinking about our hunger, he said, "What shall we do for dinner tonight?" I said, "Let's find an eatery for today".

Switching off the tubelight, closing the door behind me, I followed Papa. As soon as we stepped out of the house, he asked, "What will you eat today?" I was a few steps behind and couldn't hear him. He became annoyed. "Are you deaf?" Then he pulled me close, put his arm around my shoulder and started to tell me about this place as if he had known it for years. He said, "Listen, this place was a jungle for me. I used to live in Khichripur with my sister. These DDA flats that you see: there were acacia trees here earlier. Just beyond them was ITI. I am talking of roughly 1991-92". We spotted a place where four or five cooking vessels were set out. Papa said, "Oh look, we've reached a hotel".

We ordered food, but we couldn't eat properly. Papa paid with a 20-rupee note and then we left. As soon as we reached the room I switched on the tubelight. Papa lay down on the cot. I spread a carpet on the floor and lay down on it. I don't remember when I fell asleep. I didn't even ask Papa if he would be able to sleep.

Mister Halder Sahib

Shamsher Ali

His laughter softened the blazing sunlight and the harsh air. Clad in a vest and a waistcloth, with a saw, a hammer and a gouge in his hands to frame his skills, with dishevelled hair and an immaculate smile on his face, standing before me was Halder *sahib*. His hands were locked behind him, in the posture of a *babu* (clerk). We just stood there for a while, in front of each other, looking at each other. Not with surprise or perplexity, but with that small rag from an encounter called a smile. He would look down for a moment, then raise his eyes again. For a few minutes, laughter was all that passed between us.

Halder *sahib* 's home was in Lakshmi Nagar. After being moved from there, he was given a place in Ghevra. The place was brand new then. Lakshmi Nagar was the first settlement that came to Ghevra.

His family had difficulty digesting the 'pureness' of this place, so Halder *sahib* sent his wife and children to the old soil of his village.

According to his tools, his trade is that of a carpenter and he makes beds, cupboards, chairs, etc. But work is slow in the factory that employs him. The factory remains open, but there is no work to be done. Halder *sahib* can't afford to fritter away his money on travelling there every day. As a result, going to the factory has come to a halt. His monthly salary was Rs 7,000, which he didn't get last month because there was no work.

"People around me have taken the advance and bonus for Diwali and gone to their villages", he laughed.

Well, for the time being, he will get a lot of work in Ghevra. "There is much furniture to be made in Ghevra". Saying this, he went his way, as if he had some plans for the time to come in this place.

Bus No. 949

Jaanu Nagar

Drops of dew had not left yet the blades of grass. Rays of the sun danced upon them. Bus No. 949 started out from Sarai Kale Khan bus depot. It wasn't 7:50 am yet. Familiar faces from Nangla were in the bus; they were setting out to Ghevra. The driver of the bus must have been about 50 years old; he was wearing Rajasthani *jootis* on his feet and he smoked *bidis* frequently. The conductor was about 45 years old; he wore glasses. It was a regular DTC bus, the kind found on any route.

The bus halted briefly in front of Nangla Maanchi. Some people who live in Nangla village climbed into the bus from the rear door. Manus-*ji* also stepped into the bus. Returning from his village last night, he had got off at the Nizamuddin railway station. But there was no means of reaching Ghevra, and so he stayed the night at Nangla village. The bus started again. Crossing Delhi Sachivalaya, Rajghat, Delhi Gate, Zakir Husain College, Ajmeri Gate, Anand Parvat, Karol Bagh, Khalsa College, Punjabi Bagh, Peera Garhi Chowk, it travelled past Nangloi; and in an hour-and-a-half it turned towards Sawda-Ghevra.

Beauty Parlour

Yashoda Singh

Passing by a lane, I saw, under a black tarpaulin sheet, a dark girl shaping someone's eyebrows. There is nothing unusual in this sight. But here, where on all sides into the distance there are nothing but the remains of fields, and where houses have not yet been set up, it is surprising. Brings a smile to your lips, makes you confront the will to live.

She stopped when she saw me. Smiled a little, and who knows what hesitation she wiped away when she passed three fingers over her forehead. I smiled and asked, "You have skills to work in a parlour?"

With a thread pressed between her lips she said, "Yes".

"So do you plan to open a parlour here?"

"Yes, but not right now. There is no surety even about daily meals here yet! Why don't you come inside?"

The thatched dwelling was open from three sides. There was no door. So, there was nothing to stop one from entering. The formality of taking off one's shoes before entering was futile here, so I entered just as I was. There was no bulb, nor fan. But the Lord above was being generous today; wind entered from any direction it chose and the thatched roof fluttered, as if the wind were teasing it. For some time, I stood where I was. I think the girl was confused about how to play host to me, wondering where she could offer me a seat. I removed a *dupatta* (long scarf) and a feeding bottle from a cot that was lying on its side and sat down.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Maqsuda, but they used to call me Neha or Nisha in the parlour in which I worked".

"Where was the parlour?"

"Same place we have come from. Lakshmi Nagar, Area No. 8. They said something was going to be constructed there. And now look, where they have left us, in this jungle".

An elderly lady sitting to one side and fanning herself with a handheld fan said, "What jungle? This will become a garden, watch closely. All this place needs is four to five years. When we settled in Lakshmi Nagar, what do you think it consisted of? Acacia trees, grass, mud! We cleaned it all with our own hands. And it turned into gold, over time".

Her words had a weight. The weight of people who, no matter where they go, manage to build a habitation. The passage of time strengthens them.

Strength

Tripan Kumar

Right where Ghevra begins is a corner where, under the shade of a huge tree, some hawkers gather. Vegetable sellers, vendors of summer drinks, spice sellers, people who manage STD-PCO booths – they have all created a feeling of a small market here. This place, and the way in which people here talk to each other, and work, gives a glimpse of their capacity to create their new space and inhabit it. I spoke with one person here, whose name is Sunil. He must be about 25 years old. He is well built and he has a thick moustache. By profession, he is a truck driver.

For the time being, Sunil-*ji* has left his driving work. He says, "Now I have come to Ghevra village and I clean the makeshift public toilets. I am in search of a government job here. As this place gets made, as more people settle here, as Ghevra develops, the toilets will

become bigger and also concrete. My boss was saying to me that I should continue working here. When this place becomes concrete, so will my job. So, it's just a matter of two to three years now. By then, this place will be ready and, God willing, I will get a permanent post". Sunil-ji has a vision of himself in this place in the time to come.

I asked, "What do you do when you have free time?"

Sunil-ji smiled. "What else, I walk around in this new place. Chat and joke around with my friends and other people who live here. When it's time to work, I work".

Sunil-ji has lived for a while in J-Block in Dakshinpuri. I live in Dakshinpuri, near J-Block. I shook his hand and then walked on. I was thinking to myself, people have started making their plans about this place. There is a spark in people about settling in their own place. There is drinking water, there are toilets, mobile dispensaries. There is electricity in the evenings. Work remains as a question, since places in the city are now very far.

All that is needed is for things to get constructed quickly, people to settle down well. As people begin to settle, the place will gather strength.

That Face Has Not Been Made Here Yet

Shamsher Ali

Many words weave a space together. If a string is removed from a woven mat, the mat does not weaken. But the missing string is immediately visible. This is exactly how it is when there is an absence of certain words.

Usually, when one sees four people having gathered, and chatting, one knows they are doing 'time-pass'. But words such as 'time-pass', 'getting bored', have not taken seed in Ghevra yet. Here, seeing four people together indicates something serious is being discussed. Seeing a group like this, people passing by unhesitatingly try to join in the conversations by standing close or far from the group.

If society creates a context for us to meet, it is society that also asks us questions. "What were you doing out of the home late into the night?" "Why are you keeping company with those boys?" Questions like these wander around us from time to time; they instruct us and our behaviour. Whose face is it that asks us such questions? The face never makes a clear appearance before us. We come to accept within us that, yes, it is not good to be outside the house after midnight. Instructions seep inside us and dwell there. They begin to flower within us; we begin to create contours of that instructing face, once hazy. The argument with oneself continues.

In its process, Ghevra today has expelled the word 'vagrant'. No one seems to be just wandering about; neither does an older person call a young man vagrant.

The echo of time can be heard even in someone's rebuke or scolding. To include the word 'vagrant' in its vocabulary, this place will have to access its passed time, and to recreate it.

Many things will have to be forgotten, and many recollected.

After all, words are tied to the time of a place, and not a place and its time to words...

Proud Davs

Azra Tabassum

"It doesn't seem to me you have come from somewhere else. You seem to me to be from here itself!"

When she said this, it broke through the hesitation Yashoda and I felt about it being our first day here. Smiling, we sat down on the cot fitted beside the cot on which she was sitting.

Noorjahan *baaji* lived in a house of 40 yards in Lakshmi Nagar's Area No. 8 for 15 years. Now she has been given a plot of 18 square metres. As of now, the plot has not been transformed into a casing supported by beams of concrete.

There are only a few people around, and so Noorjahan *baaji's* heart is not in this place yet. "But so what! I have somehow made my place amidst others who live here, and I live among them".

The narrow spaces between houses that have been constructed do not shy away from inviting others. They are prepared to soak different kinds of presences into themselves.

"Do you know, a *sardar* (Sikh) came here today; and he parked his bike behind my cot". *Baaji* lowered her voice and brought her lips close to my ears to continue. "He had come to buy plots. He was staring at me. I turned my back to him. Then he said, 'O *bibi*, O *bibi*, can I get a glass of water, please?' I turned around and looked at him in surprise and said, '*Bhaiyya*, I am Muslim'. He replied immediately, 'So what? What is Hindu and Muslim when it comes to drinking water?' I liked it when I heard this. Where I used to live, that is exactly what people used to say. I gave him water in a plastic utensil. There, see, it's kept there".

Next to the stove lay a turquoise-blue plastic container. She uses utensils that are separate from her daily utensils when she gives us water to drink too.

When we meet Noorjahan *aapa*, we always feel she creates a distance from people in her mannerisms, but not in her conversations.

Looking at a shadow that stirred on our right, she said, "I never eat anything someone else has taken a bit of, or from another's plate. I always remain pure and perform my ablutions. I used to wake up at 4:00 am where lived earlier, and after saying my prayers, I would clean the entire house. The floor of my house used to shine; one would not hesitate to lick curd off the floor... I would get a new suit made for myself every month, and that too of a kind others would not be able to take their eyes off! People from the neighbourhood would come to my house to ask my advice on all kinds of matters. And now...! Now can anyone tell I have lived those days? Why, I myself wonder if it was someone else, not me, when I recall those days".

As she said this, she brought an unknown kind of laughter to her lips, and tried to hide the moistness in her eyes. Maybe this moistness wanted an answer to "When?" It was very difficult to say anything at that moment.

The Cot

Yashoda Singh

There are three cots in her house. Sitting on one, dark-skinned Noorjahan *apaa*, with half the hair on her head having turned white, gold earrings colliding with the string attached to her spectacles, was intently undoing the chain on a bag she was holding. Another bag emerged from this bag, shinier and more beautiful than its container. She unzipped this second bag, and it revealed a third bag, more beautiful than the previous two, and with fresher colours. Seeing this, a smile spread across my lips. I said excitedly, "Wow! Bag inside bag! It's looking so beautiful!"

Sweeping her hand over a bag, she said, "My daughter gave this to me; she made it from the scraps of cloth left over each time she got a new suit stitched. She said to me, 'Ammi, use them to keep your special things". Saying this, she began looking at the bags lovingly.

This is our third meeting with her. Whenever we come we find her fanning herself with a handheld fan, and she begins to talk to us with a lot of affection about different people in her family. The house, open from all sides, gets filled with so many presences that I lose track of time amidst them. I sense a big, happy family which will return home in the evening; the three cots will fill with stories from the day that has passed. Anecdotes from different days appear on her lips each time we meet her.

While chatting I asked her, "How many children do you have?" I think she didn't expect this question. She just sat there looking at me for some time. Then she said, "No, child, I have no children. I have been married 30 years".

She said this, and then picked up a plastic bag lying next to her and started to transfer the *ghee* from it into a container. She said, "The house is open from all sides right now, and can only take shape slowly. Right now, dogs come in from any side and drag away the packets of *ghee...*"

Ramlila

Jaanu Nagar

This year Ravana will be brought from Nangla and will be slain in JJ Colony Sawda-Ghevra's B-Block. The tent has been set up. Those who set it up said, "This is where we are going to live now. There we used to set up the stage for Ramlila on government land; but this space is our own. Then why should we not perform our old Ramlila here!"

As of now, all the artists are separated from each other. But whatever the case may be, a beginning has been made.

Sajjan Thakur spoke with a lot of joy, "This mic, this machine, these speakers – we bought them with money we put together in a committee in Nangla".

Caught in his excitement, the small joker said, "Take my photo or I will bury myself alive!" "Don't do that, little joker. Why a photograph; come, I will make a small film of you".

This made him happy, and in gusto he picked up his mic and stepped forward. The mic was not connected to the speakers yet. They were only rehearsing at the moment.

He called out loudly, "Long live Ram Chandra! Long live Sita *maiyya*! Long live the dwellers of Nangla Maanchi! Repeat after me with love: long live the dwellers of Sawda-Ghevra!"

All this happened when there was no audience, just members of the committee. The sunlight was harsh, the wind blew with force. The tent swayed. The things that would be played with at night were being set up.

About Myself

Love Anand

From a distance it looked like nothing more than an empty field. As we neared it, small houses made of bamboo mats and poles could be seen. Some houses were adjacent to each other, while others stood alone. I walked on and soon I found myself standing in the middle of a process of making a new part of the city.

Two *rickshawalas* stood on either side of the lane. There were carts, one after the other; people were selling things. There were five to six shops. This area has taken the form of the first market in Gheyra.

To my far left, underneath a tree, a stall had been set up like a shop selling general provisions. Next to it was a bench for sitting. I immediately headed towards it. On reaching, I saw tea was being made next to the bench. I ordered tea.

"Have you come in search of your house?" the young man managing the teashop asked me. His name was Deepak.

I replied, "I know some people here. I've come to meet them and also to see this place".

"Now the space has become capable of being seen. People have made it so. We were given an open, empty field. People have made their own spaces on it. The earth had to be dug for hours, levelled. Only then has it been possible to make something on it".

Near me, some kids were at work with their parents. The father was digging up the uneven earth with a hoe; he threw the loosened mud to one side. The mother and the kids gathered the mud and loaded it onto a cart. Once loaded, the kids pulled the cart, chanting loudly, "Zor laga ke, haiyya; hut ja, ghar banaane de jaldi, mere bhaiyya! (We're pulling with all our

strength; let us make the house quickly, don't become an obstacle, my brother)!"

Hard work and effort was visible all around. There were busy *khatar-patar* sounds, and sounds of digging. Everyone seemed busy doing something or the other. Looking around, you saw all the houses were being made of the same material – mat and bamboo poles. When I asked the tea-maker about this, he handed me my cup of tea and said, "*Bhaiyya*, there is an instruction from the government that no one is to make houses of concrete for three months. The slips we have got against the allotment of our plots will be verified after three months. Plots, lanes, roads will be measured properly in the meanwhile. No one will be exempt. If someone makes a *pucca* house, and on measuring it is found the built space is more than the allotted space, the house will be pulled down. That's why people are living in *kuccha* houses. That's why you see doors opening in all kinds of directions".

I took a sip of tea and said, "The tea is really good".

He smiled. "I have had the magic of tea-making in my hands since my childhood. Whoever has a cup of tea made by me doesn't tire of praising me".

He continued, "These days, whatever anyone was selling in the place they were living in before, they are selling the same things here. After all, everyone knows a new place is being settled; everyone is used to some things and will need them here. People may buy less, but buy they will. Haven't you heard, 'No one can pray on an empty stomach...?"

There were bamboo poles in every direction. Where there weren't any, there was preparation on to erect them. I asked, "When you run out of supplies, where do you get more from?" He said, "I take off to Shahdara. That's where I bring things from, usually. But there is a salesman here as well, who comes on a bicycle with all kinds of things to eat. I get fresh milk from the village nearby. I sit there and make sure the buffalo is milked in front of me, even though this makes it a little more expensive than otherwise. I can do anything to make good tea".

I said, "Okay, bhaiyya, I will never forget the taste of the tea you make". And I started to walk away from there.

A woman was busy plastering, with a paste of mud, the floor of what was shaped like a house to make the ground amenable to sitting. There was a table, a bench and two chairs in the middle. Some medicines were kept on the table. There was a stove outside the place, wood had burnt and become black in it. Near it, a man was splitting bamboo poles and peeling them one by one with a sickle to remove splinters.

There were mobile toilets everywhere, which probably help shade one from shame in the daytime and from poisonous insects at night.

When I reached the tea stall again, I saw someone sitting there. The goods loaded on his bicycle told me he was the salesman. Deepak and he were in deep conversation about the goods. The salesman was insisting Deepak take some things that, it seemed, Deepak didn't want. The salesman said, "Deepak *bhai*, make me a cup of tea and keep these. Pay me if these sell, otherwise I will take them back". Saying this, he put them down in the shop.

No one hesitates in forming a relationship here. Everyone is asking after each other and talking about someone else. Everyone introduces themselves through what they do, so that they may be known by their name or their skill or potential work in the colony.

Wearing a loincloth and vest, a man came to the teashop, ordered four cups, and sat down very close to me. He was lathered with mud, and splinters from the bamboo mats were stuck to his clothes. Looking at him I could tell he had been working. When I asked him if he had come from the same place as Deepak *bhai*, he laughed, raised his eyebrows, rubbed his hands and said in a loud and crisp voice, "What special thing should I say about myself?"

I became quiet. I thought I might have asked a wrong question. I said, "You are right. What difference does it make, knowing anything about anyone else?"

He slapped me on my shoulder and said, "What should I say about myself which is special? There is nothing special to be told. I had a house of my own in Nangloi. Because of fights with my brother's wife, I left it and made myself a small hut in another settlement".

"Left it? Arre, you should have stayed on in some room there".

He said, "I can't stand bickering. What special thing about myself should I tell you...? When there would be any fight in the neighbourhood, I would reach there and people would calm down with one gesture from me. I couldn't live like a coward in my own house. *Bhai*, I used to cook on my own and eat on my own. I made a hut and lived in it alone. Fate has been such that, see, I have a plot to live on here once again. Now I am happy with what I have got. I will make it, decorate it, and live in peace in it".

I asked, "What do you do?"

He said, "What should I tell you about myself which is special...! I do whitewash. Anything that needs labour to be done, I just have to see it done once, and then I can do it".

Deepak *bhai* brought tea and said to the man, "Here, your four teas". I stood up and said, "It was nice talking to you".

He immediately placed the kettle on the ground, came near me and said, "What should I tell you about myself that is special, I have not told you anything special till now. I am making houses of mats and bamboo poles for people right now. I will tell you something special once things get made here".

I said, "Of course", and set out from there.

One question kept working in my heart – is the place being settled, or is the place being *made* to get settled? Is the place making itself, or is it *being* made?

Coming here, it seems to me that no place gets made or settled on its own. Those people, they just measured out and allotted plots of land according to some map. But to decorate a place, take care of it, to carve out spaces of belonging in it, to create an environment in the place, to make new relationships in it, to seek out something special in it – all this emerges with a beauty when you go and stand close to someone.

I looked up and saw a tempo approaching, loaded with things and with people hanging out

from it. People were still in the process of reaching Ghevra. On the tempo's rear slat were painted these lines: "Buri nazar waale tera munh kaala (May bad things befall you if your gaze be evil)".

Editors' Note

These texts are excerpted from *Bahurupiya Shehr* (The Dissembler City, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2007, New Delhi), a compilation of locality logs/writings on the city by practitioners in Sarai's Cybermohalla project. Translated from the Hindi by Shveta Sarda.

For a detailed narrative of the Nangla Maanchi demolition compiled from Cybermohalla practitioner blog entries, see *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 525-69.

 $Reader\ 06\ online\ text:\ http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html$

Nangla blog (Hindi): http://www.nangla-maachi.freeflux.net

Nangla blog (English): http://nangla.freeflux.net Hindi blog translations by Shveta Sarda





At the Frontier of the Urban Periphery

ABDOUMALIO SIMONE

The Space of the Periphery

In the conventional conceptualisations of political geography, the periphery is a region that is simultaneously included and excluded in the composition of an integral territory – be that of the nation, municipality or any other form of administration or polity. The periphery is included in that it fully falls under the jurisdiction of the local or national state – subject to its laws and policies, while also assigned a valuation where it counts for little in terms of its overall contribution to the substance of the polity itself. This double status renders the periphery as a space in need of the largesse and guidance of a centre – since by this logic, the periphery is a space imbued with a sense of insufficiency and incompletion.

Yet this (alleged) lack also means that the periphery is never really brought fully under the auspices of the logic and development trajectories that characterise a centre, and therefore embodies an instability that is always potentially destabilising of that centre. This negative potentiality then requires supplemental forms of engagement that would not be otherwise operative in parts of the territory not considered peripheral. The periphery demands and occasions a surfeit of attention; it forces the state to admit to the necessity of exceeding its own 'core' values and technologies in order to rein the periphery in, as perhaps the periphery's only concrete indication of its own relevance.

If the periphery poses a threat to the integrity of the polity and thus compels the centre to continuously enact its authority in relationship to it, then the periphery is constitutive of the centre, in that it provides the occasion for the centre to perform itself, which also means to exceed itself – i.e., to go beyond what the prevailing norms, rules or policies would authorise. To set in motion the values and practices at the heart of what the centre (and thus the polity) is, requires something else: namely, a way of acting that is peripheral to those values and practices.

Such excessiveness thus implicitly identifies the periphery as a signification that must be denied, Yet always reiterated. However, the periphery never then offers anything of substance on its own; its own status as supplement never directly contributes to a transformation of the normative.

At the same time, the periphery is also a buffer. As it is never fully incorporated into the polity even as it provides the polity its constituent moment, the periphery can also act as a sacrificial object. The periphery does this by acting as a buffer, a space in between the nation or city and something else that is formally more foreign, more divergent, than the city or nation for which it acts as a periphery. In other words, the periphery can exist as a frontier, in that it has a border with another city, nation, rural area or outlying territory. When this is the case, the practices, values, meanings and important symbolic capital of the centre, and thus the polity, do not necessarily have to face directly, compete with, or risk modification or dissolution, in a proximate contact with other cities or nations. Thus the periphery is implicitly conceded as a space available to a certain *métissage* (mixing), where more direct forms of confrontation among entities – cities, regions, nations and so forth – are dispersed through a space that is positioned to absorb the tensions inherent in any intersection of distinct 'regimes'.

Theoretically, this would render the periphery as a potentially generative space - a source of innovation and adaptation. Yet it is precisely this generative role that must be foreclosed or made abject.

In a concomitant manoeuvre, the practice of making something peripheral then becomes a particular instrument for reducing the importance and value of a particular territory – one whose people and associations may have concretely established a basis for the recognition of the efficacy of their own self-identification. Therefore the periphery is not a fixed space in an unyielding relationship with a more powerful centre, but a means of altering the significance and position of a specific space through the shifting terms of association with other spaces.

In more strictly urban terms, the periphery may shift, as under-utilised spaces are increasingly filled in and subject to a broader series of the city's economic activities and residential densities.

Here the urban periphery is simultaneously pushed further out in a wider circumference as the city grows exponentially, as territories once external to the city are drawn into its orbit, experiencing its extended footprints. While these changing demarcations of the periphery may simply reflect administrative contrivance, as dynamic entities always will have their peripheries, the periphery is nevertheless suffused with varied imaginaries and anticipations. Populations and business may move toward the periphery is search of more advantageous living conditions – e.g., cheaper land, less congestion, lower tax rates, less crime or great social homogeneity. Likewise, the periphery may be enjoined to the urban system as a means of inflating land values, absorbing the displacements of devalued populations, tying down inputs for the urban economy, or acting as zones whose operations are exempt from prevailing policies so as to 'work out' specific problems or possibilities for the city as a whole.

In the latter case, the periphery is the site for economic or social operations that cannot be absorbed by the city itself – given its laws, economic policies, or cultural conventions –

but prove necessary in order to attract investment or generate other needed resources for the city as a whole. Such has been the case of Joha for Singapore or Santos for São Paulo. The metropolitan system can thus sometimes be characterised by a patchwork of varying jurisdictions, competencies, and procedures. This multiplicity of 'orders' can then be used by certain projects or interest groups to do things in one place that cannot be done 'next door'. Additionally, the problems of particular spaces can be exported onto others. Various 'localities' may be nominally articulated through their geographical proximity and situated within perfunctory metropolitan frameworks which formally provide little or loosely structured coordination, and as such, seemingly act in a highly peripheral way to each other. Yet, ironically, they may actually have more to do with each other in terms of concrete transactions and through specific complementary arrangements than if they were part of the same regime of policies and procedures.

When these various connotations and positions of the periphery are then coincided, what we have is space that is simultaneously always 'coming and going', with an incessant volatility that is permitted to go nowhere and a completion always yet to come, always unable to act in and of itself, yet ready to be whatever it needs to be at a moment's notice.

Reframing the Urban Periphery in Light of Metropolitanisation

Within the process of metropolitanisation, the heterogeneity of socio-territorial mosaics, once the predominant feature of core cities, are pushed out into the regional periphery. The periphery increasingly becomes an arena to accommodate a discrepant multiplicity of urban challenges – from housing poor populations displaced from the city, providing premium living spaces for middle-class families, developing campus-like spaces for research and development sectors, to exporting environmentally precarious industry to the fringes of the urban system. As these challenges are usually not viewed as connected to each other, it is increasingly difficult to bring the periphery into some functional domain of administrative coherence.

Given the increasingly heterogeneous composition of the periphery, there are frequent conflicts and competition over resource allocation, fiscal exploitation, and the claims of residents engaged in different forms of livelihood and with different historical relationships to a given territory. Additionally, complicated negotiations between the core city and the periphery in terms of calculating the costs of services provided by the core further fragment relationships among diverse communes in the periphery. Although recent French legislation does aim for inter-communal fiscal equalisation, there remains limited infrastructure to facilitate lateral articulation. Rather, the economy of spatial distribution still accedes to pockets of sector specialisation – e.g., in the metropolitan region of Paris: a university research centre in Marnes la Valleé, research and development centre in Saint-Quentin en Yves and Plateau de Scalay; administrative centres in Saint Denis, with little sense of potential complementarities or conflicts.²

Although the elaboration of metropolitan frameworks emphasises the polycentric, particularly as a way to manage urban sprawl, minimise environmental hazards and define regional complementarity, there is much ambiguity as to what it actually means in practice. Throughout Europe, job creation has not attained the levels anticipated, as volumes of commuter flows to core areas remain unabated, and the bulk of economic development attaches itself to already established urban areas, leaving large swathes of territory to remain as uncertain interstices. There is also the trend to recentralisation in the core city occasioned by the density of linkages across various sectors of the service, information, and media economies occasioned by globalisation.

All of these trajectories tend to leave the immediate peripheries, most usually the domain of those who cannot afford to live in the core cities, in a more tenuous position, particularly as poorer residents are pushed into former industrial areas. Rather than being more fully incorporated into development scenarios that extend themselves from the core city, development, rather, 'leapfrogs' over these near-peripheries. These areas no longer constitute a physically spatial periphery to the city, but enter into a new system of proximities where they become the problematic interstices between differentiated growth poles.

The characteristics of extended urban regions in Southeast Asia make an interesting contrast to Greater Paris. Here, regionalisation processes instantiated across the periphery refer to a largely indeterminate process under way. The peripheries of Bangkok, Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City and a range of Chinese cities are sites of accelerated social and economic change, and rapid population growth. Large-scale infrastructural investments coupled with tariff and tax incentives, inexpensive labour and prime residential developments for professional workers constitute a gravitational pull for foreign direct investments. Any resultant economic vitality is thus largely attributed to strong outward linkages and cluster dynamics facilitated by locally based collaborative governance processes. Small farmers, informal settlers, industrial entrepreneurs and urban middle-class commuters can all live in intense physical proximity. Again, these peripheries experience intense conflicts – struggles by large casual workforces over job security and benefits; rural producers attempting to hold on to agricultural land; struggles against the predominant role that irregular actors often attain in these areas, and their proclivities to corruption.

What is perhaps a more incisive conceptualisation of the peri-urban concerns its mélange of temporalities. Across almost all major cities, architecture, infrastructure and land development are being used as instruments to compel, some might say extort, new urban institutional and social relations, from how decisions get made, what is viewed as possible or useful to do in cities, how financial responsibilities are to be defined, and risks assessed. In most instances, low-income as well as many middle-income residents are pushed to the peripheries of the city which, once they are serviced and then connected to major transportation grids, themselves become objects of speculation as cheap land is acquired by those with the aspirations to build big in ways that are prohibited in more centralised locations. The presence of heterogeneous residents within the central city areas

enabled a kind of mutual witnessing of how they were implanted and operated in the city, even if it did not always elaborate various complementarities among them. The push to the periphery, however, while not necessarily stopping an inflow of low-income residents at least in their pursuit of work, renders it an often opaque place.

This opacity is the result of the inability to clearly identify just what is 'coming and going'. Surrounding the core of the city, the periphery, with its intersection of the scattered remains of old projects and those of the new in various states of completion – from factories, shopping centre, housing developments, persistent rural economies, informal and formal low-income settlements – poses an uncertain future for this core. Old golf courses are contiguous to new lakeside theme parks that are next to old factories next to mega-family restaurants next to warehouses and chemical dumps. Material sediments are overlaid with discrepant zoning and land use policies, and the periphery can remain a literal archive, dependent as much upon what is subtracted and destroyed as what is added to it.

