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Violence and Postcolonial India

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Violence and Postcolonial India

Guest Editors:

Om Prakash DWIVEDI and Binayak ROY

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Editorial

Om Prakash DWIVEDI
and **Binayak ROY**

India is famously known as a land where diversity of religions and cultures exist. Communal harmony is one of its founding principles as envisaged and advanced by various philosophers and sages like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, etc. However, this inherent feature of India's harmony has not only broken asunder repeatedly, but also heightened in the form of rampant violence. Violence has been a recurrent phenomenon both in the history of colonial and postcolonial India. In fact, as per the April 2017 Pew Research Center analysis of 198 countries, India occupied the fourth position for its religious intolerance. If colonial India witnessed the brutal onslaught of the Britishers, postcolonial India advances the cyclic pattern of violence, albeit in different mutations. The redrawing of boundary has concomitantly redefined a new enemy. The enemy is now within. The monumental period of India's postcoloniality is marked by a constant struggle over who owns India and its soul. Communal violence now converges with state sponsored violence underpinned with caste, gender, and regional identity. It creates a culture of violence, which spews, encourages, and sustains new binaries and everyday confrontation.

This special number seeks to respond to this moment of crisis plaguing postcolonial India and the various ways in which violence can be reimagined. It takes for its consideration five articles in total. The lead article by Luszczynska is a theoretical piece, which weaves a theoretical framework of violence per se. It builds its arguments by examining the relationship among ontology, being and the world on the bedrock of Etienne Balibar's *Violence and Civility* and Slavoj Zizek's *Violence.* Although the article does not bring India within its purview but the rational behind including it is the richness that it adds to the conceptual framework of the

notion of violence. The next article by Alessandro Vescovi and Elisabetta Sorini adopts a comparative approach and examines Leonardo Sciascia's *The Day of the Owl* (1961) and Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* (2006). It claims that, despite their popular reception, they cannot be considered simply as detective novels. They are indeed hybrid genres between the detective and the realistic traditions. In accord with the different poetics, settings and historical periods, they attempt to investigate the motive of the proliferation of violent criminal organizations in Sicily and Mumbai during the second half of the 20th century. The long foreign domination (Spanish in Sicily and English in India) created mistrust towards the corrupted and arrogant rulers. The consequence is the creation of a parallel apparatus that, despite its violence, helps all citizens without distinction.

Binayak Roy's article on Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* discusses the plight of a hoard of refugees repatriated from the parched lands of Madhya Pradesh in Central India to the marshlands of the Sundarbans in search of livelihood, and subsequent confrontations between the government and the refugees. Roy examines the uncompromising idealist character of Nirmal who plunges himself into the struggle between a group of powerless refugees and a dominant political force. Roy's arguments pivot around Agamben's concept of the witness.

The next article by Om Prakash Dwivedi examines the theme of the Indian partition, the concomitant violence and notion of humanism as highlighted and advanced in Tabish Khair's *Filming*. The novel takes a myriad of approaches to look into the notion of Otherness and suggests that violence needs to be resisted at all cost.

Syed Haider's "India's Global Modernity and Terrorism in the Hindi Cinema" takes a stock of the Bollywood movies, *Fanaa* and *A Wednesday* to analyse the dominance of the figure of Muslim terrorist in the Hindi cinema, which boasts of global modernity. Haider criticises the idea of modernity as such by questioning the ways in which Muslim characters have been stereotyped as terrorists and the Other in a range of Hindi movies.

"Yes…, and…". On Violence and/as Hospitality

Ana M. LUSZCZYNSKA
Florida International University

Motto:
"What I am talking about here is compassion, but not compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, xiii).

Abstract: Beginnings are violent and deceitful. Pretending that they spontaneously emerge from nowhere, these words and thoughts cannot help but feign erasure of all that preceded them. There is thus something bold and presumptuous about claiming the ability to inaugurate and virtually burst onto the scene. In an attempt to mitigate the violence and deception of this particular beginning, I want to clearly contextualize what will follow.

Keywords: Violence, Ontology, Language, Hospitality, Compassion.

Approaching a theme as vast as violence inevitably requires a process of narrowing, discarding, and eventually deciding upon what to focus (a violent move in itself). Upon considering myriad manifestations of what I call conceptual and material violences, and the implications and consequences of such a framing, I ultimately find myself preoccupied with a particular palimpsestic relationship between ontology, language, and world. That violence necessarily occurs within these three inescapable horizons, is perhaps obvious. Less obvious are the precise ways in which

various violences on both conceptual and material levels unfold together in mutually constituting relationships. Strictly speaking, identifying discrete manifestations of conceptual and material violence is impossible as they all inhere within the other. A portion of what follows is therefore an attempt to tease out these complex and difficult dynamics between them. The hope is that in so doing, we will gain understandings of the violences we can locate, the ways in which they work, and finally, possible contexts and avenues of resistance.

Given these complicated relationships between them, it is all the more difficult to imagine viable modes of resistance to the oppressive manifestations of violence. If we cannot easily identify them, much less their "source," (since violences overlap and continually mutually constitute each other within the horizons of being, language, and world) then how can we effectively respond? I propose that perceiving and analyzing the multiple contexts that nourish or prohibit various violences provides us with ways to imagine and even foster possibilities for resistance, transformation, and emancipation. In a strange formulation, I will ultimately suggest that potent forms of resistance to oppressive violences (conceptual and material) can be located in ontological events and scenes that are themselves, in some way, "positively" violent. In brief, the violence of the relatedness of being qua being cannot not resist both conceptual and material oppressive and therein essentializing violences.[1] Or more briefly still, the violence of attempts at ontological enclosure can be resisted by the violence of its inevitable disenclosure.

In a then sideways thought-move, I want to consider both the presuppositions and ramifications of approaching violence byprioritizing being and language. In terms of presuppositions, I find myself continually plagued by what Zizek might call "liberal" humanist guilt - guilt of the charge that focusing upon such apparent abstractions as being and language ignores immediate and urgent material concerns within the actual world of

[1] "Violent relatedness" also called "sharing" is borrowed from the work of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. See *The Inoperative Community*, p. xiii.

lived experience.[2] After all, there is a sense in which this kind of thinking *is* a luxury reserved for those whose belly is full and immediate physical being isn't regularly imperiled. Articulated most concisely, doesn't a focus on being and language presuppose a subject (and reader) who is *not* living in the context of the threat or actualization of material violence? Yes and no. Conceptualizations of being and language are the tools by which material violences emerge, are cemented, and disseminated. It is this relationship that Audre Lorde identifies when she asserts that "the masters tools will not dismantle the masters house." [3]

In terms of ramifications, if I pursue a line of thinking that presupposes the priority of being and language, what kinds of analysis am I leaving out and even worse, unable to see? What about more materially and historically focused examinations of violence that look at actual structures of power, oppression, and domination and the living, breathing people most saliently suffering as a result? Do I risk blindness to these crucial lines of inquiry if I remain within the abstract realms of ontology and language? The answer is emphatically "no". Work grounded in analysis of concrete structures of violence and oppression that materially occur (Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Cro*w immediately comes to mind) are absolutely vital to any thinking about emancipatory politics and strategies of resistance. Foregrounding the relationships between being and language does not imply either an inability or a lack of desire to also see and study concrete structures of power. Yes… and.

And what about the nature of abstraction and materiality as they relate to these presuppositions and ramifications? At this point in our scholarly landscape, most of us generally agree that these oppositions "don't work" and themselves presuppose atomized and therein overly simplistic (and often dangerous) understandings. The material world cannot be divorced from the conceptual/linguistic world that both

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[2] In Slajov Zizek's *Violence: Six Sideways Glances*, he repeatedly evokes "liberal communist" to derisively indicate an unsophisticated and dangerous positionality which unwittingly makes possible the very violences it condemns. I removed the term "communist" as it not as significantly at play in the United States, the context from which this analysis emerges.

[3] See Audre Lorde's seminal *Sister Outsider*, pp. 100-114.

constitutes and reflects it. Indeed, this is in large part what Chantal Mouffeand Ernesto Laclau were getting at with the phrase "discursively constituted real."[4] Similarly, Murray Krieger points to this same aporetic dynamic when he claims that "language becomes a world and the world becomes its language."[5] We can no more disentangle the two than we can separate flesh and blood- that which we can touch and that which allows us to do so. This dynamic and mutual constitution has been explicitly studied and elaborated upon extensively for at least a half a century- it is not news. If we want to effectively/productively think about oppressive violence and potential strategies for resistance, transformation, and emancipation, we must keep a critical eye on abstraction/language and materiality/world. Indeed, both are both- language and world are both abstract and material, simultaneously. Both are crucial in both senses. Yes… and.

But then, thinking sideways yet again (and at this point somewhat violently) a discussion of the false dichotomy between abstraction and materiality leads me to consider the corresponding theory and praxis or thinking and doing opposition, that also doesn't work. Just as language makes a world and the world makes language, theorizing is practicing or thinking is doing, a conceptualization specifically articulated by Aristotle. Heidegger too made this clear in his reading of Heraclitus in *Letter on Humanism* and Nancy similarly discusses such a dynamic in "What is to be Done" at the close of *Retreating the Political*.[6] Zizek also and provocatively (as is his way) cites Marx and Lenin whose responses to the start of the revolution/calls for action were "can't the revolution wait a few years as I'm not done writing Capital" and "learn, learn, learn" respectively.[7] Zizek's assertion that "Sometimes the most pragmatic thing to do is to do nothing" is indeed wise.[8] And, Derrida's claim in *Violence and Metaphysics*

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[4] See *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau, pp. 111-112.
[5] See Murray Krieger's *A Reopening of Closure: Organicism against Itself,* p. 129.
[6] See "Letter on Humanism" by Martin Heidegger, in *Basic Writing*s and the closing essay, "What is to Be Done?" of *Retreating the Political* by Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy.
[7] Zizek, *Violence*, pp. 7-8.
[8] Zizek, *Violence,* p.7.

that "non-violence is, in one sense, the worst kind of violence" is as well.[9] Yes to Zizek and yes to Derrida. As always, there is no prescription for either thinking or action or thinking as action or vice versa. So, in provisional conclusion, we must theorize which is itself praxis, and we must act, which is also a form of theorizing. Yes... and. Theorizing and/as practice and practicing and/as theory.

And now, in an attempt to move forward, I must find my way back to the main road. But I head that way while trying to remain cognizant of the paths I just walked- which revealed that in my prioritizing of ontology and discourse in a study of violence, I must (and this must is also violent in its own way - the ethical imperative erupts) remain cognizant of the complex and palimpsestic relationship between being and language, abstraction and materiality, concept and world, and theory and praxis. These are often aporetic and difficult and I can only promise to do my best (and yet another violence inserts itself in and out of me- that of the written iteration of a promise). I am thankful to have Etienne Balibar's *Violence and Civility* and Slavoj Zizek's *Violence*, as central textual interlocutors on this unwieldy and at times unsettling discursive journey. Further, as Balibar and Zizek readily invoke the thinking of Heidegger and Lacan (and in certain ways Derrida), I implicitly have them, in some measure, with me as well. Lastly, Jean-Luc Nancy's exhaustive analysis of community as singular plurality[10] and Derridean hospitality[11] assist me throughout but particularly in imagining responses to the imperatives that emerge.

Let's (pretend to) begin by grounding ourselves in a few assertions. First, considerations of language are central to substantive and layered discussions about violence in its myriad manifestations. Second, we must bear in mind that there are many kinds of violence and they do not share a single unalterable quality or characteristic. There is no essence of violence. Were we to approach an exploration of violence from an essentializing frame, we would be complicit in creating the conditions that make our interventions

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[9] See "Violence and Metaphysics" from *Writing and Difference*, pp. 79-133.

[10] See Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* and *Being Singular Plural*.

[11] Although "hospitality" is a theme arguably approached in much of Derrida's oeuvre, I am thinking here specifically of *Of Hospitality (*with Anne Dufourmantelle), *The Gift of Death*, *Monolingualism of the Other*, and *Sovereignties in Question*.

to it necessary. This way of approaching an idea is not only fruitless, but a part of the very problem, thought, or conceptualizing tendency, that leads to all of the kinds of oppressive violence we will examine.

In *Violence and Civility*, Etienne Balibar outlines several distinct kinds of violence, an exercise that might be deemed both useful and incomplete: objective, ultraobjective, subjective, ultrasubjective, as well as extreme violence (or cruelty) and counterviolence, non-violence, and finally anti-violence (what he also, oddly, calls "civility," a critical component of his "politics of politics"). Although the threat of violence cannot be eliminated, (any such attempts invariably lead to its escalation) it can be addressed. Todd May's review of Balibar's*Violence and Civility* provides an excellent summary of these various violences as well as possible ways of responding:

> If violence, or at least its threat, cannot be eliminated, what can be done to address it? Balibar briefly considers and rejects two options before embracing a third. The two he rejects are nonviolence and counterviolence. Nonviolence is to Balibar an "abstraction" (22) from violence. It fails to recognize that violence is always a threat, opting instead to occupy a position that seeks to be beyond the threat of violence. Counterviolence, by contrast, seeks to invoke violence against violence, hoping to end violence by violent means. This strategy, however, is simply an "inversion" (22) of violence, one whose consequence is often to repeat the cruelties that it set out to oppose. Instead of these two strategies, which share a false commitment to the idea that the threat of violence and in particular of the extreme violence of cruelty can be terminated, Balibar believes we must embrace a strategy of anti-violence or civility. He insists that "unless a politics of civility is introduced into the heart of the politics of transformation, indications are that the latter will not by itself create the conditions for emancipation(but only those of another form of servitude). " (Balibar, 104)[12]

Interestingly, a closer look at the various violences Balibar identifies reveals that they all inevitably invoke both the structural (abstract) and

[12] See Todd May, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*.

material/corporal (concrete). Counter violence is the violence that responds to structural and material violence with material violence that aims at an ultimate end to both. Non-violence is that which refuses to engage in material violence with the goal of attaining a non-violent material and structural state. Both have an end game which clearly involves eliminating the structures that promote and create particular kinds of material violence (in other words, eradicating both). And anti-violence, or "civility," is something like his antidote, or at least, that which he would like to promote. Quoting Balibar directly now:

> … "civility" or anti-violence (with its multiple strategies) forms as such a "politics of politics" (or a meta-politics in charge of "creating" the conditions for the institution of the political, including this very special form of institution which is a revolution), because (as I had also argued in another essay) the politics of politics is to be identified not so much with one modality (or one concept) of historical action as with a varying combination of several modalities: "emancipation," "transformation," and "civility." But for the very same reason, I would be liberated from the obsession of reaching a "conclusion" for my quest of the strategies of civility (or a conclusion that would not be a continuous elaboration of the problem itself). I would become more clearly aware of the fact that our quest, *both theoretical and practical*, is a quest for unprecedented forms of civility, combined with inventions of (post national, postcolonial, post disciplinary, post patriarchic) citizenship, which also by definition means experimenting with other modes of subjectivation" (Balibar, ix-x).[13]

For Balibar then, anti-violence, or civility, is not an isolatable or unitary theory and/or praxis, but rather has "multiple strategies' that themselves form a meta-politics "in charge of "creating" the conditions for the institution of the political." Further, Balibar posits that such a "politics of politics" is comprised of "varying combinations" of several modalities, "or concepts," of historical action: emancipation, transformation, and civility. The slippage here between concept and action or theory and praxis should not go unnoticed and brings us back to the side-paths with which we

[13] Balibar, *Violence and Civility*, preface, pp. ix-x.

began. We are reminded that it appears impossible to engage in any meaningful analysis of violence without considering the roles of theory and praxis and the complex relationship therein. We must engage (act) in and with a combination of concepts, of historical action and these are emancipation, transformation, and civility-theories and actions all. Given that Balibar prioritizes "civility" we would do well to inquire further into its nature. We have seen what it must do but what exactly "is" it? Todd May rightly notes that Balibar:

> …does not have much to say directly about its character. His discussion is more focused on the violence it seeks to prevent or at least keep at bay. However, from that discussion we can draw out his meaning. Civility, at a first go, is the attempt to ward off cruelty, to be cognizant of the twin but distinct threats of ultra objective and ultrasubjective violence, and to counter them within whatever politics of transformation is being embraced. This, in turn, would require recognizing what might be called broadly the *humanity* of others: their distinct lives with their distinct dreams and hopes and projects and loves… This recognition resists the reduction of others to an anonymous surplus or a diabolical Other" (May, italics mine).[14]

Civility in Balibar's lexicon, is then, characterized by its resistance to violence or cruelty vis a vis a politics of transformation and an ability to perceive the distinction between objective and subjective threats of violence. But in order to so resist, "civility" is able to recognize other beings as human, with their corresponding unique "lives with their distinct dreams and hopes and project and loves." This ability to recognize human being as human being, thus "resists" or disallows both objective and subjective violences. In the context of Balibar's "civility," human being cannot be made into an object of any kind. (This is an important point and I will return to it later in the context of Nancian and Derridean singular plurality and hospitality, respectively.)

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[14] See Todd May, "Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy."

Given the colonial echoes of the term "civility," and the inherent historical violences thus evoked, I propose moving forward using a different term (and cannot help but wonder at this odd choice in terminology- indeed "civilized" versus "savage" was/is a founding principle of colonial atrocities. It is certainly curious that the term used to (among other things) designate an ability to perceive the differences between various violences, objective and subjective, be one which has itself violently, conceptually (or objectively) grounded the horrors of colonial enterprise. While it would obviously be impossible to find an exact replicate (and I've made it clear that I would not wish to do so), I will use "critical hospitality" or simply "hospitality." This proposed term invokes the act of respecting and opening to the beings of others, the interpretive acumen to recognize essentializing gestures (the infliction of various violences), and additionally has the crucial advantage of being stripped of colonial connotations. The act or event of "critical hospitality" will be central to the final portion of this study.

At least as interesting as Balibar's multi-pronged meta politics "in charge" of "creating the conditions for the institution of the political" is the lack of articulation of the grounds for the imperative itself. A charge is no small thing. Are *we* not charged with examining the presuppositions that animate the charge to which he refers? If the politics of politics is "in charge" of creating conditions, is it not responsible for or obligated to and is this not itself an ethical imperative that appears to inhere within the metapolitical itself? And what of our charge to examine the nature of the metapolitical charge? Alongside Nancy, and *vis a vis* "The Free Voice of Man," I propose that there is an ethical imperative at the heart of being and discourse itself that cannot not violently announce itself and inevitably appears (in and as being itself).[15] This will be a central point at the close of the essay when I propose strategies of resistance (involving the creation of theoretical and material contexts) that are both in dialogue with and an extension of elements of the thinking of both Balibar's and Nancy.

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[15] Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "The Free Voice of Man," in *Retreating the Political.*

In his 2004 text *Violence*, Slavoj Zizek also considers both objective and subjective violences, although in a manner quite different from that of Balibar[16] Zizek posits that there are three kinds of objective violence, related yet distinct, with two of the three pertaining directly to the workings of language and the final one to systems. Appearing to prioritize the former, he understands it as "a symbolic violence embodied in our language and its forms."[17] But of the two kinds of violence embodied in language, Zizek places still more emphasis on that which is the least recognizable and rather is the theoretical frame or presupposition that props up the more obvious everyday violences contained in the content and form of language. Herein he uses Heidegger's famous philosophical claim that "language is the house of being" to make his point:

> First, there is a "symbolic" violence embedded in language and its forms, what Heidegger would call our "house of being." As we shall see later,this violence is not only at work in the obvious- and extensively studied- cases of incitement and relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms there is a more *fundamental* form of violence still that pertains to language as such: to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning; second there is what I call systemic violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning or our economic and political systems" (Zizek,1-2, italics mine). [18]

The violence of "essencing" (as he also calls it) or making a world of universal meanings, is "fundamental" and as such appears to have a central or even primary (both in terms of temporality and value) role to

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[16] Zizek, *Violence*. Zizek's inflammatory critique of gender studies and celebration of gender and sexual binaries is one with which I take violent exception. It is suspicious that a text largely focused upon the violence wrought by linguistic gestures, can itself be so assaultive regarding particular subjective identifications concerning gender and sexuality. I once again am struck by what I can only call a wilful scholarly blindness that seems to be based on 'camp" affiliations rather than sustained and open consideration and analysis.

