Rewriting nation-state: borderland literatures of India and the question of state sovereignty.

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REWRITING NATION-STATE: BORDERLAND LITERATURES OF INDIA AND THE QUESTION OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY

by

Amit Rahul Baishya

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English
in the Graduate College of
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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Priya Kumar

ABSTRACT

This project studies the paradoxical juxtaposition of the modern nation-state's guarantee of life and security to its citizenry, along with the spectacular (encounter killings, torture chambers and cells) and banal (border control practices, population policies) forms through which it exercises the power over life and death in the sphere of everyday life in particular borderland areas. I argue that a study of exceptional locales like India's eastern borderlands elaborates the paradox of state sovereignty in two ways: first, it illustrates that so-called "margins," like colonies and borderlands, are necessary for the institution of modern state sovereignty, and second, it enables a critical scrutiny of the function of forms of violence as essential tools of modern governmentality. India's eastern borderlands are a crucial locale for such an inquiry because they lie at the crossroads of the three area-studies formations of South, Southeast and East Asia. The institutionalization of the official borders of the nation-states that rim this region—India, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan—are comparatively recent historical developments. Specters of pre-nation-statist spatial connections still survive in the region, and often come into conflict with modern state technologies such as citizenship laws and statutes regulating cross-border socioeconomic contacts among people. The central focus of my project is on post-1980 Anglophone and local language literary fictions by Amitav Ghosh, Siddhartha Deb, Parag Das and Raktim Xarma. These fictions demonstrate how the eastern borderlands are figured in popular Indian discourse as a "state of nature" that occupy a position of being both inside the rationalized territorial body of the nation-state and outside the regime of normalized law and order. Focusing on figures as diverse as

bureaucrats, army officials, journalists, guerrillas and refugees (among others), they show how socio-historical changes over a *longue durée*, and the practices and policies employed by the state apparatus, coalesce to produce new modalities of subjectivity and politics in these zones of exception in the Indian nation-state.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

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To Danny and Bedanta. You are still remembered.

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Figure 1: Chongkham Sanjit being taken in for Interrogation

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On July 23, 2009, Chongkham Sanjit, a 27-year old youth, was shot dead in open daylight by a heavily armed contingent of the Manipur Police Commandos (MPC) in Imphal, the capital of the northeast Indian border state of Manipur (see Figures 1 and 2 above). Sanjit was accused of being a member of a banned Manipuri independentist outfit, the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Manipur, like many other states in India's northeast, is under the aegis of a state-security act—The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Passed on September 11, 1958, by the Parliament of India, the AFSPA empowers the Indian security forces to arrest anyone without a warrant, to search any place that supposedly harbors suspicious elements, and to fire or to use force even to the point of causing death against any person or assembly of persons who are deemed to have broken the law in these so-called "disturbed" regions. The armed forces are also provided legal immunity for any act of extra-juridical killing in these so-called "disturbed" areas. The AFSPA is technically against Article 21 (the right to life) and Article 22 (protection against arbitrary arrest and detention) of the Indian Constitution. But this Act has been in effect in the seven states of the Indian Northeast (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya) since 1958.[1] Sanjit—like many others before him—was killed as per the provisions of the AFSPA. Despite national outrage, the security forces responsible for his killing have not been brought to book till date.

On August 08, 2009, India's leading investigative journal, *Tehelka,* carried a story by its correspondent, Teresa Rahman, on Sanjit's "encounter killing," accompanied by photographs. Sanjit's case became a *cause célèbre* in the Indian national public sphere because of this article. Two statements in Rahman's article illustrate the paradox of state

[1] Since 1990, the AFSPA has been in effect in Kashmir as well.

sovereignty that I explore in my dissertation. At the beginning, Rahman asks: *"How can a State justify such a war against its own people*?*"* At the article's end, an Imphal resident observes: "Life in Manipur is like a lottery. You are alive because you are lucky." Rahman's statement emanates from the classic liberal belief in the rule of law. Legal scholar William Schuerman says that the rule of law "renders state action predictable and makes an indispensable contribution toward individual freedom…(it) protects against arbitrariness by helping to guarantee that *like cases be treated alike*" (4-5). By providing a standard of generality, clarity, public accountability and stability, the rule of law guarantees the life and welfare of its citizen subjects. By contrast, the Imphal resident's comment betrays the consciousness of the fact that the performance and reproduction of state sovereignty rests precisely in such everyday decisions over life and death in spaces designated as "states of exception." A state of exception, as the controversial German jurist Carl Schmitt defines it, is an emergency situation where the law functions only by suspending its own application. In the influential reformulation of this term by Giorgio Agamben, the legal instrument of the "state of exception" is conceptualized as the localization of a space that lies simultaneously inside and outside the normalizing rule of law and order. A state security act like the AFSPA is a good illustration of a state of exception in both the legal and spatial significations, because the Indian military forces are almost arbitrarily given the power to detain, torture and kill—technically acts that contravene the rule of law—in the name of aiding and maintaining "civil power" in the northeastern region. As Ananya Vajpeyi has suggested, state security acts like the AFSPA illustrate that within the boundaries of a democratic nation-state like India, zones of exception governed by "unelected and unrepresentative armed

forces…should not be thought of only as a zone of exception, but as a contradiction so extreme that it undoes the totality in which it is embedded, and breaks it down into distinct and mutually opposed regimes: a democracy and a non-democracy; two nations: India and not-India" (36).[2]

Through a reading of post-1980 Anglophone and Assamese language fictions set in a zone of exception—what I term the eastern borderland regions of India—my dissertation traces the historical processes through which the totality of the liberal form of the nation-state is split into a democracy and a "non-democracy." The juxtaposition of a democracy and a non-democracy instrumentalizes human existence and reduce massive swathes of the population to the level of killable bodies. The legal, juridical and governmental processes and techniques through which the totality of the liberal nation-state form comes undone illustrates that the "state of exception" is the hidden structure that underpins the normalization of law and order in the sphere of governance and everyday life.[3] As Agamben says, the institutionalization, localization and simultaneous invisibility of the state of exception is the common point of convergence for all forms of the modern state—whether it is liberal, authoritarian, fascist or communist (*Homo Sacer*, 173).

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[2] Of late, there has been a lot of scholarship on the AFSPA. Besides Vajpeyi's essay, the studies by Bimal Krishna Akoijam and the essays in the September 2009 issue of *Contemporary South Asia* are of particular interest.

[3] Such examples are, of course, not limited to the Indian nation-state alone. The simultaneous coexistence of the rule of law with the state of exception is a prevailing feature of modern sovereignty. For instance, if we look at the post-1940 history of the U.S.—the liberal nation-state *par excellence*—we find a recurring use of the state of exception to certain groups and spaces: the Alien Enemies Act of 1942 that interned Japanese-Americans in concentration camps, the notorious COINTELPRO program of the 1960's and 70's, and the recent cases of detention and torture in Guantanamo Bay and Abu-Ghraib are well known examples. The assassination of the Black Panthers youth leader, Fred Hampton, in Chicago in the 1970's is also an example of an "encounter killing."

At the same time, legal, juridical and historical processes and techniques do not exist in a void. These techniques have specific histories of their own. In the spirit of Michel Foucault, my project traces a history of these technologies of rule and the "micromechanics" of power as it operates in India's eastern border regions through a reading of literary texts like Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), Siddhartha Deb's *An Outline of the Republic* (2005) and *The Point of Return* (2003), Parag Das' *Sanglot Fengla* (1993, Soldier of Independence) and Raktim Xarma's *Borangar Ngang* (2005, The Song of the Forest). I contend that the processes through which the eastern border region was rendered an exceptional zone by the postcolonial Indian state is an inheritance of the governmental processes utilized by the colonial state to rule this erstwhile frontier region. The colonial frontier thus became the postcolonial nation-state's borderlands.[4] A primary motivation for the expansion of British power over the eastern regions was economic—Assam and Manipur, for instance, were rich in tea and oil, while Burma was the primary supplier of teak and later, with Malaya, rubber. These regions which were conceptualized by the colonizers as empty spaces free for conquest and inhabited by forms of "natural" life thus became the frontiers of the Empire in the eastern sector, and a location for a plantation-based political economy. Colonial discourse also produced certain forms of knowledge that constructed and consolidated perceptions and beliefs that the people who inhabited these regions were savage, "natural" and childlike. Both the Indian nationalist movement and the postcolonial state adopted some of these discourses about the region and its denizens. For instance, Mohandas Gandhi, in *The Hind Swaraj*, calls the people of this region *junglees* (uncivilized people), while Jawaharlal Nehru, in

[4] My thoughts on this have been influenced by Sanjib Baruah and Subir Bhaumik's works.

The Discovery of India, says that the eastern borderland region exists "outside the stream" of India's civilizational "life" (25). These discourses have also come to lodge themselves in the postcolonial legal apparatus. For instance, a legal instrument like the AFSPA designates this area as a "disturbed" region by repeatedly making references to the perceived lack of law and order. The implication is rather blatant—since law and order frequently breaks down here, the "civilizing" order of the state has to often yield the whip to impose discipline and keep the house in order.

My project narrates the processes through which these colonial state frontiers became the postcolonial state's border regions. It also locates a common element that unites these two forms of the modern state in South Asia—that of race. Therefore, the first proposition of my project is that racial practices of rule characterize the way in which the eastern frontier/borderland region has been governed successively by the colonial/postcolonial state. Following Foucault, I define race as a strategy of governance that fractures a unified biopolitical field. If biopolitics is a modality of politics that is predicated towards guaranteeing the welfare of a population conceptualized as a species, then race and racism emerges as the technique *par excellence* that fractures this unified field, divides species into subspecies called races, and thereby enables the sovereign decision over what must live and what must die. I believe that race and the history of the modern state in India are crucially interlinked. However, this aspect has not been given its proper due in South Asian Studies. This is why my work on the frontier/borderlands in India has been influenced more by the Africanist strand of postcolonial theory, which has had a strong tradition of contending with and theorizing about the colony's status as a

racialized "state of exception," than the South Asian strand which has been dominated by studies about the manufacture of consenting subjects.[5]

The second proposition of my dissertation is that while there are continuities between the racial technologies of rule employed by the colonial and the postcolonial states *vis-à-vis* the eastern border regions, there are certain important differences in the internal logic of their architecture. Adopting David Theo Goldberg's terminology in a slightly linear vein, I contend that the internal logic of racial rule of the colonial state is predominantly "naturalist" while that of the postcolonial state is "historicist." The internal logic of naturalist rule fixes "racially conceived "Natives" in a prehistorical condition of pure Being naturally incapable of development and development and so historical progress" (43). On the other hand, the logic of historicist processes self-consciously historicizes racial characterization, while simultaneously elevating a particular conceptualization of the self above "primitive or undeveloped Others as a victory of history…even as it leaves open the possibility of those racial Others to historical development" (43).[6] I do not mean to suggest that colonial governmentalities were exclusively naturalist, while postcolonial governmentalities are absolutely historicist—oftentimes there are slippages between these categories. But I adopt this terminology to delineate the dominant modalities of rule adopted by the two forms of the modern state in South Asia with respect to the eastern frontier/border region.

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[5] This modality of analysis could also be extended to other "states of exception" in India such as the "tribal" belt in Central India. Another body of knowledge which my work could ally itself with is American Studies, where the idea of the frontier and studies of racial technologies of rule have a long tradition. However, I haven't explored these connections in great detail in this work.

[6] Goldberg traces the genealogy of naturalism from Hobbes and Charles Mills, while the historicist line runs from Locke to Marx and beyond.

My third argument is that the naturalist practices of the colonial state and the historicist practices of the postcolonial state converge at one point: they possess the potential of reducing every inhabitant of the region to the status of what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life”—human life that is stripped of its political determinations and reduced to pure, natural existence that is totally at the disposal of sovereign power. At that point, biopower (the fostering of life) manifests itself as what Achille Mbembe terms “necropower” (the power to take life and instrumentalize human existence). A legal instrument like the AFSPA is an excellent illustration of the tipping point where biopower manifests itself as necropower. Therefore, my project studies the continued and paradoxical juxtaposition of the necropolitical (encounter killings, torture chambers and cells) and “banal” biopolitical (border control practices, population policies) techniques through which a modern liberal nation-state like India exercises power over life and death in the sphere of everyday life in exceptional zones such as the eastern Indian border regions.

Defining the Terms: Sovereignty, Politics, Subjectivity and Borderlands

There are four key conceptual terms in my dissertation that I would like to precisely define at the very outset: sovereignty, subjectivity, politics and borderlands. Sovereignty refers to the power that a transcendent authority, like the king or the chieftain in premodern epochs, possessed over the life and death of subjects. The later works of Michel Foucault have suggested that the passage to modernity is characterized by the rise to prominence of nonsovereign modalities of power. The sovereign decision over life and death has apparently been superseded by forms of power that manage, regulate and care for the welfare of statistically enumerable and determinable population

sets. Foucault's insights on nonsovereign power have opened up new dimensions of analyses especially in the sphere of globalization studies. Scholars like Saskia Sassen, Aihwa Ong, Arjun Appadurai and David Held have utilized the nonsovereign Foucauldian model to critically analyze the phenomenon of globalization as a new post-modern modality of power that unhinges the traditional triptych of sovereignty, territory and people. Sovereign power, in these theorizations, is conceptualized as an archaic remnant from the past manifesting itself sporadically in non-liberal societies. I disagree with this proposition, and argue that the sovereign power over life and death manifests itself in our conjuncture in both direct and camouflaged forms. Through a reading of the literary texts mentioned above, I conduct an analysis of specific modern modalities of sovereign power and their impact on subjectivity.

My understanding of subjectivity draws on Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman's definition of the term: the "felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power" (1). The complex negotiations and clashes between the objective dimensions of the political and social institutions, and the range of subjectivities that simultaneously auto-produce these disciplinary and security mechanisms, and also resist them, give us a glimpse into the shifting, undecidable sphere of the political—that fluid and dynamic sphere that is at the heart of my project. Like the political anthropologist Thomas Blom Hansen, I define the political as a shifting, fluid realm that illustrates how the "irreducible conflicts and undecidability lying at the heart of the social world…is brought under control and temporarily institutionalized within institutions, procedures, legislation, and so on" (*Saffron Wave*, 18). Politics is the *activity*

that simultaneously institutionalizes “irreducible conflicts” in temporary forms and also gives rise to new forms by resisting that which is normalized.

Till this point, I have been referring to the locale I study as India’s eastern border regions. However, from now on I will utilize the term “borderlands” instead of “eastern border regions.” A border usually stands for a fixed line on a map clearly demarcating the territory of one country from the next. Demarcating clear borderlines between states are necessary for the definition of a nation-state’s self-identity. A border clearly defines the contours of a nation’s “geo-body” and a delimited territory over which the state-apparatus exercises its sovereignty. However, as Etienne Balibar says, borders and states are formidable reducers of complexity even though, paradoxically, their very existence is a permanent cause of complexity (*Politics*, 76). My project seeks to displace the exclusive focus on states and borders—the “formidable reducers of complexity”—to a more comparative analysis that contends with the complexity of lived experiences in marginalized border regions of the Indian nation-state. The individual nation-state has been the privileged locus of analysis in the study of both national literatures and also knowledge formations such as area studies. However, focusing solely on the role of a single nation-state as the transcendent power that shapes life in border regions has a lot of shortcomings. Such an approach constructs the inhabitants of the border regions as passive entities, whereas I view these subjects as active *agents* who negotiate in a multitude of ways with the apparatus of the state. Inhabitants of border regions oftentimes have to negotiate with more than one state apparatus that presuppose and give rise to a range of identities and social relationships, both legal and illegal. A comparative study thus becomes essential—we cannot limit ourselves to the regions adjoining the borders of

nation-states; instead, our object of analysis should be *borderlands*.[7] I borrow this term from a well-known essay by Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel. Borderlands refer to the regions bisected by the boundaries of states. A cross-border perspective is necessary for the study of borderlands where regions from both sides of the border are considered as a unit of analysis (216). They also note that while much has been written about how states deal with border regions, not much has been written about how "borderlanders deal with their states" (235). The purpose of borderland studies, therefore, is to "redress the imbalance of 'state-centered' studies and to discover which social impulses originated in the borderlands and what effects they had locally as well as beyond the borderland" (235).

Unlike the term border, which marks a clear distinction between an outside and an inside, a borderland, as Baud and van Schendel use it, is contiguous with the concept of the threshold. The *OED* defines threshold as "the line which one crosses in entering" or in "reference to entrance, the beginning of a state or action, outset, opening." Both significations maintain the sense of a blurring and merging of what lies inside the line with what lies at the outer limit. While borders mark the topographical lines that separates a body (like a nation-state) from another, a threshold signifies a more complex topological figure that blurs distinctions between insides and outsides. The topological figure of the threshold plays a big role in Giorgio Agamben's works on sovereignty, from

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[7] For an ambitious attempt at studying the history of borders in Africa see Achille Mbembe's "At the Edge of the World." Though Mbembe does not use the term borderlands, the comparative method he utilizes approaches Baud and van Schendel's in scope. Baud and van Schendel say that a borderland is not the same thing as a frontier. A frontier usually signifies the "territorial expansion of nations or civilizations into 'empty' areas" (213).

where I borrow the concept. Agamben uses this concept both as a way of marking the passage from one section to another in *Homo Sacer*, and also in his characterization of the paradoxical localization and structure of the exception *vis-à-vis* sovereign power. Opposed to a topographical distinction of outside/inside, an "inclusive exclusion" like an exception is a topological structure that signifies something that is outside but yet belongs. A good way to grasp this structure is to think about the distinction between the exception and the example in grammar. Agamben says that while "the example is excluded from the set insofar as it belongs to it, the exception is included in the normal case precisely because it does not belong to it" (*Homo Sacer*, 22). The example is a case of an "exclusive inclusion" while the exception would be an inclusive exclusion. The exception, thus, lies at the threshold between exclusion and inclusion. In a border, the outside is always excluded. But, in a borderland—a region bisected by the borders of distinct states—the outsides constantly merge with the insides often creating thresholds of indistinction between the two topographical states. To paraphrase the theater critic Michal Kobialka, the employment of threshold concepts like borderlands entails a cognitive shift that makes us think *of* borders and their effects instead of thinking *in* borders (17). To think *in* borders repeats the limitations of state-centered epistemologies which this project seeks to eschew.

Locating India's Eastern Borderlands

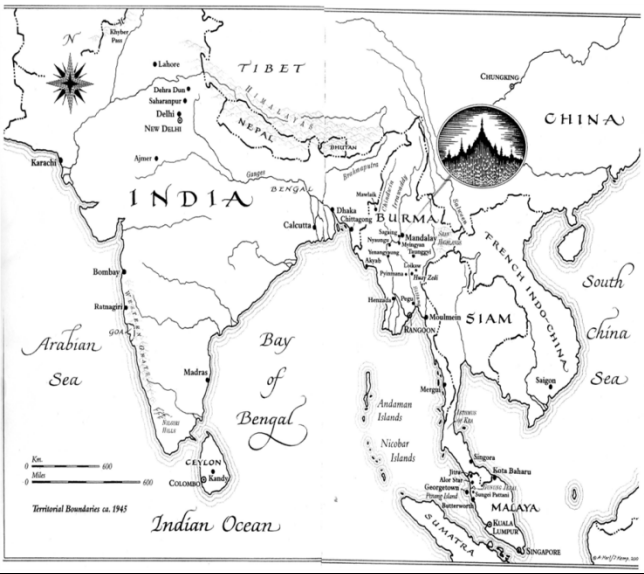

Figure 3: The Eastern frontier region circa 1945

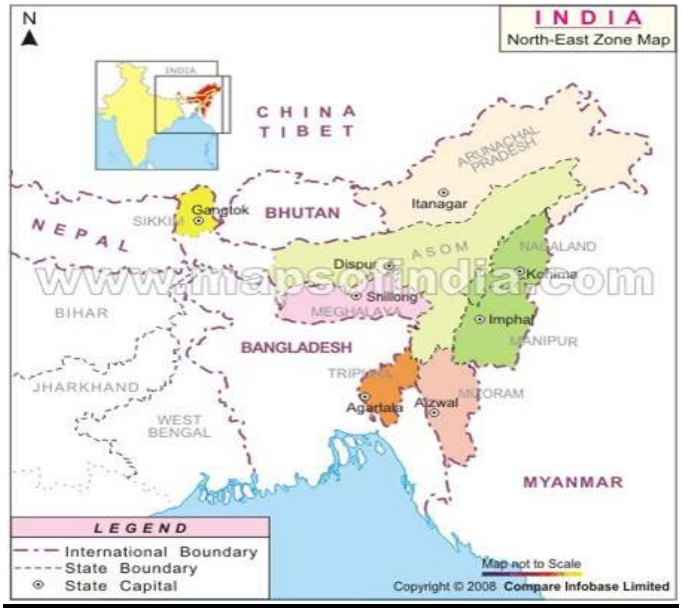

Figure 4: India's Eastern Borderlands in the Present Day

India's eastern borderlands represent a classic threshold as they are rimmed by the borders of five different nation-states and three different area-studies configurations. There is, however, no region by the name of India's eastern borderlands. This term is my invention. By India's eastern borderlands I refer to the seven northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, and the state of Sikkim. However, I avoid using the term "northeast" for two reasons: first, it is an artificial regional construction (of course, no regional construction is "natural") continuously made and remade by the Indian state over the past sixty years or so, and second, this term obliterates the complex history of socio-historical ecumene that encompass regions that now fall under the three area studies configurations of South, Southeast and East Asia. I consider terms like South Asia, India or Northeastern India to be hostage to the constrictions of Cartesian cartography: a "stable" configuration that, in Lisa Malkki's terms, recognizes spatial relations only if it is represented as a "mono-colored, territorially distinct, genealogically rooted, naturalized" nation-space (187). The eastern borderlands—my coinage—seeks to critique this territorializing *mentalitè* by fractalizing this "stable" space, thereby seeking to open up a different modality of narration that takes stock of complex social, historical and cultural overlaps among peoples in the region.[8]

The two maps produced above (Figures 3 and 4) represent the changes in the eastern Indian borderland region from the colonial to the postcolonial era. During colonial times, this region was the easternmost frontier of the British Empire in South

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[8] For the term "geo-body" see Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped*. Willem van Schendel has recently used the term "Bengal borderlands" for a portion of the region I study. My coinage—the eastern borderlands—disputes the overt centrality he endows to Bengal in his work.

Asia. Myanmar—formerly Burma—which is now considered part of Southeast Asia, was also administered as part of the Indian dominion till 1937. As we can see, India's eastern borderlands now lie at the crossroads of the three area studies formations of South, Southeast and East Asia, which are viewed as spatially and culturally separate entities. As Peter Kunstadter and Sanjib Baruah argue, the idea that South Asia is a discrete geographical region separated from Southeast and East Asia is a modernist fiction. Except the Himalayas, there are hardly any "natural" geographical boundaries that separate these three regions. Kundstadter argues that the southern boundary of China (the Yunnan region) does not mark any cultural or linguistic division from regions that are now in India and Myanmar (25). Similarly Baruah notes that the Japanese occupation of Myanmar and some portions of Northeast India (1940-44) was the critical episode that led the Indo-Myanmar border to emerge as the dividing line between South and Southeast Asia (*Between*, 2-4). South Asia came to stand for for the territories of British India (minus Burma and Afghanistan). The Western Alliance formed in 1943 subsequently placed Myanmar under the South East Asian Command (SEAC), and this became the foundation of "the post-war geopolitical category of Southeast Asia" (Baruah, *Between* 2).

These modern geopolitical categories were further consolidated as knowledge formations with the institutionalization of area-studies programs in U.S. universities. As Harry Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi say, area studies programs were set up immediately in the post World War II era to "meet the necessity of gathering and providing information about the enemy" (2). Later, the area studies programs were also diversified to provide information about areas vital to U.S. interests during the Cold War.

Despite its coincidence with decolonization, area studies reinforced a colonial relationship by maintaining Euro-America as a privileged site of knowledge production, while the rest of the world were constructed as "areas" inhabited by "primitive people, natives, simple societies, peoples and cultures that analogously belonged to the temporality of childhood…" (7). The emergence of new fields such as postcolonial studies, border studies and cultural studies writ large have conducted stinging assaults on the myopic optic of area studies.[9] However, by and large, the specter of area studies continues to haunt knowledge production of areas such as those in South and Southeast Asia in the North American academy.

Interestingly, as Harootunian and Miyoshi add, area studies is also committed to preserving the nation-state as the privileged unit of analysis. In this endeavor it simply carries on the legacy of liberal arts curriculum that since the nineteenth century had the nation-state as its organizing principle (8).[10] However, analyses of a region like the eastern Indian borderlands are bound to be simplistic if confined within the optics of area studies or national histories. First, the institutionalization of the official borders of the nation-states that rim this region—India, China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal and

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[9] For critiques of area studies from a postcolonial standpoint see Gayatri Spivak's chapter titled "Crossing Borders" in *Death of a Discipline* and the "Introduction" to *Other Asias*. Benedict Anderson's *Specters of Comparison* also critically takes stock of his training in area studies programs. Pheng Cheah's "Introduction" in *Grounds of Comparison* also discusses the relationship between area studies and Anderson's analyses of nationalism. Also see the essays by Harootunian, Benita Parry and Rey Chow in *Learning Places: the Afterlives of Area Studies*. The last three essays undertake a critical look at the relationship of postcolonial and cultural studies to area studies. Another internal critique has also been conducted by the Crossing Borders Program—an interdisciplinary endeavor initiated in sixteen U.S. universities by the Ford Foundation in 1997 as a critique of the model of area studies (my experiences in this program has been a nursery for many of the ideas explored in this dissertation).

[10] See Timothy Brennan for an incisive critique of the connection of the nation-state to the institutionalization of literature departments.

Bhutan—are comparatively recent historical developments. In many cases, the precise locations of the borders between particular nation-states are still matters of dispute. For instance, more than half of the eastern border state of Arunachal Pradesh has been under Chinese occupation since the Indo-China war of 1962. Frequent flare-ups in the borderlands between Indian and Chinese troops are regular occurrences. China also does not recognize the accession of Sikkim to India. Furthermore, numerous border disputes between India and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) have been continuing since 1947.[11] To use Oscar Martinez's terms, the borderlands between India and China can be considered an "alienated borderland" where cross-border connections are limited due to the animosity between states. The borders between India and Myanmar, though fairly well-defined and policed, have often been witness to intra-group clashes among the numerous ethnicities that inhabit the borderland regions.[12] Independentist militia groups have also come into conflict with the Indian, Chinese and Myanmarese armies. To deploy Martinez's terminology again, the Indo-Myanmar border region can be considered a "coexistent borderland" because some amount of cross-border contact exists despite the two states not always being on the friendliest of terms. The borderlands with Bhutan and Nepal, on the other hand, can be considered as "interdependent borderlands."[13] Societies

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[11] See Willem van Schendel's *The Bengal Borderlands* for a detailed description of these border disputes.

[12] See Martin Smith, Bertil Lintner and Sanjoy Hazarika's works for accounts of these clashes.

[13] Oscar Martinez proposes a four pronged model for understanding and covering the range and complexities of interactions in the borderlands. In alienated borderlands, interactions on two sides of the border are virtually nonexistent because of hostilities among states. In coexistent borderlands, some amount of interaction exists despite unfriendly relationships among states. In interdependent borderlands, close economic and social connections exist between two sides of the border. Finally, in integrated borderlands, there is virtually no barrier to trade and human movements and interactions.

on both sides of the border are linked symbiotically with a considerable amount of flow of goods and human resources. The case of the borderlands with Bangladesh is somewhat different. It has qualities of both coexistent and interdependent borderlands. This portion of the borderland region was ruled as a consolidated unit in the colonial era.[14] Large swathes of what now falls in Bengal, such as the Cooch Bihar region, were ruled as part of Assam after the 1905 Bengal partition. The 1947 partition changed the territorial contours of the region even further. The historian, David Ludden says that the creation of East Pakistan in 1947—

> …cut old routes of communication and mobility across new national borders more dramatically than almost anywhere in the world. The Bengal Assam railway tracks from Guwahati to Dhaka were torn up at the Cachar-Sylhet border, in 1965. Now it is much easier to communicate by phone or mail between Dhaka and London than between Dhaka and Guwahati (quoted in Baruah, *Between* 4).

1971 marked another rupture as Bangladesh became an independent nation. The "patchwork border" between India and East Pakistan became an even greater subject of dispute.[15] Besides land disputes, what makes the it even more difficult to precisely determine the border between India and Bangladesh are the presence of numerous rivers which are impossible to parcel out evenly among the two states, wandering streams in a delta region that often change their course and temporary silt banks (called *chars* in Assamese and *chors* in Bengali) that disappear in the monsoon season. It is, of course, very difficult to mark where the border begins and ends across a river, leading to frequent

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[14] See Baruah's *India against Itself* and Amalendu Guha's works for a detailed description of the territorial changes in the Bengal and Assam provinces in colonial times.

[15] "Patchwork border" is Willem van Schendel's term for the border between India and Bangladesh. The chapter by the same name in *The Bengal Borderlands* is a comprehensive study of the history of borders between India and Bangladesh.

conflicts and disputes about incursions by the two sides into national territory. *Chors* are formed in the winter season when the rivers are in spate. They often serve as habitations for a shifting, nomadic population who are often accused by the respective states of wavering loyalties. When the rivers flood over in the long monsoon season in these areas, the inhabitants of the *chors* often move to other places, only to settle in a different *chor* in the winter. All these factors render the precise mapping of borders very difficult in this region.[16]

Besides contemporary border disputes, any analysis of the region has to be conducted over a *longue durèe* noting the continuities between both the colonial and postcolonial polities and also keeping in mind the complex changes in the topography of the region. Two major historic events that impacted this region in a big way were the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and also the independence of Burma as a separate nation-state in 1944. A political economy that thrived on the access to sea ports through what is now Bangladesh and Burma was changed overnight. These spatial changes following the formation of postcolonial nation-states transformed the eastern Indian borderlands into a landlocked locality. Industries like jute never recovered from this killer blow. Another factor was the hardening of borders with China and Myanmar which led to the closure of trade routes with Tibet in the north and Thailand in the east.[17] The entire region formed part of an ecumene which changed drastically after the institutionalization

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[16] See Chapters 4 and 5 of *The Bengal Borderlands* for a detailed study of chors and the nomadic communities who reside there.

[17] Besides Baruah's works on this subject, also see the studies by Amalendu Guha and Udayon Mishra.

of the nation-states.[18] To be sure, the destruction of this ecumene can be traced back to colonial times. British India drew rigid lines between the hills and the plains. Barriers in trade were also instituted between Bhutan and the eastern states. Myanmar was turned into a strategic frontier that buffered colonial India against French Indochina and China.[19] Resources like teak, tea, coal and oil were extracted with minimal economic benefits coming back to the region. The postcolonial Indian state uncritically inherited many of these distinctions and governmental procedures, turning this entire region into a sensitive border region, a security threat and a "disturbed area." The siphoning off of the natural resources of the region also continued in the postcolonial era resulting in a great deal of resentment towards the state by the inhabitants of the region.

Adopting a *longue durèe* perspective with respect to this region is also necessary to analyze certain popular perceptions of the borderlands in the Indian public sphere. In the current day, the eastern Indian borderland regions are often viewed as remote, underdeveloped and primitive. Again, the roots of this *mentalitè* can be traced back to the colonial era. Yasmin Saikia, speaking specifically of Assam, writes:

> The British entry into the province of Assam followed after most of India was colonized and the first history of India was written. In Assam, colonial agents confronted mix of plains and hills people who were not Aryans. The abstract idea of racial/cultural affinity between the British and Indians on the basis of an Aryan connection was put to a severe test. Instead, in Assam, colonial agents listened to overlapping folktales inhabited by generic, nameless characters of unknown origin, and events that floated outside a fixed time line of Aryan history. Colonial confusion found its solution by making the non-Aryan(ized) peoples and cultures

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[18] Recently, the Indian government started an initiative called the "Look East" policy that attempted to make inroads into the Southeast Asian market through the northeastern region. See Baruah's *Between South and Southeast Asia* for a critical study of this policy initiative.

[19] See Baruah's *Between South and Southeast Asia* for a detailed description.

> of Assam into absent subjects; a place and people where history was made "unthinkable" (31).

What Saikia says for Assam can be extended to the entire eastern borderland region at large.[20] Typically, colonial forms of knowledge production impacted popular perceptions about the region during the nationalist movement. The prevalence of such perceptions—which attained the status of "truth" buttressed by the scientific authority of historiography and anthropology—also affected colonial and postcolonial legal and policy formulations on the region. For instance, Article 371 of the Indian constitution deals specifically with these borderland regions. The rhetoric used for these regions is significant—more than once a particular state of this region is referred to as a "disturbed region." The governors of the eastern borderland states—in the Indian polity, the governor is representative of the central government, while the states are ruled by a popularly elected state government—are given the discretionary power to dismiss the popularly elected state governments and impose military rule if it is necessary for the preservation of law and order in his/her judgment. This provision has been ab-used repeatedly since 1947. The implication is clear: these regions are viewed as a Hobbesian "state of nature" whose control and management are necessary for the maintenance of

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[20] To be sure, different communities in the region were evaluated *vis -à-vis* their similarity and/or differences to the racial norm. For instance, upper caste Assamese were considered more "civilized" and Aryanized than "tribals." Over time, many of these communities internalized these colonial categories as markers of identity. For instance, it is not uncommon to find many Assamese upper-caste elites, even in the present day, saying that they migrated to Assam from the northern plains—the more "civilized" regions. Bengalis used such self-perceptions to distinguish themselves from the "uncivilized" and "lazy" Assamese. See Boddhisatva Kar's essay for an illuminating discussion of how these self-perceptions shaped historiographical agendas in nineteenth-century Assam. Another crucial discourse of "civilization" was introduced by the spread of Christianity in many parts of the region. Christianity often became a way of marking off a "tribal" elite identity against other denominations in places like Nagaland and Meghalaya. See Duncan McDuie-Ra for a discussion of this in the context of Meghalaya. Also see the essays by Peter Pels and F.S. Downs.

state sovereignty. The people of this region are not "mature" enough to rule themselves; if left to themselves they will pose a significant threat to the internal constitution of sovereignty in the nation-state. It is no surprise, then, that the majority of the governors appointed for the region are either retired army officials or intelligence operatives. The infantalization of this region that began in colonial times persists till the present day in the postcolonial dispensation.

The construction of the borderland locale as a "state of nature" has larger ramifications in relation to the hidden connection between the normalization of the liberal nation-state and the designation of these areas as a state of exception. By figuring in the Indian imaginary as a "state of nature," a borderland locale like the Indian northeast functions as an "inclusive exclusion" that is central for the everyday institution and (re)production of state sovereignty. The state of nature and the state of exception are intrinsically connected to each other. For thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature is fundamentally a law-less, prepolitical, presocial and pre-historic order of things. The absolute identity of the state of nature and violence becomes the justification for the absolute power of the sovereign. Sovereignty represents itself by incorporating the state of nature, thereby blurring the boundaries between nature and culture and also violence and the law. A contiguous situation accrues in the state of exception. For what after all is the state of exception? It is the legal situation that accrues when the law operates by suspending itself—it is the topological inverse of the "law-less" state of nature. As Giorgio Agamben points out in *Homo Sacer*, the concepts of the state of nature and the state of exception are topologically related to each other—they are nothing but:

> …two sides of the same topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar,

> in the inside (as state of exception) and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between inside and outside, nature and exception…(the state of exception)… is not so much a spatiotemporal suspension as a complex topological figure in which not only the exception and the rule but also the state of nature and the law, outside and inside, pass through one another (37).

Indeed this passage between the state of nature and the law and the exception and the rule is a recurring feature of everyday life in this region. This leads to the normalization of the exception, as is evidenced by the rampant use of state security acts such as the AFSPA in the region.

The Theoretical Intervention

This hidden, topological juxtaposition between "the state of nature, outside and inside" in India's eastern borderlands is well illustrated by a comment of Siddhartha Deb's who in an interview in the HarperCollins website said that novels like *An Outline of the Republic* that are set in these distant, border regions of India are usually "narratives full of drifting, itinerant characters who are obsessive storytellers, characters who rise like ghosts from the periphery of India and reveal that what appears to be the border is in reality the invisible centre of the republic." Deb's comments mark a useful transition to the literary dimension of my project. The texts I read are populated by "ghostly," "thing"-like, "animal"-like and "wasted" figures. Undoubtedly, a "ghost," a "thing," or an "animal" character signify different concepts. But these divergent figures converge in one key way—they are figures that lie at the threshold of what is conceptualized as "human" and what is not. Although there are multiple ways of being human in the world, in my dissertation I take one *particular* construction of the "human" as normative and hegemonic. The normative "human" in my project is the citizen subject of the modern

nation-state. Since the seventeenth century, the state has increasingly been viewed as the acme of civilization, rationality and human *technē*. The civilizing and spatially localized order of the state ends the Hobbesian war of all against all, brackets violence by holding absolute monopoly over it and offers the promise of a good life and security to its citizenry. Additionally, each state in the world interstate system is conceptualized on the model of an individual, possessing a unique national character. A fully "human" subject is a member of a recognizable nation-state. S/he is endowed a stable identity and the guarantee of rights by virtue of being the citizen subject of a nation-state.

At the same time, Etienne Balibar points out that this "human" figure of the citizen subject contains within itself two different significations of the "subject" ("Who Comes," 36). One of the classic narratives of modernity concerns the gradual "progressive" journey of subjects (*subjectus*) to their evolution as citizens of modern nation-states: a subject who is the full bearer of rights and duties. "Subject" (the Latin *subjectus*) here implies subjection to some higher sovereign power, while "citizen" represents the abstract universal figure of the "human" subject (the Latin *subjectum*) who is the bearer of rights and who, through the modality of contract, enters into a limited exchange with the state-apparatus that guarantees them protection and the legitimate exercise of their legal rights. Therefore to be a citizen subject is to be both the subject *of* a progressive journey towards full humanity through the guarantee of rights and the performance of duties, and also to be subject *to* a transcendent sovereign power—the nation-state.

But modernity is littered with instances of figures that diverge from the norm of this fully "human" citizen subject. The colonized populations, for instance, were subjects

(in the sense of *subjectum*) and not citizens. Refugees lose the central determinant of identity in the modern world: the citizenship of a nation-state. Inhabitants of borderlands, like the nomadic populations who inhabit the *chors* in the Indo-Bangladesh border, are viewed as people with suspect loyalties to a state or are constructed as "stateless" people or "illegal immigrants" by the law.[21] Guerrillas who attack the sovereignty of a state apparatus are treated as "terrorists" who lie outside the law. Such subjects inhabit what Achille Mbembe calls the "third space between subjecthood and objecthood" ("Necropolitics," 20). The aim of my project is to alternate between the points of view of the citizen subject and those other subjects who lie on the threshold or the "third space" between subjecthood and objecthood. Through my reading of the literary texts, I also attempt to unearth alternative possibilities of collective political organization arising among subjects who lie on the threshold between subjecthood and objecthood, and sometimes even between citizen subjects and others who inhabit the "third space."[22] These forms of collectivity remain *unrecognizable* if we do not unlearn the privileges and prejudices emanating from the hegemonic point-of-view of the citizen subject.

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[21] The state has always been conceptualized as a settled order and is antithetical to the idea of floating populations. Think, for instance, about Marxist materialism and how it explains the rise of the state. The central technological implement for the rise of the state is the plough. Nomadic people who would otherwise forage for food or indulge in slash and burn techniques settled down in one place. Land was cultivated in a settled fashion and boundaries began to be drawn. The state emerged as a transcendent authority that governed the administration of that settled region. See Perry Anderson's *Lineages of the Absolutist State* for an illustration of the classical Marxist thesis on the state. A non-Marxist like Arendt also advances this theory in both *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*.

[22] Another way of conceptualizing this "third space" would be to inhabit the "in-between" space of enunciation that Homi Bhabha opens up by putting the "pedagogic" and "performative" dimensions of the temporality of the national narrative in tension. See Bhabha's "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation."

However, I distinguish this effort of mine from a dominant strand of humanist thinking in postcolonial studies that attempts to speak from the standpoint of the suffering victim.[23] I think that the strongest strands of postcolonial theory are the ones that do not speak *for* suffering victims, but rather clear a space where objects of history emerge as subjects that enunciate other histories and ways and modes of being in the world. Very often these other modes of being and living in the world are rendered unrecognizable if we take the optics framed and normalized by hegemonic institutions of modernity, such as the nation-state, for granted. By staging encounters whereby our statist selves are forced to negotiate and contend with threshold figures, literary texts emerge as a powerful site that enable us to unlearn some of the normative ways of being human. Like Gayatri Spivak, I too think that literary texts plays an important role in "training the imagination" to "de-transcendentalize the sacred, to move it…away from belief" (*Other*, 2-10). The de-transcendentalization of what we hold as "sacred"—and the nation and the state are the two of the most "sacred" entities in our times—is *the* task of the secular humanities. Literature facilitates this process of unlearning, which is an absolutely necessary and ceaseless ethical endeavor for our times.

Such ethical encounters with threshold figures in literary texts are one of the first steps towards imagining contingent politics of collectivity that, to echo Agamben, are not hijacked by the form of the modern biopolitical state. In a dialectical mode, such ethical encounters show "law in its nonrelation to life and life in its nonrelation to law…(and)

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[23] Kwame Anthony Appiah made the well known claim that while both postmodernism and postcolonialism challenge grand narratives of modernity, postcoloniality enunciates this critique in the name of suffering victims and from the standpoint of humanism. See his essay titled "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post in Postcolonial?"

open(s) a space between them for human action, which once claimed for itself the name of 'politics'" (*State*, 88, emendations mine). Thinking about these contingent and oftentimes unrecognizable forms of politics is essential if postcolonial theory has to react adequately to the challenges of our new conjuncture where many nation-states, both metropolitan and post-colonial, surreptitiously or openly reduce subjects to the status of bare life in zones of exception. Here, I ally my effort with David Scott's wide-ranging critique of the "normal" paradigm of postcolonial theory and criticism. Scott argues that postcolonial theory's "critique of representations" have by now become such a self-evident practice that the initial questions that prompted such inquiries have faded from view. Operating within a Kuhnian framework, Scott defines a "problem space" as a set of "conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations, or language games that are generative of objects, and therefore of questions" (8). When the knowledge-objects generated by such problem-spaces become self-evident to the point where the foundational questions fade from view, then the problem-space reaches a threshold and becomes a "normal" discursive space.[24] Knowledge, then, assumes a stable shape. Scott argues that postcolonial theory has reached precisely such a threshold. Postcolonial theory emerged in the early eighties as a rigorous interrogation of the "normal" problem-space of anticolonial theory and politics. The fundamental question for anticolonial theory was a theory of politics, or more precisely a "liberationist politics" (12). Political decolonization was paramount. What remained unthought within this paradigm was a

[24] This idea is drawn from Kuhn's definition of "normal science" in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

critique of representations, much in line with Ngugi's famous formulation of "decolonizing the mind."

This is precisely the challenge that was taken up by the new paradigm of postcolonial theory and politics. The event that marked the break was the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. In the wake of Said, most postcolonial critics shifted the gaze from the older idea of colonialism as a structure of material exploitation and profit. Instead, the focus now was on the idea of colonialism as a set of discursive and ideological practices that (re)produced a will-to-knowledge about the colonized. As a political-theoretical project, Scott says, "postcoloniality has been concerned principally with the decolonization of representation; the decolonization of the West's theory of the non-West" (12). Carried out primarily by a group of diasporic/exilic intellectuals located in metropolitan centers, often located in departments of literature, postcolonial theory opened up an exciting space from where totalizing interpretations of the non-West by the West could be radically deconstructed. This was a necessary task, whose valence has not diminished even in the current day. However, one aspect remains unthought within the paradigm of postcolonial studies, and this is where I want to make my intervention. In alignment with various branches of poststructuralist theory, postcolonial theory launched a vigorous attack on the politics of representation as perpetuated by the illusory-unified subject of "Europe." It demonstrated that many of the representations perpetuated by anticolonial intellectuals, politicians and activists were reproductions—even when they seemed to have radically diverged from them—of the universalizing grand-narrative of Europe. But by focusing too much on "provincializing Europe," postcolonial theory lost sight of the fact that a new "enemy" was at the gates. This "enemy" was nothing else but

the (post-colonial) state. In line with the globalization of the state form in every part of the planet in the last fifty years, the post-colonial state too employed rationalities and technologies of rule that disciplined, controlled and sequestered bodies in both "benevolent" and brutal forms. Many of these technologies of rule were inherited almost uncritically from the preceding colonial states. The institutionalization of the border became one of the key technologies for the definition of nation-statist identity, the maintenance of state sovereignty and the sequestering of bodies. These biopolitical, tangible and visceral technologies of rule were slowly and surely reshaping the terrain of subjectivity and identity, thereby bringing about new configurations of collaboration, accommodation, resistance and terror—the stuff that constitutes the warp and woof of politics. The shift that I advocate within postcolonial theory argues for an analysis of the effects of such state practices on bodies and subjectivity.

Bringing this new knowledge-object into being is very necessary in our present conjuncture as the space and functions of postcolonial politics have changed. The liberatory politics of Bandung has collapsed, the world has become aggressively unipolar, neoliberalism has assumed a new "civilizing mission" while proclaiming the end of history, the secular-modern project in many postcolonial nation-states has come under attack, the perils of the developmentalist mindset have been exposed, and even the privilege of representative democracy can no longer be taken for granted.[25] The time is, therefore, ripe for re-casting the "problem-space" for criticism that follows in the wake of postcolonial theory. Here postcolonial theory can fruitfully draw upon an emerging body

[25]For the the Bandung conference, see Vijay Prashad's *The Darker Nations*.

of scholarship that questions the interlacing of the state-sovereignty-territory triptych in theories of globalization and international relations. While theories of globalization and international studies have facilitated an enhanced understanding of the processes involved in and the changes engendered by globalization, they rarely interrogate the link between sovereignty, state and territory.[26] As Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat argue, in such scholarship about globalization, the "emphasis…remains on sovereignty as a formal, *de jure* property whose efficacy to a large extent is derived from being externally recognized by other states as both sovereign and legitimate" (*Sovereign*, 2). Even when such scholarship envisions post-national realities, they envisage it as a breakdown of the traditional nation-state structure precipitated by increasing information and technological flows. What is often obscured in such scholarship is how a particular nation-state uses technological flows to strengthen their sovereign power within their territory.[27]

In contrast to this theoretical current, scholars such as Philip Abrams, Stephen Kastner, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, Thomas Biersteker and Cynthia Weber, and Veena Das and Deborah Poole argue for the conceptualization of the territorial state and sovereignty as social constructions. The theoretical optic for understanding sovereignty and the state become radically different if we adopt this perspective. As Hansen and Stepputat suggest, the ground shifts from an understanding of sovereignty through issues of territory and external recognition by other states, toward "issues of internal constitution of sovereign power *within states* through the exercise of

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[26] See works by Saskia Sassen, Arjun Appadurai, Aihwa Ong and David Held among others.

[27] Regulations concerning the internet are a good instance of how sovereignty is sometimes reinstated within state territory through new laws and regulations.

violence over bodies and populations" (*Sovereign*, 2). If anticolonial theory advocated for a politics of identity through the liberatory promise of national independence, and postcolonial theory made a fervent and urgent demand for coevalness, the theory and politics of our conjuncture has to take critical stock of how the rationalities and technologies employed by the state form in postcolonial locales exercise control over bodies and populations through both violent and "benevolent" forms.

Border/land studies is another body of knowledge that postcolonial studies can ally itself with in this conjuncture. My work in this dissertation draws upon a specific trajectory within borderland studies. I discern two broad trajectories in border/land studies. The first trajectory coalesces with classical postcolonial theory in emphasizing the hybridity of the cultures of the border regions. The hybrid cultural formations found in the border regions are simultaneously a threat and critique of the wholeness of national *identities*—the process through which different subjects imagine themselves to be part of an abstract, collective ensemble.[28] This particular trajectory in border/land studies has opened up fruitful and provocative lines of inquiry in literary and cultural studies. The hybrid formations of identity in borderlands—Gloria Anzaldua extends it to "the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands"—open up possibilities of "in-between" narration that can unravel and critique the contradictions in any identitarian construct (3). I have found these ideas useful while thinking about the plural currents that flow in and out of the eastern Indian borderlands: currents which deconstruct the "simplicity" and univocality desired by instituting borders between nation-states and area studies configurations. However, this is a second-order concern in

[28] Gloria Anzaldua's work is an excellent example of this trajectory.

my dissertation, as I am far more concerned with an exploration of subject-formation than a deconstruction of identity. Additionally, this strand in border/land studies creates a grand narrative of its own where premodern identities and indigenous cultures are often fetishized. I reject this nostalgia for the past as it conceptualizes "culture" in purist terms and introduces binaries such as tradition/modernity and purity/contamination which are very problematic. I agree with Scott Michaelson and David Johnson who write that a "theory of borderlands need not return to homelands" (14). I interrogate meanings of home and being-at-home-in-the-world while totally eschewing nostalgia for homelands.

I draw strongly upon another trajectory in border/land studies. Political geography and the anthropology of politics have contributed a lot to the development of this field within border studies.[29] According to Donnan and Wilson, in this line of thinking the institution of the "border provides a window on a political system, on the interplay between state political systems, and on the role of states in shaping the border landscape" (45). The focus shifts to the concrete processes, technologies and policies employed to shape everyday life in border regions. Allied with the call for comparative borderland studies initiated by scholars such as Oscar Martinez, Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, this trend in border/land studies simultaneously enables a study of how the technology of the border is crucial for the formation of the individual identity of particular nation-states, and also how statist technologies shape subjectivities in the borderland. This trajectory complements the consideration of the internal construction of state sovereignty described above. Methodologically, thus, my project makes an original

[29] For examples of the former, see the works by J.R.V. Prescott and Malcolm Anderson. For the latter, see the work by Donan and Wilson.

intervention by fusing insights from postcolonial theory and border studies. While the field of postcolonial studies is concerned broadly with questions of margins and peripheries, studies of borderland areas within postcolonial states have been a minor footnote in its corpus. To echo Benedict Anderson, studies of borderland regions like that of India's eastern sector enable a critical exploration of the hyphen between the nation and the state, thereby illuminating the role of the political rationalities employed to maintain state sovereignty, while simultaneously demystifying the assumed wholeness and solidity of hegemonic national identities ("Introduction," 8).

Plan of the Work

My dissertation comprises of five chapters. My first chapter, titled "Specters of the State: Reading the State-Institution Otherwise," lays down the theoretical background for my project. I take issue with a line of thinking that argues that sovereign power has slowly been overtaken by nonsovereign forms of power in the modern age, and argue that sovereignty, in its new modalities, is still the *key* concept through which we can analyze how decisions over life and death are still made in our day and age. In this chapter, I first locate how the state form has emerged as the hegemonic institution that represents the acme of human civilization in the modern world through a reading of specific aspects of the political works of two ur-thinkers of modernity: Thomas Hobbes and G.W.F. Hegel. I then turn to a consideration of the works of Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, Partha Chatterjee and Thomas Blom Hansen who, in different ways, interrogate and complicate the *mentalité* that subjects can only be "human" and "civilized" if they are members of a state-like institution. The institution of the state utilizes its sovereign power to bracket violence and

puts an end to the war of "all against all." The theorists referred to above also complicate the thesis that the state form wields the absolute monopoly over violence. I then historicize the Indian state in its precolonial forms and its subsequent mutations through the colonial and postcolonial eras through a reading of the works of Sudipta Kaviraj, Thomas Blom Hansen and Srirupa Roy. I finally turn to an explication of how the eastern frontier/borderland region function(ed) as a laboratory of modernity/nationhood for the colonial and postcolonial state polities.

My second chapter—"Lineages of the Colonial State in *The Glass Palace*"—goes back to the period when the eastern borderland region was ruled as a frontier territory by the British colonial state. I read Amitav Ghosh's historical novel *The Glass Palace* in this chapter. Set primarily in Burma (now Myanmar), the novel spans more than a hundred year period from 1885 (the third Anglo-Burmese war) to 1992 (Aung San Suu Kyi's democracy movement). *The Glass Palace* vividly describes the material processes through which a region in the colony was "frontierized." In terms of political economy, the key determinant in this process was the institution of the plantation—teak and rubber in this case. Besides that, as a "terror formation" the frontier was ruled as if it were permanently in a state of siege. The presence of the colonial army was a ubiquitous fact of everyday life in the frontier. As a disciplinary "tool," the visibility of the army in maintaining law and order in the frontiers of the colony was far greater than in the colonial mainland—a fact that did not change too much after the frontier became the borderland. In this chapter, I study the racist structure of these two colonial institutions—the plantation and the colonial army—and the ways in which they shape the subjectivity of "natives" who are associated with them. I argue that the naturalist technologies of rule

employed to govern these two colonial institutions stand in as a microcosmic representation of the racial hierarchies created and sustained by the naturalist technologies of rule that characterized colonial *commandement* in the frontier regions of the empire.

My next chapter, " Regimes of Recognition in *An Outline of the Republic*," shifts the focus to the historicist technologies of governmentality deployed by the postcolonial state. The novel is set in contemporary times. The colonial frontier is now the postcolonial Indian state's borderlands. This region is now defined as Indian territory through the strict demarcation of borders with neighboring Myanmar. Border posts and checkpoints are the two key political technologies that maintain state sovereignty in this state of exception. The text is a first-person quest narrative with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* as its two intertexts. Its protagonist is a sentimental hero named Amrit. Amrit is a journalist from the mainland who travels into this "heart of darkness" to uncover the story of an unknown woman named Leela. Amrit's modality of recognition is shaped by statist technologies and narratives about the borderland. When he initially lands in this region, it appears chaotic and anarchic to him—the concrete manifestation of denying coevalness to a region because it is perceived as a "stateless" locale. His modality of recognition becomes much more critical of the statist imaginary after the completion of his journey.[30] However, the "surface" narrative—*Surface* is the alternative title of the novel—of the change in Amrit's modality of recognition, I argue, is not as important as what this sentimental protagonist *cannot* recognize. For this

[30] For the "imaginary" of the state, see Hansen and Stepputat's *States of the Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*.

sentimental subject, the quest for Leela's story, the journey through the space of the borderlands, and even his act of crossing the border between India and Myanmar, are simply steps that complete his individualistic quest of finding some purpose for his "incomplete" life. This all-consuming desire to complete his individualistic quest in this "state of nature" blinds him to the possibilities that i) Leela's story might possess a particularistic narrative of pain antithetical to his own, or that ii) there could be complex, contingent forms of collectivity in the borderlands that illustrate that people in these regions can also be subjects of their own histories, and not simply passive victims of sovereign power.

The last two chapters shift focus from the effects of political technologies on subjectivity to a consideration of two figures that, I argue, are powerful epitomizations of "bare life" in modernity: the refugee and the guerrilla. Refugees and guerrillas are also ubiquitous elements of everyday life in this region. My fourth chapter, titled "Amputated Lives: Refugees, Migrants and the Postcolonial Nation-State," focuses on a "waste" product of the conjunction of the nation-state and violence: the refugee. The refugee is a limit concept that illustrates how entire human populations can be reduced to the status of waste, and suddenly stripped of the most important determinant of identity in the modern world: state citizenship. I study only one novel here—Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return*. This text does not directly represent the conditions of refugees; rather, it studies the lingering long-term effects of the condition of being a refugee in the post-colonial present. The narrator-protagonist's father, Dr. Dam is a former refugee who crossed over to the eastern borderland state of Meghalaya from his natal place in what is now Bangladesh after the partition of 1947. He makes a precarious living as a small-town

veterinarian and bureaucrat, and struggles hard to provide for his family. His son Babu, the narrator of the novel, cannot identify with his "unheroic" father as a child. It is only years later, when Babu returns to the hometown that he and his family left as an adolescent after ethnic troubles began in the state, that he begins to identify with Dr. Dam's repressed fear of being a permanent "outsider" because of latter's experiences of being a refugee. In this chapter, thus, I study the figure of the refugee in two senses: i) from the standpoint of the state, I analyze how the refugee represents a threat by, in Ranabir Sammadar's words, "exteriorizing the inside and interiorizing the outside" (*The Marginal*, 6), and ii) how this permanent status of being "in between" makes the refugee shuttle ceaselessly between subjecthood and objecthood, often mournfully realizing that s/he has become a superfluous object in that process.

My final chapter titled "The 'Bare Life' of the Guerrilla" studies two Assamese novels that have guerrilla militancy as their subject of representation: Parag Das's *Sanglot Fengla* (Soldier of Independence) and Raktim Xarma's *Borangar Ngang* (The Song of the Forest). Both texts represent the lives of individual guerrillas connected with a particular partisan organization in the eastern borderlands: the ULFA (The United Liberation Front of Assam). Das's novel was published in 1993, when the ULFA was at the peak of its influence. *Borangar Ngang* was published in 2006, when the ULFA was on a decline and had been hounded out from its safe havens in Bhutan after an offensive by the Royal Bhutanese Army (RBA) in 2003. Das was a sympathizer of the organization who was assassinated in 1996, while Xarma was a former guerrilla based in Bhutan who was still imprisoned by the Indian government when his novel was published. Taken together, the two novels chart an unofficial biography of the rise and decline of a partisan

organization in the eastern borderlands. More importantly though, the two novels hauntingly portray how the guerrilla's body is reduced to bare life. This, I argue, happens in two different ways. *Sanglot Fengla*, especially, has some extended sequences that meditate on the use of torture as a political technology, and the effects of this instrument of rule on the subjectivity of the tortured. The text searingly explores the juridico-political status of the "concentration camps" where subjects are tortured, the subjectivity of both the torturer and the tortured, and the phenomenology of the act of torture. Second, both novels also explore how the guerrilla's body becomes an instance of bare life by inhabiting the inhospitable "no-man's zones" that lie in the border regions between India, Myanmar, Bhutan and China. Theoreticians of guerrilla warfare, like Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, vividly describe the lifeworlds that guerrillas should ideally inhabit. A key point they make is that, for purposes of camouflage, the guerrilla's body should represent a threshold of indistinction between human and natural/animal life. The lifeworld of the guerrilla is predicated on this indistinction as it endows the fighter the attributes of mobility and stealth—key components for the success of the "hit-and-run" tactics that characterize such forms of warfare. *Sanglot Fengla* vividly represents the lifeworlds of the guerrillas in the "no-man's zones" lying between India, Myanmar and China. But what happens when the lifeworlds that sustain camouflaged warfare break down? While *Borangar Ngang* also recreates the lifeworld of the guerrilla contingent of the ULFA in Bhutan, just prior to being flushed out of Bhutanese territory in 2003, it was written at a time when the organization was increasingly facing pressures from within and without. A significant portion of the action of the text is set in the "no-man's zones" lying between the borders of India and Bhutan. The guerrillas are hemmed in these "no-man's zones"—

spaces that lie outside the reach of the law—and are increasingly beset by starvation, thirst, ambushes by the armies of both countries, disease, and the threats posed by wild animals and natural forces. This heavily forested locale, ostensibly an ideal lifeworld for the guerrilla, gradually transforms into what Achille Mbembe calls a "deathworld" ("Necropolitics," 40). Instead of representing the point of indistinction between the human and the animal/natural life, the body of the guerrilla now begins to represent a threshold of a different type: the form lying between the living and the dead body, or the *living dead*. By focusing on the representation of the guerrilla's body as an exemplar of the living dead, this paper studies, to paraphrase Mbembe, the subjugation of life to the power of death and the reconfiguration of the relations between resistance, sacrifice and terror that accrue when subjects inhabit spaces of abandonment that lie outside the reach of the law ("Necropolitics," 39).

CHAPTER 1: SPECTERS OF THE STATE

According to Michel Foucault, governmentality is a new modality of power that is unique to the modern world and is concerned with the management of bodies, the production and regulation of populations and the circulation and distribution of goods essential for maintaining and controlling the life of the population.[31] Judith Butler notes that Foucault does not argue that governmentality legitimates state power; it "vitalized" state power in the contemporary world analogous to the way the modality of sovereignty used to earlier (51). However, contemporary theories of power that draw on Foucault's work often make the claim that governmentality has superseded sovereign power in our globalized conjuncture.[32] The tools for such a linear reading can be traced back to Foucault's works. Despite writing on numerous occasions that sovereign power and governmentality are not mutually exclusive, Foucault never addressed the problems posed by his neo-structuralist epistemology directly. As a consequence, both in his work and those of the scholars influenced by him, sovereign power has been viewed as an archaic, outmoded remnant from the past that has increasingly disappeared as the biopolitical state has slowly become a modular form across the globe.

Such at least was the dominant trend in scholarship on the modern state till the horrors of Guantanamo Bay and Abu-Ghraib became public knowledge. In these spaces of terror, where human subjects were stripped, beaten, abused, tortured and humiliated, sovereign power seemed to make a stunning comeback. Did Guantanamo and Abu-

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[31] See Foucault's essay on governmentality in *The Foucault Effect*.

[32] For examples, see the works by David Held, Saskia Sassen and Leerom Medovoi.

Ghraib horrify viewers because it seemed like an uncanny reminder that archaic forms of power still lurk beneath the "civilized" front of the modern biopolitical state? Could these images be explained as a burst of "irrationality" in an otherwise rationalized lifeworld? Like atavistic forms of violence, was it only a sudden spurt of "madness" that would settle down and disappear once the rationalized body-politic expunged it from memory and got back to its "normal" day-to-day functioning? Or did it point to something deeper—a new mutation of sovereign power that had assumed scarier proportions because it was so diffuse, divided and oftentimes invisible, quite unlike the indivisible unity and the spectacular visibility of sovereign power in premodern eras? My own views on the matter coincide with the last question. In this theoretical chapter, therefore, I take direct issue with two theses—first, that the state form represents the ultimate form of "civilized" human rational creation, and second, that the rise of governmentality has gradually relegated sovereignty to obscurity—to claim that sovereign power has persisted, albeit in mutated forms, in our conjuncture. In the first four sections of the chapter, I read the works of Hobbes, Hegel, Schmitt, Bataille, Foucault, Agamben, Arendt, Mbembe, Chatterjee and Blom Hansen to track how the insignia and internal logics of sovereign power have persisted in increasingly plural forms in modernity, and the different functions they have performed in the metropole and in the colony/post-colony. I also analyze how subjectivity is framed in and through encounters with sovereign power. In the last two parts of the chapter, I shift my gaze to the particular form of the state in India, both colonial and postcolonial, and its relationship to the eastern frontier/borderland. This frontier/borderland region is a spatialization of a "state of exception," where the law operates in and through its own suspension. I claim that the

logics and internal architecture of sovereign power are directly visible both in the governance and everyday life of this zone of exception. Just as the frontier represented, in Ann Laura Stoler's words, a laboratory of modernity for colonial power, the borderland and the techniques of governance employed there to maintain sovereignty represent a laboratory of nationhood for the postcolonial state (*Race*, 25). A detailed study of these instruments and techniques of governance here will enable an enhanced understanding of the various forms that sovereign power assumes in a particular locale of the globe. It will also enable us to recognize how subjectivity is shaped in and through complex negotiations with multiple nodes of power. Undoubtedly, the region I study is a "peripheral" locale in the modern world. But the disciplinary and security practices I outline here, and follow up in my reading of the literary texts later, will enable us to rethink the boundaries between center and periphery, norm and exception, and the legal and the illegal even in the most "advanced" biopolitical states in our conjuncture. As Guantanamo and Abu-Ghraib have shown, the relationship between sovereign power and the disposable nature of killable bodies is the hidden tie that still unites the different forms—the liberal, the communist, the authoritarian and the totalitarian—that the biopolitical state has assumed in modernity. By focusing on a zone of exception in a liberal nation-state, my attempt is to explore the ramifications of this hidden tie, and to evaluate its effects on subjectivity and forms of politics and political organization. This task of reading the "normal" state institution *other*-wise from the perspective of zones of exception allows me, in Søren Kierkegaard's words, to "rethink the general with intense passion" (quoted in Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 13).

1.1: The State and its Margins

In their introduction to an important collection of essays titled *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, the anthropologists Veena Das and Deborah Poole outline the contours of what they call "the anthropology of the margins." An anthropology of the margins, they say, "offers a unique perspective to the understanding of the state, not because it captures exotic practices, but because it suggests that such margins are a necessary entailment of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of its rule" (4). Das and Poole also observe that the institution of the state is the hidden presupposition of most anthropological inquiries even when its primary object are the so-called "primitive" or "stateless" peoples.[33] The specter of the state haunts these analyses through its very absence. People are marked as "primitive" or "backward" primarily because they are live in a "state-less" condition. In what follows, I enumerate three striking observations that they make in their introduction following this line of reasoning. These observations are germane not only to the discipline of anthropology, but are characteristic of normative forms of "common sense" thinking about the institution of the modern state. First, the presence of the state is marked by a "double effect of order and transcendence" (5). The corollary of this is that socio-spatial margins, like colonies and borderlands, are seen as "sites of disorder, where the state has been unable to impose its order" (6). Second, modern European political theology—the framework of the classical form of the modern state— bestows the state with both a quality of transcendence and a monopoly over violence. Max Weber's definition of the state is probably the most famous formulation of this idea—"A 'ruling organization' will be called 'political'

[33] An example of this is the classic study of the Nuer by E.E. Evans Pritchard.

insofar as its existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given territorial area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. A compulsory political organization will be called a 'state' in so far as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" (quoted in Das and Poole, *Anthropology* 7). Any other non-state form of violence is thereby deemed illegitimate. Third, this idea of the rationalized apparatus of the state is itself predicated on a particular view of "human nature." The image of "man" undergoes a paradigm shift from the realm of the theological to the anthropological in European modernity.[34] Human knowledge is transformed into a practice that transforms nature. A particular metaphysical idea of "man" becomes the motor that drives the rationalizing process, and the ultimate and most enduring artifact that he creates is the transcendental apparatus of the state. The political form of the modern state thus has a metaphysical counterpart: the anthropological, immanent idea of the "human."

But the fact that such axioms about the state and human behavior have become commonsense does not necessitate that they are "normal" or "natural." They are historical products that are of comparatively recent provenance. In this respect, a common way of explaining the rise of what Lisa Malkki calls the "the national order of things"—through which territorial states are recognized as individual, discrete units possessing a unique national character—is to tie it up to the rise of industrial capitalism from the eighteenth century onwards. The nation-state system, according to this thesis,

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[34] In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call this the "affirmation of the powers of this world, the discovery of the (revolutionary) plane of immanence" (71)

emerged as a geopolitical solution that facilitated the hegemony of the emerging class of capitalists. By delimiting nation-states as particularistic and discrete locales, two central conundrums of the emerging interstate order were solved—competition could be balanced and controlled and mutual cooperation among states could be ensured.[35]

In my opinion though, such explanations about the emergence and consolidation of the modern state-form suffers from three basic weaknesses. First, it attributes the shift in the global order almost exclusively to the tremendous shifts in the mode of production effectuated by an emerging class. Through this move, the bourgeoisie is designated as the motor that drove history forward. Authentic historical "man," in the Kojevian sense, is bourgeois man. Second, this thesis places a lot of importance on the question of production and distribution among states, but does not consider the underlying epistemological shifts that arose through the appropriation of non-European locales from around the sixteenth century. As a result of this foundational act of land appropriation on a global scale, the comprehension and consolidation of the first truly global system was facilitated. Undoubtedly, economic reasons precipitated and consolidated the rise of the interstate world system. But to focus on economic reasons alone would be to participate in an analysis that Etienne Balibar designates as the "conception of the heteronomy of politics"—a mode where the "truth" of politics is sought "outside itself, in its 'external' conditions and objects" (*Masses*, x).[36] Unlike conservative scholars like Carl Schmitt, I

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[35] For an example of such a thesis see Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain.*

[36] This is the major way in which this question has been posed in Liberal and Marxist theories of the state. In 1976, the ex-Guevarist Regis Debray said that one of the failures of Marxism was that it did not have a clearly articulated theory of politics. Almost echoing Schmitt, he said that Marxism has a concept of production or of what is produced, but not of *what* produces (36).

do not decry this mode of analysis. Yet I do believe—and this is a guiding thread of this dissertation—that the realm of politics should be studied as an autonomous domain.[37] We can begin to discuss the interaction of the political with other realms only after we delimit the autonomous states in which it operates. Third, and most importantly, the problem with the economic explanation of the rise of the nation-state system is that while it does provide a powerful narrative that explains the conjoining of the "nation" and the "state" into that significant modern hybrid, the nation-state, it institutes a teleology where the concept of the "state" remains the stable transcendental absolute; what changes in the passage from the medieval to the modern age is simply the adjectival form that qualifies the concept of the state. This tendency is seen in works like Anthony Giddens' *The Nation-State and Violence* where the passage from the medieval era to early modernity to late modernity corresponds respectively with the passage from the *monarchical*-state to the *absolutist*-state to the *nation*-state. I disagree with this teleological formulation and contend that the concept of the state is inherently fluid and subject to contestation as much as that of the nation.[38] As Thomas Blom Hansen says, the state "is a fractured ensemble of institutions whose relative incoherence makes it impossible to 'conquer' or 'control'…" (*The Saffron*, 26). It is a provisional institution that is an accumulative aggregate of practices and institutions. There is no a priori coherence of the state. Any coherence that is produced for relatively longer stretches of time are provided only

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[37] My conception of the "autonomy of the political" is not analogous to Balibar's description of Rousseau's views for whom "politics may have historical conditions, a complex matter to deal with…, nevertheless it is ultimately founded upon itself, as a constituent activity of the people, and individuals within the people" (*Masses*, x).

[38] Here I follow the lead of Michel Foucault, Philip Abrams and Thomas Blom Hansen.

temporarily by the interactions of different forces that cohabit the dynamic, conflictual field of the "political." The class-hegemony that arises for a time is necessarily contingent and is dependent on the specific array of forces and their interactions in a socius. In other words, there is no neutral technological "mechanism" of the state that is available for the taking. The state is a fractured machine that is molded and remolded according to specific contingencies.

However, the view of the state as a whole, fully-formed mechanism available for the taking by forces of "life" (the "nation," the revolution) is too entrenched in the popular imagination to be dismissed lightly. If we have to demystify this narrative, it is important to trace first how it came to be a form of hegemonic "common-sense" in the modern epoch. Two lesser known works—*The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* and *Nomos of the Earth*— by the controversial jurist, Carl Schmitt, are helpful in approaching some of these questions through a reframed optic.[39] In Schmitt's view, Thomas Hobbes' thought in the mid-seventeenth century marked a definitive break from earlier thinking about the state and sovereignty. The decisive move made by Hobbes is to conceptualize the state as a *homo artificialis*—a man-machine. Here, Hobbes was influenced by the Cartesian "metaphysical leap" that conceptualized the human body as a machine, and the human being as a body-soul composite that was postulated to be "in its entirety as an intellect intent upon a machine" (*Leviathan*, 37). Hobbes made a huge

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[39] Here I must emphasize that while I find Schmitt's narrative of the rise of the modern state complex and compelling, it does not necessarily follow that I agree with his authoritarian worldview The Leviathan book, written in the high years of the Nazi regime, is Schmitt's most explicitly anti-Semitic work (he derides Spinoza as the exemplar of a pernicious Jewish philosophy here). I would like my effort at utilizing Schmitt to be seen as analogous to the effort of re-thinking politics and the sphere of the political initiated by "New Left" scholars such as Gopal Balakrishnan. See Balakrishnan's excellent intellectual biography of Schmitt—*The Enemy*—in this regard.

contribution to this anthropological image of man by conceptualizing the state as a *magnum homo* or "huge man." Hobbes' gigantic figure of the Leviathan—the assimilated god, man and machine—is a representation of a singular sovereign person who approximates god in his transcendent power, but is actually a *deus mortalis* (mortal god). Unlike earlier theological models that presupposed a commonwealth made by God or an existing natural order, this *deus mortalis* was not a *Defensor Pacis*, a sovereign who traced peace on earth back to God, but a *Creator Pacis* who created and maintained an earthly peace. This conceptualization implied a shift from a theological concept of sovereignty to an anthropological one—state power is still thought of as possessing a divine character; however, its omnipotence is no longer divinely derived, but is a product of human work and a result of a covenant entered into by men. Though Hobbes uses the traditional idea of God as a transcendent power above powers (*potestas*), the repeated invocation of God has no particular meaning in the *Leviathan*. Instead, he emphasizes how the *technē* of the state is constructed through human inventiveness and reason and comes into being through the instrument of the covenant. The foundational fiction of the "state of nature" is central here.[40] The "state of nature" signifies a prepolitical state where all ties and groupings have been dissolved. Fear of a never-ending war of all

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[40] The "state of nature" has different significations in Hobbes and its later reformulation in Rousseau. For Hobbes, the state of nature was a prepolitical state whose abolition led to the institution of state and civil society; for Rousseau, it signified a romanticized state whose innocence was in stark opposition to the corruption of society. Revolution, for the latter, was a way of restoring that idealized space of freedom. Of particular interest here are the famousopening lines of *The Social Contract*—"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (13). Rousseau's famous proposition paves the way for the formulation of the concept of the inalienable rights of man—something that would have been inconceivable for Hobbes and Locke. This difference can also be attributed to the divergent presuppositions that Hobbes and Rousseau have concerning human nature. For Hobbes, human nature is essentially evil (*homo homini lupus*) and must be restrained by contract. For Rousseau, human nature is essentially good (*homo homini deus*) and needs to be rediscovered and reinvigorated.

against all brings together a set of atomized individuals together. In Schmitt's words "a spark of reason flashes, and a consensus emerges about the necessity to submit to the strongest power" (*Leviathan in the State Theory*, 33).[41] The potentially anarchic pluralism in the state of nature is subsumed thereby into the non-differential realm of the state. The state, which does not come about as a result of but rather because of this consensus, becomes thereby the only guarantor of peace.

According to Schmitt, the negative development of the Hobbesian paradigm shift was that it progressively mechanized and neutralized the state.[42] To be sure, Hobbes does not make the sharp distinction between living organism and dead machine that Kant and the Romantic thinkers instituted later. For Hobbes, mechanism, organism and the work of art were still conceived as products of human activity—the machine still possessed for him a thoroughly mythical character. However, by grasping the concept of the state as a technically completed and manmade (hence artificial and prosthetic) *magnum-artificium*, Hobbes enabled a four-hundred year long process of the mechanization of the state which, with the aid of technical developments, rendered it a "technically neutral element" (*Leviathan in the State Theory*, 42). The machine, as all

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[41] This point is also key for any understanding of Schmitt's defense of authoritarian state sovereignty.