In some peripheries – between these comings and goings, ups and downs – one finds the elaboration of translocal economies that appropriate deteriorating yet functional infrastructure, forge flexible relationships with lower tiers of municipal bureaucracies, straddle legal and illegal regulatory systems of commerce, piece together hybrid articulations of transport, machinery, storage and finance, and network under-utilised and undervalued spaces of the built environment.

Reciting the Postcolony

Cities throughout the world have highly variegated histories. They are constituted and composed at the intersection of diverse influences and conditions. While such is the case for cities of the global South, trajectories of urbanisation are marked by the colonial difference. Spaces, resources and bodies were rendered available to the instantiation of an externally configured modernity, and enrolled into the circuits of accumulation where a net loss of things in their flows northwards necessitated unruly and always insufficient compensations. Colonialism engineered various instabilities. For example, labour was frequently displaced and urban residence incessantly temporary. Cities were domains of a particular kind of emplacement – i.e., where distinctions between citizen and subject could be marked, where the mobility of 'native' ideas, bodies, and economies could be controlled, and where the signs of modernity could be inscribed.

Yet what have those that were emplaced endured? Despite the frequent assumption on the part of the coloniser that the spaces of colonisation were empty, up for grabs, undeveloped or radically antagonistic, arrivals from beyond were always shaped by what had transpired in these places before, dependent upon the tracings of past efforts by others. As articulations among cities everywhere become more extensive, and as cities in the South are more intensely incorporated into global circuits of accumulation and exchange, arrivals become more numerous: more persons from the outside come to operate in these cities in various capacities.

What have those, emplaced under circumstances where the colonial difference represents constraints on mobility, experienced while being in place? Here, like the nomad of Deleuze and Guattari, points and places are relays, always already left behind on arrival, always referring to movements yet to come. Staying in place entails what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "riding out the earth's movements on the spot"³. While the geomorphic reference can be meant literally in terms of the very physical transformations of the earth's template and climate, cities do bear the sediments of all the ways in which the bodies of inhabitants have been opened to each other. Certainly, cities are dense areas of ingestion, gesture, elimination, coupling and coagulation, and the incompletion and uncertainties of both colonial and postcolonial rule mean that the heterogeneity of wounding and suturing constitute highly particularised social architectures. How residents have persisted and have been changed through these different degrees of intensities is incalculable. Yet, as both postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak and theorist Nigel Clark have indicated, the work of these residents (and their work as a gift) makes up the basis of a different future, a more common world, as the more numerous arrivals would be unable to operate without it.⁴

In a related formulation, anthropologist Filip De Boeck pushes the metaphor of the mirror, the speculum, to its limits, whereby the city becomes a mirror of itself, the past, and the outside world, providing opportunity for the city to reflect upon itself and project itself outward. The city is the mirror world of the colonial past and current imagining of the West, that De Boeck calls the "idea of Europe". It is also a mirror of the village and of tradition, of the forest, the forbidden, the underworld and the afterworld – all too often reflecting death; and finally, the city is also a mirror of diasporic movement, of immigration abroad, of what lies beyond the postcolony. Together these mirrors, often fractured and sometimes partial, combine to reflect the relationship between the postcolonial city and the wider, increasingly global world.⁵

In the contemporary rendering of urban development dynamics, this work done by those who are emplaced is largely peripheral, off the map. Yet these histories of trial and error, of residents facing squarely the often tumultuous oscillations of physical, social, and political disjunctions that are not smoothed over by premium infrastructures or overarching discourses, potentially compels tools of city-making those instrumental in city-building to exceed themselves and confront the kinds of fears and enchantments they have long denied.

Peripheral Vision

A preponderance of critical theory has pointed to the city as given over to spectacle, and as such no longer capable of performing the work of archiving its own layers of sedimentation and interpreting its history. The material coordinates of the city are effaced in service of hyperreal narratives that simply mark the oscillations of sensation and its absence.

According to Antonin Artaud, there is a specific point in urban crises where virtuality⁶ – the condition in which all that might happen can happen – always already present in the city's efforts to keep it at bay – installs itself as a tumultuous activity without specific

purpose or end. Here, place is dispossessed of meaning and proper use; inside and outside, private and public fold into each other, and there is no clear vantage point from which to assess the efficacy of practices, interactions and speech now intensely entangled as the barriers and moulds have fallen away. But instead of this virtuality reassembling the ways in which residents live and work with each other, a sense of incessant anxiety is engineered that substitutes the variegated imagery of incessantly mutable urban conditions for any concrete deliberation of transformation.

Residents, who feel that their everyday life situations, their livelihoods, the characteristics of their living spaces, security and life prospects are increasingly connected to unknown events, situations and persons, and who have no collaborative engendered instruments for dealing with these widening circuits of transaction, simply consume images of a univocal participation in the simulation of urban life. Regimes tend to play on these basic uncertainties. That is, residents who navigate the city never can be sure how their own existence may be implicated in the narratives of others. They can never be sure whether their immediate positions and actions inadvertently place them in some 'line of fire'.

As the possibilities of mediation diminish – i.e., the possibilities to convert differences of intensity, of disorder, always an aspect of the city – into clearly defined locations, corresponding entities and fields of reliable interpretation, the sense of potential harm increases. And so, lives are increasingly open to potentially everything – promoting a fraught vigilance and preoccupation with security, as well as investment in various technologies of calculation and probability.

Various artistic experiments have attempted to affirm that something may be resuscitated from the debris on which this urban void is formed – a particular conjunction between the periphery and its image, so that when observers look upon wastelands, the anachronistic industrial zones, the decaying residential estates, warehouses, overgrown access roads and dilapidated infrastructure, they can actually see the materiality of those trajectories at work across time in the making of the city. The traces of concrete inhabitations, labour and sensuous gestures are scattered across the landscape – never complete in themselves, but available to being re-linked in circuits of signification. This is a provocation to a mode of imagining that constitutes, as media arts scholar Stephen Barber writes, a memory still unthought, or that does not let itself be thought.⁷

Additionally, the periphery of the city, with its under-coded specifications of how any particular space is to be used – but which nevertheless, brings together a range of discrepant spaces so that they can remain without prohibitive definition – allows for sporadic gatherings of all kinds. For instance, banned political organisations, marginal religions, new cultural movements and incipient explorations of possible alliances among major political actors have often used the periphery as an important venue. These gatherings, in and of themselves, provoke a kind of gestation not possible in cities where the possibilities of negotiating access and interchange across niche identities and sectors is increasingly difficult.

At the same time, these inclinations could lead to a tendency to see in the periphery, as sociologist Bülent Diken warns, a narration of what is prior to or beyond the symbolic – a traumatic kernel incessantly antagonistic and disruptive of any effort to bring it under the apprehension of an order. As such, the periphery becomes itself a kind of fantasy space – a zone where the 'real' city is unleashed in all of its possibilities, and as such, then constitutes the core city as something that can be experienced as a coherent whole with fixed coordinates. Not only does such conceptual manoeuvring occlude the often highly elaborated management systems residents put together for their lives in the periphery, but also the reality that the core city is itself full of turbulence and the so-called 'law of the street'8.

Therefore, it is important to think through these relations between core city and periphery in terms of potentialities and constraints that could 'show up' anywhere – where one does not presume the normative categorisations of territory, but looks at changing relations to contexts in which these contexts *themselves* are both changed and changing. This is not a relationship concerning what is happening 'here' to what is happening 'there', but rather establishing an understanding of relations between what Nigel Thrift terms the "known unfamiliar" and the "unknown familiar".

One way to envision this metaphorically is to take any aerial photograph of a large metropolitan system and remove all of the grids, streets and buildings, leaving simply the constellation of road junctions – traffic circles, U-turns, flyovers, exit and entrance ramps – that operate as relays and switches in what architect Pierre Bélanger has called "knot city" in the context of Bangkok, where the urban network is "barely recognisable as a system" but in fact signals the existence of "a hidden cosmopolitan order" 10. This is an infrastructure about redirecting, speeding up or slowing flows down, of modulating the intensities and rhythms of movement, of translating multiple directions and flows in terms of each other. Whereas these actual constellations of road junctions have specific shapes and locations contingent upon the areas in which they are embedded, using them as a metaphor for the street requires thinking about them as omnipresent – something that is located everywhere, given that all places entail switching and translation mechanisms. The periphery disappears from the version of how we have come to know it, and reappears across the city – in crucial ways, manifests as the city.

Notes

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Harmless Fraud: Pyramid Schemes in Andhra Pradesh

S. Ananth



The past two decades in the domain of investment in India have seen the proliferation of pyramid schemes, variously referred to as 'direct marketing', 'network marketing' or 'multi-level marketing', among others. At the popular level, they are simply referred to as 'chain marketing schemes' or 'money circulation schemes'. The organisers convince investors about an 'excellent business opportunity' to get rich quickly and enjoy the benefits of 'financial freedom' for the rest of their lives and even for posterity. This essay examines pyramid schemes as they have evolved in contemporary Andhra Pradesh (AP), and asks some questions that are of interest from the perspective of social science. Contemporary

pyramid schemes are analysed via published material from newspapers, magazines, books, promotional CDs, brochures, website data and the internet, as well as personal interviews and through a close observation of the business, with which few members of the middle class can claim unfamiliarity today.

It doesn't take a financial authority such as the Reserve Bank of India to tell us that these schemes are doomed to fail for a majority of participants. Nonetheless, they never go out of fashion. Their popularity has in fact grown, even as the media has taken it upon itself to expose them, virtually on a monthly basis. What do we make of this economic phenomenon, which today involves substantial sections of the urban middle class? The most interesting aspect of these schemes is their ability to convince the lower-middle classes that the latter's dream of making spectacular profits in a short span and with little investment can indeed be realised.

Get-rich-quick schemes have existed and prospered in AP since at least the 1960s. One participant recalled a scheme of 1963, when members enrolled by paying Rs 5 and in

return were given nine handkerchiefs. If they were to recoup their investment, they would have to enrol nine members each.¹ And by all counts, the sheer volume of investments in pyramid schemes in AP today is mind-boggling. A large number of companies running pyramid schemes are registered in either Tamil Nadu or Delhi but undertake business in AP, a fact that suggests there is some credibility to the popular belief that the organiser of the pyramid scheme disappears overnight. However, the local presence of companies registered in other states is also because AP has proved to be particularly receptive to pyramid schemes, which has resulted in a virtual gold rush among companies.

A sample compilation of recent newspaper stories (either as warnings, news coverage of scams or simple reports) indicates that investments procured (and lost) may exceed hundreds of crores of rupees. 'Goldguest', a particularly successful pyramid scheme, is stated to have collected about Rs 300 crores in India, with the majority of members hailing from AP, and that too from areas around Vijayawada (Andhra Jyothy, 24 July 2006, p.1). Another Delhi-based scheme, 'Deo Soft', reportedly fleeced investors to the tune of about Rs 73 crore in AP (Eenadu, 7 August 2006, p. 1). One person claimed to represent a Mumbai-based company and promised diamonds from South Africa's Kimberly mines to investors who paid Rs 10,000 (Andhra Jyothy, Vijayawada city edition, 20 August 2006, p. 4). This is not to suggest that innocent 'locals' are being exploited by scheming 'outsiders'. A report claimed that corporators in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation and officials in the Kanakadurga temple (run by the state's Endowments department) not only joined a scheme that offered six grams of gold on payment of Rs 33,000 but were also stated to be pressurising their subordinates to follow suit (Andhra Jyothy, Vijayawada city edition, 16 July 2006, p. 4). The Hyderabad Task Force of the local police arrested one person for enrolling members in a chain-marketing scheme that promised a laptop for every three members enrolled on the payment of Rs 14,000 each (The Hindu, Hyderabad edition, 2 March 2007, p. 5). A 20-year-old was arrested for starting a multi-level marketing firm that promised a monthly return of Rs 10,000 for each lakh invested (Andhra Jyothy, Vijayawada city edition, 22 February 2007, p. 1).

The long career of these schemes in the state resulted in the AP government passing the very first law of its kind in the country: The Andhra Pradesh Money Circulation Scheme (Prohibition) Act, 1965, to prevent such money circulation

schemes.2



In AP today, every year thousands of participants in these schemes lose millions of rupees of their investment each year. More often than not, these schemes are fairly straightforward and widely recognised disguises for money circulation schemes (which are illegal) that masquerade as multi-level marketing (hereafter in this essay, MLM) schemes that aim to sell 'products' of various types. These products range from household

items costing a few hundreds of rupees to exotic goods with little (use or exchange) value, costing thousands of rupees. The direct selling industry claims to have had a turnover of Rs 3010 crore in India in 2006. Hindustan Lever too jumped onto the bandwagon of direct selling by establishing separate divisions for the purpose.

There is quite clearly a need to distinguish between pyramid and legally-run, direct marketing schemes. However, this is easier said than done, as explained below.

As a rule, these schemes are founded on an elastic interpretation of the law. It is not useful to assume that the members are fooled by the 'misinterpretations' of the law. The proliferation and spread of these pyramid schemes clearly shows the need to understand the complex and pragmatic relationship between the 'illegal' but 'socially acceptable' aspect of everyday social and economic life. I use the term 'harmless fraud' to explain the activities of these firms: I also suggest that it best explains not only this phenomenon but also the myriad instances of economic fraud perpetrated by the urban middle class, who are, however, also susceptible victims of various form of monetary deceit. In its most generalised form, the concept of 'harmless fraud' (as perceived in the region and as used in this article) may be said to consist of a set of practices that are perceived to cause little or minimal harm to individuals, and therefore justify the bypassing of rigid/oppressive/restrictive laws.

Functional Dynamics of Pyramid Schemes

All pyramid schemes have certain common features, including the promise of superlative profits. Compellingly, the more recently emergent schemes are fashioned on the proselytising model of religious groups, and also follow the model created by Amway in MLM schemes. In Andhra Pradesh, the new groups hold meetings that attract hundreds, even thousands, of people. In these meetings the organisers lay emphasis on 'hard work' as a way of social mobility. The promise of superlative profits is undoubtedly a way of drawing new members and ensuring the loyalty of existing members. There is also intense competition among marketing networks and incidents of actual violence between different groups.

The new pyramid schemes have certain common structural features. All use the advances in information technology to claim transparency in the operation of the pyramid. Invariably, all pyramid schemes claim that they are involved in direct marketing of various products, such as commemorative coins, medallions, simple gold coins, vacuum cleaners, waterbeds, specially made mattresses, herbal products, health products, and so on. The list is endless. All the schemes sell low-quality items at exorbitant rates.3 All of them claim to be selling products in return for distributorship – this claim is necessary to circumvent the law against money circulation schemes. The Indian Direct



Selling Association consisting of 16 direct selling companies claims to sell about 400 types of products, with over 1,700 variants (*The Hindu Businessline*, 12 February 2007, p. 5). It is almost impossible to accurately estimate the number of members that these schemes collectively encompass in different parts of the country. Amway India CEO, William S. Pinckney, claimed that there were about 1.25 million distributors in all the direct marketing companies put together in India (*The Economic Times*, 21 February 2007, p. 14). The 16-member Indian Direct Selling Association claimed to have a membership of 13.73 lakh members (distributors), but only about 8.75 lakh members were active in February 2007 (*The Hindu Businessline*, 12 February 2007, p. 5). The figure is bound to increase manifold if one were to include the innumerable companies of this kind that operate in India but are not formally members of the association.

Participants are expected to join the schemes by paying money (varying from a few hundreds to many thousands of rupees) upfront, and in turn convince new members to join the scheme. The number of members that they need to recruit varies from two (known as the 'binary system'), to three or more new members. Members who join are usually provided products that are classified as fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). One would expect that the members would sell these products – after all, they are supposed to be involved in marketing – but this task is hardly a priority here. On enrollment, a member is provided with a 'starter kit' consisting of publicity material in addition to the product that they had chosen on application (quite often the companies sell more than one product). Some schemes only provide a starter kit. Very few people I came across actually resold the product they received on enrollment, and instead saw it merely as a gift or keepsake. They understood that profit

was to come through the enrollment of new members and future referral. Money received as bonus for new enrolments increases exponentially as the number of layers ('legs') in the pyramid increase. A successful referral of a pair (two) in a binary scheme can earn a person between Rs 300 to Rs 1,000, depending on the nature of the scheme and cost membership. In percentage terms it could vary from about 3% to about 20% of the membership fees. In some schemes the referral income could go up to 50% cent of the membership fee.



An example best illustrates the working of these schemes that promise opportunity to "earn millions in a short time". For the sake of convenience we will take a hypothetical example of a binary scheme that provides an incentive of Rs 500 per person and Rs 1.000 per pair for a membership fee of Rs 5,000. If it is a binary scheme, each entrant ('A') is expected to recruit two members (one 'right leg'/'B', and one 'left leg'/'C'). 'A' is thus eligible for an 'incentive' of Rs 1,000 per pair. If 'B' and 'C' enrol two members each, the members in the pyramid for 'A' would increase to 6 or three pairs, earning him an additional Rs 2,000, while 'B' and 'C' earn Rs 1,000 for their effort. Thereafter, the membership of the pyramid increases in geometric progression similar to the Fibonacci sequence of integers in mathematics: 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, and so on. A successful completion of the pyramid to the seventh level would mean that there would be 128 members or 64 pairs, potentially earning member 'A' a commission of Rs 64,000. All the schemes provide membership only for a year, after which continuation will mean re-enrolment by paying a fee. As the number of enrolments or levels increase, there is an increase in the commission earned. 'A' is now the 'upline' in the pyramid for all those he and his 'downline' (members below 'A' in the pyramid) have enrolled. It is pertinent to note that a participant receives his payout only when a person has enrolled a member in the right leg and left leg. The company of course receives the membership fee even if only one member of the pair has joined. The incentives vary, and depend on the number and speed of enrollments in the pyramid. The bonus for speedy enrollment can include anything from cash incentives to foreign jaunts, motor vehicles and so on. One company, Questnet, is stated to have promised luxury BMW cars and yachts for super-achievers.⁵ All the schemes promise endless cash incentives, often running into crores of rupees.

The Art of Selling

The mode of drawing new members is always through a combination of inducements, converting social relations into economically beneficial relations and even peer pressure. Interestingly, a large number of these schemes flourish as part of the favours for referral. In personal interviews with me, a number of participants allege that during the early years of a multinational MLM company in this region, its spread was aided by corrupt government officials 'persuading' people to join the scheme in return for favours. A significant presence in some of these schemes has in fact been the relatives of government officials, who serve as 'benamis' (where assets are held in fictitious names to bypass the law) of the officials themselves.

However, it is not economic pressures but social connections that have been largely responsible for the spread of these schemes. Attempts to draw members often starts with a phone call, or courtesy call upon a friend or relative. Conversation is slowly diverted from friendly banter to advocating an excellent business opportunity that requires low investment but provides an opportunity to earn high returns. Invariably, in these conversations there are references to case studies and 'hundreds' of instances where acquaintances – one of 'us' – have earned millions in a short time by joining the scheme. An obstinate refusal leads to

the offering of concessions, such as the payment of the membership fee by the 'upline' member in exchange for providing a list of potential candidates. Upliners offer to take care of convincing potential investors and handling all the clerical work. Some local upliners in RMP Infotec Limited (RMP), E-shoppers (run by the Delhi-based company Interworld in 2001), as well as other schemes, make a direct offer to pay up all or about half of the membership fee as an inducement to new members. The implicit unwritten agreement is that the beneficiary is expected to enrol certain number of members in return.

The middle class in coastal Andhra Pradesh, as in the rest of the country, have been doing business with its friends and relatives for decades, if not longer. From clothes to real estate, part-time business activity involving one's peers and social network is a well-established practice. This history is certainly a factor in the success of pyramid schemes, but we also need to take into account a new aspirational element, which is aligned with post-liberalisation booms. These peaks of material prosperity have given the impression that it is possible to leapfrog into the ranks of the wealthy in a short period of time. The new pyramid schemes emphasise their national and global presence; it is no longer merely a question of trusting the seller. Instead, new members are offered evidence of the stability of the scheme through its being presented as a nationwide or global network. There is safety in numbers. If the scheme is that stable, it will be easy to recover the initial investment before it collapses. One old hand in the circuit candidly declared that he was successful because he always carried out his business with strangers. That way he was not risking his reputation and social relationships should the 'downline' monetary protocols fail for any reason.

This is essential in a business where about 98% do not recover their investment, thus providing the companies and those at the top of the pyramid with phenomenal profits. They mostly require low capital investment but are highly labour intensive, requiring large number of hours to be spent in very hard work outside regular working hours. The notion of 'extra income', which is not a result of one's regular job or work, is treated as a bonus because it is generated using time otherwise idled away. Moreover, since regular jobs do not hold any promise of dramatic social and economic mobility, extra income is sometimes the only avenue towards such mobility. Eric Scheibeler's perceptive observations about Amway in the US are also generally valid about the pyramid schemes that operate in India. He has pointed out that they prefer to enroll unemployed, desperate individuals or those who are bankrupt or on the verge of bankruptcy. The fact of these people investing their labour because they are in dire circumstances may often lead to some sympathy from their social circle. The mirage of an economic recovery often serves as a catalyst for the desperate.

Most multi-level marketing firms, of course, deny that they function as pyramid schemes. In fact, without exception, all of them frown on their being classified as 'schemes', and pride themselves as being 'business opportunities' that aim to create entrepreneurs and millionaires. One director of a MLM company declared that "we sell prospective dreams", and the company claims to have produced 65 millionaires from among its distributors of 4,00,0008 – one for every 6153 members enrolled.

Amway has an extremely persuasive method to sell their scheme. They have an entity (Britt Worldwide) that exclusively deals with motivation. All their motivational material is sold and never distributed free. Upliners take mobilisation for motivational meetings very seriously, and the scale of mobilisation is reminiscent of political and religious meetings. A meeting in Hyderabad on 24 June 2006 drew about 20,000 members, each paying an entry fee of Rs 500.9 Most of their sessions are organised to seat at least 3,000 attendees. Half of the revenues go to those achievers who speak. Other companies too offer huge incentives to speakers. The sessions invariably comprise of speeches by achievers where mass hysteria is an intended effect. All the speakers start by talking about their povertystricken mechanical life without "financial freedom". The script then explains that a lucky chance came their way: initially they refused to take it, but after risking one chance at experimentation, they found the road to El Dorado. After putting in hard work, and with the right 'guidance', they are today blissfully enjoying their profits. All the speeches emphasise the capitalist ethic of hard work and super profits that accompany it. Success, for the motivator, has meant getting rid of their previous jobs in which they anyway supposedly felt claustrophobic. In one Amway motivational CD, a member calls himself a "former PhD scientist" (Britt World Wide VCD - BWW VP - 001, Kanti & Lata Gala), suggesting that educational and cultural capital are primitive forms of the real thing.

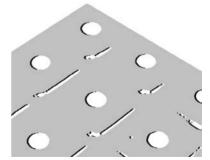
Theodor Adorno's critique of fascist propaganda (1994) offers valuable insights into the sociology (and success) of pyramid schemes. They play upon unconscious mechanisms, in this case, the pathologies linked to contempt for poverty and fear of failure. The motivation sessions are personalised propaganda, essentially non-objective. Speakers closely identify themselves with their listeners (ibid., p. 219), and only claim that they are there to help anybody who wants to get rich and attain financial freedom. Their propaganda thus functions as a kind of wish-fulfillment of the listeners (ibid., p. 220). As with the phenomenon that Adorno examines, it is important to note that this is a *mass* phenomenon – the masses are gathered by the organisers and addressed by the motivator as belonging to one large collective being with similar desires, aspirations and fears; the motivator inevitably stresses the fact that he was exactly *like* one of them *before* he ioined the scheme.

Without attempting to offer an explanation for the spread of these schemes across the states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (much more than the rest of the country), I will suggest that at a very general level, these pyramid schemes seem to be converting

or monetising what Bourdieu in another context called 'social capital' (e.g., connections and relationships) into economic capital.¹⁰

Police Raids on Amway

Any discussion of pyramid schemes would be incomplete without a discussion of the raids on the offices of Amway on 25 September 2006,



conducted by the Economic Offences Wing of the AP police. The Superintendent of Police (Economic Offences Wing), S. C. Sajjanar, stated that the police had received a number of complaints from Amway agents stating they had been coerced and forcibly induced into the trade. He added that Amway had been recruiting people in their marketing chain via exaggerated promises of high returns. The police sealed 10 Amway offices in AP (The Economic Times, Section II, 26 September 2006, p. 2). Sajjanar further stated that "the company induces members to enrol members to go to the top as leaders in the group" (The Hindu Business Line, 26 September 2006, p. 19). Amway denied that it was a money circulation scheme and claimed that the "knee-jerk" reaction of the police department harmed the livelihood of its 4.5 lakh distributors (ibid.). Amway distributors I spoke to were proving their loyalty by carrying out a vilification campaign against Sajianar, who has been in the forefront of the anti-pyramid-scheme activism of the AP police. They suggest that he was a bad loser and, moreover, was biased against multi-level marketing because he had participated in some of them and lost money (Rao, personal interview, Vijayawada, 20 December 2006). Amway has since appealed against police action in the AP High court and has hired noted lawyer Soli Sorabjee to argue its case.

Legal Businesses or Harmless Fraud?

A pertinent question that needs to be asked is if these schemes are *legally run* FMCG businesses or simply money-circulation schemes that are banned under the law but continue to thrive because those who participate in them do not think they are breaking the law. These schemes are often referred to as simply 'chain marketing schemes' or 'money circulation schemes', indicating that in most cases participants are aware of their dubious status, yet join them to make a quick buck. A reading of



The Prize Chits and Money Circulation Schemes (Banning) Act, 1978 (hereafter referred to as Prize Chits Act) clearly indicates that about 99% of the direct selling activities which continue to exist would be covered by this law. As stated in Section 2(c):

Money circulation schemes mean any scheme, by whatever name called, for the making of quick or easy money, or for the receipt of any money or valuable thing as the consideration to pay money, on any event or contingency relative or applicable to the enrollment of members into the scheme, whether or not such money or thing is derived from the entrance money of the members of such scheme or periodical subscriptions.¹¹

Under Section 2(e) (i) and (ii), the Act forbids the collection of membership fees in any form in order to repay this money to members as prize or gift. In other words, the Act clearly dictates that monies collected as membership fees cannot be distributed to existing members. It is precisely for this reason that the pyramid schemes introduced a range of products and calls themselves 'distributorships' or 'business opportunities'. In fact, they

constantly harp on their employment generation abilities. The firms claim that paying a certain amount entails members to become 'distributors' who provide members with exclusive access to deal/market in certain products manufactured or marketed by their companies. This is one of the most common ways to bypass the Prize Chits Act. Companies such as TLC Insurance India (Pvt.) Ltd. collect membership fee (in this case Rs 500) in addition to the cost of the product they market (an insurance policy by Bajaj Allianz costing Rs 5.000).¹²

A clear-cut case of violation of the laws relates to schemes that distribute insurance policies on behalf of various private insurance companies. It may be noted that the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999 (hereafter, IRDA Act) states that agents are not allowed to pass on commissions or any money to customers who purchase insurance polices. More importantly, any person desirous of marketing insurance polices has to pass an exam conducted by IRDA.¹³ Only corporate agents or brokers (registered with IRDA) are allowed to pay commissions.¹⁴ Companies that are actively involved in marketing insurance schemes include TLC Insurance (India) Pvt. Ltd. (TLC), RMP and Amway, among others.¹⁵ The details cited below not only indicate the nature of harmless fraud but also the frequent testing of the frontiers of economic law by such companies in order to gauge the reaction of the agencies of the state. The lack of reaction by state institutions, or even tacit approval, is likely to gradually lead to calls to formalise these activities at a future date.

Bajaj Allianz, one of the most aggressive private sector insurance companies, has a special division to develop 'alternative business channels'. It includes within its scope direct selling. One manager in charge of this division very frankly stated that they know very well that direct selling of insurance products is not allowed by the IRDA Act, and officially the company has nothing to do with the direct marketing of its own policies. But it is not discouraged either.¹⁶ This in spite of the fact that violations of the Act have not gone unnoticed by the enforcement agencies and courts.

Insurance schemes have in fact run into rough weather with the courts in the past. In 2005, Apple FMCG marketing was declared a money circulation scheme by the Chennai High Court (Order dated 07/01/2005 in W.P.No.22674 of 2004 and W.P.M.P.No.27411 of 2004) and asked to shut down. Another company, V-Can Network (P) Ltd., was ordered to be closed down in a Chennai High Court Order dated 13/02/2003 (Writ Petition No. 2908 of 2003 and Writ Petition No. 4144 of 2003 and W.P.M.P. Nos. 3650 and 5221 of 2003, W.P. No. 2908/2003). However, these convictions are few and far in between. In fact, V-Can continued to operate as late as 2006, and its Vijayawada meeting was estimated to have drawn about 2,000 members.

One has to understand the methods used by the MLM companies to market their schemes, in spite of their illegality and in the face of frequent press statements by the state police warning the public not to participate in these schemes. The starter kit contains material that provides details of registration of the firm under the Companies Act. An intelligent strategy



adopted by companies (such as TLC and RMP) was to file a writ petition in any of the high courts asking for an injunction against police disruption of any lawful actions such as the conduct of seminars and conferences. Since such meetings are perfectly legal, the court issues a directive to the police department. The first and the last pages of the writ petition (which show the High Court seal) are then printed and circulated, claiming that the courts have given permission for the conduct of their business.