[17] Zizek, *Violencs*, p. 2.

[18] Zizek, *Violence*. The "cases of incitement and relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms" are often termed "microaggressions" in current discourses surrounding positionality, constitutions of subjectivity, and relations of power. p. 2.

play.[19] In other words, Zizek's particular formulation suggests that the violent theoretical underpinning of linguistically constituting a world of universal meaning is that upon which we ought to focus the bulk of our analysis.

The "systemic violence" Zizek posits as the other (non-linguistic) objective violence, is easy to grasp and often discussed in both academic and non-academic circles (the terms "systemic" and "structural" are used interchangeably here). These are the abstract (yet vividly materially experienced) violences perpetrated by structures of power such as the family, the educational system, the military, and the penal system (the structures of hegemony). As these examples indicate, the "systems" referenced can be as localized as the family unit and as vast as the entire prison industrial complex. It is worth returning to Balibar's explication of systemic violence as it is particularly effective and also draws from Heidegger: "We, as individual and collective subjects, are the agents and actors of these various configurations. But even if they are made of our own "deeds," we are not the masters (much less the creators) of the conditions in which violence (which is inherent in politics…)…becomes extreme violence."[20] These are the pre-existing structures according to which we are able (or allowed) to engage with the world and others. Human agency is thus envisioned as always-already occurring "within" a context which "we" did not create and by implication, choose.

Lastly, Zizek's subjective violence is simply "the most visible." It is the violence that we generally think of when the term is evoked- "acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, international conflict…violence performed *by a clearly identifiable agent*"[21] (Zizek, 1, italics mine). These are the violences to which "liberal communists" most readily and even eagerly respond. But, he cautions us, "we should learn to step back, to disentangle ourselves from the fascinating lure, of this directly visible subjective

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[19] Zizek's "imposition of a universe of meaning" is termed "the will to essence" by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Inoperative Community.*
[20] Balibar, *Violence and Civility,* preface, p. xii.
[21] Zizek, *Violence*, p. 2.

violence"[22] (Zizek, 1). While the "lure" he references is questionable as a generalizable phenomenon, the fact that "violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent" is more directly (and I would add "easily") visible is not. Indeed, subjective violence is that which is regularly used by mass media to manipulate perceptions for any number of purposes. It is that to which we immediately and affectively respond and the source of endless "liberal communist" guilt and hand-wringing.

To most effectively understand the violences Zizek identifies and further, to witness the ways in which they seamlessly function together, we can examine the layers at work in the prison industrial complex, the horrific centerpiece of the U.S. "justice" system. With terrifying efficiency and calculation, the prison industrial complex invokes both the objective and subjective violences that Zizek suggests. Beginning with what he identifies as the most "fundamental" objective violence, that of the "imposition of a certain universe of meaning" the prison industrial complex grounds itself (hangs its proverbial hat) in the same creation of essentialized "races" that has been wreaking havoc on the world since at least the Enlightenment. This objective violence, unfolding in and as discourse, is the logic upon which the entire violent system rests- in contrast to what we call "white people" the "races" of people of color are inherently "less human" and therefore less or not entitled to livable lives.[23] Zizek and Balibar both want to underscore the world-making dynamic at play. The concept of race itself has created and continues to create both linguistic and material worlds in which all of these violences can unfold. The words of Murray Krieger once again prove concise and compelling: "Language makes a world and the world makes a language."

Consider the other kind of linguistic objective violence Zizek identifies, that of "cases of incitement and relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms" in the context of the prison industrial complex. For our purposes, in relation to the U.S. penal system,

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[22] Zizek, *Violence*, p. 2.

[23] See *Violence and Civility*, pgs. for an extensive discussion of the twin notions of humans deemed disposable and/or vehicles of potential contamination, that this "essencing" presupposes and actively works. As he notes, they are intensely related and often overlap.

popular media (and various politicians), have recently taken to task the creation and use of the term "super-predators" to refer to alleged repeat criminal offenders in the 1980's. This term reflected an already present ideological/conceptual framing (Zizek's most fundamental objective violence)- that of a universal meaning of the term "race" and the hierarchical valuing or devaluing of each in association with the presence of absence of particular traits (inversely related to the presence of melanin). This kind of linguistic violence is often referenced in (and increasingly outside of) the academy, as the process of "coding" in which one signifier is a stand in for another set of meanings which it nonetheless, hides from view.[24]"Super-predator" was clearly a code word for "people of color," particularly those designated as "male"[25] and thus itself a manifestation of the "second" kind of linguistic objective violence Zizek discusses (second because it is less "fundamental" and more readily identifiable). The two kinds of linguistic objective violence are integrally related, but most assuredly not the same.

The final kind of objective violence Zizek proposes is the most obvious of the three and one of the most commonly articulated- the violence perpetrated by systems themselves. While not quite immediately visible, systemic violence is nonetheless more readily comprehensible. The prison industrial complex is a knowable entity with components that can be easily identified and named. If I want to consider and discuss it, I can point to its physical manifestations- "actual" prisons and courts of law, for example. Unlike the linguistic objective violences, the systemic variety has a signifier

[24] Zizek's observation regarding the preponderance of discussions and/or analysis of this type of linguistic violence, seems to me, important and easily verifiable. Indeed, most fields within the social sciences and humanities today have sub-fields devoted to precisely this topic of power relations and violence embedded within everyday language (particularly as they relate to the constitution of various social identities or positionalities). Similarly, such examinations are not uncommon within the programming of both marginal and mainstream "news" outlets. Linguistic violence of this kind is certainly more easily identifiable than the "essencing" violence that provides its condition of possibility. As such, it is studied at length.

[25] I include quotes around the term "male" to indicate the constructed nature of that which it signifies (and the transcendental signifier upon which it rests - another important "essencing" to be sure). Zizek makes clear that he finds the deconstruction of these binaries of gender and sexuality, "absurd" (p. 35).

that points to something other than itself. In other words, it is not language which enacts, produces, or reifies violence here, but something to which a linguistic signifier can refer. There is no "meta" dynamic at play in the case of systemic violence and in terms of its comprehensibility, it has the decided advantage of presenting itself in an immediately accessible manner.

Clearly visible and accessible, nearly transparent in meaning, subjective violence announces itself plainly as we witness in the context of the prison industrial complex. The falsely accused and unjustly imprisoned, the victims of police murder and brutality, are all examples of subjective violence. The actual human beings who are objectified and violated, dehumanized and oppressed, are the subjects experiencing the violence of objectification. Zizek strongly encourages us to remain skeptical of the "lure" of the only non-objective violence he proposes and we get the sense that the immediate "meaning" with which it confronts us is reason enough to prompt suspicion. The less apparent, more insidious, and thus arguably, more difficult to resist, linguistic violences, herein remain hidden from view. In other words, perceiving subjective violence is "easy" and once it has been done, the possibility of any further analysis is often foreclosed. Identifying, denouncing, and focusing exclusively upon subjective violence, has the unfortunate consequence of obfuscating its linguistic (objective) conditions of possibility which thus continues to go entirely unchecked. Oppressive violences of all kinds can continue to flourish.

Mutually constituting yet distinct, the dynamic between objective and subjective violences is complex and difficult, and that upon which scholars or citizens choose to focus, is often the deciding factor in "camp" designations. Eschewing such designations in an effort to cultivate a more hospitable critical landscape, I suggest that all of these approaches are needed and none at the expense of the others. Can we not access our analysis of violence from a framework of "yes… and…?" Such an interpretive stance implicitly acknowledges the importance and value of other approaches while also seeking to contribute to and further the discussion. It is no doubt true then when imagining modes of resistance, we need to address and account for as many angles as possible. Addition is indeed preferable to subtraction here.

Balibar's proposal regarding the responsibility of meta-politics, and Zizek's underscoring of a Heideggerean conceptualization of the violence of being in language and world, under gird much of what follows. Bearing in mind that being is always-already ecstatic (or eksistence) as well as existing within the horizon of language (as "the house of Being,") we are confronted with the fundamental violences by which we are constituted. As ecstatic, being is necessarily not-one, not a unity or cohesive whole, which is another way of saying that being is finite. As Jean-Luc Nancy has intricately elaborated, finitude violently interrupts any attempts at universalization or "essencing" which are a primary source of what Balibar and Zizek both identify as objective violence. Additionally, within language as the house of being, we are necessarily thrown (violently - as indicated by the chosen verb here) into a world not of our making, including, specifically and by implication, violent and oppressive power structures. Language as violence is here evoked in two-fold fashion, as Zizek compellingly outlines.

But what of the "positive" elements of our thrownness into and existence within language and the world and how might these be related to possibilities regarding the charge of the political? As being ecstatic, or finite, and thus incapable of enclosure, I cannot not extend outward and toward and in so doing an "other" is implied. Unlike Levinas, and important strands of both Derrida and Nancy, Zizek understands a confrontation with the other (figured as the neighbour or the beloved, and importantly, the necessarily "inhuman") as negatively "violent and even traumatic" (Zizek, 56). The opacity of the abyss between beings, according to Zizek, fills me with something like terror. In contrast, following Derrida and Nancy, I propose a reading in which incomprehensibility (in the face of a confrontation with the (necessarily radical) other), instead supplies us with a fundamental ethic.[26] But rather than end our discussion with this conclusion, I propose that we continue moving and allow it to assist us in actively imagining and hopefully creating alternative contexts and (therein)

[26] Zizek, *Violence*, pp. 55-57. In contrast, see Derrida's "Rams: Between Two Infinities" and "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing" in *Sovereignties in Question*. Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, *Being Singular Plural*, and "The Free Voice of Man" also elaborate extensively on a constitutive ontological ethic.

modes of being which are simultaneously resistant to oppressive violence and hospitable, emancipatory, and transformative. This is what we can, and indeed must, do.

Understanding the crucial role that "violent relatedness," "sharing," or disenclosure plays in cultivating critical hospitality may prove a useful strategy.[27] We are unaccustomed to thinking in terms of open-ended extension that denies both origin and destination. Rather, clear, straight, lines with easily identifiable beginnings, middles, and ends, have been among our most central and guiding principles. As conceived by Derrida and Nancy (and Levinas for that matter), the constitutive movement between beings is decidedly not a line and is rather an eruptive event of opening and exposure to the other. If we can push and practice readily thinking and understanding in terms of the value of this dynamism, we might be able to begin to imagine places and spaces that actually nourish and promote critical hospitality and thus the new kinds of subjectivities that Balibar envisions.[28]

So, what are such contexts? Do they already exist or must we imagine them? What might some of those contexts look like and how might we create them? Elsewhere I have suggested the potential of literary analysis for assisting us in this task and stand by this recommendation and seek to extend it.[29] We must bear in mind that extension, violent relatedness, and critical acumen are central to the contexts we wish to identify and create, and that the hope is that the material realities as well as our comportment therein would also necessarily be constituted by said features. In other words, the hope is that different (co-constituting) linguistic and world contexts (ones based on the priority of ontological extension) constitute a different and more just material language and world.

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[27] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, *Being Singular Plural*, and *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*.

[28] Such an understanding of the anti-structure of disenclosure as an ethical event needs to occur on as many levels as possible. Certainly, we can consciously consider possible manifestations of this kind of extension, and hospitable contexts, but I suggest that this general prioritizing of a non-teleological and non-substantive extending would be most useful and potent if also occurring at a subconscious level.

[29] See Luszczynska, *The Ethics of Community.*

For an example of the ways in which disenclosure is a grounding element of being within which a kind of ethic necessarily inheres, we can look to Omeseke Natasha Tinsley's reading of Ana-Maurine Lara's novel *Erzulie's Skirt*. In Tinsley's groundbreaking essay "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" she identifies various kinds of desire implicitly and explicitly present on slave ships as well as the manner in which the event of these relations themselves powerfully resist the overwhelming violences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade broadly, and the slave ship specifically (even more specifically- to the portion of the slave ship in which African peoples were transported and effectively imprisoned). Indeed, every kind of violence that we have thus far discussed is vividly manifest in this context. Deemed chattel, the essentializing that arguably grounded the slave enterprise as a totality, was of the dehumanizing variety. As such, they were reduced to the status of object which could therefore be manipulated or controlled entirely by whatever "white" person was in charge. In researching the relationships forged below deck in these ship-prisons with their unspeakably inhumane conditions, Tinsley found a variety, including those which she calls "queer." She posits that in and of themselves, these relations enacted a resistance to the objectifying violences of the captors. In her reading of scenes narrated within *Erzulie's Ski*rt, Tinsley names this resistant event that of "feeling-for."[30] A fine articulation of the movement toward *and* fundamental taking up of the other, "feeling-for "in the context of the slave ship, is not only resistant but almost revolutionary. Powerfully refusing to be reduced to an object, which is to say, powerfully refusing not to be *as* being, feeling-for instead radically insists upon the undeniable humanity of the African captives. This humanity asserts itself with irrepressible force in the active cultivation of relations between them.

Tinsley's compelling interpretation illustrates that we *can* find extension toward the other flourishing anywhere. If it is locatable on the slave ship, a context wherein it is literally most violently oppressed, it can be found anywhere. The flip side, is that it might *not* flourish regardless of how hospitable conditions for its emergence might be. So, when I propose

[30] See Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," p. 192.

that our charge is to imagine contexts in which hospitality might be cultivated and nourished, an emphasis is placed on the word "might." For all of the pressing reasons that teleological or eschatological approaches must be avoided (they invariably lead to the escalation of oppressive violences) we cannot know or anticipate what will emerge from different possibly- nourishing contexts [31]. In contrast, we can also posit that although community might flourish *in spite of* particular contexts (the slave ship being among the most egregious examples), we cannot anticipate ahead of time what will or will not happen. (Nancy asserts that community cannot not resist and while I understand this approach, I'm not sure how much it matters to the person with the boot on the neck). So, the most we can do is hone our critical skills such that we are be capable of readily identifying contexts that are oppressively violent. Resistance presupposes identification. The trans-Atlantic slave trade and genocide itself are obvious material contexts that coincide with the various kinds of objective violence already discussed. We must be vigilant to ensure that we are able to see the less obvious manifestations of violence such as those that occur linguistically (in both of the ways that Zizek identifies). Also, we must find and support some contexts that are particularly hospitable for enacting the extension that at least *could* be powerful forces of resistance to all kinds of violence. Might nothing happen? Of course. Might essencing and other violences occur? Of course. We must nonetheless try.

It is vitally important to remember that we cannot will these contexts into being and imagine that they will provide for us some final and natural point of arrival. But we can imagine and attempt to create contexts in which they might occur. The imagining is theoretical praxis and the promotion is material praxis and both inhere within the other. Both are vital.

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[31] Imagining what such contexts might be, much less creating them, is a daunting and endless task. Possible candidates for such hospitable horizons of being might be musical performances, spaces of dancing, sporting events, or carnavale. However, as repeatedly noted, all manners of oppressive violences might also occur in these locations, and even simultaneous to ethical openings. The most we can assert is that hospitality *might* be more easily encouraged and correspondingly dominate and flourish. Further, awareness of oppressive violences do allow us to consciously intervene when they seek to make an appearance.

Likewise, we can study (Lenin's "learn, learn, learn") and therein work to precisely understand those places in which these ecstatic ruptures are violently denied, and we can correspondingly resist. Our charge is conceptual and material at once, and attempts to disentangle that complex dynamic are as doomed to fail as attempts to "better" examine eksistence by removing flesh from blood (or vice versa). In short, I want to once again propose a "yes, and…" to various theories and practices (with an understanding that both are both) that seek to resist oppressive violence and promote new kinds of subjectivities.

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Genre Hybridization in Leonardo Sciascia's *The Day of the Owl* and Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games*

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Abstract: The rise of an original Indian detective novel can be dated back to the 1950s. Like its European predecessor, the genre was initially considered strictly popular; books were sold at railway stations as cheap reading matter for commuters. During the Sixties, however, thanks to the rising importance of the middle class, detective novels became increasingly popular. For years the detective genre had been on the wane and it was only in the first decade of the 21st century that new detective and noir stories appeared.

Keywords: detective stories, crime fiction, Indian literature, influences, Hindi pulp-fiction.

The detective novel in India

In India, detective and crime fiction has developed only recently, mostly after independence. Detective novels were first imported from Europe. With a few notable exceptions, Indian literature written in English during the 19th century was often derivative, as British cultural denigration (consider for instance McCaulay's "Minute on Indian Education") had induced in early Indians writing in English a sort of inferiority complex. Indian authors suffered from that inferiority complex which led to mimicry and anglophilia (Albertazzi 2000). Among detective stories *Sherlock Holmes* achieved a wide circulation throughout the subcontinent and its influence lived on well after decolonization as "a constant object of admiring consumption, imitation and adaptation" (Matzke and Mühleisen 2006: 88).Between 1965 and 1992 Satyajit Ray published the adventures of

the Bengali detective Feluda, inspired by Conan Doyle's stories. It is probably no accident that Sherlock Holmes, a private detective rather than a policeman, became popular in India. In a colonised nation police forces are viewed as oppressors and not as heroes and protectors.

The rise of an original Indian detective novel can be dated back to the 1950s. Like its European predecessor, the genre was initially considered strictly popular; books were sold at railway stations as cheap reading matter for commuters. During the Sixties, however, thanks to the rising importance of the middle class, detective novels became increasingly popular: "the paperbacks introduced just the right amount of forbidden excitement in the lives of young men and women living in ancient and congested localities with tribal social ties" (Pande 2008). More importantly, the settings began to be completely Indian, without any reference to the west.

It is at this stage that the rationalist stories of Holmes-like detectives gave way to hard boiled violence. The four decades that followed Partition were considered the golden age of Hindi pulp-fiction. The genre was introduced by the Pakistani Ibn-e Safi (1928-1980), who wrote in Urdu; it was only in the Sixties that Hindi authors began to write in their mother tongue. The most acclaimed novelists in those years were Surendra Mohan Pathak (1940-), Gulshan Nanda (1929-1985) and Ved Prakash Sharma (1955-2017), but as for the book market, it is also important to remember the illustrator Mustajab Ahmed Siddiqui, better known as Shelle, who designed the covers. These contained explicit references to violence portraying abducted women, gun muzzles aimed at the viewer, blood trails, and bleeding knives. The Nineties saw the decline of Hindi pulp-fiction, not only as a consequence of the introduction of satellite television in India, which offered more vivid images, but also because people were bored with pulp novels, which lacked originality, and turned to sentimental stories instead. In this period there were no important examples of the genre, apart from three noir novels by Ashok Banker that were too gruesome and violent to achieve a wide readership. As Ashok Banker lamented once "it's as if publishers, editors and authors think that you have to stoop to the lowest common denominator in order to be read and break the bestseller charts" (*Mystery of the Missing Jasoos* 2010).

For years the detective genre had been on the wane and it was only in the first decade of the 21st century that new detective and noir stories appeared: *Sacred Games* (2006) by Vikram Chandra, the collection *Mumbai Noir* (2012) by Altaf Tyrewala, *Cut Like Wound* (2012) by Anita Nair, *Witnenss the Night* by Kishwar Desai (2015), and more recently *The Unexpected Inheritance of Inspector Chopra* (2016) by Vaseem Khan to cite but a few. These texts are very different from those of the past and cannot always be defined solely as detective novels. They are well structured and well written but, above all, their success is due to their originality and their hybridization with realistic and psychological genres. Moreover, they are often set in big cities such as Mumbai, with a great interest incommunal violence, or Bangalore, with its hi-tech world.

Speaking about Indian detective novels, one last remark must be made about the negative representation of the police. During colonization the British police did not protect or take into consideration the health of the citizens: "the rational regulation of the population from the outset implied the prevention and suppression of challenges to the power of the regime rather than the enchantment of public well-being" (Siddiqi 2002: 178).The negative representation of police forces, which is one of the main features of Indian detective novels, is the consequence of the long submission under the oppressive British rule.