[42] There is a positive evaluation of Hobbes' which is central to Schmitt's decisionist thinking as well. Schmitt's positive evaluation rests on his reading of Chapter 37 of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. In the medieval era, sovereign power was equated with miracles that emanated directly from God as the ultimate seat of authority. Though Hobbes was an agnostic, and subjected the commonly held belief in miracles to a radical critique, in the crucial matter of indivisible sovereign power he upheld the doctrine of *Auctoritas, non Veritas* (everything here is command); almost making sovereign power akin to a miracle. However, Hobbes' decisionism is noticeable in his capacity to relativize "truth" from the standpoint of the command. As Schmitt says—"A miracle is what the sovereign state authority commands its subjects to believe to be a miracle; but also—and here the irony is especially acute—the reverse: Miracles cease when the state forbids them" (*Leviathan*, 55). Thus, the question of miracles too is transformed into an aspect of human making, with the added proviso that they are created and sustained by the command of the sovereign. We can clearly see the echoes of Schmitt's argument for the authoritarian state prefigured here.

technology, is independent of any political goal and can be utilized as a value-neutral instrument to achieve certain goals. Once the state is conceptualized as a machine, it too is endowed with such a value-neutrality whose control and use then becomes the highest goal that cuts across the political spectrum—left, right and liberal. The laws of the state are emptied of subjective content, and are accorded validity "only as the result of the positive determination of the state's decision-making apparatus in the form of command norms" (*Leviathan in the State Theory*, 44). These command norms become autonomous, and guarantee security to the physical existence of the individual in return for an unconditional obedience. Any challenge to these norms would essentially mean a return to a pre-political state of nature. As the sole and highest lawgiver, the technologically neutral state possesses the monopoly of violence. Security and order lies in the state. The political right of "resistance" against this leviathan is a paradox because the technologically-neutral state exists as an apparatus that ends the kind of war that exists in the state of nature.[43] A state cannot be a state unless it puts an end to this type of war.[44] But the specter of this "state of nature" does not vanish; rather, it is subsumed within the statist order as a constant reminder of the rational justification for the state. Through this process, the state becomes the acme of civilized life and the supreme embodiment of

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[43] This can be witnessed in left-wing and anticolonial 'resistance" movements too—their rebellion is against a particular type of state (bourgeois, colonial etc.), but not against the idea of the technologically neutral state as such.

[44] Paradoxically, the "state of nature," while banished from the internal realm of the particular state-apparatus, reappears in the realm of interstate relationships. The realm of international relations, according to Hobbes, is a realm in the "state of nature."

human *technē*—peoples and countries unable of forging an organizational apparatus characteristic of a modern state are rendered "uncivilized."[45]

Hobbes' thought stands at the head of a line of thinking that renders the state the ultimate institution of "civilized" life. However, the gradual shift in the conceptualization of the state was accompanied by a fundamental shift in another quarter. There was a massive shift in the epistemic framework that changed the way in which the "globe" was comprehended in thought from the sixteenth century onwards, especially after the "discovery" and exploration of the New World by the European colonial powers. Schmitt's longest work, *The Nomos of the Earth*, deals with this problematic. For Schmitt, the concept of *nomos*, understood usually as "law" as mediation, or as the "normative power of the given," is key in understanding the cognitive and epistemological dimensions of this shift. However, the concept of *nomos*, he says, has been subjected to a history of misinterpretation from Plato on to Hölderlin. Originally *nomos* meant "…the full immediacy of a legal power not mediated by laws; it…(was)…a constitutive historical event—an act of legitimacy, whereby the legality of a mere law first is made meaningful" (*Nomos*, 73). The noun, *nomos*, is derived from the Greek verb *nemein*. A noun such as *nomos* is a *nomen actionis*—it "indicates an action as a process whose content is defined by the verb" (*Nomos*, 326). The verb *nemein* contains three meanings—i) to take or to appropriate, ii) to divide or to distribute, and iii) "pasturage"—the productive work that usually occurs with ownership (*Nomos*, 326-27). "Law," strictly speaking, only belongs to the sphere of the second meaning of *nomos*: division and

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[45] This tendency is, of course, seen in its highest developed form in Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

distribution only occur after appropriation. These three processes of appropriation, distribution and production are, according to Schmitt, the base of every legal, economic and social order. The major problem, however, arises in the sequencing of these processes. Especially with the rise of classical political economy and also that of socialist thought from the nineteenth century onwards, (re)distribution and production have gained precedence, thereby obscuring the question of appropriation altogether. If appropriation has been talked about at all, it has only been done so in tones of moral censure. But judged from the standpoint of pure law, it is appropriation and the concomitant name-giving that, for Schmitt, are the originary acts.[46] Appropriation occurs first; questions of distribution and production come after. Thus, Schmitt proposes that the word *nomos* should not lose "its connection to a historical process—to a constitutive act of spatial ordering" that comes after appropriation (*Nomos*, 71).

Attention to the "elemental order of the…(*nomoi*'s)…terrestrial being here and now," reveals how appropriation, ordering and orientation give rise to and consolidates the figure of the law.[47] Schmitt's particular object here is the institution of international law, which is the locus from where the hegemonic thinking about the "globe" as a totality has been consolidated. The "traditional Eurocentric order of international law"—that which consolidated the form of the modern nation-state and the legitimate system of inter-state relations—arose from an "unrepeatable historical event": the discovery and

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[46] The residues of this act of naming after appropriation can still be witnessed in common place utterances like speaking "in the name of the law."

[47] Land-appropriation is the fundamental element of the law. The sea was for a long time considered to be a space of juridical freedom. However, that began to change after the sixteenth century. Airspace, of course, is a new concept which entered the sphere of international law only in the twentieth century.

appropriation of the new world. Earlier, most people had a mythical understanding of the world, but no scientific idea of it as a totality. There were also variants of inter-national law earlier: Schmitt's example here is that of the *Respublica Christiana* of medieval Europe.[48] But it was only when the contours of the earth emerged as a real globe that was no more mythical, but factual and measurable, that the problematic of the spatial ordering of the earth under the umbrella of a uniform international law arose. This new interstate, Eurocentric spatial order—the *Jus Publicum Europeaum*, which was the global *nomos* in the nineteenth century—arose from "a balance of territorial states on the European continent in relation to the maritime British Empire and against the background of vast free spaces" (*Nomos*, 140).[49]

In Schmitt's discussion of the modern state-form in the new *nomos*, the specter of Hobbes looms large again. The problem of war, of course, is central to this discussion. Schmitt delineates the "bracketing" of war by the modern state form in three ways. First, the rise of the state meant the overcoming of civil war—the war of all against all—by war in state form. In contrast to the brutality of religious and factional wars earlier, which were usually wars of total annihilation, the "bracketing" of war among states "signified

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[48] Within this spatial ordering, wars between Christian princes were considered bracketed wars, which were distinguished from wars with non-Christian peoples. Peace was oriented specifically to the "peace of the (Holy Roman) empire, the territorial ruler, of the church, of the city, of the castle, the marketplace, of the local juridical assembly" (*Nomos*, 59). This specifically Christian empire—which had its center in Rome—was not considered eternal, but was envisaged as a historical power. The historical continuity of the Empire was a *katechon* (restrainer) that held back the end of the world. The unity of the *Respublica Christiana* was not predicated on a centralized accumulation of power in the hands of one person; rather, the antitheses of the Pope and Emperor were diverse orders upon which the ordering of the Empire rested.

[49] Though the first major maritime discoveries were made by the Spanish and the Portuguese, the British soon emerged as the major maritime power by the mid-seventeenth century.

the strongest possible rationalization and humanization of war" (*Nomos*, 142).[50] The warring parties had the same political characters and the same rights, and recognized each other as states. Thereby, Schmitt says, it was easy to distinguish the enemy from the criminal. States perceived war against each other not perceiving the other states as criminals, but as *justi hostes*. Second, a decisive step towards the establishment of the new *nomos* was made when states began being envisaged as separate persons. This shift was instituted when the state became the new legal subject of a new international law. Hobbes' *magnum homo* was now figured as a legal subject and sovereign "person." The delineation of particularistic national "characters" only served to accentuate this conceptualization of the state as a sovereign person.[51] A consequence of this personalization was that relations among sovereign states were able to be conducted with *comitas* (courtesy) and *jus* (probity). Peace treaties with vanquished parties also became possible.[52] Third, Schmitt suggests, the core of this Eurocentric spatial order lay in the division of the soil into state territories with fixed borders. Initially, of course, the soil that was recognizably divided was only European soil. This was distinguished from the "free" soil of non-European princes and that of peoples who were open for European land-appropriations. The bracketing of war, the refiguration of states as persons and the

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[50] Though Schmitt does not mention this, both Kant and Foucault point out that the state's monopoly of war also meant the eradication of "private" warfare from the social body. The bracketing of war at the extreme points of the state through the elimination of private vengeance was part of the process of the rationalization of the state and the humanization of war.

[51] In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Louis Dumont pointed out the symmetry between the idea of the nation and the idea of the individual in the following words—"The nation is the political group conceived as a collection of individuals and, at the same time, in relation to other nations, the political individual" (317).

[52] In this context, Carl von Clausewitz's statements are revealing—" If the state is thought of as a person, and policy as a product of its brain, then among the contingencies for which the state must be prepared is a war in which every element calls for policy to be eclipsed by violence" (88).

territorialization of the state-form—the central rationale of the modern state is found in these three elements. Thus, instead of the state-form emerging as a necessary byproduct that facilitated the consolidation of a capitalist world-system—a system that facilitated production and distribution later—our focus should first be on the political acts of appropriation which led to the consolidation of this new *nomos* from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The three elements of the statist *mentalité* that I pointed above first emerge from this originary act of appropriation and then are succeeded by production and distribution.

Correspondingly, the shift from the theological to the anthropological in the "objective" domain of the state is also mirrored at the level of the "human" subject. The "human" is no longer conceptualized as a temporally bound bodily entity whose passage through life in this earth is only a preparation for a life beyond. The transcendental realm is no longer the beyond, but the tangible, material and immanent realm of human creation. The supreme and ultimate exemplar of human creation is the mechanism of the state—therefore from now on the state begins to represent the best of all possible worlds. Hegel's conceptualization of the human is the most powerful exemplar of this narrative. Hegel's thinking about the "human" eschews any notion of transcendentalism and inscribes it in the immanent anthropological universe of the here-and-now. In this immanent universe, an "animal" is a being who is merely satisfied with its instinctual life. But the animal becomes "human" through a double movement of negativity. The first step is the negation of nature and the second the negation of the negated element through labor. This transformative procedure is a "world-making" process.[53] But in this

[53]See Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially the section on the master-slave dialectic.

transformation, the becoming-human is exposed to his/her negativity. Death, thus, is a risk that is consciously assumed by this subject, and it is the acceptance of this risk that differentiates human from animal life. This confrontation with death casts the human subject-in-becoming into the process of history. What happens in "inferior," slavish modes of consciousness—and for Hegel even Christianity is such a slavish mode of consciousness—is that this risk is arrested by the hope that *this* life is only a preparation for a life beyond. The authentic risk of death in this world is never assumed. A subject becomes truly "human" only when it assumes the risk of death and lives with it. As Achille Mbembe says, in Hegel, politics is "death that lives a human life" ("Necropolitics," 14).

Now potentially, this idea of becoming "human" is a revolutionary one as the drive towards self-preservation is constantly negated by undertaking the risk of death, leading to new forms of "world-making." The problem, though, in Hegel is that the potential plurality of the risk of assuming death is foreclosed by a dialectical teleology where the immanent and revolutionary potential of the becoming-human is subsumed under a new and necessary figure of the transcendental: the state. Hegel's dialectical teleology ushered in a new conception of temporality. In this new conception of temporality, as Jurgen Habermas says:

> …the "modern" now stands opposed to the "old" world insofar as it is radically open to the future. The transient moment of the present thus gains significance as the point of departure for each new generation's embrace of the whole of history. Even the term "history" in the singular is, in contrast to the many histories of different actors, a coinage of the late eighteenth century. History is now experienced as an all-encompassing, problem-generating process, and time as a scarce resource for mastering the problems that the future hurls at the present. This headlong rush of challenges is perceived as the "pressure of time" (131).

The function of philosophy changes because of this "pressure of time." It is now obliged to reflect on its own temporality. However, for philosophy to maintain its traditional vocation, it has to as Habermas says "grasp and penetrate this disquieting present, and articulate it in concepts" (132). One can only supersede the horizons of the present moment, in which philosophy itself is a participant, by articulating the "modern" as a universal concept which has a context-transcendent validity. Hegel, Habermas says, is the first philosopher "to articulate this new requirement of 'grasping one's own time in thought'" (132). But, "grasping one's time in thought" through the concept of the modern as a context-transcendent figure, meant that the crisis evoked by the breakdown of the old transcendental—the divine—could only be brought under control through a new transcendental: the state. The state, as Hegel says, "in and for itself is the ethical whole…It is essential for God's march through the world that the state exist" (*Elements*, 279). Modernity and the state, thus, complement each other—the first represents the "end of history" and the second represents the acme of becoming-human. There is no possibility of going beyond these two concepts in Hegel's metaphysics. This represents the fundamental aporia in Hegelian thought—an aspect pointed out astutely by Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> …(With) the concept of determinate negation Hegel gave prominence to an element which distinguishes enlightenment from the positivist decay to which he had consigned it. However, by finally postulating the known result of the entire process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition and himself succumbed to mythology (18).

Hegel's violent (fore)closure of the "crisis" posed by modernity illustrate, as Hardt and Negri say, that there is a "profound and intimate relationship between modern European politics and metaphysics" (83). The modern metaphysical idea of the "human" arose as a

response to the tremendous revolutionary potential unleashed by modernity. But the figure of the transcendent state became a new form of mediation, which eliminated the medieval form of transcendence, but reinstituted a transcendental form of domination—the state—in a form that corresponded to the new idea of being "human." This is the logic behind the famous Weberian definition that the state possesses the absolute monopoly over violence. The rationalized state apparatus now becomes the ultimate sovereign.

The concrete manifestation of this new figure of the "human" who contains both the revolutionary potential of "death that lives a human life," but is also mediated and dominated by the state is the citizen subject. But who or what is the citizen subject? The classic narrative of modernity concerns the gradual "progressive" journey of subjects (*subjectus*) to their evolution as citizens of modern states: a subject who is the full bearer of rights and duties. "Subject" (*subjectus*) here implies subjection to some higher sovereign power, while "citizen" represents the abstract universal figure of the "human" subject (*subjectum*) who is the bearer of rights and who, through the modality of contract, enters into a limited exchange with the state-apparatus that guarantees them protection and the legitimate exercise of their legal rights. In an essay titled "Who Comes after the Subject?", Etienne Balibar argues, contrarily, that the dominant teleological narrative that postulates that modernity displaces the figure of the subject (understood here in terms of subjection to some power—*subjectus*) into the figure of the citizen is an erroneous one. He argues instead that the notion of "sovereign equality" that predicates the new concept of the citizen marks a rupture that introduces a dissymmetry in the idea of sovereignty, thereby calling forth a radically new theoretical framework. It is not a mere coincidence

that this new theorization of sovereignty emerges almost simultaneously with the Kantian formulation of the transcendental subject. Philosophers who follow in the wake of this "specific necessity" of Kantian philosophy, like Heidegger, erroneously attribute the birth of this new concept of the "subject" (conflated with that of the "ego") to Descartes. But the reality, Balibar argues, is that one barely finds mention of the notion of the "ego as consciousness" or *subjectum* in Cartesian philosophy. What one finds in Descartes though is another meaning of subject. This is the subject conceived as *subjectus* (or its correlate *subditus*)—"…the individual submitted to the *ditio*, to the sovereign authority of a prince, an authority expressed in his orders and itself legitimated by the Word of another Sovereign (the Lord God)" ("Who Comes," 36). This understanding of subject as *subjectus* persisted, albeit not uniformly and bereft of contradictions, during the medieval epoch and the period of absolutism. The rupture with this understanding of the subject comes about through the "truth effect" marked by the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* in 1789. The new problematic is theorized now is how the "concept of sovereignty and equality can be noncontradictory" ("Who Comes," 36).

The Declaration sought to resolve this problematic by invoking what Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* calls the "empirico-transcendental" doublet of "man" and associating it with the abstract figure of the "citizen" (364). To be sure, neither this invocation of "man" nor its association with freedom is new. What is new, rather, is the idea of the sovereignty of the citizen, which is retroactively founded on a new concept of "man." Balibar argues that it is erroneous also to believe that this new concept of man fills in the space emptied by the God-like figure of the prince in the "juridico-sovereign"

model. It is not that "man" gives this new model of sovereignty a human foundation just like God gave the earlier model of sovereignty a divine foundation. Rather, he says—

> …it is because of the dissymmetry that is introduced into the idea of sovereignty from the moment that it has devolved to the "citizens": until then the idea of sovereignty had always been associated with a hierarchy, from an eminence; from this point forward the paradox of a sovereign equality, something radically new, must be thought. What must be explained (at the same time as it is declared) is how the concept of sovereignty and equality can be noncontradictory. The reference to man, or the inscription of equality in human nature is equality "of birth"…is the means of explaining this paradox" ("Who Comes," 45).

However, as soon as this new figure of "man" is associated with "equality of birth," a few paradoxes emerge. Let me quote the first three articles of *The Declaration* in full to illustrate this problem:

1) Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.
2) The purpose of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible *rights of man*. These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.
3) The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially in the *nation*. No body and no individual may exercise authority which does not emerge expressly from the *nation* (quoted in Hunt, 221, italics mine).

The key paradox here is while men are born free and are guaranteed "natural" rights, such rights can only be guaranteed if only is a member of the "cultural" ensemble of the nation. Hannah Arendt correctly points out that the proclamations of the Rights of Man were predicated on a replacement of the historical rights of man with those of "natural" rights. Nature, she says, takes "the place of history, and it was tacitly assumed that nature was less alien than history to the essence of man" (*Origins*, 298). The very wording of *The Declaration* with words like "natural" and "imprescriptible" implied a belief in an organic notion of human "nature" which "would be subject to the same laws of growth as that of the individual and from which rights and laws could be deduced."

But the paradox that emerged with this figure of the "abstract human" (who existed nowhere) and is at the base of the citizen subject, is that to realize these rights he necessarily had to be part of a particular collective entity designated either under the label of the "people" or the "nation." Hannah Arendt expresses this pithily—"…man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into the member of a people" (*Origins*, 291).[54] Thus, the particularistic principle of the nation/people emerged as an irreducible historical necessity that has to contend with the paradox that the "abstract nakedness of being human" has no element of sacredness associated with it. *Human* rights could only be protected and guaranteed as national rights. The practical outcome of this contradiction, Arendt says, is that once human rights becomes national rights, the state loses its technologically neutral aspect, and comes to be interpreted as a representative of a national "soul" or 'will" whose existence is beyond the reach of law. The citizen subject becomes identified with the member of the nation-state. This absolute identification of the citizen subject with the member of the nation-state creates a wide array of liminal, "in between," non-human and sub-human categories that I explore in greater detail in my reading of the literary texts later in the dissertation.

1.2: Approaching Sovereignty Otherwise

The narrative sketched above represents a hegemonic line of thinking about the state, sovereignty and the human in Western political philosophy and

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[54] The conservative philosopher Edmund Burke's famous assertion that he preferred the "rights of an Englishman" to the inalienable rights of man in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is quite prescient in this respect.

metaphysics. Following Wlad Godzich, I call this tradition "Parmenidan" in the sense that it aims for the "identity of thought and being" (vii). For Parmenidans like Hobbes and Hegel, the threat posed by the anarchic plurality of heterogeneity has to be subsumed eventually by a rationalized, transcendent entity or organization where the identity of thought and being finds its fullest realization. For Hobbes, the plurality of the state of nature, with the potential of a war of all against all is subsumed and controlled by the establishment of the contractual state. For Hegel, the inexorable working of a dialectical teleology eventually leads to Spirit's conquest of the world. The "ethical whole" of the state is the acme of this human conquest of the world. As Achille Mbembe says, in Hegelian-inflected analyses of the state, reason is "the truth of the subject, and politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere" ("Necropolitics," 13). Sovereignty is defined as the dual process of "self-institution" and "self-limitation."

However Godzich points out that there is a "countervailing tradition" to the Parmenidan one in Western philosophy, represented by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida and Foucault, that has explored the ontological and epistemological issues raised by any critique of this philosophical position. My thinking on sovereignty and the "human" has been influenced by this counter-tradition and their interrogation of the link between politics and metaphysics, although I have certain differences and disagreements with certain positions. In the two subsections that follow, I explore the critical insights provided by two thinkers belonging to this counter-tradition—Bataille and Foucault—and the very

different insights they provide on politics, sovereignty and the human subject than "Parmenidans" like Hobbes and Hegel.

1.2.1: The Anti-philosophy of Georges Bataille

The Parmenidan line of thought conceptualizes sovereignty as a commodity. It is almost as if sovereignty were a commodity that should ideally be possessed absolutely as a matter of right, without any possibility of barter, by the sovereign (the king earlier, the state now). But the idea that sovereignty is a "commodity" rests on a misrecognition of the fact that for it to retain its aura and power, it has to be performed repetitively in the sphere of everyday life. Sovereignty is at its base a performative category and not a stable "commodity." This aspect of sovereignty was recognized by one of the most perceptive early modern theorists of sovereignty: Jean Bodin. Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat say that Jean Bodin's famous definition of the "marks of sovereignty" in *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* emphasizes the fact that sovereignty is "…a performative category, an ontologically empty category organized around a mythical act of foundational violence" (Sovereign, 7). Hansen and Stepputat continue that the space for politics emerges from the clash between this sovereign act of foundational violence and the resistance that such violence encounters from the simple life of bodies —

> …still to be defined in the tension between the will to arbitrary violence and the existence of bodies that can be killed but can also resist sovereign power, if nothing else by the mere fact of the simple life force that they contain. If sovereign violence originates in excessive and exceptional violence that wants nothing or sees nothing beyond its own benefit or pleasure, its object, but also its ultimate resistance, is found in the simple life of bodies that desires nothing beyond itself and the simple moments of pleasure of everyday life (*Sovereign*, 13).

In modern times, this political space has been probed most insightfully by Georges Bataille. Bataille probably is the most prominent European thinker in modernity to foreground the pure simple life of the body. Like Nietzsche, Bataille is an anti-philosopher who interrogates the centrality of the mind-body dichotomy in Western metaphysics. In the Western philosophical tradition, the body has traditionally been viewed as an ephemeral vehicle and hence, something that is to be *transcended*. The mind, on the other hand, is the seat of permanence as its products outlive the limited temporal span of the body. As a temporally bound vehicle, the body is subject to decay and death. Second, the body is also subject to desires and impulses such as hunger, excretion and sexual desire. As such, it is bound to the earth. It lies in the realm of necessity, whereas the realm of freedom begins when one is freed from the exigencies of the body.[55] Bataille, following Nietzsche, critiques this drive towards the mastery of nature through the mind at the expense of erasing the body altogether from the picture. This reversal is announced very boldly in one of his early essays—"Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe…He can set aside the thought that it is he or God who keeps the rest of things from being absurd" (*Visions of Excess*, 178-81).

Bataille extended this reversal of the mind-body dichotomy to his explorations of sovereignty later. He foregrounds the body in his explanation of sovereignty in the third

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[55] Think here about the *oikos-polis* distinction in Greek metaphysics. The public realm of the polis could only admit beings who were free of the exigencies of necessity. The criterion was very narrow—propertied males only. Women, for instance, were excluded from the polis because they were bound by their bodies (menstruation, childbirth). Propertied males were also freed from the realm of necessity because these needs could be fulfilled by slaves—another "subhuman" category relegated to the realm of the "private": the *oikos* (household). For more on the *oikos-polis* distinction and its relationship to the realms of necessity and freedom, see Book I of Aristotle's *Politics* and Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

volume of *The Accursed Share*, and considers the articulation of sovereignty through acts and attitudes in everyday life that are beyond the realm of utility and calculation. To understand sovereignty is not to perform an operation of knowledge—the act of attempting to control nature through the extension of a mental operation or a rational faculty. Knowledge, for Bataille, can never be sovereign because in its need for duration and anticipatory desires, it proves itself to be servile. The experience of sovereignty, on the other hand, is an "unknowing," a "negative theology" that in dissolving the anticipated desire into "NOTHING" reveals moments of freedom that cannot be illuminated by the desire to control time that is endemic to rationalism. The world conceived according to the operation of reason is "subordinated to the anticipated result, a world of sequential duration; it is not a world of the moment" (*Accursed*, 227). It never gets outside the realm of utility, and hence is grounded in "the alleged need to avoid death" (*Accursed*, 222). This operation reduces the human to thinghood, which is essentially a servile state.

Sovereign enjoyment, as opposed to utilitarian enjoyment of goods, is characterized by excess and is irreducible to the realm of bare necessity. While the sovereign command operates not through calculation, but in its capacity to guarantee obedience through its disregard of death, sovereignty also resides within every human being who in his/her capacity to enjoy simple, fleeting moments of nonanticipatory, mundane existence experiences the "miraculous sensation of having the world at his disposal" (*Accursed*, 214). "Laughter, tears, poetry, tragedy and comedy…play, anger, intoxication, ecstasy, dance, music, combat, the funereal horror, the magic of childhood, the sacred—of which sacrifice is the most intense aspect—the divine and the diabolical,

eroticism…beauty…crime, cruelty, fear, disgust" represent together, though not exhaustively, aspects of those moments where the "miraculous sensation of having the world at…(man's)…disposal" manifests itself (*Accursed*, 230). The theory of "deep subjectivity" that Bataille enunciates in this work, manifested through moments like those enumerated above, can never be the subject of discursive knowledge, but is communicated from "subject to subject" through emotional and sensible contact (*Accursed*, 242). Thus, for Bataille, sovereignty's existence and "proof" cannot be demonstrated positively as an objective entity that is out there in the world, but can only be intuited through a "negative theology" that illuminates those fleeting moments through which it is experienced in and through bodily and sensory faculties. It is something that can only be known of through its effects, and is characterized—whether from the point of view of the sovereign or the subject—to a "denial of the sentiments that death controls" (*Accursed*, 221).

In all three volumes of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille also emphasizes the point that the recurrence of various forms of "irrational" excess in modern societies constantly overturns the ideals of equality, reciprocity and accumulation that is at the base of bourgeois and communist polities. Accumulation, after all, predicates the control of time that is precisely the antithesis of sovereign excess. Besides, the consolidation of the Protestant ethic as a genealogical predecessor of the capitalist *mentalité* also introduces a moral dimension to the condemnation of various forms of excess that characterizes sovereignty. In the first volume of *The Accursed Share*, Bataille makes the explicit point—using Marcel Mauss' theory of gift-giving—that in an archaic gift-economy, the act of gift-exchange is inherently non-reciprocal. Gift-giving has the "virtue of a

surpassing of the subject who gives, but in exchange for the object given, the subject appropriates the surpassing: He regards his virtue, that which he had the capacity for, as an asset, as a power that he now possesses" (69). This notion of unequal exchange, predicated on an excess through which the gift-giver manages to retain more than s/he gives, is always misunderstood by bourgeois and communist accumulative theories of power that are predicated on ideas of reciprocity characteristic of "restrictive" economies.

Achille Mbembe argues that these insights of Bataille provide a radically new dimension of understanding how death structures the idea of "sovereignty, the political, and the subject," which is very different from Hegel's sovereign economy of life and death ("Necropolitics," 15). First, unlike in Hegel, death in Bataille is not the pure annihilation of being. Death is not the limit to life; but, by existing in exchange with life, it represents the most luxurious form of excess. For Bataille, death represents self-consciousness as it possesses a tremendous power of proliferation. Second, while Hegel tries to keep death within the economy of absolute knowledge; Bataille places death in the realm of absolute expenditure. Death for Bataille, Mbembe says, represents an "anti-economy" because it represents the point where "destruction, suppression and sacrifice constitute so irreversible and radical an expenditure…that they cannot be determined as negativity" ("Necropolitics," 15). Finally, Bataille posits a direct relation between death, sexuality and sovereignty. There is a direct link between sexuality and violence as it involves the dissolution of bodily boundaries either through orgiastic or excremental impulses. After all, orgiastic impulses and excretion—correlative with appropriation and expulsion—remain the most privatized of human experiences. The "civilizing process" is

nothing but the gradual privatization of these impulses through a regime of taboos.[56] Just like the rationalized apparatus of the state brackets violence, a "progress" in "civilization" gradually brackets the body through the establishment of a regime of taboos. The linkage between sexuality and death reveals the point where the boundaries dissolve between reality and fantasy. The transgression of these limits also reveals the boundaries that help maintain the aura of sovereign power. For my project, this reconfiguration of the relationship between death, sovereignty and the constitution of subjectivity is very crucial as I explore the operations of sovereignty and the constitution of subjectivity in spaces that are often constructed as lying outside the reach of the law of the state. Consider, for instance, a torture chamber. In this space, the torturer represents an absolute sovereign as s/he can destroy the bodily integrity of the tortured through an excess of violence. The torturer literally has the miraculous sensation of having the world at his/her disposal as s/he transgresses the taboos of a restrictive economy. Conversely, victims of torture often endure these inhuman spaces and acts through certain unanticipated, fleeting moments of bodily experience that somehow brackets the reduction of their bodies into mere and malleable matter. This is no doubt an extreme example. But a torture chamber represents a space where bodies collide with each other violently and create forms of human experience that cannot easily be reduced to a subject of discursive knowledge. The significance of Bataille's work lies in the fact that it enables us to contend with such in-human and "irrational" logics which still play a role in the constitution and performance of sovereignty in the modern world.

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[56] Also see Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process*.

1.2.2: The Nonsovereign Model of Michel Foucault

Michel Foucault's work on power plays a significant role in my project. This subsection explores the major ideas of Foucault that are germane to my project, while also registering the differences between my positions and those enunciated by Foucault. Bataille anticipates Foucault's "non-economic" model of power where an institution like the state is viewed not as a transcendent model that stands above society, but as an systemic ensemble that is constantly re/produced through the multiple interactions of numerous aleatory events and actions that accumulate and synthesize from below. However, the major departure that Foucault makes from Bataille is that he shifts the optic from the ultimately unified field of sovereignty to the heterogenous, capillary field of power. Foucault's work, more than anyone else's, provides some provocative leads about a nonsovereign theory of power.

The inversion of the relationship between war/peace and politics is central for any understanding of Foucault's self-professed "guerrilla" theory of nonsovereignty. Like Mao Tse Tung, Foucault views "peace" as a hidden façade of war.[57] Foucault famously inverts Clausewitz's famous proposition to argue that politics is the continuation of war by other means. He critiques the classical juridico-sovereign theory of power because it is framed on an "economistic" model where political power finds its formal model in the process of exchange. Here power is viewed as a commodity that is transferred from subject to subject—hence the prevalence of the idea of contract. The essential role of this model is to establish the legitimacy of power thereby ensuring the subject's obedience.

[57] The relationship between Mao Tse-Tung's theories of guerrilla warfare and poststructuralist theories of power remain an underexplored area in theoretical explorations.

The "noneconomic" model of power that Foucault proposes bypasses the problem of sovereignty and tries to analyze relations of domination and subjugation as opposed to sovereignty and obedience. Foucault's object was to analyze power by looking at its extremities—"at its outer limits at the point where it becomes capillary…where this power transgresses the rules of right that organize and delineate it, oversteps these rules and is invested in institutions, is embodied in techniques and acquires the material means to intervene…" (*Society*, 27-8).[58] He critiques the juridico-political discourse of sovereignty for positing and presupposing a unitary source of power. There are three "primitive" elements that, according to Foucault, characterizes the juridico-political modality of sovereign power—"…a subject who has to be subjectified, the unity of power that has to be founded, and the legitimacy that has to be respected" (*Society*, 44). In contrast, the nonsovereign model of power moves away from the triptych of "subject, unity and law" to extracting operators of domination from historical and empirical instances of power relationships. Instead of considering who or what group possesses power, Foucault analyzes the "material agency of subjugation insofar as it constitutes subjects" (*Society*, 28). In the juridico-sovereign model—as in Hobbes—the primary goal was to delineate how a multiplicity of individuals could be shaped into a larger general will. Foucault, however, intends to study the "micromechanics" through which peripheral bodies are constituted as subjects by power-effects. For Foucault, then, subjectivity is not formed via the application of some external power on to inert matter, but is rather an effect of power through which bodies, gestures, discourses and desires come to be

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[58] For a detailed exposition of Foucault's theory of power see the chapter titled "Power" in *The History of Sexuality*.

identified as and constitute something like an individual. In other words, subjectivity is "manufactured" in and through power relations. Power relays through such individuals that it produces. His "ascending analysis of power" looks at how the autonomous and infinitesimal phenomena and techniques of power that operate at a lower level are eventually displaced and modified and finally annexed by a global assemblage like the state.

For Foucault, the war-function plays a fundamental role in his analysis of sovereignty. He argues, somewhat aligned with Schmitt's point about the bracketing of war among states, that the modern state's monopoly over war and violence arises from the time "private" warfare is gradually eliminated from the social body. War is confined to the outer limits of the state—a process which was only accentuated by the consolidation of the army as an organized institution. But the paradoxical point that Foucault points out is that just at the moment when war was being confined to the outer limits of the state (around the eighteenth century), a new "historico-political" discourse was coming into being that gradually supplanted the dominant models of the "juridico-philosophic" discourse that was the norm up to that point.[59] If the juridico-philosophic discourse tended to view law as pacification leading to an eventual bracketing of the war-relationship, the emergent historico-political discourse viewed war as the motor behind all institutions and order. While the juridico-philosophic discourse presupposed a subject who occupied the median position of neutrality, the historico-political discourse negated this idea of the neutral subject as all subjects were now viewed as someone else's

[59] Examples of writers who initiated such a discourse were people like Edward Coke and John Lilburne in England and Boulainvilliers and Freret in France. This discourse was taken over by thinkers like the Abbe Sieyès during the French Revolution.

adversary. The subject who spoke in the latter discourse no longer occupied the universalizing position of the jurist or the philosopher. Instead s/he advocated a partisan version of truth. Foucault's rhetoric here borrows from tropes of guerilla warfare to describe this new historic-political modality. The truth is deployed from the "combat position," "the truth shifts the balance, accentuates the dissymmetries, and finally gives the victory to one side rather than the other," truth "can be deployed only on the basis of a relationship of force" (*Society*, 52-3). Truth, thus, becomes a weapon in the establishment of a *particular* right that then gets conflated with a general will (We can think about the discourses of nationalism in this context). The principle of fury explains the logic of calm and order. Historical discourse is conceptualized as a force-field where "physico-biological" facts such as physical force, strength and energy and contingent events that presuppose intertwining bodies, passions and accidents jostle for centerstage. This discourse from "below"—a level that is confused, disorderly, and most subject to chance—is gradually reordered at the "top" by a growing rationality. The gradual ascendance of this historico-political discourse marks the threshold, according to Foucault, of two uniquely modern regimes of power: anatomo-politics and biopolitics.

The birth of biopolitics in the modern era leads to certain fundamental reconceptualizations of certain postulates that underpin any traditional understanding of power and the complex of sovereignty. The central privilege associated with sovereignty in the west for a very long time was the power to decide over life and death. This power derived from the ancient Roman idea of *patria potestas* that endowed the father of the Roman family with the right to take away the lives of his children and slaves. However, in the classical period, this power was significantly reframed by theorists like Pufendorf.

This power could not be exercised absolutely and unconditionally, but only in situations where the sovereign's existence was under jeopardy. The exercise of this power was now conceptualized as indirect, and had as its presupposition the axiom—"take life or let live" (*The History*, 136). However, since the classical age, these mechanisms of power have undergone yet another major shift. In the sphere of life, a new power "bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them" has taken centerstage (*The History*, 136). In a parallel fashion, in the sphere of death, the absolute right of the sovereign to decide on death was replaced by the right of the social body to "ensure, maintain, or develop its own life" (*The History*, 136). This new power fostered life or disallowed it to the point of death. Unlike the earlier epochs, power exercises its dominion over the unfolding of life; death now is posited as power's limit—it is the moment that escapes power.[60]

For Foucault, starting from the seventeenth century onwards, this new modality of power over life evolved in two basic forms. The first, which he extensively analyzes in *Discipline and Punish*, centered on the body as a machine and was concerned with the disciplining and optimization of its capabilities. This "anatomo-politics" ensured the integration of the human body into a developing system of efficient economic controls. The second technique, on the other hand, focused on man's "species-body." Here the body was conceptualized not as a machine, but as a body "imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of biological processes" (*The History*, 139). The supervision of these bodies was conducted through a series of regulatory and interventionist controls, leading to a "biopolitics" of the population. If anatomo-politics *individualized*, biopolitics

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[60] In contrast, earlier death was seen as a passage from a terrestrial sovereignty to the realm of a more powerful sovereignty that lay beyond—hence, the public nature of its commemoration. For a famous explication of this idea see Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies*.

specified at the level of generality. If anatomo-politics was targeted at the organic and the anatomical, biopolitics was targeted at the biological life of a collective. Biopolitics was a modality of politics that enabled the governance of men envisaged as a biological collective. The "population" emerged as a non-differentiated collective biological field that enabled the "administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (*The History*, 140). Techniques such as statistical analyses of birth and death rates enabled the reduction of what was aleatory and unpredictable on the individual level, to the collective enumeration of constant, serial and recurring phenomena. Similarly, in the realm of spatial relations, if disciplinary techniques structured a space by addressing the central problem of hierarchizing and functionally distributing elements, the mechanisms of security planned a milieu in terms of a possible series of elements that could be regulated within a "multivalent and transformable framework" (*Society*, 20). Once these phenomena such as birth, death and territory are generalized, interventions could be envisaged aimed at the optimization of a "state of life" *(Society*, 246). The optimization of "life" also implied that while power had no hold over death, it could control mortality.

The gradual consolidation of disciplinary and security mechanisms in modernity also led to the process of a "governmentalization of ethics." The South Asian political analyst, Ranabir Samaddar makes some striking observations on this score, which will help us approach this Foucauldian thematic:

> If the mastery of certain techniques identifies for the world the objects to be ruled, the mastery of the techniques of caring and protecting produces a fantastic range of institutional practices for the political self to deploy to make the world a suitable place for survival. Politics as a form of power needs kindness, the quality and the capacity to care for others, protect others and tolerate others to a greater or smaller degree—and these are essentially self-techniques now mastered by the political self in the interest of ensuring a type of regime within which this self can survive. By caring and protecting, politics…declares that it is not only a grammar

> of how to make others the objects, which can then be ruled; it is also a quasi-ethical and quasi-practical code of how to build a political self, which will be able to play in this world a game of coexistence with other actors and other selves (*The Materiality I*, 135).

In this passage, Sammadar manages to summarize, without invoking Foucault explicitly, the dual thrust of the latter's analytical model of power. The crux of Foucault's model of power, after all, is the simultaneous juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory modalities. Foucault defines this through the formula *omnes et singulatim* (all and each).[61] In other words, if biopolitics totalizes and centralizes, anatomo-politics individualizes and normalizes. More importantly, what the passage above demonstrates is that power does not simply stand for the right to decide on life and death. While it is true that this is the fundamental characteristic of the juridico-sovereign modality, for the emergent regimes of anatomo-power and biopower in modernity, "kindness," "protection" and "care" are equally central aspects for "administering" life.[62]

But certain paradoxes emerge concomitantly with the growth and consolidation of the "caring" regime of biopower. As soon as power assumed as its central function the function of "administering" life—and Foucault warns us not to confuse this with the

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[61]See Foucault's Tanner lecture titled "Omnes et Singulatim."

[62] To be sure, these functions of power are not restricted to modernity alone. A substantial chunk of Foucault's *Security, Territory, Population* is devoted to outlining the genealogy of pastoral power, which is central for any understanding of the "benevolent" aspects of anatomo/biopower. The development of this theme of the sovereign as the shepherd who guides the flock towards particular objectives, according to Foucault, can be seen first in Hebrew society. This modality has some distinctive characteristics—"…the shepherd's power is not exercised over a fixed territory as much as over a multitude moving towards an objective; its role is to provide the flock with its subsistence, to watch over it every day, and to ensure its salvation; finally, through an essential paradox, it is a power that individualizes by according as much value to a single sheep as to the whole flock" (*Security*, 364). Introduced into the West first by the Christian church and its institutionalization of the ecclesiastical pastorate, pastoral power mutated into more complex forms later through questions and contingencies concerning the governing of children, the family, the domain and the principality. The care of the biopolitical category of the "population" was the most recent of "self-techniques" for ensuring a "type of regime" under which the self could survive and thrive.

growth of humanitarian feelings—how could it invoke the old sovereign right to kill? This paradox is borne out through a consideration of historical circumstances too—the previous two centuries, while perfecting the techniques of "administering" life, have also been witness to the most infamous mass massacres in human history. If biopower's aim is essentially to make live, Foucault asks, how can it let die? For Foucault, racism emerges as the biopolitical technique *par excellence* that fragments the otherwise smooth surface of biopower. Racism, for Foucault, is "primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die" (*Society*, 254). Racism filters and arranges the groups that exist within a population as a hierarchy. This allows power to subdivide the species into subspecies called races. Racism also makes the relationship of war operate in a totally new way. It makes possible the establishment of a relationship where the safety of my life can only be guaranteed by the elimination of the other (inferior, bad) species. The improvement of the species or race was thus predicated upon the elimination of the threat that the inferior race posed. Thus if the power of normalization wanted to invoke the old sovereign right to kill, it had to become racist. Like Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Foucault also argues, albeit fleetingly, that this biopolitical technique developed first with colonial genocide and was then transported and perfected in Europe in the concentration camps in Nazi Germany and the Stalin-era Soviet Union.[63]

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[63] The most visible field into which biopolitical techniques were employed for the management of life was in the domain of sexuality. Measures aimed at sexuality were both disciplinary and regulatory. The shift from the old "juridico-political" model could also be seen in the fact that sex and sexuality were no longer conceptualized within the episteme of a "symbolic of blood," but rather of an "analytics of sexuality" (*The History*, 140) However, the discourse of racism also led to a juxtaposition of this symbolic of blood within the analytics of sexuality. The Nazi project of maintaining a pure race is the most notorious example of such juxtaposition.

According to Foucault, the gradual rise to prominence and consolidation of biopower and biopolitical techniques in the modern era led to something radically new. For the first time, biological existence was reflected in political existence—"the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention" (*The History*, 142). A society's "threshold of modernity" is reached, Foucault says, when the "life of the species is wagered on its political strategies" (*The History*, 143). This drastically changes Aristotle's old dicta—modern man is no longer an animal with an additional capacity for a political existence, but rather one whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.

Foucault's insights on biopolitics, race, governmentality and disciplinary power are central for my project. His models of power and governmentality are particularly productive ways of thinking about subjectivity and subject formation. Foucault's work shows that any sharp contrast between institutional power (say the state) and the powers lying outside that domain are an illusory construct. Examples of such distinctions are the classic ones between state and civil society and the public and the private. Instead, his focus on "processes of subjectivization," in the words of Agamben, illustrate the processes that bring the "individual to objectify his own self, constituting himself as a subject, and, at the same time, binding himself to a power of external control" (*Homo Sacer*, 119). Indeed, his "noneconomistic" model of power shows how subjectivity is constructed through the complex interaction of multiple capillary networks. The "individual" is an effect of the contingent combination of these capillary nodes. However, while his shift of focus from the "economistic" model of power possesses a lot of

potential for the study of subjectivity, it does not necessarily follow that we abjure the model of "juridico-sovereignty" altogether. I argue that Foucault conflates two elements in his work which actually signifies two different things: the constitution of the subject in and through power and the internal logic of sovereign power. He is correct in suggesting that the question of subjectivity has to be located within the domain of heterogeneous and interactive power relationships. But we have to be a little more circumspect about his implicit claim that sovereign power—which was earlier vested as a matter of right in the unified, indivisible body of the sovereign—has gradually disappeared in modernity due to the emergence and rise to prominence of the fluid and tactically pliable modality of biopower.

I have two major objections to the proposition above. First of all, I do not agree with his claim that a society reaches the threshold of modernity when biopolitics becomes the dominant modality of power. Foucault, I argue, falls into the fallacy, to echo an argument made by the historian Prasenjit Duara, of viewing modernity as a "unified episteme marked by an epistemological break with past forms of consciousness" (54). Indeed, the centrality of the epistemological break in Foucault's thought is testimonial to this overprivileging of modernity as inaugurating something radically new. This leads Foucault to underplay the importance of performative public phenomena, like spectacles and symbols, that sustain the myth of the "magic of the state" thereby assuring it legitimacy in the modern era.[64] Moreover, the historical basis of Foucault's claim that biopolitics is an exclusively modern modality of power has also been challenged, most notably by Giorgio Agamben. Agamben says in *The Open* that distinctions like the

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[64] For "magic of the state" see Michael Taussig.

classic one between the categories of the "human" and the "animal" demonstrates that from its very origins "Western politics is also biopolitics" (80).[65]

The larger problem in Foucault's work though, and this is my second objection, is that there seems to be an implicit teleology in his work—sovereign power is succeeded by disciplinary power, which in turn is superseded by biopower. To be sure, in works like *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault repeatedly reminds us that these three modalities should not be read in terms of a linear logic. But neither does Foucault provide a way of thinking outside the linear model. In fact, in the first four chapters of *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault's logic often resorts to a linear terminology. Many scholars have extended Foucault's logic to argue that in our globalized conjuncture state sovereignty has given way to a nonsovereign, diffuse model of power. I disagree with this proposition and argue that sovereign power has not been eclipsed in our age, but has mutated and taken new forms. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler makes the point that for Foucault, governmentality plays the same role in "vitalizing" the state as sovereignty did earlier. But, she says,

> …it is important to consider that the emergence of governmentality does not always coincide with the *de*vitalization of sovereignty. Rather, the emergence of governmentality may depend upon the devitalization of sovereignty in the traditional sense: sovereignty as providing a legitimating function for the state; sovereignty as a unified locus for state power. Sovereignty in this sense no longer operates to support or vitalize the state, but this does not foreclose the possibility that it might emerge as a reanimated anachronism within the political field unmoored from its traditional anchors (53).

In fact, a careful reading of Foucault will illustrate that he too was aware of this problematic of the reanimation of the anachronism of sovereignty. This awareness

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[65] A foundational text in this regard is Aristotle's *The History of Animals*.

introduces a tension in his work between the sovereign and nonsovereign modalities of power. Recall his proposition that race fractures the unified field of the biopolitical. If the logic of biopolitics concerns the care and welfare of populations, Foucault still had to contend with the proliferation of thanato-political techniques in modernity. Sovereignty, after all, is the power that conjoins both *bios* (life) and *thanatos* (death). By positing race and racism as the elements that fracture the biopolitical field, Foucault makes the implicit suggestion that the biopolitical division of "race" illustrates how sovereign power regains and retains its thanato-political vocation in the modern world. Far from disappearing, sovereign power reinvents itself in our conjuncture through racism.[66]

1.3: Rethinking Sovereignty

How do we conceptualize sovereignty without falling into the commonsensical position that the state as the "civilizing" apparatus possesses the absolute monopoly over violence or taking the Foucauldian route that suggests that sovereign power has been relegated to obscurity by nonsovereign modalities? In my opinion, the work of Giorgio Agamben represents a powerful reformulation of the question of sovereignty. Though focused almost exclusively on Euro-America, the value of Agamben's work for observers of the postcolonial state like myself lies both in his rigorous deconstruction of categories like liberal/illiberal, premodern/modern, state/stateless etc., and also his illustration of the fact that the biopolitical regime of modern states demonstrates a secret affinity between liberal-democratic, totalitarian and "illiberal" states that liberal-universal theories of the

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[66] Foucault's insights on this score have been developed extensively in a global context by David Theo Goldberg. In *The Racial State*, Goldberg says that at precisely the time "rapidly emergent and expanding social mobilities produced increasingly heterogenous societies globally, social order more locally was challenged to maintain homogeneity increasingly and assertively. The racial state…is key for an understanding of the 'resolution' to this modern dilemma"(11).

state often fail to recognize. But before elaborating on Agamben, it is important that we make a brief detour through Schmitt again. Agamben's work strongly engages with Schmitt's conceptualization of the "state of exception" and the friend-enemy distinction. Agamben is not a Schmittian, but takes up the pertinent challenged to liberalism that Schmitt posed in his controversial early work. Like Chantal Mouffe, Agamben "think(s) both *with* and *against* Schmitt" in order to point out some of the aporias of the normative modern liberal state (6).

Schmitt's controversial work *Political Theology*—written in the turbulent years before the Nazi takeover of Germany—views sovereignty as an originary force that enables the "power of real life (to) break through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition" in the secularized modern era (14). In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt views the sphere of the "political" as an agonistic field marked by the originary friend-enemy distinction.[67] He was deeply skeptical of both parliamentary democracy as well as rationalized norms of juridical thought that he believed were only mere husks of superficially secularized Christian ideas—especially of mercy and salvation. Law, he argued, did not passively reflect the norms of a society, but depended on the authority of the sovereign figure who decided what constituted the law. The sovereign decides whether a normal situation actually exists for a legal order to make sense. The central concept for Schmitt here is that of the "exception." This "borderline" concept signifies an empty space from where the law originates, but also where the vitality of the sovereign decision appears before view. The decision, Schmitt says,

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[67] For Schmitt every disciplinary formation is predicated on an originary opposition—beautiful/ugly for aesthetics, friend/enemy for politics and so on. See Jacques Derrida's *The Politics of Friendship* for a meticulously detailed critique of Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction.

"emanates from a nothingness" (*Political Theology*, 33). To theorize sovereignty from the specific and existing form of the law—as liberal theorists like Hans Kelsen did—is to mistake its source and power. Sovereignty lies behind and makes possible the authority of the law. The exception, which should not be confused with an emergency or anarchy, is the hidden presupposition of the law—it is an empty space that is the source of the indivisibility of sovereign power. The essence of sovereignty does not entail the "monopoly to coerce or rule, but…the monopoly to decide" (*Political Theology*, 13). The "norm" and the "decision," thus, are two separate concepts in jurisprudence. The autonomy of the decision—the trace of the exception—arises only when the "norm is destroyed" (*Political Theology*, 12).

The importance of Schmitt's work on political theology and the political lies in its demonstration that any attempt to theorize sovereignty from the norm cannot account for the fact that the moment of the sovereign decision, even in secularized modern societies, always appear under the sign of the exceptional. Schmitt's work on the exception thus argues that ultimately sovereign power has to be approximated and defined (if at all) on the model of the archaic residues in phenomena like magic, religion, war and the power of leaders. This explains why even in modern liberal democracies, factors like a leader's "charisma" (first analyzed by Max Weber in *Economy and Society*) and "magical" aura, invocations of metaphors and rhetoric of war and so on, still play an important and indeed even increasingly visible role, in the modern world. To be sure, we cannot detract Schmitt's inclination towards philosophic vitalism and also his authoritarian worldview

from his observations.[68] But the relevance of his thought on sovereignty lies in the fact that he manages to demonstrate how the allure of sovereignty in our "disenchanted" age still emerges from certain archaic residues buried in the cultural unconscious. Of course, the "charisma" of a Barack Obama is not the same as the aura of a king. But the structure of feeling that sustains such charismatic aspects of a leader in the public sphere is comparable to archaic phenomena like magic and miracles which have supposedly been eclipsed in our secularized era.

While Agamben marks a step beyond Foucault in not granting an excessive epistemic privilege to modernity and eschewing the linear teleology that places

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[68]Vitalism and mechanism are two dominant and opposing strands in philosophy. For an exploration of vitalism and mechanism through the ages see Georges Canguilhem's essays titled "Aspects of Vitalism" and "Machine and Organism" in *Knowledge of Life*. Modern notions of vitalism rose to prominence in the late eighteenth century in Germany, and had an important influence on ideologies of nationalism. Pheng Cheah argues that the connection of organism with the political body is a reaction against earlier mechanistic models of the state which were predicated on the "absence of a sharp distinction between the artificial and the naturally living" (*Spectral*, 28). Mechanistic models, thus, could only view society and the state as "artifacts" that were brought into being "by an act of association which must…be prior and external to the collectivity that was formed" (*Spectral*, 29). The mechanism was viewed as a non-living prosthesis to nature. Besides, the body politic in such theories was still envisaged in terms of mechanical causality because its source of movement and energy was attributed to a force that lay outside and prior to the "body": the soul. The paradigm-change that led to a shift in modern political thought can be attributed to biological theories of epigenesis, which had one of its greatest representatives in Kant's contemporary: Blumenbach. Blumenbach's theory of epigenesis was opposed directly to theories of preformationism in the field of biology. The dominant view in preformationism was that of "a static form of evolution in which the past is a germinal essence from which the present and future unfolds" (*Spectral*, 25). In contrast, Blumenbach's vitalist theory of epigenesis instituted a sharp dichotomy between the machine and the living body, and argued that a living body generated spontaneously and immanently from a formative drive. This insight had a direct impact on ovitalist ideas about the political body. From now on, organic life was viewed (beginning with Kant) "as a dynamic process of self-formation and self-generation, a spontaneous, rational-purposive and autocausal becoming" (*Spectral*, 25). Parts were now seen as "both cause and effect of the whole" and were no longer viewed as subordinate to a larger whole as in mechanistic theories. "Organismic" theories of vitalism were predicated on the *self-generating* concept of "life" that existed immanently *within* the body, as opposed to mechanistic theories where the motive force for the body's movement and generation arose from a mechanical prosthesis that had its origins outside. It was now possible to envisage the social body as a living, processual formation whose vital force emerged immanently. This shift had a direct impact on three major philosophemes that are the bedrock of modern theories of nationalism—"the transcendental idea of freedom, the concept of culture, and the idea of organism" (*Spectral*, 34-7).

sovereignty before governmentality, he also eliminates the post-Spenglerian nostalgia for older, "traditional" forms of authority and power that characterize the works of Schmitt. Agamben begins his richest work, *Homo Sacer*, by distinguishing between two terms that the Greeks used for life: *zoē*, the simple biological life common to all living beings, and *bios*, a qualified way of living proper to an individual or group. The Foucauldian notion of biopolitics is an argument for how *zoē* progressively gets included in the *polis* in modernity. Through this process life becomes the principal object of state power. Agamben departs from this thesis. The key point about modernity is not that *zoē* is included in the *polis*; instead, what is decisive is that *zoē*, which was traditionally kept at the margins of the political order, begins to coincide with the *polis* thus blurring any distinctions between insides and outsides, exclusions or inclusions. Schmitt's idea of the "state of exception" allows Agamben to capture the peculiar position of *zoē* in the "traditional" conceptualization of the *polis*. This "limit" concept of the "state of exception" is not a simple topographical opposition of inside/outside. Instead, it is a fundamental topological figure of an "inclusive exclusion" whereby *zoē* separates and opposes itself to *bios*, while at the same time maintaining itself in relationship to it. But in circumstances where the state of exception becomes the rule, this topological opposition enters into a zone of "irreducible indistinction" (*Homo Sacer*, 9).[69] For Agamben, this move towards "indistinction" explains an aporia of modern democracy that Foucault struggled with in his delineation of the regime of the biopolitical—an aporia he tried to tide over via an invocation of race and racism. One of the fundamental aspirations of modern mass democracies is to make the bodies of all humans the subjects,

[69] For the distinction between topography and topology, see the "Introduction" to my dissertation.

and not objects, of political power: in Agamben's words, modern democracy "wants to put the freedom and happiness of men into play in the very place—bare life—that marked their subjection" (*Homo Sacer*, 10). Regimes of rights that promise its citizens both freedom and equality are predicated on this desire and the promises that stem from it. But at the very moment when modern democracies seem to achieve this promise, why has it repeatedly failed to save *zoē*? The Holocaust, the state-assisted pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and Guantanamo Bay, among numerous other instances from recent history, are tragic testimonials of this massive and repeated failure to guarantee "bare life." This indistinction between *zoē* and *bios*, and the concomitant valorization of life as the supreme value, is where modern democracies demonstrate their affinities with what is regarded as its antithesis: the totalitarian state.

The distinction between *zoē* and *bios*, however, does not contain anything that refers to the sacredness of human life as such. The sacredness of human life is a much later conceptual development which has no connection with classical Greece at all. Life, Agamben says, "became sacred only through a series of rituals whose aim was precisely to separate life from its profane context" (*Homo Sacer*, 66).[70] Agamben locates the

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[70] In this respect, Agamben's work was anticipated somewhat by the work of Rene Girard on the nature of sacrifice and the juxtaposition of violence and the sacred. Like Agamben, Girard too is critical of the Mauss-Hubert thesis of the "ambivalence of the sacred," which first posited the dual nature of the sacrificial act. Instead Girard argues that through sacrifice, society deflects the violence that would otherwise be turned upon its own members on to a "relatively indifferent victim"—one who is least capable of acts of retaliatory vengeance (4). The "insulation" provided by sacrifice shatters and deflects the threat that internal violence poses to the community. Girard's characterization of the "surrogate victim" of sacrifice approximates Agamben's description of *homo sacer*. First, like the homo sacer, the surrogate victim too is a marginal member of society whose killing does not amount to homicide. The sacrificeable victim must bear a sharp resemblance to human categories excluded from the realm of the sacrificeable, but at the same time must possess a sufficient degree of difference so that categories do not blur into each other. In this, the surrogate victim is a symmetrical correlate of the king, who too must bear similarities to certain recognized human categories, but at the same time transcending them through a certain degree of difference. The other important area where Agamben and Girard's work converge is in their linking of

genealogy of the sacredness of life in an obscure figure of Roman law—*homo sacer*, or the man who can be killed but cannot be sacrificed. Agamben is careful to delineate that this is a juridico-political concept, and should not be confused with the religious category of the sacred.[71] Sacredness here does not refer to the inviolability of life, but rather that of a life that can be killed but not sacrificed. Thus the topological structure of the philosopheme of *homo sacer*—which parallels the topological structure of the sovereign exception—is characterized by a "double exclusion" (*Homo Sacer*, 82). The "limit concept" of the *homo sacer* opens up a sphere of human action by subtracting itself from recognized forms of human and divine law. This originary figure of the law constitutes the political sphere of sovereignty by means of this double exclusion—"an excrescence of the profane in the religious and of the religious in the profane, which takes the form of a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide" (*Homo Sacer*, 83). Utilizing an expression used by Benjamin in "Critique of Violence," Agamben terms the life captured by this double exclusion "bare life." The production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty and is the hidden presupposition behind the modern concept of the sacredness of life. Nowadays, of course, the sacredness of life is only understood in the singular sense of being opposed to sovereign power as a fundamental right. Instead, sacredness understood in the sense of the double exclusion is the originary form through

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violence and the sacred. For Girard, communities are created and maintained through a "generative violence" of which the ritualized sacrifice of the victim is the most fundamental and recurring feature. As he says—"In the evolution from ritual to secular institutions, men gradually draw away from violence and eventually lose sight of it; but an actual break with violence never takes place. That is why violence can always stage a stunning, catastrophic comeback" (218). Riots are probably the best illustration of this "catastrophic comeback."

[71] This anthropological misreading has a long history with well-known figures such as Durkheim and Freud also succumbing to it.

which bare life is produced and included in the juridical order. It is thus not *zoē* (simple natural life) but life exposed to death that is the originary political element.

Besides being two symmetrical "limit" concepts, the structural analogy between the Schmittian idea of the sovereign exception and Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* also lies in the fact that for the sovereign all subjects are potentially *homines sacri*, while all men act as sovereigns over *homo sacer* (no one is punished for killing the sacred man). Applying the ideas of Ernest Kantorowicz creatively, Agamben demonstrates the *homo sacer* is the inverse double (and not a substitute figure) of the ambivalent figure of the sovereign. Both figures' status and corporeality are exempt from the rules of everyday life. Just as the king's body fused two lives—a natural life that dies at the moment of death, and a sacred life that survives the demise of the former and calls for specialized rituals of expiation—the body of the *homo sacer* too fuses a natural life and bare life which is not subject to any benevolent power. Once this topological structure is grasped, Agamben argues, the entire Hobbesian mythologeme of the "state of nature" can be reread anew. The mythologeme of the "state of nature" is, in fact, nothing else but a state of exception that is continually operative in the civil state and is epitomized by the sovereign decision. The sovereign decision refers immediately to the bare life of citizens and not, as is commonly understood, the latter's free will. The Hobbes-Rousseau rerouting of an understanding of this topological space in terms of *contract* bequeaths a mistaken understanding to modern political thought that makes democracy "constitutionally incapable of thinking a politics freed from the form of the State" (*Homo Sacer*, 109). Instead, Agamben says, it is crucial that we move away from the aporias of

contractual thinking, and rethink this originary political bind in terms of the "ban." The ban is—

> …essentially the power of delivering something over to itself, which is to say, the power of maintaining itself in relation to something presupposed as nonrelational. What has been banned is delivered over to its own separateness and, at the same time, consigned to the mercy of the one who abandons it—at once excluded and included, removed and at the same time captured (*Homo Sacer*, 110).

Unlike the topographical Schmittian opposition of friend and enemy, which for the former is the originary political opposition, the formal structure of the ban signifies a zone of indistinction where the "insignia of sovereignty" and "expulsion from the community" converge (*Homo Sacer*, 111).

Thinking about modern biopolitics has to concentrate on this zone of indistinction, keeping in mind that the principle of the sacredness of life draws from the semantic range implicit in *homo sacer*, than in the inviolability of life as such. This enables us to understand that every development in the sphere of modern politics is decisively double sided—each liberty and right won by individuals simultaneously inscribe their lives increasingly within the state order. This move also facilitates an understanding of how democratic regimes turn into totalitarian ones and vice versa. The more sinister aspect of it is that the line dividing biopolitics from thanatopolitics is virtually indistinguishable. "When life and politics" Agamben says, "originally divided, and linked together by means of the no-man's-land of the state of exception that is inhabited by bare life—begin to become one, all life becomes sacred and all politics becomes the exception" (*Homo Sacer*, 148). Every sovereign decision on the right to life can also equally be a decision on death. The shifting border between what was once a clearly demarcated zone specified by the limit concept of *homo sacer* increasingly

infringes into areas which were earlier considered nonpolitical zones such as those of health and sickness. The sovereign enters into an increasing symbiosis with the doctor, the scientist or the expert. This has led to an increasing incidence of what Hansen and Stepputat call the "politicization of life" and the "medicalization of politics" (*Sovereign*, 17). A political rhetoric increasingly taken over by biological metaphors of health and sickness, life and death, and a range of political rationalities that guarantees the health of populations through programs of immunization, forcible sterilization and even eugenics have become increasingly visible.

Moreover, the state of exception has increasingly become visible in three different forms. First, there are the institutions that seek to discipline and organize the "poor" and the "plebians" thereby remolding them as good citizens. Second, it is to be found in the ever-increasing visibility of camps of refugees and asylum seekers, whose inhabitants are governed as life that is outside the community. Third, the exception can be found in state decisions as regards the worthiness and/or unworthiness of life.[72] The debate about euthanasia is probably the "mildest" form. More extreme forms are decisions that exterminate massive swathes of the population who are categorized as unfit for the purposes of living, as in the case of the Jews and Gypsies in Nazi Germany. As Agamben says—"In modern biopolitics, sovereign is he who decides on the value or nonvalue of life as such" (*Homo Sacer*, 142).

The *nomos* of the space of modern biopolitics is the camp. Juridically, a camp is a piece of land situated outside the normal order, but something which is not external. What is excluded in the camp is also included through its own exclusion. The camp,

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[72]See *Sovereign Bodies* (18).

which is a curious hybrid of fact and law, is what normalizes and stabilizes the exception. Actions that occur inside the camp—think about Guantanamo Bay—are outside the reach of "normal" legality and mark out a space of their own where the "normal" biopolitical body of the state is re/produced through shifting demarcations between the self and the other. If land, order, and birth represented the triptych of the older *nomos* of the nation-state as described by Schmitt, the new *nomos* breaks this triangulation through the introduction and addition of the fourth term of the camp. The political system of the modern nation state was founded on the nexus between a determinate localization (national territory) and the ordering apparatus of the state, and was sustained through the mediation of regimes such as citizenship that guaranteed and reproduced this nexus. The gradual ascendancy of the camp severs this nexus, and results in an increasingly seen phenomenon whereby the "State decides to assume directly the care of the nation's biological life as one of its proper tasks" (*Homo Sacer*, 175). The localization and ordering of the camp as the *nomos* of the modern concretizes the structurally inverse location that the exception has with respect to the law. The result is, as Butler says, "the creation of a paralegal universe that goes by the name of the law" (61). The production of this "paralegal universe" or a law that is no law is the point where sovereign power manifests itself concretely in modernity.[73]

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[73] Extending Agamben's insights, Butler argues that governmentality is the condition of possibility for this new exercise of sovereignty. Governmentality first establishes the law as a "tactic" possessing instrumental value. Because of this instrumental nature, this law is not binding by virtue of its status as law. The "self-annulment" of the law in a state of emergency revitalizes the "anachronistic sovereign" as the new subject of managerial power. Because of the delegation of powers, these sovereigns, like the torturers in Guantanamo, are not the sovereign in the earlier sense. They are both acted upon and acting. But, in their own spheres, they make the decisions on who or what will eventually be reduced to bare life (62).

If *Homo Sacer* outlines the formal structure of this new *nomos*, Agamben's succeeding book, *State of Exception*, attempts to outline the ontology of a new politics that can enable us to move beyond the aporias engendered through the universalization of the conjunction of biopolitics and the state of exception. Agamben here builds on the contiguity that Schmitt establishes between sovereignty and the state of exception to construct a theory that considers the state of exception as a genuine juridical problem. However, according to him, to pose the question whether the state of exception possesses a juridical nature or not is a false problem. The real problem is to clarify the meaning, place and modes of the relationship of the state of exception with the law. In this context, immediately the state of exception poses a paradox for juridical thought. The paradox can be stated as follows—i) if exceptional measures are a result of periods of political crisis, then they find themselves in the paradoxical position of being juridical measures that do not have legal form and ii) conversely, if the exception is employed by the law as the original means through which life is encompassed, then a theory of the state of exception becomes a necessary condition for any definition of the relation that simultaneously binds and abandons the living being to law. At stake here is the difference between the categories of the political and the juridical and between the living being and the law. Politics, according to Agamben, has suffered a "lasting eclipse" because of its contamination by the law. Politics now can be conceptualized only as a constituent power—a violence that makes the law—or as a power that negotiates with the already established law. However, the space for a true political action is that which severs the nexus between law and violence—in Agamben's words, to show "law in its nonrelation

to life and life in its nonrelation to law means to open a space between them for human action, which once claimed for itself the name of 'politics'" (*State*, 88).

Agamben's thesis takes him beyond Schmitt. Schmitt is correct in pointing out that the state of exception is not a dictatorship—whether commissarial or sovereign; instead it is a space devoid of law where all legal determinations—including the distinction between public and private—are deactivated. But his mistake—with rather pernicious consequences—lay in the fact that he tried to inscribe the state of exception indirectly within a juridical context by grounding it in the division between constituent and constituted power or between the norm and the decision. The state of exception, however, is not a "state of law," but a space without law. Human actions which take place in this state do not possess a transgressive, executive or legislative nature, but are situated in an absolute non-place with respect to the law. However, this empty space, while unthinkable from the vantage point of the law, has a strategic importance for the juridical order because it grounds itself in and through it (think here about the fiction of the "state of nature"). The idea of a force-of-law—Agamben draws this syntagma from Derrida's reading of Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" in "Force of Law"—is a response to the undefinable nature of this non-place. This state of a "force of law that is separate from the law, floating *imperium*, being-in-force without application, and, more generally, the idea of a sort of "degree zero" of the law" are all fictions through which the law attempts to appropriate the state of exception (*State*, 52).

The critical question that poses itself in such a reading is this: how can this nexus between violence and law be broken, and what are the stakes that emerge from such dissociation? Agamben develops this idea further by counterposing a reading of

Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" against Schmitt's theory of the state of exception. Benjamin's critique, written specifically as a response to Schmitt, seeks to assure the category of "pure violence" an existence outside of the law. For Benjamin, "pure violence"—a name for a human action that does not make or preserve law—is not an originary figure of human action (mythico-juridical violence is always conceptualized in this originary fashion).[74] While mythico-juridical violence (such as the "state of nature") is always a means to an end, pure violence seeks its criterion within a distinction within the means (such as the law) but without regard for the ends which they serve. Mythico-juridical violence never deposes its relationship with the law, thereby installing it as power. Pure violence on the other hand, severs the nexus between violence and the law, and appears as a violence that does not govern, but "purely acts and manifests" (*State*, 62). Such "pure" human action does not restitute the law in accordance with an originary use-value, but initiates a new use that is born of it as a consequence. Schmitt's mistake, according to Agamben, was that he grounded this violence in relation to the law. Needless to say, this grounding of pure violence in the law and its coincidence in the person of the Führer transformed the juridico-political machine in Germany into a massive killing machine. This is the essential core of Agamben's book: as soon as pure violence is captured within the law as a form of sovereign foundational violence—a typical maneuver in modernity—the possibility of the juridico-political apparatus

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[74] Bonnie Honig's works illustrate how images of foundational mythico-juridical violence still circulate in our cultural consciousness. For instance, popular Hollywood westerns like *Shane* illustrate how the lawgiver comes in from the outside, establishes/restores the law through an act of foundational violence, and then has to depart from the community because "murder never goes away" (22). These examples parallel the classic representation of the mythico-juridical founder of the law in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. In Rousseau too, the lawgiver has to leave after founding the polity. The mythical foundation of this political narrative is the story of Moses as the lawgiver.

becoming a killing machine cannot be ruled out. The fiction of the state of exception does not hide an access point to something originary. As Agamben says, there "is not first life as a natural biological given and anomie as the state of nature, and then their implication in the law through the state of exception" (*State*, 87). Instead, the very possibility of distinguishing between "life and law, anomie and nomos" arises from their articulation in a biopolitical machine. Bare life is produced by the biopolitical machine. Bare life does not pre-exist this machine, and is analogous to the fact that "law has no court in nature or the divine mind" (*State*, 88). Unlike the vitalism of Schmitt, the task of political and cultural analysis, thus, is to systematically and patiently articulate the imbrications of law and life, while at the same time disenchanting the fact that purity never lies at any origin. This insight of Agamben's, more than any other, is a guiding thread for my project. One half of my work is to disenchant ideologies of nationalism (and subnationalism) of their quest for an originary purity. The other half is an articulation of the multiple imbrications of law and life, and the space for politics that emerges from them.

To be sure, as Das and Poole point out, we need not go all along with Agamben's claim that the figure of the *homo sacer* arises as a "ghostly spectral presence" from the past to function as the secret uniting tie between sovereignty and the biopolitical killing machine (15). Indeed to insist on this point exclusively would be to perform an "explanatory extremism" in another sense. But we can productively use the tension in Agamben's own deployment of *homo sacer*—the fact that it could signify both a form of presocial life (as in the case of refugees) and also the continual production of killable bodies through juridical instruments (the biopolitical state can transform anyone into a killable body)—to think about a range of possible examples from both the liberal-

universal state as well from the post-colonies. Besides, Agamben's call in *State of Exception* for a delinking of law and life and a radical interrogation of the biologizing rhetoric of state-centered politics is crucial for the emergence of any form of politics that moves away from the all-too-familiar scenario of the State assuming care of the biological life of the nation.

1.4: The Colony/Borderland as the State of Exception

Neither Foucault nor Agamben spend too much time in discussing the juridico-political status of a state of exception that was central to the self-definition of the global nomos of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum*: the colony.[75] Any genealogy of power in the modern world, both in the west and the non-west, has to contend with the juridico-political status of the colony, because they were, to use Ann Laura Stoler's phrase "laboratories of modernity" (*Race*, 15). The colonial world played a central role in giving shape to the law, specific ideologies of rule and also cultural-national identities in the West.[76] A study of these aspects of the complex relationship between the metropole and the colony has been a staple of postcolonial theory. However, postcolonial theory, by and

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[75]While a major branch of postcolonial studies draws inspiration from Foucault's analyses, his absolute occlusion of any discussion of the colonial world in his major published work led Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to dismiss his work as a claustrophobic version of history that was only about the West. Foucault's silence on the effects of colonialism has also been noted by other writers with a postcolonial slant such as James Clifford and Robert Young. However, the recent publications in English of Foucault's lectures at the College de France have led to a re-evaluation of this claim somewhat. Ann Laura Stoler had anticipated this re-evaluation in her critical engagement with Foucault and the question of race in *Race and the Education of Desire*. Agamben's genealogy of *homo sacer*, the state of exception and the camp also make no reference to the colony. There are some stray references in *Homo Sacer* to how the entire third world becomes a state of exception in the era of globalization. But references like that are very rare in his work.

[76] A huge body of scholarship explores the multiple ramifications of this relationship. I will only mention a few selected topics and themes here: crowd control and urban planning (Timothy Mitchell), public health and medicine (Mitchell, David Arnold), sexuality (Ann McClintock, Gayatri Spivak, Ann Laura Stoler), mapping and cartography (Thongchai Winichakul, Matthew Edney, Manu Goswami), and literature and education (Gauri Vishwanathan, Timothy Brennan).

large, has not contended strongly with the question of the juridico-political status of the colony or the questions of sovereignty and the exception. This section, therefore, explores the question of sovereignty in the colony through a consideration of one European and four anticolonial/postcolonial thinkers who have reflected on such issues in some detail: Hannah Arendt, Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe, Partha Chatterjee and Thomas Blom Hansen. I also consider the impact of the political logics bequeathed by the colonial state on governmentality in the post-colony. The works of Fanon, Mbembe, Chatterjee and Blom Hansen are also important in that they shift the gaze from the standpoint of sovereignty and its logics to how subjects in colonial/postcolonial locales internalize, accomodate or resist these logics. As I argued earlier, the space for politics in the post-colony is created and recreated by the complex interactions between these logics of sovereignty and the accommodation/resistance engendered within subjects. This shift in perspective enables us to formulate possibilities for politics in the post-colony.