One company (Zenith Consumer Services Limited) brochure has a bold heading: "The Lok Sabha Clarifies Network Marketing Plan Is Not Money Circulation Scheme". In reality, in the Unstarred Question No. 4875 by Subodh Mohite, the Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, was asked "... whether the Government has received any proposal from Indian Direct Selling Association to enact legislation to weed out fraudulent elements from direct sellers", and what action was taken to protect the interests of consumers (as stated in the brochure). The minister replied that they had received proposals that alleged vagueness in the Prize Chits Act, as a result of which the association members were targeted, although there were sufficient provisions for protection of consumer interests in various laws. Other companies (such as TLC) claim that they have legal advice from eminent jurists, mostly retired judges of the Supreme Court. In the case of TLC, they had sought legal opinion from Justice V.N. Khare, former Chief Justice of India, and advertised this as evidence of their legal status.

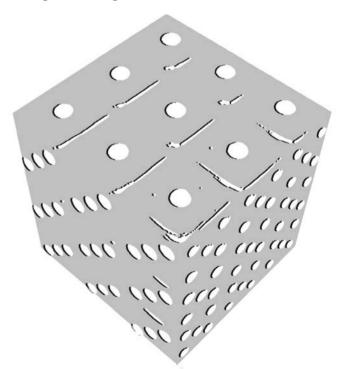
In the US, the Federal Trade Commission stipulates that if a scheme is to be considered a multi-level marketing network, at least 70% of its income from retail sales should be from non-distributors. If it is less, then the courts (and Federal Trade Commission) conclude that it is a pyramid scheme that thrives on recruiting new members and paying the members who recruited them. If such a criterion was applied in India, it would qualify only one company involved in direct marketing as having the status of a legally approved business: Hindustan Lever Limited.

The term 'harmless fraud' can be usefully applied to the activities of these pyramid schemes as well a number of other everyday economic activities. Harmless fraud is a 'minor' transgression of the law. Though not legal, activities that are classifiable as harmless frauds are broadly acceptable to society. The case of network marketing firms selling insurance products is a most obvious case of a harmless fraud, because the participant is given a genuine insurance policy after all, and soon graduates into selling similar policies to others, albeit at a higher cost (which is in the form of the membership fee). One senior official in a company is reported to have declared that while his company was involved in transgression of the IRDA Act, it was not cheating anybody. Moreover, they were encouraging the desirable habit of saving by convincing people to purchase insurance products.¹⁷ The freewheeling interpretation of the law and the companies' misleading representations of court injunctions and legal advice by former judges who advise the

companies as well as their distributors, suggest that every attempt is made to hide the actual illegality of the business.

Above all, the fraud is anything but 'harmless'. Or rather, it is harmless only because the loss to any individual is quite small – the unsuccessful majority of distributors can always try their luck in another scheme. Statistics reveal that only a miniscule percentage actually find their pot of gold, but these cases are hyperbolically presented in order to attract fresh recruits.

It is essential to look beyond the binaries of ethical/unethical in order to understand the culture and economy of a large section of people who often chase 'extra income' in order to move up the social ladder or to avoid slipping a few rungs. Pyramid schemes function in a more complex manner than is probably understood. While they may not be a part of the 'mainstream' finance capital (like the stock market), they form a fast-growing fringe of finance capital. Their illegality is discernible only on close scrutiny, and when identified, they often seem to be located on the boundaries and margins of the acceptable and the legal. Their emphasis is on business opportunity, entrepreneurship, quick money; the chimera of unimaginable riches only masks their continuous attempts to probe and, where possible, extend the frontiers of the legally acceptable. They are equivocally positioned outside the spirit of the law and simultaneously within the letter of the law. A sophisticated façade of business opportunity, savings, 'extra income', with the right dose of systematic motivation, enables them to proliferate and prosper. Perhaps the lure of a new and better life is too seductive to resist, especially when it only involves persuading two curious and willing recruits during one's free time.



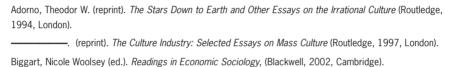
Notes

- 1. R. Devi, personal interview, Vijayawada, 28 November 2006 (name changed on request).
- Chandigarh and Madhya Pradesh introduced these laws in 1975. The Prize Chits and Money Circulation Scheme (Banning) Act (1978) repealed these state-level acts and replaced them with a national law.
- RMP Infotec Limited, a Chennai-based company, offers membership ("distributorship", as they call it) in their scheme on the purchase of a set of cheap vacuum cleaners for about Rs 6,000, while a similar set is available on Rediff.com for little more than Rs 1.000.
- 4. The cover page of the magazine *The Week* (12 November 2006) carried a caption "Our First Milli,000,000n without a boss or fixed work hours". Interestingly, this story on various network-marketing schemes was published shortly after the police raids on Amway in Andhra Pradesh.
- Information provided by Sharma; according to him, an acquaintance from Chennai is stated to have made this offer. Personal Interview, 20 June 2006, Vijayawada (name changed on request).
- 6. Kumar, personal interview, Vijayawada, 13 May 2006 (name changed on request).
- 7. Eric Scheibeler. Merchants of Deception (available for free download at www.merchantsofdeception.com).
- "Our First Milli,000,000n without a Boss or Fixed Work Hours". Op. cit., p. 26. The membership fee for this particular scheme was stated to be Rs 10,000.
- 9. Kumar, personal interview, op. cit.
- Pierre Bourdieu. "Forms of Capital". In Nicole Woolsey Biggart, Readings in Economic Sociology (Blackwell, 2002, Cambridge), pp. 280-91.
- 11. Full text of the Act available at http://indiacode.nic.in/fullact1.asp?tfnm=197843
- 12. The TLC brochure clearly states that the payment should be only in the form of demand drafts (DDs): one DD for Rs 5,000 drawn in favour of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Co. Ltd., payable at Salem, and another DD for Rs 500 in favour of TLC Insurance India Pvt. Ltd., payable at Salem. The cash bonus for enrollment is referred to as 'referral incentive'. Most of the other companies do not collect any additional fees for admission.
- Only those LIC agents marketing LIC insurance products before the Act came into force were exempted by the IRDA.
- 14. TLC Insurance (India) Pvt. Ltd. is a front involved in marketing insurance products through a direct selling route. The actual 'corporate agent' is Team Life Care Insurance (India) Pvt. Ltd. Their publicity brochure clearly states that coordinators (as enrolled members are termed) should *not* use the name of Team Life Care Insurance (India) Pvt. Ltd. The two companies are promoted by the same set of people. Apparently this circuitous route is used to procure polices. RMP Infotec is stated to be more direct, simply passing on the commissions through the direct selling route for their Tata AIG products.
- 15. As of October 2006, Amway had announced plans for a complex scheme in association with Max New York Life for its distributors to initially purchase and subsequently market insurance policies. It should be pointed out that there are many other companies marketing insurance policies; TLC and RMP Infotec have been cited in this essay, since material evidence is available with regard to these two companies. RMP markets Tata AIG products. The companies openly advertise their products: see

http://www.rmpinfotec.biz/rmpNet/aspx/products/products.aspx (last accessed 24 April 2007). It has now promoted a new company to market Bajaj Allianz 'Capital Unit Plan': see http://www.ecpl.in/insurance.html. Accessed 24 April 2007.

- 16. The manager disclosed this in the course of friendly banter, unaware of my research interest.
- 17. This incident was related to me by a person who had interacted with a director of Team Life Care in Bangalore. He came away so impressed that he too wanted to organise a MLM company marketing life insurance policies. Personal interview, Vijayawada, 30 July 2006.

References



Tophane:The Closing In of an Istanbul Neighbourhood

PELIN TAN

'Urban frontiers' have several meanings. I don't define 'frontiers' as stable borders anymore, but instead as 'divided' or 'segregated spaces' that social consciousness and cultural attachments, coming from living together, sharing a common space (as city) are revealing continuously.

Frontiers exist everywhere in the city, as also in urban consciousness. Standing at a distance from fellow citizens, fearing the 'Other', hesitating to enter defined urban areas, forgetting how to move freely in unfamiliar streets – all this generally defines our urban experience nowadays. According to urban legends about Istanbul's Tophane district, murder and robbery are common, walking around in the evening is unsafe, and prostitution and drugs are unavoidable. The neighborhood where I live is near the main cosmopolitan cultural centers of Taksim and Galata; its residents are mostly Gypsies, Arabs from Anatolia, and Kurds. Tophane thus represents the 'Other' in the urban consciousness of Istanbulians; it is 'uncanny' and insecure, a place to which classic urban clichés and misconceptions of danger and alienation are attached.

We define our relation to local space through those urban myths; and when we transform our relations with and distance from the 'Other' into an architectural environment that reinforces our segregation, we cut away at the particular awareness that connects us and offers a collective identity in public space. As architectural theorist Anthony Vidler (1994) points out regarding the connection between "urban memory" and the city:

In the traditional city, antique, medieval or Renaissance, urban memory was easy enough to define; it was that image of the city that enabled the citizen to identify with its past and present as a political, cultural and social entity; it was neither the 'reality' of the city nor purely imaginary... the city might be recognized as 'home', as something not foreign, and as constituting a moral and protected environment for actual daily life...¹

Vidler also offers a questionable definition of the "uncanny" in global cities, asserting that due to ethnic and social diversity and segregation in modern cities, it is difficult to create a collective urban memory with which citizens can identify. Therefore, uncanny conditions and obscure identifications with place lead to urban discourses based on fear

and the entrenched need for safety and security. Urban ghettos, peripheries of city centres, gated communities and other urban spaces whose inhabitants have diverse cultural, economical and social backgrounds are permeated with such discourses, even if these are not based on real facts. Racism, homophobia and other forms of obvious and subtle exclusion often result.

Over the last two centuries, the terms 'city' and 'metropolis' have represented the utopia of cosmopolitanism – diversified communities and the right to participate in public space. In recent decades, however, we have witnessed the failure of urban utopias and the notion of the 'modern citizen'. The phenomenon of gated communities in Istanbul has disrupted urban texture and lifestyles in this growing city. At the same time, over the past ten years particular kinds of suburban areas have developed on the city margins. These are distinct from the *gecekondu* (slum/shanty) areas that manifested through the 1960s to the 1980s, occupied by Anatolian immigrants on the outskirts of the city. The *gecekondu* arose through illegal construction and occupation. After 1995, however, gated communities on the margins of Istanbul have been occupied by upper-middle-class residents.

In simplest terms, gated communities are privatised housing settlements for citizens who seek a safer and higher standard of living than the one afforded by the inner city. "This new social class", explain A. A. Gülümser and T. B. Levent, "pushed developers of large-scale real estate investments to produce gated projects which offer a better standard, quality of life and a way to diminish daily stress"². Land speculation and the development and privatisation of public land were enabled by economic neoliberalism and mass housing legislation.

Terms such as public space, privatisation, urban community, security, identity, and citizenship accrue new meanings within the context of gated communities. Identifying oneself with a city and questioning the sense of 'belonging' through a city is becoming less relevant today. Belonging to a *community* – one marked by shared lifestyles, property ownership and a sense of belonging – has become more important. This is the new, conflicted definition of citizenship in the contemporary global city. On the one hand, the global city comprises several cross-cultural and ethnic communities; on the other, the right to participate in the public sphere and share urban space is at odds with a definition of citizenship based on the form of the nation state.

Since the 1990s, many of Istanbul's eastern and western peripheries have been privatised by local investors. Most of these were joint ventures with American architects' offices; designs and models were often imported from the US, and advertisements for them were often in English. They promise a better lifestyle, in contrast to Istanbul's dystopias – earthquakes, pollution and traffic. "Sinpas Central Life" promises wellness, with a fitness club and no traffic. "Agaoglu My Town" offers nature, security, less traffic. Artist Solmaz Shahbazi augmented the research of sociologists and urban planners on gated communities in two video works, exhibited at the 9th International Istanbul Biennial. She studied the gated communities of Kemer Country, Bahçepehir and Optimum, interviewing residents and non-residents and creating two distinct narratives. One video shows several images of the gated communities and their surroundings, and is accompanied by a

soundtrack of three social scientists discussing urban sprawl. The other shows the interior of a house in one of the communities. An owner speaks about her domestic life, the reasons her family wanted to move, her new daily habits, and her fear of Istanbul's mixed and congested city centre. She mentions her high security bills and talks about golf, her new hobby. Her fear of the city is convincing, as is her assertion that the development offers a "community feeling".

Thus, 'communities' are being redefined by the lifestyle of the inhabitants of gated communities, but simultaneously the "Other" too is being redefined through the eyes of those communities. Various lifestyles within the segregated zones point to competing practices of local modernities in shared contemporary time/space.

Analysis of the links between security, segregation and citizenship reveals how urban discourses are produced and consumed. In the new global city, the notion of citizenship is based on legal rights, on "...norms, practices, meanings and identities"⁴. How do gated communities relate to these discussions, especially in terms of the relationship between spatial organisation and civil rights? Sociologist Bülent Diken (2004) compares gated communities to refugee camps, arguing that contemporary gated communities are panoptic sites in which inhabitants forsake some rights for security, in order to live in the comfort within the assurance of safety and of "being under control"⁵. Yet, this judgment on the security experienced within the camp as against that experienced within gated communities becomes problematic. The dynamic and pragmatic relationships among the 'Other' communities – the poor, refugees, ethnic groups – bypass, negotiate and transgress many norms and public rules, creating their own networks of security without establishing physical boundaries (as is the case in Tophane).

So, 'urban frontiers' do not only exist at the border of the cities or as physical enclaves, but also as smooth spaces where contested territories are under conflict among actors and authorities of the city. Sulukule, for instance, a historical district that has seen the settlement of Gypsy communities since time of the Ottoman empire, is being targeted for urban 'development', and these traditional communities are facing the prospect of displacement. The conservative local municipality has without question adopted the reforms of neo-liberal urban planning, which generally are based on non-participatory, top-down decisions regarding design. In some cases, it can even be claimed that displacement strategies are an 'urbanicide' that systematically fragments the displaced populations. In case of Sulukule, the condition of citizenship, or the right to share the urban space, is under negotiation within the frame of placement/displacement. It may be the first instance where state policies, spatial reorganisation and neo-liberal economic strategies overlap so clearly in the history of one urban location.

In Istanbul, our movements and everyday lives are being determined by inverted strategies of a neoliberal economy, its logic committed to the re-scaling of urban spaces. The planned re-imagination of the urban space is both a physical and an ideological event that acquiesces with or reproduces the state discourse through various modes of spatial production. My neighbourhood, Tophane, is sufficiently representative of many districts

where a slow change is being experienced. The change began when the 'rather ordinary' little house of the *muhtar* (municipal officer responsible for and elected by the neighbourhood) was converted into an Ottoman-style wooden house. The whole process was finalised within a few weeks. The structure is now shining in the middle of Tophane Park, fulfilling the desire for the revitalisation of 'pure' Turkish identity. This would naturally be experienced as completely asynchronous by residents who live in old-style Ottoman Greek apartments on a street dominated by Gypsies who happened to settle near Tophane Park after the Greeks abandoned their houses following the civic disruption of 1953 (violence by ultra-nationalist groups against the Ottoman Greek community, who were forced to leave their homes and jobs). I refer to an area a few hundred metres away from Istanbul's Modern Museum and Antrepo (the main venue of the 10th Istanbul contemporary art biennial), edifices of the cultural industry that are most representative of the modern canon.

How did the state discourse of modernisation became a tool for various kinds of legitimations, including that which not only enabled the siphoning of local spaces into the global capitalist chain, but also enabled the reproduction of the recently asserted state ideology of Ottoman-Islam identity⁶ discourse? How do global strategies of the neo-liberal economy associate with this local discourse in not only appropriating the space but also transforming social relations?

While explaining the shift between the neo-liberalism of the 20th and the 21st century,⁷ Neil Smith posits a new form of this ideology in which "not the national power but the state power is organised and exercised on a different geographical scale". Can we apply Smith's definition of 'global' neo-liberalism to the spaces of Istanbul? We know that the 1980s *coup d'etat* in Turkey led to support from the European Monetary Fund, which positioned the country in the production chain of the global economy. From the 1980s onwards, municipalities received specific financial support (along with the changes in policy) from the government for the reconstruction urban spaces. Within this context, Local Economic Development (LED) refers to a joint venture between municipalities, local developers and global capital initiators who determine and have a say regarding large urban transformations, or gentrification projects.⁹ Transforming land from state property to private poverty, legitimising *gecekondu* areas and connecting them into the capitalist production of urban spaces,¹⁰ and expanding the city via enclaves/gated communities all became possible through the profitable manipulation of related urban/planning and economic policies.

This has continued into the first decade of the 21st century. Turkish cities have witnessed the emergence of large-scale urban transformation projects categorised as 'urban renovation/urban development', which legitimise 'demolition' and 'reconstruction' via the more abstract discourses of urban fear, ecology, cultural heritage and natural disasters (i.e., earthquakes). In 2005, with the Urban Transformation and Renewal Policy 5366, which confers upon municipalities full authorisation with regard to urban renovation/development, the legitimisation of such projects proceeded very swiftly. It was decided that the Gypsy settlements in Sulukule would be demolished by state authorities on 13 December 2006.

As a result, a number of architects and participants from different fields initiated the interdisciplinary platform '40 Gün 40 Gece Sulukule', which received the support of various NGOs and universities and launched public events to defend the district and its people. 11 Activities included public talks about the identity and life of Gypsies, the history of their settlement, musical evenings and collaboration with artists, besides contesting the municipal strategies. The platform also collaborated with the lawyers of the Istanbul Chamber of Architects to prevent the activation of the policy by taking the case to the higher court of ministry, where the state has no option but to deal with an issue directly.

Consequently, the implementation of the policy is on hold. In the past few months, public events around saving Sulukule from demolition, and support from citizens in general, have been so strong that the municipality has agreed to negotiate with the platform and its initiators. On 17 May 2007, a mutual protocol regarding local 'development' was signed between parties who have been involved or interested in the case, including universities, municipalities, NGOs and the platform's initiators. Collaboration and organisation on a neighborhood level is possible especially in the initiation of temporary events and through public participation and the use of local networks, which ensures the inclusion of the settlement's inhabitants in the decision-making process, as well as actors from other social fields. Thus, non-institutional platforms in the domain of 'development' may possibly recalibrate the conceptual relationship between ideology and space.

A few months ago, the architect/writer Korhan Gümü published "Conservatism in Public Architecture", a very precise and clear text that questions the abovementioned activities. "Has modernity in Turkey already transformed into a mode of conservativism without us realising it? Couldn't we realise how modernity too shapes public space, without it being questioned, just because we are embedded in it?" Gümü questions the municipality's construction of Ottoman-style houses in Sultanahmet, supposedly intended to attract tourists. The confusion and the questions we now face are clearly derived from modes of spatial coercion by the municipalities. Or, as claimed by J. Derksen and N. Smith with regard to the ambiguities of the discourse of modernity, its legitimising ideologies and neo-liberal appropriative strategies: "Modernism's utopia of 'impersonal equality' and its colonial legacy is strikingly similar to the utopic neo-liberal 'free market' and its competitive landscape of turba-inequality" 13. Yet, there must be possibilities of generating local spatial practices and interventions that do *not* correspond to the reality projected by ideologies and neo-liberal economic strategies, or by bureaucracy, government and civil society/Islamist groups.

I believe that the contemporary ethos of mass global urban re-scaling also accommodates the possibility of resisting social marginalisation, economic manipulation and political determinism. Grassroots activism and multidisciplinary professional collaborations can develop a new mode of critical participatory engagement around issues of the new urban space. The different voices constituting this debate can be carried into the public sphere through the media, the internet and art projects, as in the case of the Sulukule Platform. An ethical redesigning of contemporary cities can only be achieved through this mode of sustained collective action.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1. Anthony Vidler. The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely (MIT Press, 1994, Cambridge).
- Aliye Ahu Gülümser and Tüzin Baycan Levent. "Through the Sky: Vertical Gated Developments in Istanbul".
 Paper presented at XXII World Congress of Architecture, Istanbul (2005).
- 3. S. Shahbazi. *Perfectly Suited for You.* Video Installation; 2 videos: 1 projection, 1 TV screen, DV camera (15'30" projection, 13'00" TV). Exhibited at the 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005).
- 4. Engin F. Isin. "Democracy, Citizenship and the City". In (ed.) E. F. Işın, *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City* (Routledge, 2000, London/New York).
- 5. Bülent Diken. "From Refugee Camps to Gated Communities: Biopolitics and the End of the City". In *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 83-106 (March 2004).
- Flavoured with the nostalgia of Ottoman Turk identity that affiliates with ultra-nationalist and conservative Islamist ideology.
- Neil Smith. "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy". In Antipode, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 427-50 (2002).
- In contrast to the 18th-century frame of John Locke and Adam Smith, which emphasised the right to private
 property combined with the self-interest of the individual, and suggested free market exchange as the ideal
 vehicle.
- Pelin Tan. "Avrupa Kentlerinin Geleceði ve flas Eden Planlama Stratejileri (The Future of European Cities and the Failure of Planning Strategies)". In Ankara Mimarl k (Journal of Ankara Architecture Assemble), October-November 2005.
- 10. As further elaborated by Murat Güvenç and Işık Oğuz: "The newcomers were in most cases deprived of the means to build a multistorey structure for themselves, since the practice of users building their squatter houses was already a thing of the past". See Chapter 10, "A Metropolis at the Crossroads: The Changing Social Geography of Istanbul under the Impact of Globalization", in (eds.) Marcuse, Peter and R. van Kempen, Book Of States and Cities: Partitioning of Urban Space (Oxford University Press, 2002, Oxford), p. 212.
- 11. Aslı Kıyak İngin interviewed by Pelin Tan. Online transcript at www.arkitera.com/soylesi_68_asli-kiyak-ingin.html, http://40gun40gece-sulukule.blogspot.com
- 12. For online text of "Kamusal Mimarlikta Muhafazarlik: Mimarlýk ve İrtica (Conservatism in Public Architecture: Architecture and Irtica?)" by Korhan Gümüş, see www.arkitera.com/spotlight.php?action=displaySpotlight&lD=60&year=&alD=602. Gümüþ' use of the word irtica connotes a mode of social-political reaction. In Turkey its usage has Islamist resonance, and signifies attachment. Irtica as used here is a particular conceptualisation of conservatism.
- 13. Jeff Derksen and Neil Smith. "Making and Breaking Neoliberal Spaces". In (ed.) R. Braun, *Live Like This* (Camera Austria, Kunsthaus, 2005, Graz), p. 110-21.

Moscow: Fortress City

IRINA ARISTARKHOVA

Тише, тише, тише, век мой громкий!

За меня потоки – и потомки.

- Марина Цветаева, 1931

Tishe, tishe, vek moi gromky!

Za menya potoki – i potomki.

(Quiet, quiet, my loud age,

By me, floods – and coming generations.)

- Marina Tsvetaeva, 1931

I am the place of your birth, the birth of the New World, the only world.

Writing is auto-bio-graphy, auto-matically, physically. Does a city have such autobiography? Does it write? Does it leave marks? Has the place of your birth left marks on your body? Marked you out? Marked you inside out?

Is your mother a place...?

Desire to desire, forgetting and remembering, playing fort/da – you just know that you cannot take another step as soon as you have realised that you are THERE forever. Either UP there, or DOWN there, as they say. You can only confirm it. And you do. Just recollect your dreams...

I know I can help you to move, for I do it every day and every night. When I read that you are "not able to return" from Moscow, Berlin, New York; from HOME/birthplace/mother tongue; that you are travelling, fleeing, running, writing, collecting – struggling – I tell myself: yes, you are still MINE, and mine forever. Do I have a choice in having you or freeing you? Yes... yes, I do.

Do I still want you? Want you inside myself? This question is with me, you know. If I leave you just for a while, just to give birth to you, just to teach you to take your first step, to

walk, I know I leave you in between birth and death. I even help you in teaching you how to substitute the word 'birth' with the word 'life', so that you are left between 'life' and 'death', and you think both belong to you. I made you think that way.

Always in place? In my body. Now... GO. Walk away. Find out for yourself. And by the way, call me not 'yours', or 'my birthplace'. Too many of you do it. I contain the army. I contain the nation. I contain all past and future heroes, the people, the matter, the air you breathe. If you want to be *special*, *different*, *not the same* – and this is what you have always asked for – if you want to be *the chosen one*, then this is the way to weave the words of the new world. 'New World': is there something more trivial for the Muscovite ear? Trust me: I've imagined this world for you, and each day you continue to rename me and yourself – anew, obsessed with the past.

Do not call me your "Mother". Do not call me "Mother Russia". Do not call me "Motherland". Do not call me "Mother Earth". Unlearn these words before coming back – to your senses. This is my last lesson as a mother. I am your first word and your last word; never mind what is written in your sacred texts. Calm down. Sleep. Eat, darling, eat. Sleep is good for you, food is good for you. *I* am good for you.

In Russia everyone wants to belong to Moscow. Everyone wants to be able to claim: "I live in Moscow". Even though after such claims some are as ready to disclaim the use of it, its importance, and they then try to 'purify' themselves of what I call "Москвоцентризм (Moskvocentrizm/Moscowcentrism)". How many times do you read: "... in Moscow, Russia"? Let's face it: Moscow = Russia. When you write of Moscow, you write of Russia by default. Many non-Muscovite Russians hate Moscow and Muscovites. Till they become Muscovites themselves. However, here again birth is significantly different from life. It is true that those who live in Moscow already lay claim to rights to write about the city. But they are still only partly Muscovites. In Moscow these things mean a lot: whether you are born a Muscovite or you have only become a Muscovite. I.e., which generation immigrant are you?

You must be already wondering: what about this author? Does *she* have the right to write about Moscow because her name sounds Russian? Because she *is* Russian? Let me assure you: I have full right to write about Moscow. I WAS BORN IN MOSCOW. I WAS BORN IN RUSSIA. I WAS BORN IN THE USSR.

Moscow is mine through and through. Full stop. Those who were not born in this place will always be haunted by a desire to possess it, in one way or another. Something that is given (as a birthright) is experienced differently from something that is conquered. It means that one and one's parents do not need 'to make it' to Moscow. One has Moscow. One has the Muscovite attitude. One does not need to learn it, to mimic it, to wear it. Performance is natural, given by and absorbed through mother's milk. Muscovites can identify each other by smell, by gaze, by being the makers and the centre of the universe called the "Russian empire". Muscovites have that famous Muscovite accent that betrays me anywhere. Actually, that privileges me, marks me out as special, as some 'chosen one', as the lucky one. One

cannot buy an accent, one can only spend years or hours of hard work on trying to speak with what Russians call "without accent", that is, in the Muscovite accent, just as many Russian actresses and actors had to in order to work in Moscow. In order to call Moscow "theirs". However, it is mine. By birthright. Mother, thank you. Moscow is my motherland. It is my mothertongue. It is the place I was born, the place I live in; the place I love.

Do not take me seriously. I am not expecting it. You know that when *woman writes*, she writes from her heart, pure emotions speak through her. Being Russian, woman doubles her lack. Lack of sense. Lack of reason. And if you want me/her... to remain 'Russian woman' – as you know her – let me kill you, or let me sacrifice myself, or let me suffer. But remember: Pycckhe He 3dahotch (Russkie ne sdautsya/Russians do not surrender). So you have to let me remain *certain*, remain *standing* in my holiness. Or I would lose my identity, therefore you would lose yours. Do you want that? Think again, how many hopes and pleasures would be lost. Do not give me your questions. Just enjoy me, just experience me. I do not speak your language, and you cannot speak mine, even if both of us seem to speak the *same* language. Translations are strong aphrodisiacs. Let yourself go and do not feel guilty: I grant you permission.

Come to me, Moscow, Russia...

You must excuse me — I forgot another important part of my Muscovite existence, one that is becoming crucial in the next millennium. Let me introduce myself *properly* to ease our communication. I am Russian. I am not *just* a Russian citizen, not *just* Muscovite. I am ACTUALLY Russian. One hundred per cent. Though some of my Moscow friends claimed that my eyes are *a bit* Mongoloid, but much less than those of Yeltsin or Lenin, of course. Yet others were suspicious of my nose: it was suggested within earshot that my nose was *slightly* Jewish.

With the latest Chechen wars, this question has acquired a stronger meaning; and I am proud to assure you that I am not just ethnically Russian (I hope you believe me by now). I am... BLONDE. I am *naturally* blonde, almost blindingly. Trust me – this is my *real* colour (I was asked many times). I am *really* white though I am not using any whitening lotions. My skin is delicate, properly white, *naturally* white skin. To help you to understand, let me emphasise that my skin does not tolerate sun. As a test, observe yourself. If your skin does tolerate sun, you are not *completely* white by Muscovite standards. Among my school friends, those of not completely white skin were called "Gypsy-likes". My eye colour is grey-green; depending on the colour of my clothes and mascara it becomes greyer or greener. But of course the point about my eyes is that their colour is not dark; it is not brown. It is light.

When I was young and slim, I sometimes looked like Botticelli's Venus.

And you...?