Sacred Games and *The Day of the Owl*

The representation of police forces as violent, corrupted and ineffective, and the consequent development of criminal organizations may be considered typical features of Indian crime novels. However, reading vis à vis Chandra's *Sacred Games*(2006) and the novel by the Italian writer Leonardo Sciascia *The Day of the Owl* (1961) against each other, many similarities between postcolonial Mumbai and post-fascist Sicily stand out. Despite the different times of publication and the different backgrounds of the authors, the similarity of themes invites a comparison not only between the poetics of the novels themselves, but also between the two historical periods in relation to the very different settings, where violence, both physical and psychological, plays a major role.

Leonardo Sciascia tells a story of mafia in Sicily from the viewpoint of a detective called Capitano Bellodi; he is an honest man from Northern Italy who, much to his dismay, discovers a land beset by corruption and violence where it is impossible to arrest the bigger criminals who enjoy the protection of the politicos. At the time when Sciascia was writing, even the government was reluctant to admit that a criminal organization called mafia existed in Italy. The novel is set in post-Fascist Sicily, but it often refers to the Spanish domination in Southern Italy, which can be considered the starting point for the rise of the *mafia*.[1]

The situation in *Sacred Games*, despite the difference in time and place, is somehow comparable. Vikram Chandra set his novel in the Nineties, nearly 45 years after Independence, when the effects of foreign domination are still felt in Mumbai. The gangs often fight in the name of religion as a consequence of the communal animosity between Hindus and Muslims fostered by the British. Post-partition tensions have never died down in Mumbai, where they exploded in the communal violence of the early Nineties.[2] At that crucial point even the gangster Gaitonde – the protagonist, who started off as an agnostic leader – is compelled to pick sides, choosing the Hindu out of self-interest.

The Day of the Owl is told by a third person narrator and begins with the murder of the head of a cooperative building company, Salvatore Colasberna. After the initial investigations, Captain Bellodi, discovers the motive for the homicide: the criminal organization called *mafia* killed Colasberna because he refused to pay for protection. The whole novel is centred on the Captain's interrogations of the killers and reaches its climax during the dialogue between Bellodi and the *mafia* boss Don Mariano Arena. Yet, at the end, owing to the political connection of Sicilian *mafia*

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[1] The Spanish colonization of Sicily began in the XVI century, with a 15 years intermission in the XVIII century, when Sicily was conquered by the Austrians. The Spanish Sicilian rule lasted until 1861, when it was annexed to the Italian kingdom. But even then the Italian government was felt just like another "foreign ruler". The feeling of those years is well recorded in the novel *The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa.

[2] Between 1992 and 1993 in Mumbai more than 900 people died because of the religious fights between Muslims and Hindus. This period had its climax on March 12th, 1993 when the city was hit by the almost simultaneous blast of several bombs in different quarters.

with the government in Rome, the culprits are freed and the murder is rubricated as passional crime. The scope of the novel is rather wide as it offers insights not only into the collusion of Italian mafia with Italian politics, but a quasi-anthropological survey of Sicilians.

The structure of *Sacred Games*is far more complex than that of *The Day of the Owl*. The chapters dedicated to the protagonist, Inspector Sartaj Singh, are told by an omniscient narrator. Yet, Chandra also shows the point of view and the psychology of the antagonist, the gangster Ganesh Gaitonde, who tells his own story in the first person. Therefore, although Gaitonde's narration chronologically precedes Sartaj's investigation, *Sacred Games* alternates chapters about the protagonist and about the antagonist. Moreover the narrative adds chapters called "Insets" that blow up the micro-histories of minor characters.

The novel starts when Gaitonde anonymously phones Sartaj to reveal his hiding place. Inexplicably the gangster, barricaded in an anti-atomic bunker in the centre of Mumbai, has decided to tell his story to the Inspector just before ending his own life. Later Sartaj is asked by a member of the Secret Service to investigate the motives of the suicide and Gaitonde's reasons for building an atomic bunker in Mumbai. Thus at the beginning there is no real crime and the investigation seems to have no clear purpose. At length, the inspector discovers that a man called Guruji (Gaitonde's spiritual guru) has hidden an atomic bomb somewhere in Mumbai because he is convinced that an atomic conflict will put an end to the current Kaliyuga; a bomb in Mumbai will set forth a series of chain reactions that will eventually destroy the world. Sartaj finds the bomb, but, as in *The Day of the Owl*, justice does not really prevail. In order to find the atomic device he must betray his mentor and chief Parulkar, who ends up committing suicide, and, more importantly, the mind behind the plot, Guruji, escapes. In the end, Sartaj's work is never acknowledged and ironically he obtains a promotion only for the capture of Gaitonde, who had actually given himself up to the police on his own initiative just before shooting himself.

Mafia and the ghost of Inquisition

In both these novels the antagonist is not represented by a single entity or person, but by a larger group of people, a criminal organization and more importantly by their violent and yet lucid mentality. Indeed violence, whether implied as in *The Day of the Owl*, or actually represented as in *Sacred Games*, impregnates the stories and, remaining mostly unpunished, becomes an ominous threat even for the reader. The detectives discover something more than the simple motives, means and perpetrators of Gaitonde's suicide and Colasberna's homicide. Sartaj's inquiries (along with the gangster's narrative) introduce the reader to the world of corruption and of criminal gangs, their beliefs and their codes, where greed and violence are highly ritualized becoming almost one with honour in a kind of perverted civilization. Both novels emphasize that Mumbai and Sicily are places ruled by complicated systems, some non-official, corrupted societies that also extend to institutions and government and in which everyone has to conform (often negating the existence of the *mafia* as in *The Day of the Owl*), because there is no other option. Violence is a key feature in this system and serves several purposes. Crimes cannot be traced back to one single person, indeed: "corruption of the government prevents realization of justice. […] The enemy is not the single criminal but the total system" (Jackson 1981: 25).

In this corrupted society, people mistrust of politicians greedy for money and power, ready to help only the highest classes to the disadvantage of lower ones. Criminal organizations both in India and Italy were born as a reaction to this antipopular state allegedly helping and supporting that part of population that had always been subjugated by an unjust and indifferent state. The origins of Sicilian *mafia* can be traced back to the Spanish domination from the 16ththroughout the 18thcenturies and the period of the Inquisition. Ever since, and particularly during Fascism, every new authority has always been considered as an oppressor, a line of thought that emerges very clearly from the novel. Bellodi is in fact seen as a foreign enemy, because he comes from Northern Italy and represents the State. This

is why in the end he fails. The old *mafia* (and *omertà*[3] along with it) was born as a reaction to an inveterate misuse of power and had always thrived by convincing people that State and justice were conflicting notion[4] (Fano 1993: 48). According to Sciascia, policemen:

> are always the embodiment of the Law, in the absence of which society cannot exist. Their misfortune is that they can't succeed in applying this Law. They are honest and strict, they have good principles, the same principles that are of inspiration of every democratic state, but practically, they are powerless[5] (Sciascia 1979: 67-68).

In Sicily the idea has taken roots that the State cannot solve the problems of the people, because State and justice do not coincide. For this reason a lot of people prefer *omertà* to reporting the violence suffered from the *mafia*, which in the past has been identified with protection against the interference of the State. One of the notable characters in *The Day of the Owl* is very clear about this point:

> Has there ever been a trial during which it has emerged that there is a criminal association called the *mafia* and that this association has been definitely responsible for or actually committed a crime? Has any document or witness any proof at all which has ever come to light establishing a sure connection between a crime and the so-called mafia? In the absence of such proof, and if we admit that the *mafia* exists, I'd say it was a secret association for mutual aid, no more and no less than freemasonry (Sciascia 1961: 64).

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[3] This word refers to the world of the *mafia* and the underworld. There is *omertà* when a person (or a group of people) does not report a crime for fear of retaliation from the culprits (in this case the *mafiosi*) of this same crime.

[4] "la vecchia *mafia* (e con essa l'omertà) è nata per reazione a un abuso secolare del potere. Ed è sempre riuscita a prosperare, questa vecchia *mafia*, diffondendo tra la gente l'idea che Stato e giustizia, che ragione di Stato e veri problemi siciliani fossero entità contrapposte e inconciliabili" (Fano 1993: 48).

[5] "incarnano sempre la legge, senza la quale una società non può vivere. La loro sfortuna è proprio che questa legge non riescono ad applicarla. Sono onesti e rigorosi, animati da buoni principi, quei principi ai quali si ispira ogni stato democratico, ma loro sono praticamente ridotti all'impotenza" (Sciascia 1979: 67-68).

Many Sicilians were persuaded that the State is after all more violent and harmful than the mafia, partly aware that it is simpler to escape from a police sentence than from the *mafia*, which kills anyone who betrays it. This happens for example to the informer *Parrinieddu*, who, disconcerted by Bellodi's kindness, reveals too much during the interrogation: "with someone treating him kindly and taking him into his confidence, things were different" (Sciascia 1961: 30). What emerges from this scene is how the *mafia* system works. Actually no one knows about *Parrinieddu*'s revelations, yet after the encounter with Bellodi, the informer is overcome with fear. The *mafia* boss Mariano Arena notices it: "Yesterday, when I ran into him, his face changed colour; he pretended not to see me and vanished up an alley" (Sciascia 1961: 52). This fear betrays *Parrinieddu* and seals his fate.

The Day of the Owl focuses on the passage from the old, more ethical (but always violent) *mafia* to a new one. The former more connected to the people and the territory, the second closer to the power that be. Old Don Mariano Arena is a good representative of the older mafia. He maintains his own personal ethics, albeit a criminal one (Fano 1993: 52). He propounds his *Weltanschauung* when he calls Bellodi "a man", because he approves the captain's resolution to lead a hard life to remain true to his own principles[6] (Crepaldi 2002: 91):

> What we call humanity […] I divide into five categories. […] Men are very few indeed; half-men few, and I'd be content if humanity finished with them…But no, it sinks even lower, to the pigmies who're like children trying to be grown-ups, monkeys going through the motions of their elders…Then down even lower we go, to the arse-crawlers who're legion…And, finally, to the quackers; they ought to just exist, like ducks in a pond: their lives have no more point or meaning…But you, even if you nail me to these documents like Christ to His Cross, you're a man (Sciascia 1961: 102).

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[6] "approva l'eroica determinazione del capitano a condurre una vita di stenti in nome dei principi in cui crede" (Crepaldi 2002: 91).

Thus Don Mariano grants the captain the honour of war. However the captain acknowledges the boss in the same way. During the dialogue Sciascia equates the antagonist and Bellodi, but he subtly eschews the risk of exalting or justifying his actions. Arena actually represents a type of *mafia* that was born in contrast to the abuses of power, based on popular principles and ideals, and that little by little is being replaced by a new violent *mafia* interested only in money and power (which will be described in the Sciascia's subsequent novels).

Lately the same term *mafia* has often been adapted to define the underworld of Mumbai. Like Sicily, India had been long subjected to foreign domination and Mumbai is one of the cities that suffered the after-effects of the British domination most. Mumbai is a metropolis with a population of nearly 12 million and in the city there great inequalities remain between the poor, who live in huge squalid slums, and the rich, who live in large luxury apartments. In this situation, a *mafia*-like system has taken root, populating the city with criminal gangs that often fight each other in the streets in the name communal identities. As Vikram Chandra declared in an interview with Claire Chambers: "Everyone's acutely aware of the creaking infrastructure and social breakdown. […] yet there's still a strong attachment to the place" (Chambers 2008: 47). Over the last few years, the rate of violence in Mumbai[7] has increased, but still the underworld, which in *Sacred Games* is well represented by Ganesh Gaitonde and his gang, has also become famous as a sort of mutual aid for the population – a parallel state which controls the territory and its inhabitants and may even administer local justice. If policemen are corrupted, and the State sluggish, why not turning to criminal organization for protection or justice, when they may be more efficient? In *Sacred Games* this is evident, for example, when Gaitonde helps the politician Bipin Bhonsle to win his first election:

> "We want to make sure that certain people don't vote." I laughed. "Okay. You want the election given to you." He wasn't embarrassed. He smiled,

[7] In Mumbai the locality Jambli-Muhalla is called "Palermo of India" by the Mumbai newspapers (Chandra 2000).

> and said, "Yes, *bhai*." "I thought you *Rakshaks* wanted to clean out corruption in the country." "When the whole world is dirty, *bhai*, you have to get dirty to do any cleaning. We can't fight their money without tricks. Once we are in power, it will all be different" (Chandra 2006: "Ganesh Gaitonde Wins an Election"[8]).

Even with legal activities the underworld is quick, efficient, and probably no more expensive than the police: "A dispute over a flat, which takes twenty years in court, is taken care of in a week or a month by the underworld" (Mehta 2004: "Number Two After Scotland Yard"). Criminal organizations win the respect of ordinary people in several ways. Sometimes gangs resemble joint families in which everyone has a role. This is evident in *Sacred Games*, when Gaitonde even creates a private lingo that strengthens the bonds among the gang members and insists on their wearing certain clothes.

Another theme joins *The Day of the Owl* and *Sacred Games*, namely: the theme of Inquisition. Obviously, the term "inquisition" cannot be literally and historically associated with Mumbai, but it well defines the similar violent methods resorted to by both the Sicilian and Indian government through the police and the diffused fear to be found wanting. In *Sacred Games*, and even more in "Kama"[9] during the interrogation of a suspect, something like the Inquisition (though without its religious implications), although not explicitly mentioned, is an overhanging shadow. People are frightened by the police because they may resort to violence and torture to obtain confessions (which are consequently not always reliable). In other words the panopticon put up by the gangsters, who require no constitutional guaranties, works better than the one created by police forces. Moreover, the proclaimed idea of a State based on equality is perceived as hypocritical by many Indians. Therefore the fear of something akin to the Inquisition, which in *The Day of the Owl* is by now only a disturbing

[8] For simplicity, the position of the quotation from *Sacred Games* are indicated with the name of the chapters.

[9] *Kama* is one of the five stories of the collection *Love and Longing in Bombay* written in 1997 by Vikram Chandra. It is a brief detective story in which Sartaj appears for the first time, together with his wife Megha and his new colleague Katekar.

memory exploited by the *mafia* to assert its authority, is nowadays part of Mumbai society, in particular as a consequence of the religious violence of the Nineties.[10] The Inquisition, like *mafia* and the police exert a power not so much through dramatic public violence, but through the reverberation of news about secret tortures and sudden arrests or kidnappings.

While Sartaj allows for some violence like most of his colleagues, on the other hand, Bellodi knows what people think about the police and is ashamed of being perceived a sort of heir to, or simply successor of, the ancient inquisitors. This reflection is triggered by the encounter with an old man who has called his evil dog *Barruggieddu*, which means "someone who is bad". The old man is unaware that the name is the diminutive of "Bargello", the chief of police in the late Middle Ages. The old man is embarrassed when he learns the real meaning of the name, but Bellodi concedes that after all popular lore has a point:

> Perhaps he wasn't so far wrong, thought the captain; for centuries the *bargelli* had bitten men like him, bitten after reassuring. 'Hound of the law,' he thought of himself; and then he went on to think of the 'hounds of the Lord', who were the Dominicans, and of the Inquisition, a word which conjured up a dark crypt and stirred gloomy echoes of history (Sciascia 1961: 88).

The disquieting memory of the Inquisition is still present in Sicily and this passage makes explicit the perceived correspondence between the police and the Inquisition.

Sacred Games and *The Day of the Owl*attempt to provide an explanation for the existence of the *mafia* in their different worlds and to demonstrate that the proliferation of criminal organizations in Sicily and Mumbai cannot be read only in terms of greed. In fact, despite the attachment to power and money, the *mafia* is the direct consequence of an oppressive and corrupt system in which legal and social justice are virtually absent.

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[10] *Sacred Games* is not the only novel where tortures are described at length, the chapter entitled "Encounter" in *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found* by Suketu Mehta describes tortures and executions perpetrated graphically. In another context *The Lives of the Others* by Neel Mukherjee also denounces how the police tortured the Naxalites.

The genre

Since *Sacred Games* and *The Day of the Owl* narrate an investigation, the texts can be considered as part of the detective genre, but this definition does not exhaust either novel. Both Vikram Chandra and Leonardo Sciascia aim to describe the *mafia* society in the most realistic way, but without exalting it or its actions. Consequently, both authors decide to use the duality between good and evil (typical of the non-realistic detective genre), creating a solid moral separation between the criminal organization and the men who try to oppose it. Yet, the peculiarity of both novels is the realistic finale characterized by the inexorable failure of institutional justice.

Sacred Games runs the risk of exalting the antagonist more than *The Day of the Owl* does. For example, Chandra not only allows Gaitonde to speak in the first person and to justify his actions, but he also expounds Guruji's reasons and spirituality so accurately that he seems to endorse them, and the reader is almost induced to understand and sympathise with them. Vikram Chandra manipulates the typical themes of the detective tradition in order to show the lives of the protagonists (Gaitonde, the antagonist, has a major role in the novel) and their reactions to unexpected events. As the author says:

> When I set out to write, [it] was an anti-thriller. Gaitonde and Sartaj seem to belong to the classical detective tradition […], but in fact, like all of us, they are caught up by events that are far bigger in huge web of agenda and politics and ideologies (Singh 2006).

Thus *Sacred Games* breaks away from traditional crime fiction modes. In the past, the detective novel was considered a popular genre, partly deriving from gothic fiction.[12] Chandra creates a hybridization with psychological drama, because the feelings and thoughts of the characters play an essential part in the story and are often more important than the

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[12] NEROZZI, PATRIZIA, 1987, *L'Altra Faccia del Romanzo. Creatività e Destino dell'Antirealismo Gotico*, Cisalpino, Milano.

actions themselves. Consequently, the novel can be defined as a piece of "highbrow literature" and can be appreciated by readers who would find hard-boiled novels rather unpalatable.

Like Chandra, Sciascia did not write a typical detective novel. He showed the psychology of his detective, but he distorted some typical elements of the genre. Bellodi, for example, lacks the support of the society, unlike the detectives of the traditional detective stories, where the distinction between good and evil is less blurred. Furthermore, in *The Day of the Owl*, the solution of the case comes in the very first pages and the whole story is centred on Bellodi's efforts to nail the criminals. Yet in the end, despite the discovery of truth, in both *Sacred Games* and *The Day of the Owl*, the culprits are not punished and the only victory remains intellectual–one cannot even call it moral. Therefore, both novels have a realistic anticlimactic ending and not the typical happy ending of the detective novel in which the reader expects to read about the final capture and punishment of the criminals. The union between detective and realistic novels apparently excludes catharsis.

The use of violence is another interesting characteristic of the two novels: allowing for a difference in that Chandra includes some graphic scenes in the story, both depict the use of violence which is not animal instinct, but rather a rational means to the end of obtaining power bot immediately and in the long run. Since violence is resorted to by both the law and the criminals, readers are compelled to take it into their system of values in order to read the books. This is particularly true of *Sacred Games* where it is impossible to take any side without committing oneself to violent methods. In a certain sense it is impossible not to sympathize with Guruji's attempt at putting an end to this Kaliyuga through its own commitment to violence. Likewise a reader of Sciascia is tempted to have civil rights suspended in Sicily while the police wipes mafia *away*. Neither novel in fact logically disputes these solutions, leaving it to the reader to reflect.

Another important characteristic of these hybrid texts (which can be defined "detective-realistic novels"), concerns the antagonists: Don Mariano Arena in *The Day of the Owl* and the gangster Ganesh Gaitonde

with his spiritual "Guruji" in *Sacred Games*. Sciascia and Chandra dedicate several pages to the description of these characters and their psychology, so that they become as relevant as Captain Bellodi and Inspector Sartaj. The confrontations between the characters through the novels assume more importance when, at the end, the reader discovers that the failure of justice coincides with a sort of victory of the antagonists. The formulaic detective novel is based on the continuous tension between a basically good and intelligent detective and an evil and cunning enemy. The action ends with the decisive defeat of the antagonist who, despite his astuteness, cannot prevail over the moral intelligence of the protagonist and the power of the Law. Yet in *The Day of the Owl* and *Sacred Games* the culprits are not punished because they are not only cunning, but as intelligent as Bellodi and Sartaj, who actually lack the support of a healthy police system. Consequently, all characters are on the same level and there is no longer that disparity that in the typical detective novel permitted the predictable final victory of justice.