1.4.1: Phantom Worlds

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt explores the principles underpinning the processes that convert the colony into a "space of exception" and the effects accruing from them in even greater detail. Arendt argues that expansion as a "permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism" (*Origins*, 125). But as a political concept, expansion is a novelty. Earlier attempts at conquest and empire-building, like the Roman Empire, were based primarily on law—conquest was followed, though not always, by the *integration* of a heterogeneous set of people under the umbrella of a common law. In contrast, the classical form of the modern European nation-state, which was predicated on the principle of a homogenous

population's consent to its government, could not *integrate*, but could only *assimilate*. Imperialism arose when the ruling class in capitalist production in a nation-state encountered hurdles caused by national limitations. Expansion also entered the scene as a political concept around that time. The irony was that expansion was not a proper political concept at all, but emerged from the realm of business speculation where it entailed a permanent broadening of industrial production and economic transaction.[77] However, unlike the economic structure, the political structure cannot be expanded indefinitely. The productivity of the human is unlimited, but the political structures s/he can create are limited in scope. Among these structures, the nation-state is least suited for unlimited growth, because the consent that is its base cannot be extended indefinitely, and only under exceptional and rare circumstances can be won unconditionally from conquered peoples. After all, the very concept of the nation-state as a modern political formation had as its framework the triptych of people-territory-state. The nation-state, thus, signifies an element of *rootedness*.[78] As soon as this element spilled over the

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[77] Arendt has a reading of Hobbes that is the antithesis of Schmitt's. For Arendt, Hobbes was "the true, though never fully recognized, philosopher of the bourgeoisie because he realized that acquisition of wealth conceived as a never-ending process can be guaranteed only by a seizure of political power, for the accumulating process must sooner or later force open all existing territorial limits" (*Origins*, 146). Hobbes' theory of power was drawn from the commercial process too, for it envisaged man as an individual in complete isolation who realizes that his individual interest can only be guaranteed by some kind of majority. Membership in any form of community, or Hobbes, was temporary affair that did not affect the individual's solitary and private nature and created no permanent bonds with his fellow men. Power, thus, becomes only a means to an end. A community based on such a form of power would decay during periods of calm if it were not to expand its authority constantly through further accumulation. This is at the base of Hobbes' theory of the permanent war of all—the only guarantee for the stability of the Leviathan, which has to increase its power at the expense of other states. Thus the logic of imperialism, according to Arendt, can be located in Hobbes' "theoretically indisputable proposition that a never-ending accumulation of property must be based on a never-ending accumulation of power" (*Origins*, 143).

[78] While aspects of nationalism can be found from very ancient times, it is only in the modern age that it becomes a systematic movement that has the capture of the state-apparatus as its *telos*. The growth of national consciousness allied with a new secularized mode of understanding and appropriating history are the central intellectual-discursive elements that create the grounds for the growth and consolidation of this

boundaries of the national territory, its aporias became readily evident. In earlier instances of conquest, the conquerors would operate with the belief that they were imposing a superior law upon barbarian people. The nation-state, however, conceived of its laws as an outgrowth of its own national substance and traditions that were not valid beyond its own people and territory. "Indians," after all, could never be Englishmen. This is the significant difference between, say, the Roman and the British models of empire. The Roman attempt to create an empire tried to combine *ius* with *imperium*—it attempted to integrate.[79] The British model, on the other hand, was, in Sudipta Sen's words, one of "distant sovereignty": it was necessarily routed and weighted towards colonization. In Arendt's words—"Imperialism is not empire building and expansion is not conquest" (*Origins*, 130). It is characteristic of the structures of imperialism that there is an absolute separation between national institutions and the colonial administration. Indians could only be subjects, and never citizens (or "noncitizens" in Barry Hindness' terms), of the British Empire.

The other important point that Arendt makes with respect to imperialism is about the dual "discovery" of "race as a principle of the body politic, and…bureaucracy as a

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new political form. To follow the crux of Benedict Anderson's famous argument, nationalism becomes a specific and dominant form of re-enchantment that is peculiar to the modern era. Arendt's thinking shows remarkable contiguities with this line of argument too—"Nations entered the scene of history and were emancipated when peoples had acquired a consciousness of themselves as cultural and historical entities, and of their territory as a permanent home, where history had left its visible traces, whose cultivation was the common labor of their ancestors and whose future would depend upon the course of a common civilization" *(Imagined*, 229). In contrast to the nation-form though, the form of the transcendental state has been around for a long time. For a discussion of the state form through the *longue dureé* see Anthony Giddens' *The Nation-State and Violence*.

[79] The French attempted to follow the Roman model with their *mission civilatrice*, with even more pernicious results. This was the essential difference between the British model of "distant sovereignty" and the French imperial model.

principle of foreign domination" in the colonies (*Origins*, 185). Though versions of race-thinking had existed prior to the emergence of racism as a governmental instrument in the colonies, it literally exploded as an "emergency explanation" for human beings whose humanity literally frightened the new (white) immigrants to these locales. Using the *Heart of Darkness* as an illustrative text, Arendt argues that in the "phantom-like" world of the colonies (especially in Africa), racism became a dominant instrument of rule not only because of differences in the color of skin between natives and settlers, but because the lower races were found in regions where nature seemed at its most hostile. What made these "lower" races different from the rest of "humanity" was the fact that they "behaved like a part of nature, that they treated nature as their undisputed master, that they had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality—compared to which they appeared to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike" (*Origins*, 192). Because the natives lacked this "human" reality, even when they were massacred, it did not register in the colonizer's mind that they were committing murder. If race and racism represented one side of the technologies of colonial rule—"an escape into an irresponsibility where nothing human could no longer exist"—bureaucracy represented its other side: the "result of a responsibility that no man can bear for his fellowman and no people for another people" (*Origins*, 207). Perfected in "laboratories" such as Algeria, Egypt and India, bureaucracy was predicated on the same logic of ruling at a distance allied with an arrogant presumption that the "master" races knew what was best for their subjects. Aloofness, a central attitude through which the mystique and impenetrability of bureaucratic rule was perpetuated, emerged as a new and more dangerous form of rule.

At least in despotism and arbitrariness, some measure of contact was retained between the ruler and the subject, if not through anything else then at least through the means of bribery and gifts. In the aloof rule of colonial bureaucracy, even that link was severed.

Although Arendt eventually makes the "local" history of the colony subordinate to the "global" history of European totalitarianism, her insights on race and the "phantom like" world of the colony are comparable to Frantz Fanon's famous descriptions of the colony in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Sovereignty in the colony functions through a rigid spatial grid. The colonial world is a "Manichean" world where boundaries are clearly marked and internal frontiers policed through the establishment of barracks, police outposts and checkpoints. It is a world ruled by brute force and a reciprocal exclusivity that is marked by racial differentiation. The world of the colonized is superfluous in the colonial order of things and filled with disposable populations—"You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It's a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together" (*Wretched*, 4). Like Foucault, Fanon uses the word "species" to describe the colonizers and the colonized. The colonizers represent a superior species. The colonized are a subspecies that are reduced to the status of animals or things. They are literally "penned" inside the native quarters (*Wretched*, 7). The colony is a totalitarian world where the colonized are represented as the very quintessence of evil. Terms referring to the bestiary are constantly used to depict the colonized, as if they are non-humans destined either to be domesticated or slaughtered.

While Fanon's description of the colonized world represent the "phantom world" depicted by Arendt, the last chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, titled "Colonial War

and Mental Disorders," brings something radically new into the equation. In this chapter, Fanon shifts the gaze from an objective description of the colony as a state of exception to the impact that the fact of inhabiting such terror spaces have on the subjectivity of the colonized. This shift in point of view to the colonized is one of the key strategies of my project as well, as I attempt to represent the forms of death-in-life that the colonial system engendered. Following Fanon, my attempt also is to evaluate what it means to live in a terror space as a species of the living dead. Fanon argues that since colonialism systematically negates the other and denies the colonized any attribute of humanity, it forces the colonized to ask "Who am I in reality?" (*Wretched*, 182). The "I" here does not represent any attribute of personhood. Instead, after years of being reduced to the level of a simple "natural" backdrop to the colonial presence, the colonized internalize this discourse of depersonalization. The colonial system is a "pathological" one—if it makes the colonizer pathologically "aloof," it renders the colonized incapable of any sense of self-worth or personhood. In fact, colonization goes a step further. Not only does it depersonalize the colonized, the very structure of society is depersonalized on a collective level. As Fanon says—"A colonized people is…reduced to a collection of individuals who owe their very existence to the presence of the colonizer" (*Wretched*, 219-20). The logic of decolonization is to smash this dehumanizing system altogether, and in that process convert *objectified creatures* into *human subjects*. This logic is also the framework of Fanon's advocacy of violence. His controversial call for violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* is no romantic valorization of the phenomenon. Neither does anticolonial violence represent the "death of politics"—this is Arendt's critique of Fanon in *On Violence*. The logic of anticolonial violence is structurally determined. A colony,

after all, represents "one vast farmyard, one vast concentration camp where the only law is that of the knife" (*Wretched*, 232). To live in this "state of exception" means simply not to die. When such an exceptional logic becomes normalized, as it did in the colonies, the only way to liberate the self from the dehumanizing colonial system and the pathologies it induces is through violence. The key point is that the colonized people are not "dominated people"—they are objects, animals or at best, "lobotomized Europeans" (*Wretched*, 182, 227). Conceptually, colonization represents nothing else but the occupation of a "territory," a free space inhabited by forms of natural life (and not human beings). Fanon's unsentimental unveiling of this logic demonstrates the true status of the colony as a space of exception, and also the terrible impact that the fact of inhabiting such a terror space has on the subjectivity of the colonized.

1.4.2: The Post-Colony and Necropower

Fanon's work on subjectivity has been very influential within the corpus of postcolonial theory. Homi Bhabha's in influential conceptualizations of "mimicry," "hybridity" and the stereotype owe a huge debt to Fanon. However, Fanon's observations on the juridico-political status of the colony as a space of exception have not been picked up extensively by postcolonial theorists. Achille Mbembe's works represent an exception in this regard. Mbembe has developed a thoughtprovoking theoretical model that analyzes the violence engendered by the colonial system and the percolation of those brutal legacies of rule in the post-colony. The three key concepts of Mbembe's that have helped my thinking a lot in my project are those of the *commandement*, necropower/necropolitics and times of entanglement. All three concepts are predicated on a juridico-political understanding of the colony/post-colony as a space of exception. The

localization of the colony/post-colony enables a searing analysis of the phenomenology of violence in these locales and the impact that such modalities of fostering life or destroying it have on subjectivity.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon elaborates how colonial violence penetrates every fiber of everyday life and even insinuates and creeps into the cognitive dimension thereby producing a culture and cultural praxis of its own. More importantly, Fanon emphasizes the tactile nature of this violence; the fact that colonial violence necessarily entails the close contiguity of bodies—recall the image of the bodies piled one on top of the other is the space inhabited by the colonized. Fusing Fanon with Bataille, Mbembe stretches this analysis even further to argue that the forms of subjection engendered by colonial violence possess a sexual and erotic dimension that is linked to the exercise of language itself. To colonize, according to Mbembe, is to "accomplish a sort of sparky clean act of coitus, with the characteristic feature of making horror and pleasure coincide" (175). The origin of this act is to be found in language, and occurred in Europe far before the physical act of colonization happened. With respect to Africa—the specific locale of Mbembe's analyses—one of the classic archetypes of such thinking is Hegel's *Philosophy of History*. Hegelian discourse regarded the non-European spaces, and Africa in particular, as a tumultuous, *meaning-less* world of elementary and archaic drives and sensations that is the very antithesis of the principle of rationality. More importantly, the African, for Hegel, is a form of *animal* life that does not and cannot go beyond the realm of immediate necessity and self-preservation. It is well-known that for Hegel, man can only become *human* if he can transcend bare existence by directing his *desire* to be

recognized towards another being.[80] Each contestant in the struggle for recognition must be willing to risk his life to be recognized by the other. At the same time though, this contest must not lead to the death of either party because it is only when both parties live that the circuit of recognition can be completed. Thus this dialectical movement predicates an absolute reciprocity where both parties have to go beyond the level of their "being-for-itself" and also apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality. Thus, this dialectical process of mutual recognition leads to a universal consciousness of self—it is only through this movement that subjective certainty can be transformed into objective truth.

However, for Hegel, the African (and also later, though not necessarily in Hegel, any colonized) human-animal is incapable of moving beyond the level of being-for-itself. The colonized represent being in pure facticity—the simple fact that it *is*, just like an inanimate *thing is*; and nothing more. There is no aspiration in these human-animals, these *things* for transcendence or mutual recognition. Simultaneously, this same operation does not simply render the colonized/native as a thing that *is*, but through the absolute refusal of recognition of his/her humanity renders him/her into a *nothing*—a reality that is denied. Recall Arendt's statement here that when colonial massacres took place, the colonizers did not feel any sense of guilt because the fact that the natives could have been human was a possibility that was not even entertained. Thus from the standpoint of the rationality of the colonizer's "self" the colonized/native was "that *thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing*" (*On the Postcolony*, 187, emphases in original). Furthermore, the verbal economy of this discourse, that picks up on rumor and gossip culled from the

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[80] See Kojéve for a commentary on the Hegelian dialectic of mutual recognition.

discourse of the colonialists, produces a "surface," a "closed, solitary totality that it elevates to the level of a generality" (*On the Postcolony*, 178). Moreover, this "surface" is expended by multiple repetitions, a "discourse of incantation" that sustains a "truth" about which the colonizer actually knows nothing.[81] This language is a desire for an otherness that constantly haunts and obsesses the European self, and is conducted in an "auto-erotic" mode (*On the Postcolony*, 179). This language and discourse was actualized after the physical fact of occupation in a series of "enclosed hollows" (179). The impenetrability, distance and mystique of the physical spaces of the colonies, the absolute difference of the natives who are viewed as hysterical, homogenous masses bereft of humanity, and the representation and reproduction of the colonized spaces as "spaces of terror" where unimaginable horrors (human-sacrifice, cannibalism, blood rites etc.) occur are just three instances of the re/production of such "enclosed hollows." By taking on this mask of animality, power in the colony/post-colony literally moved back into a temporality that could be considered "vegetal" (*On the Postcolony*, 238).

This phenomenological reading of colonial/postcolonial violence makes the juridico-political status of the colony in European thought even more precise. In *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt fitfully touches upon the precise juridical status of the colony. We recall that in the *Jus Publicum Europeaum*, "just war" could only be conducted between recognized nation-states. While each (European) state was juridically equal, it had the right to go to war against another state if it was proved that there was an act of infringement that violated a country's territorial sovereignty. Simultaneously, while the territory of a particular state was a sovereign possession, the colonial territories were

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[81] This is the core of Homi Bhabha's theory of the colonial stereotype as well.

juridically "free" spaces that were available for appropriation. What effectively happened was the "frontierization" of the colony. These spaces were "stateless" locales. Since the state was considered the pinnacle of human creation, the colonies' statelessness implied that their inhabitants lived in a less-than-human condition. Principles of just war could not be employed there—they were literally "states of exception" where the juridical order did not apply. Colonial wars, thus, were "conceived of as the expression of an absolute hostility that sets the conqueror against an absolute enemy" ("Necropolitics," 25).[82] Allied with what Arendt says about massacres of the colonized by the colonizers, we thus arrive at a subjective-objective juxtaposition that produced and sustained the juridical status of what Mbembe terms the "terror-formation" that was the colony. Mbembe pushes these insights even further to describe the production of subjectivity for the colonizer. If the occupation and appropriation of the colony was predicated on the dual construction of the colonial space as a free space ready for the taking, and on the effacement of the colonized as yet another instance of animal/natural life, it effectively meant that the colonizer by taking possession did not succeed anyone. Hence, he did not inherit any responsibility. The colony was the space where the European could be free of the inhibitions of "civilized" life, a place where his "other" side would be revealed. To colonize, thus, was to "put to work the two-faced movement of destroying and creating, creating by destroying, creating destruction and destroying the creation, creating to create and destroying to destroy" (*On the Postcolony*, 189). From the standpoint of the

[82] For the concept of the "absolute enemy" see Schmitt's *Theory of the Partisan*. This concept will play a crucial role in my chapter on the Assamese guerrilla narratives.

colonizer, the colony was thus a world of "limitless subjectivity" (189). Conversely, the native lived and was viewed as living in a world of "half-life."

Such processes of subject-production helped sustain the modality of the *commandement*: the specific form through which sovereignty was employed in the colonies. This form of governance was actualized in two ways—i) through a combined weakness of and inflation of the notion of right, and ii) the framework provided by three types of violence. There was a weakness of right because in theory and practice the colonial model was exactly the opposite of the liberal model of debate and discussion.[83] There was an inflation of the idea of right because except when employed arbitrarily or to justify the right to conquest, the notion of right itself revealed itself as a void. Concomitantly, colonial sovereignty was also predicated on three interlinked forms of violence. The first was the notion of founding violence which created the space where right was exercised, and also simultaneously set up the colonial power as the sole judge and arbitrator of laws.[84] The second type of violence is the legitimating violence that converts the founding violence into an authority that authorizes. Last there is a form of violence geared towards the reproduction, spread and permanence of this authority. Though it fell short of war, it was equivalent to a permanent "state of siege."[85] This violence was experienced in a tactile fashion in the everyday world by the colonized.

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[83] For a similar analysis of this line of thought see Uday Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire*.

[84] One thinks of Fanon's famous opening in *The Wretched of the Earth* where the founding violence of the colonizer literally creates a *tabula rasa* from where the logic of colonial rule emanates.

[85] For state of siege see Agamben's *The State of Exception*. Agamben draws this concept from Schmitt's *The Dictator*. In a state of siege all differences between external and internal enemies are obliterated. A curfew with shoot-at-sight orders is a classic example of this modality of rule.

Such forms of violence operated both as authority and morality, erasing the distinction between means and ends, and producing infinite permutations within the spheres of the just and the unjust. The subject-object of this specific modality of power was the singular figure of the native. Mbembe also suggests that this particular mode of exercising power had four major properties. First, it was based on a regime that departed from common law and instead delegated private rights to individuals or corporations (for instance, the British East India Company) who then assumed a form of sovereignty that was similar to royal power. Second, it was a regime of privileges and immunities. The corporations, for instance, could not only levy taxes and wage war, but were also exempted from paying customs or license duties on their goods. Third, *commandement* collapsed the distinction between ruling and civilizing. To "civilize" the native also meant the "right to demand, to force, to ban, to compel, to authorize, to punish, to reward, to be obeyed…to enjoin and to direct" (*On the Postcolony*, 32). In short, *commandement* was an attitude. Fourth, *commandement* was circular; its purpose was not to achieve public good, but was geared towards absolute submission.

Mbembe's concept of the colonial *commandement*, predicated on naturalist technologies of rule, can be extended to the study of postcolonial regions that are governed as a state of exception. The eastern Indian borderlands are a case in point. Significantly, many separatist organizations in this region use the term "Indian colonialism" to describe the rule of the Indian government. While the use of the term "colonialism" does not mean the same thing as the colonial *commandement* that Mbembe describes, many of their aspects between the colonial polity and the polity in the post-colony are structurally comparable. For instance, the three types of violence that

characterizes the colonial *commandement*—founding, legitimating and reproductive—are also noticeable in the post-colony, and the ways in which this polity governs the borderland state of exception. The founding violence of Indian nationhood figured through the partition of space is replicated in the postcolonial borderland. As Sanjib Baruah has pointed out, the "engineering" and "nationalization" of space is a commonly noticed phenomenon in the region.[86] Similarly, the legitimating and reproductive violence of the state can be noticed in the realm of everyday life. Most parts of the region are ruled as a war zone, with a heavy military presence. Legal instruments like Article 371 (I will talk about this soon) and the AFSPA empower the central government to dismiss civil authority and impose military rule at any time in the guise of maintaining law and order. A state of siege is thus normalized. If the native was the subject-object of the colonial *commandemen*t, the borderlander, a figure that has uncertain loyalties to the state, is the subject-object of commandement in the post-colony. The borderlander is also conceived as being racially distinct from the mainland subject. The regime of privileges and immunities accorded to corporations and private individuals was one of the major planks for subnationalist organization in this region in the 1970's. In Assam, for instance, private companies would take revenues from the state's rich tea estates without any economic profits coming back in. The modality of governance in the tea estates did not

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[86] Since independence, the eastern borderland region has undergone numerous partitionings of space. More often than not, this process of "spatial engineering" was carried out directly by the central government in India without taking the broader public opinion into account. While this trend at partitioning space was definitely a response to ethnic identitarian movements, it was often done in a haphazard and arbitrary fashion, without taking the existing political economy of the region into consideration. The sovereignty of the postcolonial nation-state was also established through the act of naming. Sanskritized names were used, often to the chagrin of the local populations. For instance, NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) became Arunachal Pradesh. The new state which branched off from Assam in the 1970's was named Meghalaya (abode of the clouds). See Baruah's essay "Nationalizing Space" for more details.

change too much from colonial times. There would be mainland managers primarily at the top, local "middlemen" in the middle and coolie labor at the bottom rung. The bureaucracy and police force too were predicated on these hierarchies. Here, for example, is a small illustration from the beginning of *The Outline of the Republic*—a scene which has close parallels with a similar scene in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The protagonist of the novel, Amrit, meets a government official in the unnamed borderland city he flies into first. The official, an avid naturalist, dismisses Amrit's interest in the political turmoil in Manipur in the following words:

> Yes, something about Manipur…wasn't it?...Why bother?...The political turmoil is quite inconsequential. The birds, the animals, the flora, that is what lasts….You must learn to differentiate between the superficially intriguing and the truly interesting. For instance…The Moirang lake (in Manipur), perhaps as remarkable a water body as you will ever come across…The people there live in floating huts on the lake, with this incredible environmental sense, in complete harmony with the ecology (*Outline*, 42).

This scene is a classic illustration of *commandement* as an "attitude." The "political turmoils" are quite "inconsequential"—what matters at the end is how such "natural" beings coexist in harmony with nature.

Mbembe's most ambitious work, however, is the essay on necropolitics. In this essay, he re-reads Foucault, Arendt, Schmitt, Bataille and Agamben through a postcolonial lens to analyze the new configurations between life, death, politics and the sovereign complex in a global context. Taking direct issue with Foucault's idea of biopolitics, Mbembe suggests, like Agamben, that necropower is a specific modern form of thanatopolitics that is geared towards the production of "death worlds"—new forms of social existence where whole populations are subjected to conditions of maximum destruction or are conferred the status of the living dead. Unlike Agamben, however,

Mbembe does not trace such a modality of thanatopolitics back to an obscure and archaic source, but instead delineates multiple genealogies of this form within modernity itself. Neither does he overprivilege the European model of the concentration camp as the *nomos* of the modern, arguing that the aim of his essay is not to "debate the singularity of the extermination of the Jews or to hold it up by way of an example" ("Necropolitics," 13). Central to his conceptualization of necropower is a re-reading of politics through the lens of Bataille. While rationalists like Hegel read politics as the forward, "progressive" dialectical movement of reason, Bataille reframed the question of the limits of the political. For Mbembe, Bataille's "anti-economy" of politics and the political is a "spiral transgression…that difference that disorients the very idea of the limit" ("Necropolitics," 16). Politics thus is a difference that is put into play when a taboo is violated, such as the act of taking life. While a rationalist like Hegel, attempted to keep death within an economy of "absolute knowledge and meaning," Bataille, as we have already seen, located death in the realm of an absolute and luxurious expenditure that emerges only after we go beyond the domain of utility. Politics, thus, is not only the power of preserving and maintaining life, but also simultaneously a "work of death" ("Necropolitics," 16). The multiple links between modernity/modern politics and terror thus is the locus of Mbembe's analysis. While Foucault, Arendt and Agamben almost unilaterally read the state and politics that emanate from the modern state as the ultimate "terror formation" of our times. Mbembe's original contribution in this essay is to disentangle terror from the sole locus of the modern-rational state, and instead consider "marginal" spaces like the plantation, the colony and areas under "late modern colonial occupation" ("Necropolitics," 25). For the aforementioned European scholars, such

marginal spaces were at best elementary laboratories where the more complex techniques of biopower, totalitarianism or thanatopolitics were first tested and then perfected in Europe. But the most original feature of "terror-formations" like the plantation and the colony was the concatenation of "biopower, the state of exception and the state of siege" ("Necropolitics," 22). Necropower in such formations could either take the "cruel" form of taking life, or the "benevolent" form of destroying existing cultures in the name of civilizing. With respect to the "cruel" form of taking life, the exercise of sovereignty literally became the right to decide which populations were disposable and which were not. While "late modern colonial occupation," such as the apartheid regime in South Africa or Israel's occupation of Palestine, draws upon the techniques employed in the "terror-formations" of the colony and the plantation, it also differs from colonial occupation in certain ways. Specifically, it combines the disciplinary, the biopolitical and the necropolitical. Mbembe's example here is the colonial occupation of Palestine and also the massacres in Africa where a combination of these three factors allows for absolute domination and a militarization of daily life.[87]

Similarly, in the contemporary age, the role and function of war has also changed. The older distinctions between just and unjust wars or that of contractual violence are yielding to other forms. As the wars in the Persian Gulf and the former Yugoslavia illustrate, wars today conducted as hit-and-run affairs. Mobility is key. These mobile war-machines proliferate everywhere, from the tactics and strategies used by the hegemonic powers to the numerous guerilla groups and bands of mercenaries we notice in many parts of the world. Very often, these war-machines compete with the state for

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[87]I will elaborate aspects of these in greater detail in my discussions on *The Outline of a Republic*, *Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang*.

sovereignty—such as in many parts of Africa, the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) until recently in Sri Lanka and the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) in the state of Nagaland in India. The proliferation of necropolitical techniques in our age have also led to new configurations between death and terror and terror and freedom. Mbembe explores these linkages through his distinction between the logic of martyrdom and the logic of survival. Terror and death are at the core of each logic. In the logic of survival, the subject's horror at witnessing the death of the other emerges simultaneously with the satisfaction that it is someone else who is dead. Each enemy killed makes the survivor feel secure. On the other hand, in the logic of martyrdom, epitomized in our age by the suicide bomber, the death of the self goes hand in hand with the death of the other. The "will to die," as Mbembe says, closes the door on the "possibility of life for everyone" ("Necropolitics," 37). Homicide and suicide are merged.[88] New semiotics of killing appears on the horizon, where the subject by overcoming his own mortality labors under the "sign of the future" ("Necropolitics," 37). What we see, therefore, is an "ecstatic" notion of politics, where the present is a moment of vision for a future that has not as yet come, and where death in the present becomes the "mediator of redemption" ("Necropolitics," 39).

Mbembe's descriptions of fractured sovereignties, the new linkages between death, life and politics and the new semiotics of killing will be of increasing relevance to my study of the texts in the eastern borderland regions later on. The value of Mbembe's work lies in that it enables us to study the new and sometimes unrecognizable forms of politics and subjectivity that emerge in "spaces of terror" that are under siege or governed

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[88] For a wide ranging discussion of the figure of the suicide bomber see Talal Asad's *On Suicide Bombing*.

as a state of exception. Besides these descriptions of the modalities of power in the colony and its passage into the postcolony, Mbembe's work is also useful for providing a different hermeneutic through which we can read the agency of subjects subjected to subjection. The key concept in this regard is that of "times of entanglement." This term is a temporal category that contests the limitations of the universalizing temporal categories utilized by Western social theory and "universalist" political practice. Think here about temporal constructs such as "modes of production" or "nation-time." Though fundamentally different in the objects it purports to isolate and define, these temporal categories institute a homogenizing narrative through a similar intellectual-cognitive operation. In either case, they phenomenologically "purify" time and then fill that empty space with the contents accruing from the perspectival point of a particular subject ("the time of capital," "the time of the nation").[89] Discrepancies in the homogenizing process of such narrative operations are then rendered "archaic," "survivals of the premodern" or "prepolitical." Rehabilitating the two concepts of the "age" and the *durée*, Mbembe critiques this tendency towards phenomenological "purification" and argues for a resuscitation of multiple temporalities that overlay each other: what he calls an "entanglement."[90] In such times of entanglement, temporality is not viewed in a linear form, but as an interlocking of pasts, presents and futures that "retain their depths of other

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[89] The work of the Subaltern Studies collective, especially Dipesh Chakrabarty's, are powerful critiques of the "universalizing" time of capital. See Chakrabarty's critique of the concept of the "prepolitical" in *Provincializing Europe* and *Habitations of Modernity*, and also Ranajit Guha's *History after World-History*. For critiques of nation-time, see the works by *Annalistes* like Fernand Braudel (his concept of the *longue durée* and of "geographical time" in *The Mediterranean World* is of special relevance here).

[90] An "age" is a configuration of events, both visible and invisible, about whose existence contemporary subjects are conscious. A *durée* refers to a series of discontinuities, reversals and swing which overlay one another.

presents, pasts and futures" (*On the Postcolony*, 16). The contingent is given central importance in such a schema. While the contingent is treated as a byway into chaos in forms of rationalist thought, for Mbembe, such oscillations from the "normal" need not always lead to erratic and unpredictable behaviors, even though it could easily do so as well. Besides, attention to such ebbs and flows also contests the twin tropes of stability and rupture so common in European thought. Effectively, considerations of such interlocked and paradoxical temporalities views the present as the "experience of a time…when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), the absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)" (*On the Postcolony*, 16). As with Homi Bhabha in "Dissemination" this focus on time as it is *lived* in everyday life in a state of entanglement is a mode of formulating and accessing another "time of writing." Opening up another time of writing is crucial if we have to contend with the lived time and space that threshold figures lying between "subjecthood and objecthood" experience on an everyday basis. My reading of the literary texts later constantly endeavors to contend with these other times of writing and living.

1.4.3: Democracy, Political Society and Violence

Critical and theoretical work on the logics and operations of sovereign power in India and/or South Asia are relatively few in number. Work on popular politics that exists "outside" and autonomously from the realm of the state have had a much stronger tradition, most notably that of the Subaltern School.[91] In the last few years though, the

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[91] Ranajit Guha and his colleagues in the Subaltern Studies Collective enabled, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words, a new "constellation of the political" in South Asian social theory (*Habitations*, 9). In "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," Guha defined subaltern politics as an autonomous

work of two political theorists—Partha Chatterjee and Thomas Blom Hansen—have opened up new horizons of inquiry on the connections between sovereignty, politics and the biopolitical state form. Although their works specifically deal with the postcolonial Indian context, their insights have a larger significance with respect to the questions of sovereignty and subjectivity that I explore in my dissertation.

Towards the end of his well known book *The Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee makes an intriguing statement that the "modern state embedded as it is within the universal narrative of capital, cannot recognize within its jurisdiction any form of community *except the single, determinate, demographically enumerable form* of the nation" (*Nation*, 238, italics mine). Significantly, Chatterjee makes no reference to biopolitics in this book. The biopolitical implications of this statement become much clearer in a later work titled *The Politics of the Governed.* Though Chatterjee suggests

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domain that did not originate from elite politics. Though as modern as elite politics, it was "distinguished by its relatively greater depth in time as well as in structure" ("Some Aspects," 40). It is important to note here that the elite/subaltern opposition does not correspond to the spurious modern/traditional opposition. Subaltern politics was "traditional" insofar as its roots could be traced to precolonial forms, but in itself it was an adjustment and negotiation of these earlier forms with the new conditions that prevailed with the advent of the Raj. More importantly, the concept of the subaltern was also significantly different from the history from below approach advocated by British historians such as E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm. In *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Guha clearly states that the difference between the subaltern school and the history from below school lay in the former's critique of the idea of the "prepolitical." Peasant history of the Marxist version in general, and Eric Hobsbawm in particular, viewed peasant revolts organized along lines of kinship and religion as instances of a prepolitical consciousness. In the teleology of classical Marxism, such outbursts of "irrational," "archaic" forms of revolt could only be viewed as forms of consciousness that could not yet contend with the dominant logics of modernity and capitalism. The "political," thus, was limited to the realm where subjects contended fully with the institutions of modernity. Pitting his work directly against this "progressive" tendency, Guha forcefully argued that limiting the "political" only to the aforementioned realm would only result in the reproduction of the different forms of colonial political organization as a pale imitation of the master-narrative of modernity. What would be lost in the process is the specific originality of the peasant revolts that occurred during the colonial era. This effort at specifying the "originality" of popular politics characterizes the best works of this influential school of thought. Also see Partha Chatterjee's insightful applications of these perspectives to the problem of anticolonial nationalism in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* and *The Nation and its Fragments.* Guha develops the idea of forms of popular politics further in *Dominance without Hegemony*.

that the concept of "political society" that he elaborates in this book draws from the analytical split that early Subaltern Studies made between elite and subaltern domains, there are certain nuances in his argument that takes him in new directions. The key here is the distinction that he draws between the liberal-left narrative that conjoins the citizen with the sphere of civil society, and the Foucault influenced counter-narrative of populations and governmentality that he locates as the key modality of rule in modern states. By extending Foucault's work towards an understanding of popular politics, Chatterjee develops certain aspects that remain implicit in Foucault. The liberal-left narrative is predicated upon idea of the "progressive" passage from subjecthood to citizenship. The abstract figure of the citizen thus becomes the bearer of *freedom* from earlier forms of *subjection*. Equal rights for the abstract figure of the citizen could only be guaranteed by the rational apparatus of the state. Concomitantly, a split was instituted between the state and civil society. Civil society delineated a set of institutions and norms that exist independently of the state but exist within the framework of its laws. All varieties of modernization theory rest on the assumption that without a transformation and "reform" of institutions of civil society, the "equaliberty" of the political domain could not be instituted, maintained or sustained.[92] The "ethical core" of modernization theory, especially as applied to the non-western world, was predicated on the attempt in transforming former subjects, who had no concept of "equaliberty," into modern citizens. However, there is a peculiar aporia in the conception of citizenship because it constitutes both a universal and particular claim. Universally, the abstract figure of the citizen is the marker of freedom. In more particular terms though, the rights of this figure cannot be

[92] "Equaliberty" is Balibar's term (*Masses*, x).

guaranteed if s/he is not the member of a particular national community. Thus, the figure of the citizen insists on the creation of a "homogenous national."[93]

Chatterjee invites us to depart from this normative narrative. Using Foucault's terminology, he institutes a difference between citizens and populations. As I have already discussed, population stands for empirically enumerable sets of people on whom the rationalized policies of institutions can be implemented. Unlike the concept of the citizen, who carries within itself the "ethical connotation of participation in the sovereignty of the state," the concept of population makes available for government functionaries specific subsets of people who can be administered and managed successfully.[94] Unlike citizenship which carries a moral claim for participation in sovereignty, populations do not carry any such moral claim. In contrast to citizenship, which creates the illusion of a "homogenous national," governmental administration of populations create a "heterogenous social" consisting of multiple social groups that are the target of specific, multiple and flexible policies. Chatterjee calls this "heterogenous social" political society as opposed to the figure of civil society in the liberal-left narrative. Chatterjee further argues that in postcolonial societies like India, while civil society as an ideal motivates many interventionist and modernizing processes, as an "actually existing form" it is demographically limited (*Politics*, 39). Instead what we find here are *political societies*—mobile groupings of population subsets that are different from the classic associational formations of civil society.

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[93] See "The Declaration of Human Rights" of 1789 and Etienne Balibar's "Citizen Subject" for an illustration and a discussion of this aporia.

[94] Instances of population groups could be refugees, slum-dwellers, migrant labor etc.

The originality of Chatterjee's formulation of political society *vis-à-vis* Foucault lies in his shift in perspective from the standpoint of the governors to that of the governed. In Foucault, the focus of attention is on governmental and administrative practices from the standpoint of the governors. However, Chatterjee's real focus is on how associations formed in political society enables the governed to negotiate with the state apparatus. For example, through his detailed narrative of the way in which squatters in Calcutta negotiated with the state-apparatus, Chatterjee illustrates that while populations from the standpoint of governmentality are only a useful empirical category, the groups themselves devises their own ways of investing their collective identity with a moral content. By doing this, they manage to "give to the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community" (*Politics*, 56). For these groups, there are no pre-given ideas of community. By investing themselves with the moral attributes of a community, they illustrate a mobile, strategic and imaginative modality of conducting politics. As he says, these "claims are irreducibly political…(and) could only be made on a political terrain, where rules may be bent or stretched, and not on the terrain of established law or administrative procedure" (*Politics*, 60). They are necessarily temporary and contextual, without an equal and uniform exercise of citizenship rights. More often than not, the everyday practices of such population groups do not fall within the domain of the legal, but have a "paralegal" existence.

Thomas Blom Hansen's work, in my opinion, represents one of the most original contributions to the study of the politics of postcolonial India. In two works—the first on Hindu nationalism and the second on Bombay and the authoritarian political party, the Shiv Sena—Hansen provides a new heuristic for studying the sphere of the political not

only in India, but in many other postcolonial societies.[95] Key to Hansen's theorization of the political in *The Saffron Wave*, his book on Hindu nationalism, is a rereading of Alexis de Tocqueville via Claude Lefort. For Tocqueville, democracy is not the consolidation of a set of institutions, but a political institution of a process whereby a process of the interrogation and subversion of social hierarchies and certitudes is set in motion. Democracy, thus, is not the simple imposition of an established political form, but the mutation of democratic discourses through practices that reveal the provisional and constructed character of the social world. Democracy produces a society without "foundations"—the ontological certainties of earlier systems of knowledge and belief are forced to melt into thin air. A new form of secular power comes into being epitomized by the abstract and unrepresentable category of the people. As Lefort says, in democracy, the "locus of power becomes an empty place. It cannot be occupied—it is such that no individual and no group can be consubstantial with it—and it cannot be represented. Only the mechanisms of exercise of power are visible, or only the men, the mere mortals, who hold political authority" (17). What democracy inaugurates, therefore, is a fluid political

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[95] Hindu nationalism refers to various shades of right-wing political movement that gained momentum in India since the 1930's. The Hindu nationalists define India as a Hindu nation. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) is the "non-political"—in the sense that it does not participate in electoral politics—is the most organized wing of the Hindu nationalist movement. The BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) is the most recognizable political party. It was the ruling party in India from 1998-2004. Currently, it is the largest opposition party in the Indian government. There are other organizations who adhere to a Hindu nationalist worldview and are collectively known as the "Sangh Parivar" (Sangh Brotherhood) or the Saffron Brotherhood (saffron is considered as an auspicious, martial color by many Hindus). Besides Blom Hansen's works, see the book by Christophe Jaffrelot. The Shiv Sena is technically part of the Sangh Parivar. But it has a distinct identity of its own. It is a chauvinistic regionalist party that operates from the state of Maharashtra (Bombay is Maharashtra's capital). It is run by its supremo, Bal Thackeray, although he has been devolving power to his son, Uddhav, of late. The Shiv Sena rose to prominence as the agent that smashed the power of Bombay's formidable left wing trade unions in the sixties. It gained massive support in Maharashtra for upholding the rights of the "Marathi *manoos*" (Marathi man) against "outsiders" in Bombay such as Tamilians, "Bangladeshis" or Gujaratis. The party ruled Maharashtra in the mid-1990's. Currently it sits in the opposition in the state legislature. Bal Thackeray was a former cartoonist and was portrayed by the name of Raman Fielding in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

field, a hole in the center of power that can be filled by both liberal and illiberal currents. Fusing these ideas with Laclau and Mouffe's idea of "social antagonism," Hansen argues that such theorizations reintroduce the "political" into the heart of social practices and points to:

> …the ultimate impossibility of fully functional institutions and fully fledged identities—not because of any external resistance or resentment, but because of the flaws inherent in the governing discourses: the inherent contradictions and destructive character of capitalist production, the flaws and incompleteness of taxonomic schemes of classification incapable of comprehending the richness of natural or social life, the incapacity of any narration of the self and the collective to disclose fully the identity it purports to portray (*Saffron*, 23).

The realm of the political thus emerges as a fluid, creative realm where identities are never fully formed, but are constantly subject to negotiation and change. Hansen argues that the history of postcolonial Indian democracy can be interpreted as a "gradual and circumscribed questioning of hierarchies and authority, spreading from the political field to other realms of society" (*Saffron*, 8). This political field increased in prominence in postcolonial India because of the weight and prestige attached to the developmental state. The rise of authoritarian phenomena like Hindu nationalism has to be placed within this newly emergent postcolonial political field, rather than seeking deep cultural continuities with premodern forms of community association. Hindu nationalism has to be located within the specific "economy of stances" in the postcolonial public-political arena where it sought to intervene. Politics, Hansen says, produces socio-cultural dynamics in specific forms and within specific modalities. Hindu nationalism is one such modality.

Hansen also evaluates the function and connections of violence to the realm of the political. Contrary to someone like Arendt for whom the "political" excludes the

question of violence altogether, Hansen provides a nuanced reading of the role of violence in the political realm.[96] In *Wages of Violence*, a compelling anthropological study of violence and politics in urban India (Bombay in this case), Hansen argues that the myth of the state and the interconnections between violence and community-formation are linked processes. Going back to Ernest Kantorowicz's theory of the "king's two bodies," Hansen argues that the medieval formulation of the dual structure of political authority—the sublime, infallible and eternal King (the Law) and the profane, human and fallible king (the Giver of Laws)—is reconfigured in modern times as the nation (the sacred) and the people (the profane). In the medieval era, the power of this dual structure was guaranteed by "the simultaneous separation and unity of these two bodies, from the combination of the profane and the sublime in the eyes of the subjects" (*Wages*, 129). In the modern era, the leader takes the place of the sublime-abstract body of the king and makes good governance of the "profane" people possible in the name of the "sacred" principle of the nation. Since with the advent of democracy, the placeholder of power becomes radically empty, the place of the single leader is substituted by the seemingly permanent and enduring institutions of the state-apparatus. Not only does the state appear indispensable to its citizen subjects, but the "imagination of the state" also seems to be split between its "profane" (the brutality, the banal technical side of governance, naked self-interest) and "sublime" (the state's immense power, its distance, its opacity) dimensions. Performative spectacles such as parades, stamps etc. consolidate

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[96] In *On Revolution,* Arendt says that violence is the antithesis of speech because it is incapable of speech. Aristotle's two definitions of the "human"—that he is a political animal, and that he is a being capable of speech—supplement each other. Because of violence's speechlessness, political theory has very little to say about it. This is at the crux of Arendt's critique of Fanon in *On Violence* as well. Violence is, according to her, anti-political, and at its worst leads to the death of politics.

the “sublime” dimension of the state in the public imaginary, while the arbitrary power to decide over life and death perpetuate the fear of the state’s “profane” dimension.

Moreover while modern biopolitical forms of governance employed by the state enable clarity in the delimitation of ethnic, linguistic and caste categories, these new languages coexist symbiotically with registers of blood ties, honor and kinship. Utilizing Girard’s work, Hansen argues that the foundational character of constituting violence remains the link between the older model of sovereignty centered on the duality of the king’s body and the awe and fascination that the profane dimension of modern sovereignty evokes. The terror, awe and surplus of meaning in violence resist symbolization. Hence, Hansen says, the “attribution of sublime qualities and sovereignty to the dispensers of violence—be they police officers, spies, soldiers or criminals” (*Wages*, 219). And hence also, the “fascination of those who assert their own law, their archaic claim to sovereignty which they perform through acts of violence, in the midst of an otherwise complex, discrete and internalized web of disciplinary power” (*Wages*, 219). The rise of a neo-fascist party like the Shiv Sena, thus, should not be thought of as a return to archaic, illiberal forms of sovereignty. Though they speak the language of blood and honor, they operate very much within the institutionalized framework of the modern state. When in power, they had to rely upon the biopolitical forms of governance perfected by the postcolonial state apparatus towards targeted population groups. At the same time, they operate within the older logic of sovereignty too as the party is virtually remote-controlled by Bal Thackeray, who operates as a law unto himself. Indeed, Thackeray could only keep his mystique by keeping outside the state-machinery—in all other respects, the Shiv Sena totally kowtows to the myth of the state.

The value of concepts like political society, entangled times and performative politics enunciated by critics like Mbembe, Chatterjee and Blom Hansen lie in that they show us a way out of the "negative" critique of postcolonial victimology. Instead, they offer a "positive" critique that emphasizes the agency and creativity of postcolonial subjects. I think that the strongest strand of postcolonial theory is that which, in Fanon's words, illustrates the processes through which the modes of being-in-the-world of subjects inhabiting colonial/postcolonial locales are fundamentally altered. Through such processes spectators "crushed into a nonessential state" are transformed into "privileged actor(s)" (*Wretched*, 2). Victims of violence become agents of their own histories, without losing the potential of creating habitable worlds. This is a fundamentally affirmative move that strongly contends with the humanity and creative potential of subjects reduced to the status of "nonessential" things. Casting subjects in the perennial role of suffering victims invites the negative and masochistic emotion of pity. Pity, after all, is always oriented towards the individual self—I pity someone who is conceived to be "below" me. My act of pitying the suffering victim restores my unshakeable faith in *my* own goodness. The world outside thus becomes a mode of ratifying my faith in my sense of self. Reading subjects as active agents of their own histories, however, opens up horizons of solidarity and collectivity that make me move into the space of the other, while simultaneously bracketing my own self. This is the "positive" critique that is opened up by the work of Fanon, Mbembe, Chatterjee and Blom Hansen.

1.5: The Genealogies of the State-Form in India

The previous sections attempted to lay a general frame for an analysis of the state and sovereignty in the modern age, with a special focus on the centrality of the colonial

state to an analysis of modern forms of governance. In this section, I move to a more specific consideration— an analysis of the state form in India. While the previous section extensively discussed the relevance of Mbembe's work for my project, I must clarify that by using him as an exemplar I am not trying to construct "colonialism" as a master narrative in its own right. Colonialisms were historically differentiated. The ideologies and practices of racial discrimination, for instance, were applied in a much more brutal fashion in Africa than, say, in a colony like India. This is not to say that race or the deleterious effects of racism were applied more "benevolently" in India—it's just that the sheer scale of human destruction in a place like Africa in colonial times still beggars belief.[97] In colonial India, the direct application of naturalist technologies was a mixed affair. While in the urban areas and in many parts of the mainland, the technologies of rule veered more towards the historicist, in the frontiers and the hinterland regions, naturalist technologies of rule were far more of the norm. Like in Africa, many parts in the eastern borderlands underwent savage wars of "pacification" in the nineteenth century.[98] There were massive transfers of population who worked as bonded labor in the plantations in the frontiers.[99] Similarly, the evolution of the state form in India *vis-à-vis* other colonial locales also has to be understood in specific terms. If in Latin America, following the analyses of Michael Taussig and Fernando Coronil, the state assumed a "spectacular" or "magical" form, and in Africa, following Jean-Francois Bayart, the

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[97] For a detailed analysis of historically differentiated colonialisms see Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizens and Subjects.*

[98] See the essays by Peter Pels and F.S. Downs.

[99] See the works by Jan Breman, Amalendu Guha and Gyan Prakash.

dominant form that characterized the state was the "politics of the belly," scholars like Srirupa Roy have argued that the state-form in the Indian post-colony was characterized by its "banal" essence, at least in the mainland region.[100]

Sudipta Kaviraj argues that the "political architecture" of precolonial South Asia appears to have been divided between three levels—the village, the small subregion dominated by local landowners, and regional kingdoms which existed for a long time even though the dynasties that ruled them changed frequently.[101] Above these levels were the structures of the great empires, such as the Gupta empire in ancient India and the Mughal empire in medieval India, which "rose and fell with alarming regularity" (229). A peculiar dialectic of change and changelessness thus arose over a *longue durée*. On the one hand, political boundaries shifted quite regularly, while on the other, certain basic morphologies of social arrangements—such as caste and communitarian belongings—remain extraordinarily durable. The "durability of the rural cell and the vulnerability of the massive empires" showed an "inverse relation of scale and effectivity…" (229). Thus, the political was unevenly distributed across the different levels. What this entailed was that the idea of the state—as understood in classical European thought—remained in a position of a curious marginality to the process of

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[100] Recently, Veena Das has argued that the state form in India too partakes of "magical" characteristics (*Anthropology at the Margins of the State*). Roy draws the expression "banal" from Michael Billig's fascinating book *Banal Nationalism*. Coronil's work is on the "spectacular" aspects of nation-state dramaturgies in Venezuela. Taussig's work is an imaginative account of the bureaucratic practices that underpin the rule of the state in a "Latin American elsewhere." "Politics of the belly" is a multi-layered term that refers to desires and practices of politics that may have nothing to do with gastronomy. It could simultaneously mean accumulation—both of wealth and women, the politics of intimate relations, nepotism, and, in a more sinister way, "the localization of the forces of the invisible, control over which is essential for the conquest and exercise of power" (xviii).

[101] Irfan Habib and Harbans Mukhia's works remain standard reading for anyone interested in the political forms of medieval India.

everyday life in society. Rent was the only symbol and instrument of externality vis-à-vis the state and the village. Significantly the great reform movements of the medieval era were revolts against social structure, especially Brahminical hegemony, and not against the state as such. The state was not the court of appeal against the injustices perpetuated by such structures; instead, the state was considered too short-lived and temporal to be conceptualized as a "universal" association that stood above society and possessed the absolute monopoly over violence. This also led to the consolidation of a *mentalité* where for the subjects the state seemed absolutely external, while real politics was conducted in negotiations with local nodes of power.

The advent of the colonial state changed the terrain completely. Initially, as a successor to the Mughal Empire, the colonial state acted within the general terrain of "marginality and majesty" (231). But, over a point of time, the image of the rationalist state, with its attendant terms of individual, property and society started to seep into the South Asian lifeworld. This process cannot be dissociated from rationalist governmental technologies such as the colonial state's investment in mapping and statistical enumeration, changes in the educational realm, and even the scientific description and tabulation of languages and ethnicities.[102] The state also assumed a reformist role—the debate about sati being the single most famous instance.[103] This principle that the state had the authority to impinge upon social practices was a novel one in South Asian

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[102] For mapping see the works by Matthew Edney and Manu Goswami. For statistics, see the essay by Arjun Appadurai on number and the colonial imagination. The best book on education in the colonial context remains Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest*. See Tejaswini Niranjana and Alok Rai's works for the impact of colonial processes of codification on language and linguistic identity. Also see Nicholas Dirks' *Castes of Mind* for the discursive construction of caste through colonial technologies.

[103] See Spivak ("Can the Subaltern Speak?") and Lata Mani for a discussion of this.

history. Another notable and novel feature of such state interventionism is illustrated by the "unexceptionable solicitude" that the colonial state demonstrated to guarantee the "welfare" of minorities. This brought in the language of majority/minority in its liberal dimension to the South Asian scene, and also proved to be a useful way to control and divide the burgeoning nationalist movement. Paradoxically, while the state assumed the right to represent the universality of society, the specific modality of the colonial state was trapped within the older logic of marginality. The simultaneous "aloofness" of the colonial rulers and their reliance on spectacular forms of display (*durbars* etc.), made this paradoxical combination of marginality and universality a functioning governmental modality. Through this governmental modality, some of the social structures surviving over the *longue durée* combined with the narrow circle of state activity—the maintenance of order and the extracting of economic functions— thereby producing the general form of colonial society and rule.[104] Simultaneously, the operations of the colonial sphere necessitated the formation of a public sphere, however limited. This meant that the native bourgeoisie had to be inducted into some of the institutions created by colonial rule. This was where the germs of the Indian nationalist movement could be located. Colonial governmentalities, thus, created a deeply conflicted and contradictory matrix through which society was imagined. As Hansen notes, on one hand, these governmentalities fixed the social world with "unprecedented clarity" creating the space for new and abstract-collective definitions of identity on the lines of religion, community, caste, region or language, and on the other hand, also "introduced a much higher level of

[104] See the works of Bernard Cohn and Eric Stokes for further elaborations of these points.

physical mobility, a qualitative leap in communication, and uniform administration and education, creating general subjects of the state" (*Saffron*, 39).

The postcolonial (Indian) nation-state that succeeded its colonial predecessor inherited two distinct and somewhat incompatible logics. Kaviraj describes this succinctly in the following passage:

> It (the postcolonial state) inherited the colonial state's systems of internal command and control, its administrative ethos, its laws and rules, and its three predominant characteristics to the popular mind: its marginality, its exteriority, and its persistent repressiveness against the lower strata of people, who, at least in constitutional formality, were made the repository of sovereignty. At the same time, it was the successor to a triumphant nationalist movement whose principal objective was to contest the culture of that state. Some of the ambiguities which had provided strength to the national movement, because it made it possible to draw on support from opposing social groups, now came to be issues of contention. The historical circumstances of partition, dissidence, insurgency and war, made it inevitable that the apparatuses left behind by the colonial state would not be dismantled, but actually reinforced (234).[105]

The best example of such reinforcement of colonial structures came immediately after independence when the army, called in by Home Minister Patel, was deployed to force recalcitrant princely states and independent kingdoms like Manipur—which joined the Indian in 1949—to toe the "nation-building" line or face violent consequences. The state-apparatus, thus, became the literal guarantee for the safeguarding of the "nation." During the Nehruvian era, a further consolidation of such mechanisms was seen, such as the massive expansion of the bureaucracy, which primarily recruited people from the upper-castes. Ironically, the same subversive techniques utilized by the subaltern population and encouraged and often deployed by the nationalist movement against the colonial government now became a thorn in the side of the postcolonial state. As an

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[105] There were, of course, certain changes and modifications as well. Reservations for the lower castes in jobs and educational institutions represented the most important change.

example, we only have to recall the brutal repression of the Tebhaga land-distribution movement in Bengal in the late 1940s and early 1950s that foreshadowed state-action against the Naxalite movement. There was also a marked volte face in the way social inequalities and poverty was now recognized. While the anticolonial movement blamed these on foreign domination, the postcolonial state adopted a paternalist stand and blamed these inequities on the ignorance of the "irrational" masses.

Srirupa Roy's recent book on the practices of the Nehruvian state is an exemplary work that outlines the general form of the postcolonial Indian state. Roy argues that the reproduction of the nation-state rests far more on the people recognizing and identifying the state as the nation's authoritative representative than on the existence of individuals who identify with the nation (14). Emphasizing a "nation-statist" perspective, Roy's study analyzes the political rationalities through which an individual is instituted as a *homo nationalis* from birth till death (8). The nation-state, thus, is understood as a "practical" category, whose rationalities endorses and reinforces through banal, everyday practices certain ideas of the state, the nation and the citizen that then become the "norm." For Roy, the postcolonial state in its Nehruvian avatar emphasized the re/production of four principal themes in the political field: the "diverse nation, the infantile citizen, the transcendent state and the fear of politics…" (22). While it has become a standard cliché to define India's national "essence" as one of unity-in-diversity—and this is true of both die-hard Nehruvians and also anti-Nehruvians such as Ashis Nandy—it would be far more correct to study the emergence and consolidation of such common-sense as a result of practices of diversity-management reinforced by banal practices and instruments such as wall-charts used in schools and offices, short

nationalistic snippets aired through television and radio and also spectacular tableaux displayed on national holidays such as the Republic Day (January 26) parades. Concomitantly, a common strategy employed during the Nehruvian era was the popularization of the idea of the "infantile" citizen that the transcendent state would take responsibility for. The state assumed responsibility for training the figure of the "infantile citizen" to realize the potential of "full" citizenship. Such training was reinforced through an emphasis on planning as the infant nation would grow and enter the mainstream of world history as a fully realized state-form. "Development" thus became the buzzword, with the state determining the parameters of "progress."[106]

Finally, the idealization of apolitical behavior—or what James Ferguson calls "anti-politics"—also became a common refrain in public life, with both elites and activists of social movements expressing a distaste for the messy world of "real," low politics. "High politics," as Thomas Blom Hansen argues, was constructed as an anti-political realm associated with the idea of a "virtuous vocation." In this domain, upper-caste notions of "proper public conduct merged with the supposedly sublime personal qualities that freedom fighters, according to the dominant nationalist mythology, had acquired through the nationalist struggle" (*Saffron*, 51). The domain of "low politics," on the other hand was played out in clientelist economies and popular neighborhoods—the sleazy underbelly which the notion of "virtuous" anti-politics disdained.[107] The

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[106] For a trenchant critique of "development" discourse, though not in the Indian context, see Arturo Escobar's work.

[107] Versions of this discourse are still seen in contemporary Hindi movies like *Rang de Basanti*, where violence becomes a cleansing agent for "virtuous" anti-political middle-class subjects to wrest control of the public domain which has supposedly been contaminated and profaned by the ascendance of "low politics." Parliamentary politics in India partakes of both the "high" and the "low"—technically it is

continuing prevalence of discourses such as these should not simply be dismissed as instances of upper-class condescension but, as Hansen says, must be studied as a "vital part of the prose of the state and of the political imaginaries of millions of people in India in the 1950's and the following decades" (*Saffron*, 51). Hansen illustrates this through the example of the "Panchayati Raj" system and the wide implementation of Community Development Programs in the 1950's, while Roy provides an excellent ethnographic description of how steel towns like Rourkela—considered to be the machines of Indian modernity—turned from "dreamworld" to "catastrophe" in two decades after independence. However, the supposed degeneration of these "dreamworlds" into "catastrophes" was utilized as a way of illustrating the split between the "higher" and "lower" domains of politics by state elites.[108] "Dreamworlds" like Rourkela were split apart by communal violence because of the contamination of these "virtuous" spaces by "low" politics. Implicitly the lament for the destruction of these dreamworlds became a way through which the "pure" domain of the state reasserted its centrality in national life. Similarly, the idea of the selfless middle-class national citizen who devoted part of his life to do "selfless" work among the downtrodden—the key point underpinning the Community Development Schemes—enabled the construction of an "ideal national citizen" of modern India. Significantly, while middle-class, upper-caste politicians undertook such activities in the fifties and the sixties, they were considered far more credible than politicians from humble social origins. In this elitist idea of politics

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governed by the spirit of altruistic service, but is repeatedly assailed by allegations of sleaze and money laundering from representatives who come from the realm of "lower" politics.

[108] Roy adopts the terms "dreamworld" and "catastrophe" from Susan Buck-Morss.

conceptualized as a modernizing device, the "people" were imaged as basically good, religious, uncontaminated and self-contained within their respective communities. If they were transformed into an atavistic force, it was only because they were manipulated by forces from the "lower" domain. Thus, in order to protect the people from the machinations of the *badmash* (the figure of the goon), politics had to be conducted by virtuous people. This worked both ways in the 1970's, as it was the justification given for the imposition of the Emergency (1975-77) and also underpinned the call for "total revolution" given by the Gandhian, J.P. Narayan, which captured the imagination of the public. Effectively, as Hansen says, such discourses "recast the antinomy between a profane politics devoid of any morality and a sublime culture that remains only the reservoir of lasting values in a world increasingly politicized" (*Saffron*, 57).

While there are significant differences between the Nehruvian "idea of India" and the neo-fascist, majoritarian and authoritarian impulses of the later Hindu nationalist movement that rose to prominence in the late eighties and the nineties, I contend that this later imaginary of the state is rendered possible only because of the political rationalities introduced and utilized by the Nehruvian state-form. By itself, the statist imaginary represented by Hindu nationalism represents nothing original, except for a reformulation of the idea of the transcendent state taking care of the security of a "vulnerable" citizenry and "endangered" nation in more authoritarian and masculinist terms. Indeed, the Pokhran nuclear blasts of 1998, celebrated as proof of India's "masculinity," the draconian POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) implemented in 2002 or even the repeated re-stating and re-interpretation of L.K. Advani's role in the Kandahar hijacking incident of 1999, are examples of the enduring legacies of state practices that go back to

the Nehruvian era.[109] Similarly, as Roy points out, another "elective affinity" between the Nehruvian and the Hindu nationalist versions of the state, lies in the location of the citizen in the domain of "anti-politics." Indeed, the modalities of governance utilized by the BJP-led government are a repetition and authoritarian extension of the nation-statist imaginary consolidated in the Nehruvian era. The Nehruvian idea of the state still remains the unsurpassed horizon as far as the Indian nation-state is concerned.[110] Nehruvian forms of secular politics may have come under attack from various fronts, but the practices of the Nehruvian state in the political domain remain very much intact. In fact, these features and practices of the Nehruvian state still provide an implicit grammar of politics and everyday life to the Indian nation even after the rampant turn towards neoliberalization and the fall from power of the Hindu nationalist parties.

What has changed since the Nehruvian age though is the interventionist nature of the state, especially in the economic domain. The state, till the early eighties, could be called "developmentalist," while from the mid-eighties, it took on an increasingly neoliberal cast. Neoliberalization began in India in the eighties and became institutionalized in the early nineties. The last ten years have seen neoliberalization dig deep especially into the fabric of Indian urban life. The reduction of tariffs, outflow of capital, denationalization of consumer goods, the rise of the software industry and the relocation of offshore economic ventures in a cheap labor intensive market (call centers are the best example of this) have succeeded in creating rich urban enclaves. India's "rise" as an economic power is explicable in terms of the nexus between neoliberalism

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[109] For an account of the Pokhran blasts and its fallout see Amitav Ghosh's *Countdown*.

[110] I have made this claim in my published essay on *The Discovery of India* as well.

and biopolitics. Basically, neoliberalism takes the metaphysical idea of *homo oeconomicus* (economic man) as a natural given.[111] *Homo oeconomicus* is naturally a competitive animal. Hence a space must be created where this "natural" competitiveness is given the greatest capacity to prosper with minimal external controls, but in a way that it creates the maximum convergence of interests. In the Foucauldian sense, a "milieu" has to be created where a "series of events or possible events…have to be regulated within a multivalent and transformable network" (*Security*, 20). The problem of the "milieu" is fundamental to neoliberalism as it concerns the question of how the "natural" attributes of the human species can prosper in an artificially constructed space. The construction of an adequate and functioning milieu is a classic biopolitical problematic, as the "natural" life of the species has to be endowed an environment in which to thrive and prosper. Neoliberal governmentality is predicated on the eclipse of sovereignty—the state cannot intrude into the milieu. At best, it remains outside as a non-interfering agent responsible for security and nothing else. The rise of megacities like Bangalore and Hyderabad, and the rapid gentrification of the urban landscape in India are, I argue, explicable in terms of

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[111] In *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault traces the genealogy of *homo oeconomicus* from seventeenth century liberal economic thought down to its mutations in late twentieth century neoliberalism. Basically, *homo oeconomicus* gradually supplants the earlier metaphysical idea of the *homo juridicus*. In other words, the subject of right is gradually supplanted by the subject of interest. The economic world begins to be viewed as a non-totalizable, opaque world which is irreducible to the single, indivisible point that characterizes sovereign power (282). The market is run by an "invisible hand." *Homo oeconomicus* is situated in an "indefinite field of immanence, which on the one hand, links him to, in the form of production, to the advantage of others, or which links his advantage to the production of the advantage of others" (277). The convergence of interests "doubles and covers" the indefinite diversity of possible accidents. The creation of milieu then, becomes the dominant strategy of this emerging biopower. In a milieu, accidents cannot be eliminated, but their risk can be contained by creating a free space where interests converge creating a greater common good. Coincidentally, this is also the point when theories of "civil society" begin to be formulated by Adam Ferguson and others. Civil society, according to Foucault, is a concept of governmental technology—it is the "concrete ensemble" where *homo oeconomicus* can be placed and appropriately managed (296). The state is, thus, split apart from civil society and the "invisible hand" of the market slowly but surely disqualifies the power of the sovereign.

this logic. Indian cities in the last ten years or so have become functioning "milieus." There is a high amount of capital investment, a general promise and security of law and order (except in instances like the attacks in Bombay in 2008), an upwardly mobile bourgeoisie comfortable in a global language, the guarantee of continued democratic rule with a non-interventionist state apparatus and a highly educated, trained and skilled technocracy. The contrast with neighboring and "illiberal" Pakistan is stark. Pakistan, if we are to follow this neoliberalist logic, hasn't achieved the threshold of modernity yet because it is still mired in the archaic sovereign complex characterized by a state that frequently lapses into authoritarian rule. Law and order too cannot be "guaranteed" there.

But the rise of urban and small town milieux often disguise the fact that an unequal and unjust democracy has gradually been created in India. Sovereignty in its most brutal aspects still survives in those regions and zones in India where the attempt at creating neoliberal milieus have encountered stiff resistance from the people—for instance, the massive protests in Nandigram and Lalgarh in West Bengal or in Dantewada in Chattisgarh state in the last two years. The changing role of the state in India can be marked by a significant shift in the public discourse about the "internal" enemy in the last four years or so. A decade back, the Islamic "terrorist" represented the biggest internal enemy for the Indian state. While the threat posed by the Islamic "terrorist" still persists into the current day, the discourse on the internal enemy has shifted to the figure of the "Maoist." The threat posed to the neoliberal milieu by the uncontrollable and unpredictable energies of the poor masses have rendered the "Maoist" an "absolute enemy" for the (neo)liberalizing state. What we are probably witnessing in the current day is a gradual conversion of milieus like the urban areas as zones of safety, while the

areas inhabited by the rural poor, the "tribals" and "Maoists" become zones of exception. In these zones of exception, a permanent war is being waged against an absolute enemy.

1.6: The Eastern Borderland as a State of Exception

Last year, the home minister of India, P. Chidambaram, talked about using the Indian air force against the Maoist guerrillas. Incidentally, the first time the Indian government used its air power against its own citizenry was in the eastern borderland state of Mizoram in 1966.[112] Many of the techniques that the government has been talking about employing against its internal and absolute enemies in the mainland have been tried and tested in the eastern borderlands since 1947. This, I argue, is a good illustration of how repressive state technologies are perfected in "peripheral" zones of exception before being imported to the center of the Republic.

Before I elaborate on these aspects though, I will briefly discuss the "special" status endowed to this region in India's constitution to develop my point about the status of this region as a zone of exception further. Article 371 of the Indian Constitution is meant specifically for the eastern borderland region. Article 371 has to be understood in relation to the famous Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which is about the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. I will begin my reading of this juridical document here by first making a key distinction between Jammu and Kashmir—a region constantly under the international spotlight—and the eastern borderlands. I claim that the northwestern borderlands in general, and the state of Jammu and Kashmir in particular,

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[112] Mizoram was formerly a Union territory but became the 23rd state in the Indian Union in 1986. This ended the two decade long militant movement for a sovereign Mizoram by the Laldenga led Mizo National Front (MNF). Indian fighter jets bombed the Mizo capital city of Aizawl in 1966 at the height of the MNF revolt.

figure in the Indian national imaginary within the aegis of a "state of siege" while the eastern borderlands figure as the state of exception. State of siege is also a concept formulated by Schmitt in a 1917 essay titled "Dictatorship and the State of Siege." According to William Schuerman, Schmitt's concept is different from the institution of the dictatorship. Legally, both distinctions were formulated during the French Revolution. The institution of dictatorship stems from French Revolutionary *practice*. A dictatorship's power is unlimited and is based on an abandonment of the distinction between executive and legislative powers. On the other hand, the concept of the state of siege draws upon French revolutionary *theory* (28). The crucial difference between the two institutions is that in the state of siege, no fusion of legislative and executive powers occur, at least on an apparent level. Through legislative delegation, vast powers are given to the military and executive authorities to ward off any threat to the existence and continuance of the legal order. However, as Schuerman says, these powers "are to remain executive in nature. Those exercising the delegated authority are denied the right to issue orders having the status of legal statutes" (28). In contrast, as already discussed, a state of exception is one where the law operates by suspending itself. Both the state of siege and the state of exception are *emergency provisions* with the difference between them being that in the former, a certain modicum of a legal relationship still operates, while in the latter the law operates by suspending itself thereby revealing the empty source of its origin.

Let us now focus on two articles of the Indian Constitution to explore this distinction between the state of siege and the state of exception. The much discussed Article 370 of the Indian Constitution gives the northern border state of Jammu and

Kashmir special privileges as long as it did not clash with the terms of the Instrument of Accession signed by the King of Kashmir, Hari Singh, with the Indian government in 1948, whereby the predominantly Muslim state became part of the Indian Union.[113] The state legislature of Jammu and Kashmir was invested with the power to draw its own constitution, with the proviso that:

> Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this article, the President may, by public notification, declare that this article shall cease to be operative only with such exceptions and modifications and from such date as he may specify (272).[114]

This article has become a bone of contention in recent times as one of the central planks of the Hindu Right has centered on its abrogation.[115] Moreover, the article has often been suspended under the proviso stated above. The state has often seen prolonged periods of military rule where the right to legislate laws rested on the supreme executive authority, while technically the division between the executive and legislature was still operative.

While Article 370 is well-known and frequently the subject of public debate, the article that follows it is often not commented on. Both Article 370 and 371 of the Constitution are found in Part XXI of the Constitution titled "Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions." Article 371 A focuses specifically on the eastern borderland

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[113] The state has been a bone of contention between India and Pakistan ever since.

[114] The President is the executive head in India.

[115] For a representation of the right-wing perspective on this issue see Arvind Lavakare's *The Truth about Article 370*.

state of Nagaland.[116] This article too provides autonomy to the Nagaland legislative assembly to frame its own laws with respect to religious and social practices of the Nagas, Naga customary law and practice, administration of civil and criminal justice as per Naga customary law and the ownership and transfer of land and property (273). A substantial portion of this article, however, deals with the special responsibilities vested in the Governor of Nagaland—the representative of the executive power in the state. The Governor has special responsibility with respect to law and order. S/he can exercise his/her "individual judgment" with respect to the question of "internal disturbances" (274). The decision taken by the Governor in terms of the law-and-order situation would be final and binding and cannot be called into question. A decision on an emergency taken by the Governor can come to an end only when the President of India receives a satisfactory report from the former on the current state of law and order in the state. Similarly, Section 2 of Article 371 C of the Constitution states the following about the eastern borderland state of Manipur:[117]

> The Governor shall annually, or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of the Hill Areas in the State of Manipur and the executive power of the Union shall extend to giving of directions to the State as to the administration of the said areas (278).

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[116] The independence struggles of the Nagas against both the Indian and the Myanmarese nation-states have raged on since 1947. For a good account of the Naga independence movement see Udayon Mishra's *The Periphery Strikes Back.* Also see the books by Martin Smith and Bertil Lintner on Myanmar.

[117] Manipur joined the Indian Union after being coerced with armed action in 1949. The Raja of Manipur was virtually imprisoned in a residence in Shillong and forced to sign a document that transferred power. The formal transfer of power took place on 15 August 1949 in Imphal, which had already been occupied by a huge battalion of Indian troops. See the Baruah's essay "Governors as Generals" and Sanjoy Hazarika's *Strangers in the Mist* for a discussion of the political and social conflicts in Manipur since 1949, and also the impact of this forced merger on the politics of this region.

A discourse of protectionism is also evident in Article 371 F (which focuses on Sikkim), Article 371 G (Mizoram) and Article 371 H (Arunachal Pradesh).[118] Similarly, Article 371 F and H also provide sweeping powers to the Governors of Sikkim and Arunachal respectively to use their individual judgment to decide on questions of law-and-order and use their emergency powers if necessary.

It is interesting to note the rhetoric employed in Articles 370 and 371. "Law and order" is a term conspicuous by its absence in the infamous Article 370. The implication should be obvious: the emergency provisions outlined in the Article come into force when the autonomy of the state comes into conflict with the question of India's national unity. The question of Kashmir, after all, is central to Indian (and also Pakistani) national identity and is one of the unfinished legacies of partition. This state is provided a special status and guaranteed autonomy up unto the point when this status does not clash with a challenge to India's sovereignty and territorial unity. Of course, this idea of autonomy has not worked in practice as any brief look at Kashmir's bloody history since the decade of the 1950's will demonstrate. What I am concerned with though is the legal status of this locale in the Indian Constitution. As per Schmitt's definition of the state of siege, vast powers are given to the military and the executive arm to protect the legal order in Kashmir if and when a state of emergency arises.

The situation is slightly different with the eastern borderlands. If we focus carefully on the language used in the Article 371, we find the repetition of terms like "the

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[118] Sikkim joined the Indian union in 1975. Till date, China has not recognized the accession of Sikkim to India. Arunachal Pradesh is disputed territory. Both China and India claim it and border clashes between the troops of the two countries are a frequent occurrence. More than half of the state came under the control of China after the 1962 Sino-Indian war.

Governor has special responsibility with respect to law and order…" The implication here should be obvious as well—these regions are constructed in the law as a "state of nature" where the law often has to be suspended in order to guarantee its continuance. Like a guardian, the governor of these states can rely upon his "individual judgment" to decide when and where the law needs to be suspended. This decision is final and binding until the situation is considered right for its overturning. It comes as no surprise that a vast majority of the Governors of the northeastern states have either been retired generals of the Indian army or former members of the intelligence or surveillance branches of the state.[119] As Sanjib Baruah says, generations of Indian politicians, officials and bureaucrats have infantilized the eastern region which bears a parallel to the infantalization of the citizen by the Nehruvian developmental state. A representative opinion is that of the former Mizoram governor, A.R. Kohli, below. These comments were made in February 2004. Contrary to the common charge that the Northeast is the most neglected region in India, Kohli described the region as the "most spoilt child in the country." The central government, he said, showers funds and other goodies liberally into the region—the northeast was "a petulant child who is showered with goodies but does not know what to do with them" (quoted in Baruah, *Durable*, 76). Needless to add perhaps, this discourse of infantilization draws upon colonial anthropological categories that constructed the inhabitants of this region as uncivilized, stateless "savages." I have already mentioned this in my introduction.

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[119] Here's a list of the Governors of the northeastern states. This list compiled in April 2004 can be found in Baruah's essay "Generals as Governors" (67): Arunachal Pradesh—Vinod Chandra Pandey (former cabinet secretary, Government of India), Assam—Lt. General (Retd.) Ajai Singh, Manipur—Arvind Dave (former director, RAW), Nagaland—Shyamal Dutta (former director, Intelligence Bureau), Tripura—D.N. Sahay (former Director General of Police, Bihar).

Juridical documents and acts like Article 371 and the AFSPA (mentioned in my introduction) illustrate that this region has been governed, in Sanjib Baruah's words, as a "permanent regime of exception" to the law that exists in the other parts of India (*Postfrontier Blues*, 7).[120] A legal act like the AFSPA, which has been in operation in the eastern borderland since 1956, was extended to Kashmir in 1990. Indeed, the techniques utilized in this zone of exception have served as a blueprint for the maintenance of law and order in the mainland. Just as colonies functioned as laboratories of modernity, the eastern borderlands have functioned as an invisible laboratory of nationhood for the postcolonial Indian state. A colony, as I discussed in my section on Mbembe, represented a space where permanent war was waged against an absolute enemy. The permanent state of war in the exceptional space of the colony was the substructure for the peace that reigned in the metropole. "Peace," thus, was a front for war—it could only be maintained if a war without end was waged against an absolute enemy. A similar point has been made about the eastern borderlands *vis-à-vis* the context of the Indian mainland by Ananya Vajpeyi. Vajpeyi notes that if we consider the wars fought by India in the postcolonial period, two imperatives come to the forefront. Either certain wars were won or lost [such as 1962 (India-China), 1965 (India-Pakistan) or 1971 (India-Pakistan)] and the nation must "move on," or there are ongoing wars, such as the ones with the Maoists, which must be fought to the finish (26). But the war in the eastern borderlands seems to be permanent one with no end in sight. The ordinary citizenry of the

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[120] Scholarly work that reads the eastern borderlands as a "state of exception" is very recent. Besides Vajpeyi and Baruah's works, see the two volumes of *The Materiality of Politics* by Ranabir Sammadar and the essays in the September 2009 issue of the journal *Contemporary South Asia* (edited by Duncan McDuie-Ra).

region are, thus, reduced to the status of noncitizens without rights constantly living in fear of the terror induced by military rule and also the writ of the separatist organizations. It is indeed ironic that such conditions of brutal military rule have existed since the dawn of Indian democracy—the largest in the world—but has always been invisible. The point, of course, is not simply to make the exception visible, but to demonstrate that this state of emergency is the hidden structure that underpins the everyday functioning of Indian democracy. Siddhartha Deb, one of the authors I read in my dissertation, made a very pertinent remark in this context in an interview. He said that his novel, *An Outline of the Republic* is "set in a distant, border region of India, a narrative full of drifting, itinerant characters who are obsessive storytellers, characters who rise like ghosts from the periphery of India and reveal that what appears to be the border is in reality the invisible centre of the republic." The remainder of my project probes the forms of rule and control that managed this "invisible centre of the republic" both in the colonial and the postcolonial era, while simultaneously exploring the stories told by or about the characters who rise "like ghosts" from the "periphery." These stories will help us encounter forms of subjectivity and politics that are unrecognizable when viewed from the vantage point of the "norm." I also seek to unearth possibilities, following the spirit of Fanon, whereby subjects inhabiting these regions are not simply represented as objects and passive victims of state power, but active subjects that can write their own histories.