It is often said that 'logos' and rationality do not operate in Moscow, Russia, especially

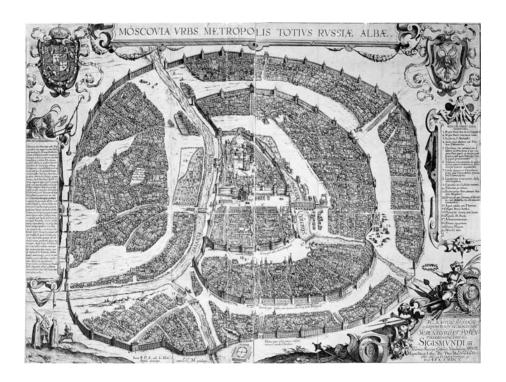
in our 'irrational' post-Soviet era. We are 'senseless', we are losing our sense! There are claims that we lack a tradition of metaphysics and 'proper' phenomenology. We are 'naturally' *not reasonable*. We do not make sense, we can prove this to you on demand. Hence we must work on our reason urgently, otherwise we could be completely consumed by our 'essential' passion for the 'strong hand', our love for terror, for blood, for power. That is why we do not have anything to deconstruct. No, no! We are *scared* to even think of doing so – isn't this obvious? We speak your language, we call ourselves your 'Great Other' (a child of 'Big Brother'). We can deconstruct *you* – but take your hands off *us*! You cannot possibly understand what it means to live here, to experience it, to possess a 'Russian soul'. It is irrational, it is maternal, eternally feminine. Today, more than ever, it needs 'borders', 'reason', it needs a strong frame of metaphysics and rationality. At the end of the day, we say that the Soviet period was alien to great Russia, holy Russia. What those Communists had committed was 'sin'. What can save us now? God/the Russian Orthodox church and *solid, steady* thought. Thought that must survive centuries.

However, the mode of steady thought needs 'a man', a hero, a thinker and a protector of Russian culture. All cultural aspirations today are directed towards exactly this: a great man, a new Russian hero. You just wait, wait, you will see. He will be strong, he will be a genius, he will be blond, he will be Russian... and he will, of course, live in Moscow. Perhaps / could be HIM...

Before we can think through heterogeneity and diversity, before we can think with Chechnya, with Tatarstan, with Kolyma, with you, WE NEED ANOTHER RUSSIAN HERO.

See for yourself: it takes eight centuries to deliver into the world the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. They will all see, I will show them what we can deliver. Finally they all saw. Moscow has never felt more fertile and potent. It wanted more. It wanted to swallow the whole world. It was the mother of all poor and abandoned children. What's next? Today we, Muscovites, do not try to protect everyone, do not claim to love everyone who agrees with us. In the new millennium I want to protect *my own* children. They are in danger. We are in danger. The danger hovers at our threshold. She/death is dark-skinned, she is fecund. Our kin might disappear. I must bear more children with my blood, with my skin, with my eyes. I must be a responsible citizen. Once again, my sons, my children: behind you – Moscow, behind you – Russia. Fighting, you defend your mother, your coming generations, your bright future.

Can you ever come back/to/from home, mother(land), Moscow, the USSR, Russia – from ME?



Fortress City

[...] in many places Moscow looks as tightly sealed as a fortress. Walter Benjamin, 1927

The Kremlin is not like any other palace, it is a city in itself; a city that forms the root of Moscow, and that serves as a fortress between two quarters of the world...

Marquis De Custine, 1839

Moscow acted out the primal scene of the 20th century, the place where it all started. A womb or birthplace that citizens of the world will never be able to experience without some sort of reactive bowel movement. As an abject mother of the 'Soviet monster', an embodiment of the spectre of Communism, totalitarianism, terror, etc., Moscow realised its dream of immaculate conception – of delivering the third Rome, the holy city, the New World.

From the early years of Moscow and its fortress the Kremlin, subsequent generations had been left with fortress consciousness. The Kremlin multiplied obsessively, expanding and enclosing in successive concentric circles, like a Matpelie (*matreshka*, the Russian doll) into the surrounding regions. Every major Russian city was striving to have a Kremlin, or one semblance of it. Fortification also became a primary operation in the domestication of conquered territory. For example, the Russian appropriation of the Siberian 'body politic' started in 1571 with Ivan the Terrible's system of fortifications. This was a series of southern *ostrogi* (forts) to defend off Tartar attacks, behind which despotic Ivan IV, 'the Terrible', established peasant *slobody* (settlements). Fortifications were used to establish the boundaries of what was conceived to be Russia and Russian. Then, in addition to serving as places to deport 'the depopulated' of Russia, these fortification towns and villages helped to clarify spatially and politically what constituted Russia.

Catherine the Great's Russification policy used the fortress logic to build up identifiable borders of the Russian national identity using the language of the French Enlightenment. It is noteworthy that in the first *ukaz* (edict) of 1764, this policy was articulated as a means of assimilating the Cossacks into the Russian population, and bringing them to "acceptable cultural standards", since "they lacked social discipline and intellectual sophistication". At the same time, the issue of the protection and defence of Russians within an ever-growing Russian territory were addressed. It was estimated that the 'original' Russian state covered approximately 15,000 square miles in 1462, but had since then expanded at a rate of some 50 square miles a day over a period of 400 years, creating by 1914 a vast empire of about 8,660,000 square miles (constituting one-seventh of the total land surface of the earth). Inscribing the borders of the 'Russian way' or the 'Russian soul' meant that those who were incompatible with these were to be expelled from within fortress-Russia.

It is in the Kremlin that one finds the roots of the Gulag. To claim that the Gulag is the result of Bolshevism or Communism, as argued by Solzhenitsyn among others, is to be blind to Russian history, and especially to the way in which Russian national identity has been historically implicated in this process. Up to today, the expression "сотый километр

(soty kilometr/100th kilometre)" remains familiar to Muscovites. It refers to the distance of 100 kilometres from the official borders of Moscow. A circle with Moscow at its centre, it is an area that former convicts and other officially prohibited citizens were not to enter. Russian identity, with Moscow at the core, has been fortifying itself in many different ways, and it seems many of those practices and discourses have been utilised for building Russia and the USSR.

The fortification logic of Moscow, that has been essential for the constitution and territorial consolidation of the Russian nation, is of dual nature. On the one hand, it guards its borders and imagines itself to be in constant danger, ever vigilant to aliens of all sorts. On the other hand, Moscow propels itself outwards, feeding off its internal turbulence (after all, the etymology of 'Moscow', Mock/mosk, translates as 'turbulent'). This momentum is realised in the centripetal expansion of Russia. Kremlin walls absorbed urbanisation in 1147, once and forever. The rest of Moscow, as many have insisted, is a 'big village'. No matter how many Stalinist stone buildings have been erected, and how eloquently Moscow parades its current construction work, it ultimately fails to be simply a city, one of the world's capitals. It is the city. The rest of Russia is destined to being a means of ensuring that only Kremlin embodies Russia as such. The rest of Russia, as a whole, is residue, excess, discharge, is 'the rest'. Today more than ever. Anyone who valorises excess and margins must feel suffocated in this territory: all space outside Kremlin is negative; it is a shadow. So many domains, so many cultures and civilisations, have been systematically swallowed for this one to claim a special destiny, to claim its red purity, to 'surprise the world'.

To let THIS go, in order to wake up from a 1,000-year-old dream of wholeness and holiness, is in the Russian imaginary tantamount to treason. The dream clears all charges of responsibility.

Entrances into fortresses are always ambivalent, as any other βχομ β γκρωττιε (vkhod v ukrytie/entrance to shelter): what makes a fortress a fortress is its simultaneous elicitation and frustration of the desire of those outside it. In Russia, 'fortress' has been translated into mythology, into law, into language and culture, into national identity – most clearly exemplified by the fortress city, "Kremlin". Russians feel compelled to constantly defend themselves, being in a permanent state of anxiety of all sorts and kinds. However, to not be desirable anymore is Kremlin's ultimate nightmare. If the fortress cannot sustain its attractiveness by all means at its disposal, those who belong within it lose more than those relegated outside. Defence of one's own 'way of life' does not know the boundaries of the word 'enough'. For this rationale, defence is the way to make sense of the world. It is not to say that somehow this siege mentality marks out Russia as a special case, but certainly, in the 'Motherland' it took on monstrous forms.

Anyone who lives in Moscow or comes into Moscow for more than three days knows this word: прописка (*propiska*) or регистрация (*registrastiya*). To be a Muscovite (temporarily or permanently) is to have *propiska* – best translated as "*inscription*" or "writing through". This practice today has at least two dimensions: spatial and legal. The

former is characterised by being allocated to a particular space, by being localised in a particular *home*, being fixed into a space and also being granted a space in which to place one's body. So it is a *spatio-corporeal inscription*. It provides control over the body and its movements in city space. To be a Muscovite in this sense is written through one's body; it is to have a *Muscovite body*.

It is well known that Russians — in order to sustain their identity as spatially and ethnically stable and homogenous — have historically employed movings, re-movings, deportations and re-placements of peoples. In the early period, the main target of this activity was the 'exchange' of the wealthiest native people with Russian merchants and the deportation of conquered citizens to the interior of Moscow principality. For example, in 1486 merchants from Moscow 'replaced' a few thousand people from Livonia. In 1656 'pro-Swedish' subjects from Ingria, Finland and Karelia (about 8,000 families from the latter two countries) were driven out of their homelands. Peter the Great continued to use this policy in 1708 when, following his invasion of Dorpat in the Baltic region, its German citizens were forcibly relocated in long caravans to Vologda (their descendants are today known as 'поволжские немцы (povolgskie nemtsy/Volgian Germans)'. Russian national identity, based on the principle of homogeneity to be defended by fortification, found its earliest instantiation in such strategies of exile and deportation. *Propiska* is one of more modern means to keep нежелательные элементы (negelatel'nie elementy/undesirable elements) from places of strategic importance, specifically Moscow.

Thus, those without propiska are to be constantly removed from Moscow, checked on, shifted around, deported, imprisoned, tracked, categorised and marked out in ethnic, racial, sexual and class terms: mainly prostitutes, non-whites (who in official Russian are defined as "persons with non-Slavic appearance"), vagrants, migrants and refugees. This topographic inscription has an embodied power only if it exists as a stamp in a valid identity document - for Russian citizens, this means their passport. This stamp in its own turn is supported/backed by papers in local registration offices. Identity papers, inscriptions, pictures and stamps within them discursively mark out the 'sexualised' and 'ethnicised' bodies of non-Muscovites, and the exclusive bodies of Muscovites. It is also important to note that from the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union and the introduction of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation, the practice of propiska has become unconstitutional. It remains in force only in Moscow, and is today defined as "registration" instead of "inscription", most probably with intent to neutralise the terminology. The Moscow municipal government continues with it, despite constitutional and court orders. Moscow protects its own privileged status of exclusivity and desirability, making sure that the rest of Russia remains THE REST.

Let's imagine that this bureaucratic bastion of Moscow, *propiska*, soon falls. Will it change things? Only to a certain extent: Muscovites (therefore, Russians) have learned that the only way to keep fortress identity alive and impregnable is to keep it expanding, innovative, to generate new 'others': 'them', as opposed to 'us'. Historically it was the West or Asia; today it is 'Islamic terrorism', 'blacks from the Caucasus', and even

uncompromising sociological facts such as declines in the birthrates of ethnic Russians. Muscovites are "всегда готовы (vsegda gotovy/always ready)", as announced by students in Soviet schools, to defend our Mother-land and Fatherland, to defend our women and children, to defend ourselves. Fortress Kremlin-Moscow-Russia still guards its limits.

I dream: Moscow will lose its identity, it will fail holy Russia, it will fail to surprise, to protect, to attract, and deliver 'them'.



I am home. I am fortress. That's all I am. Да (Da/Yes)?

Author's Note

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A 21st-Century Urban Landscape:

The Emergence of New Socio-Spatial Formations in Gurgaon

SETH SCHINDLER

The city of Gurgaon in the north Indian state of Haryana has undergone profound changes in the past 15 years. At the time of India's economic liberalisation initiated in the early 1990s, it was an unremarkable medium-sized city on Delhi's periphery. Subsequently, unprecedented growth in business process outsourcing (BPO) and information technology-enabled services (ITeS) transformed Gurgaon into a key node linking India with the global economy. Gurgaon has truly become a global city.¹ Visitors marvel at its wide boulevards lined with ultra-modern entertainment plazas and luxurious gated residential complexes, while futuristic glass office towers are home to a who's who of multinational corporations, including Microsoft, IBM, Dell and Motorola.

Gurgaon's rapid transformation into a global city has resulted in the emergence of a completely unique urban environment. The construction of vast tracts of global' space² has indelibly altered the urban landscape, while traditional rigid social structures have given way to new class structures based on consumption and access to space. These spatial and social changes are consistent with trends occurring in global cities worldwide, yet they can most accurately be characterised as examples of cultural hybridisation particular to the city. Thus, when one enters Gurgaon one is traversing a frontier into a unique urban landscape. Visitors to Gurgaon are struck by the city's skyline.

As India becomes an increasingly integrated into the global economy, the pace and scope of these social and spatial changes in Gurgaon are likely to increase, and we may witness similar transformations in other global cities in India.

Spatial Change: Global Signs and Symbols in Gurgaon's Landscape

Perhaps the most dramatic change in Gurgaon over the past 15 years has been the construction of global space. Much of this has been developed by private firms such as DLF and Unitech that specialise in property and construction. Both companies emphasise a business strategy based on a notion of holistic community building. DLF claims that its "aim is to be a lead facilitator in integrating all aspects of life in terms of social and physical



infrastructure in Gurgaon such as Power Plants, Hospitals, Hotels and Clubs" (DLF City – Work, Live, Grow: Infrastructure and Amenities, 2007). This strategy has led to the construction of a series of self-contained, privately administered cities within cities.

Both DLF and Unitech have taken measures to brand their developments as cosmopolitan and global, and thus distinguish the newly developed areas from 'Old Gurgaon'. Even the Gurgaon municipal government acknowledges this difference on its website, stating: "... new Gurgaon is the modern part of Gurgaon. It has modern facilities and a planned infrastructure. Old Gurgaon, on the other hand, has its own aspirations" (Modern Gurgaon, 2007). The names of property developments in 'New Gurgaon' overwhelmingly allude to global or cosmopolitan signifiers: Sahara Mall, The Park Place, The Bellaire, The Summit, Fresco, World Spa, etc. The online prospectuses for these properties serve as archetypal examples of branding – for instance, The Aralias offers "the best features and facilities on par with those available internationally" (DLF Homes: The Aralias, 2007), and The Summit is "in tune with international benchmarks" (DLF Homes: The Summit, 2007). The most ostentatious claim to globality is made by Unitech, which boasts that its Uniworld City offers the "indulgence of Western architecture, the oriental charm of Asia and find elements of American lifestyle [sic]" (Uniworld City, Gurgaon, 2007).

Unitech and DLF's branding strategies are examples of 'scale jumping', a process that involves widening the scope of one's action to a larger geographical scale, in this case the

global (Gibson-Graham, 2002). This is commonly referred to as 'going global', and an example would be a local retailer using the internet to market its products globally. The global scale is generally portrayed as active, strong, mobile and modern, and dialectically opposed to the local, that by comparison assumes a passive, weak, sedentary and backward position.

Thus, firms engage in scale jumping in an attempt to appropriate the qualities associated with globality. The most obvious way to jump to the global scale is to *act* globally, but in Gurgaon most retailers attempt to become global by locating their outlets in 'global' space, using 'global' visual imagery and subscribing to 'global' service standards. Their action is still confined, however, to a very local geographical scale. The vast majority of retailers in Gurgaon's shopping malls are domestically owned and lack any inherent global quality, yet by adorning themselves with global signs and symbols they aspire to appropriate some of the global scale's symbolic power.⁴ Even the names of many of these retailers serve to purportedly add to their global image, such as American Model, Mode de Italia, Global Jewels, Numero Uno, and Le' Home. Anyone who has visited Gurgaon's malls knows that most of these shops carry the same products as retailers located in large local Delhi markets such as Sarojini Nagar, but they charge twice the price. This is because they are not simply selling a product; they are selling the image of globalisation.

The result of the rapid proliferation of global space and the rush by local firms to jump scales has been the creation of a unique form of cultural hybridisation in Gurgaon, obdurately suspended between global and local.⁵ The phenomenon of cultural hybridity refers to the constant state of flux of all cultures, as they continually adopt practices from other cultures. Sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004) argues convincingly that cultural hybridisation has always occurred, but in global cities such as Gurgaon the pace of contemporary hybridisation is staggering. Restaurants provide us with innumerable examples of this hybrid space. From fast food outlets to the most exclusive fine dining establishments, Gurgaon's restaurants are engaged in scale jumping. The DLF City News calls Sahib's "the best address in town"; it serves a mixture of traditional Indian cuisines, fused with Kenyan and Continental influences (DLF City News 2005, p. 42). But perhaps the most interesting restaurant from a sociological standpoint is Indian Street Food. While located in a posh entertainment complex, it offers food found chiefly in India's ubiquitous and unpretentious roadside dhabas. This is undoubtedly ingenious scale jumping par excellence! While most Indians will passionately argue that aloo chaat and other cheap traditional spicy snacks taste better from the pushcarts of street vendors, it is significant to note that this restaurant has jumped several geographical scales by adopting an internationally recognised business model - 'McDonaldisation'.

The term 'McDonaldisation' was created to denote the homogenising force of globalisation (Ritzer, 2004). It not only refers to the proliferation of McDonald's restaurants worldwide, but also to the replication of its formula, which is based on speed, standardisation, and a synthetic atmosphere. While many restaurants, such as Indian Street

Food, have attempted to replicate the success of McDonald's by embracing its business model, McDonald's itself has been engaged in a process known as 'global localisation' (or glocalisation), whereby it attempts to embed itself in unique locales worldwide by adapting to local customs. McDonald's was forced to alter its menu significantly in order to achieve success in India. For example, in place of the Big Mac and Quarter Pounder, one finds the Maharaja Mac, the McAloo Tikka and the McCurry Pan. Interestingly, McDonald's also emphasises its global credentials by offering items such as the Crispy Chinese and the Mexican Wrap. Although the authenticity of these items could be called into question, they serve the purpose of reinforcing the restaurant's global image.

Pizza Hut has also tried hard to appeal to local tastes in India, and it has introduced the 'Great Indian Treat Menu' which offers customers a variety of Indian-style pizzas such as the Teekha Paneer Makhani and the Tandoori Paneer Chutneywala. Many Indians may scratch their heads in wonder, unable to understand why someone would rather pay exorbitant prices for these bizarre pizzas rather than eating authentic *tandoori paneer* at a local restaurant for a fraction of the cost. The reason is that Pizza Hut's customers are not simply eating a meal, but also purchasing and consuming the image of globality. One important part of this image is the global standard of service, the most consistent dimension of global fast food chains. 'Local' employees are required to assume a 'cosmopolitan' persona, and to always act in a cheerful, acquiescent, efficient and anonymous manner.

Other firms are also engaging in 'glocal' strategies in order to appeal to people who live and work in Gurgaon. This raises numerous questions about the 'locals'. Why do they find Gurgaon's entertainment plazas and shopping malls so seductive? Why have so many 'global' professionals and other people rushed to buy apartments in terribly expensive gated communities? Perhaps the answers lie in Gurgaon's emerging class structures.

Evolving Social Relations

It is fair to say that the current scope of social change in Gurgaon is comprehensive, and involves all aspects of life. There is clearly a break with the past, as people spend their leisure time in new ways, alter their diets, and exercise an increasing amount of control over deciding a marriage partner. These transformations have emanated from a radical and visible change in work culture dominated by 'captive' industries such as call centres and other BPO offices owned by a multinational. Many MNCs prefer not to outsource these operations, in order to have increased control. This is further evidence of how MNCs want to regulate the minutiae of each operation; this is also why call centre employees are subjected to rigorous training (accent, culture, etc.), and are forced to conform to microscopic details in every aspect of their work. BPOs operated by multinationals are still more likely than domestic BPO operations to promote employees on the basis of merit and ability, but domestic BPOs are rapidly adopting international human resource policies (Budhwar et al., 2006). This trend has created an entirely new class structure, in which individuals are increasingly mobile and responsive to a much wider range of social choices.

Whereas one's social position was previously more or less determined and regulated by the class into which one was born, new class structures allow for increased social mobility. This is not to say that the new class structures are based on equality, however, because fresh exclusionary entry barriers and class markers have emerged. The ability to consume, and access to space, are the two most notable features that determine one's class in Gurgaon. Yet these developments are not as liberating as they appear at first glance.

Individual consumption is currently one of the main determinants of a person's class in this global city. An estimated 25-30,000 people throng to Gurgaon's shopping malls on weekends (Ahuia, 2006). In a recent BBC series titled *India Rising*, businesswoman and Gurgaon resident Preeti Reddy commented, "The shopping mall represents the new Indian mindset of indulgence, of spending, of enjoying oneself, of enjoying your money" (Arney, 2007). In another segment of the same series, a BBC journalist interviewed call centre employees at Cybercity; they claimed that they earned a "phenomenal" salary, and that "the chunk of our salaries goes to shopping and just to keep ourselves, you know, updated" with branded goods (ibid.). Another call centre employee interviewed for the same programme said that everything must be branded, and that "lpods, nice phones, nice jeans, you know, everything must be valid" (ibid.). This obvious commitment to practices of consumerism is not indicative of all call centre employees, but it does illustrate how consumerism has become a class marker. Individuals display their class affiliation by wearing certain types of clothes, riding a certain type of motorcycle or using a certain type of mobile phone. These choices are consistent with the broader trend of the aestheticisation of everyday life, in the sense that the value of people and places is increasingly determined by visual signs and symbols. It has been noted that this trend is occurring in global cities worldwide (Lash and Urry, 1994; Featherstone, 1991).7

The emergence of class structures based on consumption is a common feature of the information age. Sociologist Mike Featherstone argues that "the competition to acquire goods in the information class generates high admission barriers and effective techniques of exclusion" (1991, p. 18). Therefore it is no surprise that Gurgaon's young professionals are the driving force behind shifting class structures. Many falling into this group are highly motivated, career-oriented individuals, who welcome human resource policies based on merit and ability rather than family connections and caste affiliation. Thus, for most of Gurgaon's young professionals these new social structures are liberating. Since identity and class affiliation are based on appearance and lifestyle, one can theoretically move into a higher social class quite easily if one conforms to certain parameters. For example, if a call centre worker moves into a management position, he/she can use the pay raise to acquire new goods that will display this higher status.

Most young professionals in Gurgaon do not know their colleagues' caste backgrounds, but they know what types of clothes their colleagues wear, and whether they arrive at the office in an autorickshaw or a chauffeured car. They know what their colleagues eat for lunch, whether they bring tiffin from home or order Pizza Hut's Tandoori Paneer

Chutneywala. This illustrates why access to space is so intimately linked with status in Gurgaon – the individuals who eat at Pizza Hut are engaging in a ritualistic display of acquired class status.

The relationship between space and class calls for further analysis.

A striking feature of Gurgaon's shopping malls is the presence of security guards at every entrance. One gets the feeling that they are not only scanning the crowd for potential troublemakers, but are also on the lookout for people whose profile does not match the mall's carefully crafted cosmopolitan image. When was the last time you saw an autorickshaw driver at a shopping mall? Theoretically he may be able to afford an occasional Coca-Cola, but he would be discouraged from consuming it within the precincts of Gurgaon's malls, because he would not be able to display the signs and symbols commensurate with 'global' space. People who cannot assume a cosmopolitan identity are meant to eat food on the street, while professionals eat at Indian Street Food. However, class structure in Gurgaon is not a facile division between haves and have-nots; there are innumerable and complex, coded gradations. But indubitably, access to space is one of the main ways Gurgaon's elites differentiate themselves from one another.

Gurgaon's 'global' professionals can be divided into two groups - those who reside 'locally' and those who commute to work in Gurgaon from Delhi or other places within feasible driving distance. Exorbitant property prices prevent all but the wealthy from residing in Gurgaon. Thus, living there has become an important class marker differentiating residents from the vast majority of professionals who commute from Delhi. Membership at DLF's City Club is limited to Gurgaon residents; and the online prospectus for DLF's exclusive gated residential complex Espace says that it is a community "for those who want to distinguish themselves from the masses" (Espace, Nirvana Country, Gurgaon, 2007). Another community, Fresco, is advertised as "a nurturing refuge from the bustle of the city, a refreshing oasis where residents enjoy peace of mind" (Fresco, Nirvana Country, Gurgaon, 2007). The DLF City News is rife with testimonials of Gurgaon residents that serve to reinforce this differentiation. One resident claims that life in Ridgewood Estate is pleasant because it is far removed from "speeding vehicles and dust, dirt and foul smell [of Delhi]" (DLF City News 2005, p. 4). Delhi is often portrayed as anarchic and dirty, while Gurgaon is portrayed as civilised, clean and cosmopolitan. As stated by one satisfied resident: "Removed from the chaotic traffic and noise of Delhi, we have our own small happy world here" (ibid., p. 4). The amount of one's time spent in this "small happy world" depends on one's class. Some people only work in this world, while others spend their entire lives within its tangible ethos of global aspirations.

Traversing a Frontier

Most people who work in Gurgaon's expanding BPO industry commute to their offices on a daily basis. Many of them come from areas of Delhi where traditional social structures persist. Thus, they cross a border every day, into Gurgaon's unique urban landscape of

proliferating global signifiers. Suddenly their caste background and family connections are meaningless, and their social standing is determined by their consumption patterns and the spaces they may/may not access. Many of these young professionals work in call centres where they traverse geographical borders figuratively, with the help of advanced information and communication technology. They receive Western names, accent and culture training, and spend the majority of their workshifts negotiating particular scripts with people around the world. All of this has contributed to a complex social landscape where tradition meets modernity and local meets global.

A great number of women are employed by BPOs, and this too is consistent with global trends. Manuel Castells recognised almost two decades ago that "there is a direct relationship between the rise of services and the feminisation of the labour force" (1989, p. 127). In the summer of 2006 I interviewed numerous female call centre employees, and they unanimously felt that while they enjoyed the salary, mobility and autonomy that came with their job, conservative 'local' society was still not ready to accept women in the workplace. This is reflected by countless articles that portray call centres as "dens of moral corruption". In an effort to counter this perception, some call centres have begun to allow their employees' families to visit during work hours, and others have instituted policies barring women from working the night shift (Misra, 2006). All the women interviewed said that dating between co-workers is a common occurrence, and that they felt accepted as equals by their male colleagues. However, some subjects claimed that these newfound freedoms are illusory. They felt that their value in the marriage market was diminished because they worked the night shift at call centres, and they also feared that this would conflict with potential in-laws' traditional notions of an acceptable partner for their son).

On the other end of the economic spectrum, there are three main slums in Gurgaon, and their occupants, employed in various capacities by the elite 'glocal' class, cross borders within the city on a daily basis. I interviewed members of one of these communities in the summer of 2006, and they estimated that roughly 5,000 people inhabited this particular slum. It was spatially very well planned and consisted of long rows of shacks made of cardboard and plastic, with each family occupying a single room. All my subjects were Bengali, and had been drawn to Gurgaon by the city's rapid economic growth which has created many jobs in construction and domestic services. Thus, most were engaged in work that continually exposed them to Gurgaon's global spaces and cosmopolitanism. According to Pieterse (2004, p. 31), many people in the global South are "within reach of global mass communications and advertising, within the reach of the message but not necessarily the action". In other words, this very large group is regularly exposed to the signs and symbols of globalisation, yet they are unable to consume or display them. They are keenly aware of their predicament; the people I spoke with said that some of the young members of their community visit the malls "clandestinely" (this was the word used by my translator).

Although actually less than a kilometre, the figurative distance between slum and global space is vast; and by sneaking into shopping malls such 'locals' must bridge an enormous psychological gulf of aspiration, as well as a literal gulf of social norms and rules. They must

disguise themselves by mimicking the behaviour of their upper-class peers. This is crossing a border in the truest sense!8

Most experts agree that in the near future, Gurgaon is poised to take advantage of the expected growth of knowledge process outsourcing. If this happens, we will see an even more dramatic and diverse irruption of signifiers on the urban horizon. The city is truly unique, defying classification as either Indian or Western. It is undeniably linked with the global economy, yet it exhibits strongly local forms, social structures and traditions that persist and manifest themselves in new ways. For theorists and consumers alike, it is an open question today as to whether these hierarchies will prevail within the commodity- and profit-driven 'glocal' environment; or whether the global and the local, embedded within and containing each other, will somehow work themselves into a more democratic and mutually supportive relationship.