The linguistic choice

Language plays a pivotal role in both *Sacred Games* and *The Day of the Owl*. Chandra is an Indian author writing in English, but the language of his novel can be more precisely defined *Hinglish*. *Hinglish* refers to several varieties of English spoken, rather than written, in India by the lower middle class. Apart from a distinct local accent and intonation, *Hinglish* stands out for the high frequency of vernacular words. Sometimes the choice of writing in English has been considered as politic – English as a language belongs to those who use it, and Indians have a right to their own English. Chandra's decision to write in *Hinglish* is more aesthetic than political; in fact he decided to use it only as a consequence of the increasing importance of this language for the Indian reality:

> In *Sacred Games* I was particularly trying to use a fluid, spoken English. I wanted to recount the story as if I was telling it to my friends in Bombay over dinner. The way that we would speak together would be

> with a sprinkling of different languages, and I wanted to convey that in the text (Chambers, Claire 2008).

The importance of English in modern India emerges, for example, when Gaitonde decides to learn this language, because he identifies it as the language of business and the Indian elite and therefore synonymous with an elevated social status:

> I turned to my English books. I was teaching myself with children's books and the newspapers and a dictionary. […] It was humiliating, but necessary. I knew that much of the real business of the country was done in English. […] When you bought an expensive new shampoo "Made with American knowhow", what was that it said in red on the label? […] I had to know (Chandra 2006: "Ganesh Gaitonde wins an election").

In both novels, the various linguistic choices characterize and set characters apart, in particular the protagonists and the antagonists. Ganesh Gaitonde in *Sacred Games*, but also the *mafia* in *The Day of the Owl*, use a private jargon and dialect words as a form of opposition and protest against the modern state, which in their opinion is only the heir to the former dictatorship. Sciascia was a Sicilian author who wrote in Italian. Yet, like Chandra, he tried to reproduce the Post-Fascist Sicilian society through language, the Sicilian dialect, spoken by the working classes and particularly the *mafiosi*, who take pride in not speaking standard Italian. Therefore, in the novel there are a number of expressions that emphasize the sense of alienation of the characters who take a position against the *mafia*, first of all Captain Bellodi, who speaks Italian and often must resort to interpreters to understand a language and a culture alien to him. This happens for example during the interrogation of Colasberna's wife, when for the first time the word *ingiuria* (offense) appears:

> She used the word *ingiuria* and for the first time the captain needed the sergeant-major's talents as interpreter. "Nickname," said the sergeant-major, "almost everybody here has one, some so offensive that they really are 'offences'" (Sciascia 1961: 40).

In the *mafia* underworld there is a semantic shift of the term “ingiuria” from “offense” to “nickname.” The reason for it is that nicknames are often given with such malevolence as to resemble offenses. This points to a diffuse system where violence surfaces in every little exchange and must be put up with at every level.

And again three pages later: “‘*Zicchinetta*,’ promptly translated Sposito, ‘a game of chance: it’s played with Sicilian cards…” (Sciascia 1961: 43).

Gangs develop a peculiar jargon that plays a double role: on the one hand it is difficult to decipher for those who do not belong to that world; on the other hand, it creates a bond between those who share it and its *Weltanschauung*.

In both *Sacred Games* and *The Day of the Owl* the linguistic choices depend on the different ways of thinking of the characters and the language can be considered as a form of protest against a state that continue to be associated with oppression and indifference. Therefore, those who do not comprehend these jargons are incapable of fighting criminal organizations and are doomed to fail.

The private language the *Bhais* employ is also strictly connected with a violent world. “Now this was our own language, kanchas and gullels for bullets and pistols” (Seth 2006: 112). Speaking a private language is not only a way to create bonds, but also to own the nominated object and share it only within a close circle of acolytes.

Captain Bellodi and Inspector Sartaj Singh

Both Captain Bellodi and Inspector Sartaj have their personal sense of justice, and their ideas of right and wrong do not always coincide with legality. Sartaj is not the first policeman in his family, in fact he has followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. In *Sacred Games* the reader discovers the corruption of the police in particular through the deputy commissioner Parulkar who is earning money illegally thanks to “right alliances” especially with a *Bhai*, Suleiman Isa, who lives in the Middle East, but “works” in Mumbai. Sartaj tries to be different from his

chief (and mentor), but he also has to accept money from victims because he does not earn enough:

> When Sartaj had been married, he had taken a certain pride in never accepting cash, but after the divorce he had realized how much Megha's money had protected him from the world, from the necessities of the streets he lived in. A nine-hundred-rupee monthly transportation allowance hardly paid for three days of fuel for his Bullet […] and there was nothing left for the investigation of a young man's death in Navnagar. So Sartaj took cash now, and was grateful for it (Chandra 2006: "Policeman's Day").

Thus, in the end Sartaj's image is not really tainted by corruption; he is not greedy and only resorts to bribery in order to do his job better. It is the government that pays its representatives too little that actually takes the blame. Likewise, towards the end of the novel, Sartaj makes a deal with Iffat-bibi (boss Suleiman Isa's maternal aunt), but it is only to discover where the atomic bomb is hidden and to save the world. Therefore, Sartaj does not always embody the image of the ideal policeman, but the reader "forgives" him, because compromise appears the only way to pursue justice.

Like Bellodi, Sartaj can be considered a sort of outsider. He "appears both at odds with the ways of the city and unable, or unwilling, to embrace its excesses, hampered, so it seems, by a tradition, and by values, of a different India" (Belliappa 2008). Sartaj, unlike his boss, is not greedy. He does not help people for money, as the sub-plot of the blackmailed lady, Kamala Pandey, shows. However, after a long investigation in which he has discovered Guruji's destructive plan, he has to come to a compromise with Iffat-bibi in order to find the bomb.

In Captain[13] Bellodi's mentality there is no space for any type of corruption: "His ideals of justice, freedom and truth make him intransigent

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[13] Bellodi is a captain of the Carabinieri. Founded by Vittorio Emanuele I in 1814, they were originally only a part of the army (light infantry), but in 1861 they officially obtained the recognition as Italian army. In 2000 the Carabinieri became an independent armed force managed by the Ministry of Defence.

with any compromise that supports crime and injustice" (Jackson 1981: 14). Throughout the novel, he is described as a very intelligent and learned man (he often cites classic writers) and, because of his elevated ideal of justice, he is ready to fight (and even die) to pursue his aim. His obstinacy in seeking truth derives from his past. Born in a Republican family, he was a partisan during the Second World War, and from this experience, he has learnt the importance of liberty and equality of all men. This is evident during the interrogations, because he is civil to everybody, even criminals, unlike his colleagues who behave arrogantly and often obtain information using the power of fear. Sometimes, however he has to admit to his chagrin that honest, humane methods do not pay off.

> The captain had felt a sudden, sombre sense of discouragement; of disillusion, helplessness. That name or *ingiuria* or whatever it was, was finally out; but it had only come out at the second when the sergeant-major had suddenly seemed to become for her a terrifying threat of inquisition, of condemnation (Sciascia 1961: 43-44).

Equality in *The Day of the Owl* is a sort of mark of Bellodi's foreignness. This is evident from the first description of the captain:

> The captain was young, tall and fair-skinned. At his first words the Santa Fara members thought, with a mixture of relief and scorn, 'A mainlander'. Mainlanders are decent enough but just don't understand things (Sciascia, 1961: 16).

In fact, Bellodi tries his best to understand Sicilians, but he cannot bring himself to share their viewpoint. Through his civility and sense of equality he astonishes suspects, colleagues and, above all, shady politicians who feel sure that with "a mainlander" they will be free to conduct their illicit affairs unhampered.

Equality and justice are not part of Sartaj's moral constitution, because the meaning of legal and illegal does not always coincide with right or wrong. For instance, when a blackmailed bride, Kamala Pandey, asks for

his help, at first he refuses because he considers her only as a spoiled rich dame accustomed to obtaining everything through her money. However, after he has solved the case and found the blackmailer, he beats him up because the man is guilty of a heinous crime and, blinded with presumption, even offends Sartaj by trying to make him his accomplice. "He carefully aimed his kicks […] and the pleasure of it throbbed in Sartaj's hand" (Chandra 2006: "The End of the World"). Sartaj does not believe in the equality of men and his system of values is independent of the law and even the Rights of Man.

Mumbai and Sicily: the setting

The investigations are conducted in two specific places: Mumbai in *Sacred Games* and Sicily (more specifically a small unnamed village near Palermo) in *The Day of the Owl*. In both cases the influence of the place on the protagonists cannot be overstated, but in the novels it is shown in different ways.

In *Sacred Games* Mumbai is well described, not in a univocal way, but depending on the point of view of every character. Sartaj for example feels like an outsider:

> now [Mumbai] was too vast, escaped from him, each family adding to the next and the next until there was that cool and endless glow, impossible to know, or escape. Given it to himself in gift, the memory of a happier place? (Chandra 2006: "Policeman's Day").

During his life, Sartaj has witnessed the transformation of the city and he remembers a happier past, the period of his childhood, in contrast to the present-day city that has become too vast to be fully comprehended. He feels different, belonging to an older generation that is now disappearing, and for this reason, in the first chapter of the novel, he even considers suicide.

The situation changes dramatically in the last pages of *Sacred Games*. Sartaj is happy to be back in Mumbai. After a pilgrimage to Amritsar:

> Sartaj drank it all in, incredulous that he had missed all this while he had been away, and that he was glad to be back. […] 'Once the air of this place touches you' Katekar had said 'you are useless for anywhere else' (Chandra 2006: "Mere Sahiba").

At the end of the investigation into Gaitonde's suicide, after saving the world from the atomic bomb and possibly World War 3, and thanks to his new relationship with Mary, Sartaj feels reinvigorated, because he has finally understood how to survive in the metropolis. He is now ready to start a new day and a new life in his big, now more familiar city. Sartaj is now ready to take in his stride a certain level of injustice and violence, conscious that he is working on the right side.

Unlike *Sacred Games*, in which the action takes place in recognisable city, in *The Day of the Owl* everything happens in an unspecified place. The homicide takes place in a square in "S." and the captain investigates in "C." and "B.", but, apart from the initial letters and some cues that suggest to the reader that Palermo is not far, the place is never precisely described. Moreover, the reader knows that everything happens in the post-war years, but the exact date is never specified either. Consequently, "S.," "C." and "B." become synonyms with Sicily at any time in the aftermath of the Fascist regime and this device makes the novel exemplary[14].

The only place minutely described in *The Day of the Owl* evokes death: the *Chiarchiaro*. It is in the countryside where Nicolosi's dead body is found. On reaching the point the captain thinks: "This is where God throws in the sponge" (Sciascia 1961: 85). Bellodi here makes a comparison between the evil and the good of men. In fact, *Chiarchiaro* is characterized by shrubs and black rocks, but is surrounded by a flourishing and colourful nature. The author uses the *Chiarchiaro* as a metaphor to describe the waste heart of Sicilians which even God cannot touch, recognizing his defeat. And this reflection is emphasized by the popular expression: "*E lu cuccu ci dissi*

[14] Crepaldi speaks of "valore esemplare" (Crepaldi 2002: 16).

a li cuccuotti: a lu chiarchiaru nni vidiemmu tutti"[15] (Sciascia 1961: 86), that underlines the sense of death emanated by the *chiarchiaro*.

Importantly, although a *polentone*[16] (Sciascia 1961: 93) and unlike Sartaj, from the beginning Bellodi tries to comprehend and change Sicily, yet he fails. In the end every criminal he has arrested is freed. Nonetheless, after a brief period in Parma, he decides to return to Sicily: "[…] before reaching home he knew, with utter lucidity, that he loved Sicily and would go back. 'Even if it's the end of me,' he said aloud" (Sciascia 1961: 120). Bellodi is aware of his failure and knows that returning to "C." means running risks (even his very life), but he cannot help trying to bring justice to Sicily, because he is an idealist who hopes in a better future with less violence and more justice.

Considered as detective stories, both novels have a happy ending as both detectives solve their cases. Considered as social novels, both end with a failure to contain the physical and moral violence of their respective setting, a violence that is deeply rooted in mismanagement and coloniality. Readers must recognise that it is not possible to fight this violence without recurring to a much harsher one, like the fascists tried to do, in vain, or like Guruji would do. However, taken as place sensitive novels, they are both successful and even optimistic in that their protagonists learn to love their environments and long to be there and mix with other people, even when they know it will entail hard labour, compromise and danger. Even knowing that their integrity as policemen may be tested and stained in this environment, they accept it as a reasonable price to pay in order to serve the place they have come to love.

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[15] Sicilian dialect: "an owl said to its owlets: we'll all meet in the end at the *Chiarchiaro*" (Sciascia 1961: 86).

[16] The Italian word means "polenta-eater". It is a depreciative way to define a person who comes from the north.

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Statecraft, Exception and Wasted Lives
Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Motto:
"The wish of all, in the camps, the last wish: know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know." Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*.

"Violence is to be found in any action in which one acts as if one were alone to act […]. Violence is consequently also any action which we endure without at every point collaborating in it". — Emmanuel Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essay on Judaism*.

Abstract: One of the reasons why Amitav Ghosh is considered an important writer is that his narratives do not occupy a "neutral" zone. Rather, they offer a sensitive and multifaceted view on the contemporary problems of the worlds he writes about. Ghosh seems to be intent on moving his readers through his narratives beyond the aesthetic of indifference. Ghosh's first commitment is to his art.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh, contemporary problems, literature, philosophy, comparative philosophy.

(I)

Giorgio Agamben, in his influential book on political philosophy *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, argues that what distinguishes the biopolitical regime of power which operates in modernity is the fact that the "state of exception comes more and more to the

foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule" (*Homo Sacer*, 20). The state of exception has become "the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (*State of Exception*, 2). He reads the emergence of exception in a Foucauldian sense, since he focuses his analysis on the "biopolitical significance" of exceptionalism as a widespread political device. The suspension of the law is pivotal because it directly affects people's lives, not as subjects of politics or citizens, but as human beings as such. The key of Agamben's thought, around which the theory of the state of exception revolves, is the indistinction, in the realm of politics, between the private life – which he calls *zoe* – and the public sphere, the one characterizing life as *bios*. The indistinct form of human being that is created in this process is called *homo sacer*. This figure has been reduced to what he defines as "bare life", meaning that the sovereign has complete authority over homo sacer, not only as a citizen of a state, but even to the point of acting upon his/her own natural life, depriving this individual of the right to live. This theoretical point of view stems from the eighth fragment of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", where he contends that

> [t]he 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 accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism. (257)

Agamben deduces from this that under a regime of biopolitics all subjects are each potentially *homo sacer* (*HS*, 115), potentially abandoned by the law and exposed to violence as a constitutive condition of political existence.

Agamben defines sovereignty primarily in terms of exclusion or exception. Sovereignty constitutes the state and statist politics by deciding who is to be incorporated into it. This decision is grounded on a fundamental exclusion of what is to remain outside. It is the sovereign who decides where and whether law applies. Politics is instead grounded on

rendering people vulnerable and abject, on subjection to a power so total that it can command life and death. The state is authoritarian command and imposes vulnerability as a condition of participation in public or political life. The rise of exceptionalist policies explains the practices of dehumanization of the other that are currently being employed in postcolonial countries, both by the West and by local governments. Walker affirms, that "exceptions may be enacted as a claim about inhumanity" (76), that is, all individuals not belonging or conforming to such a paradigm are considered as not being human beings, but rather as pre-human or inhuman persons, to which the legal juridical order that sustains the international, i.e. the regime of human rights, does not apply. Such "wasted lives", as Bauman has labelled them, are then excluded by the community of humans and treated as human waste, disposable lives that are superfluous, not necessary to the current order but at the same time part of it: they are "the waste of order-building combined into the main preoccupation and metafunction of the state, as well as providing the foundation for its claim to authority" (33).

The production of "human waste" — wasted lives, the "superfluous" populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts — is an inevitable outcome of modernization. It is an unavoidable side-effect of economic progress and the quest for order which is characteristic of modernity. Bauman argues that the waste of globalized production is not only material but also human. Inside the "developed" world this "human waste" takes the form of "redundant" people — those who are easily disposable in an economic model which is no longer based on "jobs for life". "To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of because of being disposable — just like the empty non-refundable plastic bottle or the once used syringe" (12). The world today is full (there is nowhere unexplored, or uninhabited which is habitable) and so there is nowhere to transport this excessive, redundant population – as there would have been in colonial times (5). Outside the "developed" world there are millions of people who are on the move in the liquid world – put into movement for economic or political reasons. Bauman focuses on the experience of the refugee — someone whose experience is the epitome of loss (of land, house, family,

work) but who is given no "useful function in the land of arrival or assimilation". In effect, from their present place – the dumping site — "there is no return and no road forward" (77). The state almost always portrays its use of force as an attempt to maintain "law and order". It thus projects itself as the instrument of desirable order in conflict with a naturally unruly, unpredictable, potentially or actually violent populace.

In the current political situation Butler argues that the law becomes an instrument of power to be deployed by the state. Law is no longer that which creates the state, nor that which constrains it; rather, it is one more tool for the state to use. The fact that "managerial officials decide who will be detained indefinitely" and who will be "reviewed for the possibility of a trial with questionable legitimacy", implies that "a parallel exercise of "illegitimate decision is exercised within the field of governmentality" (54). The law could have a meaningful and important role in negotiating what it is to be human, and therefore to have a liveable and grieveable life. When norms and the law are collapsed together then trials and legal interventions are an important site for securing precarious lives: "[t]he law […] is now expressly understood as an instrument, an instrumentality of power, one that can be applied and suspended at will" (82-83).

One of the reasons why Ghosh is considered an important writer is that his narratives do not occupy a "neutral" zone. Rather, they offer a sensitive and multifaceted view on the contemporary problems of the worlds he writes about. Ghosh seems to be intent on moving his readers through his narratives beyond the aesthetic of indifference. Ghosh's first commitment is to his art. The question that has engaged him a lot is whether this commitment excludes all other commitments. He has to admit that "a writer is also a citizen, not just of a country but of the world" (cited in Hawley 11). Whether a writer should be a responsible citizen or an insouciant aesthete is the issue that occupies him in the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi." His point of departure is Dzevad Karahasan's essay "Literature and War," which touches on the relation between modern literary aestheticism and the contemporary world's indifference to violence. Karahasan holds that "[t]he decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon—completely sidestepping questions about goodness

and truth—is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world" (cited in *The Imam and the Indian* 60). Ghosh abhors Karahasan's brand of aestheticism, and plumps for moral activism:

> Writers don't join crowds—Naipaul and so many others teach us that. But what do you do when the constitutional authority fails to act? You join and in joining bear all the responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents. My experience of the violence was overwhelmingly and memorably of the resistance to it. (61)

By advocating resistance to violence and rejecting the "aesthetic of indifference," Ghosh is squarely denouncing the postmodernist dogma of pan-aestheticization as enunciated by Patricia Waugh: "Postmodern theory can be seen and understood as the latest version of a long-standing attempt to address social and political issues through an aestheticised view of the world, though it may be more thoroughly aestheticising than any previous body of thought" (6). For Ghosh, it is "the affirmation of humanity" that is more important, "the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another" (*The Imam and the Indian* 61). Ghosh thus straddles the currents of both modernism and postmodernism. Meenakshi Mukherjee underscores Ghosh's refusal to be categorized, but she does so with respect to Ghosh's rebellion against the templates of genre (Hawley 4). Ghosh is too eclectic to embrace a particular *ism* and in the process stifle all his innate dynamism. Ghosh's works occupy a critical juncture between postmodern and postcolonial perspectives, exploring the potentialities and limits of postcolonialism as also evading any strategic alliance with postmodernism. He is rather an intellectual amphibian, partaking of all ideas and isms that are congenial and pertinent to his artistic pursuit. In the "Author's Note" in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh reveals that "[a]round the time of its occurrence the Morichjhanpi incident was widely discussed in the Calcutta press, English as well as Bengali. Today the only historical treatment available in English is an article by Ross Mallick, *Refugee Resettlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the*

Morichjhanpi Massacre (*The Journal of Asian Studies*, 1999, 58:1, pp. 103-125)" (*HT*, 402). Speaking about the Massacre at Morichjhapi, Ghosh reflects upon dehumanizing nature of state machinery in India and its brutalities: "In India, the state seems to be so rigid, throwing people out, working under the assumption that they are wicked people with some perverse criminal instinct. But they are so terribly poor, braving the forest for nothing more than some honey. These are some of the poorest people in the world" (18). Martha Nussbaum suggests that for poststructuralist theorists "to discuss a text's ethical or social content is somehow to neglect 'textuality', the complex relationships of that text with other texts; and of the related, though more extreme, thought that texts do not refer to human life at all, but only to other texts and to themselves" (*Love's Knowledge* 170). In response, Nussbaum argues that the vitality and appeal of literature resides largely in its continuing dialogue with life: "It speaks *about us*, about our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections" (*Love's Knowledge* 171).