CHAPTER 2: LINEAGES OF THE COLONIAL STATE IN *THE GLASS PALACE*.

It is the colonist who fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject.

Decolonization is truly the creation of new men…The "thing" colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

2.1: Introduction

The focus of this chapter is Amitav Ghosh's historical novel *The Glass Palace*. Through a reading of this text, this chapter explores the naturalist logics of rule employed by the colonial *commandement* in the frontier regions of the Empire. I concentrate on the historical processes and structures through which various segments of the colonized populations come to inhabit, in Achille Mbembe's words, a "third space between subjecthood and objecthood" and the effects of these processes and structures on subject formation ("Necropolitics," 26). Racial technologies of rule are the key instrument that relegates colonized populations to the zone in between subjecthood and objecthood. While this zone in between subjecthood and objecthood has been studied in rich and suggestive ways by many postcolonial critics from South Asia—most notably Homi Bhabha—the emphasis on race and racial technologies of rule is conspicuous by its absence.[121] In this context, I argue that *The Glass Palace's* critique of colonialism

[121] The application of Mbembe's insights to South Asia has to be historicized. For Mbembe, the entire space of the colony becomes a zone of exception. While this is largely correct for Africa or Australia, the case in South or Southeast Asia is slightly different. A mixed model of colonialism operated in South Asia—colonial *commandement* in the South Asian mainland was oriented more towards a historicist logic, whereas in the frontiers the naturalist logics of rule were more evident in forms that are comparable to the genocides conducted in Africa or Australia. These frontiers represented the zones of exception in South Asia. Of course, the fact that the logic of rule in the South Asian mainland was predominantly historicist does not make it more "benevolent;" at the end of the day colonized subjects were still *subjects* and never

represents something radically new in South Asian Anglophone fiction. Ghosh's novel squarely addresses the largely understudied and also fundamentally misunderstood role of race and racism as technologies of rule in colonial India. It has now almost become a truism in scholarship on South Asia that while a conscious policy of the decimation of the local populations was followed in settler colonies like Australia and some parts of Africa; colonialism in South Asia was far more ambiguous and relatively benign—the "persuasive" aspects of rule far outweighed the "coercive" ones. Ghosh emphasizes this relative silence on race and racism in his exchange of emails with the postcolonial historian, Dipesh Chakrabarty:

> I believe that…because we South Asians fundamentally misrecognize racism that we are not able to give it its proper place within the history of colonialism. Colonial racism was an administrative and ideological practice that was applied to the Indian subcontinent: Indians inhabited the spaces it created without giving credence to the internal logic of its architecture…I have become convinced that it is this problem—fundamentally epistemological—that underlies the 'silence' on the race issue in the historiography of colonial India…at bottom, it is founded in an epistemological perplexity, a misrecognition (*Radical History*, 159).

I think Ghosh is correct in suggesting that the racist practices of colonial rule present a formidable epistemological challenge to postcolonial scholars working on South Asia. Because of this epistemological problem, postcolonial writers and scholars from South Asia often tend to dilute key aspects of colonial rule such as the massive population transfers of slave labor from colonial India to plantations in places like Fiji, the Caribbean, South East Asia and Mauritius, the impact of racist practices on the recruitment of personnel to key colonial institutions like the army and the police force,

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citizens of the Empire. The gloves however came off in the frontiers. Human life was instrumentalized in a very brutal fashion. Disciplinary practices in terror spaces like the plantation reduced human beings to the levels of usable things.

and the racialization, infantalization and oftentimes physical destruction of "savage" populations inhabiting the frontier regions of the Empire. *The Glass Palace* is a refreshing departure from the norm in South Asian fiction. This shift is evident from the novel's concentration on two key institutions of colonial rule: the plantation and the colonial army. The plantation and the army are two institutions that vividly illustrate the racial technologies of rule employed at the colonial frontiers—the plantation is a "terror-formation" where the master literally has absolute power over the life and death of the slave-thing; the colonial army is both a "tool" of colonial sovereignty, and also exists outside the purview of "normal" law and order in the colonial context. Moreover, the recruitment policies for the plantation and the army also employed a racialist logic. Influenced by mid-nineteenth century racial discourse, "races" in India were divided into "martial" or "fallen" categories depending upon their relative physiognomic distance from the "Aryan" norm. It comes as no surprise that most of the recruits for the army were selected from the so-called "martial races," while the indentured labor for the plantations were recruited, oftentimes forcibly, from the "fallen" races—a fact represented directly in the novel as well.

The new direction that *The Glass Palace* represents in the corpus of South Asian Anglophone fiction has also been noted by other critics. For instance, in her review of *The Glass Palace*, literary critic Meenakshi Mukherjee, said that—"For all its vividness of description and range of human experiences, *The Glass Palace* will remain for me memorable mainly as the most scathing critique of British colonialism I have ever come across in fiction." However, Mukherjee does not elaborate on the nature of the novel's critique in great detail. To be sure, on the surface, *The Glass Palace* seems to be

contiguous with what Frederic Jameson called the "national allegory": a genre he said all "third world" novels necessarily adopted.[122] Ostensibly, in this text, the telling of the individual lives of the characters merges with an account of the postcolonial nation-state coming into being—a classic *topos* especially of post-1980, post-Rushdie Anglophone South Asian fiction. The central focus of the novel seems to be either on the comprador colonized capitalist class or the metropolitan colonized bourgeoisie. Both these segments of the colonized population later transmuted into the hegemonic postcolonial national subject. However, Ghosh manages to make a subtle yet very significant shift in *The Glass Palace*. In his email exchange with Chakrabarty, Ghosh suggests that *The Glass Palace* was an attempt at "stepping away from the limitations of the nation"[123] I argue that Ghosh manages to step away from "the limitations of the nation" by locating his text firmly in a frontier locale of the Empire—a classic spatialization of a "state of exception" where the law operates by suspending its own application. By situating his novel in the frontier regions of the Empire, Ghosh makes an important formal innovation rich with implications for the South Asian novel in English. Written predominantly within the generical boundaries of the "national allegory," the South Asian novel in English, especially in its post-*Midnight's Children* avatar typically narrates the history of the colonial/postcolonial nation-form through a recounting of the fortunes of its central protagonist. Such narrative strategies are not always a triumphant recounting of the

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[122] For a famous critique of Jameson, see Aijaz Ahmad's essay in *In Theory*.

[123] Ghosh suggests that his adoption of the form of the family narrative form—the rich tapestry of historical events in the novel are bound together through family narratives—is the mode through which he critiqued the limitations of the nation-form as an organizing narrative frame. I do not pursue this route.

nation-state coming into being; more often than not, its narrative premise is that of the promises of postcolonial nationhood betrayed.

In contrast, I read *The Glass Palace* as a *non-national allegory*. The first six parts of the novel seem to fit the prescriptions of a postcolonial national allegory—through the fortunes of its characters it maps the history of Burma from the period of colonial conquest to postcolonial nationhood in 1944. However, the key point to note is that the central protagonists of the novel—Rajkumar and Arjun—are Bengalis (not Burmese) who either reside or travel to the eastern frontier of the empire. The story of a postcolonial nation coming-into-being seems to be narrated from a minoritarian viewpoint. But the seventh and last part of the novel overturns this schema. Rajkumar's expulsion from Burma in 1943 and Arjun's death in World War II in 1945 literally severs the lines of narrative continuity between the colonial polity and the postcolonial nation-states: together they represent members of the colonized bourgeoisie who *do not* become postcolonial national subjects. This narrative discontinuity is especially evident in the seventh and last part of the text. In about ten pages, the narrative jumps from 1942 to 1992, as Rajkumar's granddaughter, Jaya, goes to Myanmar to trace her long-lost uncle, Dinu. The tumultuous events in Burma during this interregnum are telescoped thus:

> Through the late 1940's, the shadows of the Second World War deepened over Burma. First there were protracted civil conflicts and a large scale Communist-uprising. Then, in 1962, General Ne Win seized power in a coup and the country became subject to the bizarre, maniacal whimsies of its dictator: Burma, the "golden," became synonymous with poverty, tyranny and misgovernment. Dinu was among the many millions who had vanished into the darkness (419).

Jaya's reunion with her long-lost uncle Dinu at the end of the novel in Rangoon enables us to reconstruct the fragments of the ruined histories of subjects like Rajkumar

and Arjun. The lifeworlds of such subjects were totally shaped by the colonial order of things. Absolute ruin and an accruing living death, in Rajkumar's case, and actual death, in Arjun's case, meant that these subjects never made the successful transition from being a colonial subject to a postcolonial citizen subject. In their last days, they were relegated to a state in between subjecthood and objecthood; the acrid stench of being the detritus of history inextricably attached to them. Their stories, thus, open up different times of narration that necessitates a move away from the unisonant temporality of national time and also the organizing frame bequeathed by the nation-form.[124]

2.2: The Plot Structure of *The Glass Palace*

The plot of *The Glass Palace* spans more than a hundred years—from 1885 (the third Anglo-Burmese war after which the entire Burmese kingdom was annexed to the British Empire) to 1996 (the first few years of Aung San Suu Kyi's democracy movement). At the center of *The Glass Palace* is the love story of two orphans, Rajkumar and Dolly, who first see each other on the day when the colonial British army entered the Burmese capital city of Mandalay and takes over the Glass Palace: the abode of the last king of the Konbaung dynasty in Burma, King Thibaw. Rajkumar is the protagonist of the novel and his story is directly connected to the institution and breakdown of the plantation economy. The plantation economy flourishes after British rule is institutionalized after the 1885 invasion and breaks down dramatically after the Japanese

[124] *Midnight's Children*, for instance, opens up a different time of narration through the adoption of a minoritarian narrator. But it is still caught within the spatial exigencies of the nation-form. Even though Saleem Sinai travels to Pakistan and Bangladesh (East Pakistan), the possibility of a narrative continuity is still maintained because of Saleem's investment in the idea of indelible (Indian) nation space and his own position as a subject within it. *The Glass Palace*, on the other hand, severs the line of narrative continuity just at the point when the two nation-states of India and Myanmar are about to come into being.

attack on Southeast Asia during World War II. Rajkumar is an orphaned Indian boy who drifts into Burma from his natal place in Chittagong (now in Bangladesh), while Dolly is a personal attendant to Queen Supayalat, Thibaw's wife. Dolly accompanies the Burmese royal family when they are exiled to Ratnagiri in Western India. Rajkumar becomes the apprentice of Saya John, a Chinese businessman who later becomes a teak baron. The adult Rajkumar himself becomes the owner of a flourishing teak business and participates in the transfer of Indian slave labor into the Burmese plantations. During one of his trips to India, he travels to Ratnagiri, meets Dolly and proposes marriage to her. After hesitating initially, Dolly agrees to the proposal and travels back to Burma with Rajkumar; subsequently, Dolly and Rajkumar have two sons: Neel and Dinu. Of the two sons, Dinu plays a very important role in the text as he survives World War II and the invasion of Burma by the Japanese and the subsequent destruction of the Raha family fortune. Neel is killed during the Japanese attack on Rangoon in 1942. During the interwar years, Rajkumar and Dolly trek to India as refugees during the "forgotten long march" of 1943 (More than a million people, mostly of Indian origin, trekked to India through hazardous forest routes). They manage to take the dead Neel's infant daughter, Jaya, along with them to Calcutta. While Dolly returns to Burma as a Buddhist nun in the post-war years, Rajkumar lives on in India as a hanger-on in the household of Uma Dey, an Indian nationalist politician, and also a close friend of Dolly's from Ratnagiri, who was instrumental in bringing Rajkumar and Dolly together. Rajkumar dotes upon his grandchild, Jaya, and dies long after she marries and has a son, who later reveals himself to be the narrator of the story. In the eighties, Jaya finally manages to establish contact with her long-lost uncle, Dinu, in Myanmar. The family reunion coincides with the period

when Aung San Suu Kyi's democracy movement has started gaining strength in post-colonial Myanmar. Dinu, who has adopted a Burmese name of U Tun Pe lives a relatively solitary life, eking out a living giving photography lessons in his studio. The novel reveals that the name of this studio was "The Glass Palace Studio." Thus the novel, in a circular mode, begins and ends with scenes in "The Glass Palace." From the grandeur of King Thibaw's opulent palace to the decrepit ruin of Dinu's tiny studio, the narrative traverses a huge arc that spans the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial history of Burma/Myanmar.

The plot of *The Glass Palace* also forks out into a number of subplots. Of these subplots, the one of Arjun Roy is the most important for my project, as it bears a direct relation to the colonial institution of the army. Arjun is the brother of Manju, Rajkumar and Dolly's daughter-in-law, and is also the nephew of Uma Dey. Rajkumar is depicted as a colonized subject whose entire lifeworld is structured around the plantation economy. The breakdown of this lifeworld after the Japanese attack literally relegates him to the status of the living dead—he has no other moorings other than that provided by the colonial lifeworld. In a contiguous way, Arjun also represents a colonized subject whose lifeworld is destroyed in the aftermath of defeat. He is among the first batch of commissioned officers of Indian descent in the British colonial army. Natives were admitted as officers in the army only in 1934. Arjun starts out as a loyal British subject totally in thrall of the idea of modernity espoused by the colonial regime. However, his experiences with the barriers of race in Malaya and Singapore during the World War II years gradually disenchant him. He deserts the army and joins the rebel Indian National Army (INA) led by the famous Indian nationalist politician, Subhas Chandra Bose.

Despite the defeat of the Japanese and the reverses suffered by the INA, Arjun fights on without hope; he dies finally, all alone, in the jungles of Meiktila in Burma. The important point here is not that Arjun rebels against the British; rather, the novel focuses on the aftermath of that rebellion. The colonial army creates and sustains a particular lifeworld for this subject. "Betraying" the institution that endowed his existence with meaning renders Arjun into a nihilist. For this colonized subject too, the breakdown of a lifeworld sustained by the colonial order reduces him to the status of the living dead. When Dinu meets him for the final time in Meiktila, a "part of his scalp had been eaten away by a sore; the wound extended from above his right ear almost as far as his eye" (445). His once boyish face was covered by lacerations and insect bites. It seemed as if one was simply looking at the "pounded remains" of Arjun; he was reduced to the "husk of the man he had once been" (445).

There are three central reasons for framing the majority of the chapter around the characters of Rajkumar and Arjun. First, *The Glass Palace* is a historical novel. The distinguishing feature of a historical novel, according to Georg Lukacs, is the choice of the "middling" character as the protagonist of the text. By bringing together to its extreme the conflicting class interests whose struggles filled the text, the "middling" hero or "maintaining individuals" simultaneously enabled the historical novelist to represent artistically "a great crisis in society" and also to give "a living human embodiment to historical-social types" (37). The impact of historical events manifests themselves far more *spontaneously* in the everyday lives of these maintaining individuals. Rajkumar and Arjun are maintaining individuals in the Lukacsean sense. As a native plantation owner, Rajkumar stood at the middle rung of hierarchy between the white colonizer and the

coolie "beast" in the terror-formation of the plantation. Significantly, the text does not describe the everyday life of either the colonizer or the coolie in great detail. But the effects of the plantation system on these two extreme polarities of master and slave are filtered and mediated for us through the middling figure of Rajkumar. Arjun also stands at the middle rung of the hierarchy, between the white officer and the native sepoy in the disciplinary formation of the colonial army, and similarly mediates these two extreme polarities of this hierarchical institution for the reader.

Second, as figures Rajkumar and Arjun symbolize "absolute defeat" in the text. In an interview, Ghosh described his intentions for writing *The Glass Palace*:

> For me, at some point it became very important that this book encapsulate in it the ways in which people cope with defeat, because this has really been our history for a long, long time: the absolute fact of defeat and the absolute fact of trying to articulate defeat to yourself…(quoted in Mondal: 113).

The Glass Palace represents subjectivities that are shaped in the shadow of "the absolute fact of defeat and the absolute fact of trying to articulate defeat." The best illustrations of this aspect of the text are Rajkumar and Arjun. Their subjectivities are shaped totally within the colonial system; for them there is no "alternative" to it. Indeed, when the colonial system breaks down after World War II and the independence of the postcolonial states of India and Myanmar, Rajkumar fails to articulate this absolute breakdown of the colonial lifeworld that sustained him. He drifts to India as a refugee, and lives out the rest of his life as a dependent. Similarly, Arjun dies in despair and bereft of any hope in the jungles of Meiktila in Burma; leading Dinu, who met him a few months before his death, to say: "…what must it be like to visualize defeat so accurately, so completely?" (447).

Third, the fortunes of the two characters structurally mirror each other. Rajkumar's life is foreshadowed by Saya John; Arjun is foreshadowed by Beni Prasad Dey, Uma Dey's husband. Both Saya John and Dey represent forms of colonized subjectivity in the text. Both Rajkumar/Saya John and Arjun/Beni Prasad Dey are colonized subjects without history—the only lifeworld they know is the colonial one. With respect to Rajkumar and Arjun, Dolly, in the plot, and Kishan Singh, in the subplot, represent a different modality of subject formation within the confines of the colonial system. Their subjectivities are not examples of resistance, but of accommodation to the colonial system. However, their accommodation to colonialism is of a substantially different quality than that of Rajkumar or Arjun's. Dolly and Kishan Singh possess in Mbembe's words "alternative perspectives towards time, work and death" ("Necropolitics," 22). The access to such alternative perspectives makes their accommodation qualitatively different from that of the colonized subjectivities of Rajkumar and Arjun. Finally, the colonized subjectivities of Rajkumar and Arjun are contrasted with the revolutionary "work" of two different segments of the colonized population: the anticolonial bourgeoisie and the slave-thing.[125] In Rajkumar's case, the former is represented by Uma Dey, while in Arjun's case, it is represented by his friend and fellow-officer Hardyal Singh (Hardy). The most scathing critique of the two colonial institutions of the plantation and the army, represented allegorically through the two figures of Rajkumar and Arjun respectively, converge at one point: in the revolutionary work of what the labor historian Jan Breman calls the coolie "beast." The figures of

[125] I use this word in the Hegelian sense referring to the superseding of a being's animal-like state. I will discuss this Hegelian conceptualization in a later section of this chapter.

Rajkumar and Arjun are contrasted with that of Rajan, a former plantation coolie and a member of the INA during World War II.

The mirroring structural relationships in the plot and the subplot of the novel illustrates that Ghosh envisions the hierarchical structure of the institutions underpinning the colonial *commandement* as a tripartite one. At the apex is the "aloof" white master. The second level is inhabited by the colonized bourgeoisie who are part-objects. In times of "peace" they misrecognize their status as one of near-subjecthood—they are "not yet" part of the "civilized" apex, but given time they will get there. In conditions where a state of war tears away the masquerade of "peace" and reveals that a war without end is the true state of affairs in colonized zones of exception, the colonized bourgeoisie finally face the fact that the "not yet" is actually a "not ever." The encounter with the insuperable barrier of race, as Arjun experiences in the battlefront in the east, breaks down any comforting illusions that the colonizer and the colonized can converse as equals. Ironically, part-objects who misrecognize their situations, Ghosh seems to be saying, are actually much more enslaved than actual "slaves," like the coolie "beasts," who are willing to uncompromisingly stake their lives, smash a dehumanizing system absolutely, and through these processes regain their humanity. These slave-things or coolie "beasts" inhabit the base of the triangular structure of the colonial *commandement*. Two types of "alternative" colonized subjectivities serve as counterpoints to the figure of the deluded colonized bourgeoisie at the second level. The first type—represented by Dolly and Kishan Singh—finds "alternative" attitudes to time, work and death in certain facets of the precolonial pasts which survive as specters in the present. The second are those sections of the colonized bourgeoisie, who do not adopt the violent labor of the slave-

thing, but undertake alternative forms of anticolonial politics, like Uma and "Hardy." The first form of subjectivity is oriented more towards a defeated yet still-existing past; the second seeks to transform the defeated present into a triumphant future for the colonized. These counterpoints represent different modalities that possess some potential for transforming colonized part-objects into subjects of their own histories. For the deluded colonized bourgeoisie, however, such potential transformation into subjecthood is foreclosed because of their slavish devotion to the colonial system. Significantly, the major protagonists of the novel are both members of the deluded colonized bourgeoisie. It is to Ghosh's credit as a novelist that despite his scathing critique of the effects of the colonial system on the subjectivity of Rajkumar and Arjun, we are still able to retain our sympathy for them as characters.

The next two sections of this chapter, therefore, focus on the "middling" figures of Rajkumar and Arjun, and the manner in which they mediate the range of subjectivities formed in and through a negotiation with the institutions of the plantation and the army. The concluding section of the chapter focuses on two key figures that illustrate two subjective modalities that show a way out of the suffocating dialectic initiated by the colonial system: the slave-thing—represented by the figure of the ex-coolie Rajan—and Dinu. Both these figures are also the point of convergence between the plot and the subplot of *The Glass Palace,* as the two institutions of the plantation and the army come together towards the end of the novel.

2.3: Spaces of Terror: the Institution of the Plantation

In the frontier regions of the Empire, the structure of the plantation stands as a microcosm of the hierarchical system of power relations, predicated on race, which characterized colonial rule in many parts of the world. Mbembe argues that any modern historical account of terror and terror formations have to address the structure of the plantation system as a manifestation of the "emblematic…figure of the state of exception" ("Necropolitics, 20). In the context of the plantation the "humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of the shadow" ("Necropolitics," 21). A triple loss inheres in the condition of the slave—a loss of home, a loss over rights to his/her body and a loss of political status. As a political-juridical structure, the plantation space is one where the slave absolutely belongs to the master both as an instrument of labor and as a piece of property. Kept alive in a "state of injury" the slave/plantation worker represents a form of death-in-life.

If we transpose Mbembe's sketchy comments to the economy of the plantation represented in *The Glass Palace*, we find that there is crucial cog missing in the picture: the colonized "middle man" who stands between the white master and the coolie "beast." The economy of the plantation as represented in the novel is underpinned by a tripartite racial structure. At the apex of this structure are the white colonial masters like Assistant McKay. These European men in charge of the plantations were oftentimes young, but always "distant, brooding." They lived alone in an elevated *tai*, a classic panoptical structure, at the center of the plantation. These *tais* were built on "wooden platforms, raised some six feet off the ground on teakwood posts" and commanded the "best

possible view" of the plantation (62). Aloofness was the primary characteristic of these Assistants. Politically, as Hannah Arendt says, this attribute of aloofness in the colonizer destroyed any semblance of a world-in-common between the administrator and his subjects. The assistants actually believed that their aloof attitude was conditioned by "the forcible contact with a people living on a lower plane" (*Origins*, 212). The impact of this aloof attitude on the subjectivity of the colonizer is illustrated by the predicament of McKay-*thakin*. Suffering from fever and near insanity, McKay, just before his death, refuses the ministrations and entreaties of his senior *hsin-ouq* (leader of the elephant trainers).[126] Pointing his gun at the *hsin-ouq*, McKay shouts: "For pity's sake can you not leave me alone just this one night?" (85). Driving his laborers hard, the white master literally becomes the equivalent of a tool or a whip, thereby dehumanizing himself in the process. The distance between the white colonizer and the colonized population is maintained throughout the text. For instance, even after Rajkumar becomes a teak baron, there is hardly any meaningful or sustained interaction between him and any white person, male or female. The segregation between races in the plantation thus becomes a metonym of the racial hierarchies that underpinned British colonial rule, especially at the frontiers.

At the absolute bottom of this racial hierarchy of the plantation economy was the coolie "beast".[127] These coolies were recruited either from the lower castes or from the

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[126] Characters like McKay remind readers of John Flory in *Burmese Days* or even the narratorial persona of "Shooting an Elephant." If Kipling is the chronicler of the Empire on the West, the early Orwell shares that honor in the East.

[127] Besides the work of Breman, my reading of the "beastly" status of the coolie has been influenced by the works of Gyan Prakash and also Ann Laura Stoler's path-breaking work on plantations in Sumatra. While Breman's work is a study of the "terrorization techniques" employed in the plantations in colonial

poor "tribal" belts of the Indian hinterland or the "fallen races" such as the Tamils. As Breman says, Tamils especially were seen as desirable recruits because they were "cheaper and, according to the planters, were more even-tempered and less rebellious" (52).[128] They were often coerced or duped into signing up for the plantations by unscrupulous local agents like Rajkumar and Baburao in *The Glass Palace*. Many of them did not survive the sea passage from Calcutta to the locations of the plantations. Their status as mere "things" is illustrated by the following comment of Baburao's who, upon reaching the Rangoon docks, estimates the relative loss of his human merchandise thus—"Two out of thirty-eight is not bad…On occasion I've lost as many as six" (109). On the plantations, the value of these coolies was lesser than the value of the elephants—even an *oo-si*'s (elephant trainer) dead body could be abandoned for saving the more precious commodity of the elephant herd. Rajan, a former coolie, expresses this thing-like condition of the coolie "beast" evocatively at the novel's close—

> …every action constantly policed, watched, supervised; exactly so many ounces of fertilizer, pushed exactly so, in holes that were exactly so many inches wide…It wasn't that you were made into an animal…no, for even animals had the autonomy of their instincts. It was being made into a machine: having your mind taken away and replaced by a clockwork mechanism. (450)

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era Southeast Asia, Prakash's work is a discursive study of the history of bonded servitude in India. Stoler's work shifts focus from the study of the political economy of plantation systems to an analysis of power relations in a Foucauldian vein.

[128] Coolies were also brought from China. Both Breman and Amalendu Guha (whose book is on tea plantations in colonial Assam) mention how the processes of "coolie-catching" (Guha) and the "terrorization techniques" (Breman) were analogous to the plantation economy in the American South. Many of the terrorization techniques in the plantations that are described graphically by Breman and Guha validate Mbembe's point that as a piece of property, the slave was kept alive in a constant "state of injury." For instance, Breman refers to a "terrorization technique" commonly utilized in the tea plantations of Assam till the late 1920's (xx). Naked female coolies were often disciplined by being tethered to a post like dogs, while chili powder was applied to their genitals. As Fanon says, terror-formations like the plantation prove that any "colony tends to become one vast farmyard, one vast concentration camp where the only law is that of the knife" (232).

Subject thus to both verbal and physical techniques of terrorization, the coolie's life on the plantation represented a form of death-in-life. Positioned as they are at the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy, they were constantly subject to racist abuse from their white and Eurasian overseers. For instance, Mr. Trimble, the Eurasian manager of a rubber plantation in Malaya, after whipping his recalcitrant coolies, berates them by saying—"You dog of a coolie, keep your black face up and look at me when I'm talking to you…" (200). Coolie women especially were subject to the constant threat of physical and sexual violation and coercion, both by the European master and the native and Eurasian overseers. The story of Ilongo—Rajkumar's unacknowledged son with a coolie woman on the plantation—illustrates this aspect in the text. Uma expresses this "beast" like status of the coolie best when she tells Matthew during her trip to Morningside (this incident occurs in the late-1920's) that—"It was like watching something that no longer existed: I was put in mind of the American South before the Civil War, of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (200).

However, the bulk of the plantation segments of the text are concerned with representing colonized "middlemen" like Rajkumar, Saya John and the latter's son, Matthew. Two distinctive aspects stand out in the representation of Rajkumar's character from the outset. The first is his remarkable sense of conviction as regards his own needs. He knew "with utter certainty" that wealth and rewards would "one day be his" (12). This sense of self-certitude allied with his practical, worldly view of things makes him, in Saya John's eyes, "…a *reinvented* being, formidably imposing and of commanding presence" (113, italics mine). This capacity to reinvent himself and mold himself into his

surroundings ties in with a larger, historical theme that Ghosh explores. This theme is announced early on in the narrative when Rajkumar witnesses the grief of the Burmese populace when they encounter the passing away of a historical epoch. King Thibaw and the royal family have been exiled to India. His former subjects mourn this loss "sobbing in what looked like inconsolable grief" (40). The puzzled Rajkumar is unable to understand the source of this grief for—

> He was, in a way, a feral creature, unaware that in certain places there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth those ties had been sundered by a century of conquest and no longer existed even as memory. Beyond the ties of blood, friendship and immediate reciprocity, Rajkumar recognized no loyalties, no obligations and no limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself…In this…he was not unlike a creature that had returned to the wild…that there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs—this was very much incomprehensible (40).

The representation of Rajkumar here has close analogues with the memorable passages in the first few passages of *The Wretched of the Earth* in which Fanon describes the constitution of the colonized "species" by the colonizer. The colonial world marks a clean break from what is past. The encounter between the colonist and the colonized sets the system in place, and the former fabricates and "continues to fabricate" the colonized subject. Rajkumar here serves as a representative from an already colonized world (Bengal) who stands at the cusp of one that is in the process of being colonized. His character is already "made" on a historical level. He cannot understand the grief felt by the Burmese populace because in his case the access to the past is absolutely blocked by a century of conquest and subjugation—ties of commonality beyond those that extended from the limited circle of his self "no longer existed even as memory." His status as an orphan is also symbolic in the sense that he represents a literal loss of historical

continuity. Moreover, he is represented as a creature guided by "instinct." The passage above likens him to a "feral creature" and a "beast that has returned to the wild." Thus, Rajkumar's instinct for self-preservation and his inability to supersede the narrow horizon of his "own immediate needs" seal him within his object-like condition.

This instinctual nature and absolute lack of self-consciousness in the historical sense enables Rajkumar to reinvent himself as a collaborator with the colonial system, and to benefit financially from the profits that accrue from such collaboration. It is no mean achievement of *The Glass Palace* that a measure of sympathy for Rajkumar's historical predicament is still maintained despite his portrayal as a crony capitalist who is involved in the murky history of the trafficking and exploitation of indentured labor from India. To be sure, there are moments in the text when there are possibilities for Rajkumar to recognize the fact of his slavish condition. One such moment in the text occurs when he encounters the racial barrier directly when one of the British assistants at the teak plantation berates his mentor, Saya John, as a "Johnny Chinaman." But Saya John, whose characterization as a comprador capitalist foreshadows that of Rajkumar's in the text, quickly snuffs out Rajkumar's incipient rage by saying:

> …left to ourselves none of us would have been here, harvesting the bounty of this forest…It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit. It was they who invented everything we see around us in this logging camp. This entire way of life is their creation…That is someone you can learn from. To bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings—what could be more admirable, more exciting than this? (65).

Taken together, thus, characters like Saya John and Rajkumar represent a particular type of colonized subject-formation. These subjects lack the tools for attaining self-consciousness of their colonized status, and are thoroughly interpellated into the

colonial system. They realize that their immediate well-being can only be guaranteed by the benevolent paternalism of the colonial system, and they can envisage no way of superseding this condition.

Moments of self-awareness for Rajkumar are rare. In this sense, the passage below can almost be construed as a metaphor of Rajkumar's "instinctual" life; his inability to understand any historical or social horizon beyond the horizons of his "thing" like condition. This passage describes his thoughts on the fateful day of December 22, 1942, when Rangoon was attacked by the Japanese air force. Rajkumar staked his entire fortune on hoarding a timber consignment for the war effort. Rajkumar "smiled as he looked down on the yard with its huge, neat stacks of timber. It was unnerving to think that this was the sum total of everything he possessed" (395). This venture, which is criticized by his wife Dolly as "war-profiteering," is meant to be one final risk after which Rajkumar would sell everything and move his family to India (274). But Rajkumar is so absorbed in his calculation of profit that he didn't see the impending signs of doom. Hoarding everything together in his yard at the Pazandaung docks becomes the single biggest miscalculation of his life, as his entire stock was gutted down during the attack. More importantly, his favorite son, Neel, too died in that attack. Rajkumar's entire life had been built around a rational calculation of risk within the boundaries formed by the colonial system; the Japanese attack meant an absolute breakdown in the coordinates that gave Rajkumar's world stability and meaning. Bereft of that, all he can do later in his later life as a hanger-on in Uma's household is to smoke cheroots and nostalgically recall Burma—"the golden land." Like the detritus of history, the only option left for him after

the breakdown of his world is to make the long arduous trek to India as an absolute destitute.

Even on this arduous trek, he encounters the insuperable barrier of race. One of the most appalling features of the "forgotten long trek" of 1943 was the institution of "white" and "black" routes—British subjects could flee to India through the shorter and safer routes, while Indians and Burmese were forced to march through the hazardous routes of the forests in Nagaland and Assam. An estimated 60,000 people died on this arduous trek.[129] Manju's crazed statements to Rajkumar during this trek to India is an indictment of the tragic predicaments of colonized subjects like Rajkumar whose lifeworlds had collapsed absolutely with the destruction of the colonial system: "Look at you: you've gone on—and on and on and on. And what has that brought you?" (407). To be sure, Rajkumar represents a different modality of being-a-slave than the coolie "beast" of the plantation. He is not a pure "thing" like the coolie, but a part-object. The direct and traumatic encounter with the barrier of race during the forgotten long march and the destruction of the colonial lifeworld accentuates the fact that alternative perspectives towards time, work and death seem to be sealed off for colonized subjects like Rajkumar. For years, Rajkumar almost thoughtlessly, instinctually accepted the structures imposed by colonial rule. Like Saya John, he attempts to mimic the white colonial master's ability to "bend the work of nature" to his will. However, this illusion of power is predicated on a temporality of the "not-yet": the specular image of the powerful figure of the colonizer is mimicked with the expectation that one day, in the future, the colonized "maintaining

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[129] The "forgotten long march" was a term first used by Hugh Tinker. A good account of the march can be found in Bayly and Harper's *Forgotten Wars*. The numbers are drawn from Tinker's essay.

individual" would achieve the same status and position of the master. The subtle camouflage of the naturalist hierarchies that underpin colonial rule sustain the illusion that upward mobility for the colonized bourgeoisie is indeed possible. In "normal" circumstances, the "not-yet" remains a deferred ideal that can seemingly be achieved: given time the colonized could reach the apex of the system.[130] In "exceptional" circumstances, like in the march of Indian refugees from Burma to colonial India, the encounter with the insuperable barrier of race illustrates the fact that for colonized subjects like Rajkumar the "not-yet" is actually a "not-ever."[131]

These "instinctual" characteristics of Rajkumar emerge even more strikingly when compared with Dolly. Dolly and Rajkumar's marriage is a mixture of opposites, even though their material circumstances are similar.[132] Orphans who are dispersed from their domiciles when very young by the tumultuous historical changes of their time, the story of their marriage is the narrative's center of gravity that brings the dispersed strands of the narrative together. While Dolly is a strongly etched character in her own right, one of the central structural functions she plays in the text is as a foil to Rajkumar.

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[130] John Locke's tract on the education of children has structural similarities to the temporality of the "not yet" the child is "not yet" an adult, but has to be trained to assume the duties of citizenship. Similarly, the colonized is "not yet" ready for self-rule, but must be trained to enter into the historical realm of the state and citizenship. Psychoanalytically speaking, the colonized's identification with the colonizer is similar to the child's identification with the parent figure.

[131] My reading of the temporalities of the "not yet" and the "not ever" in this section has been influenced by Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man" and Udai Singh Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire.* Dipesh Chakrabarty's "waiting room of history" argument in *Provincializing Europe* has close similarities to the "not yet."

[132] Uma expresses this clearly when she observes the bond between Dolly and Rajkumar and compares it to her unhappy marriage with the deceased collector, Beni Prasad Dey—"Dolly and Rajkumar seemed to have little knowledge of one another's likes and dislikes, preferences and habits, yet the miracle was…that far from weakening their bond, their mutual incomprehension served rather to strengthen it" (161).

Rajkumar himself recognizes this when he tells Dolly—"…I can see that you often are right. Even though you live so quietly, shut away in the house, you seem to know more about what's happening in the world than I do" (269). It is in brief moments like these that Rajkumar recognizes the instinctual aspect of his own being and looks beyond "the limits on the compass of his right to provide for himself." Dolly's detachment from pain and suffering and also her ability to foresee certain developments in the future—as is evidenced in the fears that she expresses to Uma about the rising ethnic tensions between Indians and Burmese in Rangoon—also indicates the possibility of a different type of subject formation that is opposed to the colonized subjectivity of Rajkumar's. By being more rooted in the changes besetting her country, Dolly possesses a sharper sense of history than the uprooted Rajkumar. For Dolly, the connection with a historical past has not necessarily been severed in the way it had been in the case of Rajkumar. One of the key passages that give us a clue to Dolly's character is the one where King Thebaw delivers a discourse in Ratnagiri to the princesses and Dolly about the Buddhist concept of *karuna*—"the immanence of living things in each other, for the attraction of life for its likeness" (182).[133] As Ira Pande notes: "The connotations of this are clear to Dolly in a manner that is almost incomprehensible to Rajkumar, who cannot detach himself from pain and suffering in the way she, or the Burmese king, can." This sense of "detachment" from pain makes Dolly far more prescient to historical changes and accommodative of unforeseen contingencies than Rajkumar. This sense of "detachment" and what Uma notes about Dolly—an absence of "illusions about the nature of her condition; a prisoner who knew the exact dimensions of her cage and could look for contentment within those

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[133] *Karuna* signifies both compassion and detachment.

confines"—allows for a different response to the colonial condition than Rajkumar's mimicry. This should not be read as pure passivity, but as the basis for *an-other* mode of subjectivity that accommodates differently to the rigid boundaries imposed by the colonial system.[134]

If Dolly serves as a contrast to Rajkumar in the novel, then Uma represents another pole in the economy of the plot. Uma is instrumental in bringing Dolly and Rajkumar together in Ratnagiri. She is the wife of Beni Prasad Dey, the collector of Ratnagiri, and becomes friends with Dolly when she moves to Ratnagiri as a personal assistant to Queen Supayalat and her three daughters. After her husband's death, she travels to Britain and the U.S.A (the trip abroad incidentally was funded initially by Rajkumar as a token of gratitude to Uma for bringing him and Dolly together). As was the case with many expatriate Indians at that time, including stalwarts such as Gandhi and Nehru, traveling abroad converts Uma into an ardent anticolonial nationalist.[135] She returns to Burma almost after twenty years in 1929—the year when the first major Burmese-Indian riots break out in Rangoon. She is appalled by the conditions of the coolies in the plantations owned by Rajkumar and Matthew. Her horror and disgust is accentuated when she finds out the secret of Ilongo's parentage. Her quarrel with Rajkumar just before she leaves Rangoon for Calcutta sharply illuminates the contrast between Rajkumar, the crony capitalist, and Uma as a figure for the anticolonial

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[134] See Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* and Alatas' *The Myth of the Lazy Native* for examples of how "passivity" also functioned as modes of resistance during colonialism.

[135]Benedict Anderson's term "long distance nationalism" is germane here. Long distance nationalism refers to a set of processes and practices of identification through which diasporic subjects re-imagine the "national" space they have left behind.

nationalist. Uma expresses her disgust at how Indians and Burmese were being made to kill for the Empire. Rajkumar interrupts her by saying that she was speaking nonsense and asks—"…have you stopped to ask yourself what would happen if these soldiers were not used?...Don't you see it's not just the Empire those soldiers are protecting, it's also Dolly and me?" (214). Losing her temper, Uma berates Rajkumar for his rapaciousness and greed. Rajkumar responds by saying that all that Uma could do was to "stand back" and criticize people. She hasn't built anything, she hasn't given anyone a job or "improved" life in any way. In fact, he also accuses her of driving her "fine" husband to his death. Outraged beyond measure, Uma retorts:

> How dare you speak to me like that? You—an *animal*, with your greed, your determination to take whatever you can—at whatever cost. Do you think nobody knows about the things you have done to people in your power—to women and children who could not defend themselves? You are no better than a slaver and a rapist, Rajkumar. (214, italics mine)

Uma here reveals a central point about Rajkumar. Concerned only with self-preservation, Rajkumar is unwilling to risk his life to the point of death. Thus, he passively accepts his "animal" like state of collaborating with the colonial system. His instinct is inherently conservative—it cannot look beyond the boundaries of individual selfhood created by the colonial system. Bourgeois anticolonial nationalism, whatever its demerits might have been, was an attempt to gain recognition by going beyond the limits of the self as stipulated by the colonial system. This aspect is allegorically represented by Uma in the novel. Indeed, after the breakdown of the colonial system, Rajkumar loses his instinct for self-preservation and survives as a wastrel in the household of Uma, who by that point is a respected activist in the postcolonial state. By setting up a contrast between Rajkumar and Uma, Ghosh gestures towards the differential effects that accrue from

absolute collaboration and resistance to the dehumanizing aspects of the exploitative colonial system.[136] There is a potential for a recognition of one's objecthood through the labor of anticolonial politics. For deluded subjects like Rajkumar, there is nothing else but the possibility of absolute defeat.

2.4: "Tools" of the Empire: the Institution of the Colonial Army

Rajkumar's lack of consciousness about his "animal"-like nature obviously converts him into a "tool" for the Empire. Being a "tool" of Empire is a recurrent refrain in *The Glass Palace*.[137] If the previous section studied how native collaborators like Rajkumar ended up becoming mere dispensable tools of the colonial plantation economy, this section studies the racialized constitution, structure and effects of another key "tool" of Empire: the colonial army. A distinction between the states of being-a-tool emerges if we compare the "terror formation" of the plantation with the disciplinary apparatus of the army. Like the plantation, the army too is an "exceptional" institution, but of a different type. In the plantations, the coolies are relegated to the status of "tools." The army personnel, on the other hand, are crucial "tools" for maintaining law and order in the colonies. This idea finds a direct expression in *The Glass Palace* when Uma tells Dolly after her return to Rangoon from New York—"…the Empire does everything possible to keep these soldiers in hand: only certain castes of men are recruited; they're completely

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[136] *The Glass Palace* closes with the narrator discovering the old Rajkumar and Uma sleeping in each other's arms. This scene may be indicative of Ghosh's tendency towards "sentimental resolutions" of historical questions that Sunder Rajan pointed out in her discussion of Ghosh's earlier novel *The Shadow Lines*. *The Shadow Lines* closes with the novel's narrator sleeping in the arms of the lover (May) of his desired double: the dead Tridib. This penchant for sentimental closure illustrates, I think, Ghosh's ideological investment in liberal individualism. However, an exploration of this question is beyond the scope of this essay.

[137] Rukmini Bhaya Nair makes this point very cogently in her essay on the novel.

shut off from politics and the wider society; they're given land, and their children are given jobs" (193). This shutting off of the army from "politics and wider society" is, I think, an indicator of the mode through which armies in general are configured as "exceptional" institutions in modern societies.

Here it is instructive to turn back to French revolutionary theory to grasp the juridico-legal process through which the army becomes an "exceptional" institution in modern polities. Giorgio Agamben, in *The State of Exception*, says that a tripartite distinction was made in the French Constituent Assembly's decree of July 8, 1971—i) *état de paix*, whereby the civil and military authority acts autonomously, ii) *état de guerre*, in which civil authority acts in concert with military authority, and iii) *état de siege*, where the powers of the civil authority pass over to the military authority. The "state of exception" as a politico-juridical phenomenon accrues when military authority overtakes civil authority and is conjoined with a suspension of the constitution (*State*, 5). What is telling though is that, in all three cases mentioned above, the military wing exists as an autonomous realm apart from the civil realm. The members of the army are set apart from the civil sphere, and are subject to jurisdiction only in specially constituted courts—hence the distinction in modern societies between crimes committed by army personnel in uniform (where special military rules apply) and crimes committed when not in uniform (where the laws of the civil sphere are in operation). Interestingly, the "state of exception" comes into being when the civil sphere becomes militarized; in "normal" circumstances the army operates as an exceptional institution for which only special rules apply—they are literally "tools" that are necessary for the construction of normalcy. However, in a modality of rule like colonial governmentality in the frontiers, where the

exception is constantly normalized, and the civil sphere is constantly militarized, the differences between the army-as-tool and military rule constantly blur into each other. The army becomes more than a tool; it becomes an everyday institution that reminds the colonized everyday of the inescapable situation of their subjection.

The theme of the colonial Indian army being a "tool" of colonial governmentality announces itself very early in *The Glass Palace*. In the passage below, the dimension of the army-as-tool is juxtaposed with the subjective aspect of the army personnel's status of being-a-tool of colonial rule. The local populace of Mandalay are amazed that the conquering British army of 1885 was comprised mainly of Indians and not Englishmen. After saving the young Rajkumar from the furious Burmese mob, Saya John says:

> I used to know soldiers like these…They were peasants, those men, from small countryside villages: their clothes and turbans still smelt of wood-smoke and dung fires. 'What makes you fight?,' I would ask them, 'when you should be planting your fields at home?' 'Money,' they'd say and yet all they earned was a few annas a day, not much more than a dockyard coolie. For a few coins they would allow their masters to use them as they wished, to destroy every trace of resistance to the power of the English…I would look into these faces and I would ask myself: What would it be like if I had something to defend—a home, a country, a family—and I found myself attacked by these *ghostly* men, these trusting boys? How do you fight an enemy who fights from neither enmity nor anger but in submission to orders from superiors, without protest and without conscience? (26, italics mine).

It is important to note here that Saya John describes the soldiers as "ghostly men." If the plantations slaves represent phantoms epitomizing death-in-life, then the Indian soldiers in the colonial army, to a large measure, represent "ghosts": "husks" of men who unthinkingly carried out the orders of their masters. Ironically, in response to this the eleven year old Rajkumar (who later becomes a "tool" himself) simply says: "They're just tools. Without minds of their own. They count for nothing" (27). This idea of the Indian soldiers being mere "tools" for the colonial state runs like a refrain through the

text. For example, Uma, Hardy and Alison tell Arjun that he is just a "tool," a "toy" and a "slave" (281, 326, 381).

There were many, however, many instances of rebellion and desertion by these "ghostly men" from the colonial army. While many soldiers remained loyal, many revolted after they saw the brutal aspects of colonial occupation abroad. This is the essence of what Giani Amreek Singh—a Sikh ex-armyman and anticolonial activist who comes to receive Uma at the Rangoon docks—says in *The Glass Palace*:

> We never thought that we were being used to conquer people. Not at all: we thought the opposite. We were told we were freeing those people. That is what they said—that we were going to set those people free from their bad kings or their evil customs or some such thing. We believed in it because they believed it too. It took as a long time to understand that in their eyes freedom exists wherever *they* rule (193).[138]

Singh's statements here are also indicators of the fact that the movement of soldiers across Asia and Africa was a central factor that led Indian soldiers to interrogate the bases and rationale of colonial rule. Movement made them compare the status of the people that they were ostensibly "freeing" to their own subject status, leading to the consolidation of a form of "long distance nationalism." Such instances of desertion illustrate that the history of the colonial army is a complex combination of both collaboration and dissent, with the balance tilting more towards the former. Ghosh speculates, both in *The Glass Palace*, and in an essay in *The New Yorker* titled "India's Untold War of Independence" (henceforth *IU*) on the Subhas Chandra Bose-led Indian National Army (INA), that the reason for absolute acquiescence is fear.[139] In an

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[138] The resonances with American justifications about their presence in Iraq are uncannily eerie here.

[139] The INA was a rebel force, comprising of Indian officers and soldiers who had defected from the British army. They fought alongside the Japanese and assisted in the occupation of Southeast Asia and

anecdote on a former INA soldier, Khazan Singh, in the essay—an incident which is repeated almost verbatim in *The Glass Palace* in what Kishan Singh, Arjun's batman, tells him about his village's martial traditions in the rubber plantation in Malaya—Ghosh writes:

> As a child Khazan Singh had heard stories from old men of his village about the British reprisals: they had seen the corpses of the lynched mutineers hanging in public places in Delhi. The sight had driven such fear into their hearts that for eighty years no one in the region had thought of opposing the British (114).

Amreek Singh's statements, Khazan Singh's account, and its reflection in Kishan Singh's statements in *The Glass Palace* represent the "persuasive" and "coercive" aspects of the ideology of Empire that Ghosh points out in his email exchange with Chakrabarty. Whatever the motivations of these soldiers were, it is a fact that most historians of modern India, including the Subaltern School, have shown very little interest in the histories of soldiers who sided with the Raj. Military historian David Omissi makes a very valid point that just because certain groups of soldiers sided with the colonial power, it did not necessarily mean that they ceased to be "subordinate, or conscious, or politically dissident once they had enlisted" (xx). A whole history of military dissent that is separate from the domain of nationalist consciousness remains yet to be written.[140]

Northeast India during World War II. They were initially formed by General Fujiwara and Mohan Singh in Singapore in 1940. The arrival of the famous Indian nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, in 1942 in Southeast Asia galvanized them. Bose, who was at odds with Gandhi and Nehru, escaped from house arrest in Calcutta, and traveled in disguise to Nazi Germany. Rebuffed by Hitler, he found an ally in General Tojo in Tokyo. The INA continued to fight even after the Japanese surrender. Bose died under mysterious circumstances in an air crash. After the final surrender of the INA in 1945, three INA officers—Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Shahnawaz Khan and Prem Sahgal—were tried in the historic Red Fort in New Delhi in 1946. This trial became a cause célèbre that galvanized nationalist feelings in India in the immediate aftermath of the war. Fay's book contains an excellent account of the INA, its personnel and also the Red Fort Trial. Also see the combined memoirs of Dhillon, Sahgal and Khan, and the book on the INA by Joyce Lebra.

[140] In this respect, see Chapter 4 of Omissi's book titled "Dissent."

Ghosh picks up on Omissi's observations to hint at other histories that lurk beneath the surface of the stereotypical image of the British Indian army as a mere "tool" of Empire. In *IU*, Ghosh writes:

> …even as these Indian soldiers wandered the world in the service of the Empire, many, perhaps most, of them harbored treason in their hearts. Indeed, the story of the Raj could well be told as a narrative of failed mutinies, even if most were small-scale affairs that were suppressed with a few executions and then were quickly hushed up. (The one exception was the great sepoy-led uprising of 1857, which engulfed the most populous parts of the subcontinent and came close to pushing the British out of Northern India). (106)

This theme of dissent is explored most memorably in *The Glass Palace* through Arjun's tortured self-questionings, his eventual desertion from the British army, and his decision to join Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army. This theme is also anticipated in figures like Amreek and Pritam Singh, and also through the various tales of sedition and rebellion that Arjun and Hardy hear both in India and when they join their units in Malaya to fight against the Japanese invasion. Ghosh implicitly seems to be saying here that the INA uprising—a movement that has largely been written out of the Indian nationalist record, but is in the historian Peter Ward Fay's words "a true war of independence"—is a legatee of these numerous "failed mutinies" that occurred in the aftermath of 1857 (10).

1857 is also significant in another sense. It marked the beginning of the period when scientific racism was consciously utilized as a policy of recruitment. Racism officially became a state procedure. A bulk of South Asian postcolonial theory, even of the subaltern variety, has ignored this threshold altogether. However, the perspective changes significantly if we turn to military historians of the Raj. The works of Richard Fox, Omissi and Heather Streets, in particular, emphasize the disciplinary, "garrison" like

quality of the colonial state.[141] The work of these historians are important because they illustrate the effects of race and racist practices on recruitment into the colonial army—effects which have had an influence even on identity formation in postcolonial South and Southeast Asia. Although *The Glass Palace* does not represent the events of 1857 directly, it portrays its lingering aftermath especially on the question of recruitment into the British Indian army. By far, one of the more enduring legacies of 1857 was a fundamental restructuring of the Indian army in terms of the presumption of loyalty of officers and soldiers, as well as a principle of selection based upon what Fox called a "cultural belief in inherited martial skill" (147). Prior to 1857, the three major armies, corresponding to the three major territorial holdings of the East India Company—Bombay, Madras and Bengal—each fielded its own armies with some important differences in patterns of enlistment. While the Madras and Bombay armies followed the system of "general mixture": the mixing of several castes and religions in the military units.[142] The Bengal army followed a different practice. Upper castes were usually not recruited, and the units were organized around caste and religious divisions. During the 1857 uprising Bengal had rebelled, while Bombay and Madras remained loyal. Based on this fact, the 1859 Peel Commission recommended "general mixture" to be a policy all throughout in the interests of colonialism. However, by around 1883, the "general mixture" policy was shelved, and there were virtually no mixed regiments left. According

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[141] Streets' work, in particular, studies the close connection between colonial era racial discourses and the related question of the construction of masculinity. The idea of a "martial" race is predicated on discourses of "virile"and "effeminate" masculinity. For a larger exploration of the question of masculinity in a colonial context see the works of Ashis Nandy and Mrinalini Sinha.

[142] Much of what I say here about the British Indian army's recruitment policy has been drawn from the works of Fox (Chapter 8), Streets and Fay (especially Chapter 1).

to Fox, this volte face occurred primarily because of the gradual consolidation of the Victorian belief in biological determinism and its attendant ideologies of identifying warlike or "martial races," like the Sikhs, and the corresponding devaluation of the so-called effeminate races like the Bengalis or the Tamils (147). Another reason, as Omissi points out, was the looming threat of a Russian invasion from the North and Northwest. The lackluster performance of the Indian army during the Second Afghan (1878-80) and Third Burma (1885-89) wars led many British observers to believe that many Indian regiments were not fit physically and psychologically to wage battle against a powerful European force (12).

If we have to consider the genealogy of this racial/racist typology of course, our gaze has to go back to the early nineteenth century. As Thomas Metcalf suggests, the genealogies of this typology goes back to the philologists and Orientalists of the early nineteenth century whose ideas of race and essence were influenced by German romantic ideas of the *Volk*. The major difference during this period was that while discourses of biological determinism were gradually gaining ground, the racial hierarchy was constructed more on the basis of history than of biology *per se*. Central to the construction of this hierarchy was the edifice of the Aryan race theory. Certain "races" in India were considered more "martial" and "superior" depending on the degree of intermixture with Turanians or Dravidians.[143] Thus, while "races" like the Pathans, Sikhs or Jats in the north and northwest approximated more towards the "pure" Aryan category, and hence were considered more "martial," "races" like the Bengalis or the

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[143] Initially, Turanian and Dravidian signified linguistic categories. They were conceptualized as racial categories only from the mid-nineteenth century. For recent considerations of the Aryan race and migration theory and also its impact on the postcolonial present see Bryant and Trautmann.

Tamils were considered "fallen" because of the intermixture with "inferior" types. Of course, there were major contradictions in such discourses. But the gradual consolidation of biological determinist theories in the late-nineteenth century systematized such discourses on a more "scientific" basis.[144] The direct results of this discourse was that while "martial" races, such as Sikhs and Pathans, were recruited into the army and the police force, the "fallen" races often provided the raw material for plantation labor. This newly restructured army forged on discourses of "loyalty" and "betrayal" as well as on an increasing reliance on reified racial hierarchies became the primary "tool" of the British Empire's future conquests in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Another aspect of the racist recruitment policy was that natives were not allowed to be officers in the Indian army till the 1930's. Ghosh mentions in *IU* that Arjun and his friend Hardy's (Hardayal Singh) characterizations are a composite of his own memories of his father, and also the testimonials and memoirs of key members of the INA such as Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, Prem Kumar Sahgal and Shahnawaz Khan.[145] All of these officers in the British army were part of the colonized bourgeoisie. Ghosh's father, like the INA trio, was one among the first generation of "gentleman cadets" to have passed out from the Indian Military Academy at Dehra Dun. This academy was set up in the

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[144] As Gould argues the consolidation of the discourse of biological determinism came about only after a long and complex polemic between the "polygenists" and the "monogenists." For the former, human social diversity arose from different strands of biological development. "Inferior" races were closer to chimpanzees and gorillas—the only way in which such races could be improved was through interbreeding. Monogenists believed that the origin of the human race approximated to the Christian story of a singular divine creation. Racial demarcations happened due to adaptations to the environment. This view gained ascendancy after the rise of Darwinism. Paradoxically, while the later monogenists could believe in the ideal of human perfectibility through an adaptation to the environment, they also maintained that certain races were *permanently* inferior because of environmental reasons.

[145]Dhillon, Sahgal and Khan are the famous "Red Fort three" whose trial and eventual release galvanized the nationalist imagination in India in 1946.

thirties only after a gradual relaxation of some of the British army's notorious racial laws, which did not allow Indians to be commissioned officers. But by the time Ghosh's father joined in 1941, "one in every ten officers was Indian" (*IU*, 106).

Ghosh tells us that his father was never a part of the INA and instead had fought against them in the battle of Imphal in 1943. But it is evident that Arjun's self-interrogations are closely modeled on some of the revelations made by Ghosh's father to his son in the later years of his life as revealed in his account. Both Ghosh's father and the literary character were members of a privileged elite that had always envisioned itself as being a class apart from the poor masses of British India. This group were the legatees of the class of "consenting," intermediary subjects that Macaulay's infamous *Minute* of 1835 wanted to shape—a class "who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect" (430). But the encounters of these officers with the insuperable barrier of race during the wartime years in the frontier regions made them question the bases of their loyalty, and also made them aware of the way in which much of the subjugated population in the areas they had been sent to viewed them as "mercenaries" or "slaves." There are many representations of interpersonal experiences of racism in *The Glass Palace*, such as Hardy being called a "stinking nigger" by Colonel Pearson, and Arjun and Hardy's humiliating experiences at the "whites only" swimming pool in Singapore (295, 299). These racial encounters shatter the world of illusions that the Indian officers existed in. In *IU*, Ghosh describes their predicaments in the following words:

> They (Ghosh's father and Dhillon) had joined the army trusting that merit and performance would be duly rewarded, that they would have the chance of earning

> distinction by their own efforts, rather than through the sponsorship of relatives and patrons…The discovery of invisible barriers and ceilings disillusioned them with their immediate superiors, but it did not make them hostile to Western institutions. Rather, these encounters with racism served to convince them—as they had an entire generation of Westernized Indians—that the British colonial regime was not Western *enough*, not progressive *enough* (108).

Like Arjun in *The Glass Palace*, Dhillon and Ghosh's father were interpellated to believe that they "were the first modern Indians; the first Indians to be truly free." They could eat and drink what they liked, they were the first Indians "who're not weighed down by the past" (243).[146] The "distant abstraction" called the West was finally *understood* by this "band of the elect." But what they experienced in their journey through Asia was a traumatizing encounter with what Uday Singh Mehta characterizes as the pedagogical thrust of the temporality of the "not-yet" that is the edifice of Empire. As Mehta says in a discussion of the justifications given for Empire in the thought of famous liberal theorists like John Stuart Mill, the "persuasive" mode of liberal governance justified by the project of Empire articulated modalities of governance that lay "in between." These modalities temporized "…between educating Indians but *not yet* giving Indians self-government—in the morally, politically, and rationally justified ambivalence of liberalism for the *time being* remaining imperial." This was a project of infinite *patience* "perhaps even secretly counting on its own extended incompetence, of not getting *there* and hence permanently remaining in between" (30). Effectively, people like Dhillon and Ghosh's father had taken the claims of such a project far too much on face

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[146]Much was made of the fact that these officers had become "modern" by breaking down many of the dietary taboos like that of eating beef and pork (taboo for Hindus and Muslims respectively). Such "leveling" was, of course, limited only to this elite class of officers. In the lower ranks, the troops were still segregated along "racial" and religious lines.

value (notice the "enough" that Ghosh emphasizes). But their experiences with race at the frontier, like in the case of Rajkumar earlier, make them face up to the inescapable fact that the "not yet" is a "not ever."

Structurally, the racial hierarchy in the army mirrors that of the plantation in the novel. At the apex of the edifice are "aloof" white officers like Lt. Col. Buckland; at the bottom are common sepoys, like Khazan Singh, who are segregated on racial lines. But, as in the plot, the bulk of the army sections of the text are concerned with "middling" figures like Arjun and Hardy. Like Rajumar's character, Arjun too is foreshadowed by Beni Prasad Dey, Uma's husband and contrasted with the anticolonial nationalist that Hardy later becomes.[147] But the relationship between Arjun and his foil, Kishan Singh, represents the most haunting, complex and subtle part of the text. A critical exploration of the Arjun-Kishan Singh relationship endows an even more complex and nuanced dimension to the Fanonian idea of the colonized subject without history that was explored in the previous section.[148]

To be sure, while Arjun's encounters with racism, his war experiences and his conversations with Hardy, Alison (Saya John's granddaughter and Matthew's daughter),

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[147] Dey was an alumnus of Cambridge and had joined what was then the grandest job for Indians in the colonial hierarchy: the Indian Civil Services. He marries Uma because he thinks she'll be "quick to learn" modern ways (137). The pedagogical thrust of the project of Empire here is *repeated* in miniature in the interpersonal domain of the patriarchal marriage bond. But when Dey recognizes that Uma is not merely a passive lump of clay that he could shape according to his whim, he begins to question his confident belief in the efficacy of this project. The final straw comes when he is made the scapegoat by the authorities for his failure in preventing what was probably the foremost taboo in that period—his inability to keep the "races tidily separate" by failing to prevent the liaison between the First Princess of Burma and Sawant, a lowly Konkani horseman. There is a hint that when he goes out boating in the Ratnagiri harbor on the day he dies, he has already lost his will to live—a situation which has a direct parallel with the report of Arjun's last moments (454). Hardy, on the other hand, involves himself in anticolonial politics after the war years and later becomes a successful postcolonial diplomat.

[148] Even an unsympathetic critic of *The Glass Palace* like Pankaj Mishra is willing to grant this point.

Uma, Dinu, and others gradually make him realize his predicament as a "tool" of colonial interests, his interactions with Kishan Singh play a greater and more complex role in molding his consciousness. As a commissioned Indian officer, Arjun has the privilege of having his own batman. Initially, Kishan Singh seems too submissive and passive to Arjun. Arjun, who is part of the colonized elite, literally dismisses him as simple and uncomplicated. But as the narrative progresses, we notice how Arjun's perceptions about Kishan Singh's "simple nature" change. The metaphor of "shaping" is central here. This metaphor occurs twice in the text. The first time it occurs is when Kishan Singh saves him from Japanese bullets in the rubber plantation, after Arjun has been shot in his hamstring:

> He (Arjun) had a sudden, hallucinatory vision. Both he and Kishan Singh were in it, but transfigured: they were both lumps of clay, whirling on potter's wheels. He, Arjun, was the first to have been touched by the unseen potter; a hand had come down on him, touched him, passed over to another; he had been formed, shaped—he had become a thing unto itself—no longer aware of the pressure of the potter's hand, unconscious even that it had come his way. Elsewhere, Kishan Singh was still turning on the wheel, still unformed, damp, malleable mud. It was this formlessness that was the core of his defense against the potter and his shaping touch (372).

In this passage Arjun realizes that, like Rajkumar earlier, his subjectivity had been fabricated by the colonizer. This realization is vocalized directly earlier when Arjun tells Lt. Col. "Bucky" Sutherland that he is deserting the British army in the rubber plantations in Malaya. In response to Buckland exhorting him not to be a "traitor" and a "turncoat" by switching loyalties to the INA, Arjun retorted that officers like Sutherland always "knew" that the logical culmination of inducting Indian officers to the army would be the desire for independence. British officers like Sutherland "knew" this, Arjun says, "because you made us" (388). On the other hand, Kishan Singh, somewhat similar to

Dolly, is figured as "formless" and unmade—the process of being fabricated by the colonizer had not infiltrated to the extreme level. This metaphor is repeated, but with a difference, in the climatic episode of *The Glass Palace*—Arjun's execution of Kishan Singh after the "court martial" in the jungles of Meiktila in 1945.[149] Here is what Arjun thinks just prior to pointing the gun at Kishan Singh's head:

> …he thought of his guilelessness and trust and innocence, of how he had been moved by the histories that lay behind them—the goodness and strength he had seen in him; all the qualities that he himself had lost or betrayed—qualities that had never been his to start with, he who had sprung from the potter's wheel fully made, deformed. He knew he could not allow Kishan Singh to betray himself, to become something other than he was—to become a creature other than he was—to become a creature like himself, grotesque, misshapen. It was this thought that gave him the strength to put his gun to Kishan Singh's head (453).

While in the first quotation Arjun recognizes explicitly that Kishan Singh's "formlessness" may be the core of his defense against the colonial order, and also implicitly that Singh may possess a greater degree of moral fortitude than him, in the second passage he presumes to possess knowledge that Kishan Singh could eventually come to resemble his own (loathed) self. Arjun undertakes the onerous task of executing Kishan Singh because he cannot risk looking like a "mercenary" before the troops that he commanded, who by then comprised almost wholly of the Tamil plantation workers from Malaya (his own men, by this point in the novel, had mostly deserted to the British army after the Japanese retreat in the hope of being granted amnesty). Like a grotesque version of the persona of George Orwell in "Shooting an Elephant," he *has* to enact the role of

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[149] By this time, the Japanese army had already been defeated by the British troops led by General Slim. Only a few units of the INA held out till the end because in Arjun's words, they "had joined an Indian army that was fighting for an Indian cause" (446). Many Indian soldiers could not bear the isolation and deserted. To stave off mutiny, many officers executed the deserters. Kishan Singh was also one of the deserters who was later captured and executed.

executioner because only that could stave off mutiny. He knows that he has no choice in the matter.

But what is important to note in the second quoted paragraph is that Arjun justifies his action of executing Kishan Singh because he presumes that the latter is acting from the same motivations as him. He says that he is protecting Kishan Singh from "betraying" himself (453). The dim recognition he has in the first passage that Singh's "formlessness" may emerge from a *different* historical response to the colonial system—analogous in this respect to that of Dolly's—is obliterated because of Arjun's inability to foresee any other alternative to the colonial situation that has "shaped" him. In this respect, Arjun is the most concrete exemplar in *The Glass Palace* of the colonized man without history whose subjectivity is formed through identification with the master's self-image. The paragraph below about Arjun's dilemma over whether to desert and join the INA evocatively drives this point home:

> …where would his loyalties go now that they were unmoored? He was a military man, and he knew nothing—nothing important—was possible without loyalty, without faith. But who would claim his loyalty now? The old loyalties of India, the ancient ones of—they'd been destroyed long ago; the British had built their Empire by effacing them. But the Empire was dead now—he knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion—and with whom was he now to keep faith? Loyalty, commonality, faith—these things were as essential and as fragile as the muscles of the human heart; easy to destroy impossible to rebuild. How would one begin the work of re-creating the tissue that bound people to each other? This was a labor beyond the abilities of someone such as himself, someone trained to destroy (380).

The "Empire was dead now—(Arjun) knew this because he had felt it die within himself, where it had held its strongest dominion." This line is the best example in *The Glass Palace* of the deferred temporality that characterizes identification with a specular image such as the colonizer. Homi Bhabha suggests that such specular images are "at

once a metaphoric substitution, an illusion of presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence and loss" *(Location*, 51). The image's plenitude—here the image of the Empire—is sustained through the double play of presence and absence. The subjectivity of the colonized is formed in and through the identification of its presence and the desire for attaining it in its full plenitude. But, in the jungles of Meiktila—a natural space in a zone of exception—the wholeness of this specular image had been shattered irretrievably by the visceral encounter with racism. The *consciousness* of the relegation of the colonized in a permanent liminal zone between subjecthood and objecthood destroyed any possibility of "recreating" a new being-in-common. For someone "trained to destroy," trained to be a "tool" of Empire, this new challenge of subjective re-creation was an impossible endeavor. Arjun's inability to claim "the validation of the future, knowing that it…(would)…not be" his, thus, had its roots in this inability to foresee any possibility of beginning the *work* of "re-creating the tissue that bound people to each other" outside of colonialism (452). Hardy begins this *work* by plunging himself headlong into the anticolonial nationalist movement after his surrender, whereas Arjun dies "completely alone" (454).[150]

My claim above that there is *an-other* history that the Arjun-Kishan Singh story hints at will be clarified if we consider an intertextual reference that Ghosh subtly weaves into the text. This intertextual parallel is, of course, shot through with irony. Arjun and Krishna (Kishan) are the two central characters in the discourse of *The Bhagavad Gita*—the famous dialogue which is a part of the ancient Sanskrit epic *The Mahabharata*.

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[150] I emphasize the term "work" here because in Fanon's proto-Hegelian schema it is precisely this concept that leads to the former slave's freedom.

Incidentally, Kishan Singh hails from Kurukshetra, the battleground which is the scene of Arjun and Krishna's dialogue. The dialogue that is the *Gita* takes place just before the epic battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who are actually kinsmen. Arjun, the most famous warrior in the Pandava camp, is reluctant to engage in war with his kinsmen over the question of kingship. In her essay on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Simona Sawhney suggests that Arjun's dilemma can be posed on the basis of the following two questions: "How can he fight his own kinsmen, his elders, teachers and friends for the sake of a kingdom? *Would that not be a sin, and would not his victory destroy precisely the community that would make success meaningful*?" (93, italics mine). In his discourse, Krishna, who despite being a divine being is Arjun's charioteer (another symbolic role), convinces Arjun that his duty as a warrior lies in fighting, regardless of the fact that the people he will possibly be killing are related to him by blood. While Arjun's dilemma is predicated on a concept of human life that is concerned with the imbrication of mortality and desire, Krishna's response, Sawhney argues, valorizes "the figure of a man unattached to both friends and mortal life itself; one whose actions are impelled only by duty and not by desire" (95). The Arjun of *The Glass Palace* also faces a dilemma similar to his mythological namesake. As he sees the idea of the Empire die before his very eyes, he too is assailed by the doubt whether the possible victory (or defeat) of his actions would "destroy precisely the community that would make success meaningful?" He recognizes that loyalty and faith are fragile entities—"easy to destroy, impossible to rebuild." However in his moments of doubt, he sees no possibility for enlightenment.

I argue that the novel does gesture towards a discourse of "enlightenment," even though Arjun in *The Glass Palace* is not equipped to understand it. This discourse is

delivered by Arjun's own "charioteer" Kishan Singh; it occurs immediately after Kishan Singh has rescued Arjun in the rubber plantation and tells him that many people from his village joined the Indian army because of fear. To this, Arjun responds in the confusion of his pain (he has been shot in the hamstring)—"What are you saying, then, Kishan Singh? Are you saying that the villagers joined the army out of fear? But that can't be: no one forced them—or you for that matter. What is there to be afraid of?" (371). Kishan Singh responds thus:

> "Sah'b," Kishan Singh said softly, "all fear is not the same. What is the fear that keeps us hiding here, for instance? Is it a fear of the Japanese, or is it a fear of the British? *Or is it a fear of ourselves because we do not know who to fear more*? Sah'b, a man may fear the shadow of a gun just as much as the gun itself—and who is to say which is more real?" (371).

Similar to Dolly's "detached" nature, Kishan Singh here demonstrates a greater awareness and comprehension of the dilemmas that beset colonized subjects like Arjun. An active engagement with and investment in the colonial lifeworld had the potential of transforming colonized subjects into part-objects. Detachment and passivity here serve as a political emotion where the infiltration of the colonial lifeworld into every sphere of existence is sought to be checked. The registers inherited from the past are utilized as a gesture that refuses the dehumanizing aspects of the colonial system.[151] In this sense, Kishan Singh, like Benjamin's storyteller has "counsel" for Arjun. "Counsel," Benjamin says is "less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" ("The Storyteller," 86). But to Arjun, the very "idea of such a magnitude of terror seemed absurd—like reports of the finding of creatures that

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[151] Gandhian "passive resistance" is probably the best collective utilization of this political emotion. The call to "detach" oneself from an engagement or participation in colonial laws or economic structures is the basis of *satyagraha*.

were known to be extinct" (372). Arjun concludes that this was where the essential difference between officers like himself and the other ranks lay—"common soldiers had no access to the *instincts* that made them act; no vocabulary with which to shape their self-awareness" (372, italics mine). They were destined to be led and to be forever strangers to themselves; ironic given that he soon realizes that it is officers of his ilk that are actually the "led." However, Arjun is also dimly aware that this apparent formlessness is also the core of Kishan Singh's being. It gives the latter an access to the "weight of the past" far more than Arjun could ever have. But that is as far as Arjun's understanding can go. With no ability to access the past creatively he is doomed, like Fanon's colonized bourgeoisie, to perish with the demise of the structure that produced him. As he confesses to Dinu in Meiktila, by rebelling against the Empire that shaped his life and by destroying it, he also destroyed himself. Finally in an ironic and grotesque inversion of the Arjun-Krishna relationship, he performs his "duty" by executing the "charioteer" who could have enlightened him: Kishan Singh. The possibility of the knowledge of a different historical response to the colonial *cul-de-sac* is thus tragically foreclosed in this strand of the narrative.

2.5: "Fighting Back": The Revolutionary Work of the Slave

While taking Uma for a tour around the Morningside Estate Plantation in Malaya; Matthew, Saya John's son and Morningside's proprietor, suddenly makes a strange remark that sometimes certain rubber trees "fight back" by refusing to yield any latex.[152]

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[152] While natives and Eurasians became owners of plantations, they still were hemmed in by colonial racist practices. The best example of this comes when Alison, Matthew's daughter, is not allowed to leave on a "whites only" evacuation train that transports Europeans from Malaya during the Japanese attack in 1941. Although Alison's deceased mother, Elsa, was a white American, she is still considered half-caste because of her Chinese origins from her father's side.

Uma is astonished by this remark. In response to this, Matthew tells her about the local belief that every rubber tree was "paid for with an Indian life" and then goes on to say:

> This is my little empire, Uma. I made it. I took it from the jungle and molded it into what I wanted it to be. Now that its mine, I take good care of it. There's law, there's order, everything is well run. Looking at it, you would think everything here is tame, domesticated, that all the parts have been fitted carefully together. But it's when you make the whole machine work that you discover that every bit of it is fighting back. It has nothing to do with me or with rights and wrongs: I could make this the best-run little kingdom in the world and it would still fight back (202).