Notes

- 1. The term 'global city' denotes more than a large agglomeration of urban space it refers to a city's status as a premier node in the global economy. Scholars in this field, such as Saskia Sassen, argue that the global economy is increasingly articulated by these cities, rather than by national economies. Sassen claims that global cities are the "command points" of the global economy (1991). Thus, they serve to link geographically distant economic zones. The most comprehensive introductory text on this subject is the Global Cities Reader, (eds.) Neil Brenner and Robert Keil (2006); see also the website of the Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network (www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/).
- 2. The term 'global space' is problematic because there is no single definition, as it is always a mixture of global signs and symbols and local influences. Thus, Tokyo's Roppongi area and New York's Times Square are both examples of global space, yet they differ on many accounts. However, there are characteristics that all global spaces exhibit, such as the existence of high profile mega-projects, access to which is highly regulated. These zones are characterised by ubiquitous global signifiers and the visual presence of multinational corporations. Finally, all 'local' global space is linked with global space worldwide by sophisticated information and communication technology enabled by 'local' infrastructure.
- The built infrastructure in Gurgaon's global space was designed by renowned Indian architects and highprofile international firms. One example of particular interest is Unitech's Global Business Park, codesigned by Oru Bose, master planner for Disney's elite private community Lake Buena Vista in Florida.
- 4. Indian law currently requires that all retail outlets be domestically owned. Thus, international chains such as McDonald's are franchises in India.
- 5. Many scholars have been critical of the rigid categories of 'global' and 'local' (Swyngedouw, 1997; Herod & Wright, 2002). Edward Soja (1996) argues convincingly that we must expand our sociospatial imaginations and create new scales of analysis, which more accurately describe hybrid urban forms emerging in global cities such as Gurgaon.
- 6. Many scholars have taken a more nuanced view of 'McDonaldisation'. Pieterse (2004, p. 51) argues that it is "a form of intercultural hybridisation", and gives numerous examples of the franchise's 'glocalisation' strategy. Interestingly, McDonald's restaurants in Germany have recently introduced some menu items that are ostensibly Indian, yet they are designed to appeal to German tastes. None of these items are to be

- found on McDonald's menus in India! The 'Chicken Delhi Katess' and the 'Pork Rajahal' were the two featured 'Indian' sandwiches, and Indians may be surprised to learn that Chinese-style spring rolls were sold as 'Indian food' under the auspices of 'Fakir Roellchen'.
- 7. The recent phenomenon of the proliferation of signs and symbols worldwide has been well documented. Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) give the most thorough account of how these symbols are disembedded from their original cultural contexts, and then assume new significance as they are reintroduced in other places. For a discussion on the importance of signs and symbols as class markers, see Mike Featherstone's Consumer Culture and Postmodernism (1991).
 - For a detailed discussion of the impact of 'global' signifiers, see Warren Neidich, "The Neurobiopolitics of Global Consciousness", Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 222-36 (online text at http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html). Using theorist Paul Virilio's concept of "phatic signifiers", Neidich explains that the word "phatic" shares the same root as "emphatic" (Gk. emphanein, 'to exhibit, display') "it means something that forces you to look at it". Fields of phatic signifiers are linked up in "large conglomerates of signification... The brand is only one part of a large landscape of interconnected signifiers". Phatic signifiers are produced according to the rules of cognitive and visual ergonomics, "and as such have greater 'attention-grabbing' qualities than those stimuli not so engineered... If one superimposes the effect of global capitalism on this perceptual system, one begins to understand its staggering proportions, for it has the potential of producing and disseminating these stimuli worldwide, and sometimes to bizarre excess". Neidich concludes that brands are a "distinctive form" of phatic signifiers, that become "attentionally intensified" when they are linked up to global campaigns in which they participate in other global phenomena, "such as the global flows of money, people, ideas, raw materials; and through which they interact with local food, languages and cultural customs".
- 8. Graham and Marvin's *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technical Mobilities and the Urban Conditions* (2001) is slightly outdated but still an authoritative source on the theme of the fragmentation of global cities. Isin (1999, p. 280) argues that marginalised groups in global cities routinely engage in "counterhegemonic practices, which are practices of insubordination, refusal and resistance". The example of youths I interviewed who live in 'local' slums and "clandestinely" visit Gurgaon's 'global' malls would be an example of this. Mittelman (2004, p. 27) calls such activity a form of "microresistance". He argues that these acts are overlooked by scholars who give undue attention to large politicised events such as the World Social Forum; and also suggests that when considered in depth, these acts "send forth streams of doubt and questions concerning the viability of neoliberal globalisation".

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Looking Outwards, and Outwards

Gauri Gill



Nizamuddin, New Delhi (2005)



Grand Trunk Road, New Delhi (2007)



Jodhpur, Rajasthan (2004)

I began to photograph urban landscapes in 2003, in the smaller *mofussil* towns and larger cities of Rajasthan. I have continued working in New Delhi and its neighbouring satellites – Gurgaon, Noida, Ghaziabad, Faridabad; and also in Mumbai and various cities in Uttar Pradesh. To me these landscapes are about the frontier, not only because I'm often shooting the borders of towns, suburbs, spillovers, where the rest of India starts to intermingle with its cities, but also because it's hard to say where the nebulous frontier lies any more. I am photographing what seems to be an endless city.



Bikaner, Rajasthan (2003)



Bikaner, Rajasthan (2003)



Gurgaon, Haryana (2004)



Mumbai, Maharashtra (2007)

Frontier Town:

Marking Boundaries in a Delhi Resettlement Colony 30 Years On¹

CRESSIDA JERVIS-READ

They have the swords in their hands and we were made the shield, so that when people come to Delhi they have to go through us people. What else was the sense of making us sit on the border...?

Ram Singh recalls the resettlement of 30 years ago, from the front steps of his house early one evening. Now in his 60s, he sits solidly on the threshold, taking in the view from his plot on the end corner of the *gali* (by-lane). In one direction are the built-up, boxy brick houses of the colony, a spindly tree and two of his young grandsons spinning a wooden top on the uneven concrete outside their house, further up the lane. In the other direction, past more recent *jhuggis* (squatter dwellings), scrub and grass, a couple of Sulabh toilet blocks mark the limit of the colony, and a sparse traffic of bicycles, rickshaws and handcarts make their way along the road running along the border between Delhi and the next state, punctuated by the roar of buses ploughing U-turns at the end of their route.

At the time of the resettlement, the residents of 'Power House' (cleared again in 2004 as the site of 'Yamuna Pushta') found themselves 'thrown' from their dwellings on the banks of the river Yamuna at the centre of Delhi to Punarvaspur on the eastern frontier of the city. Plans for



clearing the 'encroaching' *jhuggis* on the river bank are in circulation once again, ahead of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, to make way for parks and recreation; so Ram Singh muses, are the inhabitants of his home and of the many thousands of others earlier demolished and displaced, to 'sit on the border' and stand as a warning to all comers to the city?

As a one-time Customs man, Ram Singh might be expected to have a professional interest in the operation of borders. But sifting through the notes of my conversations with residents of Punarvaspur, it is frontiers, limits and boundaries, and the place of the neighbourhood in relation to the rest of the city, which are a recurring preoccupation for residents, as well as others with an interest in the terrain, such as NGOs and local politicians. The congested resettlement colony, with its mixed and often changing population, is a place of heterogeneous identities, and dense and occasionally fraught spaces, which can become charged with meanings and associations as people negotiate similarity and difference in their relationships with each other, within them. From the time of the resettlement, residents have worked hard to maintain both lives and livelihoods, often far from places of work. While the frontier of the city has since rolled upto and beyond Punarvaspur itself, as residents come and go daily through the same spaces, the borders of social life in the settlement are constantly remade through mobility, speech and assessments of dress, manners and customs. As social interactions are daily reiterated and relationships affirmed, it remains very much a place in progress.

At the Frontier of the City

One of the logics of a frontier is its capacity to transform space through the polarisation of similarities and differences so that new configurations of meaning accrete in relation to each side. What was once an undefined area, like the scrub of abandoned farmland prior to the resettlement, takes on consequence as a frontier is drawn between inside (the colony) and outside (the 'jungle'); between the city and the neighbouring state, or one *gali* or the next; one side in relation to the other. Frontiers work to contain and exclude people, objects and associations with them. Continually delineating interiors from exteriors, they may be deployed in an attempt to mark public arenas from domestic spheres, to distinguish family from mere neighbours, to mark one block from another. Yet they are rarely fixed or impermeable.

Punarvaspur was set down in 1976 on the eastern border of Delhi, during the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. Although not one of the more infamous incidents of resettlement, the episode was often no less violent, particularly for those settled in the second round in July of that year, as *parchis* (paper slips) for plots were traded for fertility.² Arriving on the site, and for some years afterwards, resettled residents tell of a place that was nothing but "jungle", describing themselves as "thrown out of the city". "You could kick the dust there and it would just fly, there was nothing to stop it", one woman said, scuffing her foot across the concrete of the present day *gali* by way of illustration. This sense of being pushed to the margins, into the unknown "jungle", is compounded by grisly descriptions of the place as a *qabristan* (graveyard), of its use as a cremation ground, of

wild animals and insects. Amidst these symbols of desolation and ruin, stories of intimidation or assault by marauding Gujjars from the surrounding villages, of widespread robberies and theft, added to the sense of insecurity and fear about the place.

Against this backdrop, perched on the precarious frontier edge of the city, a sense of the nascent neighbourhood emerges. These fragile new homes see the materialisation of a new series of relative 'insides' and 'outsides', areas of 'public' and 'private', where before there were none.³ Scholar Sudipta Kaviraj (1997, p. 94) writes of the home/ghar as "a realm of security, stable and patterned relationships which did not usually contain surprises", in relation to the public outside, the unruly bazaar (Chakrabarty, 1991, p. 17); or here, the fearful 'jungle' beyond the city. But as residents grappled with the uncertainty of the new settlement, with its creation came the production and the inscription of new divides, shaping the new spaces and marking the perimeters of the settlement.

In this uncanny⁴ landscape, while many gave up, sold their plots or simply left, residents who remained lived in clusters down lanes towards the centre. Families and people from the same village, or even just the same region, sifted themselves together, often as not away from those who belonged to other castes and religions, sieving like with like into the same galis. Here, old connections or links of kin could more reliably be leant upon, and there was the reassurance of knowing the kind of people you were surrounded by. As the city has come out to meet Punarvaspur and the place become more homely, surrounding land prices have risen; and inside the colony, plot values have escalated too. These surrounding areas are now built up into Gulshan Nagar and Gulshan Extension, areas of DDA (Delhi Development Authority) and privately developed, patchily plotted, four- and five-storey blocks of flats. But the boundaries of Punarvaspur remain physically marked relative to its neighbours by the size and style of its 3 x 7 metre plot development; and its straight, narrow, vehicle-excluding lanes continue to demarcate it from the surrounding flats and *jhuggi* areas.

The colony's origins as a site of resettlement are commonly known, and borders are maintained through boundary walls and disparaging talk. As residents of Gulshan Nagar and Gulshan Extension refer to people in Punarvaspur as *jhuggi*-dwellers in terms of criminality and fraud (referring to the trade in houses by the sale of power-of-attorney); so in the opposite direction, people in Punarvaspur speak of the unfriendliness of Gulshan Extension inhabitants who wouldn't give you the time of day. Yet, the divides between them are not in fact exclusive. A busy market and weekly *haat* (street market) draws residents from all three kinds of neighbourhoods. Women from Punarvaspur and the *jhuggi* areas work in the flats of Gulshan Nagar and Gulshan Extension, children enroll in primary school there, while many women in Gulshan Extension have come to adopt the Shiv *mandir* (temple) on the corner of Punarvaspur for their own use. The *mandir* itself is the project of an ex-Punarvaspur resident, a ration-shop owner and frustrated politician, himself now living in Gulshan Extension. For some new residents of Punarvaspur, crossing the border into Delhi from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh represents a first step into property ownership in the city, where electricity supply and schools are considered superior to those across the state border.

Yet boundaries remain to be maintained externally between the different areas, and between residents in Punarvaspur. The settlement's 'outside' connotations, as a frontier town on the state border, remains viewed with suspicion, partly fuelled by the nefarious associations between borders, illicit bars, liquor and trafficking. In this peripheral location Punarvaspur also remains a site for 'development' – from residents' perspectives, with the addition of floors to houses, but also in demands for reform and cleaning up, in ways similar to the modernising drives demanded of colonial bazaars as described by Chakrabarty (1991, p. 18). Its location is also marked through the activities of NGOs and politicians as a site of 'lack', in need of infrastructure, reform or education. Survey forms are used to marshal the frontiers of categories to tame unruly reality; and electorates are cajoled via the promise of 'development' and 'improvements'. However, the greatest concern for inhabitants is *between* one area and another – the uncertainty of not knowing whether people *are* actually who/what they say they are, in the fluctuating mix of neighbours and 'others' in this crowded urban terrain.

Internal Divides

Elsewhere in the city, in more elite (or "hi-fi", in local parlance) colonies, the operation of space is already partially structured: residence is ordered by income and access to property, so maintaining and limiting social relationships with others may be more straightforward. In these places, the need to mix extensively with one's neighbours may be avoided by withdrawal from the 'outside' and public spaces, as family life can be conveniently conducted in the prosperous space behind walls. Interaction with 'others' is mediated by security guards, colony gates and the time of day, regulating who and what kind of person may be admitted. In Punarvaspur, by comparison, where physical space is a great deal more limited and much domestic life conducted outside in the *gali*, more subtle means must be deployed. Here, frontiers of similarity and difference are discursively drawn through allusions to caste, class, region or religion, dress and deportment.

Most often, the signifier of the 'mahaul' (ethos/environment/atmosphere) is consciously as well as instinctively used to mark internal divisions within the colony. By associating certain kinds of people with the mahaul of different kinds of places, people come to interpret each other, and to structure their interactions accordingly. More concretely, spaces may be marked with shrines, or occasionally with gates to galis. These stand as physical markers of an affiliation to a group or a lane, as the organising principles of an informal frontier – of proximity and similarity, as well as distance and difference – are informally achieved.

But while clarity may be striven for out of the messiness of everyday life, it is rarely simple. The *mahaul* as a concern is frequently offered as an explanation for, or statement of, disquiet about the place or people there, both by residents and those regarding it from the outside. The scale of the term is relative and variable; it can refer to the entire settlement, or be as narrow as one end of a lane compared to another. While *mahaul* often

gets flatly translated as 'environment', it also connotes 'atmosphere', a sense or feeling about a place or of the situation there, also implying that it may change or be changed, rather than it being fixed or immutable. During my fieldwork I was often advised that I should not go to a certain block, or speak to people in a particular *gali*, as "...the *mahaul* is not good there". On other occasions the *mahaul* was the explanation for a child's lack of progress at school, or for bad habits that people were afraid their children would pick up.

This is similar to Daniel's (1984) analysis of the Tamil 'ur' (village) as a place where those people sharing the 'substance' of the locale, or compatible with its 'atmosphere', will thrive. By contrast, others who are not 'compatible' with its atmosphere, will have to do work on the locale to improve it, or to change their ways of inhabiting it to avoid taking on what may be seen as its 'bad habits' or negative attributes.⁶ But while scholars such as Daniel focus on understandings of personhood in rural south India, here I am more interested in understanding how people use these understandings of personhood to order and negotiate social relations with each other in a continuously changing urban space, and how they draw lines between domestic life and public space.

Knowing Who the Neighbours Are

Such knowledge is a matter of some import in Punarvaspur. With small plots built up on three sides, often with three generations of family resident, or rooms let out to tenants, much everyday life takes place outside in the space of the *gali*. A curtain across the front door often draws the boundary between the private space of the house and the *gali*, admitting the chance of a cool passing breeze but excluding invasive stares. Yet the space of the *gali* is neither quite private, nor totally public. Conventionally, more private areas such as those used for cooking and sleeping might be at the rear of a dwelling; more public spaces would be found at the front, where visitors can be received and access to the interior can be regulated (Vatuk, 1972; Dickey, 2000). In Punarvaspur, however, light and ventilation are available only on the roof, or at the front of the building, so that day-to-day tasks and social interaction most often happen on people's doorsteps. In this way, access to houses and the *gali* itself is monitored by the informal surveillance of residents. From steps and thresholds, or sometimes rooftops, acquaintances are greeted, gossip and information exchanged,⁷ or enquiries made and challenges issued to strangers.

Women dominate the *gali* during the daytime, especially if there is a power cut. It is a place for household chores, vegetables prepared in the daylight for a meal; washing is done here, and otherwise idle moments filled with home-based jobs, often embroidery work or beading. As the day goes on and men start to arrive home from work, the gendering of the space becomes more mixed, but remains domestic; mechanical items are repaired, motorcycles of wealthier households washed and checked, handcarts put up and autorickshaws parked for the night. While it is a quasi-domestic space, the *gali* remains open to anyone to walk down, accessible to inquisitive gazes from the public street. Yet the *galis* are also regulated as persistently as household spaces, just as the main road from which they branch off, is not.

As several girls put it, "In our *gali*, everyone is an 'uncle' or an 'aunt'"; and while 'boys' or young men might stare and pass comments in the street, this would be unlikely to be tolerated in the presence of parents, elders and neighbours in the *gali*. Neighbourly surveillance also has a gendering effect on the space of the *gali*, so that an eye to one's reputation regulates an individual's behaviour to that appropriately gendered in the domestic space of home. While men might play cards, talk, pass whiskey or simply pass time on the street, such activities are not appropriate within the *gali*, making it difficult for men and boys past school age and without work to be at home during working hours. Domesticity can also be marked by dress: working men may return home to divest themselves of their 'day wear' of shirt and trousers, and re-emerge from the house clad in *lungi* (sarong-like lower garment) and vest. Conversely, *dupattas* (long scarves) may be dispensed with entirely by women for the rigours of housework or tied round the body so as not to trail, but are pulled back into place or the *pallu* end of a sari adjusted into a *ghunghat* over the head, to partially or fully veil the face on physically leaving the 'domestic' *gali* for the 'public' street.

Where neighbourly relations are good, this informality of domestic life can be a way of reducing difference and boundaries between residents of a *gali*. Good relations between neighbours are necessary where the luxury of withdrawal from the space of the *gali* and attendant social interactions is difficult. Indeed, while some families do attempt to withdraw almost entirely from life in the lane, they do so at the risk of being regarded as haughty and aloof. But when the surveillance of neighbours fails, and the boundary of the private home is too strong, the results can be most shocking. They can be simply criminal, as with the pyramid-scheme seller and his family who disappeared one night with the savings of many neighbours, leaving only the debris of broken trust. More horrifying was the debt-driven suicide of a despairing tenant who killed himself after giving his young family poisoned milk to drink.

However, before relationships can be formed, there is the more complicated task of assessing the kinds of people that putative neighbours or acquaintances are, as Gurminder, a forceful mother of three in her 40s, married to a frequently absent lorry driver, and her coterie of neighbours agreed.

Repeating herself again, Gurminder emphasises that this residential block is "developed", "it is healthy and clean". Dominating the conversation, she speaks of the personal cleanliness of houses and clothes, casting an appraising eye over Khatun's house, in which we are seated. "Your clothing also matters, but many people don't bother". She gives the example of her tenant, who she says dresses very nicely, so much so that until recently she didn't know the tenant was illiterate – "but often her children don't even go to school". There is a murmur of assent and nodding from Gurminder's listeners, as if this was to reveal what kind of people the family really are. "In Punarvaspur, people in the *jhuggi* areas don't wear fresh clothes everyday. People there spit *paan* (betel-nut juice), there is rubbish – it is dirtier. There is greater need, and people cannot improve their *mahaul*. We can't sit with each other..."

Everyone clustered around Gurminder speaks at once, but the conclusion is that "here people can live better", "educate their children", and so "people are smarter".

The persistent mention of a 'good' *mahaul* as Gurminder describes it is largely a claim of class and aspiration through a desire for and acquisition of better education, better modes of dress and behaviour, as compared to others in surrounding blocks. As Gurminder points out, appearances are not always reliable indicators. But this assessment of a person relative to the *mahaul* is usually the only index available when deciding on what kinds of interactions to have with someone. Here then, her tenant's dress and deportment were convincing.

For Gurminder, the effect of the *mahaul* is evident as she points out the 'inevitability' of certain kinds of behaviour of people 'there'. This is a major concern, particularly to uppercaste people in a 'reserved' (lower-caste) constituency, where political power does not lie with them. These terms compelled Gurminder to comment both about others in the neighbourhood and elected representatives without using explicitly caste-based language. More pressingly, though, is the uncertainty at the level of everyday interactions. As another woman grumbled: "People here are mixed. I don't know who you are, but if you say you are a Brahmin, I have to believe you... We are not related here; we are all from different villages..."

Physical Boundaries

Things are not always so indeterminate. Some *galis* were more or less recreated from those at the original settlement sites, others are clustered around regional or religious associations with the lane. 'Masjid-Wali *Gali*' has a large mosque in the park at one end, and but only one 'Madrasi' (south Indian) family remains in 'Madrasi-Wali *Gali*', while the name and association remains with the small 'Madrasi' *mandir* at the end of the lane. Another *gali* has subtly, silently, become populated mainly by Brahmin and Rajput families who,



concerned at the mix of residents belonging to other castes, regions and religions, collected money to put up tall gates at the ends of the *gali*. Shut at night and half-open during the day, they stop small children running out into the main street beyond, but residents were also pleased that fewer male vendors with handcarts came into the lane, and that it was no longer used as a shortcut, keeping the mêlée of the main road at bay. Ramesh, a resident in his late thirties with a young family, works as a peon in an MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) office. Arriving home from work on his rickety scooter to impose himself on the conversation at large, he argued that the successful collection of money for the *gali* gates was evidence of the peaceful, orderly relationships between householders in this *gali*, from which the fights and poor *mahaul* of other lanes, as well as the commotion of the main road, had been excluded.

Elsewhere, *mandirs* and *masjids* in parks, or smaller ones set into walls, may also mark the boundaries between different groups of people. While often genuinely devotional, they can also have more utilitarian purposes. Kamlesh, in her forties with two teenage daughters, lives between her brothers-in-law, at the opposite end of the lane from the main market. This market separates the two phases of resettlement and different predominant communities, marking an antipathy between the fish- and meat-eating 'Bengali' (Muslim) community, and the nominally vegetarian Hindu households. But although the vegetable market lies on the western or 'Hindu' side, the vendors throughout the market are predominantly Muslim. This fact, and the anarchic mess and crush of shoppers, is a source of anxiety to Kamlesh and others in abutting *galis*. As the rush peaks at around 7 pm, increasing numbers of people cut through the lane, bringing the very public cacophony and debris of the market with them.

A mandir containing a statue of the goddess Durga occupies a small space at the market end of Kamlesh's lane. It was good the temple had been built, Kamlesh explained, adding that it had been set there specifically to deter the market's vegetable sellers from parking their handcarts on that spot. To this end, the residents of the mainly Hindu gali had collected money and constructed the shrine. "It's so they [the vendors] could not capture this [space]. It started very small, and then after a couple of years it was built bigger". Kamlesh's daughter Archana is more blunt. "On this side of the road, it is good; on that side [gesturing to the market and beyond] it is filthy – there everyone is Bengali, they throw bones [of meat], it is completely filthy".

While the *mandir* has not prevented the lane being used as a general shortcut – conversations were often interrupted by the belligerent cough and fart of a diesel tempo delivering vegetables from the Azadpur wholesale market – the lane has been marked as 'Hindu', in opposition to the 'Bengali' block and market beyond, and has in fact reduced the actual incursion of vegetable stalls into the lane. As reflected in Archana's comments, on both sides of the market people had entrenched views and prejudices with regard to the social customs and habits of other residents. It was claimed these were detrimental to the *mahaul* – whether it was vegetarians commenting on meat-eaters, or high castes commenting on low castes. These structures have a rhetorical effect, literally concretising

the frontier between communities, appearing as a banal, everyday reminder of the purported ill effects of the 'other' community on the *mahaul*.⁹ They also put into material effect the claims to space and frontiers of the respective communities, and demonstrate each group's ability to organise the means to mark this.

Conclusion

Frontiers operate in many different ways and at different levels in Punarvaspur in its physical location on the frontier of the city, even if it is no longer surrounded by 'jungle'. Houses and walls have transformed the scrub and wilderness into an emergent habitation, and through the assessment of the 'prototypical category' (Frøystad, 2005) of the *mahaul*, its residents have marked out its spaces out with speech.

Operating in this way, the *mahaul* has to be decoded through the uncertain and ambivalent interrelations in the public space of the neighbourhood. Based on previous 'knowledge' or associations, and physical attributes, it can provide crucial pointers regarding how to quickly assess and place people in relation to each other and the space they are in. Hence, the meaning of the *mahaul* and what people draw from it also emerges from the relative positioning within it of people by each other. Produced largely through speech and conversation, it operates deictically, so that talking about others in reference to oneself allows some kind of relative ordering of the unruly and mixed-up nature of the environs. It works as a means of allowing people to 'know' something about otherwise yet-unknown 'others', and to position themselves accordingly.

In placing Punarvaspur on the edge of the city, perhaps the state hoped, as resident Ram Singh suggested at the beginning of this essay, that such a place would deter future migrants from coming to the city. However, in many ways it was more a very visible declaration of the marginality of the residents in their place in the city. Certainly, in their associations as 'ex-squatters' or 'encroachers', the slur of illegality and criminality remains, particularly in the naming of the local *thana* (police station) after the colony; or it being reiterated in newspapers and policy documents as a 'slum', and hence of dubious value. In this way it appears as a site in need of 'development' and as a locale where a number of 'target populations' for NGO programmes may be conveniently found.

Under constant consideration, the *mahaul* is a strong issue around which to pragmatically organise. Accordingly, promises to improve water supply or remake drains, or to 'mobilise' people to form community sanitation squads to 'improve the *mahaul* of the place' have all been promoted by both local politicians, as well as NGOs. While this might motivate the community because such actions or policies can produce visible, tangible, local benefits, it is also because residents know that what they really desire – stable jobs, income, reliable education, to be able to move beyond the *mahaul* of Punarvaspur – are aspirations which in fact *cannot* be achieved by these organisations.

Meanwhile, the *mahaul* as it is invoked offers the means of producing new boundaries of constituents, or groups of people prepared to participate in the more modest aims of

NGO programmes; or simply producing in day-to-day life the further creation and organisation of resilient demographic frontiers.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

- 1. This research was undertaken as part of a wider doctoral research project exploring the role of 'civil' and 'political society' in the history and development of the neighbourhood, through the relationships between residents, neighbourhood organisations, NGOs and local politicians. Positioning myself as a student with a particular interest in the history of the colony and experiences of residents over the years, served to distance me from NGOs in the neighbourhood (and a litany of complaints about public services in the locale), particularly from the periodic tours of international donors to projects there. The majority of the research was carried out through a combination of casual conversations and more directed but informal 'interviews'; and also some 'snowballing', as I was directed to individuals who people thought I should talk to. The names of local residents and sites used in this essay are pseudonyms.
- 2. In the intervening period between the first round of resettlement in the first days of January 1976 and the second round in July of the same year, the 'Family Planning' campaign seems to have gathered considerable momentum. Newspapers of the time reported ever-increasing numbers of people as having been 'motivated' to undergo voluntary sterilisation. However, the brutal realities and Faustian bargains brokered are better recorded by Emma Tarlo in her book *Unsettling Memories* (2003, also 2000 and 2001), based on research in the Welcome locality in Seelampur, also an East Delhi settlement.
- 3. Both Chakrabarty (1991) and Kaviraj (1997) explore shifting conceptions of 'inside', 'outside', 'public' and 'private' in the interactions of colonial conceptions of public space and the domestic private realm beyond the state. While their trajectory is different from the one developed in this essay, they also, however focus on the negotiation of frontiers in the politics and meanings of space.
- 4. Freud writes of "unheimlich", often translated into English as "uncanny", as that "realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread" (2003, p. 123); but which on closer investigation, is also "everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away", but "has come into the open" (ibid., p. 132). After the upheaval and violence of the resettlement, it is easy to see how many one-time villagers, then ex-city dwellers, might feel they had been thrown somewhere quite 'uncanny' where it was difficult to know what aspects remained hidden or exposed in the anarchy of dislocation and the upheaval of lives turned upside down. The converse, "heimlich", more often translated as "homely", also covers "what is concealed and kept hidden" (ibid.); and perhaps also what is built up in secrets and shared histories within families and between neighbours over time.
- 5. This can be quite literal, as broken bricks and spare concrete from a house construction is very often the source of materials for a small shrine in a *gali*.
- 6. In this respect, the 'mahaul' as a concept works within larger South Asian 'ethno-sociological' understandings of the connectedness of persons and substance; hence the ingrained belief that people

can be affected by polluting places or occupations. Related to Dumont's work (1981) on purity, pollution and hierarchy, Marriott (1990) also argues for an 'ethno-sociological' approach, taking vernacular concepts as categories – in this case, the shifting of substance between persons and place. This is also used by Daniel (1984) to explore the openness of persons to the interrelationships between physical environment and person: physical, mental and moral. More usefully here, Parry (1989) argues that this view of the openness of people is better understood as an ideology that serves to stabilise and direct relationships.

- 7. This varies from enquiries or news about family members, to information about new home-based work opportunities. In this way galis are rich conduits for information, as much as progressive layers of boundaries. It was striking how rapidly this kind of information could travel.
- Similarly, Anita Weiss (1998) also explores the ways in which the differently gendered use of physical space has been transformed by the relocation of people from the walled city of Lahore to newly built suburbs on the outskirts.
- This is very similar to the routine 'flagging' of symbols and habits of language in the shaping and reiteration of 'community' that Michael Billig notes in his study of 'banal nationalism' (1995).

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Moving Cities: Life on the New Frontier

BERT DE MUYNCK

If design is merely an inducement to consume, then we must reject design; if architecture is merely the codifying of the bourgeois model of ownership and society, then we must reject architecture; if architecture and town planning is merely the formalisation of present unjust social divisions, then we must reject town planning and its cities... until all design activities are aimed towards meeting primary needs. Until then, design must disappear. We can live without architecture...

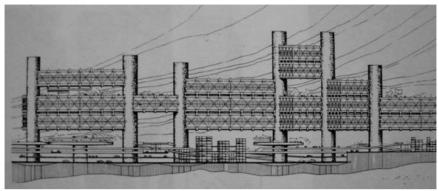
Adolfo Natalini, Superstudio

Introduction

All over the world, physical borders are bombarded with a diversity of questions, researches and debates. The contemporary world is governed by the following paradox: the more intensely the course of its development is analysed as a state of flux, a flowing network of goods, resources, thoughts and people, the louder the claims on the singularity of territories and the tougher the separation (through walls, passports, biometric scans) between its nations. Today the airport, a high-security enclave, is the new frontier. Looking the same almost everywhere, airports channel bodies and goods; and bring human beings into the same illusory state as evoked by contemporary theorist Paul Virilio citing the French writer Georges Rageot, who claimed in 1902: "Today's traveller can say: I am an inhabitant of earth, just as if he were saying, I am an inhabitant of Asnières... There are travellers who no longer even know they're travelling"¹.