A crucial component in literature's ability to do so is empathy — "the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us"' (192). This kind of empathetic engagement, Nussbaum argues in *Poetic Justice*, is a crucial ethical dimension of literary texts. She points to the way in which novels tend to "construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters" (7). Indeed, "the very structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined reader" invites a shared concern with "how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires" (7).

(II)

Hounded out from their homeland in Bangladesh during the Partition, a group of refugees were rehabilitated in the forests of Dandakaranya in central India. Officially termed as "resettlement" (*HT*,118)

their existence was continuously scrutinized by security forces as in a concentration camp. While these poor rural people were ruthlessly exploited both by Muslim communists and upper class Hindus in Bangladesh, they were looked upon as intruders in central India and often attacked with weapons by the locals. In 1978, a hoard of refugees repatriated from the parched lands of Madhya Pradesh to the marshlands of the Sundarbans in search of livelihood. These poor people settled in the islands of Morichjhapi, a protected forest reserve. This brought the state government into a series of confrontations with the refugees and it was determined to evict them. Inspired by the resistance of these marginalized, the leftist intellectual and an erstwhile college teacher in Kolkata, Nirmal's dormant revolutionary instinct comes to the forefront and he identifies himself with them. He seems to endorse Trotsky's programmatic theory of "permanent revolution", of an uninterrupted "growing over of the democratic [bourgeois] into the socialist [proletarian] revolution" (Löwy, 43). The idealist Normal internalization of Trotsky's prediction that the periphery would become the "vanguard" of the proletarian movement invites his wife's accusation that he is living "in a dream world — a haze of poetry and fuzzy ideas about revolution" (*HT*, 214).

However, he seems to provide a concrete shape to the concept of divine violence, an idea set out in Walter Benjamin's early essay "Critique of Violence". Benjamin conceptualizes divine as violence undertaken by a sovereign individual, a strike at power, an attempt at the dissolution of the law in favour of justice, a decision that reaffirms the sovereignty of the self against the coercive violence of the law. Reflecting on her husband's revolutionary zeal, Nilima contends that:

> "Men like that, even when they turn their backs on their party and their comrades, can never let go of the idea: it's the secret god that rules their hearts. It is what makes them come alive; they revel in the danger, the exquisite pain. It is to them what childbirth is to a woman or war to a mercenary". (*HT*,119)

The uncompromising Nirmal thus plunges himself into the struggle between a group of powerless refugees and a dominant political force.

The commune established by these "unhistorical" squatters in Morichjhapi is considered to be extra-ordinary by the idealist Nirmal. Witnessing "*the birth of something new, something hitherto unseen*" (*HT*,171, italics original), Nirmal feels that Daniel Hamilton's utopian project of establishing a commune is being translated into a concrete reality but with a vital difference: "*this was not one man's vision. This dream had been dreamt by the very people who were trying to make it real*" (*HT*,171, italics original). The revolution of this subaltern consciousness from below initiates Nirmal's transformation. These marginalized beings organized themselves and created the edifices of a micro-society which impresses Nirmal: "*It was an astonishing spectacle — as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud*" (*HT*,191, italics original). They had set up their own government and also taken a census.

What they now endeavour is to make their voices heard in the world outside and mobilize public opinion rather than being falsely represented in government files as "*destroyers*" and "*gangsters*" (*HT*,172, italics original). For this purpose they invite the urban intellectuals to a sumptuous feast to orient them about their hapless condition. The impressed guests deliver extensive speeches extolling the efforts of the settlers but their hollowness is revealed by one of Nirmal's erstwhile friend Khokon: ""'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs'"" (*HT*,192, italics original). Considered as eggs or insignificant non-entities, these marginalized beings would soon be driven out of the island or meet a silent death.

While the visionary Nirmal completely aligns him with the refugees in Morichjhapi, the worldly-wise Nilima chooses to keep safe distance from them and urges Nirmal to do the same. When Kusum visits Lusibari to meet Nilima in expectation of some medical aid for the people of Morichjhanpi, the latter, in spite of believing in community development, refuses to stand by the refugees in their hour of crisis. She prefers to "stay on the right side of the government" (*HT*, 214) because she does not intend to antagonize the politicians for the welfare of the Badabon Trust hospital. Hence, if the settlers in Morichjhapi are "*human beings*" for Nirmal who "need medical

attention as much as people do anywhere else" (*HT*, 213, italics original) Nilima dismisses them as "*squatters*": "*that land doesn't belong to them; it's government property. How can they just seize it*" (*HT*, 213, italics original)? While Nirmal asserts his subjectivity against oppressive government machinery, Nilima's subjectivity is repressed. James Kavanagh believes that "[w]e now understand this process of "subjection" as working largely through an address to unconscious fears and desires as well as rational interests, and we understand it as working through a multiplicity of disparate, complexly interconnected social apparatuses" (310).

Most certainly, Nilima"s individuality is crushed by a "Repressive State Apparatus" which function "by violence", […] massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression)" (Althusser, 145). The miserable refugees refuse to succumb to the terror tactics unleashed by the people in power. Besieged by the onrushing police, a group of refugees carrying provisions for their fellow islanders in a boat proclaim in unison: "*Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed*" (*HT*,254, italics original). The plaintive cry of these wretched people forces Nirmal to interrogate his own identity and his space in the world:

> *And as I listened to the sound of those syllables, it was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry?* (*HT*, 254, italics original)

Inspired by the settler's defiant spirit, Nirmal's series of self-questionings meets a happy resolution: "*Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave. I joined my feeble voice to theirs: 'Morichjhâpi chharbona! We'll not leave Morichjhanpi, do what you may"* (*HT*,254, italics original). Nirmal's narrative is an eye-witness account of police atrocities unleashed on these dispossessed in quest of their homeland. To quell the desperate cries of the settlers, the patrolling police motorboat suddenly picks up speed and destroys the boat full of passengers and provisions. The announcement of the High Court order which declares that

the siege is illegal and has to be lifted is just a lull before the storm. Already the condition of these people is destitute and with all supplies stopped they are being starved to death. It is sheer inhumanity on the part of a callous state machinery to declare that the island has to be evacuated for the preservation of ecological balance. Through the grievances of Kusum, the subaltern voice articulates its plight of living on the edge:

> "*Saar", […] "the worst part was not the hunger or the thirst. It was to sit here, helpless, and listen to the policemen making their announcements, hearing them say that our lives, our existence, was worth less than dirt or dust. […] it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil.*" (*HT*, 261-62, italics original).

It dawns on the resigned Nirmal that the fate of Kusum and the others on the island is doomed forever. While he is stunned into insanity by administrative brutalities, his wife wryly comments that her husband is an unpractical individual with limited worldly experience. The psychiatrist from Kolkata who comes to treat Nirmal dismisses the settlers as "*a nuisance"*(*HT*,275, italics original). Nirmal gives Nilima the slip, surreptitiously enters Morichjhapi with Horen, and documents his experiences the night before the imminent police onslaught. He was later found on the embankment in Canning and lived only a couple of months after the evacuation. His diary survives as a vital subaltern testament.

Herself not a refugee from Bangladesh, Kusum shares their identity as she wishes to share the same land of Morichjhanpi with them. The economic blockade imposed by the state had made the situation worse, as the poor "*settlers had been reduced to eating grass… were drinking from puddles and ponds and an epidemic of cholera had broken out*" (*HT*, 260; italics original). Still, the impoverished peasants did not revoke and ultimately appeal to the High Court seeking justice. After the High Court gave the ruling "that barricading the settlers was illegal; the siege would have to be lifted" (*HT*, 260; italics original), their resilience found judicial

support but it only made the state more rigid. Even after the apparent withdrawal of the economic barricade, the state power continues threatening the settlers. Kusum's vital question to Nirmal — "*Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names?* (*HT*, 262; italics original), articulates the basic conflict between the environmentalist programme and the question of human settlement.

While the local people encounter the tiger as a deadly predator, distant urbanites romantically regard tigers as sublime. The narrative raises the issue of how tigers and humans can coexist in the Sundarbans but leaves it unresolved. This comes to the forefront when a frenzied mob frantically tries to kill an incapacitated tiger that had recently killed a new-born calf. In an act of spirited defiance, reminiscent of May Price in the Dhaka riot in *The Shadow Lines* and Uma in Rangoon in *The Glass Palace*, Piya tries to stop the infuriated mob. Far from coming to her aid, Fokir drags Piya from the scene in spite of her vehement protests. The horrible experience unsettles her and she cannot get out of it: "It was like something from some other time – before recorded history" (*HT*, 300).What seems barbarous from the sensitive Piya's perspective is "just a part of everyday life" (*HT*, 300) for Horen and Fokir. This dichotomy springs from inhabiting antithetical life-worlds. Piya is oblivious to the danger of living in proximity to the habitats of ferocious wild animals. Western patrons who put a premium on wildlife conservation pay scant regard to the poorest of the poor whose deaths go unrecorded.

Interestingly, this incident serves as a perfect metaphor for the Morichjhapi incident. The difference is that while the intruding tiger is ruthlessly attacked by men armed with spears, in Morichjhapi armed police massacred a group of settlers in the name of preserving ecological balance. Kanai's response to Piya establishes the connection between the two events: ""It happens every week that people are killed by tigers. […] these killings are never reported, never written about in the papers. Isn't that a horror too – that we can feel the sufferings of an animal, but not of human beings"" (*HT*, 300-301)? Kanai's concern articulates the vital question that his childhood friend Kusum, a victim of the Morichjhapi killings, raised a few

years earlier to Nirmal: ""*it seemed to me that this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil*"" (*HT*, 262, italics original). For Kusum, development is coterminous with the expansion of human settlement, setting up of agricultural lands, the mastery of the human beings over nature: "…*we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil….by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil*"(*HT*, 262; italics original). Kusum's arguments nourish a dilemma of how to balance the needs of human beings in a poverty-stricken country like India and nature: whether the green environmentalist project, insisting on the importance of wildlife preservation over human needs should be accepted, or let people live in an agrarian economy keeping a balance with wildlife.

The aggressive state unleashes violence on the settlers not only by policemen, but also by gangsters and criminals: "[…] *busloads of outsiders were assembling in the villages around the island; they were people such as had never before been seen in the tide country, hardened men from the cities, criminals, gangsters. Morichjhanpi was now completely encircled by police boats; it was all but impossible to get in or out*" (*HT*, 276; italics original). The state had arranged everything for the planned genocide, and none was spared. Horen Naskar, the companion of Nirmal during his last visit to Morichjhanpi, just before the day of the final attack, renders to Kanai his experience:

> "…*the assault began the next day; the gangsters who'd been assembling around the island were carried over in boats and dinghies and bhotbhotis. They burnt the settlers*" *huts, they sank their boats, they laid waste to their fields…. Whatever you can imagine them doing, they did […] No one knows for sure, but what I've heard is that a group of women were taken away by force, Kusum among them. People say they were used and then thrown into the rivers, so that they would be washed away by the tides. Dozens of settlers were killed that day. The sea claimed them all*" (*HT*, 278-279; italics original).

Through Nirmal's notebook and Horen's reminiscence the narrative constructs an undocumented history of the massacre at Morichjhapi.

Nirmal is a witness to the events leading up to the holocaust. His journal does not narrate the carnage, presumably because it interrupted his composition and later drove him insane. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the impending catastrophe and could anticipate the inevitable: "*I am out of time*" (*HT*, 277, italics original). He fits the bill for Agamben's concept of the witness, a person who has experienced an event from the beginning to the end. He is a witness that possesses a memory of "things seen at close hand" (*Remnants of Auschwitz*, 34), a "superstes witness" capable of bearing testimony to the events as experienced (17). Agamben classifies the superstes witness under several rubrics. On the one hand, there is Primo Levi, the "perfect example of the witness […] the "proxy witness", a superstile who has survived and recounts his experiences in Auschwitz" (16, 34).

On the other hand is the Muselman, the "complete witness" or the "true witness" (47), the one who could not survive, and is unable to recount his experience. The power of the "testimonio", explains Bill Ashcroft, lies in "its identification of the personal and the political" and the "most compelling of testimonio is its representation in history of the unhistoricized, the, voiceless" (Ashcroft, 113). Nirmal's notebook becomes a *Testimonio* proper, as it "affirms a self-identity that is inseparable from the collective oppressed group or class" (Ashcroft, 114). The mere presence of a testimonial document acquires a materiality and authority that the act of sharing of pain cannot have. Moreover, the importance of not merely testifying to the truth of one's reality through suffering, but of recording the suffering of others *for* others, becomes crucial to the *construction* of the collective. Testifying does not construct an artifice: writing a testimony does. Living in close proximity to the victims and driven out of his mind by violence, Nirmal operates between the poles of speech and silence; his journal is a vivid rendition of the events.

While he inscribes the incidents in his journal "*every moment takes on a startling clarity; small things become the world in microcosm*" (*HT*,148, italics original). The dominant metaphor that he uses for himself is

of "*some misplaced, misgendered Scheherazade*" who tries to delay the inevitable trauma with the power of his stories: "*I am trying to stave the night off with a flying, fleeting pen*" (*HT*,148, italics original). Explicit is the reference to princess Scheherazade of *Thousand and One Nights* who weaves a complex amalgam of stories to postpone her death. In Ghosh's "The Hunger of Stones", a translation of Tagore's "Khudito Pashan", the protagonist declares that it "seemed to me that a night from the Thousand and One Nights had transported itself here from the realm of fiction" (*II*, 332). When Horen asks Nirmal engrossed in his copy of Bernier"s "Travels": ""Saar, what is that you're reading? Are there any stories in it? Why not tell me too, since we have such a long way to go"" (*HT*,145), the latter translates to him not only from one language to another to make it accessible to him but also from the written form to the oral form of storytelling. Nirmal's emphatic ""All right, then, […] Listen"" (*HT*,145) is an archetypal beginning in the oral tradition.

Nirmal is very much aware of the silencing propensities of official history as also the ephemerality of life in the tide country. In this tide country where environment is transformed every moment, nothing is certain and stable. By fusing time-space as an inseparable whole, the novelistic chronotope of the Sundarbans subverts the binaries of culture/nature. Bakhtin describes the artistic chronotope thus: "[…] spatial and temporal indicators are fused into a carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). This primal landscape, presented as a colossal and mysterious figure, is Janus-faced. Its richly evocative description as "the trailing threads of India's fabric, the ragged fringe of her sari, the *āchol* that follows her" (*HT*, 6) is juxtaposed with its destructive aspect which adds to the sense of the uncanny: "'At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's utter hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them'" (*HT*, 8). There is no hospitality in the tide country. Ghosh's uncanny waterscape that alternates between being subject and object, victim and victimizer, land and water can never really be "home" because it can never provide stability,

security and freedom from fear. It is a space where the perceiver finds himself simultaneously "at home" and "not at home." Further, there is a sense of a primeval secret buried deep in the earth itself when Nirmal speaks about "how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past" (*HT*, 69, also 229). The Sundarbans is an embodiment of post-structuralist space with a palimpsest of differentiated human and natural activity existing in a state of perpetual tension. An emblem of dynamic space it is an apt illustration of the Foucaldian concept of "heterotopias" which represents "the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our times and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us" (23).

In the tidal world time is shaped with each ebbing and rising tide, "*that after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten*". He is fully aware "*how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past*" (*HT*, 69). Nirmal records the incidents in detail to prevent his memories from being erased. In a post-structural world which celebrates the destabilization of the nature of signification and rejects the power of language to reflect empirical reality, Nirmal demonstrates the humanistic faith in logo centric security: "*I was once a writer; perhaps I can make sure at least that what happened here leaves some trace, some hold upon the memory of the world*" (*HT*,69, italics original). Nirmal not only records the experiences of the settlers but also writes his own self, about his vacillations and his ideals. Gradually, he experiences the withering away of his unbelieving secularism as he begins respecting the myth of Bon Bibi. His rational, secular, Marxist consciousness dismissed religious devotion to Bon Bibi as "*false consciousness*" (*HT*,222, italics original).

This, coupled with the horrors of religious fanaticism during the Partition, forbids him to identify with any sets of religious beliefs. But the strong beliefs of Kusum and Horen and their acts of worship in the middle of the mohana at Garjontala make the invisible very much visible to Nirmal. They thrust on him the idea that they had just crossed the imaginary line that separated the realm of human beings from the abode of Dokkhin Rai and his demons. He

> [*r*]*ealized, with a sense of shock, that this chimerical line was, to her and to Horen, as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me.* […] *it occurred to me that in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book — a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same.* […] *On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables.*" (*HT*,222, italics original)

Nirmal's realization affirms multiple ways of being-in-the-world, difference and heterogeneity and the limitations of the artifice of modern reason. His recognition of the rural's religiosity is a celebration of the autonomous subjectivity of these marginalized beings, an attempt to bridge the gap with the nonmodern: "*To me, a townsman, the tide country's jungle was emptiness, a place where time stood still: I saw now that this was an illusion, that exactly the opposite was true.* […] *here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life*" (*HT*,224, italics original). In the Sunderbans where the mangroves can recolonize a denuded land in double quick time, transience governs the lives of the people.

The domain that lies beyond comprehension and knowledge is that of the other, standing in opposition to empirical, rational and "modernized" knowledge systems. Kanai's nightmarish experience in the tide country swamp with Fokir effects a profound change in him as he delves deep into his unconsciousness. His journey into the depths of his psyche is, of course, initiated by his dreams. Out in the waters, accompanying Piya and Fokir in their expedition, a "recurrent childhood nightmare" – the vestiges of his past – comes back to haunt him: "a dream in which he was taking the same examination over and over again" (*HT*, 316). In his dream the examiners were not his teachers but Kusum and Piya, Nilima and Moyna, Horen and Nirmal and the words "*pariksha*, "examination", "trial by ordeal"" haunted him. Needless to mention that recurring dreams or recurring dream images are the most reliable indicators of an individual's unconscious concerns. The very next day, the sweltering midday heat induces a kind of torpor in Kanai and as if in a dream he sees Fokir traveling to Seattle with Piya. Emotionally entangled with Piya, what Kanai unconsciously fears is

abandonment. Lois Tyson's enunciation serves as an insight into Kanai's mind:

> if my nightmares begin to occur while I'm awake – that is, if the breakdown of my defences is more than temporary, if my anxiety cannot be abated, if the truth hidden by repression comes out before my conscious self in a manner I can neither disguise nor handle – then I am in *crisis*, or *trauma* (21).

For Kanai, Piya was an object of "pure desire", "incarnated in the woman who was standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh" (*HT*, 269). Indeed sexuality seems to be "the strongest and most immediate instinct, standing out as the instinct above all others" (Jung, 68). Kanai's unconscious self thus projects Fokir as his potential rival for Piya"s hand. Hence when Fokir spots tracks of a tiger on the shore and mentions that the animal was keeping a close watch on "strangers", Kanai suspects that Fokir "was playing a game with him, perhaps unconsciously" (*HT*, 321) by heightening the inscrutability of the surroundings. The goose bumps on Fokir's skin indicate his fear and he asks Kanai ""[c]an you feel the fear"" (*HT*, 322)? Fokir's question to Kanai is reminiscent of Horen's question to Nirmal years back: ""*Tell me, Saar, bhoi ta ter paisen? Do you feel the fear*"" (*HT*, 244, italics original)?