Occurring when we are roughly one-thirds of our way into the text, this passage is probably the best allegory of the master-slave dialectic in the novel. Matthew, the plantation owner can be likened to the colonist, the master's consciousness, who pits his desire against that of another, defeats it and attains recognition as the master from his antagonist whom he then bends to his will. The slave here is likened to natural entities—the rubber trees—that have to be tamed and domesticated. But the master's weariness comes from the fact that the natural beings continually fight back. The slave's consciousness resists sealing itself into this situation of objecthood. Of course, Matthew is utterly wrong in saying that this process of fighting back "has nothing to do with me or with rights and wrongs"—he naturalizes a historical condition, thus absolving himself of culpability and through that process restoring faith in his "civilizing mission." Once again the novel illustrates that a "middling" semi-native like Matthew ventriloquizes the inexorable logic of colonialism's mission of bringing and maintaining law and order in lawless "states of nature."

However, the text also attests to the possibility of a very different subjective response to the constricting boundaries of the racist colonial structure, which emerges

from the work of the slave-thing: the coolie "beast." The work of the slave illustrates the clear distinctions between the human, the animal and the thing. I believe that Frantz Fanon's re-reading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic in *White Skins, Black Masks* provides the key for understanding this "work" of the slave-thing. For Hegel, man can only become *human* if he can transcend bare natural existence by directing his *desire* to be recognized towards another being.[153] Each contestant in the fray must be willing to risk his life to be recognized by the other. At the same time though, this contest must not lead to the death of either party because it is only when both parties live that the circuit of recognition can be completed. Thus this dialectical movement predicates an absolute reciprocity where both parties have to go beyond the level of their "being-for-itself" and also apprehend the existence of the other as a natural and more than natural reality. Thus, this dialectical process of mutual recognition leads to a universal consciousness of self—it is only through this movement that subjective certainty can be transformed into objective truth. If this risk of death is not assumed, then the becoming-human remains entrapped within the boundaries of its own animal nature. For Hegel, the animal is essentially conservative as it is caught within its instinctual life and cannot envisage any possibility beyond that horizon. Rajkumar and even Arjun, to an extent, are "animals" in this sense. They lack the tools to attain self-consciousness because of their inherently conservative drive towards self-preservation within the boundaries of the colonial system. They are only apparently free—a state that is guaranteed by the existence of the system. But once this colonial lifeworld collapses, there is no alternative for them. Geared towards self-preservation within the system, such subjects cannot adapt to the breakdown

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[153] See Alexandre Kojève for a commentary on the Hegelian dialectic of mutual recognition.

of that lifeworld and the formation of the new one. Hence they either become redundant (Rajkumar) or are totally destroyed (Arjun).

Fanon, however, adds a further angle to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic when it is transposed to the colonial context. For Hegel, there are essentially two terms in the dialectic: the human and the animal. Fanon introduces a third term into the configuration: the thing. For Fanon there can be no mutual recognition in the colonial encounter because one day the "…White Master, *without conflict*, recognized the…slave" (*Black Skins*, 217). This cannot be mutual recognition, because the White Master decided to recognize the slave as human from without: there was no fight to death for the slave to press his desire to be recognized as human to the Master. The Master in this colonial dialectic is not like the master described by Hegel. For Hegel, Fanon says, "there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work" (*Black Skins*, 220). The master here can only behave with an attitude of benign paternalism; he condescends to recognize the slave as a human (if at all). The slave does not gain an objective consciousness of his/her own humanity. S/he is far less independent than the Hegelian slave, who has a chance to discover his/her own humanity by losing himself/himself in the object and discovering the realm of freedom through labor. Instead, as Fanon says—"In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns towards the object…Here the slave turns towards the master and abandons the object" (*Black Skins*, 221). The Hegelian slave creates a human world by appropriating the object through work; the slave in the colonies, by turning towards the master, abandons any possibility for creating a human world apart from the one the master has created. And in this world, the slave can only exist as an animal, or even worse, thing-like

reality. Though trapped in the human body, the colonized slave thus is reduced to the level of an unthinking, sensual being, or worse, to a thing that can be instrumentally utilized.[154]

To be the colonized, therefore, in Mbembe's words, is to be reduced to the status of things. The colonized cannot exist as a self; its existence is facticity in its purest, rawest state. If the colonized cannot shake free of their turn towards the master, they will be reduced purely and simply to what Mbembe calls "the universe of immediate things" (*On the Postcolony*, 187). They are things who can be made superfluous when needed, but who can occasionally become "things of value." Think here for instance of the predicament of Rajkumar. For years, he lives under the illusion that he is a *person* within the confines of the colonial system. But the breakdown of the system shows him that this belief is all a lie—he is a disposable thing who now has no value. Similarly, the Indian soldiers who are the "tools" of Empire making find out traumatically, in the wake of the Japanese defeat and the surrender of the British army, that they are mere disposable objects.[155]

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[154] Malcolm X's distinction between the "house negro" (the domesticated beast) and the "field negro" (pure untamed nature) is instructive here. See his famous speech titled "Message to the Grassroots."

[155] Significantly, Ghosh has suggested in his interviews and conversations that Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Kshudhito Pashan" (The Hunger of Stones), which he translated, was an important influence in writing the sections in *The Glass Palace* on the INA. In his conversation with Chakrabarty, he says—"…the constant refrain (in Tagore's story)…of 'It's all a lie"…is very explicitly a fable for switched identities (the frequent change of clothes etc.). Despite appearances, I think Tagore was always struggling to repress the very vision that blinded the followers of the INA in Malaya—and this struggle surfaces in his work in the constant refrain of 'It's all a lie'. This was precisely what the Indian soldiers said to themselves in Malaya: 'it's all a lie', the difference being that they had to discover the fragility of their accommodations on the battlefield" (*Radical History*, 17).

For Fanon it is only when the former slave desires to "*make himself recognized*" through conflict, that the process of liberation can be initiated (217). In *The Glass Palace*, the clearest example of this liberatory work of the slave occurs towards the end as Dinu recounts the last few years of World War II to Jaya in Rangoon. After the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia and East India, and their own encounters with the barriers of race, many Indian soldiers in the British army had defected to the INA and fought alongside the Japanese. The rebels were joined by a large number of former coolies who wanted nothing else but the absolute destruction of the plantation system. Initially, the rebel soldiers hesitated to admit the coolies. Formed by the racial hierarchies that underpinned the recruitment policies of the colonial British army, the rebel Indian soldiers were skeptical about the fighting qualities of the coolies. But eventually they were forced to admit them. Most of the coolies were Tamils, who were not considered to be a "martial" race in the Indian context. After their defeat at the Battle of Imphal (1943), the Japanese began retreating from India and Southeast Asia. The INA was fighting a losing battle as they became increasingly hemmed in the dense tropical jungles of Nagaland and Burma. Unable to bear the destitution and the hardship, many soldiers deserted the INA ranks. One segment that did not desert, however, were the coolies, who proved themselves to be much "hardier and more dedicated than the professionals" (448). The plantation recruits laughed at the "pampered lives" of the professional Indian soldiers and about the way they had been "fed and fattened by their colonial masters" (449). They realized that in the end their struggle wasn't even the same as that of the professional soldiers—"they weren't even fighting the same war" (449). Although they were eventually defeated, many of them being summarily tortured and executed upon capture,

their subject-formation illustrates a different response by the colonized to the colonial situation. The coolies initiate the process of turning away from the master through their fight to the death; Rajkumar and many of the elite Indian soldiers did not. Therein, Ghosh seems to suggest, lay the essential difference between their "animal" and "thing" like natures.

2.6: Moments of Joy in the Shadow of Defeat

Rajkumar's second son, Dinu, plays an important role in binding the plot and the Arjun subplot of *The Glass Palace* together. From the beginning, Rajkumar and his younger son, Dinu, are depicted as distant from each other. Indeed, Rajkumar was "nervous and tentative" at the prospect that his progeny could be so weak and frail (180). In his childhood, Dinu had developed a limp because of polio. Because of his disability, Dinu had grown up as a withdrawn child, although for Dolly he seemed "years older in maturity in self-possession" (178). As he grows older, Dinu, who had affiliations with the socialist cause, develops ideological differences with his father. But there is one point when father and son came together—they had both volunteered to be Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens for Rangoon in the days preceding the Japanese occupation of Burma. But the manner in which they arrive at the same positions only serves to accentuate the difference in their motivations:

> The outbreak of war had brought them through opposite routes to a shared position: Rajkumar had come to be convinced that in the absence of the British Empire, Burma's economy would collapse. Dinu's support for the Allied war effort was rooted in other kinds of soil: in his leftist sympathies; in his support for the resistance movements in China and Spain; in his admiration of Charlie Chaplin and Robert Capa. Unlike his father, he was not a believer in colonialism—indeed, his antipathy to British rule was surpassed only by his loathing of European Fascism and Japanese militarism. (266)

To be sure, Dinu is often doctrinaire in his socialist beliefs as his conversations with Uma and his wife, Daw Thin Thin Aye, show (256, 462). But as the narrative progesses, Dinu's characterization becomes more complex than a simple allegorical representation of a social internationalist viewpoint (critics like Mondal read him in that way). His encounters with Arjun at Meiktila are key precipitants in this change. Initially, Dinu tended to think of Arjun as a "friendly and bumbling pet" who was "barely capable of coherent utterance" (240). But when he meets him during Neel and Manju's wedding, he becomes aware of a different facet of Arjun's character: his capacity for "imaginative precision" (241). Things sour between them in Sungei Pattani when for a brief moment they become rivals for Alison's love. But Alison's death and their subsequent encounter in drastically different circumstances in the jungle at Meiktila makes Dinu reevaluate Arjun once again. During their conversation Arjun tells him that the Japanese surrender meant absolutely nothing to him. He joined an Indian army that had been fighting for an Indian cause, and that the war was not over for him. Of course, this last display of defiance is immediately followed by his despairing comment about the Empire staining all their lives. However, Dinu does not pity Arjun in this moment when he confesses the absolute nature of his defeat; rather, he feels compassion and realizes that even in this despairing statement, there was a "sort of triumph…a courage—that value of which he did not wish to diminish by arguing" (447). After this encounter with Arjun, Dinu felt "profoundly shaken." For the first time,

> …he began to understand the irreducible reality of the decision that Arjun had made; he saw why so many others whom he'd known—men such as Aung San—had made the same choices. He began to doubt his own absolute condemnation of them. How does one judge a person who claims to act on behalf of a subordinated people, a country? On what grounds can the truth of such a claim be established or refuted?...If the people of India chose to regard Arjun as a hero; if Burma saw

> Aung San as her savior—was it possible for someone such as him, Dinu, to assume that there was a greater reality, a sweep of history, that could be invoked to refute these beliefs? He could no longer be confident that this was so (447).

Encounters such as the above impel Dinu to modify the skepticism engendered by the absolutist notion of politics that he upholds earlier. This does not mean that Dinu jettisons his left wing sympathies. But, his gradual awareness and appreciation of other forms of living and being human lead to a more inclusive notion of politics. It would not be too far off the mark to claim that the text seems to uphold such a capacious vision of politics above everything else.

That this expansive notion of politics can also be a guide to living in dark times is illustrated by the last section of the text when Jaya finally meets Dinu in postcolonial Myanmar. In his narration to Jaya in Rangoon, Dinu covers the interim period between the end of colonialism in Burma and the consolidation of authoritarian rule in the renamed Myanmar. Dinu stays behind in Burma after Rajkumar and Dolly trek to India as refugees. He never makes contact with Rajkumar again. Dolly came to Myanmar from India to become a Buddhist nun. Dinu and Dolly meet once before Dolly's death in 1949. Dinu makes a living as a photographer in the post war years in Rangoon, living through the assassination of Aung San in 1945 and the takeover of power by General Ne Win in 1962. He marries a student named Maung Thin Thin Aye, who later became a famous writer known as Daw Thin Thin Aye.[156] Both Dinu and his wife were incarcerated by the Myanmarese army for a while for so-called dissident activity. While his wife died in

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[156] In the Burmese naming system younger women are addressed as "Maung" and older women are addressed as "Daw." Maung Thin Thin Aye thus becomes Daw Thin Thin Aye when older.

captivity, the aged Dinu was finally released in the mid-eighties. Dinu eked out a humble existence by giving lessons in photography in his residence which he renamed "The Glass Palace Studio."

Besides his life-changing encounter with Arjun in the forests in Meiktila, Dinu's changing relationship to photography becomes a useful way of mapping the shifts in his characterization. During his youth, Dinu is represented as "detached." Dolly, who is a painter, believes that Dinu's interest in photography grew out of "his childhood habit of looking over her shoulder while she sketched" (186). She encouraged this early interest of Dinu's in photography because she felt that it would draw Dinu out of his self-absorption. Over time this self-absorption hardens into an "analytic guardedness" (241). The place where he really felt comfortable was the "murky light and fetid closeness" of the photographic darkroom. At the same time, he also felt "humbled" by people who could observe things with minute precision and later recall them vividly. This is one of the major reasons for his re-appraisal of Arjun when he meets him during the time of Neel and Manju's wedding.

The full implications of these traits—which also have larger symbolic resonances—are drawn out in his encounters with Alison at the *chandis* at Gunung Jerai. After making love to Alison in the ruins, Dinu sits back and looks at her as if she were framed in a photograph—"…the horizontal planes of her forehead, her eyebrows and her mouth perfectly balanced by the verticals of her straight, black hair and the translucent filaments that hung suspended from her lips" (309). The inordinate time he spends in silently contemplating his work makes Alison impatient. Exasperated, she reproaches him

by saying that he was far more interested in looking at her through his camera. She felt as if she were just a "thing" for his camera to focus on. Dinu responds by saying:

> I see more of you in this way than I would in any other…If I were to talk to you for hours, I wouldn't know you any better. I don't say that this is better than talking…it's just my way—my way of understanding…You mustn't think that it's easy for me…I never do portraits; they frighten me…the *intimacy*…being in someone's company that long—I've never wanted to do them (310, italics mine).

To do portraits would entail intimacy, which Dinu's "analytic" nature was deeply suspicious of. The Cartesian perspective through which experience is distanced and turned into a way of seeing and knowing is lost. And since this is what gives Dinu his sense of self, it is something that he is very hesitant to give up.

Of course in the course of the subsequent events Dinu does manage to see and understand Alison without the camera coming in between. Distance slowly turns into intimacy. Though he briefly thinks that he has lost her to Arjun, eventually both understand the relative merits and strengths of the other. However, their brief moments of bliss are cut short by the tragic deaths of both Alison and Saya John at the hands of the Japanese. This tragic event and the tumultuous political changes that occur during and after World War II in Myanmar push any reference to photography out of the frame of the text, but it re-emerges when Jaya traces Dinu back to the decrepit Glass Palace Studio in Yangon. When she sees him for the first time, he is delivering a lecture in Burmese to a group of interested enthusiasts about "Edward Weston, Eugène Atget, Brassaï"—famous names from the history of photography (435). During their conversation later, Dinu reveals that many among his audience were children of high officials in the Myamarese military junta. Jaya is shocked having already experienced the repressive

rules of the regime first hand.[157] She asks Dinu whether such large gatherings are not proscribed by the junta. She is even more astounded to hear that Dinu encourages the people who come to his weekly gatherings to speak freely—"even of simple things—for them this is an adventure, a discovery…" (438). She asks Dinu whether this does not incur the wrath of the junta in any way? What if there were spies among his audience? Dinu acknowledges the possibility and adds:

> You have to understand that their brutality is of a strangely medieval ilk…they are not so advanced as to be able to perceive a threat in what we do in this room… when we talk of politics it is in ways that they cannot follow…we don't say things that they can pin down…in Myanmar nothing that is worth saying can be spoken in ordinary language…everyone learns other means of communication, secret languages. Today, for example, I was talking about Edward Weston's theory of previsualization…that you must see the truth of the subject in your mind…after that the camera is incidental, unimportant…If you know the truth of what you see, the rest is mere execution. Nothing can come between you and your imagined desire…No camera, no lens…To that list I could have added: No band of criminals like this regime…here in the Glass Palace photography too is a secret language (438).

By this time, of course, Dinu is a frail old man who had just been released from prison by the regime, while Daw Thin Thin Aye has already died because of the inhuman treatment that she had undergone while she was incarcerated.[158] What he finds now in the discourse on photography is a secret language, a "code" or language of political solidarity beyond the repressive apparatus of the authoritarian Myanmarese state. While part of this secrecy could possibly be attributed to his own precarious position as a dissident activist within the Myanmarese regime, it would also not be too far-fetched to

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[157] For more on the repressive regime in Myanmar, see Ghosh's *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma.*

[158] The portrait of Dinu in his later years is closely based on the Burmese dissident writer, Mya Than Tint. See "The March of the Novel through History" (108-109).

speculate that the changed valence he endows to photography emerges from the transformations in his worldview that occur through his dialogical interactions with Uma, Arjun, Alison and Ma Thin Thin Aye. Notice carefully what he says here: "Nothing can come between you and your imagined desire." This is a huge shift from the persona who tells Alison that he prefers the detached view from behind the camera because he is afraid of intimacy. It also brings to fruition the "humbling" insight that he garners from Arjun that imaginative precision can be a way of seeing the truth of the subject in the mind rendering the "objective" apparatus merely incidental.

In the Ghosh-Chakrabarty exchange, the latter mentions that the problem of how "we live fragments of joyful existence within structures of domination" interested him a great deal as a scholar (*Radical History*, 156). I suggest that the discourse of photography in relation to Dinu in *The Glass Palace* is an example of living "fragments of joyful existence within structures of domination." But these brief subjective moments of joy—the sovereignty that Georges Bataille's work is concerned with—also have larger political dimensions in *The Glass Palace*. As we have seen, it becomes a coded political language for a form of collective action against a repressive regime. The role of "secret languages," gossip, laughter and innuendo as forms of resistance against totalitarian and authoritarian regimes is, of course, a well known topic.[159] Dinu and his student's "secret language" of photography is another instance of sovereign collective resistance against the brutal excesses of authoritarian state power. Taken together, such resources become a guide for living for men in dark times.

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[159] For well-known examples see Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*, Mbembe's "The Aesthetics of Vulgarity."

Indeed, the dark times into which Myanmar has fallen in the contemporary age make such camouflaged strategies of being-in-the-world an absolute necessity. In this respect, it is also significant that Dinu names his decrepit studio "The Glass Palace." This reference to a ruin from another era accentuates the contrast with the ruin that is now post-colonial Myanmar. The direct evocation of the past-as-ruin also brings the narrative full circle—starting from the destruction of the "golden Burma" with the takeover of the glass palace, the text ends with a melancholic representation of the absolute death that the past is subjected to everyday because of the brutality of the Myanmarese regime. But the regime of the Myanmarese junta is only the latest episode in the litany of deaths that the past has undergone in Burma. *The Glass Palace* illustrates that the brutal murder of the past can be dated back to the time the colonial power conquered Burma and reduced a country, which was then the richest in Asia, to absolute destitution. Queen Supayalat's unspoken indictment in the text when the British Collector comes to visit the erstwhile Burmese royal family in Ratnagiri attains an ominously prophetic status, and sums up this century long process—encompassing both the colonial and post-colonial eras—of impoverishment and despoilment in a haunting fashion:

> Yes, we who ruled the richest land in Asia are now reduced to this. This is what they have done to us, this is what they will do to all of Burma. They took our kingdom promising roads and railways and ports, but mark my words, this is how it will end. In a few decades the wealth will be gone—all the gems, the timber and the oil—and then they too will leave. In our golden Burma, where no one ever went hungry and no one was too poor to write and read, all that will remain is destitution and ignorance, famine and despair. We were the first to be imprisoned in the name of their progress; millions more will follow…A hundred years hence you will read the indictment of Europe's greed in the difference between the kingdom of Siam (now Thailand) and the state of our own enslaved realm (76, emendations in brackets mine).

CHAPTER 3: REGIMES OF RECOGNITION IN *AN OUTLINE OF THE REPUBLIC.*

(*An Outline of the Republic* is)…a novel that is set in a distant, border region of India, a narrative full of drifting, itinerant characters who are obsessive storytellers, characters who rise like ghosts from the periphery of India and reveal that what appears to be the border is in reality the invisible centre of the republic.

Siddhartha Deb

3.1: Introduction

While the previous chapter explored the naturalist logics of rule that provided the framework for the colonial *commandement*'s exercise of sovereign power over its frontier regions, this chapter shifts focus to the effects of the historicist technologies of rule adopted by the postcolonial Indian state with respect to its eastern borderland regions. Within India, the eastern borderlands are often viewed as distant and disconnected from the national mainstream. These locales are also considered "backward," "primitive" and "uncivilized." The following comments by the well-known Indian policy intellectual, B. John Varghese are a good illustration of these perceptions about the eastern borderlands commonly found in mainland India. Varghese writes that India's eastern borderlands "are *rainbow country*, *extraordinarily diverse* and colorful, *mysterious* when seen through parted clouds, a *distant* and *troubled* frontier..." The states in this region are "… the youngest members of the Indian family." The political troubles in these borderlands—many of them dating back to India's independence in 1947—are not heralds of doom tolling India's eventual disintegration; rather, these are signs of a growing politico-social consciousness "where the clock, dormant for centuries… meanwhile started ticking away" (quoted in Baruah, *India*, 13, italics mine). This discourse has a lot of continuities with colonial anthropological categories as these former "frontier" regions of the British

Empire were often viewed during that era as states of nature available for conquest and resettlement.[160] If we focus carefully on the words italicized in the quotes above like "rainbow country," "extraordinarily diverse" and so on, we can clearly notice the enunciation of what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls "typological time"—instead of being a measure of movement, time now is represented as a "quality of states…that is unequally distributed," thereby being suitable for ordering in a hierarchy (23). The locale represented is distanced from the time of the observer who simultaneously renders it exotic and opaque. But this presumed opacity is only a cue for instituting a temporal hierarchy on a spatial plane—these locales are, after all, the "youngest members of the Indian family." The dawning political and historical consciousness of the people of this region, even when it is directed against the state, is a positive development because it is evidence that this naturalized space is finally entering into the realm of culture and history.[161]

Siddhartha Deb is among a handful of Anglophone South Asian novelists whose fictions are based in India's eastern borderland regions.[162] This chapter on Deb's 2005 novel, *An Outline of the Republic*, explores the effects of the processes and practices through which the eastern borderland locales, in Fabian's phrase, are denied "coevalness"

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[160] See Sanjib Baruah's *India against Itself* and Yasmin Saikia's *Fragmented Memories* for a discussion of these continuities between colonial and postcolonial anthropological categories.

[161] As Baruah notes, it is odd that a region that had undergone enormous capitalist transformation in the nineteenth century primarily because of the tea and oil industries should still be conceptualized as "awaiting" modernity (*India*, 19).

[162] Deb has written two novels so far: *The Point of Return* and *An Outline of the Republic*. Other writers who have set their novels in the eastern borderlands include Amitav Ghosh, Anjum Hasan, Temsula Ao and Aruni Kashyap.

in the Indian postcolonial dispensation.[163] State technologies such as borders and border control practices, the representation of the region in constitutional and legal statutes, and security and population policies employed by the state-apparatus have shaped and consolidated perceptions about this "peripheral" region amongst the mainland Indian populace, as illustrated by Varghese's comments above. Such state technologies re/produce particular regimes of recognition that sustains the reality-effect that predicates that such borderland areas are stateless, prehistoric and uncivilized. The fact that this region is a dynamic socio-cultural ecumene with complex histories of its own is thereby rendered *unrecognizable*.

The effects of these state-centered regimes of recognition are illustrated by the subjective formation of the narrator of *An Outline of the Republic* (henceforth *OR*). The narrator, who hails from mainland India, travels through the region adjoining the Indian border with Myanmar. For this male mainland Indian subject, the eastern borderland locale is spatio-temporally distant from mainland Indian space, while the region beyond the border with Myanmar is a space of absolute "blankness" (144). Even after the

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[163] In a well known meta-critique of the anthropological project, Johannes Fabian argues for recognition of the political nature of the discipline of anthropology that simultaneously constitutes and demotes its object temporally. Fabian's terms this the "denial of coevalness"—a process through which a distancing mode of localizing the "other" masks the simultaneous and co-temporaneous nature of the ethnographic encounter (31). He also says that such denial of coevalness is the "allochronism" of anthropological discourse—a discourse that is the product of an ethnocentric history and also the ground for the creation of an ideological narrative of the other (32). While anthropologists are placed in a privileged time frame through this allochronic process, the other is relegated to a stage of lesser development. Think, for instance, about the central anthropological category of the "primitive." This is not a term that signifies an empirical presence, but is a temporalizing concept that signifies a category, but not an object, in anthropological thought (18). Far more importantly, Fabian identifies the "rhetoric of vision" as the central metaphor that is the epistemological base of the allochronic discourse of scientific anthropology. The ideology of visualism that emerges in and around the valorization of this rhetoric of vision is the primary strategy through which anthropology has managed to maintain spatial distance from its object thereby denying it coevalness.

narrator crosses over the border to the town of Tamu in Myanmar, he remains blind to the complex forms of social collectivity existing among the people who inhabit this supposedly stateless and anarchic region rimming the two postcolonial nation-states of India and Myanmar. It is telling that this subject, whose ideas about national space and borders are shaped by statist technologies such as cartography and border-posts, cannot recognize that a non-nation-statist form of collectivity exists between a group of exiled Myanmarese democracy activists and a Manipuri woman who escapes persecution from the Indian side. The fact that such a cross-border, cross-national collective formation is unrecognizable for a mainland Indian subject indicates that statist technologies, such as border posts and border control practices, have produced the "reality" that the *individual* national histories of India and Myanmar are radically and absolutely different in the postcolonial era. Thus, while my reading of *The Glass Palace* in Chapter II imaginatively explored a shared pre-nation-statist past of the two postcolonial nation-states of India and Myanmar, *OR* focuses on the postcolonial period when statist technologies and practices consolidate the belief that beyond the border, in Amitav Ghosh's words, "lies another reality" (*Shadow Lines*, 227).

3.2: Beyond the Border Lies Blankness

OR is a first-person narrative that recounts the story of a mainland Indian journalist's quest for a Manipuri woman named Leela. The journalist, Amrit Singh, unearths Leela's photograph in the basement of his newspaper's (named the *Sentinel*) office in Calcutta. In the photograph, Leela was seated with an "expressionless" face surrounded by two masked gunmen. She had been "disciplined" by an independentist militant group named MORLS (Movement to Resuscitate the Liberation Struggle), that

accused her of being a porn actress and a representative of Indian "imperialism." Amrit also discovered a memoir on the northeastern Indian front of World War II written by Euan Sutherland, the editor of the *Sentinel*'s colonial-era predecessor, *The Imperial*. The memoir focused on Sutherland's encounters with a wandering British soldier named Jim during the war years (1941-44).[164] The discovery of the two objects led Amrit to accept the offer of a shady German "stringer" named Herman, who wanted him to write an "exemplary" story on India's "misery." Herman agreed that Amrit's leads possessed the elements of a "good story"—"sex, violence, political turmoil, the remoteness of the border, with the World War II campaign against the Japanese like a heavy, detailed backdrop in an old painting" (37). The search for Leela led Amrit to travel through the eastern Indian states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur, and into Myanmar. As Amrit proceeded deeper into his "heart of darkness"—Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a key intertext—he became intrigued by the overwhelming presence of the Kurtz-like figure of Malik and his grandiose plans about a development program labeled "The Prosperity Project," and also by the latter's connection with Leela's murky predicament. Amrit never met Malik as the latter was killed by the MORLS militia before Amrit reached Manipur. However, Amrit gradually became aware of Malik's duplicity. Amrit returned without meeting Leela either. Back in Calcutta, Amrit gave up his job at the *Sentinel*. He never heard from Herman again, but found out that the latter possibly was a member of an evangelical church. The text closes ambiguously with Amrit walking towards the Hooghly River, seemingly repeating the scene of Jim's suicide in Sutherland's narrative.

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[164] Sutherland's narrative is based on Conrad's *Lord Jim*.

I argue that *OR*'s plot narrativizes the gradual re-formation of an Indian statist-subject's modality of looking at a "marginal" locale such as India's eastern borderlands. This preoccupation with vision is announced in one of the novel's epigraphs, taken from *Heart of Darkness*: "Do you see the story? Do you see anything?" The titles of the four parts of the text—"Shadows," "Darkness," "Light" and "Fire"—also illustrate the ocularcentric nature of the plot.[165] Indeed, the central trajectory of the plot narrativizes the re-formation of Amrit's monocular vision into a way of looking that recognizes *certain* forms of difference. Two examples from the text, one from the beginning and the other from the end, illustrate this "progression." Below are Amrit's impressions of the unnamed northeast Indian city he flies into first—

> …Nothing could have been more forlorn. It seemed to me that the region had been forgotten by the world, and in the absence of connections with what lay beyond, an entire society was trying to create itself from selected memories and incomplete knowledge…The people were like that too: their responses taking place within single, discrete moments, their personalities determined by the whimsy of immediate acts, so that no story taking place in that region was ever quite complete, no individual a rounded figure, and the outline of the republic itself was traced by blurred, fluid boundaries that shifted back and forth with each fresh incident (8-9).

Compare this with what he says about the scenes he witnesses in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, towards the end:

> After weeks spent struggling through the bewildering profusion of images and voices in the region, I *saw* things with as much clarity as if I had freed myself from my body and was suspended high above, the clamor of contending voices fading away to the rush of the wind and the gentle, barely perceptible movement of rivers and trees and towns and the people. I slowed down, and in what I had so far thought of as a homogenous crowd, I began to see distinct, individual faces… (310, italics mine).

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[165] For "ocularcentrism" see Martin Jay.

Clearly, Amrit's "act of seeing" changes from viewing things in the borderlands as spatially distant, "incomplete" and "fluid"—hallmarks of what Fabian decried as the "denial of coevalness"—to seeing "distinct, individual faces" in what he once viewed as a homogenous mass. *OR's* plot, thus, recounts how Amrit's monocular gaze *slows down* and learns to differentiate between what he earlier perceived as homogenous and undifferentiated.

However, focusing only on the re-formation of Amrit's ocular modality is tantamount to touching the text's "surface" level. I highlight the word "surface" because the non-U.S. edition of *OR* was published as *Surface*. However, I do not invoke "surface" to argue that the text employs a *topographical* surface/depth binary suggesting that a deeper "truth" lies beneath the manifest-level of the text. Instead, my play on "surface" intends to "outline" a *topological* juxtaposition within *OR*'s textual-space of the concepts of "state of nature" and "state of exception."[166] I argue that *OR*'s topological "surface" explores the ramifications of a "political theology" where the transcendental state-apparatus is the guarantor of law and order. The sovereign power of the state attempts to institute a regime of order in these borderland locales which are imaged as a "state of nature." Conversely, the continued existence of the "state of nature" is the implicit presupposition that undergirds the state's sovereign power. By figuring in the Indian imaginary as a "state of nature," the eastern borderlands functions as an "inclusive exclusion" that is central for the institution and (re)production of state sovereignty.[167] It

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[166] The borderland region is referred to as an "untapped region" twice in the first two pages of the text—once by the narrator and another time by Sarkar, the editor of the *Sentinel*. This repetition signifies that the borderlands are construed as a "state of nature" by mainland Indians like the narrator.

[167] See my introduction and first chapter for the distinction between topography and topology.

is noteworthy that for thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature is fundamentally a law-less, prepolitical, presocial and pre-historic order of things. The absolute identity of the state of nature and violence becomes the justification for the absolute power of the sovereign. Sovereignty represents itself by incorporating the state of nature, thereby blurring the boundaries between nature and culture and also violence and the law. As Giorgio Agamben points out in *Homo Sacer*, the concepts of the state of nature and the state of exception are topologically related to each other—they are nothing "but two sides of the same topological process in which what was presupposed as external (the state of nature) now reappears, as in a Möbius strip or a Leyden jar, in the inside (as state of exception) and the sovereign power is this very impossibility of distinguishing between inside and outside, nature and exception…" (37). For what after all is the state of exception? It is the legal situation that accrues when the law operates by suspending itself—it is the topological inverse of the "law-less" state of nature.

The exploration of the objective dimension of the topological structure of sovereignty is juxtaposed with the representation of a particular modality of subjectivity in *OR*. Referring to the "miraculous" dimension of the act of colonizing, Achille Mbembe argues that, in such contexts, a form of subjectivity is deployed that is "freed of any limit, a subjectivity seeing itself as absolute but which, to experience that absolute, must constantly reveal it to itself by creating, destroying, and desiring the thing…that it has previously summoned into existence" (*On the Postcolony*, 189). The colony is, thus,

a world of “limitless subjectivity” for the colonizer, just as, later, the borderland space represents a locale of “limitless subjectivity” for a mainland subject like Amrit. To be sure, the contingencies of the colonial scene and the relationship that a post-colony like the Indian nation-state has with its borderland regions are not the same. But I argue that the modalities that form the colonizing subject and also the mainland subject in the post-colony are definitely comparable. The intertextual parallels of *OR* with the colonial ur-text *Heart of Darkness* accentuates these contiguities with respect to subject formation in the colony and the post-colony.

Besides the intertextual parallels, evidence from the text also supports my case about the borderland being a space of “limitless subjectivity” for the mainland subject. Leela, the object of Amrit’s search, remains a mere textual construct. Amrit never meets her in person. Instead we encounter a constant and repetitive process through which the narrator creates, destroys and desires the woman, who is objectified within the text as a thing that can be manipulated. This narratorial manipulation of the figure of the woman-as-thing corresponds to the shifts in Amrit’s modalities of self-making during his journey through the borderland space. Amrit’s perceptions of self are thus reflected externally in his shifting representations of this human *object* at different points in the text.

Also, the potential for limitless subjective (re)creation becomes clear through a representation of Amrit’s attempts to escape “culture” (the mainland), thereby recreating his “passive” self in the state of nature. Amrit’s self-perception of the passive nature of his self is outlined early—“My enemy was within…I was a discontented man…without the will or belief to act on the impulses that seethed inside” (5). His journey is undertaken with the explicit purpose of “seizing the circumstances and shaping a unique role…in the

flux" (49). A "life without shape, almost without meaning," could be shaped anew (33). In this respect, *OR*'s narrator is comparable to what Mary Louise Pratt describes as the "sentimental subject" of the "anti-conquest" narrative (75-78). For Pratt, this sentimental subject travelling to the imperial frontier is usually a male, middle-class character who represents himself as an innocent, passive and "non-interventionist…presence" (78). As a textual construct, the sentimental subject's "innocence lies less in self-effacement than…in the display of self-effacement" (78). The mystique of reciprocal vision orders the "human-centered, interactive narrative" of such "anti-conquest" narratives (80). While the "humanism, egalitarianism, and critical relativism" of this reciprocal visual modality offers possibilities of critique, it never directly interrogates the hegemonic power-formation's "authenticity, power and legitimacy" because it is caught too much within the framework of the education and reformation of an *individual* self (84). The sentimental mode of such narratives, in James Chandler's words, enables "a…kind of mobility—the capacity to put oneself in the place of another…" (842). But putting oneself in an-other's place entails a projection of a self-image onto the space of the other. The integrity of the self as such is never interrogated. Eventually, sentimental modes of anti-conquest narratives end up underwriting what Pratt calls the "non-reciprocal non-exchange" of the "civilizing mission" of colonialism, and also, by extension, the postcolonial state's modernizing mission in the borderlands (85).

Indeed, on the "surface," *OR* approximates an "anti-conquest" narrative. Amrit, the novel's male, middle-class narrator is a "non-interventionist" mainland presence. He is passive and middle-aged. Much is made of his distinctive bodily presence—references are made to his height, his "big, Northern face" and his ethnic distinctiveness. This

"passive" subject actively desires to find "freedom" in the borderlands. Ironically, while Amrit becomes conscious of the fictions that undergird state sovereignty, this development is not matched by an awareness of his authoritative role as the sovereign producer of the text's meaning. He only represents forms of difference that is identical with his self-image, while he *author-itatively* suppresses aspects that could potentially jettison his desire to re-form his masculine self through the act of plotting his story. Thereby, the male narrator also fails to interrogate his complicity with the hegemonic power formation's "authenticity, power and legitimacy."

While the next section of this essay explores *OR*'s "surface," the concluding section examines two elements that enable a critique of its emplotment: i) the Conradian intertext and ii) the border-line story of Leela's. Amrit's journey is modeled on Marlow's journey through the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*. Besides enabling Deb to establish continuities between the colonial/postcolonial polities, it simultaneously critiques the narrative desire of the colonial/mainland subject to identify sentimentally with the colonized/borderland other. Alongside the parallel with *Heart of Darkness*, Sutherland's hypodiegetic narrative is modeled on *Lord Jim*. Amrit identifies an "uncanny" resemblance with the Jim of Sutherland's narrative (138). While this "uncanny" resemblance is another instance of Amrit's tendency to project his self-image onto the other, it also plays a crucial structural role in the text. Peter Brooks argues, in a Freudian vein, that the death-instinct operates in the narrative text through repetition. Repetition retards the "pleasure principle's search for the gratification of discharge…" (102). These two principles of forward-moving drives in the text operate on each other and create "a dilatory space" that becomes the condition of possibility for narration (103).

The development of the narrative illustrates that the tension between the two principles is maintained as a complicated postponement (the "plot" of the narrative) that eventually leads narrative desire towards its end through the act of seeking "illumination in its own death" (103). Moreover, for "satisfactory" closure this death must be the "right death." Jim's suicide—he jumps into the Hooghly river with his tunic weighed down by rocks—is a "wrong" death, given that other characters read it as proof of his "madness." Since Amrit identifies strongly with Jim, his attempt to redress the balance towards the end—the text ends enigmatically with Amrit saying that if he knew that if he kept going he "would come to the (Hooghly) river" (318)—is an attempt to sum up his life at the moment of the "right" death. But even here the irony is palpable: Jim's voice-consciousness is mediated through others (Sutherland, Amrit), while *OR* **is** Amrit's "testimony." For a "captive reader" like Amrit, the alterity of Jim's story is naturalized as another imaginary identification that maintains the integrity of the narrator's self-image.[168]

Second, we find a subversive counterdiscourse flitting around the "borders" of the first-person narrative— Leela's story. For the captive readers within the narrative, Leela too is an "unreadable" character. These readers attempt to naturalize Leela's unreadability. Of these versions, Amrit's reconstruction of her life is the most important. Even if Amrit does not collude with Herman that the story of the woman in the photograph should represent a "portrait of the mystery and sorrow of India," from the

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[168] For H. Porter Abbott, a "captive reader" could be a character within the text who tries to make sense of an "unreadable" mind—a mind that frustrates the reader's search for transparent meaning. An example of such a captive reader would be the narrator of Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener." In the story, Bartleby represents the "unreadable" mind. I am grateful to Garrett Stewart for directing me to this article.

beginning he wants to make "her story **my** story" (7, emphasis mine). Thus, Leela is constantly represented in terms of how Amrit wants us to *see* her—his "double waiting for…(him)…at the edge of the republic" (241). Leela is the subaltern who (almost) does not speak—we encounter her voice in two extracts from her letters written to her aunt. But does that mean that there is no possibility of retrieving a different story of her at all? I am not, of course, privileging the statements of Leela as a portal that gives access to what Gayatri Spivak terms an "ideology-transcendent or fully 'subjective' truth" ("Can the Subaltern," 306).[169] Instead, my attempt later to retrieve *an-other* story of Leela constitutes an effort to unearth "the ingredients for producing a countersentence" to Amrit's sentimental narrative.

3.3: Amrit's Tunnel Vision

When Amrit first sets foot in the eastern borderlands, he denies coevalness to the region by his detached way of looking. The city he lands in has the "air of an impending siege," incidents flicker and die out "like fireflies in the dark night of the region," and the weather evokes "a state of crisis to which there could be no possible human response" (25, 38). More importantly, he divests the region of any history whatsoever —"The distant past, in any case, was of no use in understanding the future or the present here" (8). These judgments are ironic given that both the place and its history are "created" in Amrit's mind through the discovery of the two objects in the basement of the office (the

[169] In *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Spivak talks about how the subjectivity of the women who committed Sati gets effaced by two formulaic statements that "go a long way to legitimize each other" (93). These two statements are a) the colonialist argument—"White men saving brown women from brown men" and b) the nativist argument—"The women actually wanted to die." In the domain of reality defined by these two statements, the "testimony of the women's voice-consciousness" is never encountered.

"morgue") of the *Sentinel*. As Amrit confesses—the "place did not exist in my mind, but the photograph had offered me a glimpse into that faraway corner of the country, and I sensed that at last I had found a possible story for Herman" (65). The memoir too opens up an aspect of the region's past that he feels bears an "uncanny" resemblance to his quest. Thus, the chance discovery of these two objects initiate the process of "closing" the gap between Amrit's modality of vision and the objects, peoples, histories and locales that he encounters in his journey through the borderlands.

If Amrit's vision becomes less monocular, there are three factors that facilitate this change. The first is his conversations with characters like Robiul (the local "stringer" of the *Sentinel*), Meghen (the unemployed Manipuri youth Amrit meets in Imphal) and the unnamed Burmese dissident. For example, Robiul counters the denial of coevalness to the borderlands thus—"…things aren't different here from anywhere else, perhaps more extreme…but not a different order of things" (58). Similarly, Meghen tells him that it was cynical to think that the borderlands were spaces of "limitless subjectivity." For "moon-dwellers" like the borderlanders, he says, "the lower gravity doesn't seem like freedom, but a constraint they have always struggled against" (238).[170] Likewise, the meeting with the Burmese dissident—who reminds us of the Russian Harlequin in *Heart of Darkness*— in the Myanmarese border-town of Tamu enables Amrit to *see* the sordid

[170] Meghen's comments are directed against the comments of the army officer, Captain Das, who tells Amrit that he felt like a "moon-dweller" in the borderlands.

reality behind the glittering "surface" of Malik.[171] These interactions play a big role in Amrit's perspectival shift.

The second factor in the re-formation of Amrit's vision is his growing consciousness of his body and its ethnic distinctiveness in borderland space. A key episode of the text illustrates this—Amrit's experiences at the checkpoint *en route* to Imphal. While border posts clearly demarcate an inside/outside dichotomy with regard to the nation-state, the checkpoint blurs these boundaries within its territory. As Pradeep Jeganathan observes, a checkpoint is framed by a "map of anticipation" that attempts to neutralize the possibility of insurrectionary violence against the state. The checkpoint's temporal logic is that of the future anterior—it is the point that "acknowledges the emergent quality of violence without producing a normalization that is also its effacement" (74). Jeganathan suggests that the checkpoint is the node where we notice the paradox of citizenship—the citizen "is that abstract being of equality who, with the demand for freedom in an insurrectionary sense, or its granting, as a right, in a constitutional sense must be subject in the double sense of self-subjection and being to that field…(called)…'community'" (78). By subjecting oneself to a search at the checkpoint, the citizen positions his/her "political affiliation in terms of alliance or enmity" to the state and works through his/her own subjection.

The borderland territory Amrit makes his journey through is pockmarked with checkpoints. Negotiating these checkpoints is a practice of everyday life in the

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[171] The dissident is initially dazzled by Malik. However, unlike the Russian Harlequin, the dissident loses faith in Malik. Thus, the dissident serves a critical function in the text in a way the Harlequin never does in *Heart of Darkness*.

borderlands stipulating a code of behavior. In contrast, here's Amrit's first experience of a checkpoint by a mobile army-patrol *en route* to Imphal:

> Most knew the routine *already*: the men climbed off the bus again, leaving their bags behind, their hands empty and faces blank. While the soldiers waited, they formed a loose line, not looking at me as I joined them, *still holding my bag*. Some of the soldiers carried out a search on the bus itself, poking underneath the seats and pulling cases out from the overhead rack…In the meantime, another soldier…approached me slowly, a small compact man from the Garhwal regiment, and I was taken aback when he started shouting at me…I felt slightly *bewildered* as I looked at him, the suspension order from the *Sentinel* coming to my mind at that very moment. By now he had backed away a few feet, and was cursing me as he rifled through my possessions (205-06, italics mine).

When the bus is stopped by the army patrol, most passengers know the form of subjection expected of them in order to avoid suspicion or detention. They climb off the bus leaving their bags behind, their hands empty and their faces impassive. Jeganathan characterizes the process of the expected modes of subjection at the checkpoint as a "double play" predicated on a visualist logic—the soldier and the person checked must "agree on the resultant answer of the irreducible play between citizen and subject" (79). If this play is interrupted, the subject is liable to be detained. In this case which provokes Amrit's "bewilderment" the play between the citizen and the subject is interrupted. Amrit, a mainland Indian not used to the protocols of borderland checkpoints, keeps his bag with him provoking the soldier's ire at this sudden break in the expected modes of subjection. By the time Amrit has to go through the next round of "checking" at another checkpoint, he has already internalized the logic of this play. As he says—"When the next round of searches took place, I complied with a detached air, not reacting to anything at all—not even when they took a young man aside and made him pull down his pants, laughing as fear and the cold air caused his skin to break out in gooseflesh" (207).

What happens immediately after the first search described above is even more significant. After the soldier starts shouting at Amrit and begins to scatter his belongings, he is unable to accept his humiliation without resisting. Addressing the soldier with a particular inflection of Hindi, Amrit demands to know who his commanding officer is. This inflection combined with his physical appearance (his "big northern face"), which marks him as different from the rest of his fellow passengers, intimidates the soldier, and Amrit is allowed to go. Conscious of the fact that his fellow passengers avoid his gaze as he returns to his seat, Amrit marvels at how "things had been overridden by…(his)…features and the Hindi…(he)…spoke which must have reminded the soldiers of countless commanding officers…who looked and spoke the same way" (207). This encounter emphasizes the anthropological logic that is at the heart of these practices of state security. The soldier lets Amrit go because of two elements that make his body *look* and sound different and distinctive—his ethnicity and his language. Both Amrit, who feels like "a disembodied observer" as he returns to his seat, and the reader recognize the line boundaries between the statist self (the citizen subject of the state who possesses a normative body) and the non-normative body of the inhabitants of the borderlands. Indeed, one of the common stereotypes associated with people of the eastern borderlands is that they don't *look* "Indian" enough. (The pejorative **racialized** term "chinki"—slang for "Chinaman"—is often used to describe this non-normative body.) The viewpoint from the "other" side of this visual logic of recognition is provided by the Burmese dissident's account of his life—

> "So he drifted…a foreigner among foreigners, although the Indian soldiers who made him squat on the road and strip to his underwear *did not distinguish between his face and that of the Indian hill tribals*. It was a sign of his freedom that no one any longer understood who he was" (287-88, italics mine).

If the practices at checkpoints are novel experiences for Amrit, the institution of the border is central for his consciousness of self. Like Amitav Ghosh's narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, Amrit too believed "in the reality of space…in the reality of nations and borders…that across the border there existed another reality" (*Shadow Lines*, 227). Amrit's consciousness of himself as a citizen-subject of the Indian nation-state is connected with these neat topographical divisions, and the way in which this national topography is visually accentuated by state-technologies such as cartography and border-posts. Here's a concrete illustration of this modality:

> I had finished more than half my journey…The road snaked down southward on the map…The space looked intimate on paper, an area thick with lines and dots and strange names, but when I followed Highway 39 beyond Imphal to the border town of Moreh, the map changed character. Across the border, in Burma, it was all blankness (144).

These topographical certainties literally dissipate for Amrit as he travels closer to the India-Myanmar border. The passage below illustrates how even temporal durations are experienced differently by Amrit during his stay in the Indian border-town of Moreh:

> Sanat had a collection of Victorian novels, fat books into which one could retreat to follow the slow progression of time, the deeds of the characters taking years to come to a resolution. It had been an expansive world for those authors…Even when the immediate surroundings of the novel were provincial, every small town and city depicted in those books was the center of an empire, quite unlike this spot on the periphery where I had found myself without knowing how I had got here, as if I had sleepwalked my way to the edge of the republic (312).

If temporal durations are "slower" in the center of the empire/nation, it literally "speeds" up in the borderlands assaulting the subject with a "bewildering profusion of images and voices" (309). Focusing, distantiating and fixing—the markers of visual

power—become increasingly difficult.[172] Beyond the border lies absolute blankness. The *topoi* of visual distance and blindness give us a sense of what Agamben, invoking Foucault, terms "processes of subjectivization"—those processes formed by modern technologies that "bring the individual to objectify his own self, constituting himself as subject and, at the same time, binding himself to a power of external control" (*Homo Sacer*, 119). This play between vision/blindness persists for the subject even after he crosses the border from Moreh to Tamu (Myanmar):

> I was a stranger in Tamu, but I set off as if I knew exactly where I was going, following the highway until I had left the main street with its hotels and shops far behind. What I saw around me now was still a very modern town, but the buildings became more widely spaced out as I progressed, with gardens or open fields in between. In the distance, I could make out a low line of hills, their pale blue form speckled with yellow pagodas…It was like being in a dream, with no way of measuring time and distance apart from the fact that when I looked at the hills again, they seemed to be a little closer (279).

Amrit's impression of the first foreign country he visits is equated with a dream-like experience where "time and distance" seem to merge. This description illustrates how even the subjective perception of "objective" spatio-temporal relations is discursively created by the rationalized visual regime privileged by the state. Across the border all stable coordinates of space and time seem to dissipate for the subject. Blankness or dream-like experiences are the only possibilities that are available for this observing subject.

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[172] Hans Jonas traces the reasons for vision's privileged position in the Western *logos*. Jonas's essay provides the phenomenological ground that explains the privileging of sight in classical Greek philosophy. Sight has usually tended to serve as the model of perception in general, but it is in fact a very special sense. It is incomplete by itself and needs to be complemented by the other senses and functions for its cognitive office. The unique distinction of sight, rather, consists in what Jonas provisionally calls "image-performance" where "image" implies three characteristics: i) simultaneity in the presentation of a "manifold," ii) neutralization of the causality of sense-affection and iii) distance in the spatial and mental senses. These three reasons are at the base of the privileging of being (staticity) over becoming (dynamism/flux), the notion of identity which is an extension of the static present, the idea of infinity and also the separation of *theoria* from *praxis*.

But eventually the limitations of this modality of vision become evident as Amrit's mode of recognizing the other appropriates the latter as a sentimentalized version of his idealized image of self. Like the hero of the anti-conquest narrative, Amrit too projects himself as innocent and passive. Things happen to him and he lacks the capacity to act. In his own words, Amrit has led a "life without shape, almost without meaning" (33). The contrast with Herman, the German stringer, emphasizes this passivity. Herman could impart meaning to experiences, and saw possibilities where Amrit did not. Experiences, for Herman, possessed a shape whereas for Amrit, "they were merely transient moments flitting by as they transformed themselves into memories" (32). If these elements attempt to emphasize Amrit's passive nature, then his repeated invocation of fate can also be construed as an attempt to frame himself as an "innocent" bystander swept away by the logic of larger events he could not understand or control. Things "are planned elsewhere" (86), the "nature" of places "reveal" attributes and aspects of himself hitherto unknown (165, 193), the "simultaneous explosion of separate events…illuminated—and occasionally obscured each other" (185), he found himself at the spot on the periphery "without knowing how…(he)…had got there, as if…(he) had sleepwalked his way to the edge of the republic" (312). All these statements taken together construct the image of a passive, "innocent" spectator of events. Psychological explanations are also provided by him to justify his "display of self-effacement." Amrit's childhood is characterized as one "without parents for the most part, but not without love" (190). Following his parents' divorce and his father's death, he was brought up solely by his spinster aunt, Harpreet. After he spends several years drifting around in Delhi, his aunt decides that her responsibilities towards him are over. She gives him her

flat in Calcutta, and fulfils her long cherished dream of travelling. There is also a hint that Amrit had been involved in quite a few unsuccessful, unfulfilled affairs which leads him to claim that—

> The fact was I didn't understand women, and I had given up on any efforts to do so at a certain point in my life. It had been a relief to me when I left behind my stilted attempts at relationships and took my pleasure from the occasional sexual encounter (186).

The grounds are thus prepared within the narrative for a psychological explanation that causally relates Amrit's search for Leela's "exemplary" story as an ostensible compensation-formation for the lack(s) that he suffers from. What is telling though is that the same Amrit who says that "no story taking place in the region was ever quite complete," consciously ignores looking at other narratives that would distract him from his projected telos of uncovering Leela's "exemplary" story. Other stories come "looking" for him, but he ignores them. This is illustrated by the despairing admonishment of the slain militant, Santanu's wife, to Amrit early in the narrative:

> "Why aren't you interested? I thought you wanted to write about what's happening here. So write about me, about my husband, my father. This is what is happening here, this is the story you are looking for (73).[173]

Clearly the act of narrating can be wielded only by those who are positioned at certain levels of the hegemonic power formation. Amrit as a representative of a mainland Indian newspaper clearly possesses this power, despite his display of self-effacement. Even if certain "subalterns" speak in the text, their voice is resolutely ignored because of Amrit's single-minded quest to give shape to the *only* story he wants to tell, at the expense of

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[173] Amrit witnesses the funeral of a slain militant named Santanu on his very first day in the northeast. He notices a lone woman at the funeral. The woman—Santanu's wife—later beseeches him to write a story on the death of her husband. Amrit refuses.

excluding other narratives. His display of self-effacement also leads him to construct a series of doubles during the course of the narrative. These identifications are also justified as compensation-formations for the lack(s) that Amrit perceives in himself. He finds an "uncanny" resemblance of himself in the Jim of Sutherland's narrative—another character who was struggling to be "free of his past" (126). Similarly, he identifies with Maria, the Goanese wife of a Naga leader with whom he has a brief tryst; an "unrooted" character who, like him, sleepwalks her way to the edge of the republic. The Burmese dissident filmmaker he encounters in Tamu lacked a "sense of selfhood" much like himself (306). And finally, Leela whose "past was many times removed from…(Amrit)…just as her life itself had been," becomes his sister, his double waiting for him at the "edge of the republic" (248). But the very fact that he can say towards the end of the narrative that a "touch of grace, of wisdom," had been imparted to him by Leela, while at the same time he dreads to meet her in person because he "did not want to find, on meeting this woman that she was not after all the person…(he)…had created in…(his)…mind, that she was frivolous or stupid or shallow or simply inept," makes us wonder if his way of looking at the other is significantly re-formed. Crucially, Amrit never meets Leela in person as he is held up in Myanmar far longer than he expected, and as a consequence misses his appointment with her. We never know whether the "wisdom" imparted by Leela is genuine or yet another imaginary-libidinal identification on Amrit's part.

Interestingly, Amrit identifies with a range of people except the one person whose "imaginative" projects approach those of his in scope: Malik. To be sure, although Malik serves as a Kurtz-like figure in *OR*, there are important differences in his presentation *vis-*

à-vis Kurtz. Amrit is seemingly not as obsessed as Marlow is with Kurtz—at one point Amrit confesses that he resented "the way Malik had pushed his way into the scene" (229). The story, Amrit remonstrates, had never been about Malik in the first place. However there are certain similarities between Amrit and Malik that suggest that their connection is comparable to the Marlow-Kurtz relationship. There are several points in the plot where Malik is described by other characters as an "artist," "a genius," an embodiment of clarity," and "a man of action and also a thinker," much before Amrit meets him. I contend, therefore, that Malik is an inverted version of the storyteller that Amrit aspires to become. If the artistry of Amrit lies in his attempt to endow shape to a miasma of transient experiences through the act of plotting a story, Malik too is an artist, albeit of a devious sort, who constructs a "surface" of lies that masks an "unbearable reality" (306). Malik constructs an elaborate façade called the Prosperity Project that serves as a glossy "surface" camouflaging his other activities such as printing and distributing counterfeit notes. Whether it is the ironically named Prosperity Project, the counterfeiting of official notes or the staging of Leela's public chastisement by MORLS, Malik is an embodiment of the artist who believed in "seizing the circumstances and *shaping* a unique role for…(himself)…in the flux." The passive male narrator out to seize the circumstances and shape himself anew by plotting a story, and the "seducer with the silken voice" (the Naga minister Vimedo's assessment of Malik) who seeks to bring order to the "anarchic" borderlands—at first sight, nothing could be more apart. When viewed closely though, a direct parallel is traceable between the "ordering" power of (male) authorship and the operations of sovereign power in imposing rational authority over "anarchic" spaces. In this context, Amrit's statements about "shaping

circumstances" are comparable to the analogous attempts of other mainland characters to make sense of the "orderlessness" of the borderlands. The Indian army officer, Captain Das, cynically suggests to Amrit the possibilities of limitless subjective creation that the borderland offers to the mainland subject:

> …thinking has to be fluid in an area of such great turmoil. There are many restrictions and situations here that would not be found in mainland India, such as the fact that six Bihari laborers digging a trench for a water pipe can be gunned down at night by ultras. But if there are such problems, then there are also opportunities here that would be equally unthinkable in the mainland. To understand, what I am going to tell you, you must accept this, the absence of old rules and the ability to make new ones as you go along, the feeling of almost being free from gravity. We felt as if we were walking on the moon (223).

The "absence of old rules and the ability to make new ones" invokes the *topos* of the "state of nature." This *topos* explains the mythic stature endowed to Malik by some of the other characters. Here, for instance, is what a government official tells Amrit about Malik early on in the narrative:

> "No, Mr. Singh, not a social worker running your average NGO. Instead, a man who is a remarkable thinker." The official hesitated, trying to find the right words to describe Malik. "Almost a visionary…I would say he is an inspiring figure in a place where so much is bleak. A creator of order in the wilderness, a messenger of hope for an area plunged in darkness. An emissary sent from the heart of the republic to its borders" (42-3).

And for Captain Das, Malik—

> …showed us how things could be done here, if only one had the right approach and imagination. He was an artist, and all of us—army officials, criminals, insurgents…were brought together by him in a belief that far exceeded what the government or the insurgency alone could offer…(227).

Implicit in such pronouncements is not simply a mode of distancing, but also a political theology that predicates that the state must always be imagined as an incomplete project that constantly requires the "inclusive exclusion" of a state of nature. Through the figure of the law, boundaries are created that demarcate the sphere of possible state actions over

its juridical spaces. The constituting violence of the state that is the basis of its legitimacy emerges through a subsumption of the state of nature. This foundational fiction, however, is always conceptualized as possessing the potential of threatening rational procedures of governance from within—it has to be contained or else it could lead to a Hobbesian war of all against all. If Malik appears to these characters as a transcendental entity, then it is because through his limitless capacity for subjective creation, he seemingly possesses the power to realize the order-making functions of sovereignty. Through his absolute faith in the "power of images" that conceals nothing underneath, Malik demonstrates an acute awareness of the empty space where both the law originates and the autonomy of the sovereign decision comes into view. This sovereign power lies behind and makes possible the law's authority. Both the State and the independentist militias struggle to control this power—the fact for which they were "brought together" by Malik.

Moreover, for the statist functionaries Malik possesses an even greater fascination. If the state has failed in stamping its "rational" authority on the borderlands, then figures like Malik assume their mystique through their "visionary" capacity to control and re-direct the anarchic violence of this "state of nature" for "rational" ends (38). Das states this clearly when discussing Malik's project of counterfeiting bank-notes. Through the fake notes Malik "was restoring luster" to the "soiled image" of the Republic. The dirty notes these counterfeits replace are a metaphor for the constant danger that "states of nature" represent to the "tarnished" image of the Republic. Through his creative act, Malik was "imparting a degree of authenticity that was not to be found in the originals"—almost creating a prosthetic "reality" of greater power, much like Amrit's work of "art" (226). Both Malik, the visionary, and Amrit, the authoritative creator of the

narrative's meaning, are, thus, transcendent loci who attempt to order the flux of experience *author-itatively* thus creating parallel "surfaces" of their own. This process of (male) creation complements a rationalizing system of authority in both cases—sovereign-power in Malik's case, and the textual economy of the anti-conquest narrative in Amrit's.

3.4: "Finishing" versus "Completing"

Although monological on the "surface," *OR*'s narrative has two elements of autocritique that can be isolated through the textual play between the two phrases "to finish" and "to complete." Amrit's cross-border meeting with the Burmese dissident enables him to "finish" Leela's story. By providing him with the story behind Leela's humiliation, the dissident functions as the point of closure where Leela's story "finishes," but is not "completed" (283). Though it seems at this point as if Amrit has given up his quest for giving his story shape, he contradicts himself soon by saying that Leela—whom he never meets—and the Burmese medical students, whom he meets in her stead, provide him a touch of "grace" and "wisdom." The temptation of "summing up" cannot be resisted:

> Their belief was both simpler than that and more elusive, and it was expressed in the way they spoke of themselves as nothing more or less than medical students. Without saying a word about it directly, they helped me understand why Leela was with them and the direction in which she was headed. She too had faith, that sense of selfhood both the filmmaker and I lacked, and that Malik had never thought worth possessing (306).

However we are never sure about the nature of this "wisdom." Instead, Amrit's invocation of the "understanding" imparted by the Burmese students re-routes his narrative towards a sentimental resolution.

OR's plot, on the other hand, is "completed" only when Amrit finds the "right" means to correct the "wrong" death of his other alter-ego: Jim. We only encounter a small portion of Sutherland's narrative—the one where the latter focuses on the "oddest experience" of the war years (1942-44) in Calcutta: the curious account of Jim's. Like in Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Jim is not the real name of the character who survived a "rough passage" through Burma and Assam during the Japanese invasion, and arrived on Sutherland's doorstep first in 1942 on the recommendation of a clergyman, Brierly. Jim was a "splendid physical specimen" who possessed a "terrible innocence" and "youthfulness" despite the horrors faced during war (105). Sutherland instantly warmed up to him. He found out soon that Jim suffered from terrible nightmares. A few days after Jim's arrival, Sutherland invited a few RAF air-sergeants. Sutherland caught a sergeant muttering to his fellows on seeing Jim that—"Some of us here would have never sunk so low" (109). After that incident, Jim was very agitated. Later, from Jim's ramblings before he received his orders to leave Calcutta and also Brierly's account, Sutherland pieced Jim's story somewhat. Jim was part of a British commando-unit sent to Burma in 1941. After the British defeat in Burma, Jim and his troop attempted to withdraw to Assam. Jim was captured by the Japanese while retreating. He saw several of his comrades being tortured and butchered. Somehow he managed to escape, becoming a freebooter as he made his way back to India. During this period, Jim and two other escapees started operating like "armed thugs" (110). An incident that occurred at that time kept haunting Jim. The three soldiers attacked a Eurasian family trying to make their way to India. They seized the family's pack-mule and supplies, effectively leaving them to starve to death. One of Jim's companions also raped the lone woman in the group.

Jim reappeared on Sutherland's doorstep in 1944. He looked like a "ghost soldier". He was thinner, more melancholy but also immeasurably mature as if the "years seemed to have made a man of him" (123). Jim evinced a desire to narrate his 1941 experiences, and also the subsequent developments post-1942 because he felt that an editor like Sutherland "might understand things a common soldier cannot make sense of" (127). His narration skirted around the infamous 1941 event. When Jim returned to the front in 1943, he had picked up enough Japanese to become an interrogator for the British army. He had also suppressed memories of the earlier incident, feeling a "palpable sense…of being free of the past" (126). As they moved into the interior, the sight of corpses forced Jim to recall the earlier event. Finally, they arrived at the same region where the incident had taken place. Sitting in his tent in gloomy weather trying to shut out ugly memories, Jim began to translate letters of dead Japanese soldiers into English. These letters, written with "lyrical tenderness" shocked Jim (131). What struck Jim most was the diary of a dead gunner he found on the road to Moreh. This soldier had written about how the war ravaged landscape brought back memories of the cherry blossom trees in his village. While his fellow soldiers dismissed the gunner as a "mad" fellow, Jim felt that he understood what the soldier had written.

When they reached Moreh, Jim and a fellow officer, Wright, were charged with interrogating the captured soldiers. Towards the end of a long day of interrogations, a young prisoner was brought in. Wright was an aggressive interrogator whose nerves were fraying. Jim began interrogating the soldier slowly in Japanese. However, there was a particular word that Jim didn't understand. Suddenly, Wright savagely intervened and made the "Jap scum" cry (137). Jim couldn't contain himself and hit Wright hard.

Bleeding, Wright retorted that Jim was a "filthy little bugger" who went around "raping women and killing our own civilians" (137). Jim knew that he was done with the war for good. Deserting the army, he fled to Calcutta the next day. The only person he sought out was Sutherland, to whom he handed the original and translations of the dead gunner's diary, asking him to send it back to Japan. The next day, Sutherland got a call informing him that Jim had committed suicide by drowning himself in the Hooghly. A Bengali Babu, who saw Jim jumping into the river, told Sutherland later that the "gentleman was quite mad…He looked at that neem tree there and declaimed aloud that he was viewing the cheery blossoms of England" (141).

One possible interpretation of Jim's story is to emphasize the "surface" theme of journeying into the "heart of darkness" where the "layers of civilization" are gradually stripped away (130). What I am more interested in though is how captive readers within the text naturalize Jim's story. Sutherland retrospectively says that: "More than once the thought struck me then…that the poor fellow was not quite well, and I did not know whether these were actual experiences being recounted to me or some kind of fever of a weary spirit that had reached the limits of his exhaustion" (125). Like the Bengali Babu, Sutherland too attempts to naturalize Jim's story as an instance of insanity. But another "editor"—Amrit—who claims to "understand" Jim, also naturalizes this unreadable character, albeit in a different way. Jim's attempt to make Sutherland "understand" his experiences on the battlefront constituted a futile attempt to communicate the "meaning" of his experience before death. But stories have to be listened to for the narrative transaction to be complete. A "summing up" that lacks a credible listener—and Sutherland's "black and white" morality renders him somewhat unreliable—risks being

interpreted either as “madness” or falling over onto the side of death. Significantly, Amrit says that there was the risk of tippling over into the abyss of madness if one did not “maintain the proper distance and disinterest” in the borderlands (86). Thus Amrit’s attempt to construct the scene of his “right” death by repeating the scene of Jim’s death can be interpreted as an attempt to displace the risk of being read as mad.

Furthermore, other than the desire to be free of the weight of the past (assuming that Jim and Amrit’s pasts were comparable in the first place), there are no manifest similarities between Amrit’s and Jim’s stories. If read carefully, we find certain differences between Amrit’s borderland experiences and Jim’s wartime experiences. In this context, notice what Jim tells Sutherland—“How orderly everything is in your second city of the Empire…Wonderfully arranged, all straight lines and precise rules and stiff spines, and how all that becomes a big lie when you move to the edge of the Empire and run loose in the jungle with guns and knives” (129). On a “surface” level this seems similar to the “heart of darkness” motif. But if read closely, we notice that Jim does not employ the topographical opposition of surface/depth that suggests that a deeper “truth” is hidden beneath surfaces. All he says is that the “surface” of order “all…becomes a big lie” when one moves to the edge of the empire. This “lie”—the empty space that marks the law’s origin—is the presupposition of the topological “surface” of sovereignty. This is also the “lesson” that the Burmese dissident imparts to Amrit. By displacing these into a surface/depth binary, Amrit displaces this knowledge into a classic topographical opposition. And by adopting this binary standpoint, it is possible that he cannot recognize that the narrative topography he creates is as empty underneath as Malik’s “surfaces.”

Amrit's desire in appropriating the other as a version of his self-image is magnified further when we consider how he handles Leela's story. Amrit fills in the gaps in Leela's story from the accounts he gathers from Maria, Leela's aunt and the Burmese dissident. He also incorporates fragments from Leela's letters. Leela's first entry into the narrative is through the more than six-months-old photograph that Amrit discovers in the "morgue." The photograph however *changes* character as Amrit proceeds deeper into his heart of darkness. In the first two instances when the photograph is described, Amrit says that Leela has "no expression on her face" (34-5, 64-5). The scenario depicted is described—Leela is wearing a traditional-looking skirt, and is surrounded by two men with only their heads and torsos visible. However, there are significant differences in the description of the photograph when it makes its appearance next (84-86). The plot moves back to the night when Amrit discovers the photograph and Sutherland's narrative and takes them back to his flat in Calcutta. Already prolonged contemplation on the photograph invites frustration for Amrit. It is now an enigmatic veil whose secret Amrit wants to penetrate.

Victor Burgin argues that photographs are usually deployed such that we don't look at them for long—to "remain long with a single image is to risk the loss of our imaginary command of the look, to relinquish it to the absent other to whom it belongs…the camera" (152). By no longer receiving our look, the image assures us of our founding centrality while simultaneously "confirming its allegiance to the other." Clearly at this point, Amrit's "command of the look" is diverted towards the construction of the scene. He realizes that the photograph was not taken by a professional. The device used was probably "a small automatic camera with a built-in flash—a stringer's cheap simple

accessory…" (85). The camera's flash made the woman's complexion appear much lighter than the men, making it seem as if she were of a different ethnicity. Significantly, now Amrit begins to project a personality into the hitherto "expressionless face":

> She was slender, in her early twenties, but she didn't have the kind of face one would expect in someone so young. It should have been unformed yet, still assimilating the experiences of adulthood, but instead it possessed a wariness that concealed something…I was surprised to see an intelligence, even alertness, in the woman's eyes (85).

Three types of "looks" have already been described by this point—the look of the viewer (Amrit), the looks of the people depicted, and the look of Leela at the camera. Now, the look of the camera as it pictures the "pro-photographic event" is also described the next time we encounter the photograph (100-102).[174] Amrit now is lodging at a seedy hotel in the refinery town on the Assam-Nagaland border. He refocuses on Leela's gaze and discovers that it is directed at the gaze of the "absent other"—the photographer, Thoiba. Amrit learns that Thoiba died a couple of months before in an accident. He is unsettled when he realizes that what he is looking at was embalmed by a dead man, and that Leela's gaze did not match his eye-line because "she was really looking at the invisible specter of Thoiba…" (102). A whiff of mortality enters the scene, reinforcing the photograph's indexical nature. Amrit concludes that the "reality" he is attempting to decipher is a spectral one embedded within other narrative-layers—the narrative of the dead Thoiba is one of them. But this consciousness of the embeddedness of narratives that emerges from the over-long contemplation of the photograph is a fleeting one. Though it reveals, as Burgin says, the "systematic deception" of the "monocular

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[174] For the four types of looks see Burgin (148).

perspective system of representation," *OR*'s narrating-subject soon reasserts his centrality by ignoring these other narratives.

This is noticeable the next time the photograph reappears in the narrative. Amrit is in Kohima (Nagaland) and his photograph is now complemented by other photographs of Leela, Malik and the Prosperity Project collected for him by Maria. Looking back at this assortment of random photographs, Amrit says that "something like a carefully constructed narrative" had already emerged, even though he did not realize it at that time. These photographs and the information Maria provides about Leela, animates the personality of the "two-dimensional figure" Amrit had stared at for long (185). But it also provokes anxiety. So far, Amrit had been a "distant observer of the tale," but now things were uncomfortably close. While this proximity could have been a mode through which Amrit initiated a self-critique of his "monocular perspective system of representation," he displaces its troubling nature with sexist confessions about his inability to understand women and speculations about the Malik-Leela relationship (185-89). Since he forecloses the possibility of "understanding" altogether, it is not surprising that when he learns about Leela's past from her aunt in Imphal, and also from the family-album and the letters that Leela wrote to the latter, he can only recreate Leela's story as if the "memories and experiences were his own, as if…(he)…had become Leela for that brief span of time, making…(his)…way through the uncertain, bewildering world where fulfillment and failure often appear in the same guise" (248-49). Indeed, on the "surface" everything in Leela's story seemed to bear an uncanny resemblance to that of Amrit's. Like Amrit, she was left in her aunt's care after her sister's death. And from the evidence that Amrit provides from her letter fragments, she too had a yearning for "freedom" and a strong

sense of empathetic identification with others. Indeed a careful filtering of these details creates the image of Leela as Amrit's double waiting for him at the edge of the republic. The possibility of a differential understanding is re-routed towards a sentimental identification again.

Lauren Berlant suggests that sentimental narrative resolutions collapse under the weight of its own contradictions because "the ideology of true feeling cannot admit the nonuniversality of pain…the ethical imperative towards social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy" (652). The political "as a place of acts oriented towards publicness" is replaced by a world of private thoughts and gestures. The sentimentality of Amrit's look divests the narrative of Leela's singular narrative of pain into a "passive ideal of empathy." For him too, the political realm is reducible to "private thoughts, leanings and gestures." However, Leela's reactions are different. I quote a substantial portion from one of her letters to illustrate my point:

> …I notice things and people nobody else does, the decrepit and the defeated and the solitary, perhaps because I identify with these aspects...
>
> At the corner of the pavement near Janpath, there's a Russian woman dressed in black who holds shiny watches, washed up here the way…I came here from Shillong. Her face is hard…while the men passing by say she's a prostitute and discuss how much she would cost. Some of them crowd around her…and try to touch her, so that she has to stand with her arms straight out even if they hurt. Why do I see these things and nurse them and take them home with me after I have gone back to the flat after fighting with the auto-rickshaw drivers or having warded off the hands trying to grope me on a bus?
>
> I must leave Delhi (254-55).

Leela's letter draws upon the conventions of the sentimental narrative. But at a crucial moment (notice the last rhetorical question), she undercuts the "rhetoric of tears"

of sentimental narratives into a "rhetoric of outrage."[175] There is a huge difference in this rhetoric from the sentimentality of Amrit's writing. The response invited by Leela is more complex—her outrage becomes a way of refusing to accept the status of victimhood. And indeed, Leela refuses to play the victim. She leaves Delhi to work with Malik at the Prosperity Project, and is ready to defy him when she learns that the project is a sham—the reason why Malik and MORLS connive together to chastise her publicly on the trumped-up charges of her being a porn actress. Till the very end she resists, as the testimony of the Burmese medical doctors, with whom she collaborates, illustrate (304-06). The Burmese medical doctors are pro-democracy activists who live in exile in Moreh.[176] The collectivity forged between a Manipuri woman escaping persecution from the Indian state and also an ethnic independentist movement, and Burmese democracy activists working against the repressive Myanmarese junta from exile is an example of a contingent cross-border, cross-border, non-identitarian alliance that Amrit's sentimental discourse simply cannot recognize. I venture to make a larger claim here and

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[175] I draw these distinctions from Kathleen Woodward's essay (65-70).