At the same time, the surroundings of the airport create a new type/hype of city, aerotropolis: mostly single-use, one-dimensional and homogeneous areas where streets are not streets and its inhabitants are not inhabitants, but rather 'employees'. The organisation of the contemporary world is no longer about space; it's about time and cost. Accessibility has replaced location.

Architecture is the art of making frontiers and divisions, expressing inclusion and exclusion, reduction and expansion, liberty and oppression, protection and defence. It is almost impossible to define architecture without resorting to these or similar binaries.



City in the Air (Arata Isozaki, 1961)

The City as an Archipelago

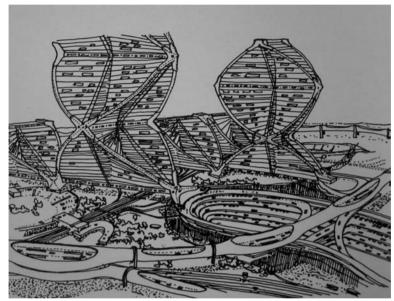
All cities deal with the question of the 'urban frontier'. Brussels, the capital of my country and of the European Union, is encircled by a massive ring road, creating a hard separation between the urban politics of the city and the 'sprawl' politics of its hinterland. This ring road transforms the city into an island where everything could be possible. When driving through the city, one is mesmerised by the eclectic image this *everything is possible* strategy, ideology or fantasy has produced. It is not uncommon to find in one street a cross-section of architectural history, from the classically postmodern to no-nonsense apartment buildings from the 1970s, to an Art Nouveau masterpiece built at the turn of the 19th century placed next to a tower in the high-tech international style of the 1990s...

The result is the ultimate clash of cultural imaginaries. The urban space of Brussels is constituted of frontiers, borders and clear edges. The city looks as if planners of different stamps and convictions were forced to work together, each independently decoding Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas' famous prophecy in *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972): "So the city of the future, and in fact even the city of today, constitutes not a whole but an archipelago of different enclaves, where ideological values could be installed in limited, strong and specific places, but with no pretence at being universal"².

Today I live in Beijing, and confront the ongoing explosion of urban, human and architectural frontiers. My spatial experience is close to the state of hallucination Aldous Huxley recalls in *The Doors of Perception*:

The really important facts were that spatial relationships had ceased to matter very much and that my mind was perceiving the world in terms other than spatial categories. [...] Place and distance cease to be of much interest. The mind does its perceiving in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern.³

The present, ever-evolving Chinese urban condition is the next frontier of urbanity, ruled by a non-linear paradigm established through maximising mobility, and through an intense and profound rearrangement of the culture of cities. Any attempt to define urbanity here implies being subject to a constant struggle with its etymology – the very word is linked to the Latin *urbs* (walled town). In Beijing, all walls have been torn down except the one surrounding the Forbidden City, and everything floats – a relentless whirlwind of people, money, buildings, infrastructure, food, thoughts and life. Walls were demolished in the first instance so as to create with their raw material new buildings; now other countries are lured to trade their resources to create new Chinese cities.



Helicoids Project (Kisho Kurokawa, 1961)

Modernism Revisited

A world without frontiers, a world without borders, architecture without walls, life without buildings, architecture without architects...

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Western and Japanese architectural avant-garde seriously speculated about projecting amazing structures throughout existing cities, with the intent of dissolving the borders between humans and nature, urbanism and architecture, development and supposed backwardness. At that time the West was fast-growing; and in this state of development – a state of deliberate instability, an ethos of transition, a climate of transformation – borders and frontiers disappeared. However, they only disappeared in order to appear again, this time arranged in a different order...

When in a state of completeness, real or imagined, society becomes exclusive – borders appear, humankind celebrates itself, and interaction is limited to what is encapsulated by this frontier. When a society is in transition, everything seems to be intertwined, full of potentialities dependent on and related to each other. When the future is bright, frontiers dissolve. After World War II, the future of rapidly evolving Western architecture seemed to embody the following fast-growing mantra:

[...]fast-growing industrialisation, a fast-growing population, and a fast-growing urbanisation. And one of the by-products of this world is that architecture is coming to be considered as just another product, able to be produced almost full-blown by the same processes that now make other things for human use.⁴

As a product, architecture does not in and of itself pose the question of the border, but becomes a medium offering the seductive possibility for all things to flow into, hold and frame each other - culture, politics, construction, gravity, economy, materiality, spatiality, intellect, love, family, society and sociology (to name just a few). Within this open-ended logic, the parameters of contemporary urbanism and architecture are reworked by the designer: s/he discards the idea of the central city - the single crater around which the peripheral lava coagulates – as well as tabula rasa and related CIAM (Congrès International de l'Architecture Moderne) concepts relating to restoration and the survival of built heritage. Instead, urbanism is projected upon, through and under the existing matrix, as for instance in Yona Friedman's Paris Spatial (1957) and Kenzo Tange's Tokyo Bay Project (1960). These projects show a thrilling confidence in the ability of the designed system to digest all population growths and swings; technology offers a vision of a civilisation that is in a selfsustained state of change, luring our image and perception of what the city is into the permanent realm of metabolism. In an ideal world without borders, architects create spaces and situations for ongoing change, mobility, exchange, democracy and leisure, as one can see in the work of Yona Friedman, Fumihiko Maki, Archigram, Constant, Kisho Kurokawa and Cedric Price.

Intermezzo 1

If one area experiences a shrinking of populations and economy, then this means that in other regions there will be growth of the same factors. Basically, one could state that growth in one sector causes shrinkage in another. In today's world of globalised capital and labour, everything is interconnected, so both shrinking and expanding are not phenomena completely separated from each other. One important mistake in the Shrinking Cities project, I believe, was the isolation of the shrinkage phenomenon; and by doing so we do not get to understand the full scope or extent of its relations with the dynamics of urban growths. That is why I pleaded not to look at our subject cities as shrinking or expanding, but rather as 'moving' cities.

Kyong Park, interview with the author, 9 April 2007, Beijing

Thoughts on the 'Present'

Beijing is a metropolis without a clear border, without a frontier. Although one could state, innocently, that the present is the frontier, and that the speculation about the future is the driving force to push that frontier forward.

In this expanding city different modes of urban and architectural development are powerfully intertwined. Economies flow into each other and are juxtaposed in a terrifying and beautiful way. People literally breathe the state of transition. This city is on a headlong flight forward. This is more obvious in some parts than in others, but each reinforces the boundlessness of the whole. It is urbanity cut loose from its moorings and drifting on real-estate speculation, the memory of a disappearing history, the incomprehensibility of the audacious (and simultaneously disappointing) manifestation of the new. There is no clear distinction between what is being erased and what is being inscribed. It is not difficult to acknowledge *what* eventually will disappear – *everything*, except the forbidden void at the heart of the city. At the same time, it is impossible to think what will appear. No other city in the world currently deals so intensely with finding a new relation between emerging modern physical, human, economic, cultural and artistic dimensions, thereby creating an image of the time that is so far ahead and yet so immediate.

Or as Rilke (Virilio, 1991) suggests: "What happens is so far ahead of what we think, of our intentions, that we can never catch up with it and never really know its true appearance".

Living in an urban condition that is driven by the fundamental need for rapid, conscious change in both social, collective, civil and individual life, it is impossible to discern whether we are heading towards a dead-end, taking a phantasmagoric shortcut in urban evolution, spinning continuously in the same loop or taking the same track that other, more 'developed' nations did in their own histories. Although China has more than a billion eyes, hands and minds, we might as well be blindfolded, handcuffed and hallucinating; and although we are creative, it is equally possible that we are saving it for better times. Life without frontiers then becomes the experience of an intimately linked series of situations, intentions and behavioural patterns whose modes of existence involve not just architecture and design, but also art, communications, criticism, philosophy and politics.

The process of dissolving borders and frontiers, which could also be termed the *fleeing* frontier, can be understood as a form of radical urban acculturation. Beijing constitutes not a whole but a patchwork of different zones where the past and the present meet and clash. Driving and walking around the city, observing it, thinking about it, reminds me of Superstudio's assertion: "It is in these zones that one witnesses the annihilation of a culture and its more or less painful replacement by another: one often comes across abandoned farmhouses whose owners seems to have suddenly disappeared"⁵. In Beijing one witnesses a similar destruction and substitution, but spectrally, from behind the mirror: one often comes across abandoned office towers whose owners seem to have suddenly disappeared. This disappearance is a postponed appearance, as nobody really knows when

















these towers will be operational, or serve any purpose beyond being a spatial marker in the urban scene. Rumour goes that at least 40% of the office buildings in Beijing are empty.

Intermezzo 2

In the present, and in the future, we will be less concerned about the so-called fundamentals of architecture and urban planning, but constantly seek instead to evaluate each other's movements. We will rather be looking at what the plans, the infosthetics, the diagrams, the mapping, will be telling us about how people, crowds, masses and individuals behave in the city each day, each minute, each second. Get an accurate picture of where the crowd is moving and you jump on for the ride – uphill or downhill – it doesn't matter.⁶

Floating between Urban and Rural

We have been looking for the city in the wrong places. In the course of its historical 'development' humankind has crossed a crucial frontier, the divide between the urban and rural. Today supposedly more people live in urban than in rural conditions, and it is expected that this will inevitably escalate. However, it is not a clean, classic split: the world is mixed with rural-urban sites, peri-urban environments, in-between zones subject to migratory movement, temporary shelters and havens for the massive floating population of migrants who are not *inhabitants* but *employees* of the city. Their access to the labour required by the city counts more than their location within the city. That location is transient and ephemeral. We could consider this analysis neat and convincing, as it places the migrant population on the treadmill of migratory movement from overdeveloped, high-priced land to comparatively raw and unoccupied land. The difference between the policies governing the countryside and those governing the city created in the 1980s a generation of 'floating migrants' that roam through China today. The effects of these migrants on the growth and reorganisation of the cities reciprocally influences the urbanisation of the countryside:

Among China's huge "floating population" of rural-to-urban migrants were not a few who moved in order to give birth to more children. Unrestricted by urban work units or residence officials, peasant communities in the cities sometimes served as "safe heavens" where couples could have births without fear of being fined – to the great frustration of local birth planning officials. (...) Meanwhile, the youngest generation, having grown up in a media-saturated culture and in many cases having experienced city life firsthand, were living in imagined worlds that were urban rather than rural. Carrying modern urban culture, these returned migrants, now roughly one-third of all rural-to-urban migrants, are major forces for reproductive change in the villages.

'Moving' Cities: Life on the New Frontier

In order to research, discuss and formulate the future of architecture and urbanism, and to determine the agenda for life on the new frontier of emerging urban situations, some of us are

exploring the concept of *moving cities*. For us, studio studies are less challenging than work in the open urban air, where from minute to minute the energies of people, space, architecture and society vibrate, transform, coalesce and disperse, reconfigure and recalibrate.

For us, Rilke still makes sense – even if situations are so far ahead of what we think, of our intentions, one day we will surely catch up with their true appearance...

In line with the Futurist agenda of poet and propagandist Filippo Tomaso Marinetti, we inscribe ourselves in the old tradition where people are described as the 'primitives' of a new and completely transformed sensibility. What we have inherited from the Futurists is the intense concern with *materiality in flux*. In our own way we want to prolong, extend and connect with the manner in which this radical artistic movement threatened hitherto received ideas about space and time – more generally still, about all such principles of order in the world.

When and where do cities start 'moving'? Can we see, feel, smell or even understand this? The movement of cultures, of communities, seems to follow a strange path. The primitive cultures adopted a certain form of nomadism – these days embraced by a group of highly mobile people, "travellers who no longer even know they're travelling", struggling with the technological constraints this world has put on their effort to be nomadic. We, i.e., industrialised and 'developed' cultures, follow the path of progress, along lines of infrastructures, moving from hub to hub. These are mostly located in already existing cities. We don't pioneer anymore, we don't theorise nor centralise anymore. We despise intensity, and what we like to do is to move everything through division, segmentation, categorisation, separate this from that – centres from suburbs, high-rise from houses, people from places. New movement provides the opportunity for the creation of new places, 'occupied territories' that will attract new flows of people, goods, consumers and resources. These flows, that experience different levels of restrictions within urban space, are only to be halted at borders.

The concept of 'moving' cities does not connect to conditions of transition as such, but rather to processes of intensification, circulation, accumulation, formation and standardisation provoked by this time of transition.

Thinking beyond the Borders: Maximum Mobility

What we witness and are mesmerised by, almost to the point that we don't, or can't, understand its functioning, its modus operandi that now dominates large areas of the world, is *maximum mobility*, a term coined by economic historian Fernand Braudel.

As artist/philosopher Manuel De Landa explains in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, maximum mobility is "the layer where large amounts of financial capital, for example, flowed continuously from one highly profitable area to another, defying frontiers and accelerating many historical processes"⁸.

The two other layers, that together with maximum mobility form the three separate flows moving at different speeds through the history of the past millenium, are what Braudel terms "material life" and "accelerators of all historical time". As defined by De Landa:

[...] "material life", the know-how and traditional tools, the inherited recipes and customs, with which human beings interact with plants to generate the flow of biomass that sustains villages and towns. This body of knowledge resists innovations and hence changes very slowly, as if history barely flowed through it. (...) Next comes the world of markets and commercial life, where the flow of history becomes less viscous. Braudel calls market towns "accelerators of all historical time".

The socioeconomic contours of developing countries are still determined by these three flows today. Urban and architectural development in these nations is inevitably and unavoidably intertwined with these flows. Along with the flow of financial capital, halting to circulate in some cities, or infiltrating one country after another, comes the flow of people, ideas, knowledge and styles. They halt only temporarily, as if briefly touching the ground and then taking the next leap to a different site. Today's problem could be that we don't understand this temporality, and that we have not been able to get a grip on an ephemeral that lasts for a hundred years. In vain, it seems, we search for concepts and tools to deal with this; desperately we implement methods that have proven their use in the past; painfully we watch reality come into being, history unfolding, the future nervously knocking on new doors of perception.

Meanwhile the three flows move along at different speeds, forcing different trajectories and modes of 'development'. Is there a beauty, or a method, in the madness of this inevitable movement?

Space, the Final Frontier...

Increased mobility has put pressure on our understanding of the concepts of frontiers and borders. Increased movement has made it very difficult for us to recognise how the new contemporary cities manifest. Like Beijing, the new cities, the ones in the making, the ones transforming, meet none of our preconceptions of what constitutes a city.

"First there was downtown. Then there were suburbs. Then there were malls. Then Americans launched the most sweeping change in a hundred years in how they live, work, and play"¹⁰. Twenty years later, we should seriously ask ourselves if our minds will even be able to perceive a new reality, as Huxley did, *in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern.* A lot has changed; and we need to urgently formulate alternatives in discourse, design, education and human organisation. In all our frenetic mobility and anxious construction of a new sequence of fluctuating and contingent borders, we have lost the sense of what the city is *really* about.

We are disturbingly out of alignment with the so-called fundamentals of architecture and urban planning: *space*, *space*, *space*.

Editors' Note:

Kyong Park is a curator and artist, and a founding member of the International Centre for Urban Ecology in Detroit, as well as Centrala Stichting voor Toekomstige Steden in Rotterdam. He co-curated the international exhibition *Shrinking Cities* (2005). Artists, architects, filmmakers, graphic artists, journalists and cultural/social scientists developed over 60 works for the project. Themes ranged from the neglect and appropriation of spaces, through changed practices of daily life, survival strategies, and new forms of work, to the development of innovative subcultures and criticism of existing planning cultures.

Natasa Petresin's interview of Kyong Park and Marjetica Potrc, "The Dynamic Balkans: A Working Model for the EU?" appeared in *Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence* (CSDS, 2006, Delhi), pp. 320-28.

Reader 06 online text: http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader_06.html

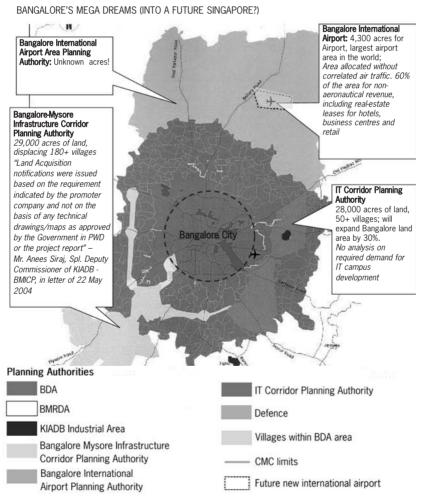
Notes

- 1. Paul Virilio. The Aesthetics of Disappearance (Semiotext(e), 1991, Paris), p. 102.
- Rem Koolhaas. "Of the Captive Globe: An Explanation by Rem Koolhaas". In Architectural Design, No. 5, p. 331 (1977).
- 3. Aldous Huxley. The Doors of Perception & Heaven and Hell (Grafton, 1977, London), p. 17.
- Ellen Perry. "Future of Urban Environment: The Metabolist Group". In *Progressive Architecture* 45, p. 162 (1964).
- 5. Superstudio. Life Without Objects (Skira, 2003, Torino), p. 226.
- 6. Draws upon a statement by art critic, writer/cultural theorist and activist Brian Holmes. See http://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2007/05/03/the-speculative-performance/#more-163. Holmes is a particularly involved in the mapping of contemporary capitalism. His essay "Three Proposals for a Real Democracy: Information-Sharing to a Different Tune" appeared in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 215-20. Reader 05 online text: http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader_05.html
- 7. Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler. *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (University Press, 2005, Stanford) pp. 222, 229.
- 8. Manuel De Landa. A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History (Swerve Editions, 2000, New York) pp. 128-29.
- 9. Ibid.
- 10. Joel Garreau. Edge City: Life on the New Frontier (Anchor Books, 1991, New York).



Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses

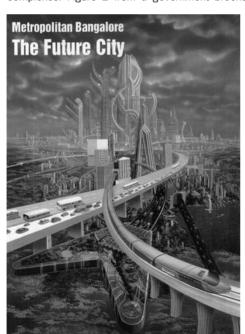
SOLOMON BENJAMIN



1. The Nation State and 'The Economy', with some activist comments

I propose the concept of Occupancy Urbanism as a way to read the everyday city and its spaces of politics. The city is understood as an intense dynamic that is being built incrementally via multiple contestations of land and location. This concept poses the urban 'frontier' as an *oppositional site* rather than accepting it as a definitive edge to 'Capital'. This site, built around land, economy and complex local politics, is shaped by multi-dimensional historicities embedded in daily practice. It offers an unexpected resilience, stakes an unpredictable claim that cannot easily be uprooted via narratives of maps, modernity shaped by 'Mega' projects, civil society, economic imperatives, or the rubric of 'development'. Nor does it accept the nature of 'resistance' shaped by explicit purpose and organisation as viewed in 'social movements' or NGO-centric 'deep democracy', or reactions reduced to 'tactics' in confrontation with 'strategies'.

Ambivalence towards Mega city building across seemingly divergent ideological positions can be clearly seen in the following renditions of the 'Plan'. Figure 1 shows a map of Bangalore City surrounded by three main Mega plans and their authorities to globalise it: a new international airport, and surrounding it, the designated airport planning authority; the IT corridor and its planning authority; and, the Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Planning Authority. While the scale of these operations are each several times the size of Bangalore city, there are other smaller Mega developments in the form of huge housing complexes. Figure 2 from a government brochure shows a futuristic Bangalore whose



2. Bangalore as a globalised metropolis (from a government brochure)

mimetic ideal, the Singapore model, is depicted in images of the proposed airport: illuminated passenger lounges, high roofs, coffee shops with uniformed attendants, glittering outlets interspaced by palm trees. These modernist images obviously underline particular types of real estate, globally connected big business and financial institutions. and an appropriate regulatory regime. For the neo-liberal globalists (a term that encapsulates this diverse group), the Mega set in both plan and map is 'The Economy' and development in the huge market amenable for tapping and investment. It provokes sharp and vivid reaction and resistance from well-meaning progressive activists. But here too, similar to the neo-liberal globalists, belief lies in grand plan to 'balance growth' via satellite townships to organise development and to stem 'slum development'; i.e., a model of participatory good governance.¹

While assuming the inevitability of globalisation via Mega projects, activists and academics raise technically accurate, specific points of critique:

- > huge territories proposed for acquisition, drawing on newly reconstituted harsh land acquisition laws and institutional procedures
- > huge and hidden subsidies to big business
- > the capture of the policy process
- > harsh evictions and demolitions that make way for malls, hotels and convention centres, glass-walled commercial and IT complexes

A more nuanced reading of both progressive activism and big business points to absurdity and a paradox.

The absurdity lies in what has been pointed out regarding progressive activism's creating a 'Ghost': Mega projects projected larger than life, to be an inevitable future, and thus justifying a mega 'resistance'. As important, this creation of the Ghost of macro liberalisation poses the local as being marginalised, feudal and incapable of strategic politics. This view may be rooted in a lack of field understanding of diverse political practices, 'development' and 'progress' as negotiated on the ground, and the demands of a public performance in order to build public legitimacy and constituency.

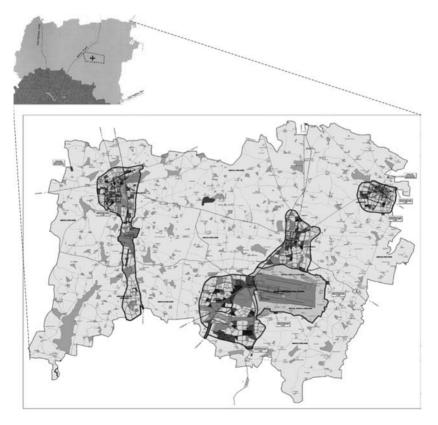
A paradox emerges from the 'capture' of a progressive language by neo-liberal globalists: call for *more* state intervention via more and effective Master Planning; 'social organisations'- or NGO-assisted pro-poor housing to replace slums; transparency and reduction of corruption especially at the municipal level; and establishment of 'rights-based' development via the establishment of clear land titles. A hint towards unravelling this paradox is that such views are most strongly asserted by those confronting the ground-level 'frontier of liberal expansion': very large and powerful land developers of the Mega, their investors in India's largest private bank now with huge global funds, their close compatriots in the seniormost government bureaucracy (especially those in charge of urban development and institutional finance), and the country offices of the World Bank, USAid, DFid and the Asian Development Bank. What these groups commonly point to is the fear of slum development driven by 'vote bank' politics, and undisciplined municipal offices and rural councils in the city periphery.

The striking similarity to the language of progressives, while unsettling to the latter, is hardly born out of fear requiring co-option.² Perhaps it comes from a conflation between these ideologically diverse interests implicated in the global Mega narrative: development and economic opportunity for one; and for the other, the possibility of 'mass' and 'mega' resistance as a counter to the 'Ghost'. Thus for both, the possibility of the Mega lies punctured, unsettled and confused. The city seems increasingly out of control with regard to policy and programmes. Instead, it emerges as a fearful, unruly and occupied terrain of

illegal titles and corrupt, opaque slum politics, fuelled by a seemingly marginalised economy. These factors constrain both 'the market' and opportunities for political organising.³

It is this 'unruly' and 'fearful' city that I now focus more closely on, moving beyond the hyperbolic to consider more carefully the day-to-day reality.

Figure 3 is a ground-level view that shows the fragility of the 'Map'. Here, the apparently uniform zone designated as planning territory for the new airport authority, the Bangalore International Airport Planning Authority (BIAPA), turns out to be a richly textured area of settlements and small towns. Closer inspection here shows the planners' representation of neat zoning diagrams to be 'occupied' by an existing urbanism, a dense package of small plot settlements, meandering roads, farmland, and a host of local structures, including an ancient fort.

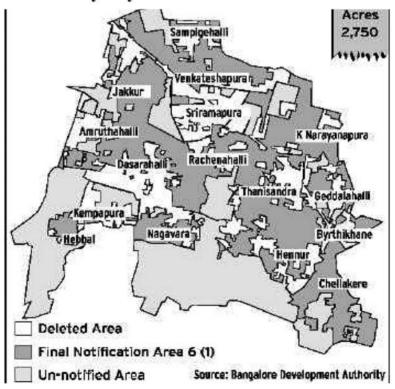


3. Mega Project of the Bangalore International Airport

An official chart of the land status of a proposed large mega housing project is even more explicit with regard to these assertions. Some inhabited zones are implicated in court cases, forcing the land acquisition process to declare these as 'deleted areas'. Others, more prevalent across the city, suggest a deeper politics and are revealed in this public notification as 'un-notified areas'.

Such occupancies are not unusual, recent, or restricted to the peri-urban. Figure 5 (a, b) traces an area in south-west Bangalore where territory designated for Master Planning confronts on-the-ground, pre-existing settlements of villages. Together with this, and in parallel to the planning process, further occupation by private mixed land-use settlements could be observed on what were earlier designated as village common lands. More recently, some of these have been converted into small shops and factories, and more housing.

Arkavathy Layout Final Notification



4. The 'Plan' punctured by Occupancy Urbanism

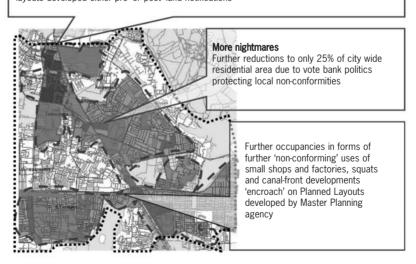
The Planners' dream

50% of the city proposed as Master Planned

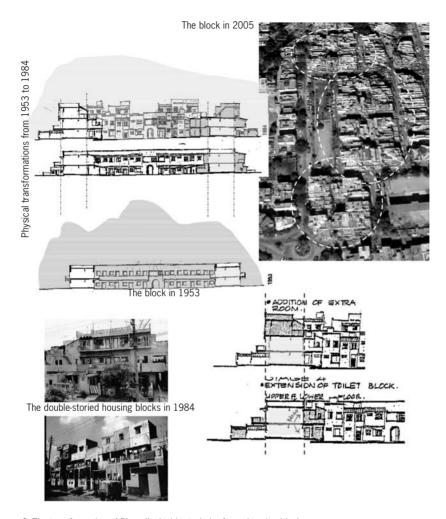


The nightmare

50% of planned area reduced due to legal disputes by *gramthana* (village lands), Revenue layouts developed either pre- or post- land notifications



5a,b. The fragility of the map as the Planners' nightmare



6. The transformation of Bhogal's double-storied refugee housing blocks

A more detailed illustration of this is seen in Figure 6. Here, a simple square double-storied block of 64 two-room units with common toilets and baths at the corners of each storey were built in 1952 and leased out to incoming refugees from Pakistan. Over time, as families expanded and relatives moved in, occupants appropriated as much space as they could – on the terraces, in the corridors and common courtyard, and on the extra-wide

pavements in the front. Residents maintained and in fact enriched common space functions – as in the communal coal-fired *tandoor* (clay oven) located in the inner square of each block and shared by the families in turn to cook *chapattis*. In the extensions to their living spaces, they accommodated not only family activities, but also shops, workshops and workstations, small primary schools, daycares and health clinics. Such use of space came out of negotiations led by residents' associations' office bearers pressurising the municipal bodies via the refugee rehabilitation board. This was to reframe regulations while collecting extra development charges, and also creating a consensus regarding how much to extend: 11 feet + 6 inches in the front, and up to 16 feet at the back.

Occupancy Urbanism is not a narrative of progressive urban change shaped by developmentalism; nor is it one that validates individual entrepreneurship or depicts a heroic poor standing up to big business and harsh state action. It is also not a schema of progressive Master Planning or urban design that invokes public participation in order to include 'public good', ensure civic culture, and make cities 'inclusive' while 'globally competitive'. Rather, Occupancy Urbanism is a conceptual frame for viewing city dynamics in an open-ended way, unencumbered by the anxiety of a grand narrative. In pointing to a dynamic underpinned by unpredictability, its specific focus is on how the politics of space is not only manifested but also *reconstituted* at a perceptual level. By this I imply the constant relationship between day-to-day acts on material issues (land, economy, working the bureaucratic system), and the consolidation of a popular political consciousness influenced by those actions. This is different from a political consciousness 'taught' by specific leaders. The key issue is not an issue of 'decentralised' learning, as these can happen via political agents at a variety of levels, but the consistent practice of 'working the system' through the politics of the material in a contingent manner.

Such a view of Occupancy Urbanism helps explain and distinguish between different types of actions and forces embodying the chaos that accompanies the urban dynamic. For instance, in the late 1980s two conflicting neighbourhood associations in the refugee housing in Bhogal, the area in south Delhi mentioned above, went to court, but then resolved their problems through mediation via local elders and the councillor. The conflict was over common toilet spaces. Corner units, which had relatively smaller backyards, however had the distinctive advantage of building into the unused common toilets located in the corner. However, all occupants of the housing were on lease; and part of this lease, paid since 1953, included a portion for the common toilet spaces. Thus, those units not adjacent to the toilets felt it proper for those accessing these spaces to pay a sum to those who did not have such advantages. In another case, there were local disagreements when some residents extend their houses beyond the fixed 11 feet + 6 inch norm negotiated with the municipal authority and the refugee rehabilitation board. The issue is not the absolute resolution of these conflicts, but the existence of a level of administration and politics, which resolve these safely even if unevenly.