For a rationalist, urban intellectual like Kanai "fear was not […] an instinct": "It was something learnt, something that accumulated in the mind, through knowledge, experience and upbringing" (*HT*, 322). Cocooned within his own self, he believed that "nothing was harder to share than another person's fear, and at that moment he certainly did not share Fokir's" (*HT*, 322). It is Horen who pointed out that ""[…] *it's the fear that protects you,* […] *it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles*"" (*HT*, 244, italics original). The distinction between fear and anxiety is of some importance in the given context. Fear for Kierkegaard refers to "something definite" (42). A threat is detrimental by its very nature; the fear it inspires has its definitiveness rooted both in the character of the region from which the threat originates and in the entity marked out for harming. Furthermore, "the situation of inching closer without being within striking

distance heightens the effect by a degree of uncertainty on the part of the frightened" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 179-80). The fearful Fokir and the fearless Kanai go ashore to take a closer look at the footprints of the tiger. Fokir, of course, has a reason for his daring act because his mother told him that "this was a place where you had to learn not to be afraid. And if you did, then you might find the answer to your troubles"" (*HT*, 323). Landing on the slippery banks, Kanai and Fokir experience a complete role-reversal of their authoritarian positions, as Fokir, acting as "some hapless traveller's window on an unfamiliar world" uses a rather different form of address with Kanai: "From the respectful *apni* that he had been using before, he had now switched to the same familiar *tui* Kanai had used in addressing him" (*HT*, 325). Before long, in his competition for one-up-man ship with Fokir, Kanai loses his footing in the mud and slips. Exasperated, far from accepting Fokir's help to get out of trouble, he is "powerless to stop the torrent of obscenities that were pouring out of his mouth":

> His anger came welling up with an atavistic explosiveness, rising from sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master's suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman's mistrust of the rustic; the city's antagonism to the village. He had thought that he had cleansed himself of these sediments of the past, but the violence with which they came spewing out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (*HT*, 326)

The rational, intellectualized, cosmopolitan Kanai who has all his life stifled and negated his unconscious suddenly feels it erupting like a volcano. The façade of sophistication that has shrouded his conscious self cracks and he meets himself as something other. The translator Kanai, empowered with the instrument of language, "a transparent film, a prism" (*HT*, 327) could have a glimpse into another mind. Caught completely off-guard deep inside the inscrutable mangrove forests and having entered the domain of the irrational unconscious, Kanai, through the "opaque, unreadable" eyes of the silent Fokir sees in him "a double for the outside world" who has decimated Fokir"s village, burnt his home and killed his

mother, for whom the insignificant Fokir"s value was "less than that of an animal" (*HT*, 327). He realizes that the prime reason why Fokir has brought him there is that because he wanted Kanai to be judged. Loosed in a boundless expanse in which he is not habituated and experiencing himself as the object of unseen factors what Kanai feels is terror that can be diagnosed as anxiety. "That in the face of which one is anxious", believes Heidegger "is completely indefinite." As he goes on to explain:

> Not only does this indefiniteness leave factically undecided which entity within-the –world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within the world are not "relevant" at all. […] The world has the character of completely lacking in significance. In anxiety one does not encounter this thing or that thing which, as something threatening, must have an involvement. (*Being and Time*, 231)

Confronted with an emptiness beyond limit, an incomprehensible scale of things beyond measure, the linguist Kanai feels emptied of language because the "sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses, had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation" (*HT*, 329). Such nothing and nowhere, a phenomenon characterized by total indefiniteness, indicate, according to Heidegger, "that the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety" (*Being and Time*, 231). "To be in such a world", contends Ranajit Guha, "is not to be at home in one's environment" ("Not at Home in Empire", 41). Unsurprisingly, Kanai feels "so little at ease" in his "translated world" (*HT*, 328). Standing face to face with his repressed unconsciousness is for the intellectualized urban translator an almost unbearably abnormal experience. For him it is a perfect pointer that he is a misfit in that remote world, an expose of the limitations of his civilized garb as he confesses to Piya ""[t]his is not my element […] What happened today certainly showed me that"" (*HT*, 334). Kanai loses his composure and collapses on the mud which his quite unbecoming of his "buoyant confidence" (*HT*, 333). Recognizing the shortcomings of language as a rational medium of communication, Kanai acknowledges Moyna's

observations on language that "words are like the winds that blow ripples on the world's surface. The river itself flows beneath, unseen and unheard" (*HT*, 335). A remarkably chastened man after the trauma, Kanai refuses to be part of the adventure any further and prepares to depart.

Amitav Ghosh's specialty lies in his deft handling of political and philosophical issues without sacrificing the graces of art. Exhibiting a profound sense of history and space, his novels explore the human drama amidst the broad sweep of political and historical events. The riots of 1964 in *The Shadow Lines* and the Morichjhapi massacre in *The Hungry Tide* are never represented in the narratives in vivid dramatized details, or recreated as panorama of violence. While Robi's version of the riot in Dhaka is in the form of a recurrent, frightening dream, Nirmal's diary records the incidents leading up to the bloodshed. As an ethically committed writer and as a responsible citizen, Ghosh is acutely aware of the implications of describing the bloody details of violence as a gory spectacle:

> To write carelessly, in such a way as to appear to endorse terrorism or repression, can add easily to the problem: and in such incendiary circumstances, words cost lives, and it is only appropriate that those who deal in words should pay scrupulous attention to what they say. It is only appropriate that they should find themselves inhibited. (*II*, 61)

At the end of *The Hungry Tide* Nirmal's eye witness account slipped from Kanai's hands amidst the storm and was lost in the waters. But Kanai voluntarily intends to reconstruct it from his memory, he wants to write the "story of Nirmal's notebook" (*HT*, 399) which would give Morichjhipi its place in the historical archives. Leela Gandhi points out that postcolonial theory "seeks its anti-colonial counter-narrative in the written word" (159), and Kanai's textualization and archivisation of Morichjhapi is this counter narrative. The government machinery annihilates those who are virtually state-less Dalits. Interestingly, Kusum describes them to Nirmal as "*ghosts*, covered in dust, strung out in a line, shuffling beside the rail tracks" (*HT*, 164). "If violence is done against those who are unreal," argues Butler, "then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those

lives since those lives are already negated": "Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealization of the 'Other' means that that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral" (33). The arrival of the ghost, Avery Gordon contends, is the arrival of a "social figure" which calls attention to "modernity's violence and wounds . . . about systematic injury in the social world" (24-25). The ghosts of the massacred refugees will return perpetually to demand justice from future generations.

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Partition, Violence and Humanism in Tabish Khair's *Filming*

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Abstract: Tabish Khair's novel, *Filming* (2007), highlights many deeply vexed issues that are central to any discussion on colonial/postcolonial humanism. The novel presents the film industry of Hindustan and the lives of people associated with this charismatic industry. It also deals with the maltreatment of women and the manner in which their voices are muffled by the male chauvinistic society, thus making them the subaltern that cannot speak, or if they *do* manage to speak, they are brusquely silenced, because it questions the authority of those in power, and concomitantly tries to reroute the established power relations, and hence these voices and demands are to be viewed as something that deserves immediate disapproval and censorship.

Keywords: Tabish Khair, novel, partition, postcolonial humanism, film industry, violence, Indian society.

Tabish Khair's novel, *Filming* (2007), contains the covert theme of the cleaving of united Hindustan into two segregated parts-India and Pakistan, and the ensuing tragedies that enveloped people on both sides of the barbed wires.

It is this latter issue that I will be exploring in the present paper – how self-centred or community-centred political aspirations can propagate a cycle of violence and concomitantly (un)settle a large number of people and incite genocide. Such a result always underpins forced demarcations of barbed wires, and quite rightly, Khair questions the partition history of India which has surprisingly gone unregistered at official levels. The

present paper engages with the notion of 'Otherness' or difference as witnessed in *Filming*, and how it has become increasingly important in the present world, poised on the axis of deep-hatred to treat the Other in an inhuman and beastly manner. The aim of examining this communal violence in the novel is to project the suffering and chaos that it brings to human society, and to offer a viable alternative, by investigating some other theorists, in order to overcome this suffering.

Filming offers seven reels to its readers – the seven different dramatic postures propounded by Rishi Bharatmuni: Rasa Terrible, Rasa Heroic, Rasa Erotic, Rasa Marvellous, Rasa Pathetic, Rasa Furious, Rasa Odius. The large segment of the action of the novel is reworked through the dreams of a young man who is presented in the first chapter of every different *rasa,* sleeping outside a village far from his home. The time of the dream is 1948, and this young man moves the narrative back and forth through his dreams. At times, important events in the lives of some (fictional) characters in this novel overlap with historical events that take place in colonial/postcolonial India. And it is in these various dreams that we get to see the casting of the characters that play important roles in this novel – Harihar (later changes his name to Hari Babu), Durga (later changes her name to Bhuvaneshwari), Ashok, Chhote Thakur (who also changes his name to Rajkunwar, later on), Saleem Lahori and Seth Dharamchand. Quite interestingly, Khair has also registered 1947 in the casting of the novel. He has hit the nail on the head as it is this very casting of 1947 in the novel that tries to fill the gaps that exist in the Partition history of India. It is an epochal moment as it heralded one of the largest migration movements ever in the twentieth century, and positioned a new Other - both for Indians and Pakistanis.

Partition and its Other

> "Strange, isn't young man, how we are brought up to believe that sameness is good?... But it isn't true. If different desires create friction, so

does desiring the same thing . How can you desire the same thing and not come to blows over it." *Filming*[1].

The year 1947 has registered an indelible presence in the memories of people residing on both sides of the barbed wire – India and Pakistan. It has become a moment of history that will continue to offer repercussions of violence until we arrive at some peaceful negotiations and choose cogent alternatives of living in this world. Nationalism has become an undying and dangerous attraction for political activists who tend to passively dismantle the very idea of nation and the ensuing freedom that they enjoy because it is by propagating this episodic cycle of violence, that they can foster and consolidate their own political considerations. By engendering such kinds of violence in the name of nationalism, which is mostly predicated on how identities are culturally and socially constructed, nationalism becomes a spectral delusion. As such the hardcore jingoistic approach eventually intensifies the feeling of nationalism on both sides of the barbed wires. It is surprisingly noteworthy as to how nations have become the excuse for mass destruction and extermination of humanity everywhere in this globalised world. "Nationalism", Pheng Cheah contemptuously states, "has almost become the exemplary figure for death. The millennium's end is marked (and marred) by an endless catalogue of fantastic intolerance, ethnic violence, and even genocidal destruction, which are widely regarded as extreme oppressions of nationalism."[2]

Khair also exposes this inherent flaw in nationalism when he states in *Filming* – ''how can there be rebirth without death? Hundreds of deaths; millions of deaths. The ritual of modern sacrifice in which entire peoples are put on the stone slab and killed for the sake of wellbeing and unity of the nation.'' (*Filming*, p. 249). What is seemingly important here is to note the kind of fragile national unity that has emerged out - a national unity which pressingly demands the exclusion of minorities and their rights by

[1] Khair, Tabish. *Filming*. London: Picador, 2007, pp. 132-33.
[2] Cheah, Pheng. *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom From Kant To Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2003. p.1.

posing them and their loyalties as perilous for the formulation of a working definition of a pure nationalism. Further, Khair goes on to state that "Modern nations…were built on great gushes of blood, on massacres that left no shadow." (*Filming*, p. 6.) It is this dangerous relationality of nationalism with its lurking Otherness and ensuing violence that has become an overriding issue at the present moment and demands an immediate attention. Seen from this angle, *Filming* plays a vital role as the novel is an expository exhortation for an end of violence. By interrogating historical consciousness in this novel, Khair critiques the existing socio-political conditions and tries to recover the lost voices of Partition.

It is a universal truth that violence results from difference – differences of class, colour, culture and gender. Because there *is* a Self, there *has* to be an Other to give a recognition to the existence of the self. In one of his recent articles, Tabish Khair sums this notion of Otherness clearly thus: "the Other can be visualized in various terms of difference – those of gender, sexuality, race, colour, ethnicity, culture, class, nationality, and so forth, or a combination of two or more of these. What the Other signifies is the *irradicability* [what cannot be erased] *of difference*."[3]

It follows that any person can have a different identity at different times, or in different places, thus substantiating the fact that identity is always contextual, and that it is always (re)producing itself, but what also needs to be meticulously investigated is the problem of the liminality of this plural identity at moments of crisis, when a person, as in the case of this novel, a Muslim *cannot* be just any other person – say a neighbour, a friend, a fellow citizen, or simply, a human being. At such critical junctures, the Self views the Other as nothing else but *only* as an Other that must be eliminated. This failure to accept the alterity of the Other has been a major problem since times immemorial. Such a supposedly sacrosanct approach in the name of nationalism acts, to borrow a Lacanian phrase, as a '*passage a*

[3] Khair, Tabish. "Re-Orientalisms: Meditations on exoticism and transcendence, Otherness and the Self.", eds. Lisa Lau & Ana Cristina Mendes. *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics : The oriental Other within.* London: Routledge, 2011, p. 145.

l'acte' – an impulsive moment – which alarmingly perpetuates difference and violence.

Filming is about exposing the nationalist faith tinged with extremism and radicalization. It is "about mobility, about how people move from place to place, time to time, name to name; and it is about barbed wire, how we are entangled in the barbed wire of history… how we erect in our minds the barbed wire fences that leave our body bleeding, and it is about violence." (*Filming*, p. 70.) It is also about the creation of "the borderland between India and Pakistan, as depicted in the recent spate of Bollywood border films, persistently to its own filmi-ness."[4] *Filming* is a serious study of Partition and violence which targets, in a truer sense, mainly the 'impassioned fundamentalists' and political activists. Although Khair also blames people sustaining antagonistic political and communal views which only intensified the grammar of hatred. Here is what he says in an interview with Sandra Rota:

> I think I have in mind the fact that people have to take responsibility for what happened. We are not all complicit/criminals, but we are all responsible when something happens around and to us. As for the Partition, I feel that it was one of many possibilities in the 1940s: unfortunately, due to various reasons, colonial and nationalist, political and personal, it was that possibility which erased the others. Some dominant British ways of seeing India (as divided into two great 'nations' of Hindus and Muslims) as well as colonial manipulation and nationalist ambitions (on both sides) played a role, but finally the Partition became what it was because a number of 'ordinary' people saw it as necessary, inevitable or justified. Colonial maps came to be inscribed on human hearts. I think Gandhiji saw this more clearly than most others.[5]

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[4] "No Passports, No Visas: The Line of Control Between India and Pakistan in Contemporary Bombay Cinema" eds. Peter Morey & Alex Ticklell. *Alternative Indias: Writing*, *Nation and Communalism*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005. p. 197."

[5] "'Postcolonialism will have to live with its strengths and weaknesses': an interview with Tabish Khair". *The Journal of Contemporary Literature*, 3:2 January 2012. p. 95.

The story of *Filming* opens with a picture of Anjangarh in 1929 and presents Harihar, the bioscope-wallah, his so-called wife Durga (though they never got married) and their son, Ashok. Moving to different places to show the old movies to the villagers was their only means of livelihood. It is here in Anjangarh, after repeatedly pleading to put up a show before the Thakur family that Harihar comes in touch with Chhote Thakur. Both of them share a common interest in movies. Later on, Harihar sells his son, Ashok to Chote Thakur's family (since the wife of Chote Thakur elder brother was childless, and she saw an image of her own dead son in the newly found Durga's son), in exchange for money to get his dream of making a movie come true, without bothering about Durga's desire, and then they move to Bombay to achieve their dreams by setting up a film studio, Rajkunwar, disguising themselves under new names and identities. It is this self-chosen Otherness by these characters through which they try to efface their pasts in order to sustain and foster their futures. In the course of the vents that follow in the novel, the Rajkunwar studio occupies a vital place as "the story of Rajkunwar studio returns in subtle ways to the story of India and Pakistan." (*Filming*, p. 327)

One of the other vital characters in the novel is Batin, an Indian writer who migrated to Pakistan at the time of Partition, before finally (un)settling in Denmark. It is a novel where everyone seems to have another identity, more often a forced one, and hence the narrative that Khair spins is difficult to comprehend. It demands close attention. There is one such rich passage in the novel which advocates the use of different stories in the novel by Batin: "It is difficult, young man, for me to recount just one story, for each leads to another… where do I begin? What do I tell?" (*Filming*, p. 220). One of the reasons of "employing not one but four recurring narrative voices which disappear and reappear, constantly interrupting each other and providing his or her own version of events by suddenly taking the reader down different narrative routes"[6] is to substantiate the fact that it is very difficult to choose a language for the narration of any Holocaust. In so doing, Khair points to the sadistic feature of the displaced person who

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[6] Harrington, Louise. "'Fragmentary Evidence': the struggle to narrate Partition" *South Asian Review*, 31:1 (January 2011), p. 271.

cannot lay claim to its motherland, that (s)he is always in a continual engagement with his/her own Otherness, trying to find out ways to bridge the two ends of the pole. In the same vein, Khair also puts a pressing demand on its readers to fill in the gaps in the narrative. It is almost as if he is asking the readers to consider the gaps created in the lives of the people due to the Partition of 1947. Gaps that are always very difficult to fill in. Such kinds of gaps, suggests Batin, can only be filled "if you have listened to my account…If you have *listened*." (*Filming*, p. 362). At times, it seems, that by creating these gaps Khair is contemptuously hinting at the historical suspicions that plagued the Indian Partition, and continues to act ''as mobilizing principles leading to extreme violence and brutality.''[7]

The reasons for these gaps and diverse views of Partition that Khair evokes in *Filming* can also be seen as a parallel to the failure of the Indian government so far to register any national memorial for the Partition. "In India, there is no institutional memory of Partition: the State has not seen fit to construct any memorials, to mark any particular places—as has been done, say, in the case of holocaust memorials or memorials for the Vietnam war."[8] In case of Indian Partition, it is mostly the films produced by the Bollywood that has produced so many reels of Partition and made the public aware about its trauma.

Batin is very specific about the events taking place during 1930s to 1940s in his narration, as it was around this time that the importance of barbed wires started arising in Indian political scenario. Due to the cracking, dilapidating financial condition of Britain now involved in the Second World War, it was explicit that the days of the British Raj in India were numbered. The Britishers tried hard to continue their hold on India by making many promises for their betterment, and in 1942 the Cripps Mission visited India for this same purpose but they failed because of Gandhi's blunt refusal to accept any such proposal. It was what Stanley Wolpert called ''a

[7] Peter Morey & Alex Tickell, *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*. p. x.
[8] Daiya, Kavita. *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008, p.7.

post-dated cheque on a bank that was failing.''[9] But this failure has in its offing a free India very soon, and it is this vision of freedom at hand that led to the division of India into two parts. Mark to what the Lahore Session of 1940 headed by Mohammad Ali Jinnah proposed:

> The Lahore resolution stated "that no constitutional plan would be workable… or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following principles, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute [autonomous and sovereign] states.[10]

So we can clearly see that the stage for the division of India on communal basis was set, and eventually it *did* materialize only to sabotage many dreams of a united Hindustan. Listen to what Batin says: "one day, we discovered that time was vitrescent and the fused light of our dream struck the prism of 1947 and refracted into the orange and yellow of Hindustan, the green of Islam, the red of violence, the blue of a disappointed hope, and into the indigo and violet of subtle, unredeemable differences." (*Filming,* p. 168.) It is amidst such an environment of terror and horror that the novel traps its characters.

The Partition of 1947 forced many Muslims to leave India and take refuge in the newly found state of Pakistan, not because they were willing to take that refuge, but because the country can offer them "Nothing but stones and screams" (*Filming*, p.356). In this novel, Saadat Hasan Manto, the famous Urdu writer, Batin, Yousuf, 'the ghostly rider of horses', who used to train the horses of the Rajkunwar studio, Ashiq Painter, another person associated with the film studio – all have left for Pakistan, ''except those who stay because they have nowhere to go'' (*Filming,* p.284). The sabotaging of the Rajkunwar industry in Mumbai by the firebrands of

[9] Woleport, Stanely. *A New History of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. p. 334.
[10] *Ibid*., pp. 330-31.

young Hindus overlaps with the murder of Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi - both these incidents metaphorically represent a loss of 'dreams' – dream of a united Hindustan, and dream of Rajkunwar and Harihar to make a film. Following this incident, the readers' curiosity heightens as there is no whereabouts of Bhuvaneswhari, Saleem Lahori, and the two children – Kabir and Rosy whom Lahori had saved from the carnage of Partition and handed them over to Bhuvaneshwari's patronage. It is hinted at, and that too, covertly that they might be with Batin and his wife, who have finally (un)settled in Denmark. The Partition of 1947 was such a moment that both Hindus and Muslims were on the lookout for ritual sacrifice to proliferate the sanctity and assertion of their respective religions.