[176] Moreh is a border town in Manipur with a population of 14,960 according to the 2001 Census. Moreh has been described by Subir Bhaumik as similar to a "coastal town in southern Florida with its huge émigré Cuban population—a town of drug dealers, dubious frontier-traders, and spies involved in sleaze, espionage and smuggling" (195). More than that though, Moreh is a town with a cosmopolitan ethnic identity with the population comprising of Kukis, Nagas, Bengalis, Kachins, Shans, Meiteis and Tamils among others. Most of the Nagas have been forced out of Moreh after the Kuki-Naga clashes in the nineties, though the Nagas control the highway that leads to Moreh. There were also riots between Kukis and Tamils in 1995, after which the Tamil population has started dwindling. Besides that, Moreh and adjoining areas are also home to a huge number of refugees from Myanmar. Many of these refugees include Burmese pro-independence dissidents fleeing the military junta as well as ethnic minorities like the Chins and Karens. According to R.K. Ranjan Singh, many pro-democracy dissidents escaping from the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese Army) arrived in Moreh on Oct. 2, 1988. Many of these dissidents were interned at the Leikhul and the Champhai camps in Mizoram, while some stayed on in Moreh. The dissidents managed to get refugee status from the UNHCR in 1989. Initially, the Indian government was pretty sympathetic to the plight of the dissidents. But the u-turn in India's Myanmar policy in the nineties has led to a tightening of control over the activities and movement of the dissidents in recent times.

suggest that Amrit's blindness to such a non-nation-statist form of collectivity illustrates the elective affinities that sentimental conventions in literature share with the modern idea of the nation-state. As Louis Dumont has pointed out, the idea of the nation and the idea of the individual are symmetrically correlated—"The nation is the political group conceived as a collection of individuals and, at the same time, in relation to other nations, the political individual" (317). By privileging the story of *individual* change, the sentimental form of an anti-conquest narrative implicitly complements the three holy shibboleths of the modern nation-state: sovereignty-territory-people (together this triptych defines an *individually* unique nation-state). Thus, while both Amrit and Leela inhabit the discourse of sentiments, it is only Leela who initiates an exchange "oriented towards publicness" that gestures beyond the constricting boundaries of both individualism and the topographical limitations that the *imaginaire* of the nation-state imposes on the subject. Significantly, Amrit recognizes that it is the "faith" that Leela possesses that distinguishes her from him. But typically he re-routes this insight into an individualistic sentimental discourse through which Leela's "faith" in public forms of political action simply becomes an instrument for his private redemption. Leela's ethico-political "lesson," for Amrit, remains unlearnt; the act of seeing with his own eyes remains incomplete.

CHAPTER 4: REFUGEES AND THE POSTCOLONIAL NATION-STATE.

It seemed to me then that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all.

Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*

4.1: Introduction

While the previous two chapters focused predominantly on the impact of statist institutions on subject formation, this chapter and the next marks a shift in my optic. Instead of institutions, I focus on two human figures that are classic epitomizations of "bare life" in modernity: the refugee and the guerilla. As we have already seen in Chapter I, the production of bare life is both the subject and object of sovereign power. The guerrilla is often conceptualized and represented as an absolute enemy for the state apparatus. When captured by the state, s/he is often stripped of the most basic human rights and reduced to the status of "bare life" in prison or concentration and torture camps. The refugee, on the other hand, is a "waste" product of the disjunction between the nation and the state. Stripped of rights of citizenship and interned in camps, the refugee also becomes an exemplar of "bare life." Somewhat similarly, even after a refugee is rehabilitated, s/he internalizes the paradoxical "inside-outside" localization of the camp. As s/he was born "elsewhere," the refugee often becomes a victim of processes that redraw lines between the inside and the outside within the body of the nation-state. Given that both these figures—the guerrilla and the refugee—are also the products of the intersecting points between the nation, the state and various modalities of violence, they

also enable us to study how the "world destroying" characteristics of violence impacts the warp and woof of everyday life in India's eastern borderlands.[177]

Both the refugee and the guerrilla are also a ubiquitous part of everyday life in India's eastern borderlands. While the borderland region has over hundred partisan organizations, it has also seen a constant flow of refugees since 1943 (the "forgotten long trek" from Burma). This particular chapter provides a close reading of a novel dealing with the representation of Bengali Hindu migrants to the Indian nation-state—Siddhartha Deb's *Point of Return*. Deb's novel enables a critical scrutiny of the liminal subjectivity of the Bengali Hindu migrant/refugee in postcolonial India. I do not suggest that the conditions of the migrants I read in this chapter are in any way comparable to the stateless status that is still the lot of millions of refugees in the world today. However, Dr. Dam, the central character of *Point of Return*, internalizes certain aspects of the modes of being-in-the-world encompassed by the figure of the refugee. While in "normal" circumstances these modes of being-in-the-world remain repressed, in more "exceptional" situations, such as inter-ethnic riots that target former refugees as "outsiders," they surface above upsetting the neat topographical divisions between "home" and "away," "coming" and "going" and "inside" and "outside." These "exceptional" situations are hauntingly represented in Deb's text.

More specifically, I also want to complicate certain received narratives about the partition of 1947 and the concomitant issue of migration to India from areas that were formerly part of Pakistan and now fall within Bangladesh. In her essay on the impact of partition and the subsequent flow of migrants (*muhajirs*) on Pakistani national identity,

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[177] For violence as a "world destroying" force see Hannah Arendt's *On Violence*.

Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali, utilizing the work of Victor Turner and Lisa Malkki, argues that the 1947 partition emerged as a "rite of passage that twelve million people…underwent in which the 'stable state' was culturally recognized in the global order as the mono-colored, territorially distinct, genealogically rooted, naturalized nation" (187).[178] While contemporary refugees are constituted as necessarily liminal to the established institutional "national order of things," the refugees/migrants of the 1947 partition were assumed to be incorporated in this order of nation-states. Such incorporation, she suggests, accounts for the virtual invisibility of partition refugees/migrants in the field of refugee studies. In one way or another, partition refugees/migrants, especially belonging to the "majority" community in each country, are assumed to have seamlessly merged into the hegemonic national identity, whether Indian or Pakistani. Through an undeclared assumption, the invisibility of such figures fuses modernity with nationhood. It is as if through the rite of passage from refugee-hood to citizenship, the migrant emerged as a full and visible national figure. The fact that there could be other non-national histories whose narratives are suppressed by the technology of citizenship is thereby rendered *invisible* and *unpresentable*.[179] In this context, it is useful to cite Pankaj Mishra's comment on *Point of Return* in the back cover of the novel—"Set in a part of India that is little known to a majority of Indians as to most foreigners, his wise, elegant novel makes

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[178] According to Victor Turner, a stable "state" refers to a fixed or stable condition that is culturally recognized, while a "transition" is a "period of margin" (quoted in Fazila-Yacoobali, 187). *Muhajirs* are the name of the population groups of Muslim migrants who came over to Pakistan from territories which are now part of India.

[179] According to Jean-Francois Lyotard, the *unpresentable* is that element of a genre of discourse whose claims for justice cannot be satisfied within the bounds of available conceptual structures. See *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute.*

vivid and dramatic the small, usually unremembered lives lived out in the shadow of large national histories." My first task in this chapter therefore is to formulate a conceptual language to represent these other stories "lived out in the shadow of large national histories."

It is not insignificant that the figure I focus on in this chapter is a *Hindu* Bengali migrant to India. The "transition" of Hindu Bengalis to "Indians," as opposed to Muslim, is usually thought of as seamless and unproblematic. But as this text demonstrates, such a shift is anything but uncomplicated. *Point of Return* is set in India's eastern borderland region which has been the scene of ethnic tensions between Bengalis (both Hindus and Muslims) and other linguistic communities that inhabit this region. Anindita Dasgupta reminds us that the usual view of 1947 as only a Hindu-Muslim problem needs to be nuanced when the eastern region of the subcontinent is taken into consideration.[180] Attention to the narratives of Sylheti partition migrants, for instance, reveals that many of the post-partition riots in the Indian northeast were a result of "the rivalry between Assamese and Bengali middle-classes in colonial Assam than that between Hindus and Muslims of the colonial province" (345).[181] Thus, texts like *Point of Return* (henceforth *PR*) reveal that the transition from a "Hindu" to an "Indian" identity in the eastern borderland region often came into conflict with local rivalries and issues that fractured the assumed seamlessness of the movement into the "national order of things." Even

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[180] This hegemonic view, of course, needs to be complicated in other regions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as well.

[181] Sylhet used to be ruled in colonial times as part of the province of Assam. Now it is a province in Bangladesh. Sylhetis are primarily Bengali speakers. For an account of Sylhet's inclusion in Assam during the colonial era see Chapter 2 of Sanjib Baruah's *India against Itself*.

citizen subjects who were supposedly mapped demographically into the national system as Bengali Hindus could become "outsiders" overnight as new battle-lines between "insiders" and "outsiders" were (re)drawn in particular locales in post-colonial India. Adapting Fazila-Yacoobali's terminology creatively, I suggest that very often refugee/migrant subjects in the postcolonial Indian state who are supposed to have been interpellated in the national order of things progressively pass through the following stages: Refugee-Indian, Indian-not-Refugee, not-Indian-not-Refugee, Indian-but—always-Refugee. This passage creates confusions and conflicts about belonging and rootedness that engender a tremendous amount of fear and insecurity about modes of being-in-the-world for the refugee.

Each of the four stages referred to above also marks a movement from uprootedness to superfluity. As Hannah Arendt says—"To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all" (*Origins*, 475). The poignant individual predicaments of refugees symbolize the decrepitude forcibly imposed upon massive sections of human populations in the modern world via the social *pathology* of forced migration. To quote Arendt again, the central loss imposed by this modern social pathology on migrants/refugees was—

> …the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world…What is unprecedented is not the loss of a home but the impossibility of finding a new one. Suddenly, there was no place on earth where migrants could go without the severest restrictions, no country where they would be assimilated, no territory where they could found a new community of their own…it was a problem not of space, but of territorial organization. Nobody had been aware that mankind, for so long a time considered under the image of a family of nations, had reached the stage where whoever was thrown out of one of

> these tightly organized closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether (*Origins*, 294).

To be sure, what Arendt says here draws upon the dissolution of the classical model of the European nation-state system. Translating her thinking into postcolonial locales, I argue that the emulation of "tightly organized closed (national) communities" by postcolonial states on the global model of the family of nations are at the root of the aporias explored in this chapter. Postcolonial nation-states formed on the basis of territorial reorganization, such as India and Pakistan, promised the manna of citizenship to migrants—of particular communities—who came from across the newly instituted borders. But very soon, the cure of citizenship transformed into a poison as many migrants realized the truth of the following statement from *PR*—"new battle lines were being drawn everyday and fresh groups of people were being defined as outsiders, borders bristling with barbed-wire teeth" (296).[182] This chapter, thus, explores the processes through which new battle-lines were (and are) being drawn everyday in India, and the impact of such changes wrought by state technologies on the subjectivities of migrants/refugees.

4.2: Refugees as the "Waste" of Modernity

The liminal figure of the migrant/refugee is complementary to, yet in many respects the absolute antithesis of the figure of the citizen subject that I elaborated upon in Chapter I. The citizen subject is the full bearer of rights and a performer of associated

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[182] Fazira-Yacoobali mentions an analogous case from the Pakistani side—"Indian-Pakistani, Pakistani-not-Indian, not-Pakistani-Indian, not Pakistani-not-Indian—the predicament of the Muhajir identity is most movingly summed up by one of Verkaik's informants: 'It was horrible. He was so nostalgic before he died. He expected to be Pakistani but he realized he would die as a mohajir, still a migrant'" (191).

duties by virtue of being a recognized member of the nation-state. The nation-state is, thus, the most recognizable form of a habitus in the modern age. Being a recognized member of a nation-state also endows the subject with a guarantee of rights. The notion of human rights, for instance, can often be guaranteed only if a subject is the citizen of a state. It becomes far more difficult to guarantee human rights for subjects who lose state citizienship. The conjunction between the "rights of man" and the "rights of (national) man" is evident from the very moment when the idea of universal human rights was formulated and disseminated globally for the first time. Let me once again quote the first three articles of *The Declaration*, the foundational document of the modern human rights regime, in full to illustrate this problem:

> 1) Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.
> 2) The purpose of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible *rights of man*. These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.
> 3) The principle of all sovereignty rests essentially in the *nation*. No body and no individual may exercise authority which does not emerge expressly from the *nation* (Hunt: 221, italics mine).

The key paradox here is while men are born free and are guaranteed "natural" rights, such rights can only be guaranteed if only is a member of the "cultural" whole of the nation. Hannah Arendt correctly points out that the proclamations of the Rights of Man were predicated on a replacement of the historical rights of man with those of "natural" rights. Nature, she says, takes "the place of history, and it was tacitly assumed that nature was less alien than history to the essence of man" (*Origins*, 298). The very wording of *The Declaration* with words like "natural" and "imprescriptible" implied a belief in an organic notion of human "nature" which "would be subject to the same laws of growth as that of the individual and from which rights and laws could be deduced"

(*Origins*, 298). But the paradox that emerged with this figure of the "abstract human" (who existed nowhere) and that is at the base of the citizen subject, is that to realize these rights necessarily had to be part of a particular collective entity designated either under the label of the "people" or the "nation." Arendt expresses this pithily—"…man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into the member of a people" (*Origins*, 291).[183] Thus, the particularistic principle of the nation/people emerged as an irreducible historical necessity that has to contend with the paradox that the "abstract nakedness of being human" has no element of sacredness associated with it. Human rights could only be protected and guaranteed as national rights. The practical outcome of this contradiction, Arendt says, is that once human rights becomes national rights, the state loses its technologically neutral aspect, and comes to be interpreted as a representative of a national "soul" or 'will" whose existence is beyond the reach of law. The citizen subject henceforth becomes identified with the member of *a* nation.

Correspondingly, human life can only be rendered sacred if one is a member of the nation-state. If one is not a citizen subject of the nation-state, then not only was his/her life not "sacred;" in many cases it would cease to have any legitimacy at all. The peculiar and poignant plight of refugees is not so much that they are deprived of "the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion" (*Origins*, 300). The refugee thus often exists by accepting a

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[183] The conservative Edmund Burke's famous assertion that he preferred the "rights of an Englishman" to the inalienable rights of man in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is quite prescient in this respect.

state of political and civic death within the regime of rights. Paradoxically, though, the figures of the refugee should have embodied the Rights of Man in its purest sense. However, as Giorgio Agamben says, this figure marks the "concept's radical crisis" (*Homo Sacer*, 126). He argues that it is high time that we dispense with the halo of eternity with which declarations of rights are daubed, and instead consider their "real historical function in the modern nation-state" (*Homo Sacer*, 127). According to him—"Declarations of Rights represent the originary figure of the inscription of natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state." Bare natural life (*zoē*), which in earlier juridico-political forms had been endowed a neutral, apolitical value and had been distinguished from political life (*bios*), now begins to get politicized, enters into the structure of the state, and becomes the "earthly foundation of the state's legitimacy and sovereignty" (*Homo Sacer*, 127).

This point is illustrated by the third article of *The Declaration* quoted above. By endowing the principle of sovereignty in the "nation"—whose etymological root is *nascere*, "to be born"—the question of birth gets inscribed at the core of the emergent political community. The "principle of nativity" and the "principle of sovereignty," hitherto excluded, now becomes united in the figure of the sovereign citizen subject. Agamben writes:

> It is not possible to understand the "national" and biopolitical development and vocation of the modern state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries if one forgets that what lies at its basis is not man as a free and conscious political subject but, above all, man's bare life, the simple birth that as such is, in the passage from subject to citizen, invested with the principle of sovereignty. The fiction implicit here is that birth immediately becomes nation such that there can be no interval of separation between the two terms. Rights are attributed to man (or originate in him) solely to the extent that man is the immediately vanishing ground (who must never come to light as such) of the citizen (*Homo Sacer*, 128).

To be a citizen subject in this formulation means a new status of "life" (*zoē*) as the bearer or ground of sovereignty. Two key consequences accrue from this modern biopolitical determination of sovereignty—i) the question of national origins and essences (whether it be ethnic, racial, religious or linguistic in determination) moves from the domain of philosophical anthropologies to become a political question and project, and ii) this determination necessitates a "constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside" (*Homo Sacer*, 131). Refugees and migrants then emerge in this biopolitical field as a "limit concept" in both these senses. First, by breaking the link between nativity and nationality they place the "originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis" (*Homo Sacer*, 131).

Second, they also rupture the assumed continuity between man and the citizen subject. Technically speaking, the rights of the abstract figure of "man" can only be applicable outside the legal concept of the citizen subject. The refugee probably approximates closest to this abstract figure, as s/he is not an embodiment of the nativity-nationality link. S/he is not a legal subject and can only be understood in terms of bare natural life. By bringing this bare life directly within the realm of the *polis*, the figure of the refugee brings to light the hidden presupposition of the political realm. Simultaneously, his/her predicaments clearly demonstrate that "human rights" or even the question of humanitarianism cannot be equated with the rights that the citizen subject of a nation-state enjoys, but must be envisaged outside the realm of the latter. This can only lead to a sharp disjunction between humanitarianism and politics, and also a constant need to redraw boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders" for whom different standards of legal recognition apply. These distinctions between the "outside" and the

"inside" are not clear cut boundaries, but run like malleable fissures within the body of the nation-state. Thus, as Agamben says, the increasing incidence in the visibility of refugees and migrants demonstrate that "the very rights of man that once made sense as the presupposition of the rights of the citizen are now progressively separated from and used outside the context of citizenship, for the sake of the supposed representation and *protection* of a bare life that is more and more driven to the margins of the nation-states, ultimately to be recodified into a new national identity" (132-33, italics mine). Within a particular nation-state though refugees/migrants literally embody what Zygmunt Bauman calls the "waste" of modernity, with "no useful function to play in the land of their arrival and temporary stay or realistic prospect of being assimilated and incorporated into the new social body" (77). Quoting Michael Agier, Bauman suggests that "becoming a refugee" literally means to lose—

> …the media on which social existence rests, that is a set of ordinary things and persons that carry meanings—land, house, village, city, parents, possessions, jobs and other daily landmarks. These creatures in drift and waiting have nothing but their 'naked life', whose continuation depends on humanitarian assistance (77).

If "humanitarianism," as Agier and Bauman seem to imply and what Agamben states explicitly, has sharply become dissociated from politics, then it is necessary to analyze the modalities through which it performs its ostensibly non-political functions.[184]

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[184] I suggest that "humanitarianism" as we know it now is often a shorthand for a reinscription of the "pastoral" modality of power of the modern state. Central to the genealogy of this modality of power as Foucault says is the art of "governing men" (*Security*, 165). The idea of the pastorate displaces the focus from the "juridico-political" problematic of subjecting men to a law or a sovereign, to a subjective-objective technology that involved both the power of moving a multitude towards a particular objective, and also a power of individuation that accorded value to each individual subject as well as the entire multitude. Agamben draws upon this point as well (*Homo Sacer*, 119). For Foucault the analysis of pastoral power begins with the idea of the shepherd caring for the salvation of every member of his flock—a specifically Christian idea and practice. Though there was "general crisis" of the pastorate in the fifteenth

If the Rights of Man now make more and more sense as a modality for the protection of "bare life" at the margins of the nation-state, what emerges as an object of study then is no longer related to the matter of simply granting rights to the figure who *ought* to emerge as the normative-universal figure of the citizen. Instead, what we should study are the more differentiated regime of state practices that provides "care" and "protection" for such marginal figures. These analyses will illustrate the fact that such practices and policies of care and protection of refugees and migrants did not develop solely as a matter of right, but also as an ethical and humanitarian practice at both individual and institutional levels. This process of what Ranabir Samaddar calls the "governmentalization of ethics" calls for a relational analysis of power that focuses not only on the universal discourse of rights, but also everyday ethical practices via which the idea of a particular notion of the political self—the inherent "tolerance" and capaciousness of the Indian nation-state, for instance—emerges from a historical domain. The realm of politics, then, is not simply related to questions of domination or symbolic rule; in many cases, techniques of care and protection are also crucial strategies of governmentality as they become modalities for defining practices of everyday ethics and morality on both an objective and subjective level. Samaddar makes some striking observations on this score:

> If the mastery of certain techniques identifies for the world the objects to be ruled, the mastery of the techniques of caring and protecting produces a fantastic range of institutional practices for the political self to deploy to make the world a suitable place for survival. Politics as a form of power needs kindness, the quality and the capacity to care for others, protect others and tolerate others to a greater or

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and sixteenth centuries, it was eventually re-routed, in a significantly modified form, in the emergence of *raison d'Etat*—"an art of governing that finds the principles of its rationality and the specific domain of its rationality in the state" (364-65)—around the seventeenth century.

> smaller degree—and these are essentially self-techniques now mastered by the political self in the interest of ensuring a type of regime within which this self can survive. By caring and protecting, politics takes a decisive stand. It declares that it is not only a grammar of how to make others the objects, which can then be ruled; it is also a quasi-ethical and quasi-practical code of how to build a political self, which will be able to play in this world a game of coexistence with other actors and other selves (*Materiality I*, 135).

This dual subjective-objective movement explains the "mystery" behind what Samaddar terms "care-producing power": how "self-calculation and enlightened self-interest" produce democracy, and also subjective identifications with such powers of "external control" (*Materiality I*, 140). Let us now turn to the more specific history of the postcolonial Indian state and an account of some of its policies and practices of dealing with refugees and migrants for an example of how this dynamic of power and care operates in concrete terms, and how these policies in turn create and sustain the idea of a national "self."

4.3: The Indian Nation-State and its Policies of Care and Protection

In his "Foreword" to the important collection of essays on refugees and the postcolonial Indian state titled *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000*, the then UNHCR Chief of Mission in India, Augustine Mahiga, writes:

> From the challenging experience during and after the partition crisis, India has built an emergency response capacity which has been applied in different emergency situations caused by natural disasters as well as refugee influxes…What has not been adequately highlighted…is the success in integrating refugees into the mainstream life of the nation as reflected in the opportunities given to the refugees which enabled some of them to excel in different activities. Some persons with a refugee background have distinguished themselves and contributed significantly to the nation in various spheres such as politics, business, professions and culture (12).

Mahiga illustrates his claim about the integration of refugees "into the mainstream life of the nation," by citing the case of the Tibetan refugees whom India received with

much hospitality after their flight from China in 1959. Mahiga concludes his praise of India's treatment of refugees by saying: "…India has adhered to and expounded the universal moral values and principles of protecting refugees, especially the principle of non-*refoulement* and its corollary principle of voluntariness when refugees wish to return to their countries of origin" (16).[185] Commendations like the above do show the tremendous achievements of the postcolonial Indian state's treatment of refugees and migrants. Few countries have had to welcome such a massive number of refugees and migrants as India has since independence. A brief look at the staggering number of people who came in through the eastern borderlands alone will illustrate this point. Partition led to the displacement of an estimated 4 million people. An estimated 10 million people entered India from Bangladesh in 1971. The number of people displaced from Burma has already been mentioned in the last chapter. Add to that the flow of refugees from Tibet and Bhutan, and the sheer magnitude of the numbers become mindboggling. Faced with such a tremendous influx of people, the policies adopted by the Indian government towards refugees and migrants from across its borders have been commendable indeed.

However, critical scholars who have studied India's refugee policies and its practices and institutions of care have been far more skeptical of claims about India's adherence to "universal moral values" on this score. First of all, India has steadfastly refused to sign the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees and also the 1967

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[185]The principle of non-*refoulement*, adopted during the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, stipulates that no refugee should be returned to a country where s/he is likely to face persecution and torture.

Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.[186] Second, India's existing policies towards its refugees have variously been described as the politics of the "near abroad" (Samaddar), "calculated kindness" (Samaddar) and "strategic ambiguity" (Chimni). Refugees from Myanmar were welcomed at one point, but with the transformation of India's relationship with that country these refugees were ignored and at times even prevented from crossing over to India.[187] Tibetans, by and large, were allowed to settle freely in India, while Tamils from Sri Lanka were interned for years in strictly supervised camps. Such contradictions also reveal themselves with regard to the Indian state's attitudes towards the politics espoused by refugees and the policies of asylum implemented since 1947. While the Indian state frowned upon Sri Lankan Tamils airing their political views, it allowed the Burmese (upto a point) and the Tibetans to do so. The presupposition here is that as recipients of the state's hospitality, refugees and migrants should not "resume their political selves," even though this was implemented unevenly in actual practice (Samaddar, "Refugees," 54). These ambiguities are also noticeable as far as the state's asylum and repatriation policies are concerned. While refugees from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sri Lanka were forcibly repatriated, the "Indian state did not even try to find a solution that might persuade the refugees to return, as it did in the case

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[186] While there no official statement on why India has consistently refused to sign these two pacts, the legal scholar B.S. Chimni notes six major reasons for this: i) the Eurocentric definition of the "refugee" in the 1951 Convention, ii) the tremendous economic burden that the rights regime would impose on third world countries like India, iii) the fear of intrusive supervision by the UNHCR on the national refugee regime, iv) the fear of negative reports by international NGO's, v) an objection that the 1951 Convention does not allow an effective protection of India's security needs and vi) the self-perceived commendation that India's record in giving assistance and protection to refugees have been satisfactory (444-45). Chimni also states that none of these reasons actually stand up when subjected to close scrutiny (445-47).

[187] See the essays by Subir Bhaumik and R.K. Ranjan Singh.

of the Tibetan refugees" (Samaddar, *Materiality I*, 138).[188] Many refugees are interned in abominable conditions. The Leikhul refugee camp in Manipur, for instance, forbids free movement of Burmese refugees outside its walls. While the policy of accommodating selected refugee groups has contributed a lot in consolidating a self-image of India as a tolerant "palimpsest," a study of India's actual asylum and repatriation practices actually reveal a prolonged history of what I would call "strategic care" based upon the self-interests of the Indian state.[189]

While these histories of "strategic care" play an important function in delineating the differentiating regime of pastoral power of the postcolonial state, thereby demarcating categories as "insiders" and "outsiders," "citizens" and "aliens," they have also played a crucial role in the process of "nation-building." Commentators like Samaddar, Samir Kumar Das and Ritu Menon have emphasized how, despite the inconsistencies in the Indian state's policies of care and protection, such policy regimes have also played an important role in the process of "nation-building." In the east, the rehabilitation of refugees was quite successful in placing within the emergent national polity some of the worst-affected victims of these massive population displacements. Ritu Menon argues, taking the rehabilitation efforts in the Western sector as her exemplar:

> It was the characterization of the refugee as a critical component of nation-building that marked a significant shift in conceptualization and, consequently, in policy formulation. Linking resettlement with development, and rehabilitation with reconstruction, was a uniquely progressive and far-sighted response to a

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[188] Also see Willem van Schendel's book on the Chittagong Hill Tracts for more on the refugee question in that region.

[189] "Palimpsest" is the central metaphor that illustrates India's inherent tolerance and accommodation in Nehru's *The Discovery of India*. See my essay on the implications of such metaphors in this ur-narrative of the Indian nation-state.

> problem of crushing proportions; in this scheme of things refugees became a valuable human resource rather than only an onerous liability (138).

The deleterious underside of these progressive projects, though, was the gradual institutionalization of the patriarchal state that fastidiously maintained its right to control both refugees and women.[190] Undoubtedly, these technologies of rule, manifested through policies of care, played a big role in the process of nation-building thereby consolidating and legitimizing the role of the state as the ultimate repository of power, they also functioned on the micro-level to shape the subjectivities of many of these migrants who became invested in this project. This was very much evident in the post-independence era as refugees from what is now Bangladesh enthusiastically participated in the process of nation-building. Most of the bureaucracy and police force in Assam, for instance, was dominated by Bengalis, leading to resentment from local populations later.[191] These policies and practices of care and protection also had a huge role to play in the way in which such migrant subjects recognized themselves as being interpellated into the systemic form of the nation-state. A good illustration in this regard for this chapter is the distinction made in policy statements like the "Annual Report of the Department of Rehabilitation (1965-66), Government of India" that differentiated

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[190] The discourse on abducted women was the most notorious example of such control, both in case of India and Pakistan. The critical literature on this is increasing steadily. For well-known examples, see the work of Menon and Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, Priya Kumar and Jill Didur. An excellent work which deals with postcolonial identity formation through the domain of law and citizenship regimes and the implications of these with the patriarchal regime of the state is Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's *The Scandal of the State* (2003).

[191] I can provide a personal anecdote here. A majority of my mother's side are migrants from what is now Bangladesh. My mother's uncle, Samar Das, became the DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police) in Assam in the seventies. The seventies also saw the anti-Bengali agitation in Assam at its height. Along with K.P.S. Gill, who later went on to lead anti-terrorist operations in Punjab in the eighties, my mother's uncle was a much reviled man in the local Assamese press. One of the frequent accusations made against him was that he had no attachement to Assam because he was an "outsider." His family was also attacked in their car once in 1979.

between “migrants” and “displaced” people. A “migrant” was someone who had come to Indian Territory before 15 August, 1947. A displaced person (DP), on the other hand, was—

> …one who had entered India (who left or who was compelled to leave his home in East Pakistan on or after 15 August 1947) on account of civil disturbances or fear of such disturbances or on account of the setting up of the two dominions of India and Pakistan (quoted in Samir K. Das, 106-07).

Such technologies of rule influence the self-perception of the purported citizen subject of the postcolonial nation state, setting in place a complex system of recognition and subordination to the institutionalization of state power. My reading of *PR* will illustrate that later. The moot point, of course, is that regimes of care and the process of governmentalizing ethics help in sustaining a national self-image where the “tolerant” nation selflessly devotes itself to welcoming refugees and migrants from “other” places. A critical scrutiny though illustrates that such regimes of care are strategically (and unequally) employed, and often serve as a mask for managing anxieties (for instance, about gender).

Interestingly, such policies that institute regimes of care for migrants and displaced people have also come into conflict with laws and statutes guaranteeing the rights of “autochthonous” population groups in the postcolonial Indian state. A case in point is the India’s eastern borderland region where the settlement of displaced and migrant population groups have created and exacerbated ethnic tensions. Ethnic conflicts have increased all over the eastern borderland over the past sixty years. Most of these conflicts are predicated on shifting definitions of autochthones and “outsiders/foreigners” and are geared around the demarcation and desire for territorial rights for particular communities. While the complex ethnoscape of the Indian northeast is one of the major

precipitants of these conflicts, another factor that has led to the exacerbation of these conflicts is a continuing regime of "protective discrimination." A majority of the population of the eastern borderlands are constructed in the law as "tribal" communities—a legatee of colonial era anthropological categories. The "tribes" of the eastern borderlands fall under the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category according to the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Like the Scheduled Castes (SC) and OBC (Other Backward Classes) categories, there are reservations for jobs and in official positions and educational institutions for the STs. In the eastern borderland states of Nagaland and Meghalaya only specific ST communities can own property. For example, in states like Meghalaya only the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population can own property, which they can lease out to non-tribals. 85 percent of public employment is reserved for the locals, while 55 out of 60 seats in the state legislature are reserved for STs.

Taking a pan-northeast Indian view in his essay titled "Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, Homelands and the Crisis of Displacement" Sanjib Baruah argues that the "protective discrimination regime" is an anachronistic remainder from the colonial era that has subsisted almost unchanged in the postcolonial period. This has led to a differential regime of citizenship, where certain segments are relegated to the rights of "denizens."[192] "Denizens" open up an aporetic space within the folds of citizenship—they enjoy a few rights, but are excluded from most (such as owning property). The roots of this differentiated citizenship regime can be traced back to colonial policy instruments, such as the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 and The Government of India

[192] Baruah says that while "denizen" is not a contemporary legal category, he is referring to the power of denization that endowed a few rights, but not all, to aliens' vis-à-vis natural born citizens.

Act of 1919, which were devised to foster a protectionist regime for aboriginal people living in areas designated as "backward tracks." This idea of protection was a governmental strategy employed by the colonial state and emerged in the bloody aftermath of savage repression in the course of "pacification" of these aboriginal people in the northeast, especially as it was seen that the sudden advent of capitalist structures had led to massive dislocation and dispossession among them and was liable to cause social unrest.[193] Most of these colonial policy instruments were implemented with minor modifications in the postcolonial regime. The key policy instrument in this regard is the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, through which many of these formerly protected enclaves were transformed into autonomous regions or states. The Sixth Schedule empowers district councils to allocate development funds, to regulate customary law and also to determine the occupation and use of land. Reservations in schools and public employment are also regulated by the Sixth Schedule. Most of the territorial divisions in the northeastern regions according to the Sixth Schedule were made on an ethnic basis, as the new autonomous regions were often identified with particular Scheduled Tribes (ST)—such as Nagaland with the Nagas, Mizoram with the Zo tribes etc. However there were certain differentiations made in the Sixth Schedule. Autonomous enclaves were only formed in select "protected areas" of the colonial regime. Not all ST groups were incorporated. Many "plain tribes" like the Bodos and the

[193] See Kar's essay for an elaboration of the distinction between aboriginal people and "civilized" communities, like the caste Assamese, in the eastern borderlands.

Tiwas were left out of this arrangement, leading to resentment among particular "tribal" groups.[194]

Baruah argues that this continuity in policy structures between the colonial and postcolonial regimes has led to "the normalization of the idea of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups…" This normalization generates a form of politics predicated on ethnic definitions of the "outsider" and "insider" that is not congruent with the existing political economy of the region. Moreover, the socio-economic benefits of the project of spatial engineering on ethnic lines—elsewhere Baruah calls this the "cosmetic federalism" of the Indian state—have led to the unequal distribution of wealth and resources among the large proliferation of tribal groups scattered around the region. Further such divisions cannot be ruled out in the future as this has become the political model to be aspired to for ethnic groups in the region.

Similarly, Duncan McDuie-Ra argues that the protectionist discrimination regime has been pursued with contradictory approaches. First, legitimacy has been granted to certain "traditional" institutions that only date back to the colonial era. Second, money has been pumped in to shore up regional elites. Third, the region has been completely militarized and is still governed as a war zone, and finally, the region has been marketed as the home of premodern and tribal society. All these aspects of the discrimination regime have been internalized by the people of the region and have become a part of identity politics. This has also led to violent agitations where "outsiders" and "foreigners"—like Bengalis, Biharis, Adivasis or Nepalis—are often targeted violently.

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[194] For the colonial distinctions between "hills" and "plains" tribes see Chapter 3 of Baruah's *India against Itself.*

The most heinous instance of such violence is the infamous Nellie massacre of 1983, where over 900 Bengali Muslims were butchered in one night in the hamlet of Nellie in Assam. The next section studies the impact of the (re)drawing of "new battle lines" within the geo-body of the nation-state on the subjective formations of first and second generation "displaced" characters.

4.4: "The Inept Archeologist of Memories"

Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* traces the story of the narrator—Babu's—relationship with his father, Dr. Dam, and also his painful desire to relinquish his "outsider" status in his hometown, Shillong, the capital of the northeastern Indian state of Meghalaya.[195] Babu, the narrator, is a second generation Bengali migrant to Shillong. His father had migrated to Shillong a few years after partition. Dr. Dam was a veterinary doctor and a small-time bureaucrat who had made Shillong his home. Babu was born and brought up in Shillong. The text is divided into four parts. The timeframe of the action in the first two sections of the text ranges from 1979-1988. 1979 saw the first major anti-*dkhar* (*dkhar* is the Khasi word for foreigner) riots in Shillong. The text begins with a prologue set in 1987, where we learn that Dr. Dam has suffered from a stroke. The subsequent chapters in the first two sections give us different accounts of Dr. Dam's life as a veterinary doctor and a "government servant." We learn that Dr. Dam had migrated with his family—he was not married then—to Silchar in Assam after 1947. Soon, after settling his family in Silchar, he moved to Shillong and joined the veterinary department there. As an ardent believer in the modernizing potential of the postcolonial Indian

[195] Though Shillong is never named directly in *PR*, references to places like St. Edmund's College give the game away.

nation-state, Dr. Dam devoted all his energies to the veterinary projects he worked on, believing that these investments would ameliorate the poverty-stricken conditions in one of India's most economically backward regions. He married at the age of thirty-eight, and slogged his entire life to support his wife and young son. He made numerous attempts to buy property, both in Guwahati (Assam) and in Shillong. While he lost his property in Guwahati to an arbitrary government regulation that decreed that a public road would pass through his land, he never got the opportunity to build a house in Shillong because of Meghalaya's "protective discrimination" regime.[196] Finally, he managed to build a ramshackle house in the property he shared with his father and brothers in Silchar. The 1970's also saw the rise in ethnic tensions in Meghalaya, culminating in the anti-*dkhar* riots of 1979. The 1980's witnessed recurring clashes and rioting between the "local" Khasis and "outsiders," such as Bengalis, Nepalis and Assamese, in Shillong. Migrant Bengalis especially, whether Hindu or Muslim, were viewed with particular suspicion as "foreigners."[197] Dr. Dam and his family were caught in this maelstrom. He constantly had to endure humiliations from his superiors as well as in everyday encounters with "locals" on account of both his lack of power and his "foreign" antecedents. He was physically attacked in the streets once. A Khasi junior minister also threatened him with a gun when he had the temerity to say no to one of the former's demands. The department he served selflessly and idealistically for over forty years treated him as a dispensable

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[196] I will talk more about the regime of "protective discrimination" in the second section of this chapter.

[197] This was not limited to Meghalaya alone. The Assam Agitation (1975-82), for instance, was also organized around the plank of "*bidexi kheda andolon*" (drive away the foreigner movement). The history of tensions between Bengalis and other ethnicities in northeast India has a long, complex and context-specific history. I will explore this in the second section of the essay.

commodity after his retirement in 1986, and he daily felt "the humiliation of being old and at the mercy of the state" (8). After his stroke, the Dam family left Shillong for good in 1988. The second section ends with their move to the house Dr. Dam built in Silchar. At one level, thus, *PR* is an exercise at writing the biography of the "unremarkable" life of Dr. Dam—a biography that is closely connected to the historical contingencies in the Indian northeast that led post-partition Bengali Hindu migrants to become permanent migrants in the postcolonial Indian state. *PR* powerfully illustrates the progression of post-partition Hindu Bengali refugees from Refugee-Indian, Indian-not-Refugee, not-Indian-not-Refugee to Indian-but-always-Refugee through the characterization of Dr. Dam.

The last two sections of *PR* shifts the focus from the father to the son. Babu returns home after ten years. Dr. and Mrs. Dam are both dead by now. Babu lives in Delhi and is employed in an unappealing job as an editor of news reports. He is conscious that his life has been a failure thus far.[198] His return "home" to Shillong is motivated by his desire to find meaning in his life. As he says—

> If there had been a future, or even a present worth paying attention to, had there been something other than an infinite, monotonous, endlessly repeating assembly line of days, perhaps my thoughts would not have turned so obsessively to the past. It was not a question of roots or origin, you understand. That was not possible, not now, not fifty years after the notional ancestral village had ceded its place to the modern nation-state. If we were all to do so, we whose lives are flung around in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, if we were to let loose our songlines, our routes of memory, our pilgrimage paths, we would find them faltering against the documents and borders and guns (248-49).

The return "home," as Babu says, is not about tracing back one's roots. What he hints at is far more complex—for second-generation migrant subjects whose lives are

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[198] Babu's life parallels that of Amrit in *An Outline of the Republic*.

"flung around" in the postcolonial nation-states, the idea of the ancestral home beyond the border hardly held any allure. Indeed memory itself would falter against the bottleneck of state technologies like "documents and borders and guns." The motivation for going back was impelled by something different:

> No, I let go any idea of an ancestral homeland long ago and it would never have surfaced at all in my life had those days of fear not brought it up so sharply: "Go back, foreign dogs. Go back, Bangladeshis." *But this was home, surely this space of childhood*, this place where I had last seen my father on his feet, this confluence of childhood hopes and a faith in the future (249, italics mine).

Passages like the above illustrate that *PR* is not a text about the nostalgic search for "homelands," but a phenomenological exploration of the meanings of "home," the "space of childhood" and the condition of homelessness. Linking this claim up with my previous point about the question of permanent migration of post-partition Bengali Hindus in the Indian northeast, I argue that *PR* is an intense exploration of the phenomenological realities engendered by the displacement of populations, and the subsequent negotiations that such displaced people (DPs) and their future generations have to undergo in the sphere of everyday life with the governmental regimes of the postcolonial state apparatus.

Indeed, the past (the father's life in Shillong) is uncannily repeated in the present (the son's return journey to his hometown). Instead of reconciling "modes of being and seeing" to the point where the narrating subject becomes his "own hometown," the trip back to Shillong in the last two sections of the text only accentuates the consciousness of being an outsider in Babu. More than once, he is referred to as "Bangladeshi" and *dkhar*. His long conversation with his former neighbors, Dr. and Mrs. Chatterji, makes him confront the fact that the post-partition migrants were a "dispersed people, but unlike the

Jews we have no mythical homeland" (287). Somewhere, "on some map," Dr. Chatterji says, there must be a place for such migrants (290). But the fact remained that no map existed anywhere that could give such migrants the stability of "home." The killer blow comes when Babu comes face-to-face with his boyhood nemesis "Adolf Hitler."[199] This xenophobic ethnic youth leader was now a minister in the state cabinet. Holding Babu's eyes in his at the end of their interview, Adolf Hitler whispers "almost imperceptibly—*Dkhar*! Foreigner"(225). Babu knows then that he has to bid his hometown goodbye forever. As he says at the novel's closure:

> I look at my birthplace, knowing that I will never see it again. I want it to be home for everyone who lives there, for everyone to have a place in it that cannot be lost or stolen. But how you achieve that future is no longer my concern, I tell my hometown. I have truly let go…(304).

The text thus narrates the process of an amanuensis gone wrong—at the end, the narrator cannot reconcile "being and seeing" and has to "let go." It would not be wrong, therefore, to call the plot of *PR* as a quest, albeit futile, for a cure of the social pathology induced by the consciousness of being a permanent migrant.

The text's narrative structure too replicates the restless, ceaseless quest of memory to endow the amorphous past with some meaning that would serve as an amanuensis for the narrating subject. In one of the self-reflexive chapters towards the

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[199] Ironically, the son's tormentor, Adolf Hitler, is the son of the father's nemesis, Minister Leapingstone. The junior Leapingstone got this nickname because as a youth leader, he led a xenophobic party that idolized Nazi insignia. At the same time, names like Adolf Hitler are pretty common in Meghalaya. Adolf lu Hitler R. Marak was a former minister in the Meghalaya state cabinet.

close of *PR*, the narrator provides us with a clue that I believe can help us describe the complex narrative structure of the text:[200]

> Memory is also about what you decide to remember, so that you can make sense of what has been irrevocably lost. That was the only way in which the past could be recovered, in the writing of stories in different voices, sometimes across the distance of the third person, sometimes through the eyes of the boy who lived here. Change a name there, add a street, put in the rain, as if by doing this there was something that could be reached, a way for the waste to be negated. If the fear found its way into the stories, it was through a screen, somewhere in the background of my father's affairs and failures, little details tucked around that most unremarkable life as I attempted to give it a shape…Each group has its own truth, but there is no way of putting them together to form a complete picture (254-55).

PR purportedly is the "biography" of Dr. Dam, the narrator's father. But it is a biography that is heavily mediated by the son's desire to discover a "feeling of being at home in the world around" (294). The presentation of the father's life is constantly mediated through the mottled screen of the son's existential dilemmas and crises, best encapsulated in the following statement—"…am I transferring my own uncertainties to him?" (142). By seeking to endow shape to his father's "brief and inconsequential" and "unremarkable" life, the son attempts to understand the condition of his own "exile" and the intense desire to reclaim his natal place as "home." The formal divisions of the narrative mirror this dual impulse. For the first two sections (titled "Arrival" and "Departure"), the narrative runs chronologically backward from 1988-1979, shifting between first person (Babu's point-of-view) and third person narration, while the last two sections (titled "Terminal" and "Travelogue"), narrated exclusively in the first person, are framed like a travel diary that recounts the narrator's return journey to his hometown,

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[200] In his interview on the HarperCollins website Deb says that the narrative form of *PR* was influenced by W.G.E. Sebald's *The Emigrants* and also the fictions of Virginia Woolf.

Shillong, that he left as a young adolescent. If the use of the third-person distances the observer, almost chronicle-like, from the past-as-object, the shifts to the first-person reduces that distance and merges the past with the narrator's present. Throughout the narrative, the father's insecure position as a post-partition Bengali Hindu migrant into the "peripheral" northeastern region of the Indian nation-state—itself a region where "history lies defeated" —seeps into the son's present, indelibly coloring it with the taint of "outsiderness" (211). The son's attempt to understand his own feelings of alienation leads him to reevaluate the image of his father that he had during his childhood. Therefore, this narrative exercise of the "individual straining at the limits of memory," attempts to provide a therapeutic function in a double sense—striking a compromise between "loss" and "fear," it seeks to rescue the narrator's father's "inconsequential" life from the nothingness to which history condemns him, and also to reconcile the narrator's modes of "being" and "seeing" to the point where "observer and image merge into one" in the place he can reclaim as "home."

Moreover, the "return" journey in *PR* is not simply an opposition of the past and the present; rather, this return makes "space bend and time fold," and the past Babu attempts to talk about "is impregnated by what comes after, laden heavy with all the failures that were not apparent then" (231). The failures, fears and frustrations that constitute who the narrating subject has become in the present makes him return to the past in a search for causes. But this search for causal factors that can help Babu in his process of "accounting" does not lead to a neat closure; it rather illustrates the ceaseless shuttle between what Peter Brooks terms the repetitive attempt "to create a coherent and explanatory text, yet struggle over its interpretation"—a common feature of

psychoanalytic and also many literary texts (57-8). In this context, it is useful to invoke the Freudian distinction between repetition (*wiederholen*) and reproduction (*reproduzieren*) to parse out the ceaseless shuttle between the past and present, the father and son and the child (Babu) and adult (Babu) that characterizes *PR's* plot . Reproduction would entail the full reliving of the scene of original trauma, whereas the repetition enables the confrontation, in a symbolic form, with the affects and the figures of the past. Part of what creates repetition's "uncanny" effect, Brooks says, is the imbrication of the ambiguities inherent in the process that cannot be resolved satisfactorily. Laplanche and Pontalis say that at the level of concrete psychopathology—

> …the compulsion to repeat is an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious. As a result of this action, the subject deliberately places himself in distressing situations, thereby repeating an old experience, but he does not recall this prototype; on the contrary, he has the strong impression that the situation is fully determined by the circumstances of the moment (78).

In both "Repetition, Remembering and Working Through" and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud suggests that repetition is a tendency made by the ego to master excessive tensions. Repetition is not simply the realization of desire under the cloak of suffering; rather, it is a simultaneous derivation of both pleasure and unpleasure for the two parts of the psychical apparatus: the pleasure principle (*eros*) and the death drive (*thanatos*). Brooks translates these psychoanalytic insights to the functioning of literary narratives and argues that the operation of these two drives on each other creates a "retard, a dilatory space" that is the condition of possibility for narrative. Repetition, he says, in "all its literary manifestations may in fact work as a 'binding', a binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them in serviceable form, usable 'bundles' within the energetic economy of a narrative" (101). If the text is a force-

field of energies, then the simultaneous and contradictory movements of the impulse towards repetition bind these energies together and put it to serviceable form. The text's closure is a form of death. The narrative, thus, literally seeks the illumination of its meaning at the moment of its own death.

In the third section of *PR*, the narrator's (who now lives in Delhi) dreams and reveries are constantly haunted by images of his hometown—he dreams of "the sound of horses' hooves drumming on the slanted, corrugated tin roof, gathering myself in the cold until the moment of awakening drenched in sweat, and the realization of having been torn elsewhere from home long ago" (208). There are other "arbitrary" dream sessions, where he sees "words scrawled in blood red" on a flimsy piece of paper pasted onto a wall (220). In each remembered dream of Babu's adulthood, the town's features appear differently "dispersed across a shifting landscape of time" (219). Besides attempting to find a proper closure to his father's inconsequential life, Babu's re-turn to his hometown is thus motivated by his need to hold on to a tangible memory of his hometown that suspends the flight of "the shifting landscape of time." He returned, as he says, to "find an end to the story other than Dr. Dam's death, and to find something that would recover the voice of the boy who had left with hopes of night journeys, of another future where he would be free and successful and unafraid of his alienness" (255). But the repeated mention of the word *dkhar* during his sojourn in Shillong brings back him back 'home to fear…its salty taste arriv(ing) with pulsating quickness to the tongue" (229).

Babu's narrative intention, of course, was to destroy the wall of fear between the two characters through whose points-of-view he tried to understand the town: Dr. Dam and the child Babu. However, the performance of this simultaneous narrative task where

past and present were "strung out on the two ends of the long run," posed formidable difficulties for the narrator. In the absence of well-formed stories and/or records from the past, such as photographs, Babu was forced to reshape Dr. Dam's "biography" from the "little details tucked around that most unremarkable life." Recalling these "little details" necessitated a repetition of certain events that was blocked out of the adult narrator's consciousness. As he says, in the absence of signposts of memory, all that the narrator could do was to "retrace the runner's route, from the first awareness of what it meant to be an outsider to a final settlement of accounts" (230). But the accounts are never really settled in the narrative. The niggling, recurring fear of "alienness"—the underlying fear of the migrant consciousness—found its way as if "through a screen" and overdetermined Babu's reminiscences of his father and the "town that…(he)…had *invented* and *refashioned* in words and images…(which)…was caving in under the weight of this, the real, the present, the now" (254, italics mine). This fear, more than anything else, binds his story to that of Dr. Dam's. The son identifies with the father not through some idealized image, but rather through cognition of the fear that his father may have felt analogously in the past. A migrant from Shillong, Babu had built up a nostalgic image of his hometown that found its way even into his dreams. But this "invented" town was slowly destroyed by the weight of what he experienced in his return journey, forcing him to "truly let go." To translate to Brooks' terms, the principle of repetition in *PR*—between father and son, between child and adult—creates the tension that demands narration. By "letting go" of his hometown—the moment of narrative death— the adult Babu writes the epitaphs for the child and the father. But we have a lingering suspicion

that that their ghosts will haunt Babu forever—this second-generation migrant can never find a "future where he would be free…and unafraid of his alienness."[201]

4.4.1: The Historical Backdrop of *The Point of Return*

In the Indian context, well-known oppositions such as the Hindu/Muslim binary nowadays need little contextualization, so ingrained it is in the national psyche. However, the distinction between "outsiders" and "insiders" in a "peripheral" region like the northeast needs a lot more explanation because the local ramifications of these divisions shift from one place to another, and sometimes go counter to the received national narratives. Such is the case with the *dkhar*-Khasi conflict in Shillong—the focus of *PR*. While I have already elaborated on the "protective discrimination" regime in the previous section, in this section, I will shift the point-of-view to that of the displaced person (DP) who settled in the eastern borderlands post partition. I will also localize the Khasi-dkhar conflict that tore Meghalaya apart in the late seventies and early eighties. In an interview with the daily newspaper, *The Hindu*, Deb says that while he used some elements of his childhood in Shillong as a template for *PR*, he had "no intentions of presenting a factual

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[201] To be sure, we should not discount the authoritative and privileged space that the son inhabits in narrating his father's life and writing his epitaph in *PR*. But at the same time, the narrator is skeptical enough to subtly undercut the bases of his own authoritative position. A passage like the following a good illustration:

> In the eighteenth century, nostalgia was diagnosed as a medical condition, arising from a lesion in the brain that in turn was caused by homesickness. Who would you say had the disease? Me with my constant rewriting and recharting of a landscape of a childhood hometown? Or my father, who never allowed himself to acknowledge the loss of this place, to whom it was the most unspeakable of loves? (256).

Not only does Babu "call back" the past (Dr. Dam), but he also halts, turns back ("Who would you say had the disease?") and self-reflexively meditates on his protocols of reading. Thus, the authoritative position of the narrating subject (Babu) often trades places with that of the object (Dr. Dam). Past and present are brought face to face, "…strung out on the two ends of the long run; father and son, characters and narrator, the town and the self…here, now, at this whirling, dizzy point of vertigo that is the return" (254).

picture of life in Shillong in the 70's and 80's." Though this was meant as a defense of the fictional autonomy of *PR*, it is difficult to understand the contingencies that the novel represents without an explication of the specific political and socio-economic circumstances in the Indian northeast in the post-partition era. If Babu's past is "impregnated" by the fear engendered by what came after, it is important to understand the specific socio-political circumstances that coalesced in the escalating conflicts between *dkhars* ("foreigners") and indigenous "tribals" that visibly rent apart the socio-cultural fabric of Shillong from the late-1970's onwards. It is important to note here that Babu's memory, figured in the novel through a narrative that moves backward on the time-line, "stops" at 1979. While this narrative choice is explicable on a purely pragmatic level in terms of childhood recollections—if Babu were born in 1971, he would have been eight at that time—it is also the date when the first major ethnic conflagration occurred in Shillong. Babu's recollections of his father thus get inextricably intertwined with the process whereby "…new battle lines were being drawn and fresh groups of people were being defined as outsiders, borders bristling with barbed-wire teeth" (296).

PR is primarily a tale of Bengali Hindu post-partition migrants who moved to the Indian northeast during or just after the partition of 1947. The two major geographical locales in which this novel is set are the towns of Shillong in Meghalaya and Silchar in the Cachar district of Assam. While Cachar is a Bengali dominated district, Shillong has had (and still does have) a substantial Bengali population. Meghalaya is one of India's smallest and poorest states, and borders Bangladesh. At the time of partition, Meghalaya was a district with limited autonomy within the state of Assam. In 1969, Meghalaya became an autonomous state under the auspices of the Assam Reorganization Act. In

1972, the Indian Parliament passed the Northeastern Areas Reorganization Act, and Meghalaya attained full statehood.[202] The hill-town of Shillong was the erstwhile capital of Assam, and is currently the capital of Meghalaya. Khasis, Garos, Jaintias and Hmars—ethnic groups who were listed as "hill tribes" by the British—form the bulk of Meghalaya's population.[203] As Duncan McDuie-Ra says, the term "tribe" is itself a colonial category, perhaps a translation of the Sanskrit *mleccha* (outcast) (6). As a term, it signified backwardness and lack of civilization, and was also employed as a descriptive label for the inhabitants of regions that were savagely "pacified" in the nineteenth century and were later subjected to the paternalism of European missionaries.[204] This colonial codification has persisted in postcolonial India as even a cursory look at the sixth schedule of the Constitution will demonstrate. Besides the "tribal" populations, Meghalaya also has a substantial number of Assamese, Bengalis and Nepalis among others. Since the late 1970's Meghalaya has seen heightened tensions between the "indigenous" "tribal" populace and the non-tribal "outsiders."[205] There have been major

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[202] For a trenchant critique of the Indian government's project of spatial engineering in the northeastern region see Sanjib Baruah's essay "Nationalizing Space: Cosmetic Federalism and the Politics of Development."

[203] For a historical discussion of the divisive policy of differentiating tribes in northeast under "hills" and "plains" categories—although focused primarily on Assam—in both the colonial and postcolonial periods see Baruah's *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (esp. Chap 2 and 3). Also see the "Introduction" to Yasmin Saikia's *Fragmented Memories*. Baruah's later essay "Clash of Resource Use Regimes in Colonial Assam: a Nineteenth Century Puzzle Revisited" considers the implications of colonial policy on "settled" and "shifting" cultivation and its connections with the categories of "hills" and "plains" tribes. Many "hill tribes," although not exclusively, practice a form of slash-and-burn cultivation on the hillsides known as *jhum*.

[204] See the essays by F.S. Downs and P. Pels.

[205] See McDuie-Ra's Ph.D thesis "Civil Society and Human Security in Meghalaya: Identity, Power and Inequalities" (esp. Chapter 3) for a good discussion of the imbrication of colonialism, postcolonial state

anti Bengali, Assamese and Nepali riots in Shillong in 1979, 1987, 1992, 1997 and 1998. Of course, as my discussion of Baruah's essay in one of the previous sections illustrates, these riots did not erupt all of a sudden, but have to be understood in terms of a *longue durée*.

There is one factor that Baruah's otherwise very rich essay skirts around. The boundaries instituted by colonial/postcolonial state technologies, such as that of the "protective discrimination" regime, lead people to identify with some of these categories both at a collective as well as a subjective level. State instruments are fundamental in shaping forms of identity and subjectivity. The fact remains that a modality like that of "protective discrimination" has proved been attractive for people in the region because of the perceived benefits that have accrued for certain groups. Utilizing the anthropologist Gananath Obeysekere's idea of "self-primitivization," McDuie-Ra makes the suggestive argument that many tribal elites "accepted and reproduced categories of identity derived from colonial knowledge and its postcolonial reproduction…and made it the basis of political, social and economic life" (88).[206] This reproduction empowered certain groups, while it marginalized others. The "persistence of forms of knowledge" consolidated the idea of tribal groups as "homogenous groups devoid of inequalities based on class, ethnicity and gender" (88). A good illustration in this regard would be the history of the gradual dissolution of the APHLC (The All Party Hill Leaders Conference),

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policy and the consolidation of the discourse of "outsiders" in Meghalaya. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Susmita Sengupta's *Regionalism in Meghalaya* also provide a useful historical and contextual background.

[206] According to Obeyesekere, self-primitivization is the "process that occurs during periods of unequal power relations whereby the native adopts the image projected onto him by the colonial other, sometimes parodically and sometimes with seriousness or a combination of both" (120). "Self-primitivization" thus is a mode of specular identification, which may be narcissistic or non-narcissistic, much in line with what Fanon outlines in the dialectic of colonial identification in *Black Skins, White Masks*.

which was group formed out of multiple tribal affiliations—including Khasis, Jaintias, Karbis and others tribes— in 1960 to oppose the imposition of the Assamese language in undivided postcolonial Assam, and which was also at the forefront in the demand for a separate Meghalaya. By 1966 however the APHLC lost most of the other members, and became a party driven by the Khasi elite. It lost its pan-ethnic, pan tribal composition and had become a party driven by a mono-ethnic identity. A large part of the dissolution of the APHLC can be attributed to mutual suspicions among the various tribal factions who had inherited their ethnic self-definitions (with the attendant ideas of savage/civilized, progressive/primitive) from colonial anthropogenetic categories.[207] These mono-ethnic identities then fuel the territorial search for ethnic homelands. The discourse of "insiders" and "outsiders" in the Indian northeast has a direct connection to this desire for an isomorphism between an essentialized notion of ethnic identity and the claims over territory. Contemporary ethno-nationalist groups like the KSU (Khasi Students Union) in Meghalaya inherit this discourse, and it is precisely these circumstances that are represented so evocatively in *PR.*[208]

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[207] Many elite Khasis, for instance, identify strongly with Western modernity and look down upon other tribes as well as the plains peoples. While these stereotypes persist among the tribals, they also frame the relations between tribals and non-tribals. For instance, McDuie-Ra mentions that Bangladesh is viewed by the locals as the "Malthusian nightmare" and Bengalis are perceived as "desperate, land-hungry…who will do anything to settle across the border; including work for miniscule wages, marry into a tribal family, negotiate *benami* transactions, or simply dwell in urban areas waiting for work" (111). At the same time, non-tribals too perpetuate the discourse of difference by not learning tribal languages and also sending their children to separate schools. Stereotypes about tribals being "simple" and "stupid" also persist among many non-tribals. Dasgupta mentions in her essay how Sylhetis used to display contempt for the Assamese "going along with the imperialist projection of the 'lazy good-for-nothing native…" (349). Many of these attitudes and stereotypes still persist among people to this day.

[208] The KSU's slogan was "*Mait Shaprang Khlur ka ri"* (Strive ahead sons of the soil).

Of course, the distinctions among "insiders" and "outsiders" get even more complex in the variegated socio-cultural milieu of the eastern borderlands. The Scheduled Tribes and "indigenous" people, after all, form only one component of this milieu. Since the colonial era, there have been massive movements into this region initially for providing labor in tea gardens and oil fields (among others).[209] Gradually most of these groups were incorporated in the complex political economic structure that had grown in the region. Of course, these people who are now viewed as "outsiders" themselves belonged to different socio-economic strata.[210] While some of them definitely exploited the locals in alliance with both the colonial and postcolonial state, others occupied the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.[211] Besides people who came either as capitalists or as part of the labor force following the gradual consolidation of capitalist structures, a large group of people also came and settled down in the northeast after partition. In fact, to say that people "settled down" would be a radical simplification. To be sure, a lot of people did migrate from what is now Bangladesh to the northeast—like Dr. Dam and his family in *PR.* But it also must be remembered that partition was only one moment in a long, complicated history of territorial segmentation and readjustment in the eastern borderlands in colonial times. Most parts comprising the eastern Indian borderlands now were annexed to the British Empire after 1826. Colonial Assam (and this region included what is now Meghalaya) was ruled as a part of Bengal till 1874.

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[209] The Santhals, for instance, were brought to work in the tea gardens in the nineteenth century.

[210] The Marwaris, for instance, were primarily part of the capitalist class.

[211] Many "Bangladeshis," perceived as the epitome of the figure of the "outsider" in the northeast, often form the poorest section of the migrant proletariat.

After 1874, it became a separate province. But East Bengal and Assam were again ruled together as a separate province from 1905-12. Till 1947, the district of Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) was ruled as part of Assam. The tensions between northeastern "indigenes" and Bengalis, for instance, are connected to this long drawn out process of territorial segmentation during the colonial regime.

Partition plays a huge role in the current tensions in the eastern borderlands. In the months before partition, the Muslim League demanded that Assam become part of East Pakistan. This proposal was defeated formally only a month before partition, and the majority of the hill districts (with the exception of the Chittagong Hill Tracts) went to India. The plains district of Sylhet—part of colonial Assam—voted to be part of Pakistan. The new borders changed the entire political economy of the region as hills tribes, who had trade relations with plainspeople in Bengal, were left straddling an international border. Access to ports like Chittagong was cut, while riverine routes were also patrolled as part of new national territories.[212] The northeastern region—a new regional construction—became landlocked, while its populations were now viewed by the two postcolonial states as borderland populations of questionable loyalties.

The other angle to partition is that it saw the migration of a large number of especially Bengali Hindus to northeast India. Already there were historical tensions between the Bengalis and other communities in the eastern region.[213] But partition saw the arrival of more than two million Bengali migrants (primarily Hindu) into the

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[212] See Willem van Schendel's *The Bengal Borderland*.

[213] See Baruah's *India against Itself* and McDuie-Ra for a description of these tensions between local communities and Bengalis in colonial India.

northeast. The Indian state too felt duty-bound to repatriate such displaced people on Indian Territory. This movement of populations, allied with the economic marginalization of the northeast in postcolonial India was one of the reasons that led to an exacerbation of tensions among locals and "outsiders" in the region. The 1979 riots in Shillong—one of the key events in *PR*— are a result of such a local conjunction of historical socioeconomic rivalries between particular ethnic groups, and also a revivified autochthonous identity fueled by an absolute claim over a delimited territory.

4.4.2: Learning to Narrate an "Unremarkable" Life

Part of the problem in narrating the story of Dr. Dam, Babu admits, lies in the fact that the life he was trying to represent was not "heroic."[214] Because of this limitation, the "biography" of Dr. Dam could only be fleshed out if it were mapped on to and made isomorphic to the town he had migrated to: Shillong. What was left of Dr. Dam's life before his move to Shillong were "only images in…(Babu's)…mind, a scrap of scenes to be wrested free somehow, to be retained against the excesses of history, of time" (297). Dr. Dam's past, thus, existed only in disconnected fragments in Babu's memory. There were a few reasons for this. First, there was hardly any communication, verbal or otherwise, between father and son. Dr. Dam is characterized by a "stoic rationality" and offers minimal avenues for imaginative identification for Babu. Second, there was a big generational gap between Babu and his father. Dr. Dam was married when he was thirty-eight, and Babu was born when he was in his early forties. Many a time in the narrative Babu is referred to by people who didn't know their actual relation as his grandson.

[214] These observations about narration occur in the last two halves of the text, where the narration is taken up exclusively by the adult Babu.

Besides, there were very few records of Dr. Dam's past. There were hardly any photographs that documented his past. Only three material objects are strongly connected to the character of Dr. Dam in the narrative—his official diaries, the numbered, loose sheets of paper in which he kept a meticulous balance of his accounts, and most importantly "a series of matter-of-fact diaries that over four decades incorporated" entries about his daily life and routine in "the compressed, telegraphic language that expressed his personality so well." These material objects appropriately "carried the burden" of representing both his "stoic rationality" and his deference to authority. Thus, in the absence of any possibility of imaginative identification, Babu had to recreate his father's character through his memories of how he had seen him negotiating life in Shillong. As Babu says—"Without stories, without photographs, I can only *imagine* him (Dr. Dam) where I had always *seen* him, in this town, walking that winding road curling around the hollow, coming up the steps with that curious tread of his, carrying different offerings for my mother and me…" (297).

To be sure, there are sections in *PR* where Babu tries to imagine Dr. Dam beyond the constrictions of what has been seen or heard—the story of Dr. Dam coming to Shillong with his father in the era before partition, and the "redemptive" fantasy towards the end of Dr. Dam and the elephants are two such instances. But these are rare instances of imaginative projection in the narrative. Instead, Babu recreates the unremarkable life of his father through two dominant narrative strands. The first is his memories of his father's negotiations with the institutions of the postcolonial state. The second strand is the relay of fear between the father and son—the fear engendered by the consciousness of having migrated to a place where one was not "rooted." The father, thus, hands "over his

memory of…fear and uncertainty" to the son. If fear enables the partial bridging of the "vast spaces" between Babu and Dr. Dam through the act of telling, then there is a secret tie that unites these two figures—a tie embodied in a single, terrifying word: *dkhar* (foreigner), the Khasi word for "foreigner." The son, through his act of narration acknowledges his father's gesture of fear, and "deal(s) with it in his own way, his high-lace up boots crunching down the concrete of the places he has lived in, places like Calcutta and Delhi, all those lonely places that have never been home, the tread of his feet just a little unsteady when he recalls his father and…(the)…night of fear" (153). This quotation occurs towards the end of the third person narrator's account of the night of the blackout during the riots of 1979, when Dr. Dam was terrified by the march of unknown boots in his frontyard. These two strands are also mirrored in the text in terms of the chapter divisions in the first two parts of the text. If we look carefully at the division of chapters in the first part of *PR* (titled "Arrival"), we notice an interesting pattern. Chapters 1, 3, 5 and 7 (titled "The Pension Office," "The Minister's Chambers," "Foreign Visitors," and "Blackout") are weighted more towards a representation of Dr. Dam's negotiations as a small-town bureaucrat with the postcolonial state apparatus. Chapters 2, 4 and 6 (titled "Highway Journey," "Wedding Season," and "A Tale about Tigers"), on the other hand, offer us fleeting glimpses into the life of Dr. Dam prior to partition, and also his consciousness of his precarious position as a migrant who has tenuous moorings in the postcolonial dispensation.

Recent anthropological work on the state and politics, influenced strongly by the work of Foucault, have shifted attention away from an analysis of the state as a idealized, transcendent apparatus that stands above society, to focus on how everyday practices and

representations function as modes through which the state comes into being.[215] What motivates this inquiry is the failure of the normative models of the state/civil society distinction and also the Weberian idea of rationalized bureaucracies to explain how citizen subjects in postcolonial locales negotiate through differential modes with the apparatus of the state. Such universalized models are predicated on a "state/society" split that is culturally constructed, but is then taken as normative. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta describe this shift in the following passage:

> Once we see that the boundary between the state and civil society is itself an effect of power, then we can begin to conceptualize "the state" *within* (and not automatically distinct from) other institutional forms through which social relations are lived, such as the family, civil society, and the economy. Such an analysis of state formation does not simply assume that the state stands at the apex of society and is the central locus of power. Instead, the problem becomes one of figuring out how the state *comes to assume* its vertical position as the supreme authority that manages all other institutional forms that social relations take, and that functions as the super-coordinator of the governance of social and individual conduct by these other institutions (9).

The sphere of everyday practices here emerges as the central field through which "ordinary" people learn about the state. Routine and repetitive everyday practices like standing in line to cash a pension check, paying taxes and so on substantiates the state as an institution in people's lives "through the apparently *banal* practices of bureaucracies" (11). These insights from anthropological theory give us a useful handle to understand Dr. Dam's subjective-formation. Moreover, it also illustrates how the state gets constructed as a vertical institution in a small town in a borderland region of the nation-state, which is located away from the actual centers of power.

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[215]See works by Veena Das and Deborah Poole, Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, and Jonathan Spencer.

A few illustrations from *PR* will emphasize these points. The opening scene of the first chapter ("The Pension Office") shows Babu and Dr. Dam waiting outside the pension office to cash the latter's check. It is 1986, and Dr. Dam has recently retired from a lifetime of service as a government veterinary doctor and small-time bureaucrat. The narrator emphasizes the repetitive, ritual-like performance of the disbursement of retirement checks in the following paragraph:

> Work, that is the disbursement of money, did not begin until after lunch, although the pensioners had to hand in their Pension Payment Orders (PPO's) at counter three by eleven o'clock in the morning. The counter closed after the clerk had accepted the PPO's and given out numbered, round brass tokens. What happened between eleven and two when the numbers were called out was uncertain, but in some ways was the most important part of the day. It usually ended with some of the supplicants being summarily rejected, while the lucky ones were given slips of paper that they exchanged for checks at counter five. A slightly different system was followed for those who received cash—these were people whose monthly pensions amounted to less than three hundred rupees—but barring the few who claimed to have a close relative among the clerks, the entire sequence was fraught with that strange mixture of tension and boredom that only a practiced bureaucracy is capable of producing (10).

What is important to note here is the banal, yet almost ritualistic, performance of this administrative activity.[216] The process of the disbursement of these checks is predictable, yet possesses a sense of mystery around it—what happened "between eleven and two when the numbers were called out was uncertain, but in some ways was the most important part of the day." "Tension and boredom"—the aleatory and the predictable—merge in the systemic performance of this state apparatus. After a long interval of waiting, "at last…the *magic* sequence" appears (27, italics mine). The "supplicants," like Dr. Dam, thus, undergo the "humiliation of being old and at the mercy of the state" (8). Indeed, the performance of this activity necessitates a code of behavior— supplication—

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[216] See Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* for a discussion of the banal, ritualized aspects through which the nation-state's presence is reinscribed in everyday life.

by the pensioners towards the agents of the state (the clerks). While excessive insistence arouses the wrath of state agents, "supplication" literally gets the job done, as in the case of the widow who followed Dr. Dam in the queue—"The widow…a small woman whose eyes barely came up to the counter, brought her fingers together and bobbed her head. 'Thank you, sahib, thank you, you'll see to it that I get my money today, won't you?" (8).

This code of supplication towards state authorities is one of the key elements of Dr. Dam's characterization. Dr. Dam repeatedly refers to himself as a "government servant"—the accent falling strongly on "servant." Babu recalls the differences in the English language utilized by the father and the son; Dr. Dam always "…cautious and circumspect in his choice of words: 'Yours humbly, I beg to inform you…'" (15). He "flinches" when he hears his father refer to petty officials as "sir" (28). But these cannot be considered as personal idiosyncrasies of Dr. Dam alone. What Deb, I think, tries to capture here is a subjective formation engendered by what Gupta terms the implication of the state in "the minute texture of everyday life" (1995). While it is easy to dismiss Dr. Dam's reactions as an instance of his "servile" personality on the basis of Babu's interpretations, it may be useful to speculate whether this mode of behavior is itself a strategy of negotiation that attempts, maybe in a futile fashion, to bridge what Gupta characterizes as the problematic gap between specific local institutions and translocal entities like the Indian state. "Servility" itself, in this context, may be a strategy of camouflage for negotiating this gap. As the narrative illustrates, Dr. Dam's position as a petty government employee forces him to negotiate with the state as well as corrupt local officials such as the Minister Leapingstone and his nephew. A simple act such as taking two Danish veterinarians around a diary farm in Shillong, results in an inquiry conducted

by two Indian intelligence officials (119-35).[217] Besides that Dr. Dam, who never managed to get rid of the taint of his "outsiderness," also had to negotiate with corrupt local officials like the Khasi Minister Leapingstone, who came to power on the populist plank of ethnic mobilization. Leapingstone's drunk nephew, who himself had become a minister, even threatens to shoot him because he refused to supply fifty table birds for free from the government supply, as the following conversation indicates:

> "…You listen. Want another feefty. More people. Very big party."
>
> "But, sir, it's late now. The farms are closed. I can't take another fifty table birds without disrupting the market supply. It's not allowed, sir, by government regulations."
>
> "You listen, Dam. I am gofment. Get me chickens. People hungry. Get other birds, is okay."
>
> "The other birds are all laying birds, sir. Can't kill them. There'll be no eggs for weeks."
>
> "Damn you!" (235).

In this particular instance, Dr. Dam refuses, upon which the minister threatens to kill him. Leapingstone becomes angry because, Dr. Dam, both as a *dkhar* and a minor employee had the temerity to say no to him. Both these instance, on a larger level though, reveal the negotiations that a petty small town official like Dr. Dam has to constantly make between local institutions of power and the translocal apparatus of the state. Servility and

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[217] Most of the eastern Indian borderland is still under the aegis of the Restricted Areas Permit Act, because these borderland regions are deemed as "sensitive" areas by the Indian state. The entry of foreign visitors, and even Indian citizens from the mainland (especially in places like Nagaland), are severely restricted. While this can be attributed to the "nation-building" ideology of the postcolonial Indian state, a corollary factor is that the "loyalty" of people living in such regions towards the state is considered suspect. Besides, there is a strong paranoia about the infiltration of the "foreign hand" (most notably China) that has the potential of destabilizing the region. A popular perception in mainland India in this regard concerns the "anti-national" activities of Christian missionaries (Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are predominantly Christian states). This has recently become a big issue with the Hindu Right, though the genealogy of this perception can be traced back to the Indian nationalist movement. The narrator of *PR* states sardonically that there was something about this region "that could not be revealed to the world at large" (196).

supplication, in this sense, may be a subjective strategy of camouflage on the part of Dr. Dam as a means of negotiating everyday life in the borderlands. A clarification here—when I use the term "camouflage" as a subjective strategy, I do not mean to imply any form of "resistance." Even more tellingly, the text might be hinting at the foreclosure of any alternative form of collectivity once the discourse of citizenship is internalized by the subject. To twist Marx's words from the *Eighteenth Brumaire* slightly, for government "servants" like Dr. Dam, the state appears as their "master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them…and sends them rain and sunshine from above" (106). In this case at least, the internalization of the discourses of postcolonial state citizenship renders any other form of collectivity impossible. Dr. Chaterji lays his finger on this problem when he tells the adult Babu in the last section of the text:

> But your father remained aloof when we appealed to him to join us in our efforts to make our position (that of displaced persons in the northeast) known in the national arena. He would not put his signature on our appeals. The reason he gave for this always was that he was not an independent person but a government official. He didn't say official, of course. The phrase, if I remember it correctly, was 'government servant.' As a result he was quite alone in his troubles (278, emendations mine).