Occupancy Urbanism is also an effective mode for the conceptualisation of more serious and often life-threatening conflicts. Figure 7a shows images of various types of



7a. Extensions along the periphery of the airport



7b. New settlements



7c. Existing settlements in the middle of airport territory

settlements in the territory now designated under the BIAPA introduced in Figure 3. Some, adjacent to the road, pre-date the declaration of the airport and grew in response to the potential of increased commercial transactions – not just in terms of land, but also supplying construction material and small-time retail. A street view of these would reveal a range of low-income rental spaces for shops, small factories and manufacturing units, and also residences. The causalities here run in complicated ways. Just like the rental spaces for shops, some of the sheds here are maintained as future warehouse spaces – for the possible transport services that *may* come up *in case* the proposed airport is constructed. Figure 7b shows a new subdivision being marked out – the relatively larger plot sizes indicating expectations of an upmarket clientele. Figure 7c, however, shows a relatively rural hamlet set in fields that are designated for the terminal building and runways in the main airport territory.

As per these plans, there seem at least two settlements within its core territory, including one where a future runway will be landing the latest Airbus 380! If the airport is constructed, the settlements are almost certainly destined for eviction by the BIAPA under the very powerful new land acquisition legislation. It is also possible that road-widening or expressway construction might also impact some of the roadside settlements seen in Figure 7a; and the land may be acquired for allocation to much larger warehousing companies. Or, given the increasing political clout of the town council in times of political uncertainty at the provincial level, the possible subversion of the entire project itself – set in motion via bureaucratic foot-dragging. Occupancy Urbanism conceptualises city processes that point to the dynamic uncertainty of city politics, the partial occupation of Mega territories, the possibility of violent dispossession, and an ethos where 'speculation' becomes just as irrelevant as a concept as 'public good'.

Occupancy Urbanism: Ten Theses

I.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM REFLECTS CITIES BEING INCREMENTALLY DEVELOPED AND VIA THE ACTIONS OF MULTIPLE AGENTS (RATHER THAN HEGEMONIC MASTER PLANNING)

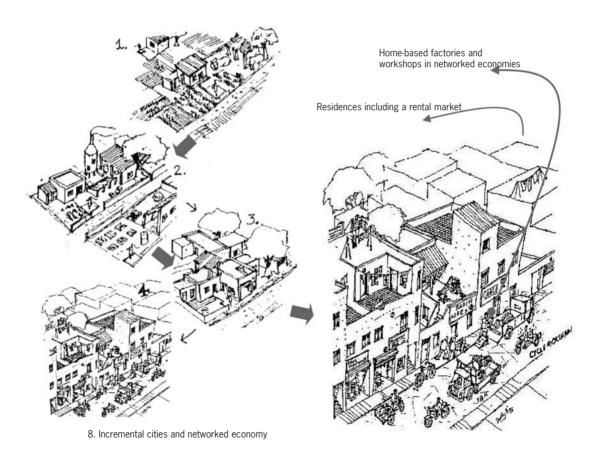
Figure 8 shows in diagrammatic form the incremental consolidation of land. This is not just for housing, but also a resilient economy constituted by small manufacturing firms usually located on the street.

II.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM SIGNIFIES DE FACTO AND DIVERSE MULTIPLE LAND TENURES

These diverse claims shape incremental building as a distinctive and all-pervasive dynamic (since it is difficult for one group to appropriate larger parcels), and thus point to cities built via complex occupation and negotiations. Policy and programmes do impact land

occupation. But rather than playing a directive role, these in most part confront existing claims to and occupation of territory. Thus, *de facto* implies an act of proactive settlement by occupants claiming locations, rather than a centralised authority allocating land (with *de jure* titles) as per policy. *De facto* tenure represents a contest and a tension. It is shaped by interventions by various types of public bodies. Some can be pressured to intervene in ways to strengthen claims – the extension of basic infrastructure to areas irrespective of their land status. Others act in ways to reduce *de facto* tenure via evictions, restrictions on basic amenities, or vigorous acts of Master Planning.



Box 1a lists the diverse tenure forms in Bangalore used by mostly poor groups to consolidate non-planned settlements of housing, shops and factories that dominate the cityscape. Tenure refers to a *bundle of possibilities* to use the land in particular ways – especially for the local economy. Tenure patterns are shaped by the pressure of public actions. Box 1b shows the basis for economy in diverse land tenures in 1996. Forming licencing systems for small firms in non-Master-Planned areas, these emerged via an occupancy politics set within office orders at least parallel to, if not overriding, Master Plan regulations. Crucially, these diverse tenure situations are not 'designer features' to be incorporated or used in a programmatic way for progressive Master Planning. They emerge from and are used in a political environment shaped and materialised via *daily practice*.

III.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM POSITS THAT LAND FORMS THE BASIS FOR ECONOMY

Occupancy Urbanism shows how incrementally developing land around diverse tenures forms the basis for a substantive economy. Predominantly small shops, commercial spaces and manufacturing units, these are inter-connected in both production and distribution and, as we shall see later, utilised to shape political consciousness. Just as land is incrementally developed, so is economy; and it is closely connected to the process of diverse tenure regimes. This allows service workshops and commerce to evolve in close physical proximity, making production efficient. A central factor cementing these relationships is the funding of capital investments in machinery by real estate surpluses that the multiple forms of leases help redistribute to tenants and sub-tenants. A third critical aspect relates to a dynamic economy unconstrained by intellectual property rights (IPR) and driven by an intensive and innovative 'copy culture'. While this happens via the interconnected nature of production/distribution, and promotes the blurring of work relationships between workers and shop-owners and managers, it is also shaped by the intersecting dynamics of both incremental production and land development.

Figure 8 shows the emergence of a small-firm economy closely connected to incremental land development – made possible by diverse land tenures (Box 1a). This mode reinforces proximity, and builds on diverse land tenures around regulation of mixed land use (Box 1b) and technology shaped by access to infrastructure. Occupancy Urbanism refers to cities being constituted by several such spaces of economy (often interconnected in a wider relationship) but also, as discussed subsequently, representing varied histories of political claiming. These economies are not insignificant in scale. Some estimates from government research agencies suggest these units are responsible for 67% of local economic 'value addition' and 95% of local jobs.

Box 1a: CLAIMING LAND

- > ID card given by the slum board
- > Possession Certificate given by the Bangalore City Corporation; Possession Certificate slip given by the Bangalore Development Authority
- > Ashraya housing holders patta
- > Ambedkar scheme hakku patra
- > 25th Independence Day hakku patra
- > Section 94 A of the Revenue Act
- > 1993 Act on the regularisation of revenue layout enforced in 1998
- > Gramthana certified
- > Conversion certificate by the Revenue Department
- > Holder's khata (after 1999) by the Revenue Department.

In the smaller municipalities adjoining Visakapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) 12 forms of tenure provided access to land, and in Madikiri (Karnataka) 24 forms).

This diversity of tenure forms comes from:

- > Historical/indigenous conventions
- > Implementation procedures related to particular sections of legislation, especially the Revenue Act
- > Titles related to announcements on particular national occasions such as Independence Day
- > Titles related to particular housing schemes (although the issue is not access to housing but rather a claim on a location)
- Titles issued by village bodies, city corporations and state-level organisations
 In some cases Madikiri, Baroda (Gujarat), and some towns and cities in Rajasthan, titles to land are handed down by the local royalty

IV.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM IMPLIES A 'LOCALITY' POLITICS VIA EMBEDDED INSTITUTIONALISATION

Incremental claims to land related to *de facto* tenure are usually interwoven with municipal politics, and relate to a vast territory of metro-cities and small towns: 85% of city territory consists of non-Master-Planned areas, while much of Master-Planned territory finds subsequent 'occupancy'. This relationship is not merely from legislative or Constitutional directives. The importance of local councillors is not just that they are part of a democratic system shaped by voting (and perhaps Constitutional decentralisation), but rather that they are *embedded* in society. This embeddedness allows occupants to play the system, and to use their councillors to pressure higher-level political and administrative circuits when municipal councils are disempowered. It is this materiality linked to the upgrading infrastructure that builds popular and extensive political consciousness of *how* to work the municipal system.

BOX 1B: CLAIMING ECONOMY VIA DIVERSE LAND TENURES

LOCAL COMMERCIAL AREA

- Local Commercial areas are identified by the Delhi Development Authority/Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the Ministry of Rehabilitation periodically: usually main roads or declared `Light Industrial Areas'
- > Power load restriction: 7.5 HP
- > Licence is expandable and promotional
- > Location not allowed adjacent to any medical clinic
- Includes light industry, light mechanical workshop, repair shops, cooling and refrigeration plants and service trades

URBAN VILLAGE

- > Village to be in urban areas
- > Typical trades allowed: dal (lentil), rice, wheat flour, mill, kutti cutting, cotton carding
- > Power load up to 20 HP; 10 workers
- > Expandable licence
- > No licence needed inside the Lal Dora (village-settled area) if power consumption is below 20 HP

HOUSEHOLD INDUSTRY

- > Entrepreneur operating from dwelling unit
- > Power load allowed up to 1KW (3KV), raised to 15-20 HP
- > Maximum workers: 4
- > Licence is granted to 38 listed trade groups of DFC list
- > Permissible on all floors except basement
- > Enterprise should not be more than 300 square feet

HEATING & COOLING LOADS

For main road enterprises with loads upto 11 KV: A/c showrooms, restaurants, clinics, auto maintenance shops

AD-HOC REGISTRATION

- > For registration purpose of units in non-confirming areas functioning in an unauthorised way without any licence, units created till 31.12.89 are eligible (proof of date to be submitted)
- > Polluting/Obnoxious/Hazardous units not to be registered (listed under Annexure C in Master Plan)
- > Maximum ceiling of power: 40 HP
 - Increased to 70-80 HP in 1982-83, and 100-120 HP under Ad-hoc certificate policy of 1990-91
- Sometimes of Section Sectin Section Section Section Section Section Section Section Section
- > Licence is non-renewable or expandable
- > No change of trade allowed, no passing of factory to entrepreneur's heirs
- > Cases booked for unauthorised construction after 10.6.92 shall be kept pending until further instructions

(Benjamin, 1996, compiled from MCD documents)

Such consciousness develops irrespective of literacy levels, adherence or membership to political organisations, social movements and NGOs. This is not a survival 'tactic' by a marginalised 'subaltern'. Instead, these (as listed in Box 1a and b) are materialised in the bureaucracy in the form of 'administrative orders' to allow extension of infrastructure, services, and acceptance of mixed land use. Set within lower- and middle-level bureaucratic procedures, as 'documents' they occupy the space of 'policy' imposed by higher levels of government. These systems of politics strengthen *de facto* tenure *en masse* on a citywide basis, and strike fear in planners, senior administrators and the property-owning elite. At times, such regulatory systems find sanction in lower courts and rarely in the higher judiciary. Such politics do not present an 'alternative', but through a connection to political parties and mainstream politics, the ability to appropriate and re-define such political space is indeed significant.

٧.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM IMPLICATES MULTIPLE HISTORICITIES THAT ARE LOCALITY-EMBEDDED AND CONNECT ECONOMY TO LAND AND POLITICS

Incrementally evolved as a dominant process of city building, this factor was realised in the earlier literature on cities in Latin America and Asia. Central here was recognition that public interventions for infrastructure and services followed rather than led the settlement process. That is, land was claimed in a dynamic process via the actions of myriad actors rather than the single entity of 'the state'. Such studies, mostly ethnographic, also showed how land markets operated around social conventions, despite their official 'illegal' status. The main focus, however, was to see this dynamic mostly as a process for residential use. Although there was some recognition of their economies, these were considered to be 'the informal sector', and thereby marginal. Little or no direct connection was made to the substance of such economies, their basis in the process of land development for both technological and political aspects, as explained earlier. The central importance of considering the historicity in land lies in the substantial political consciousness located around 'place-making'. Paradoxically, rather than narrowing down, the 'folklore' of how to politically work the municipal bureaucracy to influence even higher levels of government, and a shared knowledge system across several varied settlements at the city system. implies the development of a *larger* political consciousness.

A useful illustration is that of the politics around the issue of 'policy' versus 'documents'. A Karnataka state government order of 23 April 2005 banned registration of 'revenue sites' formed on agricultural lands without a conversion order, a layout plan approved by the planning authority, and an assessment register extract from the local body (sanctioned by the commissioner rather than the elected council). At a time of political confusion brought about by coalition politics and public debate about how land acquired by eminent domain went to large IT firms, political pressure via municipal levels onto higher levels of government pushed the state level judiciary to draw on a then recent Supreme Court

judgment in a case in Rajasthan on a similar issue of registering incremental settlements, that highlighted the importance of 'documents' above that of 'policy'.⁴

In the Karnataka case, the petitioner also raised the issue that documents reflected a longer historicity in city building that predated Master-Plan-based policy. Such connections across otherwise vastly different regions of the country are made possible by similar processes of incremental development of land but also by the political appropriation of a municipal space, and the political consciousness to use this at an opportune time in a flexible way at the judicial level. The methodology of working the municipal system for a group of small interconnected paper-product manufacturing units in Rajasthan would be not very different than those small firms making plastic components in east Delhi, or those involved in making automobile components in south Bangalore.

Significantly, the political space that both closes *and* opens the possibility of diverse tenures centres upon the realm of administrative orders – a politically more efficient way to counter policy. Normally, 'policy' moves to 'close' space, but this is constrained by the lengthy Master-Planning five-year cycle. Thus the political space of administrative orders also attracts lobbies backing Mega projects, and uses them as a way to make space for more Master Planning, oriented now to neo-liberal globalisation. The movement between spaces of politics in administrative orders, state government policy and various levels of judiciary is shaped by contesting lobbies: those of small plot-dominated residential environments which also house interconnected manufacturing firms, and those that align together around Mega planning now invested globally, with the backing of the new 'reforms' policy agenda that seeks to make cities competitive.

These multiple historicities point to contestations of institutional spaces, and intersecting political consciousnesses. In offering this as an ongoing dynamic, rather than one burdened by an anxiety over 'closure' or 'resolution,' Occupancy Urbanism posits an open-ended political space in a daily existential matrix. The importance of diverse tenure regimes and their persistence and expansion cloud earlier binary conceptions of 'use' and 'exchange' value, and with it, the assumption of alienation. Overall, one could argue that the history of such cities is one of *land*, rather than being shaped by a larger force of the economy or modernist developmentalism. Occupancy Urbanism counters the 'political economy' explanation of its genesis. Further, its ability to move across political levels even while it is embedded rejects 'localism', the constricting and fragile idea of being 'local'. Its openness and strength as a political concept come from *not* being tied to a development trajectory or, alternatively, stamped with a synoptic structure.

VI.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM INVOLVES RADICAL VISION

When city peripheries in Latin America, for instance in capitals such as Lima and Bogota, were 'discovered' by researchers in the 1960s as having a history of incremental

development by settlers, this aspect was also seen as radical action. These perspectives came at a time when 'user control' and squatter action took centre stage in the protestfuelled urban politics in northern European cities. Occupancy Urbanism builds on this idea by pointing to specific ways in which property, specifically that of real estate, is reconstituted. The main conceptual element here is that of how diverse land tenures open up multiple claims to real estate surpluses. As land is settled and spurs a politics to make the possibility of new infrastructure and services more real and de facto tenure more secure, land values rapidly rise. Figure 9 shows the process of land value increase as it comes under the claims opened up via diverse tenure regimes. Some of these tenures are leases, which involve a specific understanding about the distribution of future gains. Others, closely linked to the act of occupancy, are more subtle, with an understanding that if occupants have stayed long enough they are justified in demanding one-third of the surpluses accrued to prior inhabitants. Significant research on squatter settlements in Latin America and South and Southeast Asia shows that despite being officially 'illegal', realestate markets operate along local conventions that also include day-to-day resolution of plot-boundary issues. Given the dynamics and diversity of tenure and its multiple claimants, this implies that when the vast majority of city terrain can be 'read' as being incrementally developed, it is not a mere 'physical form': it also shows the extensive materialisation from a new conceptualisation of real estate.

Such an understanding of the radical in urbanism does not imply that real estate values get distributed equally. Instead, the radical is embedded in complex stories of real life, disjointed in both joy and sorrow, and shaped by uncertainty and risk. Figure 10 shows the occupation and incremental building of a plot by a poor hawker couple in South Bangalore. The diagrams also offer an account of the complex financial arrangements that came into play, including what is locally termed as a 'bhogee' lease arrangement. This involves payment of a lump sum in lieu of monthly payments for a three-year cycle, open to then subsequent re-negotiation.

The narrative is layered and opaque, compressed into a location; and with adjoining units' support, tries to pressure authorities to introduce services, infrastructure, and various interventions of land tenure regularisation. All these would obviously increase the price of land. While the complex cycles of financing are somewhat discernable, it is unclear how the great variety of tenants and sub-tenants share the obviously increasing value of land. It becomes even more complex when the origins of the plot are obscure – if the land was squatted upon, or if the hawker couple bought it from a small land developer, as is often the case. Despite the equivocation, one can visualise how such cycles of financing allow real estate surpluses be routed to fund an economy, and spur further connectivity between predominantly small firms. New entrants, if this plot was in a predominantly home-based industrial area, would form production relationships, and the financing would reflect investments into capital machinery to re-engineer a new product line.

This is borne out in a case from an east Delhi area manufacturing cables and conductors. This location has fuelled a great many lives in material ways, and linked them

to a larger city economy. Real estate markets have been central here in occupying what is likely to be, 15 years on, a central part of the city. Figure 11 is an extract from a website of the official website of the 'Bhoomi land digitisation programme' implemented in Karnataka, and particularly in some districts including Bangalore's periphery. One diagram shows an earlier land title whose 'over-writing' is read by those promoting the programme as 'corruption'. The second reformist image shows the new computerised title that is devoid of such ambiguity and seen as a step towards being 'globally tradable'. A more detailed investigation reveals how this programme sought to reduce 20,000 forms of land tenures – categories of claims to particular uses and their complex histories across the state territory – into just 256; the programme is, not surprisingly, fraught with legal and political crises. It in part helped Bangalore's largest land developers appropriate huge parcels of land to cater to massive IT companies and Mega infrastructure projects. But the emphasis



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"With the ban being lifted, we cannot make land conversion mandatory for registration. But this will be a problem in future once the government amends the Act," officials explained.

The April 23 notification banning registration of properties on agricultural land without conversion to section 22(A) of the Registration Act, which talks of "documents opposed to public

policy".

Now, the government is proposing an amendment either to the Registration Act of 1908 or RegistraNECESSARY DOCUMENTS FOR A CL

Alienation plan (land conversion order), approved layout plan, release certificate from the competent authority, correct dimension report from the urban development authority, encumbrance certificate for 13 years from sub-registrar's office, Up-to-date tax-paid receipts, Khata, Sale deed.

tion Rules of 1965 so that the notification can have legal status and made mandatory. The decision to ban registration of proper-

les on non-converted lands was to curb haphazard development of the city. This notification has been issued to prevent indiscriminate conversion of agricultur-

whit indiscriminate conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural use, to regulate and control the conversion."

"It is necessary to prevent the registration of

ites quashed

the government (the executive) to decide on what is "opposed to public policy" without describing it by itself in the Act.

But the apex court had made it clear that the legislature can delegate only the ancillary and procedural powers and not the essential legislative points.

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Further the Supreme Court had said that it is not possible to define public policy with precision at any point of time. It is not for the executive to fill these grey areas as the said power rests with the judiciary.

"Whenever interpretation of the concept of 'public policy' is required to be considered it is for the judiciary to do so and in doing

9. 'Documents' versus 'Public Policy' in Bangalore

here is to expose a contested terrain of politics. One side represents complex reinscriptions of historicities of occupancy. The other, assisting competing real estate claims where singular tenures allow huge real estate profits, seeks to narrow these down through posing a narrative of modernisation, development, and the establishment of *de jure* rights.

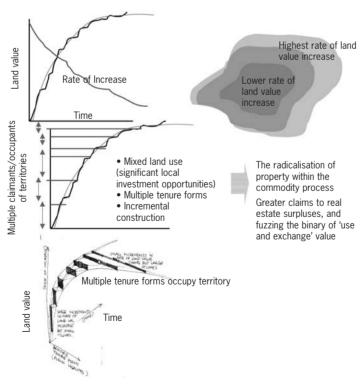
VII.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM MODULATES THE EXISTING LAWS OF PROPERTY

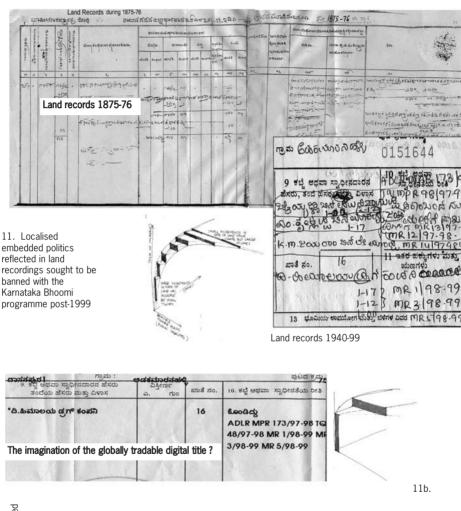
Occupancy Urbanism appropriates and disfigures the concept of 'property' in real estate. It is also in effect doing so in law. An urbanism that is extensive, embedded in local society economy and politics, and built around *de facto* and multiple tenures, promotes a *plurality of law*. Researchers as far back as the mid-1970s and early 1980s observed this evolutionary aspect of law in locations as diverse as squatter settlements in Hong Kong and Caracas. This is an important consideration, since as much planning that is regressive to mass urbanism, actions by the nation state and large capital finds solace in 'The Law', and significantly, converges with positions adopted by 'progressive' advocacy groups in promoting 'housing rights' or *de jure* titles. Well intentioned, these groups are alarmed when they find themselves in agreement with recent pressures by India's largest business groups seeking to develop Mega projects, which also argue for land rights to be established, and

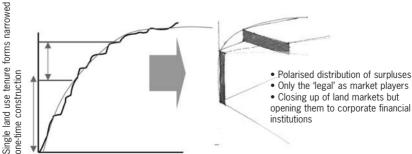
Porous legalities radicalise property

Capitalisation of the land fund economy. The distribution of land based surpluses helps understand contestations. Rate of land value growth is rapid at first, but in low absolute values, followed by lower rates of growth but higher values



10. Multiple tenure forms





The use of the 'Nation State' to narrow down claims from the multiple to the few!

proper Master Planning instituted. Instead of this, Occupancy Urbanism points to the space of politics that opens up when *subverting* the definition of property in law. This takes place not through being explicitly rejected as an 'alternative'; rather, it happens via appropriation *within* the municipal procedures, extending to other layers of public institutions, and from the lower judiciary upwards to higher levels.

VIII.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM HAS A CENTRAL ROLE IN MOVING POLITICS BEYOND 'POLICY'

One could argue that one aspect of neo-liberal globalisation has been the use of 'policy' to emphasise 'property': the privatisation of water, the attempt to define land titles, the emphasis on strict zoning to allow resource generation. In part, this is supported by progressive academics and activists from the left who see in this an emancipatory possibility of a nation state-enforced 'rights' agenda, and as a way to ensure 'inclusive cities' while accepting the inevitability of the need to be 'globally competitive'. The rejection of a normative and singular/homogenising law, the *dirigisme* of the nation state or globalised homogenous markets as objectives or prerequisites, and the reconstitution of 'property' imply that Occupancy Urbanism rejects/displaces the 'policy' discourse. For instance, occupants in areas designated as 'slums' work the system towards recognition, but not complete legal declaration, as the latter (a 'logical' conclusion to policy) substantially increases their possibility of being evicted. Here, a faith in progressive policy frames is as naïve (and even as dangerous) as that of advocacy planning and 'civil society'.

This is not fundamentally different from those facing 'planning tribunals' in cities of richer countries where urban renewal sets up community organisations against planners and large developers in such depoliticised forums. Another example of the fragility of policy is the continued expansion of land markets, despite 'illegality'. A third example lies in policies promoting 'clusters' for 'local economic development'. While observing the technomanagerial advantages of interconnected small-firms-based production, the frame of policy can hardly account for the significant historicities in the politics of land and location, its incremental development, and the complex financial relationships. A final illustration can be located in the institutional-political realm. Here, official policy actually *removes* land as an interventionist realm from local government, or then distances this crucial material factor into the abstract realm of Master Planning. The issue is not just legislated powers or institutional location, but rather a conception of planning that is *inherently* depoliticised.

IX.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM IS INVOLVED IN THE PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND CONSUMPTION OF ARTEFACTS

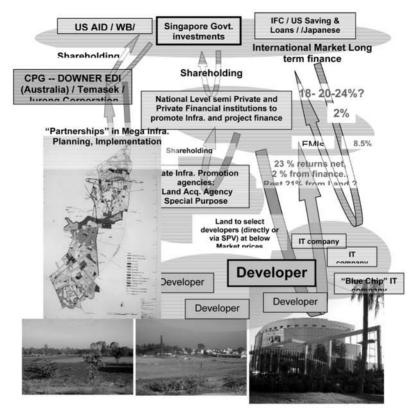
Figure 12 provides an illustration of this from a street front in upmarket Juhu in central Mumbai. A glance at this typical bazaar of a 'third world city' can suggest multiple meanings: an exotic feel of street celebration, unauthorised construction and

encroachments on street pavements, or the beginnings of a slum. A closer examination shows this not just to be a Christmas stand built via the complex negotiations of the local church ward with the municipal council, but part of a larger series of 'occupancies'. Each, as layers of tenures, embeds complex histories. Some, like the shop, or another in the structure at the rear, have theirs located in municipal ward officers, the commercial licencing department, the water and electricity department. The Christmas stand, more temporal, is located in one of the more Catholic areas in this part of Mumbai. The street here, despite the incredibly high real estate values of Juhu, allows porosities reminiscent of those described by Walter Benjamin in his essays on Naples. And if one looked into the Christmas stand, the range of artefacts that surround the infant Jesus point to other historical trajectories located in this city's more industrial suburbs, which appropriate symbols materialised beyond fear of copyright; and in their indigenous variations, those of authorship as well. Such streetscapes flourish everywhere as resilient locations of day-to-day consumerism, and of capital itself occupied. Occupancy Urbanism evokes memories of Benjamin's Arcades, 5 their reflective sheen set now in a sharper tropical light.

X.

OCCUPANCY URBANISM FOCUSES ON CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF NEO-LIBERAL GLOBALISATION AND AT LEAST THREE OF ITS CORE ELEMENTS: ACCESS TO SPACE; ACCESS TO REAL ESTATE SURPLUSES; AND ACCESS TO BRANDED RETAIL MARKETS

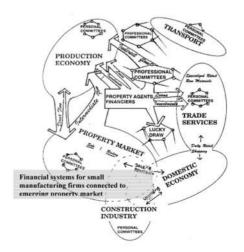
At stake here are not just the material aspects, but also a popular consciousness that acknowledges these as normative to modernity. The preceding arguments and analyses suggest that Occupancy Urbanism shows serious fractures in this assumption of an easy and inevitable global hegemonic. It subverts the ability of international capital to extract surpluses from rapidly developing city peripheries – via diverse forms of land tenure routing real estate surpluses into small-firm economies and into municipal government. In doing so, it also occupies spaces in uneven and unpredictable ways, and pushes a flexible legality that bogs down Mega politics, to appropriate real estate surpluses where opacity restricts centralised access and accumulation. It also complicates and underpins popular protests beyond the more pliable NGO strategies to suggest murkier 'workings' within the bureaucratic system. As important, it appropriates the possibility of a unilateral rendering into commodity, via global branding. Occupancy Urbanism disrupts the smooth flow of global capital from within the commodity process – and within the present, rather than as a strategy for the future.⁶



Competing land surplus financing circuits

Globally connected corporate markets drawing on state-led acquisition via eminent domain and allocation subsidised prices versus

diverse tenure characterised small land subdivisions – routing real estate surpluses into small manufacturing firms for capital investments and cash flows – supplementing trade based finance





12. Multiple occupancies radicalise space



Editors' Note

For an account of how the lower-level bureaucracy plays a central role in extending infrastructure/services and in regulations allowing mixed land use, especially with regard to lands declared illegal by institutions reporting to higher levels of government, see Solomon Benjamin, "Touts, Pirates and Ghosts", in *Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts* (CSDS, 2005, Delhi), pp. 242-54. Reader 05 online text: http://www.sarai.net/reader/reader 05.html

Notes

- 1. The rhetoric points to the 'progressive' critique (emphases mine):
 - > Bangalore International Airport: 4300 acres for Airport, largest airport area in the world; area allocated without correlated air traffic; 60% of the area for non-aeronautical revenue, including real-estate leases for hotels, business centers, and retail
 - > Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor Planning Authority: 29,000 acres of land, displacing 180+ villages. "Land Acquisition notifications were issued based on the requirement indicated by the promoter company and not on the basis of any technical drawings/maps as approved by the Government in PWD or the project report". As stated by Anees Siraj, Special Deputy Commissioner of KIADB BMICP, in letter dated 22 May 2004
 - > IT Corridor Planning Authority: 28,000 acres of land, 50+ villages; will expand Bangalore land area by 30%. No analysis on required demand for IT campus development
- 2. It is hardly surprising that in public forums, performance by activism points to the Constitutional impropriety of neo-liberal reforms bypassing democratic debate and legislation to decentralise decision-making processes. However, the unease and severe suspicion of local politicians mutates their arguments towards a a rubric of greater public participation via 'proper' NGOs, and 'civil society', which some academics have argued as being equivalent to 'deep democracy', while others seek to establish these as 'social movements'.
- 3. In a passing comment at an international conference on Indian real estate, globalisation and urban reforms, arranged by the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, two of the country's most powerful and influential land developers, one from Mumbai and the other from Delhi, declared that NGOs could be "controlled", and likened activists to "earthworms" that could be "trampled".
- See various issues of *The Hindu, Deccan Herald* and *The Times of India* (Bangalore editions) between 30 October and 3 November 2006.
- Walter Benjamin and Lacis Asja. "Naples". In Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings (Schocken Books, 1986, New York), pp. 63-173.
- 6. With such subversion, it is hardly surprising that Occupancy Urbanism, its intricate politics in municipal government, and the reconstitution of land and economy are all deeply threatening to the upper classes, the high commands of political parties, captains of industries, the English-language/elite media, the globally connected financial elite, and the Supreme Court of India's 'judicial activism'. It also threatens those seeking singular proprietary definitions over artefacts enforced via copyrights.