The Violence of Words & Community

> ''It has worried all of them, this burden of words, the way names can be death.'' (*Filming*, p.286).

When William Shakespeare wrote in *Romeo and Juliet* 'what's there in a name?', probably he would have not realized that in the time to come it would only be words that *will* matter. We are living in a time when words, 'colour of passports' and skin interestingly intersect to unleash staggering hatred and violence, when one's name and belonging to a particular community can become tantamount to hatred and violence. *Filming* is replete with such a heightened sense of communal violence – where one community is always in search to kill the Other because he/she bears a different name, a different caste, and hence it *has* to be an Other. The novel projects many major questions as to why should Muslims, or say any other community, be looked upon as a threat to the society? How can this be possible that any particular community be viewed as dangerous, threatening, diabolical or uncivilized, or, why is it that the claims that the Other makes always needs to be looked upon as illegal or immoral? These are the overriding issues that need to be examined and overcome in order to achieve solidarity amongst communities and nations.

In order to have a better understanding of a secular Indian nation – free of all the differences, let us have a look at the Nehruvian view of Indian nation that he dreamt of. In his famous book, *The Discovery of India*, Nehru juxtaposes two nationalisms – Indian and Muslim and then quickly moves on to choose a nation that is a *real* nation devoid of any communitarian differences. Here is what Nehru says: "Hindu nationalism was a natural growth from the soil of India", whereas, "Muslim nationalism… comes in the way of the larger nationalism which arises from the differences of religion or creed." He then proceeds to state that "Real or Indian nationalism something quite apart from these two religions and communal varieties of nationalism, and strictly speaking it is the only form which can be called nationalism in the modern sense of the word."[11] But it goes without saying that this idea of a secular nation collapsed like a heap of cards because what Indian ended up achieving was only a *reel* of that *real* Nehruvian dream.

The Rajkunwar studio owned by Rajkunwar is a symbol of 'united colour of Benetton' because it offers job and a living space to members oblivion of their class and castes. But this working approach of the studio becomes an increasingly threatening aspect, especially at a time when Mumbai was deeply wrought with communal violence. It is at such a critical moment that Seth Dharamchand decided to get hold of this place. Hari had struck a deal with the Seth to seek his financial help in order to turn his dream of making the movie, *Aakhri Raat*, into a reality – a dream which at the end costs him everything. The Seth took the help of Guruji, leader of young Hindu extremists, who fervently believed in the ideology of massacre and always eulogized a proliferation of violence in order to churn out a pure Hindu nation, ''And that is what he dreamt for his country; that it would, one day, remember the Muslims of India, sacrificed on the altar of the Indian nation.''(*Filming*, p. 306). His attitude echoes one of the cogent concerns of Chetan Bhatt, a famous historian. Bhatt is perplexed by this unprecedented attachment and priority being given to the sacredness of a nation by the extremists. He states, ''How indeed *are we* to account for the

[11] Nehru, Jawaharlal. *The Discovery of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 286.

late twentieth century postcolonial demand that a nation must be considered literally sacred by *all* its citizens?"[12] (emphasis mine). Such an atrocious demand, at once, ignores or cancels the rights of the Other, because it proliferates the perception of difference as a potent peril for the existence of any nation. We get another version of the lurking danger that often accompanies the modern concept of nation in the words of Gyanendra Pandey, a famous historian. Pandey states that:

> Nationalism has everywhere had a deeply divided relation to 'community'[...] On the one hand, nationalism must speak the language of rationality, of the equality of individuals [...] on the other it needs the language of blood and sacrifice, of historical necessity, of ancient (God-given) status and attributes – which is part of the discourse of community.[13]

It is this dovetailing of the sacredness of the nation with the sacredness of religion by jingoists that has undermined the very concept of 'unity in diversity'. Such political opportunism only widened gaps between the Hindus and the Muslims as they are always placed on a battlefield where they must fight each other out.

Filming contains many explicit disquieting encounters between the polarized Hindu-Muslim communities. In one such horrifying event, Guruji employs Pramukh, a young man in his early twenties, to ravage the Rajkunwar studio. The Pramukh along with other extremists unleash an attack on the studio and Raheeman Cha, the studio-guard, by cutting his hands and penis, ''before or after he was stabbed to death" (*Filming*, p.385) simply because he was a ''Mussulman''. This abhorrence for the Other community – in this case it is the "Mussulman" – dismantles the solidarity between Hindu and Muslim because it turns out to be a kind of unity ''that depends so much on certain rituals of hatred, on myths of

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[12] Bhatt, Chetan. *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*. Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001, p. 210.

[13] Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1999, p. 209.

violence, on the language of rape'' (*Filming*, p. 292) 'They are never aggressors, for everyone knows how lustful and aggressive the Mussulman is.'(*Filming*, p. 293). Ostensibly, we see the complicit presence of violence in the dialect of nationalism. For example, in one of the examination question papers set up in Uttar Pradesh it was asked ''If it takes four sevaks to demolish a mosque, how many does it take to demolish twenty?''[14] This is not a simple question, but a question which carries an implicit motif for installing and proliferating hatred for the Other community, by necessitating the destruction of the mosques in order to obtain a scared nation. These are all different ways of imagining nationalism underpinned by a flagrant violence and an insistence on difference.

For a scholar like Tabish Khair, readdressing the issue of Partition requires a basic understanding of human existence. *Filming* is one such novel that provides a humanist critique of dispossession due to the Partition. It can be viewed as a sociological tract on the human life conditions resulting from Partition. Thus when we hear Batin, not once, but many times in *Filming* reiterating: ''I did not choose to leave, I never chose to leave. I simply chose to live" (p. 195, p. 271, p. 358, p. 395), a horrifying view of the human beings is represented who are forced to migrate not because their association with the old land has attenuated but because if they *do not* leave, they will cease to exist. That is the kind of (un)ethical demand that modern man is faced with wherein the colour of the skin and the religion define your association and loyalty with your homeland and wherein the Other can *only* possess, what Virginia Woolf accurately described as ''unreal loyalities''[15], and because it is looked upon as something 'unreal' the Other becomes an object that cannot be trusted anymore, and hence it must be expunged at any cost or ghettoized so that they cannot lay claim to any rights. Such a tenacious political praxis, reminds, at once, of George W Bush's speech after the 9/11 terror attack that marked the US – to be for the war or for terrorism. Here, we again get an explicit version of a ferocious binarism of the Self and the Other – the binarism which Bush proposes is such that there is no alternative available,

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[14] Bhatt, Chetan, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, p. 207.
[15] Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*, New York: Harcourt, 1938, p. 78.

except for the blunt fact, that one needs to fight the Muslim community upfront, because the entire community has become a symbol of terror and fear, and as such must be executed.

Racial and communal hatred has become ubiquitous due to the tendency of the one to assert oneself over the Other. It has become a 'churning sea-bed of crisis' – today's meteoric threat, and a menace that reverberates time and again because of the role the State sometime assigns to its agents by granting them the right to kill its citizens. The case of Hindu nationalism becomes more problematic because of its continual refusal to count the Other as human being, and its complicit tendency to view them as a betrayer, disloyal, a problem that could no longer be ignored, thereby turning them into scapegoats to accomplish its mission of churning out a pure nation. It signals the failure of the Hindu nation to integrate different communities. Chetan Bhatt points out this inherent flaw in Hindu nationalism. Bhatt states that "The major problem that has faced Hindu nationalism since its inception is that its ideology has never been equivalent to the expression of national identity of India or Indians.''[16] If we start exploring the historical records of Hindu nationalism, we shall come across the genealogy of communalism in India. The assertion of Bal Gangadhar Tilak about Hindu nationalism can be counted as one such view.

""His resurrection in 1893 of Hindu festivals and public events such as the Mahrashtrian Ganesh Chaturti, in response to local Muslim celebrations of Muharram, was, Wolpert argues, a political strategy in which "the grass roots of Indian cultural nationalism were […] tapped for the first time.""[17] This set the ball rolling, where each community started promoting its rituals and sacredness against the other, and this often resulted in clash between the two communities. Jyoti Puri also argues this same point when she says that ''Hindu fundamentalism claims to represent the true forces of nationalism, and speaks of themes that have long been the preserve of nationalism, namely, injustice, exploitation, territory, and inherent rights of people, among others. Like fundamentalism, nationalism

[16] Bhatt, Chetan. *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, p. 210.
[17] Peter Morey & Alex Tickell, *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*. p. xiii.

seeks to transcend parochial identities, such as religion, region, sect, clan, etc., in exchange for the rewards of citizenship”.[18]

Conclusion: Towards A New Conception of Difference:

> “Love is an abstract noun, something nebulous. And yet love turns out to be the only part of us that is solid, as the world turns upside down and the screen goes black.”[19]

The art of Khair lies in the fact that through *Filming*, he provides an alternative to his readers to think over the very idea of humanity and freedom. The novel’s overriding demand is for a creation of solidarity not just between Hindus and Muslims living on the edges of barbed wires, but among all the communities, because Khair believes that this hatred and violence cannot be expunged until we all stand united and turn our back to it as “violence is not simply an act; it is an infection like the plague, and self-perpetuating. It can never be answered by violence, for that is the way it spreads.” (*Filming*, p. 327). What needs to be resisted when faced with such ghastly moments is the rehearsal of violence because Khair believes that it “is perhaps the greatest crime that we can commit. There is as much hubris in considering oneself without options as there is in thinking that all options are the same or equally available.” (*Filming*, p. 313). There is considerable merit in such a plausible alternative suggested by Khair in the above-mentioned lines as it constitutes a radical shift from structural modes of thinking about violence. By attaching significant importance to the choosing of ‘options’ at precarious times, *Filming* projects a new way of thinking as to how violence can be avoided through meaningful negotiations.

It is increasingly important to remember that the existence of the Other is essential for the identity of the self. Khair clearly echoes

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[18] Puri, Jyoti. *Encountering Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 204.
[19] Amis, Martin, ‘All that Survives is Love’, *The Times*, 1 June 2006, pp. 4-5.

Levinasian ethics that ‘‘My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in the-world. … In ethics, the other’s right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other.’’[20] The same working national solidarity is also being proposed by Gyanendra Pandey: “‘Hindu unity’, like ‘Muslim unity’ appears to be a prerequisite [...] for a larger national unity.”[21] This is the alternative that the world must choose at this cynical hour of increased hatred for the Other. Human lives *cannot* and *should not* be sacrificed. They should not be looked upon, to borrow a term of Zygmunt Bauman, as ‘waste lives’.

Likewise, Khair proposes that the idea of difference should not be a factor for the proliferation of hatred and violence, instead this difference should be viewed as something which demands a better understanding and the creation of moral and ethical projects for everyone’s existence, because ‘‘death comes on its own, finally; it always does – what has to be attained and preserved is always life.’’(*Filming*, p. 306). In Khair’s *Filming* the great tragedy of the Self-Other relationship is that the Self so often fails to see that in its very difference the Other (as Levinas would put it) calls us to responsibility.

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[20] Butler, Judith. *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning And Violence*. London New York: Verso, 2004, p. 132.
[21] Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. p. 224.

India’s Global Modernity and Muslim Terrorism in the Hindi Cinema

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Abstract: From its very inception, Indian cinema has been a cinema interested in the idea of nation. Although *Raja Harishcandra* (credited as the first Indian feature film) was strictly speaking a mythological, Dadasaheb Phalke’s motivation was grounded in a strong sense of nationalism.

Keywords: Indian cinema, idea of nation, social imaginaries, Hindi films, global modernity, terrorism.

The nation is never very far from the concerns of many of the films produced and while the common (mis)perception of Indian films is that they are melodramatic romances, it is truer to say that like all cultural products Indian films – and Hindi films, which are my concern in this chapter – are polyvocal. As such, films like other discursive products may be read in various ways to examine broader issues concerning the societies that produce them, and in this regard Benedict Anderson’s illuminating thesis on nations as imagined communities and Charles Taylor’s recent excursions into social imaginaries are helpful aids to frame my reading of Hindi films.

The Hindi screen, I argue, is one place from which to read – cautiously – an Indian imaginary. Hindi films are shaped in part by the thoughts and concerns of Indian filmmakers and in turn help inform the thoughts and opinions of audiences both Indian and non-Indian. The dialectic of films as products that are at once shaped by and in turn shape popular opinion is not, of course, a strict one. The polyvocal nature of films

means that audiences can read and interpret the codes, conventions, symbols and narratives within the film text in a multitude of ways; but it is also true that films can furnish the mind of viewers with certain ways of cogitating identities, histories and politics. It is with this that I begin an analysis of the ways to interpret the dominance of the theme of terrorism (and specifically Muslim terrorism) on the Hindi screen. What I want to argue in this article is that Hindi cinema's treatment of terrorism in the first decade of the new Millennium has changed. Whereas earlier treatments were jingoistic or consciously tempered, the recent representation is marked by a change in the choice of where to stage terrorism (*Kurbaan, New York, My Name is Khan*), a change in the attitude towards terrorism (*Black Friday*; *Black and White*) and, what will be the focus of what follows, a more frightening and modern conception of the terrorist character. These changes can be read as part of India's changing sense of itself as a nation state, and the latter in particular is one way of using the theme of terrorism to produce an Indian modernity in tune with a contemporary global modernity, where the politics of Muslim terrorism (specifically) functions as a necessary 'other' (Yan Islam 2010, 150).

Muslim terrorism and an Indian modernity

'India is not simply emerging; India has already emerged' declared Barack Obama to the Indian Parliament in November 2010 and to a house that broke out in spontaneous applause. The dual emphasis in Obama's speech on India's great advancement as a democracy and its global position as a leader, played to the ambitions and growing sense-of-self that animates the Indian elite if not the polity as a whole (Nilekani 2010; Kamadar 2007; Fernandes 2006; Mishra 2006; Kapur 2006). Touching on issues of security, terrorism and the tragedy of the Mumbai attacks in 2008, President Obama stated:

> …we insist that nothing ever justifies the slaughter of innocent men, women and children. It's why we're working together [the US and India]…to prevent terrorist attacks even further. And it is why, as strong and resilient societies, we refuse to live in fear.

Yet a certain type of fear is portrayed in most of the films that have dealt with terrorism in the new millennium. *Fanaa* (Kohli 2006), *Aamir* (Gupta 2008) and *A Wednesday* (Pandey 2008) stand in contrast to a film like *Tere Bin Laden* (Sharma 2010) which satirised and appropriated the conventions of comedy to deal with the theme of terrorism and the war on terror. But Sharma's film is the exception[1] amongst the vast majority of films produced since 2001 in which terrorism is not only a formidable menace, but one that has developed into something altogether more frightening and insidious. Whereas once the dominant concern of films that chose to deal with the themes of The Nation, Citizenship and Indian Muslims was with nation building and then later (mostly in the post-1990s era) with sustaining the nation, the evolving preoccupation today is with the need for security - not the type imagined in the 1990s, when the spectre of a disintegration of the nation haunted the imagination (think of *Roja* [1991] and *Sarfarosh* [1999]) – but a nation that is securitised against sporadic and systematic violent disruption.

Kohli's 2006 blockbuster *Fanaa* articulates this exaggeration well. The film begins with a tranquil shot of boats floating down a river in Kashmir and sweeping shots of the wintery beauty of the landscape that contrasts with the more established iconography of Kashmir, because although it is beautiful there is also a serene desolation about it, encapsulated mostly by the leafless trees and the use of a cold greyish blue colour in these initial shots. In fact when the establishing shot of the raising of the Indian flag takes place, the colours that emerge on screen seem immediately vibrant due to the pale and cold scenes that accompany the credits. Iqbal's ode to Hindustan (Sare Jahan Se Acha/Better than the entire world) is sung passionately by a group of school children as they and their teachers – amongst who is Kajol – stand saluting the flag.

This heavy handed opening establishes the patriotism of Kajol's character, Zooni and of her family (who are also present) and hints at the political overtones of the film. However, this soon gives way to

[1] *Delhi 6* (Mehra 2009) is another rare example that approaches the theme of terrorism and the war on terror through a satirical lens.

considerable time on screen to the burgeoning relationship between Zooni and Rehan Khan (played by Aamir Khan), during which the viewer may in fact forget that the film is a thriller dealing with political issues like terrorism. This strategy of course is more than a strategy: the film, like so many other similar films, is a romance as much as an edgy thriller. But it is a technique in so far as heightening the sense of twist that takes place in the middle of the film. Just when Zooni's eyesight is restored by an operation that Rehan encourages her to undergo, news reaches her of a terrible terrorist attack in Delhi – where they have moved to – in which, it seems, Rehan is a fatality. This takes the story to its interval point, just before which the narrative reveals Rehan is alive and well and in fact not the person we thought we knew. Indeed the shots that begin the reintroduction of Rehan's character maintain the mystery as they begin by tracking the feet and back of someone walking decisively across an airport. These elusive shots build up a theatrics of anxiety and feed a sense of the inscrutability of this terrorist character (the viewer doesn't know yet that it is Khan) with a voice over of Tabu, playing a psychologist named Malini Tayagi, explaining to a sceptical, hard headed and old fashioned law officer (played by Sharat Saxena) the immense danger this terrorist poses.

Shots reintroducing Rehan Khan

The sequence begins with Saxena's character arriving at the Bureau of Intelligence building and specifically the Anti-Terrorist Unit. A low angle shot reveals the Bureau building, elongating it and signifying its authority, with the Unit's logo clearly visible in the centre of the shot. As Saxena arrives he is confronted by journalists who want to know more about the Delhi bombing. He in turn expresses his dissatisfaction at the pestering questions of the media, who, he says, having opened up their 24hour channels hound 'us' for the news. He and a junior officer walk together with the officer telling him that RAW (India's Intelligence Agency) has sent Tayagi, at which point Saxena stops and, to a sudden sound of an ominous flute, says, 'now things are going to get out of control'. Tayagi and Saxena's character are shown to have an antagonistic relationship with the latter unappreciative of Tayagi's role as a psychologist in matters of terror. This antagonism though links with two separate discourses of terror; one that is Realpotik and sees terrorists as criminals while the other psychologises them in an attempt to understand what drives them or motivates them, their intentions and patterns of thought. The two dovetail and come together in defence against terrorism as is the case in *Fanaa* with Saxena's and Tabu's characters working together. But the former is irritated by the seeming esotericism of Taygi's skills and views it at times as coming uncomfortably close to empathising with the terrorist. This irritation is clear to see when Saxena opens a door and says, 'So Tayagi, have you solved the case with all your psychologising?' The camera cuts to a close up of Taygi and then indicating her stature, distinction and importance in the narrative. 'This [the Delhi bombing] is his doing', she says. The choice to withhold the full identity of this terrorist both in the shots that follow and in Tayagi's dialogue is a way to exaggerate the mystery and tension at this point in the film.

Within the conventions of cinema or storytelling this is not a problem as such. Hyperbole, after all, is part of artistic lexicon. The problem lies in the intersection between art and society. As well as reflecting the national mood on certain topics films also contribute to setting the mood and tone *for* certain topics. In an interview with Tejaswini Ganti Aamir Khan averred, 'I think Hindi cinema is very much a part of the

Indian culture... [it's] a big thing for an average Indian person and the majority of the population is viewing films. They're really hooked on it. And they base a lot of their thoughts also on the films they see' (2004, 192). In light of this and because it is a narrative and visual medium cinema's presentation of such a charged topic as terrorism becomes particularly important. But even if Khan is claiming too much for films it is also true that because 'a single act of terrorism', as Roy reminds us, 'is not in itself meant to achieve military victory... the act itself is theatre, spectacle and symbolism' (2010, 191), its cinematisation draws it into the field of narrative thus at once participating in its theatrics but also transforming it. The cognisance the viewer has of terrorism then is part of the mediascape – to borrow Arujun Appadurai's helpful phrase – that has "created" it in its re-presentation. It is at this level of analysis that we can note the conception of the terrorist character that has emerged in Hindi films. What we see in the proliferation of the Muslim terrorist film is a heightened sense of anxiety on the Hindi screen if not in the actual society of which the screen is part reflective.