Here the discourse of citizenship and the fear engendered by the translocal apparatus of the state combine to pulverize any sense of collectivity. Note that I am not talking or celebrating a discourse of resistant collectivity. The formation—an instance of "political society" in Chatterjee's sense where a population group, such as refugees, identifies around common interest to negotiate with the state—that Dr. Chaterji proposed was not a resistant collective-formation in any way. Rather, the purpose of such an interest group was to push forward the claims of DP's (displaced people) through the channels of political society. But even this was impossible for Dr. Dam. Dr. Dam, thus, is a classic

exemplar of the "isolated" man as described by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. For Arendt, the hallmark of isolation is "impotence insofar as power always comes from men acting together, "acting in concert"… isolated men are powerless by definition" (475). Isolated man who loses his place in the political realm of action is "no longer recognized as *homo faber* but treated as an *animal laborans* whose necessary 'metabolism with nature' is of no concern to anyone" (*Origins*, 475).[218] Indeed, Dr. Dam is treated as an *animal laborans* by his superiors, while he, in the absence of any mode of "acting together" with others, internalizes this sense of isolation. Only in a rare moment of realization does he recognize his condition of being an *animal laborans*. When he decides to protest to the minister in charge of Pensions, he blurts out that the old supplicants were treated "Like cattle…Worse than cattle" (13). Typically though, when he writes the letter of protest, he does not include the animal analogy above, but signs his letter "Yours humbly" (13).

The overriding element in an isolated man is the feeling of fear. The primary precipitate of Dr. Dam's fear is the sense of insecurity that arises out his consciousness of being an "outsider" and a migrant in Shillong. This fear of dislocation seems to be at the core of his attitude of supplication to the state apparatus. I will come back to this aspect in greater detail in the next section where I talk about the migrant's yearning for "home." Continuing with the line of thought about the "isolated" man in the previous paragraph, I

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[218] For Arendt, man is *homo faber* insofar as through fabrication (*poeisis*, the making of things), as opposed to action (*praxis*) or sheer labor, s/he isolates himself/herself from the world of common concerns. But even here, man is in contact with the world through his human artifice. Isolation truly arises when even the "most elementary form of human creativity, which is the capacity to add something of one's own to the common world is destroyed" (*Origins*, 475). It is then that s/he becomes an *animal laborans*.

suggest that the story of Dr. Dam in *PR* can be conceptualized as the antithesis of the genre of tragedy. If a tragedy, as Arthur Miller says, pivots on the "inherent unwillingness" of a human being to "remain passive in the face of what he considers to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status," then Dr. Dam "unheroic" nature is disqualified from such a conceptualization (149). Indeed, he remains passive and isolated in the face of the two events that dominate his life—his experience of dislocation and his life as a "government servant." All throughout, his most evident characteristic is his "stoic rationality"—a characteristic that dictates his official persona and also his interpersonal relationships. Isolation colors his relationship with his family. There is rarely any display of emotion by Dr. Dam, either to his wife or to his son—in the "small household" they lived in, the "spaces…were vast" (15). He "seemed to have calculated all the possible courses of action and behavior, and there was no room in that system for varying opinions about the situation" (14). His response to the burgeoning costs for building his house in Silchar fleshes out this aspect better—

> Dr. Dam's response was in keeping with his character. The answer lay in rationality, in an approach that assessed possibilities and weighed outcomes, in an application of that strain of thought that the first impressive schoolmaster, in standard eight, had reiterated constantly in the village school, that ability unknown to the East and that had been the blessing and the weapon of the West. Rationality told him to look at everything again, and over the days he thought over it dispassionately, reducing what could have easily become a lament in someone else to a matter of figures and numbers, materials and manpower" (46).

"Dispassionate," "stoically rational," reducing problems to figures and numbers, diary entries in the "compressed telegraphic language that expressed his personality so well" (12)—all these are further indicators of Dr. Dam's isolated status. Thus, the isolation he is faced with in the public realm permeates almost every sphere of his life, including his private life.

Incidentally, the female figures in the narrative function as foils, and offer a critical counterpoint to Dr Dam's "stoic rationality."[219] When Mrs. Dam suggests that he bend his rigid adherence to rules by accepting the offer of help forwarded by the builders, Chakraborty and Das, Dr. Dam authoritatively silences her by stating—"This is not about principles. This is about rules"(54). Mrs. Dam's implicit critique is reinforced directly by Mrs. Chatterji's assessment towards the end of the narrative—

> Your mother would agree with me, Babu…I hope you will be different from your father. As a boy, you were not like him at all. You took after your mother…Your father made too much of regulations. One doesn't have to be corrupt to take care of oneself, you know. He had no understanding of everyday affairs, of matters concerning his own family" (276).

The poignant irony of Dr. Dam's life is that the very strategy of camouflage that he adopted as a way of negotiating everyday life in the borderlands rebounds back on him to the point where he ceases to have a coherent "understanding of everyday affairs." His isolated state literally renders him incapable of action.

However, *PR* also sympathetically appraises Dr. Dam's "unheroic" nature in the latter half of the text. If Babu learns to *read* Dr. Dam's character differently from this manifest level of presentation during the initial half of the narrative, then it happens due

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[219] A brief observation on a slightly different track has to be made here. Filiation in *PR* is a handing down of an inheritance from fathers to sons. Women are left out of this genealogy. An essay in a very different direction from this one would be necessary as far as the representation of the female characters in *PR* is concerned—the three major ones being Mrs. Dam, Babu's grandmother, Mayarani, and Mrs. Chatterji. *PR* operates within a representational universe strongly marked and determined by patriarchy. A good illustration of this would be the fact that while Babu attempts to understand Dr. Dam's story, and also to some extent his grandfather's, he is not very curious about the untold story of his grandmother's origins. He confesses that Mayarani left him "much colder." The mysterious story of her marriage to his grandfather were for him simply "things lost in time, like the past itself" (106). For a text which is strongly concerned with the past, this is a revealing comment indeed. Although Mrs. Dam plays a larger role than Mayarani in the text, she too is confined to its periphery.

to two factors—i) because he retrospectively reinterprets what Dr. Dam may have repressed underneath the various "layers of life" that envelop him, and ii) the projection of his present fears of being an "outsider" onto Dr. Dam helps him empathize with his father better. These two factors are not mutually exclusive—in all cases, they function together. For instance, in the chapter titled "A Tale about Tigers," Babu recalls one of the few instances where Dr. Dam narrates stories to him. It was a rainy afternoon in the two decrepit rooms they inhabited in Jail Road in 1980. The Dams had moved to this location from their previous residence in Garikhana after the 1979 anti-*dkhar* riots.[220] The longest story Dr. Dam narrates in this chapter is the one about his encounter with a tiger in Mizoram. This incident is narrated in the first person. After he has finished the story and Babu is preparing to leave the room, he suddenly says "Boots." At the time, Babu is puzzled by this sudden outburst. The next chapter titled "Blackout," narrates the incident of the boots. This incident is narrated entirely in the third person. It was a dark December night in 1979. The first anti-*dkhar* riots in Shillong had just occurred. Shillong was under curfew, and there was a blackout on that particular night. Dr. Dam was all alone in the government bungalow when he heard the crunch of boots coming up to his frontyard, knocking on his door and then inexplicably leaving. Years later Dr. Dam suddenly blurts out "Boots, marching up and down, that night." Babu makes the connection between the "boots" reference from 1980 and the night of the blackout in 1979. Babu is able to make that connection because as an adult he experiences similar feelings of homelessness and alienation as his father. The father hands over the "memory

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[220] Many "non-tribal" families moved out of locations where they could be singled out as foreigners to other places in Shillong where people of particular ethnic communities clustered together for safety.

of that fear and uncertainty" to the son. And the son, "will acknowledge the gesture, deal with it in his own way, his high lace-up boots crunching down the concrete of the places he has lived in, places like Calcutta and Delhi, all those lonely places that have never been home, the tread of his feet just a bit unsteady when he recalls his father and that night of fear" (153).

Another instance where a slip in Dr. Dam's "rational" façade allows Babu to see his father in a different light are the two comments that the former makes about the Khasi minister, Leapingstone, when he is convalescing at the Civil Hospital—"Partying into the night. Drinking, gambling…(Leapingstone) and his cronies," and "He carries a gun" (167, 168). At that time, the adolescent Babu considers it an instance of delirium. But these slips foreshadow Dr. Chatterji's revelation in the penultimate chapter about the incident with the gun in Leapingstone's chamber and also Babu's brief mention in the last chapter about the "anguished" entry in Dr. Dam's otherwise matter-of-fact diary about that traumatic day (279-81, 296-7). These cues also allow us, readers, to retrospectively fill in the missing details in the truncated third chapter titled "The Minister's Chambers: 1983," where the actual instance is briefly narrated.

If slips like the above function as clues that allow both the reader and Babu to recognize the fear that the condition of alienness and isolation engendered in Dr. Dam, the text also offers us Babu's diagnosis of the possible causes for Dr. Dam's "stoic rationality." Let us return to the first half of "A Tale about Tigers." Dr. Dam is narrating stories to his young son on a rainy afternoon in the cramped rooms at Jail Road. The Dams got these rooms—which were originally a storehouse for sanitary equipment—due to the largesse of their friends. These two rooms had only one window between them, and

the suitcases and trunks packed into one corner, the bare walls and the absence of familiar sounds added to their "unusual sense of impermanence" (137). Recalling that gloomy and rainy day in those two rooms Babu wrote—"I sometimes felt as if we were on a train, and perhaps it was that temporary air about the house in Jail Road, that feeling of suspension, that led to my father telling me stories, as strangers on a train often do" (137). Babu emphasizes the strangeness of this encounter—it is only these peculiar circumstances that impel his father to tell stories. Dr. Dam's limited story telling abilities in "normal" circumstances is well illustrated by the following anecdote from an earlier portion of the text:

> My father and I never spoke of the way things were, keeping our separate worlds to ourselves. He had taught me very early on about the trees and the flowers, pointing out the vague shapes or smudges of color and assigning names to them.
>
> "That's a willow, and that's a weeping willow."
>
> "Which one? The wavy one?
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Why is called the weeping willow?"
>
> "Because it looks like a person weeping" (238-9).

On this 1980 afternoon in Jail Road though, Dr. Dam himself volunteered to tell a story. Babu recalled that he insisted that the story have a beginning, a middle and an end—"like a good essay" (138). But the two "stories" that Dr. Dam narrates about his school and his shoes appear like anti-climaxes for the child Babu, who protests indignantly. Dr. Dam hesitates and tries to save face by sending Babu away on an errand. The adult narrator attempts to reinterpret Dr. Dam's subsequent hesitation thus—

> Perhaps he was thinking about the past, about the village life that had come up so suddenly in his stories, and maybe he was overwhelmed by the memories, each bit that surfaced revealing only a small part of the whole, fragmentary and

> uncertain. Or am I transferring my own uncertainties to him? He may have thought about telling the story about the first time he had come to this town (Shillong). That was when he was still in school, when it had been part of the same country and the country itself ruled by the British. Along with his father, he had walked from their village in the plains in Sylhet up the hills to this town. They had come to visit someone. A relative on his mother's side, her brother, who had been a civil servant (143).

Babu, of course, never hears this story about Dr. Dam's first ever journey to Shillong from his father's lips. He only learns about it years later from his mother when they moved to Silchar following his father's stroke. After listening to the Chatterjis summing up his father's "brief and inconsequential life", and in light of all the fragments of stories that he tries to piece together into a coherent whole, Babu presents us with his closing statement on Dr. Dam's reticent character and his chronic inability to tell a complete story:

> It is not surprising…that he would have had so little to say to me, that he should have been able to acknowledge that he had not only lost youth and home but also everything that should have come after as some kind of compensation. At the age of fifty, it must have been impossible to understand how he remained an alien, an outsider in the new land that he had come to love and had hoped to call home in some fashion. There you have it, the strangeness of it, that those who had left their homes forever to try and find themselves within the nation that was supposedly for everyone should have found that the journey was not over. The hills that appeared around the horizon were only another mirage, their destination just another place that would reject them as not part of it (292).

In this passage, a direct link is made between the individual case of the introverted and severely repressed nature of Dr. Dam and his peculiar situation of being both inside and outside the nation-state. After having lost "youth and home," he ardently desired to be incorporated into the new entity of the nation-state. But, he painfully realized later on that even the idea of nation-as-home was a mirage. Yet, *how* this state of affairs came to be was "impossible" to for him understand. Dr. Dam's is an individualized symptom of a larger social pathology created by the institutions of the

nation-state and state citizenship: the condition of permanent migration that inheres in the figure of the former refugee. The next section explores the phenomenological ramifications of this social pathology further.

4.4.3: "The Immigrant's Passion for Construction"

Babu's attempt to narrate his father's life—"…a life that disappears once and for all, that does not return…"—is a dominant thread in *PR*, but not the only one. For *PR* is also Babu's story. If the first two parts utilize personal memory to provide a "point of return" to the lost hometown through the interactions between father and son, the last two sections are primarily about Babu's attempt to construct a coherent frame that can enable an "accounting" of their intertwined loss of home. Of these, "Terminal," the third part, marks a caesura between Babu's departure and final return to Shillong. The narrative comes full circle in the fourth part "Travelogue" through Babu's encounter with the "honorable minister Leapingstone"— once known by the nickname of "Adolf Hitler." The brief suggestion that this particular Leapingstone ("Adolf Hitler") could be the elder Leapingstone's son adds another, darkly ironic, dimension to the text's narrative of filiation. For if the father's encounter with Leapingstone senior led to the traumatic consequences briefly alluded to above, the son's encounter with the minister "Adolf Hitler" in the latter's chambers that brings his repressed fear of being constructed as a foreigner to the surface. This same "Adolf" is the "the most visible, terse symbol of the fault line running through the town" that divides "people into insiders and outsiders, laying down the rules of existence" (234-35). In fact, Babu encounters his outsiderness even before he meets Adolf Hitler, when the secretary at the state archive calls him

"Bangladeshi" (271). These encounters makes Babu realize once again "the tyranny of the present over the past" (216).

"Travelogue" begins with a simple, evocative line—"I had moved far away from fear" (225). This line can be read in a double sense—Babu has physically moved away from the scene of fear (Shillong), and that the fear has been pushed aside to the unconscious. But his encounter with the "honorable minister Leapingstone" brings this fear to the foreground. After reading the text as a whole, we realize that this last portion of the text is framed like a circle—it begins and ends (apart from the last "leave-taking" scene at the bus station) at the point where "Adolf Hitler" holds Babu's eyes in his and whispers "almost imperceptibly": *dkhar*. The passage that follows demonstrates how repressed memories burst forth to the surface rendering familiar space *unheimlich*:

> Now it all comes back to me, sitting in the hotel room with the windows looking at Wards Lake, the bridge arched over it like some prehensile serpent poised for a drink, turning that whispered word over and over in my mind, that lifetime of fear. And the first time I walked into enemy country (225).

The sudden emergence of that repressed fear transforms the self and the perceived space of home into an unrecognizable other. To borrow a line from *The Shadow Lines*, it was almost as if the space of home had turned itself "inside out," rendering a familiar place uncanny (203). As is well known, Freud posits two central definitional criteria in defining the "uncanny." First, if every affect that arises from an emotional impulse "of whatever kind" gets transmuted into fear by being repressed then the uncanny would be that species of the frightening that was once repressed and now returns (147). Second, if the uncanny can be construed as this element of the return through repetition, then the shuttle between *das Unheimliche* and *das Heimliche* can be understood as not something new or strange, but something "long familiar to the psyche…(that)…was estranged from

it through being repressed" (148). The internal movement of the fourth part of *PR* can be read through this lens as it is concerned with how the hometown—"the most unspeakable of loves" for both the father and the son—gets transformed into a frightening entity where "quadrants of time and space" are sliced up into "zones of fear" (235). The otherwise serene bridge over the picturesque Wards Lake, one of the most famous landmarks of Shillong, uncannily gets transformed into a "prehensile serpent poised for a drink" for the narrator.

This subjective sense of unhomeliness—the cognition of *not* being at home *in* one's home, of familiar space being rendered uncanny—ties up with a very important socio-historical issue in modernity that weaves its way through the text. This, as Agamben reminds us, is the fundamental aporia in the "originary fiction" of modern sovereignty—the rapidly accelerating crisis posed by the figure of the migrant/refugee to the link between "nativity and nationality," or the idea that the institution of citizenship "names…life as the origin and ground of sovereignty" (*Homo Sacer*, 129). The Latin root of nation, after all, is *natio*: "to be born." The possessive inflections of this term signify a strong, irreducible sense of belonging and homeliness tied to the nation's geo-body—an affective relation that is key for hegemonic discourses of nationalism (as well as local nationalisms) and the nation-state. The migrant/refugee, by being born "elsewhere," threatens to unhinge the link between this interrelationship. Therein lies his/her menace. The Hindu Bengali migrant/refugee figure in this specific context, materializes the border within the body of the nation-state—as the narrator of *PR* says, new "battle lines" were being drawn and "fresh groups of people were being defined as outsiders, borders bristling with barbed-wire teeth" (296).

At the same time, *PR* also inverts the perspective from this global standpoint of modern sovereignty, and gives us an evocative portrait from the "miniature" perspective of the subjective negotiations made by migrants/refugees with the trauma of dislocation. If the constant feeling of unhomeliness renders the fear of dislocation literally tactile for the migrant/refugee and his descendants—"its salty taste arrives with pulsating quickness to the tongue, the premonition of a cut lip flooding…(Babu's)…mouth"— it coexists with a corresponding desire, almost bordering on anxiety, to mark a space that one can finally call "home." The concept of "home" is closely connected with the notion of "being in the world." The geographer Theano Terekenli points out three constitutive factors that inhere in the concept of the "home"—i) a "recurrent, regular investment of meaning in a context with which people personalize and identify with some measure of control": this serves as a stable interface between the self and the world, ii) an unfolding in historical time—"home" attains meaning through "a passage of time linked to experiential consciousness", and iii) the idea of home gets consolidated by being placed within a network of social relations that "validate the individual as human being" (325). Thus "home," understood as a concept, signifies a fixed point in space that allows being to come into consciousness of itself, both on a subjective as well as a socio-historical level. Gaston Bachelard, though he does not use the word "home" directly, expresses this relationship between home and being succinctly when he writes:

> At times we think we know ourselves in time, when all we know is a sequence of fixations in the spaces of the being's stability—a being who does not want to melt away, and who, even in the past, when he sets out in search for things past, wants

> time to "suspend" its flight. In its countless alveoli, space contains compressed time (8).[221]

It is crucial for the being's self-definition that time "suspends" its flight in a fixed place that it then cognizes as home. For the migrant/refugee who is forcibly displaced from the original domicile, the loss of "home" is thus traumatically experienced at all these three levels laid out by Terekenli: a loss of meaning and control with respect to the identification of the boundaries of the self, an absolute breakdown of a network of social relationships through which the self objectifies itself socially, and most importantly, a traumatic "suspension" of time in the topography of the past which is virtually impossible to reconcile with the realities that arise in the aftermath of displacement. If the unfolding of being implies historicity, the trauma of dislocation brings about a radical crisis in the ordering of this historical movement. *PR* hints at this radical crisis of being at different points in the narrative. The references that Babu's grandfather makes to his "home" in East Pakistan, even decades after the Dam clan had settled in India, "revealed something more than a limited grasp of geopolitical shifts." It demonstrated rather, the timelessness of the topography of the past—this "landscape of his past would forever be permanent and unchanging, not something that was historical and therefore open to perpetual revision but a place beyond the vagaries of time" (35). The poignancy of this situation is underscored just a few lines later when the narrator reveals that after moving to the Thikarbasti slum in Silchar as a post-partition refugee, his grandfather "never once" moved to see the town of Silchar till Dr. Dam moved them to the family home at Aizawl Road. His grandfather lived there till the end of his days, "his interests restricted to pipe

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[221] This understanding of home would render the concept similar to Yi-fu Tuan's notion of place—"Place is a pause in movement" (138).

and garden" (105). Upto the very end, his body demonstrated visible signs of this timelessness, whether it was "his speech slushed over with the earthy village dialect that clung…forty years after partition" or even his gait "showing in his stride a residual habit of open spaces" as he clanked his old bones into motion (105). The latter observation brings into sharp contrast Babu's grandfather's pre and post-partition negotiations with space, and the bodily habits ingrained thereby, illustrate the sharp disjunction in the flow of historical time and the loss of meaning and identification that forced migration without the possibility of return brings about.

This desire for home is also concretized in the narrative through the travails Dr. Dam faces in constructing a house of his own.[222] For the "uncertainly poised" Dr. Dam building a house of his own was the only way of shaking off "the stigma of the refugee" (43). Building a house would signify laying claim to the land—finally making time suspend its flight. This motif is announced on the very first page itself (set in December 1987) when Dr. Dam's physical act of uncertainly touching the cold, wooden floor to curl into his rubber slippers is immediately correlated to "trying to keep a precarious balance on the shifting, sloping world that had been his home for forty years" (1). The second chapter, "Highway Journey," builds on this motif. It takes the reader back to 1984, the year of Babu's grandfather's death. The death of his father forces Dr. Dam to confront the fact that his entire life had been a series of movements— from Baniachang to Calcutta to various places in the northeast and finally from one government residence to another in Shillong. The land that he buys in Aizawl Road in Silchar, Assam, is for his

[222] For the differences and interrelationships between "home" and "house" see Terekenli.

extended family. Even the plot of land that he had bought in Narangi, Guwahati, is taken away from him because of arbitrary bureaucratic action. By the time he wanted to buy land in Shillong it is too late: "outsiders" had already been prohibited from buying land. The attempt to construct a house in the family property in Silchar was "his last-ditch attempt to find a resting place" (43). This desire to find a "resting place" is crucial for Dr. Dam's emotional geography; a stability of being that was never there and the lack of which is brought to the foreground through the encounter with mortality. In this emotional geography, a house signifies not only a place of one's own, but the fixed point from where one would make one's "final journey" to the cremation ground, where his son would light his pyre. The house would be the place from where "he could set forth ultimately on his final journey from the same emotional space at which he had arrived fifty-six years earlier, the space some of us call home" (43). In other words, the self-assurance endowed by the "fixed point" one could call home would allow Dr. Dam to close the circuit of being. If, as Walter Benjamin says in "The Storyteller," the authority of a story first assumes transmissible form at the moment of a subject's death, then Dr. Dam's frenetic attempt to find a "fixed point" for himself could be construed as a desperate attempt to authorize the transmissibility of his distinctive story, thereby saving it from being submerged in the otherwise formless flow of time. For an "uncertainly poised" migrant like Dr. Dam this attempt at transmitting his story was even more urgent because having lost his natal home during partition, he could no longer gesture towards the point where the story began. His son empathizes with this feeling of desperation later:

> The stories about my father's life, of life here up to the day we left, were attempts to find a site for the fleeting emotions and images that came up again and again... Yet how does one find a justification or a story around such intangibles? There is so much I have left out, so much of pleasure and happiness…the feeling that I

> would like to come back to this town some day, maybe when I was married or when I had children. To be able to do what my father has always been unable to say or do, to point out, "This is where it all began" (257).

The tragic fact of Dr. Dam's life was that he could neither point out his beginnings nor the point where he would eventually come to rest. The "intangibles" that characterized the life of a displaced person negate the possibility of a coherent telling of his/her tale.

There is another territorializing motif in *PR* that is closely connected to the motif of the house: that of maps and cartography. Cartography is the key statist technology that naturalizes the national space. Lisa Malkki argues that in the global ordering concretized through Cartesian cartography, the world comes to be conceptualized in the model of a school atlas. Malkki writes—"One country cannot at the same time be another country. The world of nations is thus conceived as a discrete spatial partitioning of territory; it is territorialized in the segmentary fashion of the multicolored world atlas" (quoted in Fazira-Yacoobali, 186). A metaphysical essence is also created through this spatial ordering—"land" becomes "*home*land." The nation is viewed as the comfortable home, the nurturing womb. This "aborescent" notion of national rootedness is predicated on metaphors of kinship through which—

> Motherland and fatherland, aside from their other historical connotations, suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it. By implication, it is impossible to be part of more than one tree. Such a tree evokes both temporal continuity of essence and territorial rootedness (186).

The problem the migrant poses for the nation is precisely that s/he belongs to more than one tree. This problem is concretized very clearly in the chapter titled "Maps" in the third section of *PR*. Here, the narrator says:

> If the map where you follow the national highways and rail lines is not to scale, that is simply because it is a simulacrum, a copy of an original where these issues

> are perfectly clear. You will understand these elisions, or what appear to be evasions, when you have become the complete citizen, when as taxpayer and consumer, husband and father, you have been mapped demographically onto the system. No one will tell you what you yourself do not seem to know at times, that your forefathers came from elsewhere. From where? It cannot be found in the map of India, which with its confident peaks and curves and wholeness, eliminates any speculation that in this representation of the subcontinent there are places that do not belong, people who do not belong (210).

But even when a migrant is mapped into the system as a complete citizen, there are moments when natality and nationality often come into conflict, bringing into question the topic that is taboo in the national public sphere—that for people who "do not belong" can never shake off the stigma of being a simultaneous part of a non-national tree. And once this fact comes to light, the nation becomes an un-homely place.

To be sure, two different themes merge in the motif of cartography. The first is the consigning of the Indian northeast to a space outside national history and visibility—in the northeast, Babu remembers, "history lies defeated" (211). It is of course ironic, in an especially poignant way that the person who evinces the most "unspeakable of loves" for this region should eventually be stigmatized as an outsider. One of the prominent characteristics of Dr. Dam is his intimate knowledge of the northeast as a place, illustrated in the text by his familiarity with cartography and space. Even when he is virtually paralyzed, he can point his finger and authoritatively state the direction to a particular place (204). In one of his rare voluble moments, he enables the young Babu to *imagine* northeastern towns like Aizawl, Kohima and Dimapur that he visited for official trips (197). The most tragic element of Dr. Dam's tale emerges in the text in a relationship of inverse proportion to this intimate love for maps and places:

> Even after the riots of '79, the assault, he had thought of the possibility of a new distribution scheme, had envisioned lines of supply running through the state, bringing the lost hamlets and far-flung places of this impoverished hill state into

> the fold of the modern world. *What he had forgotten was his own place on the map, until the minister pointed the gun at him* (296, italics mine).

In the paragraph above, two distinctive themes merge in the motif of maps and cartography creating a grotesque irony. The man who wanted to give the "impoverished hill state" a "home" in the modern nation-state confronts his home-less condition when his "true" location on the map is pointed out to him by a minister holding a gun in his hand. The nation-idea that he served so selflessly, and that had been "shored up by the efforts of people like him" was ultimately nothing but a fortress, where new battle-lines of "outsiders" and "insiders" were constantly being redrawn (296). As Dr. Chatterji says later in the text, it was this realization that more than anything else made Dr. Dam feel that his life had been "one big failure" (281-2). It is significant in this context that the "uprooted" character of Dr. Dam literally exits the narrative as a "superfluous" entity. Dr. Dam is paralyzed after a stroke and becomes virtually speechless. There is a progressive deterioration of the capacity for language and representation. Only the son's biographical act of "leave-taking" brings this superfluous entity back to life to some extent. Otherwise he would have represented mere debris from history that signified nothing.

Additionally, Babu's return to Shillong as an adult represents his attempt to recall and visualize his hometown beyond the exigencies of statist cartography and history. He begins the short chapter "Memory" (in "Terminal") by musing on how the map literally defines the territory—"What recourse, then, but to the map?" (215). But in order to convey something more than "a dim comprehension of remote beauty and even more remote violence," he had to go beyond the recourse to memory, which over the years had "taken on the greater share of this burden, each step up in the world resulting in the disappearance of one more artifact from those days" (215). Hence, the necessity for the

return journey. Babu emphasizes that his return journey is not a search for roots. Rather, it was an attempt to re-discover what "home" really meant:

> But this was home, surely, this space of childhood, the place where I had last seen my father on his feet, this confluence of childhood hopes and a faith in the future. All concentrated in the word hometown, a definite point in the curve of the earth, where the monsoon marshals its forces and bursts through rooms and doors and staircases with a wet, cold smell, where the winter months swivel from light to darkness and the halogen lamps that come on in the evening create little pools on the metaled roads, broken up momentarily by the rumbling wheels of supply trucks (249).

However, this nostalgia for home is strongly contrasted with the sights and sounds Babu encounters in the Shillong of the present. The traveler's eyes, he says, "caught between alienation and familiarity" peered as if "through some inverted telescope which distorted the scale without any gain in clarity" (250). The ghosts that he had nurtured through the years burst through, "scattering like loose change." The result was not simply remembrance—the encounter between the spectral past and the reality of the present was "the place itself, imposing and resonant" (252). But Babu sought to encounter this imposing reality of the place not through his own eyes alone, but through a splitting of vision. The eyes of two ghosts—that of Dr. Dam and the child Babu—wandered through the streets "that had once been so familiar." Through this attempt, Babu sought to see the two of them "closer together than they had ever been in real life, without the wall of fear rising between them, without each trapped in self-doubt" (255-56). But in the end it is "the taste of fear" that freezes the images of the past. If the father's self-doubts are understood by the son, it is through a mutual recognition of this fear. And for the son, it is this visceral encounter with fear—"the one familiar face he found in…(his)…hometown"—that forces him to bid adieu to the hometown (300).

"So it ends." Like his father, Babu too cannot ever return back to the point where it all began (257). The consciousness of always being an outsider in his hometown shadows Babu till the very end. *PR*, however, contains an image of transcendence beyond statist cartography—Babu's reverie about Dr. Dam and the elephants. This reverie emerges from a fragmentary memory that Babu has about Dr. Dam and his experience of tending to sick elephants in the logging camps in the northeast, though he is not sure if this story was ever narrated to him by his father. This reverie leads Babu to reflect on the most cherished image he has of his father:

> That is the image of him I love the most, of a shy and earnest young man riding a bicycle along a jungle track. It is a moonlit night and his little lamp wavers in the darkness as the cycle bounces on the rough, stony path. He is afraid of wild elephants, of Englishmen who might point a gun at him and order him off the path and into the forest. But he rides on, smelling the jungle scent because that is his duty in the service of the government of India. And as the forest swallows him completely, he is happy, not because India or the government mean anything to him. India is just a name, but this forest rising around him is a country without boundaries, whose borders cannot be mapped, where the most cartographers can do is mark, in bold letters: HERE THERE BE ELEPHANTS (302).

Like a cinematic fade out, the last image of Dr. Dam in *PR* shows him melting away into the forest beyond the reach of the disciplinary apparatus of the nation-state. To dream of spaces beyond the mapped confines of the nation-state is a recurring feature of many South Asian fictions that critique this socio-political formation.[223] *PR* is no exception to this rule as this illustration above demonstrates. But instead of dismissing this utopian fantasy as escapist, it would be far more useful to reflect on the pathos of this image. Reading this image against the grain, I would suggest that its power does not lie in what it explicitly proposes—a world not bound by the nation-state—but rather in the

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[223] Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, *In an Antique Land* and Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* are probably the most well known.

anxiety it wants to conceal. This anxiety inheres itself in the subjective formation of the refugee—if you cannot be mapped demographically on to the nation-state system, then "home" becomes the signifier of a painful desire that always will exist at the level of fantasy, but will be deferred at the level of reality. The desire for a home-in-the-world is not the same thing as a desire for a homeland. A homeland goes back to the mythical idea of an origin; a search for a home marks a fixed space on the earth where a being can suspend its flight and recognize its own historicity.The greatest strength of *PR* as a text is that it externalizes the festering symptom of *homelessness*—the fact that a being can never suspend its flight—through a haunting representation of the refugee.

CHAPTER 5: THE "BARE LIFE" OF THE GUERRILLA

Let's sing a song
For the sorrows are falling asleep

On evening's shoulders.

Let's sing a song, for
If you too fall asleep
Who will sing for them
When they awake?

Megan Kachari, "The Song."

5.1: Introduction

This chapter marks a shift from the rest of my dissertation in that I read two non-Anglophone novels—Parag Das's *Sanglot Fengla* (Soldier of Independence) and Raktim Xarma's *Borangar Ngang* (The Song of the Forest).[224] To my knowledge, there aren't any South Asian novels in English that deal centrally with the border-crossing figure of the guerrilla.[225] We have to place these novels within the very different tradition of the Assamese novel. While the history of the Assamese novel can be traced back to the 1890s, the novels by Das and Xarma represent a relatively new trend in this history.[226] They are directly concerned with the atmosphere of violence and the instrumentalization of human existence in the eastern Indian borderland state of Assam since the late 1970s. The history of the particular forms of violence they address, both state and non-state, cannot be encompassed without talking about the fortunes of a particular partisan group—the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam). The ULFA has been a ubiquitous

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[224] All translations from *Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang* are mine.

[225] Aruni Kashyap's forthcoming novel *The House of a Thousand Novels* could well be the first one

[226] The first Assamese novel—*MiriJiyori* by Rajanikanta Bordoloi—was published in 1894.

presence in everyday life in Assam since the early eighties. There has been a significant amount of literary production both about the ULFA and the atmosphere of violence in Assam in Assamese literature. Dhrubajyoti Bora's Trilogy of Blood—*Rupantoror Gadya* (The Story of Change), *Tezor Andhar* (The Darkness of Blood) and *Artha* (Meaning)—Bhupen Xarma's *Megh Bihu* (The Bihu of Clouds), and Anurag Mahanta's *Aulingar Zui* (The Harvest of Ash) are notable and powerful novels that touch on aspects of militancy and violence in the region.[227] Recently, there has also been a substantial amount of literary production, primarily constituting of poetry and memoirs, by former ULFA cadres who are now in prison. Megan Kachari's poems and Xamudra Gogoi's *A Former ULFA Member's Memoirs* are titles that immediately come to mind. However, I choose to focus on the two novels by Das and Xarma here because they are texts that represent acts of crossing the border between India, China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Since the institution of the border plays such an important conceptual role in my project, these two texts seemed to me to be the most powerful illustrations of some of the issues I raise about nations, states, borders and thresholds here.[228] Additionally, these fictional texts enable us to engage both with the technical and military aspects of guerrilla warfare, and also the lived experience of guerrillas in "no-man's zones." Referring to fictional representations of partisan struggle, Walter Laqueur, the well-known historian of partisan warfare writes that:

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[227] *Aulingar Zui* also depicts life in a no-man's land between India and Myanmar. However, I wasn't able to incorporate this novel in time for my project. I plan to include it in a revision or extension of this work. Mahanta was also a former member of the ULFA.

[228] To be sure, *Megh Bihu* too has instances of crossing the border. But the border crossing figure of the guerrilla is not as central as in these two novels

> Fiction should not be disparaged; Balzac's *Les Chouans*, Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat* and Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* perhaps convey a better picture of what it means to be a partisan than many volumes of military history. But these novels deal with the fate of individuals; for an understanding of guerrilla war as a political and military phenomenon, fiction is of little value (*Guerrilla*, viii).

I take direct issue with Lacquer's claim that "fiction is of little value" when it comes to an understanding of the political and military aspects of guerrilla war. My reading of the two novels later in the chapter will demonstrate that the representation of "the fate of individuals" actually allow for a more complex view of the phenomenon of guerrilla warfare and its impacts on the subjectivity and lifeworlds of its participants.

From now on, I will alternate between the term "partisan fighter" and "guerrilla" in this chapter. The word partisan derives from the French *parti*. As Carl Schmitt says—"The partisan fights at a political front, and precisely the political character of his acts restores the original meaning of the word partisan. The word derives from *parti*, and refers to the tie to a fighting, belligerent, or politically active party or group" (15). The word "guerrilla" derives from the Spanish *guerrer*, which means "small war." During the 20th century, guerrilla referred primarily to internal opponents of a government or an occupying party, though with Che Guevara and Regis Debray, it also assumed an internationalist, transnational cast. The word guerrilla first came into operation after Empicenado's "small wars" against the Bonapartist regime in Spain between 1808 and 1813. In the 20th century, guerrilla warfare primarily became associated with a partisan cause. Guerrilla warfare, which was initially a defensive form of action that attacked the enemy utilizing camouflage primarily to save the homeland, became closely associated with a partisan cause. The predominant partisan causes were fought by either communist organizations, parties advocating national resistance (as in France during World War II)

and/or anticolonial nationalist organizations, although, in some cases, guerrilla warfare was also waged in favor of a fascist or proto-fascist cause (as in the case of Raoul Salan's putsch in Algeria in 1961). I use the word partisan more than guerrilla in this chapter to represent the political character of this form of offensive-defensive action, although at times the two terms are used interchangeably.

This chapter is divided into five parts. In the first section of this chapter, I argue that the transmutation of the partisan fighter to the "terrorist" through the figure of the law gives us a key for an understanding of how sovereign power reinvents itself through new modalities in the contemporary conjuncture. A lot of recent theorizations of the political, from Foucault to Hardt and Negri, have discussed how nonsovereign, capillary, network and/or centerless power characterize the new *nomos* of the earth. I disagree with this proposition and argue that sovereign power has remained remarkably flexible in the current conjuncture. The shifts in the figuration of the partisan in the law and the reconceptualization of the partisan as the "terrorist" is, I argue, one of the key ways through which sovereign power reinvigorates itself. I then turn to a consideration of the lifeworld of the partisan fighter through a reading of some famous manuals on guerrilla warfare, especially by Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara, in my second section. My central argument in this section is that, for purposes of camouflage, the disciplinary apparatus of the guerrilla army enjoins the individual partisan to transform his/her body into a threshold between human and natural life. In the third section, I recount the history of the particular partisan organization, the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), which is at the center of both the novels.

In the last two sections, I present a reading of *Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang* and study the figure of the guerrilla both as an object of state terror and a subject that terrorizes the state in camouflage from spaces that are designated as "no man's lands." More than lifeworlds, "no man's lands" that guerrillas inhabit are adequately described by a term that Mbembe uses in "Necropolitics": deathworlds. The everpresent shadow of unexpected death constantly shadows the guerrilla. Both *Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang* allow us to explore everyday life as it is lived in deathworlds such as the guerrilla base/zone. If ordinary everyday life is predicated on the implicit expectation of an insured future (the expectation that the social world I interact with today continues tomorrow and in the forseeable future), a situation where the emergency becomes the norm—such as the guerrilla base/zone—brings into operation the temporal category of risk (the social world I inhabit today may not even exist tomorrow). A common refrain in Xarma's text is that the guerrilla may not see his/her friends the next day, the next year or so on. I ask what form do *human* phenomena, such as friendship, assume in such radically contingent contexts? I also analyze how the everyday reality of inhabiting deathworlds transforms the guerrilla's body into a threshold of another type: the liminal zone between life and death. The hungry, starving, severely wounded, tortured and disease-ridden body of the guerrilla often resembles the *living dead*. I explore the ethico-political dimensions of the reduction of the human body into such *in*-human forms which push the concept of "life" to its very limits. I ask whether forms of being-in-common can even be envisaged from such limit situations.

These two texts also enable me to plot a chronological trajectory that plots the unofficial "biography" of a particular region from a militant standpoint. *Sanglot Fengla*

was published in 1993: the height of the ULFA's popularity in the eastern borderland state of Assam. Its tone is triumphalist and it is optimistic about the revolutionary movement's future. *Borangar Ngang* was published in 2006, after the ULFA bases were smashed in Bhutan and the cadres of the organization were put in prison by the Indian army. The author was one of these captured guerrillas and wrote the novel from prison. The novel is melancholy in tone and poignantly and repeatedly asks the question—what has gone wrong? Taken together, thus, these two novels plot an unofficial biography of the rise and fortunes of a particular partisan organization in the eastern Indian borderland region, and also illustrate why a serious consideration of the question of guerrilla militancy is absolutely necessary for writing histories of the rapidly vanishing presents in the region. Moreover, the progression from *Sanglot Fengla* to *Borangar Ngang*—a progression from the "optimistic" moment of the revolution-to-come to the "pessimistic" moment of the perceived failure of a revolution—also illuminates the temporal substructure that underlies one of the most widespread phenomena of modernity: the idea of revolution itself. Simply put, the hope and pathos of revolution lies in the promise of the "morning after," when the constituting violence of the foundational moment is consolidated and preserved in a constituted form. This moment when violence is constituted "after" the event becomes the herald for a new, a better future that wipes away the injustices of the past. But modernity is also littered with the examples of many revolutionary movements that failed to achieve the morning after; for every successful Jefferson or Lenin, we also have many Charu Mazumdars and Kanu Sanyals.[229] To play

[229] Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal were the leaders of the Naxalite movement in the late sixties and the early seventies. The Naxalite movement began in Naxalbari, West Bengal, in 1967 and was influenced

on words, the way in which the morning after literally becomes the mo(u)rning after is also a central feature of the revolutionary age of modernity. If *Sanglot Fengla* is suffused with the spirit of the former, *Borangar Ngang* poignantly reminds us of the latter.

5.2: The Partisan as the "Absolute Enemy"

Partisan warfare has existed for a very long time.[230] However, the partisan emerged as a figure in the juridical and legal sphere fairly recently. The conceptualization of the figure of the partisan in international law has to be read within the ambit of a changed conceptualization of the friend enemy relationship. In *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt argues that the friend-enemy distinction is the central antagonism in the political sphere. While this antagonism is a basic distinction that enables us to grasp the political, it takes different forms in various historical epochs. From the sixteenth century onwards, the central distinction of friend and enemy in the global sphere has been predicated on the interstate world system. The new globalized rationality that inaugurated the now commonsensical view that the state apparatus is the ultimate form of human rationality brought a new conceptualization of friend and enemy and also of the correlated concepts of war and peace. Ever since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, individual states were considered friends and enemies of each other, contingent upon the question of national interest. The older *nomos* that predicated that an enemy kingdom was an absolute enemy for the Christian kingdom gradually dissipated, and so did wars where the enemy state was considered an enemy who had to be absolutely destroyed. In *Nomos*

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heavily by Maoist thought. Mazumdar was captured in 1972 and tortured to death by the Calcutta police. Sanyal committed suicide a month ago.

[230] For comprehensive histories of partisan warfare through the ages see Laqueur's *Guerrilla* and John Ellis *From the Barrel of a Gun*. Also see the *Encyclopedia of Guerrilla Warfare* by Ian F.W. Beckett.

of the Earth, Schmitt views the problem of war as central to this discussion. He delineates the "bracketing" of war by the modern state form in three ways. First, the rise of the individual state meant the overcoming of civil war of all against all by war in state form. In contrast to the brutality of religious and factional wars earlier, which were usually wars of total annihilation, the "bracketing" of war among states "signified the strongest possible rationalization and humanization of war" *(Nomos*, 142). Civil war was literally the most "formal destruction of form" (quoted in Ulmen: xvi). Whoever participates in civil war has to kill, but this killing cannot be sanctioned by any formally justified order. The state emerges as the apparatus that brackets war within its territory. With its consolidation, war can only exist outside its territory, with other recognized states. The warring parties—that is, the individually distinct states—have the same political characters and the same rights, and recognize each other as equal. Thereby, Schmitt says, it was easy to distinguish the enemy from the criminal. States pursued war against each other not by perceiving the other states as criminals, but as *justi hostes* (just enemy). Second, a decisive step towards the establishment of the new *nomos* was made when states began being envisaged as separate persons. This shift was instituted when the state became the new legal subject of a new international law. Hobbes' *magnum homo* was now figured as a legal subject and sovereign "person." The delineation of particularistic national "characters" with the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century only served to accentuate this conceptualization of the state as a sovereign person. A consequence of this "personalization" of states was that relations among sovereign states were now able to be conducted with *comitas* (courtesy) and *jus* (probity). Peace treaties with vanquished state parties also became possible. Third, the core of this Eurocentric spatial order lay in

the division of the soil into state territories with fixed borders. Initially, of course, the soil that was recognizably divided was only European soil. This was distinguished from the "free" soil of non-European princes and that of peoples who were open for European land-appropriations. The central rationale of the modern interstate order of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum* is found in these three elements—the bracketing of war, the refiguration of states as persons and the territorialization of the state-form.

As long as the overcoming of civil war remained at the core of the juridical substructure of the interstate world order, partisan warfare remained a marginal phenomenon. In this "classical" period of war, the partisan was simply "outside the law" (*hors la loi*) (*Partisan*, 10). But the central point of Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth* and the later *Theory of the Partisan* is that the older *nomos* of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum* has steadily eroded in the last one hundred and fifty years or so. A new *nomos* gradually come into being from the late nineteenth century with the rise to prominence of internationalist ideologies like global communism, bringing with it a radically new conceptualization of friend and enemy. Here, the key figure to understand this shift is not the regular soldier in uniform, but the "irregular" figure of the partisan. For what does the uniform of the regular soldier signify? It is a mark of recognition that the soldier is the representative fighter of a particular state and is subject to humane treatment upon capture. This recognition by the enemy is at the core of "classical" warfare in the modern period, stretching from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) through the Congress of Vienna (1812-14) to World War I (1914-18).

The key aspect about the partisan is that s/he is an "irregular" fighter—the mark of recognition that is the uniform is missing in his/her case. As a fighter in *camouflage*,

the partisan is not directly subject, at least initially, to the same treatment as a soldier in uniform. Moreover, one of the fundamental changes that occurred in the wake of World War II is a change in the nature of partisan warfare itself. With the rise of the idea of revolution, especially communist revolution on a global scale, the partisan gradually lost its "telluric" or defensive posture; from then on s/he was increasingly more and more mobile and offensive. The character of the partisan changed from a purely defensive position, geared towards the defense of the homeland against an occupying enemy, to a more openly political position. S/he could now be deployed in overt or covert war and deactivated whenever necessary. This change in the understanding of the partisan, Schmitt suggests, can be studied via two distinct dimensions—i) the shifts in international law, and ii) the increasing proliferation and sophistication of partisan revolutionary theory—a line that encompasses Lenin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Regis Debray and Amilcar Cabral.[231]

Legally, the change in the status of the partisan can already be noticed in the 1907 Hague Convention. Here, for the first time, the partisan enters the figure of the law as a political figure. According to Article 3, Section 4 of the Convention, the irregular fighter is no longer "outside the law," but is now equivalent to a criminal according to ordinary law (*Partisan*, 24-25). By the time of the Geneva Convention of 1949, the juridico-political character of the partisan became even more sharply defined. Articles 4 and 13 of the Convention widened the circle of persons equated with regular soldiers to members of *organized* resistance movements. Organized resistance fighters are here equated with

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[231] In this chapter, I will focus primarily on Lenin, Mao and Guevara as their influence has been wider than that of others. Walter Lacquer's *The Guerrilla Reader* has a good set of writings by the others.

volunteers and are subject to the same humane treatment as the soldier in uniform. To be sure, the numbers and forms of partisan fighters and organizations have proliferated so tremendously over the last fifty years or so that new legal regulations keeping in tune with changed forms have proved virtually impossible. The Geneva Convention still remains the best touchstone in this regard. But it is important to note that when the Geneva Convention was drafted, the situation it addressed was the status of organized resistance groups fighting against Axis rule: the basic determinant was still a defensive move. But in the last sixty years or so, a new figure has appeared increasingly on the horizon—the global revolutionary. Che Guevara still remains the best example of a revolutionary of the global type. Therefore, the basic antithesis remains in the field of partisan warfare—the distinction between the defensive indigenous "telluric" fighter and the globally aggressive revolutionary still remains confusing, with most contemporary partisan groups partaking of elements of both, to a greater or lesser degree. From the legal standpoint, the mixture of these two elements often creates aporias of judgment and of application. First, as revolutionary forces fighting oppressive "colonial" powers—the ULFA, for instance, frames its struggle against India in these terms—partisan organizations demand to be treated as defenders of a despoiled homeland. In fact, after a century of global revolutionary and anticolonial movements, the justifiable attack against the "colonizer" has become the dominant *topos* of partisan struggle. The peculiar paradox is that when a partisan fighter is caught, s/he often invokes the right to be treated humanely as an enemy combatant, while for the state s/he is not recognizable as an "enemy" as s/he is an "internal" enemy and not an "external" one (most of the war statues have the "external" enemy as its object).

Viewed from the other angle—that of the state—a revolutionary organization can also be seen as the primary initiator of civil war as it attacks the particular country's existence as a civilized order. This self-definition emerges through the identification of the triptych of sovereignty-territory-people and the simultaneous bracketing of the war against all. However, the paradox that the partisan fighter represents illuminates a key transmutation of the friend-enemy dichotomy in our conjuncture: the primary feature of this modern form of warfare dominated by partisan organizations and statist movements against them is a refiguration, in a changed conjuncture, of the premodern *nomos* of the criminalization of the enemy and a destruction of the enemy state. The partisan literally pronounces a death sentence on the enemy (the state), and expects to be treated as a criminal when s/he is caught. Schmitt says that the fundamental logic of such warfare is *justa causa* (just cause) without the recognition of a *justus hostis* (just enemy). This notion of the partisan fighter as the "absolute enemy" is the key political feature inaugurated by the proliferation of the partisan organizations in modern juridical history.

The concept of the "absolute enemy" also emerges as the key one if we shift the point of view from the sphere of the state and the law to that of twentieth century revolutionary theory. Schmitt argues that Lenin is the first important proponent of this theory of the "absolute enemy" from a revolutionary standpoint. In "classical" state warfare, the enemy is still a "real enemy" in that, at least hypothetically speaking, the concept of enmity was relative to the interests and ends of a particular state. In pamphlets like "Guerrilla Warfare" and works like *What is to be Done?* and *The State and Revolution*, Lenin formulates a theory of absolute war and absolute enmity that is central for an understanding of war and peace in the post-"classical" age. First of all,

Lenin recasts the entire question of war. Interstate war is merely "play" for Lenin; the really genuine war is revolutionary war as it arises from absolute enmity. This can be seen in his justification of violence as a means of absolutely and uncompromisingly smashing the bourgeois state apparatus in *The State and Revolution*. However, the concrete absolute enemy for Lenin is the class enemy. Since class warfare is not as regular as interstate warfare, the partisan appears as central figure in Lenin—in Schmitt's words, in Lenin we see the first combination between "philosophy and the partisan" (*Partisan*, 51). Moreover, for Lenin, the mode for determining authentic partisan warfare from inauthentic ones depends on an elegantly simple criterion: the party organization. The only partisan action that is legitimate is the one sanctioned by the party organization; the rest are anarchistic and reactionary.

Schmitt terms Mao Tse-Tung's theory of guerrilla warfare as a further development of Lenin's. In fact, Mao is, in my view, probably the greatest theorist of guerrilla warfare. Two key aspects differentiate and prove the radical originality of Mao's theories: i) the concrete factor of the "telluric" character of the Chinese Revolution as opposed to Lenin's global theory, and ii) the radical re-conceptualization of the nature of war and peace in his work. In the era of the *Jus Publicum Europeaum*, "war" and "peace" were conceptualized as separate states. Peace began when war ended; conversely, the state of war became necessary when conditions of peace could no longer hold. For Mao, peace can never be a state separate from war. Peace contains within itself the potential for war. Peace, therefore, contains a theory of potential enmity. The theory of potential enmity thus is a political strategy oriented towards futurity: the party always has to be on guard such that the potential enemy never manifests itself as the absolute enemy. The

justification for the Cultural Revolution of 1967 lies here. This re-conceptualization of war and peace makes political reality itself "partisan." Peace is simply the continuation of a hidden war against which the partisan must constantly keep watch.[232]

A further development to partisan theory is added by Che Guevara's works. Till *Guerrilla Warfare* Che's theories do not differ radically from, say, Lenin's. However, in "A Message to the Tricontinental" in 1967, Che says something radically different. The essential element of partisan struggle, he says, is:

> …a relentless hatred of the enemy, impelling us over and above the natural limitations that man is heir to and transforming him into an effective, violent, selective and cold killing machine. Our soldiers must be thus; a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy. We must carry the war to every corner the enemy happens to carry it: to his home, to his centers of entertainment; a total war ("Message," 173).

Mao's telluric reformulation of Lenin's global revolutionary theory is re-routed back to the global sphere by Guevara. The key terms above are "relentless hatred" and "total war." Thus, what changes with Guevara is the radical elimination of any defensive character in the partisan. Offense becomes the best and sometimes the only defensive posture possible. Partisan warfare in Guevara's sense is an absolute war against an absolute enemy; there is no longer any "real" enmity possible. Absolute warfare is aimed at the radical denegation of the enemy. Indeed, Guevara's experiences in the Congo and in Bolivia testify to the practical applications of his theory—the reason why Regis Debray calls him an internationalist in the "purest" sense possible (36). Schmitt, on the other hand, marks Guevara as the moment when the partisan transmutes into a new figure—the "terrorist."

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[232] The impact of Mao on the "guerrilla" theories of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari has yet to be studied comprehensively.

Does Schmitt's narrative lead us to believe that like the partisan who earlier represented the figure "outside the law," the "terrorist" now represents the figure "outside the law"? Schmitt justifies this answer in a neo-theological vein arguing that the contemporary partisan (or "terrorist") is no longer an enemy, but a "satanic pursuer"; s/he attempts to create *ex nihilo* (create from nothing) (quoted in Ulmen:xviii). Though Schmitt doesn't state it directly, he implies that stopping such "satanic pursuers" in their tracks can justify any authoritarian action from the state. This is where I disagree with Schmitt precisely and turn around his theorizations about the partisan and, implicitly, the terrorist, to put the spotlight back on brutal aspects of state action in the post-"classical" age. Any theory of state war depends on a definition of "internal" and "external" enemies. The internal enemy threatens the nation's sovereignty; the external enemy is one with which the state could potentially be at war. Conceptually though, the "partisan" earlier and the "terrorist" now blurs the boundary between the internal and the external enemy. S/he is internal to the state, but often operates supposedly under the guidance and patronage of the "foreign" hand—think here about India's common accusation that the numerous "terrorist" groups operating within its soil work at the behest of Pakistan and China, or, relatedly, Pakistan's accusation that there are numerous "terror" groups that operate under Indian supervision. However, the move from "partisan" to "terrorist" changes something further. Once partisanship is conceptualized under the term "terrorism," it implies a de-particularization of any substantive critique of the social and statist order. "Terrorist" is an empty signifier that can be endowed any content and is totally dependent upon the will of the sovereign authority. As Leerom Medovoi says:

> …the terrorist becomes to terror precisely as the criminal is to crime in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, or the pervert to sex in volume 1 of *The History of*

> *Sexuality*. Terrorism becomes, like murder and rape, the naming of a deviant type against which society must be defended (72).

Therefore, just as the gradual emergence of the partisan on the global scene changed the concept of "real" enmity to "absolute" enmity, the appearance of the "terrorist" in the figure of the law also illustrates the rise of a new disciplinary-security modality of biopolitical governance whereby the "deviant" figure of the "terrorist" must be kept under surveillance at all times. The transmutation of the partisan to the terrorist in the figure of the law, therefore, represents a key point when sovereign power transmutes itself to biopower. As a social deviant, the state acts on this deviant to preclude any possibility of harm for the population. Any possibility that this figure possesses of creating *ex nihilo* must be spotted, controlled and neutralized in advance—hence the necessity for emergency state laws concerning detention, torture and encounter killings. Though torture and detention have been common state practices through history, the semiotics of such techniques that instrumentalize the human body has changed drastically over the last two centuries. Earlier torture, for instance, was a spectacular, public act meant to restore the wholeness of the right of the sovereign in the body politic. Now, torture, which is conducted in hidden, dark and subterranean spaces, is justified, like most other biopolitical measures of governance, as a preventive measure that insures a safer tomorrow. Like the carceral prison, a torture chamber is a disciplinary/security space that isolates and "treats" a radically pathological social deviant: the "terrorist." Indeed, as the notorious Khalid Shaikh Mohammad case illustrates, a subject only has to be branded a "terrorist" to be stripped of all basic political and human rights. Liz Cheney's statement on March 5, 2010, that "terrorists have no rights" is a concrete epitomization of this biopolitical logic.

Let me illustrate this statist logic through a reading of a particularly notorious Indian state security act titled POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) passed in 2002 by the then government led by the right-wing NDA (National Democratic Alliance). Chapter III, Article 18, of the Act defines a "terrorist organization" in the following terms:

> 18. **Declaration of an organization as a terrorist organization.-**(1) For the purposes of this Act, an organisation is a terrorist organisation if—
>
> (a) it is listed in the Schedule, or (b) it operates under the same name as an organisation listed in that Schedule.
>
> (2) The Central Government may by order, in the Official Gazette,—
>
> (a) add an organisation to the Schedule; (b) remove an organisation from that Schedule; (c) amend that Schedule in some other way.
>
> (3) The Central Government may exercise its power under clause (a) of sub-section (2) in respect of an organisation only if it believes that it is involved in terrorism.
>
> (4) For the purposes of sub-section (3), an organisation shall be deemed to be involved in terrorism if it—
>
> (a) commits or participates in acts of terrorism, (b) prepares for terrorism,(c) promotes or encourages terrorism, or (d) is otherwise involved in terrorism.

The important point to note above is the remarkable flexibility and open-endedness of the term "terrorism." The individual specificity of various partisan groups are flattened out and grouped under the common moniker of "terrorist." There were thirty-two organizations listed under the schedule, of varying ideologies including subnationalism/ethnic nationalism of various hues, Maoism, Marxism-Leninism and Jihadism.[233] Ten organizations listed here operate from the eastern borderlands. The

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[233] Here's the full list of organizations: Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Commando Force, Khalistan Zindabad Force, International Sikh Youth Federation, Lashkar-e-Taiba/Pasban-e-Ahle Hadis,

central government here has the absolute discretionary authority to decide what counts as "terrorism" or as a "terrorist organization," possessing the power to add or remove an organization from the list as and when needed.

The other important segment in the portion from the POTA legislation listed above is the one relating to punishments. Article 3 of Chapter II says—"Whoever conspires or attempts to commit, or advocates, abets, advises or incites or knowingly facilitates the commission of, a terrorist act or any act preparatory to a terrorist act, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than five years but which may extend to imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine." In each case of punishment, like in the article above, the categorization designates "deviant types," which includes "terrorists" and their sympathizers who must be controlled and incarcerated such that society can be defended. In other words, to invert Schmitt's terminology, if the increasing centrality of the partisan in the juridico-legal sphere of the new *nomos* of the earth led to the passage from "real" enmity to "absolute" enmity, I argue that the transmutation of the partisan into the undifferentiated figure of the "terrorist" led to the creation of a new "absolute" enemy that could incarcerated, controlled and/or eliminated at will so that "peace" and society could be defended. This

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Jaish-e-Mohammed/Tahrik-e-Furqan, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen/Harkat-ul-Ansar/Harkat-ul-Jehad-e-Islami, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen/Hizb-ul-Mujahideen Pir Panjal Regiment, Al-Umar-Mujahideen, Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Front, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), People's Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup (KYKL), Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF), All Tripura Tiger Force, National Liberation Front of Tripura, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Students Islamic Movement of India, Deendar Anjuman, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)—People's War, all its formations and front organizations, Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), All its formations and front organizations, Al Badr, Jamiat-Ul-Mujahidden, Al-Qaida, Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DEM), Tamil Nadu Liberation Army (TNLA), Tamil National Retrieval Troops (TNRT), Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES).

new “absolute” dimension of enmity against the deviant figure of the terrorist illustrates how power in the new *nomos* has not become nonsovereign, as Foucault would seem to suggest. Instead, via the refiguration of the “terrorist” as the figure “outside the law,” sovereign power reinstitutes and reinvents itself utilizing the logics of biopower. The undifferentiated figure of the “terrorist,” thus, is a concrete example of how “bare life” can be produced in our conjuncture by sovereign power.

5.3: The Lifeworld of the Guerrilla

How is the partisan fighter positioned *vis-à-vis* recognizable categories of the human? How does the guerrilla fighter internalize these categories to maintain the advantages of the key attributes of guerrilla warfare: mobility and camouflage? In my opinion, guerrilla training manuals, like those by Mao Tse-Tung (*Yu Chi Chan* or *Guerrilla Warfare*) and Che Guevara (*Guerrilla Warfare*), are a good source to explore these questions. This section therefore marks a move from a study of the juridico-political status of the guerrilla fighter to an analysis of specific aspects of guerrilla theory. Guerrilla training manuals emphasize the melting of the body of the partisan fighter into the environment *as if* s/he were a species of natural and/or animal life. The “as if” here is key—a partisan fighter is not an animal or a natural being, but has to approximate them as far as possible if s/he is to camouflage him/herself well. Besides mobility, after all, the key features of the partisan fighter are espionage and camouflage. Melting into the environment is one of the most effective ways of camouflage. The partisan fighter, thus, represents a threshold between the human and the animal/nature. The ideal lifeworlds of guerrillas are, thus, those which partake of elements of both human and “natural” worlds.

The clearest explorations of the lifeworlds of guerrillas can be found in the two famous tracts on guerrilla warfare written by Mao Tse Tung and Che Guevara. In Chapter II, I discussed how the colonial army functions as an exceptional institution as the spheres of the political and the military become indistinguishable in its operation. A contiguous logic, albeit with some major differences, can be seen in operation in a partisan army. This point is made directly by Guevara: "Under certain conditions, the political and the military are not separate, but form one organic whole, consisting of the people's army, whose nucleus is the guerrilla army" (*Guerrilla*, 218). There are two major distinctions though between a conventional army and a partisan army. A conventional army becomes an exceptional institution only in certain circumstances and locales—such as the colonial locale where the political and the military remains indistinguishable. In "normal" circumstances, where the political and the military remain separate. A partisan army, on the other hand, is always "exceptional" in character—the political and the military aspects can never be separated. Second, a conventional army can get by without the support of the local populace; a partisan army, as an irregular organization, has to count on the people for their support.

These distinctions between conventional and partisan warfare are stated most clearly in the works of Mao Tse Tung. Mao clearly states that as an object, partisan warfare is fundamentally different from organized warfare. First, the modalities of organization differ in the respective cases of partisan and organized warfare. Partisan war groups are characterized by an organization that is not predicated on a rigid centralized authority; it is always mobile indulging in active, and not passive, maneuvers, and operates without the conventional army's distinctions of "front" and "rear." They usually

attack the conventional army's rear and are comparable to "innumerable gnats, which, by biting giant both in front and rear, ultimately exhaust him" (40). Relentless and speedy activity, abjuring defensive positions as far as possible, tactical flexibility, the ability to camouflage oneself and mobility: all these aspects characterize the partisan fighter. Guerrilla warfare, according to him, is one of "lightening war and speedy decision" (49). The aim throughout is to deploy hit-and-run tactics and utilize the element of surprise, in order to destroy the morale and strength of the (sometimes) numerically superior and/or technologically advanced enemy.

Although Mao's work is prescriptive, it provides some key details about the everyday functioning of a guerrilla army. Both the conventional army and the partisan army are disciplinary formations. However, they are disciplinary formations of a different type. If a conventional army is based on a hierarchical model, then the partisan army is formed on a disciplinary model "established on a limited democratic basis" (65). While obedience is necessary for a partisan army as well, the basis has to be the "individual conscience" (65). Externally imposed discipline, as is the case with the conventional army, works relatively less within the partisan army. For the partisan, the discipline has to be largely self-imposed. The partisan must "understand completely why he fights and why he must obey" (66). Guerrilla recruits thus have to have an understanding of the partisan cause for this form of warfare to succeed. Similarly, the disparity between the officers and the personnel must not be too huge and stark as in a conventional army. The key point here is not the "theory of equality in all things"—a logical impossibility—but "equality of existence in accepting the hardships and dangers of war" (66). Therefore, the importance of discussion among troops and the spread of propaganda among them are

stressed—we will see a direct representation of these aspects in the discussion of the novels below. The leader of the partisan army must be a flexible and alert individual who must adjust the operations to the situation of the enemy, the terrain and the local factors. The three pronged formula of "dispersion, concentration, constant change in position" is the hallmark of the partisan force—in Mao's words, the leader, especially, must be like "the fisherman, who, with his nets, is able to cast them and to pull them out in awareness of the depth of the water, the strength of the current or the presence of any obstacles that may foul them" (73). If the situation gets serious, then deception is key—central for any form of partisan action is the preempting of any possibility of being maneuvered into a position where the "initiative" can no longer be theirs and the desperate action of attack is the only option left for the force or unit. "Initiative," along with deception, flexibility and self-discipline, thus, is one of the key subjective attributes for a partisan fighter as it endows him/her with a "liberty of action."

Mao's work on the partisan subject is expanded by Che Guevara in his tract on guerrilla warfare. While Guevara repeats some of the points made by Mao, such as the importance of self-discipline, stealth, flexibility, mobility and initiative, he adds two additional dimensions to the subjective constitution of a partisan fighter. First, the partisan, according to him, is a social reformer. To attain the status of a true "crusader," the partisan has to display "impeccable moral conduct and strict self-control" (*Guerrilla*, 126). In the beginning, the partisan does not stress social reform, focusing instead on acting as a "big brother" to the poor in matters of "technology, economics, morals and culture" (*Guerrilla*, 126). Slowly, as the contradictions among classes sharpen, the partisan becomes the people's "standard bearer," stealing from the rich and giving to the

poor. At this point, the partisan fighter provides the ideology for social reform through both propaganda and also by personal example. Second, Guevara pays greater attention to the everyday life of the partisan fighter than Mao. Like "a snail," the partisan fighter carries his/her home on his/her shoulders. Food can often be scarce and hardly any attention is paid to personal hygiene. The scarcity of food often forces the partisan to use innovative methods to make food more palatable. Absolutely essential equipment which the partisan has to carry on his back included a hammock, a blanket, a jacket, trousers, shirt, a sturdy pair of shoes, canvas pack and food items such as butter/oil, tinned goods, preserved fish, condensed and/or powdered milk, sugar and salt. There were variable sets of non-essential items as well. A partisan who had these implements literally carried a "solid house" in his/her back (*Guerrilla*, 130).

If the captured fighter can potentially be reduced to "bare life" in state organized spaces of terror, the discipline inherent in partisan formation emphasizes the transformation of the fighter's body to the level of simple, natural life. If one of the tenets of the bourgeois idea of being human is the gradual bracketing of the body, the partisan fighter represents the opposite of that tendency. The partisan is not an ascetic who is literally enjoined to forget the body; rather, s/he has to use the body as a resource to increase speed, mobility and initiative. The key point for any study of the partisan fighter's body is not self-denial, but self-discipline to the point where s/he literally adapts and melt into the environment as forms of "natural" life do—think here, for instance, about Mao's comparison of the partisan with the fish in water and gnats biting the elephant's rear, and Guevara's comparison of the same figure with the snail. Indeed, the aim throughout is to preserve the element of surprise through camouflage, mobility and

virtual invisibility. The partisan loses his/her effectiveness if s/he is recognized and seen easily as human; instead, s/he is at his/her most effective and deadly when they literally melt into the environment as forms of "natural" life.[234] Of course, melting into the environment does not mean that they *become* forms of natural life (captured guerrillas are often treated like that in terror-spaces like torture camps). Instead, to preserve the advantage of camouflage and surprise, they have to represent a threshold between human and "natural" life.

The concept of camouflage, however, also signifies something else apart from the act of deceiving the enemy by hiding in one's environment. As Elizabeth Povinelli says, if we turn the angle of the gaze from the dominant modality or institution that endows or withholds recognition (such as the state), and look at the world from the perspective of the camouflaged, then:

> …the problem is not the agony of worth, but the agony of Action: getting in without being seen and clandestinely navigating internal and external perimeters in order to change the existing order. The problem is not being deemed worthy or having worth for one who is in their most robust social skin, but what one could potentially do, how one could potentially transform the world as it is given, or dominantly given, and make it into the world that it is not (22).

By espionage, Povinelli refers to "actual practices of spying and being spied on as well as assumptions that someone is trying to penetrate a socially sealed space," while by camouflage, she refers to "the art of hiding within a given environment via embodied

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[234] The figure of the guerrilla can be compared here with an earlier figure that was similarly romanticized in earlier epochs: the bandit. Both the guerrilla and the bandit are figures who are placed under a "ban" from entering or inhabiting the *polis*. Topologically, the bandit/guerrilla, who is an example of a figure under the law, is related to the body of the sovereign who is above the law. What Agamben says about the bandit could be extended to that of the guerrilla—"The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to the law or the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, inclusion and exclusion…" (*Homo Sacer*, 105).

disguise" (5). Espionage and camouflage are modalities internal to the dominant modality of recognition; for recognition is not simply about the worthiness of the other, but also about "arts of disguise, perimeter busting, and uncloaking" that is necessary for a justification of the established forms of life especially in spaces that are abandoned, or are rendered "no man's land" for the "civilized" order.

Povinelli's insights about camouflage—the art of hiding within a given environment via embodied disguise— and espionage bring up the question of the spaces that figures outside the law like guerrillas navigate. Both Mao and Guevara argue that the more inhospitable the territory, the better it is for guerrilla bases. At the same time, the important point to note in both favorable and unfavorable terrain is that for guerrilla warfare there are no real concept of 'lines', except for moments of combat. Guerrilla zones, as Guevara says, are "a fluid no-man's land penetrated by the enemy during the day and the guerrilla at night" (*Guerrilla*, 135). Espionage thus is the key strategy through which guerrilla warfare is conducted. Guerilla warfare changes the notion of warfare into a permanent, continuous form carried on multiple fronts. Since direct confrontation between recognizable enemies is preferably eschewed, guerrilla warfare can potentially transform any space into a "no-man's land" if it proves to be propitious for attacking the enemy and inflicting maximum damage.

The potential to transform any space into a no-man's land is the real threat that guerilla warfare poses to the "existing order" of the state. Spatially, no man's lands represent spaces or zones of abandonment where the law does not apply. The *OED* defines "no man's land" as: "…a piece of waste or unwanted land; a plot of ground lying outside the north wall of London used as a place of execution in the Middle Ages; a space

amid ships used to hold blocks and tackle in the time of sail; and, in a military connotation, an unoccupied space between fronts of opposing fortresses." While this definition, especially the last phrase, privileges the classical definition of "bracketed war" between two recognizable armies, the proliferation of guerrilla warfare in the last century introduces two new dimensions to the concept. First, guerrilla bases are set up in regions that are no man's lands. Since guerrilla armies lack recognizable status, these bases are not legal spaces, but regions "outside the law" (*hors de loi).* Second, and more importantly, the fluid mode of guerrilla warfare subverts the order of lines. Since attack is predicated on camouflage and is dictated by what Guevara calls "moments of combat," even legally recognized areas can be transformed in no man's lands. Once a space is converted to a "no-man's land"—a very common phenomenon in regions which witness guerilla activity—the exception is localized. In that space, anything or everything can happen, since it is technically outside the reach of the law. This is one of the reasons why regions like the eastern Indian borderlands are ruled as war zones because there is a potential that surprise attacks can occur at any time. The absolute indistinction between civil and military authority, a key feature of everyday life in this region, stems from the conversion of the borderland space into a "no-man's land."

5.4: A History of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)

Currently there are approximately around eighty militia groups in India's eastern borderlands.[235] Although none of the two novels read in this chapter—*Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang*— invoke the name of the partisan outfit directly, the reference is to the same organization (*xongothon*): the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam). The ULFA, along with the NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland), the NSCN (The National Socialist Council of Nagaland) and the PLA (People's Liberation Army) of Manipur are among the largest, best-organized and most durable partisan groups in the region. My intention here is not to outline a general history of the ULFA that subsumes the complicated histories of the formation and organization of all militant groups in the borderland region. However, since some of the events in the literary texts I discuss are bound to the particular history of this partisan outfit, I will briefly sketch a narrative of its formation, rise and relative decline in the paragraphs that follow.

The ULFA was officially formed on April 7, 1979, in the historic precincts of the Rangghar in Sibsagar, Assam. It is often considered as a militant, radical outfit that grew out of the Assam Agitation (1979-1985)—a popular mass movement in the state that was geared around the plank of "*bidexi kheda*" (drive away the foreigner). The Assam Agitation was geared around the protection of the rights of ethnic Assamese against "foreigners"—this included both local Bengalis and other Indian groups, as well as alleged infiltrators from newly-independent Bangladesh. This perception that the ULFA was a violent offshoot of the Assam Agitation will, however, be complicated later in this

[235] According to the Institute of Conflict Management report of 2002, Manipur has 35 militia groups, Assam has 34, Tripura has 30, Nagaland has 4 and Meghalaya has 3. There are female cadres in many of the militia groups, although the official positions are always held by male cadres.

section. The choice of the Rangghar was symbolic in that it was the seat of the Ahom kings who were sovereigns over many parts of medieval Assam. The ULFA's aim was to "establish scientific socialism in an independent Assam (*swadhin Axom*)" (quoted in Baruah, *India*, 150). It regarded the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826 between Burma and British India as the formal end of Assam's independence, as the formerly independent kingdom was incorporated into British India. The following quotation from a speech of the now imprisoned chairman of the ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa, illustrates this narrative of the organization succinctly:

> …history does not sustain the argument that Asom and Asom's identity is part of India and the Indian identity. It is for this reason that Asom is not even mentioned in India's national anthem. For us Asom is our only mainstream. We are not secessionists. The demand for Asom's independence is a just demand. History provides no instance of any Indian ruler ever ruling over Asom. After the British left, India had no moral right to take over Asom. At the time of India's independence the Indian rulers masquerading under the guise of democracy and Gandhism deceivingly forced us to be part of India instead of allowing us to be independent (quoted in Mishra, 146).

To be sure, like all partisan versions of history, there is a selective and interested reading of history here.[236] First of all, the territory of *what is now known* as Assam was divided among numerous kingdoms in the pre-British era. Some regions, like the kingdom of Cooch Bihar, had a greater connection with the Indic mainstream, whereas others like the Bodo, Kachari or even to some extent the Ahom territories, were more distanced from that mainstream. The point here, of course, is not whether ULFA's

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[236] In "The Past as Resource," Arjun Appadurai argues that the past is not simply a "boundless canvas for contemporary embroidery" and people simply do not invent pasts for themselves out of thin air (201). There are, he says, a minimal set of formal-structural constraints that every act of re-inventing the past has to follow. At the very least, a cultural consensus as to what sort of "authority, continuity, time-depth and interdependence (with other pasts)" must exist if a particularistic version of the past has to have any credibility. All these aspects are clearly seen in the "partisan" history of the ULFA as well.

version of history was "true" or "false." Rather, it is important to view it as a partisan reading of history geared towards the realization of certain goals. I think it is more productive to view it as an instance of the Foucauldian "counterhistory" of "permanent war." According to Foucault, the modern "historico-political" discourse of "permanent war" is not one that seeks to establish truth or right; rather, "truth functions exclusively as a weapon that is used to win an exclusively partisan victory" (*Society*, 57). 1826, thus, figures in the ULFA narrative as the moment when the "independence" of the *Axombaxi* (inhabitants of Assam) passes into dark servitude. The invocation of this in the ULFA's discourse introduces a binary differentiation—"us" (*Axombaxi*) versus "them" (the Indian "colonizers").

Sanjib Baruah traces a culturalist genealogy to account for the rise of the militant outfit. In *India against Itself* Baruah argues that while "subnational political mobilization in Assam," is often animated by "India's Constitution, laws, public philosophy, and political processes," the roots of subnationalist identitarian processes have an older genealogy that goes back to colonial partitions and reorganizations of space and the subsequent attributions of linguistic and "tribal" identity to the people who inhabited these regions (5). The neglect of this genealogy by Indian state apparatuses led to an absolute disjunct between centralized state policies dealing with conflict zones or border areas like Assam, and the aspirations vocalized by subjects living in these border areas. Baruah argues that the "politics of subnationalism should be located in the theoretical space that is usually referred to as civil rather than political society" (*India*, 9).