No One Is Illegal!

Steve Cohen, Harriet Grimsditch, Teresa Hayter, Bob Hughes, Dave Landau

NO ONE IS ILLEGAL!

For a world without borders! No immigration controls!

DEFEND THE OUTLAW!

Immigration controls should be abolished. People should not be deemed 'illegal' because they have fallen foul of an increasingly brutal and repressive system of controls. Why is immigration law different from all other laws? Under all other laws it is the act that is illegal, but under immigration law it is the person who is illegal. Those subject to immigration control are dehumanised, are reduced to non-persons, are nobodies. They are the modern outlaw. Like their medieval counterpart, they exist outside of the law and outside of the law's protection. Opposition to immigration controls requires defending all immigration outlaws.

BEWARE THE FASCIST! UNDERSTAND THE ENEMY!

Immigration controls are not fascism. Detention centres are not extermination camps. However, immigration laws are different from other laws in one other significant way. They are the result, at least in part, of organised fascist activity. This country's first controls were contained in the 1905 Aliens Act and were directed at Jewish refugees fleeing anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and Russia. A major, perhaps the major, reason for the implementation of this legislation was the agitation of the British Brothers League. This was a proto-fascistic organisation formed in 1901 specifically around the demand for controls, which organized major demonstrations in London's East End and which can legitimately be viewed as the main force behind the legislation.

The first controls directed against black people – the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act – quickly followed events in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958. These were the so-called 'race riots' – so-called to give a spurious impression of both spontaneity and non-political street fighting. The reality was that these physical and political attacks on black people were engineered by explicitly fascist organisations such as Oswald Moseley's Union

Movement and Colin Jordan's White Defence League. And these organisations had a specific demand – immigration controls. Fascist front organisations such as the British Immigration Control Association subsequently continued the agitation until legislation was enacted. Oswald Mosley himself was quoted in the left-wing Reynolds News (5 November 1961) as claiming the Bill leading to the 1962 Act was the "first success" for fascist activity in this country.

Immigration laws are inherently racist, since their purpose is to exclude outsiders. And they feed and legitimise racism. Far from being a natural feature of the political landscape, they are a relatively recent and disastrous distortion of it, explicable only by racism. This, together with the fascist origins of such laws, renders problematic the notion of 'reform', as opposed to abolition, of immigration controls.

IMMIGRATION CONTROLS ARE MORE THAN THEY SEEM

Immigration controls deny people the right to freedom of movement and the right to decide for themselves where they wish to live and to work. They also deny people access to rights such as the right to work and the right to social and legal protections enjoyed by some of the current inhabitants of the place to which they migrate. In the process, these controls cause intolerable suffering to many people. The sole purpose of this suffering is to deter others who might come to this country to claim asylum, to work or to join family here. People are thus punished not for anything they have themselves done, but for what others might do in the future.

Controls are not simply about exclusion and deportation. They are a total system. A system of extremes of pain and misery. They are international in the sense that virtually all countries, particularly all industrial countries, use controls. They are also international in the way the old British Empire was international. British Embassies, British High Commissions, British Consulates encircle the globe, denying visas or entry clearance to the unchosen. A vast edifice of repression is built to prevent the movement of people. Those who attempt to flee wars and repression, or to improve their situation through migration, are forced to resort to buying false papers from agents or, worse, to travel clandestinely, again usually with the help of often unscrupulous agents. In the process many of them suffer great hardship, and thousands die.

The answer is not to abolish agents, unscrupulous or otherwise. It is to abolish the controls on which the agents, the pain and the misery breed.

Controls are also internal to the modern state and in particular to the modern British state. They require the expansion of repressive and violent activities such as surveillance, security, prisons and policing, changes which threaten to permeate society as a whole. The deaths of Joy Gardner and others at the hands of immigration officers are a portent for the future.

Immigration officers have become part of what Karl Marx's colleague Frederick Engels described as "the armed bodies of men" who constitute the state. Under immigration laws,

abound 2,000 immigrants and asylum seekers who have not been charged with any crime, including children, babies and pregnant women, are locked up without trial, without time limit, and with minimal access to bail. Asylum seekers who are not detained are no longer allowed to work. Since 1996, employers have become an extension of the immigration service, responsible for the immigration status of their workers and liable to criminal sanction for employing undocumented workers.

Over the last two decades, entitlement to most welfare state benefits and provision has to some extent or another become linked to immigration status. Those without the required status go without. They are excluded from virtually all non-contributory benefits, child benefit, social housing and homelessness accommodation, in-patient hospital treatment, significant areas of community care legislation relating to the destitute, the sick, the elderly and the otherwise vulnerable, protection under child care legislation, state education provision in prisons and detention centres and in the proposed new accommodation centres. So much for the idea that those coming from overseas obtain priority treatment! Instead, since 1999 asylum seekers from overseas have been deliberately transformed into an underclass subject to a regime that is the direct copy of the 19th-century century poor law. Like the poor law, there is maintenance below subsistence level (70% of income support). Like the poor law there is forced dispersal into accommodation over which those dispersed have no choice. Under legislation introduced in 2002, many asylum seekers are no longer to have even this miserable entitlement, and are neither supported by the state nor allowed to work.

Immigration controls are not only about refugees. This is just the latest government myth. Migrants and immigrants – those coming to work and those wanting to join family here – along with visitors and students are all equally subject to controls along with refugees. Except that unlike refugees, they are not even entitled to the fake safety net of the poor law. History is important. It is the immigrant communities, especially of the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean, who from the 1970s launched a direct attack on immigration control by organising around campaigns against deportations and for family reunion. It is these campaigns that laid the foundations for the present movement in defence of refugees.

CAN THERE BE NON-RACIST OR FAIR CONTROLS?

Immigration controls are racist. The first post-war controls, contained in the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, were directed at black people. However, all those subject to immigration control are not black. Within the last decade there has emerged or reemerged a racism against those from Eastern Europe, often combined with an anti-Islamic racism which ensures controls are directed against all those from Bosnians to Serbs to the Roma to the nationalities of the new Russian empire. There is nothing new about this. The first immigration controls, contained in the 1905 Aliens Act, were imposed against refugees – Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe and Tsarist Russia. Controls were

again imposed on Jews attempting to escape Nazism. In short, the first half of the 20th century was about controls against Jews, the second half about controls against black people and the last decade has been about controls against anyone fleeing war, poverty or mayhem or anyone wanting to join family here.

Today there exists, however fragmented, a movement against immigration control – a movement that challenges deportations, which opposes detention centres, which offers solidarity to refugees. The great strength of this movement is that it has united and formed a coalition between liberals and socialists, between reformists who don't challenge controls on principle and socialists who are opposed to all controls – and who argue no one is illegal. The greatest weakness of this movement is that on the level of ideas, liberalism dominates. Many of those critical of controls believe that such controls can somehow be sanitised, be rendered fair, be made non-racist. Even socialists are sometimes reluctant to raise the demand for the abolition of all immigration controls or to take this demand to its logical conclusions, in case this alienates potential allies against the abuses that follow from them. The result is that the argument against controls is simply not presented. Many people, perhaps most fair-minded people, if they are presented with the case, do agree that in principle immigration controls are wrong, but may also believe that to argue for their abolition is unrealistic.

But ideas matter, and so too does the struggle for ideas. Wrong ideas can at best lead to confusion and dead ends, and at worst to collusion with the present system. It is our position – a position that denies anyone is illegal, a position that is for a world without borders – that immigration restrictions can never be rendered fair or non-racist.

This is for the following reasons. First, controls are inherently racist in that they are based on the crudest of all nationalisms – namely, the assertion that the British have a franchise on Britain. Second, they are only explicable by racism. Their imposition is a result of and is a victory for racist, proto-fascist and actual fascist organisations. It is impossible to see how legislation brought into being by such means, legislation accompanied by the most vile racist imagery and assumptions, can ever be reconfigured and rendered 'fair'. Third, the demand for 'fair' controls simply ignores the link between immigration controls and welfare entitlements. This link is itself intrinsically unfair – and racist. Finally, controls can never be 'fair' to those who remain subject to them.

The demand for no controls – based on the assertion that no one is illegal – is frequently derided as utopian, and is compared adversely to the 'realism' of arguing for fair controls. However, this stands political reality on its head. The struggle against the totality of controls is certainly uphill – it may well require a revolution. However the achievement of fair immigration restrictions – i.e., the transformation of immigration controls into their opposite – would require a miracle.

More Problems With Arguments For Reforms

The proclamation, our proclamation that **No One Is Illegal**, means what it says – it does not mean some people are not illegal or only some people are legal. The demand for no controls means no collusion with either the arguments for controls or with controls themselves. However, controls have become so politically legitimised over the relatively short period of their existence that it has become all too easy to accept their existence whilst simultaneously opposing them. Here are some examples of what we are arguing against – deliberately difficult, and we hope provocative, examples:

First, we are absolutely and unconditionally in favour of campaigns against deportation. However, we are critical of the emphasis given to so-called 'compassionate' grounds – in particular the recurrent themes of sickness, age, vulnerability of children, violence towards women and destruction of family relationships. Of course, we accept that these issues have to be presented, and presented forcibly, to the Home Office in private as part of any legal argument. The present balance of power – with the Home Office having most of the power - requires this presentation. However, this does not require campaigns against deportation to construct themselves politically and publicly around such compassionate grounds. What this does is make a distinction between the 'worthy' and the 'unworthy' - between those with compassionate grounds and those without. It legitimises the racist-inspired obligation that people feel to justify their presence here. In doing this it transforms what is normally undesirable – for instance, ill health – into something highly desirable in order to try to remain here. Under the guise of gaining support on humanitarian grounds, it actually dehumanises individuals, and denies them their dignity, by reducing them to the sum total of their disabilities and vulnerabilities. It creates a competition between those subject to immigration controls as to who has the more 'compassionate' grounds. Ultimately, it makes it virtually impossible for young, fit, childless, single people without an asylum claim to fight to stay. This is why we support the slogan 'Solidarity not Pity'. We support unconditionally the right of all people to stay here if they wish to, and irrespective of their personal circumstances.

Second, we are absolutely in favour of exposing the lies and hypocrisies of those advocating immigration controls – such as the lie that people coming here are a 'burden' on welfare or are 'flooding' the country. It is important to reject the notion that if immigration controls were abolished this country would be invaded by the populations of entire continents; the reality is that the vast majority of people prefer to stay where they are if this is at all possible. However, we are opposed to building a case against immigration controls on the grounds that immigration is in the economic self-interest of the current inhabitants of this country, both because such an argument is wrong in principle and because the situation can change. For example, although it was true until recently that more people left this country than came here, this is no longer the case. And while migrants, immigrants and refugees are currently net contributors to the welfare system, supposing it could be shown that new arrivals are somehow accessing a 'disproportionate' percentage of welfare, would that mean we now have to support controls? Statistics are useful to refute distortions and lies, but

cannot be the bedrock of our opposition to controls. Statistics can be a hostage to political fortune. Principles cannot. This is why we support the principle of **No One Is Illegal**.

Third, we recognise the many contributions made to British society by migrants, immigrants and refugees stretching back centuries. Britain has been constructed out of waves of migration – the very idea of there being an 'indigenous' population is both politically racist and historically nonsensical. However, we are opposed to all arguments that seek to justify the presence of anyone on the grounds of the economic or cultural or any other contributions they may make. It is not up to the British state to decide where people should or should not live, or anyone else but migrants and refugees themselves. We support the unfettered right of entry of the feckless, the unemployable and the uncultured. We assert **No One Is Illegal**.

GAINS FOR SOME MEAN EXCLUSION OF OTHERS. NO 'EQUAL-OPPORTUNITIES' IMMIGRATION CONTROLS!

An obvious, if often overlooked, feature of immigration control and the struggle against it, is that defining who may be excluded from it by necessity entails defining who is included in it. **No One Is Illegal** means that reform of immigration control, in whatever way such reform is presented, is at best problematic, at worst unacceptable, because it would leave some people subject to control. It would still leave immigration outlaws. The degree to which any demand falling short of total abolition of controls is acceptable can only be measured by the degree in which it takes up the fight for all outlaws. All specific demands against controls need to be put in the context of and worked out through a position of opposition to all controls. Again we present some deliberately controversial examples:

First, we are critical of the demand for a government 'amnesty' against immigration outlaws. The level of our criticism will depend on the level at which the amnesty is pitched. Who is to be included in this demand? More importantly, who is to be excluded? What gives anyone opposed to controls the right to define who is to be excluded? No One Is Illegal means what it says – anyone in the entire world who wishes to come or remain should have the right to do so. On a pragmatic basis, amnesties have to be criticised as they will be used by the Home Office to entrap those not included in the amnesty. This is precisely what happened when in 1974 a Labour government declared a tightly defined amnesty – deporting many of those who applied under the mistaken belief they fell within the definition.

Second, we are critical of demands which, however well meant, leave even more vulnerable and exposed to immigration controls those not contained within the demand. An example is the demand that women coming here for marriage who are subsequently subject to domestic violence should not be subject to the requirement that they remain living with their partner for 12 months in order to acquire full immigration status. After years of campaigning, this demand has now been met in part. As such it is clearly a tremendous gain for those women who otherwise would have the impossible choice of remaining in a violent relationship or being deported. However where does this leave all those women not

subject to violence who wish for whatever reason to leave the relationship? For them, not being battered by their partner has now become a positive disadvantage for immigration – purposes. This is yet another example of how something morally outrageous abuse of women – has become something highly desirable in immigration law. It is simply not a tenable position to argue. The only tenable position is to fight for the right of all, men or women, to remain in the country, irrespective of their personal situation.

Third, immigration controls are not just racist. In their nationalism they encompass virtually all reactionary ideology. So, unsurprisingly, they are homophobic. Until recently there has been no provision for a gay partner to come or remain. However, we are critical of the campaign for 'equality' with heterosexual relationships for gay relationships within immigration control. There cannot be 'equal opportunities' immigration controls – unless one is in favour of the equality of the damned. For the last 40 years, immigration control has systematically attacked, undermined and wrecked tens of thousands of mainly black extended families from the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean and Africa. Demanding equality with heterosexual couples simply ignores the inherent racism of controls, and therefore the relationship between racism, sexism and homophobia. An additional problem is that the demand for the rights of gay couples elevates romance into a political goal what about the single gay person, the celibate, the lonely, those of no sexual orientation or the promiscuous of any sexual orientation? Including gay couples within immigration law and its spurious 'rights' means that all these other people are by definition excluded. Their status as outlaws is intensified. The way forward is to fight for the rights of all gay women and men along with everyone else to be able to come and remain, irrespective of personal circumstances or relationships. The only 'equal opportunities' immigration controls are no immigration controls.

Fourth, demanding to be 'included' within controls – in the sense of demanding specific provision for gay couples – seems itself quite strange, in that everyone else is fighting to be excluded from the tentacles of controls. However, this contradiction only exists because, given the existence of controls, then absolutely everyone is already 'included' in them to a greater or a lesser extent – in that everyone remains liable to investigation as to whether or not they are subject to them. In this sense, women experiencing domestic violence still very much remain subject to controls – as they are obliged to undergo the humiliation of reliving the violence by having to prove its existence. The only political answer to these issues is to fight for no controls.

Fifth, each piece of immigration legislation going back to 1905 (and dramatically intensified in the last decade) can be seen as another brick in the wall – the wall preventing entry of the undesirable, the unchosen. It is therefore not sufficient to demand the repeal of the latest piece of legislation, to remove the latest brick – the whole wall has to go. Otherwise all those excluded by previous legislation remain outlaws and, what is worse, forgotten outlaws. Simply demanding the repeal of the most recent, and only the most recent, laws only serves to legitimise those preceding them. An example is the agitation

against that part of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (the latest legislation) that denies support to asylum seekers who make 'late' asylum applications – thus rendering these refugees destitute. However, in 1999 there was a campaign against the then latest legislation – the Immigration and Asylum Act. This was the legislation that created the poor law of forced dispersal and below-subsistence support. But now the agitation is to include late asylum applicants within the poor law! Again, this is not a tenable political position.

At the same time, there is being forgotten all those undocumented non-asylum seekers, migrants and immigrants, who have effectively been without any support due to provisions in various pieces of legislation prior to 1999. These statutes were themselves once new, were once campaigned against and are now forgotten – along with those subject to them.

No One is illegal means fighting to destroy immigration controls in their entirety, and at the same time fighting to break the link between welfare entitlement and immigration status.

SOCIALISM

Many, if not all, of the arguments used to justify immigration controls are simply ludicrous and are more the result of racist-inspired moral panic than of any connection with reality. Such is the notion that the entire world population would come to this country if there were no controls: even if such an absurd notion were true, it should prompt concern for their reasons for coming, rather than fear. Nonetheless, these objections to open borders need to be answered; and they require a socialist and anti-imperialist analysis. The objections about 'overcrowding' can only be answered by discussing socialist use of resources - use based on needs, not profits. The objection, the surreal objection, that migrants, immigrants and refugees obtain luxury housing and endless welfare compared to British workers needs to be answered both by pointing out the truth (namely that just the opposite is the case), but also by a recognition that benefits and welfare are woefully inadequate for everyone both for the documented and the undocumented; and that both have a shared interest in fighting for better welfare. The objection that those fleeing the devastation of the third world have no right to come here can be met by pointing out the imperial responsibility for this devastation, both in the past and currently. As the Asian Youth Movement used to say: "We are here because you were there". The objection that a state has the right to control its own borders can only ultimately be answered by questioning the nature of the nation state and of borders.

We agree, and sing along with John Lennon: "Imagine there's no countries..."

THE WAY FORWARD: BREAK THE LINKS, PULL THE PLUG!

>TO BUILD THE WIDEST POSSIBLE ALLIANCE in all struggles against immigration controls amongst those of differing political views. But to do this without collusion with controls and without compromising with the principle of no controls. To do this on the

basis of challenging and winning over those involved to a position of opposition to all controls. No One Is Illegal – No Exceptions, No Concessions, No Conciliation!

- > TO RAISE THE DEMAND FOR NO IMMIGRATION CONTROLS within all actions and campaigns in support of migrants and refugees. A no-controls position should not be a necessary precondition of support for any particular campaign, but we should argue constantly within all campaigns for such a position. We should argue for campaign slogans to reflect a position of opposition to controls, not 'refugees are our friends' or 'refugees are welcome here', but slogans which recognise that we are in favour of freedom for all as a right, not a charity. No One Is Illegal Free Movement No Immigration Controls!
- > TO SUPPORT AND BUILD EVERY SINGLE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DEPORTATION. To do this on the basis of solidarity, not compassion. **No One Is Illegal No Need for Justification of Presence!**
- > TO SUPPORT AND BUILD EVERY CAMPAIGN AGAINST DETENTION/REMOVAL CENTRES, since these are one of the clearest and most outrageously brutal and unjust consequences of immigration controls. No refugees or migrants should be detained simply because they want to be in this country. All detention/removal centres, and also all accommodation, induction and any other repressive 'centres' designed to enforce the unenforceable, should be closed. **No One Is Illegal No Detentions!**
- > TO FIGHT AGAINST ALL FORMS OF COLLUSION with immigration control and with the Home Office. In particular this means local authorities and voluntary sector organisations refusing to implement the new poor law. Local authorities should refuse to act as sub-contracted agents providing accommodation (often otherwise unlettable) for the forced dispersal scheme. Voluntary sector agencies should likewise refuse Home Office monies to enforce the poor law either through the provision of accommodation or advice. No One Is Illegal Break the Links between Welfare Entitlement and Immigration Status!
- > FOR WORKERS WITHIN THE WELFARE SYSTEM TO REFUSE TO COMPLY with the denial of benefits or provisions based on immigration status. Most workers within the welfare state, at either local or national level, entered their jobs in the belief they would be providing some form of socially useful service. Instead they now find they are denying services and have become part of the apparatus of immigration control. **No One Is Illegal No Compliance, Be in and against the State!**

Of course, non-compliance by individual workers would leave them absolutely vulnerable to victimisation and dismissal. Non-compliance requires major trade union support. It is manifestly important to try and win trade unions to a position of no immigration controls. To do this it is equally important to form rank and file groupings within unions of welfare workers who are being obliged to enforce internal immigration controls. **No One Is Illegal – Workers' Control, Not Immigration Controls!**

> FOR A MASSIVE TRADE UNION CAMPAIGN OF RECRUITMENT OF UNDOCUMENTED

WORKERS or immigration outlaws. Such a recruitment campaign would help break the division between the documented and the undocumented. It would enable a campaign to develop against sweated labour and for the protection of migrant rights – rights to a fair wage, right to proper work conditions and, most of all, the right to work itself – as now it is unlawful to work without the correct immigration documentation. It would also provide another base for the undocumented to resist deportation and to fight for the regularisation of their status. No One Is Illegal – Everyone Has the Right to Work, the Right to Be in a Union, and the Right to Have Proper Working Conditions!

WE ARE NOT ALONE!

No One Is Illegal is a phrase first used by Elie Weisel, a Jewish survivor from Nazi Germany, a refugee and a Nobel Prize winner. He was speaking in 1985 in Tuscon, Arizona, at a national sanctuary conference in defence of the rights of refugees to live in the US. The sanctuary movement undertaken by religious communities in the US (and to a far lesser extent in the UK) in support of those threatened by immigration controls is one of many pieces of resistance to controls. Over the last few years No One Is Illegal groups have been formed throughout Europe and North America - for instance, in Germany (Kein Mensch Ist Illegal), Spain (Ninguna Persona Es Ilegal), Sweden (Ingen Manniska Ar Illegal), Poland (Zaden Czlowiek Nie Jest Nielegalny) and Holland (Geen Mens Is Illegaal). In August 1999 anarchists organised a demonstration in Lvov, Poland, against the deportation of Ukrainian workers under the banner of No One Is Illegal. In France the sans papiers campaign functions under the slogan Personne N'Est Illegal/e. There have been No One Is Illegal/No Border camps at the joint borders of Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland, and No Border camps at Frankfurt, southern Spain and Salzburg. In June 2002 there was a demonstration against war, globalisation and in defence of refugees under the same slogan in Ottawa, Canada. In England groups are emerging that call themselves **No Borders**. The demand for no controls, rather than being seen as extreme, operates as a rallying call to the undocumented and their supporters. Our aim in producing this, our initial manifesto, is to encourage the formation of No One Is Illegal/No Border groups throughout this country - groups specifically and unreservedly committed to the destruction of all immigration controls.

6 September 2003 http://www.noii.org.uk/no-one-is-illegal-manifesto/



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Cybermohalla

A group of young researcher-practitioners has emerged in working-class and quasi-legal settlements in Delhi, under the rubric of Cybermohalla (a collaboration of Sarai-CSDS and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education, Delhi). These settlements are: LNJP Colony (media lab operational since 2001), Dakshinpuri Resettlement Colony (media lab operational since 2002), Nangla Maanchi (media lab operational from 2004-2006; demolished when the settlement was bulldozed as part of Delhi's ongoing preparations for the 2010 Commonwealth Games); and Ghevra, a new resettlement colony still in the process of formation on the northwest periphery of Delhi. There is also an experimental Research & Development Lab that hosts the Cybermohalla mobile lab which travels between locations, and to other sites to initiate new possibilities of spaces, practices and circulatory forms. Over a duration ranging at present from six-and-a-half years to a few months for different researcher-practitioners, the city has been inscribed in different registers, using a range of old and new media and narrative strategies involving sound, images, and texts, within the context of the media labs located in their own neighbourhoods. A recent publication from Cybermohalla researcher-practitioners is *Bahurupiya Shehr* (The Dissembler City, Rajkamal Prakashan, 2007, Delhi), a collection of stories, biographies, conversations, blog entries and reflections about the city.

Azra Tabassum (b. 1983) left school in Class IX and assisted her mother with sewing work. She first saw the full expanse of her colony, LNJP, in 2000 while conducting a survey with Ankur. In 2001 she joined the Cybermohalla Lab in LNJP, and also finished her secondary education through Open School. One of her key interests is conceptualising and testing processes for the creation of self-regulated spaces. **Jaanu Nagar** (b. 1985) completed his secondary education in Fatehpur (Uttar Pradesh) and his first year of undergraduate study from Delhi University. Deeply interested in writing in Hindi, he taught for a year at Janhitkari Saraswati Vidya Mandir in Fatehpur, and completed a one-year computer course in Delhi. In 2005 he joined the Cybermohalla Lab in Nangla Maanchi, the colony where he lived. By the time the settlement was demolished in 2006, he had created an archive of audio recordings about Nangla. Post-eviction he has continued to work with Cybermohalla. He is a co-author of *Bahurupiya Shehr* (The Dissembler City, Rajkamal Prakashan. 2007), a compilation of writings by Cybermohalla practitioners.

Lakhmi Chand Kohli (b. 1981) took up different jobs after he finished school – operated a public call booth, worked in a milk depot and a factory, as a compounder in a pharmacy, and collected data for different kinds of city surveys. In 2003 he joined the Cybermohalla Lab at Dakshinpuri and now works there fulltime. He coedits the quarterly Cybermohalla broadsheet *Bade-Bade Shehron Mein Kuchh Namm Baatein* (Soft Sounds and Conversations in Large Loud Cities).

Love Anand (b. 1987) completed Class XII and is trying to find a means to pursue an undergraduate degree in Computer Applications. In 2004 he joined the Cybermohalla Lab in Dakshinpuri. He finds he has matured through working collectively with other researcher-practitioners, and is now paying more attention to his responsibilities towards his parental home.

Neelofar (b. 1985) has been with the Cybermohalla Lab in LNJP colony since she finished school in 2001. While at the lab she has also completed short-term courses, training as a beautician, a DTP operator, etc. At present she is engaged in trying to understand the formation and texture of shared public shared spaces, and to evolve a vocabulary to bring this understanding into public dialogue.

Rakesh Khairalia (b. 1978) took up different jobs after he finished school – tried to start a courier service, worked in a screen printing press, in a placement agency, as a cashier, as a marketing agent and as a supervisor for different companies. He joined the Cybermohalla Lab at Dakshinpuri in 2004. He is currently researching how different conversational contexts in the locality can be drawn upon and deepened. Shamsher Ali (b. 1986) has been associated from childhood with the Ankur Learning Centre. While in school he started a workshop with his friends to make jewellery boxes. In 2001 he joined the Cybermohalla Lab in LNJP colony, dividing his time between school, workshop and lab. For the last two years he has been focusing on questions emerging from his engagement with LNJP, Nangla Maanchi and Ghevra resettlement colonies.

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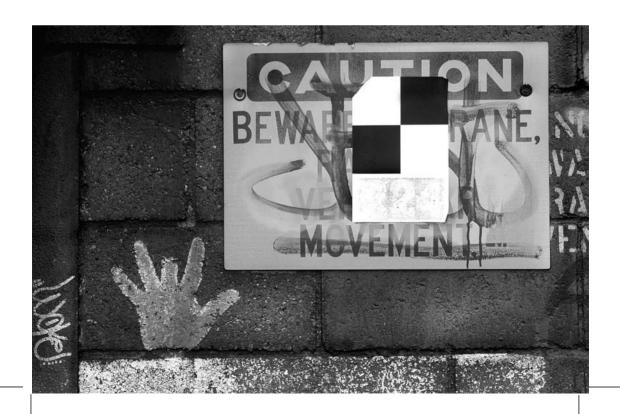






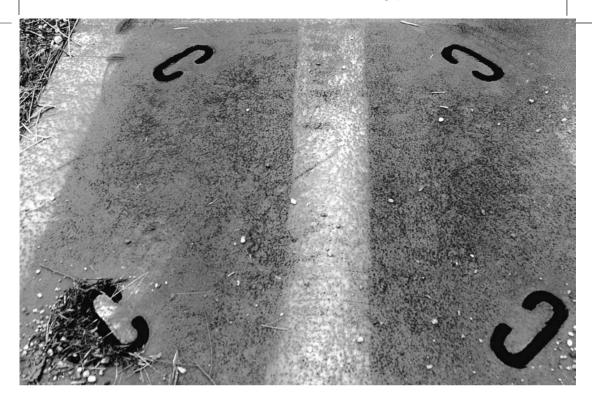


























Rokovoko

MOGAS STATION

Video Projection, 20 min., (2007)

Queequeg was a native of Rokovoko, an island far away to the West and South. It is not down on any map; true places never are.

Moby Dick

The artists are filmed at sea, each upon a floating white surface, the ruins of a deconstructed 'white cube', minimally designed and perfectly finished. We might imagine these surfaces as pieces of banquise, or sea ice, carried south by Arctic currents to warmer waters. Curiously, they arrive off the Vietnamese coast and the tropical climate both fractured and intact.

The film is non-linear, fractured and speaks to isolation and the search for the power of company. The gestures of the actors imitate the activities of everyday life as if performed in a real-time social context. However, once removed from the quotidian into an almost empty environment – a non-space – they create an atmosphere where absurdity reigns and banality is pushed to the limits of madness.