In this context, Nandy points out:

> Anxiety is a more diffuse sense of discomfort, with no fantasy in it. Fear usually has a concrete reason of fear, and even when it is a vague, even when it is the fear of ghosts or witchcraft, has a clear cut fantasy beneath or within it. (*Sarai Reader* 2008, 279)

What I am proposing is that there is an anxiety that pervades the Indian imaginary. Only, because it is diffuse and vague and generalised it is displaced and finds expression in an *obsession*[2] with terrorism and Muslims as potential agents of terror. This obsession, which is a type of substitution, helps manage the amorphous/unconscious anxiety in the two ways Giddens identifies for the individual above: '[it helps] avoid the direct experience of

[2] I am not suggesting that terrorism in India is a phantom menace merely substituted for something real and thus by inference is itself unreal. India does of course face terrorism and has done so throughout its history. What I am foregrounding here is the 'new' obsession with terrorism and its presentation as 'unique' against the near silence of other serious political and cultural problems facing the nation.

psychic conflict deriving from ambivalence, and [helps] block off further development of anxiety from its prime source.' To elucidate the source of this anxiety or ambivalence Vivek Taneja's interpretation of an early flourishing of Muslim socials and historicals in Hindi cinema post-1947 is particularly insightful. Just like Taneja then, for whom these early films with their heightened performance of *Indian* Muslimness or an *Indian* Islamicate were possible retreats from the overt modernisation programs of Nehruvian politics, I posit that the increasingly invasive and pervasive nature of contemporary Indian Modernity – especially since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s – has left a society where, as Sengupta puts it to Ashish Nandy, it feels like one is living in more than one time period simultaneously. And while Nandy interprets this as positive because 'this diversity…can only make this society more vigorous and creative without threatening its basic styles, its algorithms of life' (*Sarai Reader* 2008, 283), Sengupta suggests it is also very 'uncomfortable for people more used to living in one time at a time' (282).

But where does this anxiety manifest itself if the Hindi screen is dominated by the substitution of the source? Leela Fernandes and Arundhati Roy provide some ideas. Roy for example points to the absence of the poor:

> In this 'counterfeit' version of India, in the realm of culture, in the new Bollywood Cinema, in the boom in Indo-Anglian literature, the poor, for the most part, are simply absent. They have been erased in advance. (They only put in an appearance as the smiling beneficiaries of microcredit loans, development schemes and charity meted out by NGOs.) (2010, 156)

She then recalls watching a TV commercial for *The Time's of India's* 'India Poised' campaign with Amitabh Bachchan appearing in the advert. 'There are two Indias in this country' Bachchan announces and this is the theme of the marketing of the newspaper's campaign. One India it declares has opted for optimism, for progress and to become 'all the adjectives that the world has been recently showering upon us'. The other is like a leash, marred in scepticism and focussed on the 'constraining ghosts of the past' (2010, 157-158). In a fierce and cogent analysis Roy shows the

uncomfortable implications of this advert: the poor are made to seem obstinate and agents of their own trouble because they are choosing to remain in the wrong India. Indeed, when the other 'progressive' India (Roy scandalously and caustically asserts) looks at the richness of the land – the bauxite mountains and iron ore; prime land that could be chemical hubs; acres of fertile farmland that could be Special Economic Zones for industry – *this* India wonders 'what are these people [from the other India] doing on our land?' (153) The gloss of India as an emerging/ed market and rising power coexists with the reality of an India still striving/struggling to achieve an equity in the social, cultural and political fabric of the nation. And while Nandan Nilekani notes that 'India has always seemed to be defined by such contradictions' (2010, 1) these contradictions are heightened by modernity (*Sari Reader* 2008b, 273) and underwrite the ambivalence that is caused by the invasive and pervasive nature of Indian modernity.

This pervasive anxiety – I posit – is managed by substituting it for an anxiety over terrorism and Muslims and amplifying this on the Hindi screen. This is partly because Muslims have always been the 'other' in the Hindu Indian imaginary (a legacy of colonialism inherited and endlessly evolved post-1947) and partly because such was the coincidence of a global zeitgeist (The War on Terror) whose emergence came to provide one way for India to think itself global and globally important.

However, if an earlier ambivalence towards the modernising project of the state produced a propensity to look to the past, as Taneja has noted, the anxiety present since the 1990s and heightened in the new Millennium produces an unexpected twist. Instead of shirking 'the modern' and casting one's gaze backward to some earlier 'purer' period, there is a corresponding embellishment of a Muslim modernity – decentred, ideologised and finally illegitimated. The Muslim terrorist is not backward anymore like his earlier incarnations; Tayagi is right in that. He is all the more sophisticated and crafty *because* of his adoption of the accoutrements of various modernities – Indian, Western and even Arabian. For example, in films like *Black Friday* Dubai is presented as a haven for terrorists from where they bank roll their diabolical plans. Rehan Khan in *Fanaa* wears contemporary

Western clothes. In *A Wednesday*, Naseeruddin Shah's character illustrates his skill by drawing on what spurred India's economic boom: its inroads into Information Technology (IT).

Staged as another terrorist film, *A Wednesday* begins with a flashback. The day before his retirement, Police Commissioner Prakash Rathod (Anupam Kher) reflects back on the most significant case of his career that took place, his voice over narrates, on a Wednesday. The scene immediately switches from the isolated presence of Anupan Kher on the screen sitting alone by the sea after an early morning jog, to the frenzy of Mumbai's morning rush hour and to the other star of the film, Naseeruddin Shah (playing a character that is given no name). The camera cuts from framing him to adopting his position as it shows the audience what he is looking at. This movement of the camera as an objective lens capturing for us – the distanciated viewers – the scene on the one hand and simultaneously assimilating the gaze of Shah's character is a disquieting experience: the camera's ability to move 'inside' the terrorist is rendered possible but our distance to the terrorist is also lessened. These framing shots set up the juxtaposition of the terrorist as both part of the city and its inhabitants but also detached – the quick cuts from scene to scene and their business stands in strong contrast to the slow and unflustered character portrayed by Shah, who, by the end of the credits, is shown leaving a bag he has been carrying in the middle of a busy train station and then leaving himself. The story has been framed, or so it seems. There is a concerted effort to lead the viewer to see Shah's character as a terrorist: his behaviour, his demeanour point in this direction and though the film itself will have nothing to do with Kashmir as such, even this association is added to push the viewer to make the link. This link between Kashmir and terrorism creeps up as it has become shorthand in the Indian imaginary so that when a police officer calls Shah but Shah doesn't respond, the officer says (seeing a J&K anagram on Shah's bag) 'oi Jammu and Kashmir come here'.

But this is all a ruse to make the twist in the story more dramatic. Naseeruddin Shah is in fact an ordinary man driven to take the law into his own hands to execute summary justice on four terrorists in police custody. His aim is to have them taken by the police to a certain location while making

the police and the terrorists believe all the time that the threat of the bombs is there to coerce the authorities into releasing these men, when in truth it is the complete opposite. There are no bombs as it turns out. When presented in this way, *A Wednesday* seems less about terrorism and more about vigilantism: a person driven to extreme action because of the perceived paralysis of a Justice system that is bureaucratic and time consuming. Yet *A Wednesday*'s vigilantism occurs in reference *to* terrorism – the 1993 and 2006 train blasts in Mumbai – and Shah's character is presented from the start as a terrorist through behaviour and get up that Neeraj Pandey knows full well will be interpreted by the audience as a case of terrorism. The key scene that establishes this is the one that follows the sequence of scenes that shows all the various actors who will become embroiled in Shah's plan and what they were getting up to that eventful day.

When Rathod reacts to Shah's threat what we see unfold on screen is a case of the State machinery galvanising. Pandey once again uses a quick succession of shots matched with a serious and determined background music indicating the beginning point of two modernities competing. As Rathod is prompted into action the camera follows him from his office giving instructions to junior officers in person and on the phone and then follows him into the war room. This space, which will become the nerve centre of the response, symbolises (in condensed form) the Indian State's modernity, stocked with all the same paraphernalia that Shah has though in larger numbers than him, and the high angle shot that establishes the full breadth of the room immediately give it a sense of power and authority that is lacking in the case of Shah. Rathod gathers his men and in a direct, snappy professional tone directs instructions to different people.

An ominous and fast beat background score adds urgency to Rathod's actions – time becomes a reoccurring motif not only due to the fact that Shah has set them a time limit by which to complete his demand, but also in the way Rathod instructs his officers telling them how fast he wants them to complete the tasks he is setting them. Bit by bit what is impressed upon the viewer is the systematic, operationalised, agentive and disciplined nature of the State's modernity. It assumes the centre and marginalises other modernities – in the case of the film specifically, the

Muslim modernity implicated by Shah. Not only is Shah alone, he is possibly a lone terrorist. Bit by bit as the modernity of the State assumes centre stage, the dark modernity represented by Shah is decentred.

Before Shah calls Rathod a second time, Rathod is shown handing over his mobile phone to an officer who rushes over to a computer, taps keys in earnest, connects the phone to the computer while the camera cuts to and from him to the dozens of others sitting in the room around him all busy working away at their computers with the same determinacy enhancing the sense of the whole team working as one organ. The decentred modernity helps the narrative make visible if not *produce* the modernity of the State. When Shah calls back for instance, he asks to speak to someone who has the authority to make decisions. This notion of authority then is introduced by Shah so that when Rathod speaks to a senior politician and appears to be shirking from negotiating with the terrorist himself, Rathod's defence is:

> The reason for this is because if this man is genuine then to stop him there would be the need for unlimited authority; no red tape, no protocol, absolute and complete freedom should be granted: 'Why are you doing this?' 'Why do you need this person?' questions such as these should not even arise. But because I know this is not possible that is the reason I am avoiding my responsibilities.

The politician grants Rathod these powers and thus Rathod now officially enters the story as the interlocutor with Shah that forms much of the entertainment and suspense of the film. Security here means the concentration of power and authority, and although in this case Rathod is asking for this authority himself, in terms of the state, a belief in the need for such exceptional and stringent powers inaugurates the securiotocratic state that is an un/conscious reaction to external threats, the inflation of which, in turn, obfuscates the threat posed by an expanded state itself. Although a case of inflation in the context of the film is difficult to sustain given that within the story the threat seems all too clear and Rathod and others must respond to it, an inflation of sorts is still taking place if only

because *A Wednesday* like others in this new genre of the Muslim terrorist film chooses to focus singularly on the terror of the terrorists and omit any possibility of the terror caused by the state (Roy 2010, 20).

The function of a Muslim modernity in these films therefore, is to be presented as decentred and ideologised so as to substantiate an Indian modernity and help it assume a hegemonic centrality. But these films do not convey a smug congratulatory attitude. If an Indian modernity is presented as hegemonic it is simultaneously vulnerable. This performance of vulnerability is necessary to create tension within the plot but also because, to maintain a sense of vulnerability is a way to reproduce this modernity and sustain the agencies invested in it, foremost amongst who are the agents of the state.

When the senior politician whom Rathod spoke to earlier comes to see him and find out the plan of action, he is disappointed to hear that until they have a breakthrough they need to follow the terrorist's instructions. He says,

> This is ridiculous. Law and order has been turned into a comic spectacle. Prakash why are we not able to do anything? We have such a big force, we have the Intelligence, we have RAW and the ATS; why do we always end up so helpless? We can't involve the media; can't send out alerts – I simply can't believe this; we've become a joke.

'Why do we *always* end up so helpless?' is an interesting rhetorical question for the effect it has. This question leaps out of the screen and poses itself in real time and space to the viewer who is not only brought into association by the collective pronoun, but also by making a timeless statement that speaks as much to the fictional time and events within the film as well as the threats and tragedies that have taken place in real time and space. The quiet implication here is that what is needed is more security and operational capacity. To this end Rathod has to bring in a young – somewhat cocksure – hacker who is more skilled than even the individuals on pay roll within the war room. He finds it funny that the officials in the room are using slightly outdated equipment and software and represents the speed of

development which the State finds difficult to keep up with due to the way it is organised as a large body full of bureaucracy and budget constraints.

But an Indian modernity comes out on top in the end. Decentred, ideologised and ultimately illegitimated, a Muslim modernity in the new Millennium is created on screen only to be disavowed so that a sense of a unified Nation, endowed with all the positive attributes prescribed by an ideology of patriotism, can once again be restored. This restoration is part of the change that has occurred in Hindi cinema and its treatment of terrorism. Through the amplified spectre of terrorism films in the new millennium have cast the communities from where terrorist characters are drawn as key players in solving the problem of terrorism and thus untangled the nation state from both responsibility and accountability in its treatment of terrorism. Instead, a securitorcratic logic is naturalised and whole communities have been foregrounded as needing to take responsibility and – to use a colloquial phrase – put their houses in order. This is something that is clear in Rajkumar Gupta's 2008 production *Aamir*.

After being given various instructions and made to traipse around the city of Mumbai – coerced always by the threat of harming his family – Aamir is told to board a particular bus with a particular briefcase given to him earlier, and then to leave this briefcase underneath the seat in front of him and step off the bus. It dawns on Aamir that he has been employed as an unwitting but crucial accessory to a terrorist atrocity. Deeply conflicted he does as he is told with his family in mind. However, no sooner has he stepped off the bus that his guilt and misgiving get the better of him and he rushes back to retrieve the suitcase. With only seconds to go before the bomb explodes he sees a construction site by the road and runs to it. The character that has been following Aamir on a motorcycle keeping an eye on him and communicating with the ringleader, who is seen residing comfortably in his house surrounded by his own family throughout the film, looks on in horror at the turn of events. He is on the phone talking to his ringleader in dumbfounded voice of what Aamir is doing. Their plan, it is clear, has been thwarted, something that is confirmed later by the several voiceovers of reporters frantically relaying to their audiences details of the blast, one of which is that it is unclear why the terrorist (Aamir) ran from

the bus but thank God he did so otherwise there would have been a large toll of casualties. By preventing this Aamir quite literally brings the ringleader to his knees.

In a revealing shot Aamir looks up at the sky knowing he is going to die and then looks straight at the camera and the audience – a subtle smile flashes across his face before the countdown of a crossing reaches zero and the blast rips across the street and the screen. This smile though is both poignant and an example of the narrative shift of responsibility, for even though Aamir is seen as a terrorist by the news media who descend upon the scene of the bomb blast, the audience have been taken into his confidence: they know it is not true; that in fact Aamir is a hero for having in the end sacrificed himself and (potentially) his family in order to save his fellow citizens (national family?). But not only has he proven himself and purged himself of the suspicions and prejudices – rightly or wrongly – associated with his Muslim identity (something that is captured most starkly at the start of the film when a Hindu immigration officer at Mumbai airport harasses him) Aamir has also actively intervened in the politics of 'his' community. He has taken hold of the meaning of his name – something that the ringleader pressed him to reflect on – and led 'his' community away from the morally reprehensible act of terror. And despite Rajkumar Gupta's good intentions, it *is* the community because every Muslim character that we encounter is somehow involved with the ringleader. So pervasive is this that when Aamir asks a child waiter at a Muslim run restaurant for a glass of water, he simply says 'no' so bluntly and in such a menacing tone that Aamir and the viewer immediately realise that even the little boy is somehow linked to this nameless, faceless terrorist linchpin. In his review of *Aamir* Kuhu Tanvir writes:

> Class distinction is consciously done away with to privilege the idea of the *kaum*, the community the nameless leader keeps harping on about. Every Muslim…knows their role in this terror machine and everyone is willing to carry out that role without questioning. This becomes evident when…Aamir too realises it is pointless to challenge what he's being asked to do. An absolute community is what is presented to us: one which

is defined by a sense of otherness (both internally and externally) and one that has a common aim – to avenge the wrongs done to the Muslim community, by sending out messages through acts of violence. (SARAI Reader 2008, 249-250)

Aamir smiles as the ringleader tries to call him.

Aamir's smile towards the end though can be interpreted as the satisfaction of the narrative at resolving a structural dialectic. Aamir steps outside of 'his' community to aid the Nation by taking hold of the problems within 'his' community and then dissipates back *into* the Nation quite literally, even though on another level the nation (as represented in the film) does not accept him. But this becomes irrelevant because Aamir is smiling at the Nation proper; he is speaking to them, telling them: 'do you see? I am not a terrorist'. In that distanciating gesture of the smile and through the understanding the film edifies, Aamir *is* absorbed back into the Nation. But whereas in *Aamir* one may have to go through these interpretive leaps in order to see this dialectical engagement, it is more than clear in *A Wednesday*.

Bewildered by the turn of events, Rathod asks Shah who he is and Shah responds: 'I'm just a stupid common man' who, he insists, is neither Hindu nor Muslim – 'this has nothing to do with my religion' he says. Yet this is precisely the dialectic that Muslim political representation in Hindi cinema runs up against: Shah's character is marked as Muslim by small details such as his proficiency at using Muslim specific vocabulary ('asalam alaekum', 'insha'Allah'); his use of predominantly Urdu words ('zaleel' 'jaayiz'); laughing at hearing the Muslim name of the police officer who has been given the duty to transport the terrorists to Shah's stated

destination – yet this character also represents an unmarked *Indian* who deliberately withholds more formal information that would instantly mark him (his name and admitting what religious community he belongs to, for instance). Sacrificing yourself or demonstrating your own patriotism is no longer part of Muslim political representation. Now the Muslim must also be seen/shown to actively take part in dealing with the 'troubles' within his/her communities and once done he/she needs to quietly blend back into the national fabric. Such is the ending of *A Wednesday*.

The hacker locates Shah's whereabouts and Rathod himself goes to arrest him. Meanwhile Shah hears the news of the death of all four terrorists and begins packing away. The scenes switch between Rathod who is driving over to the derelict building where Shah has based himself, and Shah who is making his way down the stairs and out of the building. Outside the two are shown walking towards each other in slow motion and a tense beat of drums builds the sense of climax. Rathod, suspecting that the man walking past him is his interlocutor, stops him to ask the time. A rigid exchange takes place between the two – each knowing the other knows – and then Rathod offers Shah his hand as one stranger to another. However, before Shah can give his name the screen freezes and Rathod's voiceover, which began the story, returns: 'He did give me his name', Rathod's disembodied voice narrates, 'but I won't share that with anyone because people tend to identify religion through names… he was just an ordinary man'. There are no files or reports that record the details of this case, according to Rathod. It has no trace except for in the memories of all those who unknowingly became a part of it. Shah simply disappears back into a population of over 1.2 billion people in whose place emerges India the Nation, unified and cleansed of some cockroaches (for now).

The preoccupation that Hindi cinema has shown with the Muslim terrorist film over the last ten years can be read in many ways. The theme of terrorism – transformed by real life events, most notably the global war on terror – provided Indian films an opportunity to indulge an Indian imaginary with a new way of thinking about India's globality. Meanwhile the intellection of the issue of terrorism, once scaled up to a global level and divorced from localised contexts, reflected in films in terms of their

changing attitude towards the phenomenon of terrorism. With these changes there was also a change in the conception of terrorist characters who (being expressly linked to global networks of terror now) were presented as ultramodern and more dangerous as a result. This latter change has been the focus of this chapter. This heightened anxiety around the figure of the terrorist and the reprehensible practice of terrorism led to further opportunities within the filmic texts to incorporate discourses of securiotocracy and a newly imagined role for communities from where terrorists are imagined to come to help fight terrorism and also enact their own patriotism. Reading these films in this way highlights the function the theme of terrorism serves the Indian nation state and places film as an important cultural artefact for reading an Indian imaginary. If Phalke's thoughts on Indian cinema revealed the idea of the nation as a motivating factor in his making of *Raja Harichandra*, an analysis of Muslim terrorist films in the new millennium reveals the *persistent* concern in Indian cinema – and Hindi films in particular – with India as a nation. What is more, given that there is this persistent concern and we can read it out of these films in particular, the (Muslim) terrorist character and the theme of terrorism may be seen as constituting the 'other' of Indian nationalism. And if the 'other' is always constitutive of the self, then terrorism and the (Muslim) terrorist character is as necessary as he is condemnable in and for certain discourses of Indian nationalism.

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