The consolidation of Assamese identity went hand in hand with a definition and delimitation of the *bidexi* (foreigner) by the Assamese bourgeoisie. Who were these

bidexis? The "foreigners" were identified as both Bengalis and other groups that immigrated to Assam in the 19th century as this region was integrated into the emerging system of global capitalism primarily through the setting up and consolidation of tea plantations and oil refineries. While Assam was accorded the status of a separate province in British India after 1912, the policy of encouraging the movement of people from other regions of India was actively encouraged. One of the major reasons for this colonial policy was the sparsely populated nature of the frontier region. There was a prevalent colonial view that Assam was a "land frontier" (*India*, 64). The growth of tea plantations, which Assam came to be well known for, provided an additional impetus for encouraging the flow of an "immigrant" labor force. Baruah thus identifies three factors that combined to foster subnational identitarian formations in colonial Assam: 1) the colonial administrative procedure of governing Assam as a part of Bengal until 1912, allied with the real or imagined fears among Assamese speakers of the threat of Bengali hegemony, 2) the differentiation of the hills from the plains, and 3) the policy of actively encouraging migration from other parts of India both to serve as a labor force, and to populate a sparse land frontier.

Spatial re-ordering in this land "frontier," however, was not confined to the colonial era alone. This policy spilled over to the post-colonial era as well. The policy of the newly independent Indian state, as is well documented, was to institute state territories on linguistic lines since the 1950s. However, while the process of drawing state boundaries in other parts of India was often the result of political mobilization, Baruah observes that "redrawing boundaries in the northeast was more a top-down process" (*India*, 106). The original post-colonial state of Assam was divided at least four times.

Baruah says that, once "New Delhi's fondness for carving separate states out of Assam became evident, it profoundly affected the state's politics," by energizing "movements for separation and discourag(ing) a politics of accommodation" (*India*, 107). The fact that these divisions were often made without consulting the local population exacerbated matters, leading to a further disjunct between the demands made in the Assamese civil sphere and the policies of the centralized state.

What complicate the ethno-linguistic scenario even further are allegations of centrist neglect in the post-independence era—not only of Assam, but of the entire eastern borderland region. Most of them are entirely legitimate grievances. The treatment of the northeast as a restricted security area, exemplified by the Restrictive Area Practices Act that for a long time restricted the entry of Indian nationals as well as foreigners on the pretext of "security," alienated the region as a whole from the mainland. There were allegations of centrist neglect in developmental schemes, and also widespread anger at the siphoning off of profits from this otherwise resource rich region to the mainland. Consider the fact that the first oil refinery in Assam (Assam is an oil rich state) was set up in Noonmati only in 1981, and that too after a protracted struggle with the center.

All of these factors contributed to the gradual hardening of Assamese subnational sentiment against the Indian state. The Assam Agitation (1975-82) emerged from this context. However, if one can talk of an immediate impetus for the Assam Agitation, it would have to be the demand for the eviction of "illegal" migrants. The paradox of this, as Baruah notes, was that this demand was framed entirely within the ambit of the Indian constitution and laws:

> Framing the question in terms of the laws and the Constitution was a major reason that the Assam movement was successful in mobilizing popular support…The

> focus on illegal immigration by the Assam movement illustrates a contradiction: the Constitution and the laws shaped the acceptance of many immigrants as much as it shaped the non-acceptance of many others. The other side of the opposition to illegal immigration and the enfranchisement of "illegals," in fact, was the acceptance of immigrants whose stay in Assam was seen as legal—immigrants and descendants of immigrants who came a long time ago and those who came from the other parts of India (*India*, 118).

Baruah correctly points out that the acceptance or non-acceptance of immigrants in the pan-Indian sphere was embroiled in two highly sensitive questions for the post-colonial Indian nation-state. The first was the treatment of the Muslim minority population, and the second was the unspoken obligation of the Indian state to repatriate Hindu refugees from the former East Pakistan. Both segments were viewed as "foreigners" by Assamese speakers. The Assam Agitation was framed as a movement for deporting "illegal" immigrants from the recently constituted Bangladesh and also Nepal. But, it also targeted Bengali migrants or descendants of Bengalis who settled in the area long ago. It is important to note here that the Assam Agitation was not a demand for *separation* from the Indian state, even though many of the demands were couched under the rubric of Assamese "nationalism," whose roots could be traced back to the colonial period.

Significantly, the "militant subnationalism" of the ULFA did not share the immediate goals of the Assam Agitation, even though its formation and ideology can also be traced back to the genealogy of the Agitation. There are two significant differences between the goals of the Assam Agitation and the ULFA—i) their demand was uncompromising in their stance for Assam's independence, and ii) their appeal was to all *Axom Baxi* (people living in Assam) rather than to *Axomiyas* (the Assamese ethnic formation).[237] ULFA's ideology emphasized the unity of all indigenous peoples in

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[237] Of course, barring few exceptions, ULFA's appeal has primarily been limited to ethnic Assamese only.

Assam, who had been affected by the fragmentation of Assam's territory, especially in the post-independence period. Thus, ULFA's formation was not geared towards an ethnicist definition of identity, as in the Assam Agitation, but rather in the restoration of a sacralized "national" space that had been sundered repeatedly because of the powerlessness of the people of the region *vis-à-vis* the colonial and the postcolonial states. From the very beginning, the ULFA formed ties with other militant organizations of the region such as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur and the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), and received training, arms and supplies in and from the borderland regions adjoining India and Myanmar. In fact, on May 2, 1990, the ULFA, the NSCN, the United National Liberation Front of Manipur (UNLFM) along with a few other Burmese militant organizations signed a memorandum of understanding with an objective of forming an independent state comprising of the northeastern regions of India and the northwestern regions of Myanmar. This common front was called the Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF). The aim of fronts like the IBRF was to establish scientific socialism in the eastern borderland region through the route of national liberation.

The ULFA became very prominent in Assam's public sphere between 1986 and 1990. The Assam Agitation had ended and the student leaders who had led the movement were voted overwhelmingly to power. The new AGP (*Axom Gono Parixad*)—the name of the new political party comprising of former student leaders who led the Assam Agitation—government however quickly lost popularity because if inefficient governance and also because many of its members were embroiled in massive corruption scandals. The ULFA stepped into this vacuum created by what Baruah calls a "localized

regime crisis" (*Durable*, 17). Besides advocating the goal of Assam's independence, the ULFA assumed the role of a custodian of the Assamese social space—punishing corrupt government officials, destroying drug-related and prostitution rings and so on. It ran a virtual parallel government, winning a significant amount of sympathy from the Assamese urban middle class. It funded itself primarily through sympathizers and also by means of extortion from big business houses and Assam's cash-rich tea plantations. It also kidnapped and/or killed many executives and personnel associated with the government and the corporations—the murder of Surendra Paul, the chairman of Assam Frontier Tea Ltd., in April 1990 became a national issue (Paul was the brother of the well known Indo-British tycoon, Swaraj Paul).

On 27 November, 1990, the central government dismissed the AGP government on account of non-performance and its alleged sympathies with the ULFA, and imposed President's Rule in the state (see my discussion of Article 371). It started an anti-insurgency campaign against the ULFA codenamed Operation Bajrang. Operation Bajrang was not successful, as many ULFA leaders had allegedly been tipped off by sympathetic members in the Assam bureaucracy and made their escape before the army reached their bases. This military operation continued till April 20, 1991 without significantly affecting the support base or the organization of the ULFA. 1991 saw the first election in Assam since 1984. Significantly, the ULFA decided to remain neutral in this election. The Hiteswar Saikia led Congress (I) government was voted to power, but immediately after the election, the ULFA struck again: on July 1, 1991, it kidnapped ten people belonging to the Indian government led Oil and Natural Gas Commission

(ONGC).[238] Two of these people, including a Soviet citizen, were murdered. Initially, the state government negotiated with the ULFA and released around 400 imprisoned cadres of the organization.

However, the situation deteriorated further. On 14 September 1991, under the state government's recommendation, a second military operation named Operation Rhino was launched against the ULFA. This operation was even more stringent than the previous one. Besides that, repressive state security acts like the TADA (Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act) and the AFSPA was extended to the entire state. Gruesome reports of human rights violations from both sides became the staple of daily news. Mass graves of people executed by the ULFA were found in Lakhipathar. Similarly, the violations from the side of the army were heinous. Disappearances, detentions, encounter killings, incidents of rape and torture and censorship were common events. Parag Das and Ajit Kumar Bhuyan, who had formed the *Manab Adhikar Xongram Xomiti* (Human Rights Struggles Forum) and were also co-editors of the pro-ULFA weekly, *Boodhbar* (Wednesday), were booked under TADA and imprisoned three times between 1991 and 1996. Many other journalists and human rights activists were imprisoned under charges of dissent and sedition as well.

Besides launching Operation Rhino, Saikia's regime from 1991-96 was significant for another reason. While the military operation against the ULFA significantly reduced its strength without decimating it completely, Saikia very shrewdly initiated a split within the ULFA by inviting militants to surrender arms and establishing

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[238] The Congress (I) is still the leading political party in India. The Congress (I) was the ruling party at the center when Saikia came to power.

government programs to rehabilitate surrendered militants. Financial rewards were also given to surrendered militants. Thus arose the phenomenon of the SULFA (Surrendered ULFA), an organization which is now a ubiquitous presence in Assam's political, social and economic life. An important aspect of the policy of surrender was that the former militants were allowed to carry weapons or provided armed security guards as a measure to protect them from their former comrades. Supported by a corrupt bureaucracy and police force, the SULFA literally controls many business establishments in urban centers in Assam, operating like a veritable mafia. Many SULFA members also reportedly indulge in smuggling of goods such as timber and coal. Moreover, the formation of the SULFA also led to a bloody round of killings and counter-killings between ULFA and SULFA. While many SULFA members and their families were targeted by their former comrades, they also assisted the armed forces in decimating ULFA members and their families. The brutal and cold-blooded murder in August 2000 of the entire family of Mithinga Daimary (the pseudonym of Megan Kachari whose poem is the epigraph for this chapter), the currently imprisoned former Central Publicity Secretary of the ULFA, is a notorious example in this regard. In the mid-1990s, open gun battles between ULFA and SULFA members in urban centers in Assam were not an uncommon sight. One such incident actually occurred a mile from my parent's residence in Guwahati on 25 December 2002.

Besides the splits within the organization, one of the reasons for the ULFA's decline from its heydays in the 1990s is the relative decline in sympathy from the influential middle classes in Assam. The benefits that have accrued from neoliberalization for the middle classes in Assam meant that the romantic veneer of the

militant organizations—once considered to be a springboard for frustrated middle class ambitions in Assam—wore away considerably. A key incident that also brought a lot of negative internal and international publicity for the ULFA was the kidnap and murder of an NGO worker, Sanjoy Ghose, in 1997. The international situation has also turned the tide against revolutionary movements. The rise of an aggressively unipolar world after the fall of communism has meant that revolutionary movements which daubed themselves in an anticolonial garb are no longer able to win widespread sympathy or support the way they did from significant sections of the international community in the sixties or the seventies.

Finally, the ULFA's relative rise and decline from 1990-2010 can also be analyzed from the "external" perspective of foreign policy. The presence of camps for partisans in "hostile" or even "neutral" foreign countries is a commonly seen phenomenon in many regions of the world. The pressure on other countries that harbor such partisans is also an integral element of the modern nation-state's foreign policies. However, this aspect of foreign policy is still a largely understudied phenomenon. If the state becomes the rationalized apparatus that brackets the war of all against all within its territorial boundaries in the modern world; it displaces the war of all against all into the domain of inter-national relations. Hobbes was very prescient on this when he states that paradoxically, while the "state of nature" is banished from the internal realm of the particular state-apparatus, it reappears in the realm of interstate relationships.[239] The realm of international relations, according to Hobbes, is a realm in the "state of nature." As nation-states are conceptualized on the model of individual personhood and national

[239] See Part II of the *Leviathan*.

"character" and as the question of a transcendent authority that brackets war among them does not exist in the same scale at the level of the globe, "peace" among nation-states is actually predicated on the hidden model of "war." Since outright war among states is eventually detrimental to the furtherance of national interest, much more surreptitious and camouflaged forms of warfare are employed under the guise of foreign policy.[240]

Support, covert or overt, for partisan groups that fight against the governmental apparatus of another country is one of the primary forms of camouflaged "warfare" that neighboring states employ *vis-à-vis* each other as part of their respective foreign policies. Clearly, partisan warfare is no longer a solely telluric activity. As states consolidate and seek to maintain power over their territories, they often enter into complex relationships with partisan groups who fight against governments in neighboring countries, and provide moral, technical and logistical support to these groups. They also provide bases for the guerrillas within their own territories. Oftentimes, the scale of support depends on the friendliness or hostility of states *vis-à-vis* each other. India's eastern borderlands present an interesting and complex case study in this respect. With specific reference to the ULFA, India's relationship with four major neighboring countries—China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh—needs to be taken into account. As powers aspiring for regional hegemony, India and China often support partisan groups that contest the sovereignty of the respective regions—China's support for partisans operating in India, of both Maoist and separatist hues, and India's support for Tibetan dissidents are a case in point. The ULFA has received significant backing from China, both with respect to the

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[240] A comprehensive history of intelligence agencies like the CIA, Mossad, RAW, ISI or KGB would illuminate this point. But such histories are yet to be written.

supply of arms as well as moral support. The Myanmarese state has always been hostile to the ULFA. Initially, the ULFA maintained close contacts with separatist groups operating from the border regions in Myanmar such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). A significant factor in recent times which led to the ULFA being on the run was the u-turn in India's Myanmar policy since the late 1990's. Till 1990, India had adopted a no-engagement policy with the authoritarian Myanmarese regime. However pragmatic considerations, such as China's increasing influence on the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) and the proliferation of militant outfits on the Indo-Myanmar border led to a u-turn in India's policies towards Myanmar. But this cozy partnership between the two states meant that the border zones between India and Myanmar were increasingly becoming difficult to access for militant groups like the ULFA. The increasing cooperation between the Indian and Myanmarese armies made access to guerrilla bases difficult for organizations like the ULFA.

Bangladesh and India have a testy relationship. Bangladesh has had reason to be resentful of India's "big brother" attitude in the region. For instance, India periodically threatens to cut off Bangladesh's water supply by building a dam on the Ganga River, and also supports the aspirations of certain groups that fight for sovereignty in the Indo-Bangladesh border regions.[241] Since the early 1990s, the ULFA had shifted many of its bases to Bangladesh. In mainland India, this is often read as evidence that the ULFA is remote-controlled by the "foreign hand"—read the ISI (Inter Services Intelligence), the intelligence agency of Pakistan. Within Assam, this shift has also been read ambivalently

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[241] See Willem van Schendel's work on the Chittagong Hill Tracts for a discussion of such separatist movements aspiring for sovereignty in Bangladesh.

because, after all, “Bangladeshis” were the big Other during the Assam Agitation. However, the realities of ULFA’s shift to Bangladesh are a little more complex; the organization has strategically utilized two key determinants that shape the relationship between India and Bangladesh to its advantage—i) Bangladesh’s resentment at India’s “big brother” attitude in the region; the presence of groups like the ULFA in the country thus give it a strategic leverage against its big neighbor, and ii) the virtual impossibility of policing all segments of the Indo-Bangladesh border. Willem van Schendel’s works provide a good account of the topography of the riverine areas in the border regions between India and Bangladesh, and the complicated terrain of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This complicated topography has often served the interests of numerous militant groups, including the ULFA. Of late though, there has been a greater degree of cooperation between the Indian and Bangladeshi governments in cracking down on the ULFA. On 30 November 2009, the Chairman of the ULFA, Arabinda Rajkhowa along with a few other members was handed over to Indian officials by the Bangladesh Police. Rajkhowa is currently in prison in Guwahati. The ULFA commander in chief, Paresh Baruah, is allegedly still in Bangladesh, although there are unconfirmed reports that he may have fled to China.

Another base for the ULFA till 2003, and of particular significance for my reading of *Borangar Ngang*, has been Bhutan. Since 1990, the ULFA had set up around thirty camps and had operated from Bhutan—the time of Operation Bajrang. However, on December 15, 2003, the Royal Bhutan Army, in alliance with the Indian army, “smashed” these camps and forced the 3000 or so inmates, many of them non-combatants

(including children), on the run.[242] Many militants, including Raktim Xarma, one of the two authors I examine here, and Mithinga Daimary, were captured by the Indian army while trying to cross the border to India. The prize "catch" was that of 75-year old Bhimkanta Buragohain, one of the founding members of the ULFA. Many of the cadres flushed out from Bhutan are still imprisoned across Assam.

Over the last ten years, there have been numerous initiatives for talks between the government and the ULFA. Mention must be made here of the People's Consultancy Group (PSG) led by the famous Assamese *littérateur*, Indira Goswami, which mediated between the Indian government and the ULFA for a while. However, talks broke down in 2006 after protracted army action that killed several ULFA members, and also the central government's refusal to accept ULFA's demand to talk about the question of Assam's sovereignty on the table. Many members of PSG, including Goswami, were maliciously vilified in the local and national press. At the moment, the intransigence from both sides makes dialogue a very remote possibility. Of late, Goswami has been instrumental in publishing memoirs and poems by incarcerated ULFA leaders and cadres. For instance, she wrote the preface to *Melodies and Guns*, the English translations of Megan Kachari's poems.

5.5: Spaces of Abandonment in Parag Das' *Sanglot Fengla*

Parag Das was a well-known radical intellectual of Assam in the late eighties and the early nineties. Known to be a sympathizer of the ULFA, Das was the editor of *Axomiya Pratidin* (Everyday in Assam), a daily newspaper and a popular weekly titled *Boodhbar* (Wednesday). He was also a noted human rights activist who, along with

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[242] See the report by M.S. Prabhakara in *Frontline*.

another journalist, Ajit Bhuyan, started the *Manab Adhikar Xurokha Xomiti* (MASS, translation: *The Organization for Safeguarding Human Rights*). An economist by training, Das started *Boodhbar* in 1987. It soon became one of the most widely read weeklies in Assam. *Boodhbar* became a public watchdog often exposing corruption scandals in government circles, the bureaucracy and the police force. It also ran a popular question and answer section which informed readers about the ideology, motives and goals of the ULFA. Das and Bhuyan started MASS in 1991. Since the TADA (Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act) was in effect, Das and Bhuyan were often imprisoned between 1991-94 for their outspoken support of the ULFA, and their critique of human rights abuses by the state. A pamphlet by Das—*Xwadhinotar Prostab* (Proposal for Independence)—was banned under the provisions of TADA, on the charges of directly attacking the sovereignty of the Indian nation-state. Eventually, Das was gunned down in Guwahati in front of his young son by members of the SULFA in May 1996. His funeral became a massive public event in Guwahati. His killers have not yet been brought to book. On July 28, 2009, the prime accused in the Das murder case were acquitted due to lack of evidence.[243]

Das was primarily a journalist and socio-political commentator. *Sanglot Fengla* was the only novel he ever wrote. According to his biographer and close friend, Manorom Gogoi, the novel was based upon Das's encounters and interviews with captured ULFA militants in Tamulpur prison in Assam in 1993. Booked under TADA for attacking India's sovereignty in his writings, Das was incarcerated in Tamulpur at that

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[243] Details of Das's life have been culled from the biography by Manorom Gogoi titled *Paragdar Xannidhyot* (Homage to Parag *da*). "*Da*" is the honorific in Assamese for an elder brother or a male considered to be senior in age or stature).

point. The novel is dedicated to a slain ULFA militant, Rajen Xarma alias Uddipta Hazarika, who was killed in the late eighties. *Sanglot Fengla* is a partisan novel *par excellence*, making no bones about its ideological sympathies with the ULFA. The outfit (*xongothon*) is not named directly in the novel, but is mentioned as an ally of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The name of the protagonist is Diganta and the novel charts the period from 1987 to 1992. Diganta joins the *xongothon* as a *sanglot fengla* (soldier of independence) in 1987 and is captured and imprisoned in Guwahati Jail in 1992.[244] In between, he undergoes guerilla training in the KIA controlled territories in the Indo-China-Myanmar border and then moves between India, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh to further the separatist revolutionary cause.

Sanglot Fengla employs an irregular timeline. The use of the irregular timeline does not mean that the novel is plot-driven. The first chapter of the novel is set in Death Valley—in the Kachin region that intersects the border between India and Myanmar.[245] The date is 17 October 1989. Each subsequent chapter heading refers to a specific date and place name: Guwahati, Assam (27 March, 1991), Doomdooma, Assam (12 July, 1987), Nampew Valley, Sino-Burma border (15 February, 1988), Charaideu, Assam (11 March, 1991), Lakhipathar, Assam (15 March, 1991), Calcutta (7 March, 1991), Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (15 July, 1991), Moukhuwa Chapori, Assam (20 October, 1991),

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[244] *Sanglot Fengla* is a term from the Singpho language, which is spoken in the border zones between India and Myanmar.

[245] Death Valley is so named because over 90,000 Asian laborers and 15-16,000 Allied POWs died during the construction of the Burma-Thailand railroad and the Stilwell Road that connected Thailand to Tibet. The bridge on the Kwai was built during the Japanese occupation of Burma during World War II. The construction of this bridge was made famous by the publication of Pierre Boulle's *Bridge on the River Kwai* and the subsequent film adaptation by David Lean. However, both the book and the novel make it seem as if only allied POWs died during the construction of the bridge. The presence and deaths in huge numbers of Asian laborers is almost totally erased.

Dinjan Camp, Assam (12 February, 1992), Guwahati Jail, Assam (22 May, 1992). Of these locations, Doomdooma is a town in North Assam that is ringed by tea estates (it is also Diganta's natal place in the novel), Lakhipathar was an ULFA base which was busted by the Indian army during Operation Bajrang in 1991 and Dinjan Camp was an army base and detainment camp for captured partisans. Naming each chapter after a place is significant because it introduces a different type of narrative progression. For the Assamese audience, Das's novel constantly evokes the friend/enemy opposition that is central for any form of nationalist politics (or politics in general). The opposition between friend and enemy is also the primary *topos* of narratives that advocate national liberation, of which *Sanglot Fengla* is a good example. Writing about the Filipino author, Jose Rizal, Jonathan Culler says—"Far from assuming that the community he addresses consists of like-minded friends, he (Rizal) recognizes that they can band together as friends only against the enemies, whom his work helps to constitute as enemies of the national project" (40). Likewise, Diganta's travels across the eastern borderlands, to Calcutta, and into the territories of Myanmar, South China and Bangladesh constitute the Indian state as the enemy of the ULFA's "national" project, while constantly seeking out friends and alliances across borders and within Indian territory that can assist in defeating the enemy.[246] Diganta also perceives that the *xongothon* is decaying and losing public support because it is strayed from its ideological roots. There is also a distance between the leadership and the cadre. Significantly, Diganta is not part of the leadership of the *xongothon*. Neither is he just a common footsoldier. He is a guerrilla leader of middling

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[246] For instance, in Assam Diganta travels to *chors*, tea estates, slums and remote villages. These spaces are populated largely by poor people, who are not necessarily ethnic Assamese. Most of the *xongothon*'s sympathizers are depicted to be residing in these regions.

rank who is totally dedicated to the revolutionary cause. The choice of a "middleman" is a significant artistic choice because it enables Das to bring Diganta into contact with both the leadership and the common cadre, thereby providing us a view of the *xongothon* as a whole. Structurally, the movement of this mobile figure with the proper name Diganta through the space of the eastern borderlands and into cross-border territory (Myanmar, China and Bangladesh), thus, is a fictional device through which differing ideological positions, construed as positive or negative from the vantage point of the revolutionary struggle, engage in dialogue with this "ideal" ideologeme of the text.

Critical readings of *Sanglot Fengla*, like those by sympathetic readers like Rakhee Kalita or even relatively unsympathetic critics like Hiren Gohain, utilize this paradigm of the friend-enemy opposition and way in which this binary attempts to structure and define the emergent national community in the novel. In contradistinction to the national/ist paradigm, my reading of the text in this section attempts to modify the optic to bring a new object into view. I argue that *Sanglot Fengla* powerfully represents how the partisan fighter is an exemplar of "bare life" in two senses—i) how inhabiting "no-man's lands" reduce the guerrilla's body to the level of simple, natural life, and ii) how governmental technologies such as torture and internment in concentration camps reduce him/her to the status of "bare life." If the guerrilla army teaches the partisan to use his/her simple, natural life as an offensive strategy of camouflage, the state strips and reduces the captured partisan, its absolute enemy, to bare life in spaces of terror. Biological life and the body are the constants in both cases, albeit in different ways. Despite the novel's almost pedantic partisan message, what constitutes *Sanglot Fengla's* strength, I think, is the cool, dry and almost documentary-like third-person narratorial

voice. This narratorial voice is at its most effective and powerful when it takes us into the heart of spaces of terror, like torture chambers, and unsentimentally describes the effects of the practices employed in these spaces on subjectivity and the body. I argue that Das's style of narration in these moments in the text allows us to viscerally experience the pain that human bodies undergo in spaces of terror. Pain, like violence, can be anti-political in that it destroys the human being's capacity for speech and representation. But *our* encounters with moments of intense bodily pain and privation can provide a basis for formulating an ethico-political response that gestures towards something Darius Rejali, in *Torture and Democracy,* says is "more powerful and fragile"—the ability to imagine common political spaces where subjects can appear before each other in their pain (31). In my reading of *Sanglot Fengla,* I will point out moments in the text where such alternative modes of being in common are gestured towards by the narrator.

5.5.1: Living and Surviving in a "No Man's Land"

The opening scenes of *Sanglot Fengla* are set in the remote border regions ringing the three nation-states of India, China and Myanmar. These inhospitable border regions represent a "no man's land." The advantage of camouflage that inhospitable no man's lands offer for the partisan fighter is strongly underscored on the second page of the novel:

> …The camp of the second brigade was located in the Hukong region. The Hukong was an inhospitable region; there was no end to the number of diseases prevalent there. That was why during the construction of the Stilwell Road in World War II, the English had named it "Death Valley." Many allied soldiers and locals died falling prey to many unnamed diseases. From that point onwards, there was hardly any human habitation in the area. But however uninhabitable an area was for human habitation, the more propitious the same region was for a guerrilla

> army. Therefore, large contingents of the KIA were based in this valley of death (2).[247]

The hilly and heavily forested nature of the inhospitable terrain in this region makes it especially propitious for guerrilla activity. Since 1980, many guerrilla groups, like the ULFA, have found this region to be a suitable one for training and forming bases. Cooperative formations like the Indo Burma Revolutionary Front (IBRF) have also proposed the opening up of an eastern corridor that bypasses regional hegemonic powers like China, India and Myanmar.[248] Besides the inhospitable nature of the landscape, the particular borderlands represented in the novel are also a "no man's land" in another sense. They are spaces where different state sovereignties come into direct conflict with each other, as well with competing forms of sovereignty.[249] They represent areas where

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[247] Death Valley and Nampew Valley are in the northeastern part of Myanmar and border India, South China and Thailand. The Chindwin River forms a natural boundary between the Naga Hills—which fall on both sides of the Indian and the Myanmarese border—and the Kachin State. The Kachins and the Nagas communities are predominantly Christians, although they also include many adherents of traditional animistic religions. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) was formed by Zau Seng in the 1950s; it has been fighting for an independent Kachin homeland separate from the predominantly Burman dominated mainland of the Myanmarese nation-state, and also the Chinese state. This often brings the Kachin guerrillas in direct conflict with the *Tatmadaw* (the Burmese army), which is dominated by Burmans. Besides the Burmans, the hill-dwelling Kachins have also been historically in conflict with the Shan tribe, who inhabit the plains. I draw most of my information here from Bertil Lintner and Martin Smith's works.

[248] Das himself has written about this eastern corridor in his banned tract *Xwadin Axomor Arthoniti* (The Economy of Independent Assam).

[249] For instance, the Naga Hills region on both sides of the Indo-Myanmar border is controlled by the various factions of the NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland). The Naga National Club (NNC), the precursor of the NSCN, and led by the Naga stalwart, Phizo, declared independence from India on August 14, 1947. The NNC started an armed revolt in 1952 after the failure of the talks between Phizo and Nehru and also the subsequent arrest of Phizo (he later escaped to East Pakistan and died in London in 1990). An agreement was signed by the NNC and the Indian government in Shillong in 1975 in Shillong, Meghalaya. But the Shillong Accord angered radical Naga leaders like Isaac Chishi Swu, Muivah and Khaplang. They went underground and formed the NSCN—later the splinter factions bore their respective names. The formed an underground Naga federal government and engaged in a protracted guerrilla struggle with the Indian army that continues to this day. The NSCN demands a separate Nagalim that will eventually incorporate areas in India, Myanmar and China. Their demand for a separate homeland, a demand that stems from colonial times, has often resulted in bloody battles with the Indian and

the state has not been able to impose its normalizing regime of order—hence the common refrain, one we encountered in *An Outline of the Republic*, that the eastern borderland regions are stateless, atavistic and anarchic "states of nature." Of course, even putative "states of nature" are not inhabited by forms of natural life, but by human beings and human communities. To my mind, one of the greatest achievements of *Sanglot Fengla* as a literary text is a vivid description of the lived dimensions of everyday life in "spaces of abandonment" like Death Valley and Nampew Valley. Chapter 1 ("Death Valley," 17 October, 1989) and Chapter 4 (Nampew Valley, 15 February, 1988) of the text vividly illustrate the lives of the guerrillas and the relationships between them and local inhabitants in these spaces construed to be outside the law.

However, the everyday life of the guerrillas in these "no-man's zones" is inextricably linked with death. Guerrilla manuals, like those by Mao and Guevara, vividly describe the ideal lifeworlds of guerrillas. But what is missing in these manuals is the acute sense that the lifeworlds partisan fighters inhabit are also simultaneously "deathworlds." The representation of these close imbrications between lifeworlds and deathworlds is the unique prerogative of partisan fictions—no guerrilla manual can

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Myanmarese forces and also rival ethnic groups such as the Meiteis in Manipur and the Kukis in both Manipur and Myanmar. The region lying between the Naga Hills and the Kachin state are virtually controlled by various partisan groups who have their own "government" and impose their own taxes. Their taxation and "governmental" policies often exist side by side with Indian and Myanmarese laws and institutions; it is often not uncommon to find people inhabiting these regions paying taxes to two authorities. Udayon Mishra gives an excellent account of the NSCN in *The Periphery Strikes Back*. Also see Sanjoy Hazarika's *Strangers in the Mist* for a journalistic documentation of the Kuki-Naga and the Naga-Meitei conflicts. Significantly, the British promised the Nagas, the Kachins and the Karens independent homelands because of their support for the allied endeavor during World War II. That this promise was not kept has often been a cornerstone of the independentist ideologies of the respective guerrilla movements. Amitav Ghosh provides a good historical background to this in *Dancing in Cambodia, at Large in Burma*.

adequately convey the experience of everyday existence conducted in the constant presence of death. Diganta realizes this imbrications of life and death very early in his training period as a guerrilla at Nampew Valley as he sees his comrade Mrigen Bhatta die in front of him after contracting pneumonia during a trek to another guerrilla base—"In this path ridden with dangers, death is always a guerrilla's everpresent companion" (60). Death can strike the guerrilla in various forms. First, there is the threat of death due to disease and natural causes. *Sanglot Fengla* opens with a sequence of the death of a close companion due to natural causes, in a locale that is significantly titled "Death Valley." A good friend and comrade of Diganta's, Gautam Sonowal, succumbs to a tropical disease locally known in Singpho as *Mokhlong* (a form of black fever). Upon receiving news of his death, Diganta ruminates:

> Yet another intimation of death. He had witnessed the deaths of many of his comrades in the last two years. Sometimes the cadres would die of acute hunger. Sometimes they would succumb to *mokhlong*. Many cadres of the organization also died due to attacks from the Burmese army. They could not even reclaim the bodies of many of their comrades to perform their last rites. Once they discovered the dead body of a comrade who had been killed by the Burmese army in the forest only three days after the incident. Thousands of insects had eaten away the flesh on the face and the torso. The very sight of the dead body chilled the viewer to the bone. Earlier the gruesome sight of the dead bodies of his comrades would terrify Diganta (3).

Second, besides the threat of disease, the guerrilla also has to contend with uncertainty at any moment as s/he can fall prey to hunger or ambushes from the enemy. In a way, the guerrillas represented in *Sanglot Fengla* symbolize the classic and most extreme epitomization of the Hegelian idea of death as explained by Mbembe. For Hegel, the figure that is truly human is the form of biological life that is not afraid of death, but that is willing to accept and live with the risk of absolute dismemberment and death. Politics in this sense, as Mbembe says, is "death that lives a human life" ("Necropolitics,"

15). The partisan fighter's attitude to death, as epitomized in the passage from *Sanglot Fengla* above, is an exemplar of how death lives a human life in the pursuit of a human/izing goal. The redemptive horizon of this logic in *Sanglot Fengla* is the almost messianic belief in the promise of national liberation. With reference to this messianic goal, a refrain repeated throughout the text attains a special significance—"They came out to the wilderness only to heed the sweet call of the word 'independence'" (79).

At the same time, the partisan fighters in *Sanglot Fengla* show the Hegelian logic of death at its extreme limit. The Hegelian slave's risk of life is predicated upon the possibility of recognition. But, to adapt Povinelli's formulations, the risk that the partisan fighter assumes is not predicated on "worth," but rather on the absolute negation of the enemy's world through violent, mobile action. We are in the domain of the master and the slave, but presented in its extremity as the realm of the absolute enemy. This means that there is a qualitative distinction in the notion of the *risks* assumed by the Hegelian slave and a partisan fighter. The Hegelian paradigm is predicated on concepts of prestige and recognition—the expiatory dimensions of work and labor insure a better, a more humane world for the slave. But what is the nature of a world where risk is not counterbalanced by insurance, but becomes a pure concept in itself? As Schmitt says, the juridical *topos* of risk is the right or the expectation of insurance. Everyday life, at least in our modern, bourgeois lifeworlds, is built on this fundamental substructure—I generally assume risks because of my expectation of insurance. Insurance introduces the idea of a control of time. Uncertainties and contingencies lose their terrifying aspect because of our unspoken assumption that even if I take risks, even, for that matter, a risk of life, eventually this fight will lead to prestige and recognition of my worth. To be sure, the

partisan fighter takes that risk too—the difference though is that he takes it without any expectation of insurance. This expectation of risk without insurance structures the everyday realities of the guerrilla.

In *Sanglot Fengla* we see this consciousness of risk without insurance in operation. Gautam Sonowal's death occurred in 1989. The key portions in the passages where Gautam's death is described are the temporal markers like "once they discovered…," "earlier the gruesome sight of dead bodies…" and so on. We are told later that Diganta arrives for guerrilla training in the Kachin Valley in 1987. By 1989, his internalization of the guerrilla's everyday reality of risk without insurance has hardened him to the sight of dead bodies and the human loss that accrued from them. In the fourth chapter, we are taken back to his period of training in Nampew Valley in 1987. Two incidents recounted in this chapter, both of which happened to Diganta's close associates, illustrate the gradual internalization of the modality of risk without insurance by the guerrilla. The first is the unexpected death of Uttom, a member of Diganta's battalion who had initially been misled to join the organization. A poor construction worker, Uttom has no idea about the revolution and its goals. A scout for the organization tells him about the easy money he could earn by joining the revolutionary cause. Tempted by this proposition, Uttom crosses over to the Kachin Valley. He soon realizes there was no prospect of a quick return from the Kachin region. Consumed by worry for the widowed mother and sister he left behind in Assam, he tries to escape. However, he was captured by the Nagas, bound hand and foot, and brought back to the guerrilla base. By this time, Diganta made a name for himself as a fearless battalion leader. He was present at Uttom's interrogation. When Uttom breaks down and confesses why he escaped, Diganta feels

sorry for his predicament and pleads with his superiors to let Uttom go unpunished. He takes Uttom under his wing, and by treating him with respect and dignity converts him to the guerrilla cause. Uttom rapidly transforms into a hardened and brave partisan fighter often taking the lead in the Diganta-led 13th battalion of the KIA on dangerous missions against the Burmese army. Diganta and he become especially close. On one such mission through the dangerous Lidu Lam road in North Burma to connect up with the KIA's 2nd Brigade, Uttom volunteers to take the lead with another cadre, Haren, persuading Diganta that the latter's life is more important as he is the commander of the battalion. After leading the battalion jointly for a while, Uttom leaves Haren behind and proceeds alone carefully towards a flat space lying between two small elevations. This space was a prime location for ambushes by the Burmese army. Suddenly, Diganta heard a huge explosion. The Burmese army had planted mines in that area and Uttom stepped on one of them. His body was dismembered and his limbs were strewn all over the place. His act, however, saved the entire battalion. Here are Diganta's reflections immediately after this incident:

> Diganta's battalion had no time to lose. No one could estimate where the Burmese army was hiding in camouflage. They must have begun advancing after hearing the noise of the explosion. Rapidly, Diganta and his comrades dug a hole in the ground. They collected the dismembered parts of the body named Uttom and dropped them into the hole. After performing these last "rites," they left the main road and camouflaged themselves in the thick forest surrounding the two elevations. Then began a different and new journey through the forest to link up with the 2nd Brigade…On the way, Diganta recalled Uttom's worries about his mother and sister. The two of them must still be waiting in expectation for Uttom's return…(94-5).

This episode reveals a few important facets both about the subjectivity of the partisan fighter. First, the passage quoted above illustrates the importance of mobility for the guerrilla band. The guerrilla band has to be flexible enough to change tack midway depending upon contingencies. To employ Michel de Certeau's terms in a slightly

different way, the everyday functioning of the guerrilla band has to abandon "strategies" for "tactics."[250] The guerrilla can survive in the "no man's land" by "poaching" into the space of the other (the other here is the "enemy"). In this case, the sudden death of one of the members of the band exposes the camouflage of the enemy. In turn, the mobile guerrilla band has to camouflage itself anew and reach its safe haven by poaching into the territory of the enemy.

Most importantly, however, the passage quoted above also reveals another crucial dimension of the subjectivity of the partisan fighter. The partisan fighter exists on "fast time"; a moment's hesitation can be the difference between life and death. But this relationship to time also colors the partisan fighter's viewpoint about human relationships. Literally, there is *no* time to mourn the death of a friend or a comrade. In a similar episode related later in the same chapter, Diganta, under cover of darkness, has to step over the dead body of another close comrade, Amrit Rabha, who succumbed to a hail of bullets as the 13th battalion was forced to cross a wooden bridge that the Burmese army was shooting at from a distance: "Stumbling around in the darkness, Diganta suddenly tripped over the dead body of Amrit on the bridge. But there was *no other alternative*. It was his duty as a commander to take his troop to safety by evading the attack. There was *no time* for anyone to mourn the death of their comrade" (92, italics mine). The partisan fighter's relation to time is absolutely opposite to how we conceptualize time in "normal," everyday situations. For "normal" subjects, risk is a

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[250] A "strategy" is a calculus of force relationships emerging from a stable space and applied to an exterior object. A "tactic," on the other hand, cannot count on a stable space or a clear demarcation of the other as a "visible totality." It has no "base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to its circumstances" (xix). A tactic, thus, is a mobile maneuver whose prerogative stems from the other, but whose concrete functioning poaches into the other's space.

deferred temporal category as it is counterbalanced by the expectation of some form of insurance. Unless there is a radical contingency, there is a belief that the social world I inhabit will exist in the same way tomorrow and in the foreseeable future. For a subject like the partisan, risk is a "normal" state without any guarantee of insurance. The possibility of death exists in a concrete way at every moment. One may "party" with a comrade today (as Diganta does with Uttom a few days before his death), but that comrade may simply be reduced to a shapeless mass of blood, limbs and bone tomorrow. Consequently, the dead comrade's corporeal body has to be objectified and put at a distance—"They collected the dismembered parts of *the body named Uttom* and dropped them into the hole" (italics mine). Reduced thus to an empty, meaningless corporeality, the labor of mourning for the comrade is deferred till there is time *enough* in a relatively safe place.[251] Until then, the "logic of survival" functions relentlessly. In this logic, as elaborated by Achille Mbembe through a reading of Elias Canetti:

> …the survivor is the one who, having stood in the path of death, knowing of many deaths and standing in the midst of the fallen is still alive. Or more precisely, the survivor is the one who has taken on the whole pack of enemies and managed not only to escape alive, but to kill his or her attackers…(this logic) consists in wishing death on others while preserving one's own life…In such a case, triumph develops precisely from the possibility of being there when the other (in this case the enemy) are no longer there. Such is the logic of heroism as classically understood: to execute others while holding one's own death at a distance ("Necropolitics," 36-7).

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[251] Mourning for the comrade can only take place when there is time enough. One such ritual of mourning is the act, mentioned several times in both *Sanglot Fengla* and *Bornagar Ngang*, of the survivor informing the relatives of a comrade of the fact of his/her death. Diganta, for instance, is charged with the responsibility of informing the mother and sister of Sarat Dihingia, another slain comrade. He was also entrusted by Sarat before his death to pass the Rs. 300 that the latter had borrowed from his sister before he went to Kachin. Diganta passes on the money to Sarat's mother and sister, but could not meet their eyes and tell them about the latter's death. Like an "escapee," he hastily takes leave. He "never could tell them about Sarat's death" (64).

Although *Sanglot Fengla* describes the partisans as "martyrs" to the national cause, Das's description of the everyday functioning of guerrilla bands in "no man's lands" partakes more of the "logic of heroism" elaborated above. The dead comrade's dismembered body is objectified and distanced as shapeless, formless corporeality precisely because of the projection towards futurity. The close relationship to one's comrade is bracketed via this mental operation of distancing. Eventually, the responsibility of the commander of the guerrilla band, the true "hero," is to preserve his battalion's life while wishing death on the enemy. The loss of a few members in the present is subordinate to the future goal, where the moment of survival becomes the "moment of power." One's own death, and by extension, that of one's dead comrades has to be held at a distance. The purpose is survival, as one has to stay alive to witness the moment of triumph. [252]

If unforeseen contingencies such as landmine blasts or ambushes by the enemy culminate in the dismembered or bullet-ridden body of the guerrilla; disease and hunger, two common situations that most guerrillas face, bring a different bodily economy and relationship to temporality into play. Very often these contingencies would make the guerrilla's body resemble an indeterminate stage between life and death. Various types of diseases proliferate in the inhospitable climes of the "no man's land" that guerrillas inhabit. While the everpresent threat of disease often works to the guerrillas' advantage as it keeps the enemy at bay, it also means that the guerrillas themselves are subject to

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[252] Mbembe compares the logic of heroism to the logic of martyrdom. In the logic of martyrdom, this moment of power is obliterated as my death goes hand in hand with the death of the other, or as Mbembe says, "the will to die is fused with the willingness to take the enemy with you…" ("Necropolitics," 37). Suicide bombing is an example of this logic.

death. *Mokhlong* was the greatest killer in this area, and Diganta encountered it in Nampew much before Gautam Sonowal had succumbed to it. Six months after he had arrived at Nampew for training, he saw an experienced guerrilla named Mrigen Bhatta die in front of his eyes. Mrigen was guiding the new trainees to the base camp of the 13th battalion. A few days into their march, three guerrillas contracted *mokhlong*. Mrigen recognized the symptoms early and managed to draw the infected blood from the cadres, thus saving their lives. But in the process he contracted the disease himself. He tried his best to guide the guerrillas as far as he could. But eventually his strength ran out and,

> …he fell headlong into a stream and started gasping for breath. Diganta and his comrades picked him up on their shoulders and carried him ashore. They didn't know what to do. Feeling helpless, Gautam started massaging his arms and legs. But Mrigen didn't survive. He started frothing at the mouth. Some of the cornmeal he had consumed in the morning came out with the froth. After that, he died (59).

In the absence of proper medical care, most guerrillas who contracted deadly diseases were virtually condemned to death, while their comrades would look on helplessly, as in the case of Mrigen above.[253] Oftentimes, to avoid ambushes, the guerrillas were forced to take routes that weren't easily accessible. The real difficulties began in the prolonged monsoon season in the Kachin region. The onset of the monsoon meant the proliferation of tropical diseases. A large number of cadres would catch various types of illnesses. Besides, the inhospitable and uninhabited routes that they traveled by also meant that their regular supplies of food were disrupted. The novel shows how hunger and disease combined together to decimate the ranks of the guerrillas.

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[253] Guevara mentions the central importance of a doctor for a guerrilla band; however, Das mentions several times in *Sanglot Fengla* that the guerrilla bands in Nampew and Death Valley had very few competent doctors.

On marches like these, the band considered itself lucky if only two or three cadres died—the usual expectation was that a lot more would succumb. Pneumonia, malaria and *mokhlong* kills off a lot of cadres in that way in the novel. On one such march, a cadre named Munin falls grievously ill. He is carried on the back of another member of the guerrilla band. But Munin dies on the way. It was only about two hours later that the bearer of his body realized that Munin is already dead. His body had to be disposed off in the river (91).

Besides, actions of enclosure by enemy forces could often cut off food supplies for the guerrillas. Diganta remembers coming across a camp deep in the forest comprising of three cadres named Jayanta, Niren and Biren. Lack of food had almost made them emaciated, forcing them to kill and eat rats for survival (78-81). In circumstances like these, a different category of risk is involved. What's involved here is not the sudden and unexpected obliteration of life; like forms of slow torture until death, death in such cases was almost an inevitable fact. Yet very little insurance could be made even against such foreseeable situations. In many cases, as in the case of disease, the partisan fighter is forced to see his/her comrade die slowly and painfully in front of his/her eyes. In other cases, such as the cutting off of supply lines due to enemy action, death or near-death conditions accruing from slow starvation are almost inevitable. The way the human body would change in such situations is aptly illustrated by the proliferation of adjectives and expressions that Das utilizes to describe the corporealities of the guerrillas: *ordhoahar* (famine-stricken, 80), "…like a flu-ridden fowl that would constantly stay huddled in a corner" (4), "…the Burmese army fell mercilessly on them

as *danaavs* (demons) would fall upon an army of ghosts…" (90), and so on.[254] Ghosts, flu-ridden fowls, famine-stricken cadaver-like bodies: the repetition of these terms illustrates how the guerrilla literally strips him/herself to the category of pure *zoë*. The possibility of achieving a particular version of the *bios* eventually remains as the only messianic goal; a goal for which the committed guerrilla cultivates a will to die at any time.

However, *Sanglot Fengla* also illustrates, albeit briefly, how more permanent bonds of being-in-common, very different from the contingent quality that structures the composition of the guerrilla band, are occasionally formed between the militants and the local people who inhabit these "no man's lands." In one of the marches across the "no man's land," Diganta and his band of guerrillas stay for a few days in a friendly Chin village. A rudimentary school had been opened in the village which was not functional because there were no teachers available. The KIA is very eager that some of the children in this remote village can get some education. One of Diganta's fellow guerrillas named Nripen volunteered to stay behind as an English teacher. Diganta had observed that many guerrillas opted to stay behind in these villages as educators. Many of them ended up marrying locals. This, he thought, was how solidarity among different communities could be created without "the enemy observing us" (90). The "corridor to the east"—the dream of pan-eastern guerrilla organizations like the IBRF—could also be created through such surreptitious, camouflaged, but also non-violent means. Diganta's observations here may forever remain a pipedream. But the very fact that such an alternative imaginary of a being-in-common can still be envisaged in a violent and oftentimes inhuman

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[254] The last expression is a proverbial expression utilized often among Assamese speakers.

representational world illustrate that alternative possibilities for creating human worlds are not totally obliterated even in the most "exceptional" situations.

5.5.2: Techniques of Torture and Subjectivity

A space of abandonment that is much more terrifying than "no man's lands" is the torture cell. The torture cell is a space where, paraphrasing Arendt's words, anything may happen. In this section, I focus on *Sanglot Fengla's* representation of torture practices and their impacts on the subjectivity of both the torturers and the tortured in order to contend with the phenomenological realities engendered in the terror space that is the torture chamber. I begin this section, however, with a quick survey of the topic of torture and the degradation of the human body in the fields of literary and cultural studies before I turn to a reading of the representation of torture in Das's novel. As a human rights activist, Das was centrally concerned with the debilitating effects of torture on tortured subjects. In a series of articles, he scathingly criticized both the ULFA and the Indian army for their utilization of torture. These concerns find a direct reflection in his fictional works as well.[255]

Is torture compatible with liberal democracies? The common answer to this question would be strongly in the negative. Liberals would say that, from the times of Beccaria onwards, the gradual abolition of brutal, public forms of torture and the attendant concern with human rights represents one of the biggest triumphs of the system

[255] See the collected volumes of Das's journalistic essays titled *Parag Das: Kisu Prosno, Kisu Uttor* (Parag Das: A Few Questions, a Few Answers) and *Parag Das Rachanabali* (The Parag Das Compendium) for illustrations of his exposes of his critiques of torture by the ULFA and the Indian army.

of liberal-democracy.[256] It is undeniable that the rise of liberal-democracy and regimes of human rights has led to a significant reduction in incidents of torture across the world. Even the most authoritarian states, like Myanmar, are conscious that human rights bodies, such as Amnesty International, are constantly on the watch for violations. However, an excessive celebration of liberalism's triumphs also makes us blind to the fact that torture still exists, even in liberal democracies, and has undergone significant and sophisticated mutations in the past hundred years or so. Therefore, before we address the question of torture and its effects, a few myths have to be challenged.

Two types of liberal positions can be delimited on the question of torture. First, there is the position that incidents of torture, if they happen, are an aberration in the smooth functioning of liberal democracies. Like violence and riots, torture represents something irrational and atavistic.[257] It erupts only in exceptional circumstances and locales, like Abu-Ghraib and Guantanamo. Otherwise, it is bracketed as an anomaly in normal times, as state laws and human rights watchdogs prevent its occurrence. A good example of this position is Alex Gibney's well-known 2007 documentary on Bagram, Abu-Ghraib and Guantanamo: *Taxi to the Dark Side*. Significantly, this Oscar winning documentary ends with the director's father—a veteran of the Korean war—deploring the practices at Guantanamo and Abu-Ghraib as "un-American." The statement plays upon a comfortable national myth: Americans don't torture. This statement, a feel-good one to

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[256] Cesare Beccaria's 1764 treatise on crime and punishments is the first major anti-torture treatise in modernity. One of the best contemporary defenses of the liberal positions on torture and human rights is Lynn Hunt's *Inventing Human Rights*.

[257] For violence and riots as irrational aberrations, see Hannah Arendt's *On Violence* and *On Revolution*, and also Gyanendra Pandey's reworking of this position in his study of riots in postcolonial India.

be sure, absolutely erases the history of torture practiced by American troops in the twentieth century.[258] A false opposition between the "good" American and the "bad" American is set up—a classic *topos* of both of nationalism and liberalism. Liberalism, after all, claims the perfectability of man through progress. The guarantee of human rights in the modern age is one of the biggest illustrations of the success of this perfectability model. While I emphasize that I do not denigrate the tremendous success and necessity of the regime of human rights, I do want to point out that the presence of human rights regimes often becomes a way of marking a "civilizational" difference between "us" and "them," and between "here" and "there." Human right violations like torture happen "there"—in authoritarian and totalitarian states. They do not happen "here," and if they do, it is a temporary moment of irrationality that can soon be corrected.

The second type of position is one surprisingly upheld even by reputed scholars like Talal Asad, who at other times has been critical of liberal myths. Asad says clearly in *Formations of the Secular* that the use of torture by liberal-democratic states "cannot be attributed…to governmental techniques for disciplining citizens" (296). This position takes direct issue with the Foucauldian-inspired position that torture is a disciplinary

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[258] See Alfred McCoy's *A Question of Torture* for a historical documentation of torture techniques used by the U.S. Army and the CIA. Rejali's *Torture and Democracy* also documents the use of "clean" torture techniques in the U.S. domestically. The shot of Gibney's father at the end of the documentary takes American viewers back to the period when U.S. POWs were tortured by Chinese and North Korean forces. Two of the most notorious examples of the widespread use of torture in the world's largest liberal democracies, the U.S.A and India, were during the COINTELPRO era in the 1960s and 70s in the U.S., and during the repression of the Naxalite rebellion in India in the 1970s. For torture practices during the notorious COINTELPRO era in the United States see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall's *The COINTELPRO Papers*. For the torture practices employed by the Indian state against captured Naxalite rebels in the 1970s and beyond see Sumanta Banerjee's *India's Simmering Revolution*.

technique of modern governmentality. Darius Rejali, who has written the most comprehensive and comparative history of torture, takes direct issue with this position when he says:

> This view cannot explain why torture occurs in the huge cities of established democracies (United States, Venezuela, India), among immigrant populations (Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Switzerland), or in emerging democracies with limited democratic resources (Russia, Eastern European countries, South Africa, Brazil). What drives torture in these cases is neither war, nor a permissive legal environment, but informal arrangements among police, residents, and businesses to shape the urban landscape (60).

Rejali claims that the greater role of human rights regimes in liberal-democratic polities has led to a gradual modification in modalities of torture. Most liberal-democracies today employ "clean" torture techniques as against "scarring" techniques employed before the strict watch kept by human rights organizations or still employed in authoritarian states such as Myanmar. Clean techniques are not psychological techniques, but physical tortures that leave relatively few marks on the body of the tortured. These "clean" techniques are not necessarily technologically sophisticated. As Rejali says, a "paddle or a fist applied to the body leaves marks if used in one way, but not if used in another" (4). The point is that since "clean" techniques are not easily visible, it becomes more difficult to prove that torture actually happened. It is not so much that torture disappeared as a governmental technology; we actually see more sophisticated, modified and invisible forms of torture in liberal-democracies.

My own position is that torture is a dehumanizing, degrading and "world-destroying" practice, and cannot be justified either as a preemptive instrument to gurantee national security or as a way of gaining revenge at the enemy. My concern with torture and representations of torture is an ethico-political one—I am concerned with outlining

how techniques of torture and the tortured body can be read to frame a political space where subjects can appear before each other in their pain. This attempt to frame a common political space beyond the human worlds destroyed by torture has to take on the question of torture both as a technological (in the Foucauldian sense) and a phenomenological reality. At the risk of simplification, I suggest that there are two dominant modes through which representations of torture have been studied especially as it pertains to literary and aesthetic representations. The first line is phenomenological and is exemplified, in different and distinct ways, in the works of Jean Amery, Elaine Scarry and Veena Das. Amery was a survivor from Auschwitz, where he underwent torture at the hands of the SS. In *At the Mind's Limits*, he explores the phenomenological reality of torture. He claims that torture absolutely destroys a subject's "trust in the world" (28). Ordinary everyday life is a form of "codified abstraction"—my buying a newspaper is indistinguishable from the imagination involved in the ordinary act of "a man buying a newspaper" (26). Normal, everyday life is predicated on this absolute indistinction between imagining that I buy a newspaper and the actual act of buying it. Extreme acts, like torture, break down this "indistinction between the imagination and the event." For what is it that predicates this indistinction between imagination and event? It is my trust in the written or unwritten social contract that the others with whom I carry on the commerce of everyday life will respect my bodily, and by extension, metaphysical being. Through torture, the other forces his/her corporeality on me and denies me any recourse to resistance. I become absolutely *helpless*. After all, Amery says, one of the fundamental aspects of being human is the expectation of help from others. But in the act of being tortured, I am totally defenseless and feel absolutely bereft of help (28-9). Torture makes

me experience my body with an intensity I never felt before. As Amery says: "In self-negation, his (the tortured subject's) flesh becomes a total reality…Frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body and nothing else besides that" (33).

Amery's phenomenological description of torture briefly touches upon the absolute breakdown in human communication that accrues from acts of torture. Elaine Scarry and Veena Das's works highlight this communicative breakdown to emphasize how torture reduces victims to a form of "prelinguistic" silence. Using Wittgenstein, they emphasize how torture reduces subjects to a state anterior to language; Scarry argues that physical pain "does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it" (4). If the imagination, especially in its Romantic and post-Romantic genealogies, is endowed with the capacity of creating worlds, then the pain induced by violent acts such as torture is the obverse: it destroys the world of the victim. In the silence created by this destruction, power formations, such as the state, impose their legitimacy. If Scarry's works probes the mental space of the victim of torture, Veena Das's work takes thinking about the phenomenology of pain into a slightly different direction. In many path-breaking works on violence and its impact on subjectivity and the everyday, Das shifts the register from pain's capacity to destroy worlds thereby reducing subjects to a preverbalized silence, to a Wittgensteinian analysis of thinking about pain as "asking for acknowledgement and recognition" from the other ("Language and Body," 88).[259] The burden then shifts from the tortured body to *us*—the subjects who have to respond to such brutal and

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[259] Besides Das's "Language and Body," I am referring to works like *Violence and Subjectivity* and *Life and Words*.

dehumanized/dehumanizing acts. Denial of pain on our parts, in this sense, is not a failing only of the intellect, but more importantly, that of the "spirit." By shifting the focus away from language and representation, thus, Das forces *us* to think about how pain lodges itself in the subject's body, and how *we* can read these marks and think of a future collective formation where the appearance of subjects in their pain need not necessarily be a test about how certain or how doubtful we are about our own pain and that of others.

The second line of thinking about framing political spaces beyond torture—I term this line of thinking "technological" as opposed to the phenomenological tradition above—derive from Michel Foucault's work on penal technologies in *Discipline and Punish*. Although Foucault does not spend too much time on instances of torture in the modern era and is concerned more with the "microphysics" of power, one can also study torture and torture practices within the paradigm of the "political technology of the body" (*Discipline*, 24). In effect, it is possible to study techniques of punishment—both in its "benevolent" and brutal forms—as they are inscribed within the political anatomy of a specific body politic. Rejali's magisterial *Torture and Democracy* is the best example of an extension of Foucauldian insights to a study of torture and torture techniques. Instead of needlessly speculating about *why* torture happens, Rejali's book—which is a comparative study of torture with a global dimension—shifts focus to *how* torture happens. One of Rejali's central claim is that it torture is not a sheer arbitrary act of human cruelty, but a carefully calibrated *craft* that differs according to specific contextual genealogies. The emphasis on craft, rather than science, is significant. There is an erroneous myth that torture has become more and more clinical and precise as technology has progressed. Instead, as Rejali proves through the numerous case studies in his book,

most torturers do not receive any formal training in torture. What torturers do is "turn to what is available, what is habitual, what they can get away with, what they have heard from others, what they remember, and what they can learn by imitating others" (28). Torturers also have to struggle with contingent factors such as death (mostly inadvertent), unconsciousness, and variations in personality and so on—all of which make a precise science of torture impossible. Instead, apprentice torturers "perfect" their craft through the features mentioned above. Rejali's book also allows us to shift focus away from the easy equation between torture and national character—the incidents at Abu Ghraib, for instance, are not a reflection of some chimera of American national "character." Torture, he argues, does not reveal anything about the "nature" of man or about national "character;" it is a craft—a brutal, dehumanizing one, to be sure—that is properly studied as an object only when it is placed within the realm of a specific and local history of techniques.

My analysis of the torture sequences in *Sanglot Fengla* seeks to combine the phenomenological (Amery, Scarry, Das) and technological (Foucault, Rejali) analyses together. There are three scenes where techniques of torture and the tortured body are described in the text. In the first scene, the narrator probes the subjectivity of the torturer. In the second scene, we encounter the lingering effects of torture on the survivor's body. In the last scene, the narrator graphically describes an actual scene of torture as it is experienced viscerally by a tortured subject. Significantly, the narrator explores the subjectivity of the torturer not through the typical figure of an army official, a representative of the state, but through that of two partisan soldiers belonging to the ULFA: Rana and Naba, who brutally torture social "deviants" and betrayers of the

organization. Judging from the standpoint of the text, this is quite explicable as any sustained interaction between an Indian/Myanmarese army official and a KIA member would have been impossible. Also, in the context of the ULFA, torture was not simply a one-way street with the army forces being the only perpetrators. Amnesty International reported numerous incidents of gruesome torture conducted by ULFA cadres. When the ULFA camps in Lakhipathar in Upper Assam were busted by the Indian army during Operation Bajrang in 1991, many mass graves of unidentified people were also found by them. In the chapter titled "Lakhipathar, March 15, 1991," Das explores the aftermath of Operation Rhino on the organization. This chapter is set a few days after the Indian army destroyed the militant camps in Lakhipathar. Diganta visits the camp on a stock-taking mission after the army operation. The chapter begins with a direct report of the following exchange between Diganta and two other KIA cadres, Rana and Naba:

> "How many people did you kill here?" queried Diganta while jumping across a narrow brook. The youth named Rana glanced at his comrade. Then without hesitation he said, "About 30-40, I'd estimate…After a little while, Diganta again asked them "Didn't you recoil from killing so many people? How do you feel now?"…Rana answered, "Why should we feel any remorse? We didn't kill them because of any personal grudge. After they were judged as enemies of the people, our superiors ordered us to kill them. Therefore, we had to kill them."…Diganta did not press the issue further. What purpose would it serve to blame these two? Each member of the organization had been taught to follow the orders of the leadership to the letter. Who could question that? (121).

The significance of this conversation between Diganta and the two cadres does not dawn upon the reader until later in the chapter. Immediately after this passage, Das employs a narrative technique equivalent to the cinematic jump-cut, as the three figures are objectively distanced for the reader by shifting from a direct report of the conversation to a distanced look at the three characters: "After crossing Dhunda Nahar village, three young men were walking in the direction of Lakhipathar. Diganta, Rana and

Naba. They were wearing torn shorts and a dirty vest each. The army was still prowling in and around Lakhipathar" (121). Rana and Naba are two young partisan fighters who have been assigned the dangerous posting in Lakhipathar due to their bravery. They, along with four other comrades and "Gohain Sir" (a pen portrait of Arabinda Rajkhowa, on of the founders of the ULFA), manage to keep the Indian army at bay for four days utilizing the thick forest cover, the widely used guerrilla tactic of confusing the enemy about their numbers by firing continuously, and by planting landmines around Lakhipathar. Eventually, however, the sheer numerical strength of the Indian army wins the day. The army enters Lakhipathar. But the partisans won sufficient time to wipe out as many visible traces of their camp as possible. Rana, Naba, Gohain sir and few others also managed to escape. The Indian army occupied the area in and around Lakhipathar and interrogate and torture anyone they suspected to be a KIA sympathizer. A few women are also raped. Rana and Naba are recounting these incidents to Diganta as the three partisans make their way into the heart of the Lakhipathar forest.

Lakhipathar is a heavily forested area. Even in daytime, very little sunshine could be seen due to the dense foliage. The guerrilla camp, which was at the heart of the forest, had virtually disappeared. Only a few bamboo structures remained. Diganta's gaze suddenly fell on an elevated *changghor* (a cage ringed by bamboo platforms) in the middle of the camp. When he asks what that structure was meant for, Rana nonchalantly replies that it was their "jail"—the KIA often imprisoned deserters, betrayers, pimps, drug-dealers, smugglers and other people considered to be enemies of society. It was a huge structure, about 300 feet in circumference, and ringed by bamboo poles on all sides. Diganta wonders how prisoners are put inside this structure. Rana replies that they would

make the prisoners climb over to the center using ladders. Guards would be posted outside the structures at all times to keep watch over the prisoners. Diganta asks him how the prisoners slept. Rana replies that question of sleeping did not arise. The floor of the structure was covered by about one feet of mud. The prisoners had to stand or sit there. Appalled at this description, Diganta queries how long the prisoners could stay alive in that fashion? Rana laughs nonchalantly—his nonchalant laughter is emphasized very strongly in the text—and says that after staying in the mud like that for a day or two, the prisoners' skins would dry or begin to peel off. Then the partisans would bring them out and dry their skins in the sun. When they felt the prisoners were better, they herded them back to the cage. Of course, the prisoners did not have to stay there for long. Very often, after a week or so, they would be shot dead by orders of the high command. Diganta was curious to know how the prisoners were killed. Rana answers at length, in a tone reminiscent to "describing a form of sport":

> That depended on the orders of the superiors…If the crime were of a serious nature, then we would torture the prisoner slowly before his death. Sometimes we would chop off their limbs before killing them, sometimes we'd pour boiling water on them…Once our boys captured three pimps from Naharkatiya. First, we poured boiling water on them and peeled away their skin and flesh. Then we made the three of them stand in a pot and shot them in the stomach using a G-4 rifle…The prisoners would be brought to the camp blindfolded with their hands and feet bound. On the first day, we'd punch a hole in their earlobes with an airgun. Then we'd chain them to the trees by their earlobes. Because they feared tearing their ears off, they wouldn't dare to escape. The next day we'd take them to the prison…After being in the prison for about a day or two they'd beg us to end their lives. *It was great fun watching their state then* (126-7, emphasis mine).

Diganta is horrified when he hears this. The orders of the leadership had transformed these young boys from revolutionaries into cold, sadistic killing machines. The blame for this, Diganta ruminates, lay entirely with the leadership of the organization. Undoubtedly, he thinks, punishment is a necessary part of the

organizational structure; but, is it correct or justified to encourage such extreme forms of cruelty? If the organization thought of itself as a democratic one, why was it that such questions were never raised in the weekly question and answer sessions and propaganda meetings? Was the organization going to create a better society, a better tomorrow, on the back of such barbaric inhumanity? (128).

By means of these reflections of Diganta, Das seeks to illustrate the rot that had set in the ULFA, and the corrective measures that were necessary to stem it. However, I argue that this section illustrates the employment of torture techniques as disciplinary and terrorizing strategies by partisan organizations, and also the subjective constitution of the torturer. The production of "bare life," as we have already discussed, is the originary biopolitical vocation of sovereign power. The production of bare life is the point of convergence for the state and the revolutionary organization—two institutions that struggle for the control of sovereign power in the region.[260] Additionally, this sequence also illustrates how "death-worlds" are created as an expression of sovereign power—what Achille Mbembe terms "new and unique forms of social existence in which…populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the *living dead*" (40). Indeed, the burnt, scalded body, the ears that are punctured or torn off, and the utilization of the luxurious forms of killing described above by Rana illustrate the reduction of human subjects to the status of the living dead. If a life-world signifies conditions that facilitate everyday forms of being in the world, a death-world is its exact opposite. Here, death is no longer the external limit of life; instead, conditions of

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[260] I made a similar argument about the state and revolutionary organizations in my chapter on *An Outline of the Republic* when I was discussing the allure of the character of Malik.

living in a space of exception, like Assam of the 1990s, are more akin to a form of death-in-life. Moreover, judging from the genealogical standpoint of the history of techniques, the use of the *changghor* becomes significant. As a terror space, it taps on the cultural memory of the torture techniques used by the Ahom rulers who were the sovereigns of medieval and early modern Assam. The *changghor* was one of the key terror-spaces used by these rulers. Though the semiotics of public torture are radically different in the two eras—in the Ahom era, they were meant for *public* displays of rebels and prisoners in the heart of the city; in the contemporary era, the *changghor* is a *hidden* space in a "heart of darkness"—the use of this local technology of torture possesses a symbolic dimension for the revolutionary subnationalist cause (cynically speaking, a more "authentic" way of punishing social "deviants" such as pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers and betrayers of the organization). In these terror spaces, prisoners are absolutely reduced to the status of "bare life"—like in a concentration camp, the prisoner's fortunes are totally dependent on the "benevolence" of the guards outside. The guards could be "kind" and shoot them immediately, or they could be sadistic, like Rana and Naba, and "sport" with them indefinitely.

Mention of sadism brings us to an exploration of the subjective constitution of the torturer. The torturer has to be a sadist; the question of humanity in torture simply does not arise. Amery offers some penetrating insights here. Utilizing the work of Bataille, Amery suggests that sadism is an existential pathology "in which it appears as the radical negation of the other, as the denial of the social principle as well as the reality principle" (35). A sadist does not care about the continued existence of the world, but by nullifying the world and negating his fellow man, he "wants to realize his own total sovereignty."

The anti-human that is the sadist reduces his fellow being to the status of mere flesh. The torturer, Amery says, has "control of the other's scream of pain and death; he is master over flesh and spirit, life and death." If a social world is built on a mutual expectation of trust and help, then torture totally inverts that social world—"in the world of torture man exists only by ruining the other person who stands before him" (35). Indeed, this is true for anyone who justifies torture even as a way of making the future "safe" (the common justification made for the torture of "criminals" and "terrorists" from a statist standpoint, for instance).[261]

In this respect, Diganta's reflections on how torture turns revolutionaries into cold, inhuman killing machines may seem like a clichéd truism—indeed any turn towards violence necessitates the objectification of the other and a simultaneous objectification of the self. However, Diganta's statement gestures towards one of the paradoxical features of politics in the modern age. It reveals a secret link between two of the most pervasive political phenomena of the modern age: the phenomena of sovereignty (residing in the valuable *commodity* of the state) and revolution. Both have in common the pervasive use of terror as an instrument of governmentality. Torture, like encounter killings, concentration and internment camps and so on, is a technique that terrorizes the other. For both the state and revolutionaries, terror becomes a crucial element of politics—hence we encounter a similar justification for torture from both sides.[262] Referring to the nexus between reason and terror in the French Revolution, Mbembe writes that terror is

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[261] For the most disturbing justification of torture as a way of reducing risk for the future (written in the wake of 9/11), see Alan Dershowitz's "Tortured Reasoning." Elaine Scarry has written a spirited rebuttal to that reprehensible piece in the book edited by Sanford Levinson titled *Torture*.

[262] The strongest argument for this nexus still is Lenin's *The State and Revolution*.

construed as a necessary element of politics. An absolute transparency is formulated between the state and people. As a political reality, this transparency is achieved by displacing the category of "the people" from concrete reality to rhetorical figure. Theorists of terror, Mbembe says, believe it possible to distinguish between authentic expressions of sovereignty and the actions of the enemy. They,

> …also believe it possible to distinguish between the "error" of the citizen and the "crime" of the counterrevolutionary in the political sphere. Terror thus becomes a way of marking aberration in the body politic, and politics is read both as the mobile force of reason and as the errant attempt at creating a space where "error" would be reduced, truth enhanced, and the enemy disposed of ("Necropolitics," 19).

Indeed, what Mbembe says here can be extended beyond the institution of the modern state and extended to consider revolutionary activity as well. For what has been the inexorable logic of revolution in the modern age? Ever since the American and the French Revolutions, two characteristics have been key for an understanding of revolutions—i) the constituting violence of the revolutionary endeavor can only end once violence has been constituted in the stable form of the state, and ii) as Hannah Arendt says in *On Revolution*, in both the idea of revolution and the state that could accrue from it, "the idea of freedom (for the "people") and the experience of a new beginning should coincide" (19, emendations mine). This nexus between freedom and novelty underlies the tremendous rhetorical force of the category of the "people" in most modern constitutions (Think here about the opening lines of the Indian Constitution—"We, the people of India, do solemnly declare to constitute ourselves as a sovereign, secular, socialist democratic republic). Too often though, the iterative, pedagogic performance of this novel rhetorical category in everyday life leads to a series of actions that constantly distinguishes between "authentic expressions of the sovereignty and the actions of the enemy," whether we are

talking about statist or non-statist expressions of sovereignty. The safeguarding of the newness ushered in by the state or revolution necessitates the use of techniques that control future time. Terror techniques are the most pervasive element that fills the gap between "expressions of sovereignty" and "the actions of the enemy." The enemy, after all, is someone who can destroy the future. From the standpoint of the revolutionary, the absolute enemy is the counterrevolutionary; from the standpoint of the nation-state, the absolute enemy is the anti-national (the "terrorist," and, in the Indian context nowadays, the "Maoist").[263] Terror, thus, marks an aberration in the body politic. It marks a distinction between the (national/ revolutionary) self and the (anti-national/counterrevolutionary) other.

The argument for torture as a preemptive instrument arises there—in Medovoi's words, the "terrorist becomes to terror precisely as the criminal is to crime…(and) the pervert is to sex" (72). We can probably also add, as the counterrevolutionary is to reaction. I think that this logic is the basis of the "new cultural sensibility" that Mbembe points out, where killing the enemy "is an extension of play," as we see in *Sanglot Fengla*, and where more "intimate, lurid, and leisurely forms of cruelty appear" constantly and horrifically ("Necropolitics," 19). Indeed, if the passage to the biopolitical marks the threshold of the modernity of societies, these new and associated forms of necropolitics and the politics of cruelty are also a pervasive, persistent and inexorable feature of the passage to modernity globally. Even though it is an unapologetic partisan novel, moments like these in *Sanglot Fengla* vividly illustrate these necropolitical

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[263] On March 5, 2010, the Home Secretary of India, G.K. Pillai, said that, if unchecked, Maoist groups would overthrow the Indian state by 2050.

techniques that produce human beings as forms of bare life. Das's critique is, thus, two pronged. While the major focus is on organized state terror, he is also sharply critical of the techniques of terror employed by the KIA (the fictional name of the ULFA). The doubling of this critique makes *Sanglot Fengla* transcend its unabashedly partisan point of view, unsentimentally exposing the logic of necropolitics in a state of exception.

Sanglot Fengla also shifts the perspective from the torturer to the tortured. At this point, the focus shifts back to state terror. We encounter the tortured body in two different scenes in the text. First, Diganta sees the long-term effects of torture on the tortured during his meeting with Nikhil*da* in Calcutta. The chapter titled "Calcutta, 7 March, 1991" immediately follows "Lakhipathar, 15 March, 1991." Nikhil*da* was an ex-Naxalite who was captured and brutally tortured by the Indian army in the 1970s. The resultant torture left him paralyzed on one side. Disowned by his father for joining the Naxalites, Nikhil*da* eked out a living by publishing pamphlets. Diganta and another guerrilla, Ismail, go and visit him in his small shack. This brief episode that shows the lingering impact of the "scarring" techniques used by the Indian security forces on the body of the tortured foreshadows what happens to Diganta two chapters later.[264] In the chapter titled "Moukhuwa Chapori, 20 October, 1991," Diganta and a few other guerillas engage in a crossfire with the Indian army after their hideout at Changchari (near

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[264] While the torture practices employed by Indian forces in urban areas partake of "clean" techniques—maybe the supervision of human rights agencies is the issue here—in more "exceptional" spaces, scarring techniques are used quite frequently. See Sumanta Banerjee's *India's Simmering Revolution* for a description of these scarring techniques utilized to suppress the Naxalites in the 1970s. Also see the document titled "Torture in India, 2010" published by the Asian Centre of Human Rights for a detailed catalogue of incidents and techniques used in India by both state and non-state actors. Incidentally, India still hasn't ratified the 1975 UN treaty against torture. The Indian Penal code does not define torture nor does it make it criminal as it is defined in Article 4 of the UN treaty. However, on April 8, 2010, the Union Cabinet approved a proposal called the The Prevention of Torture Bill, 2010, which takes a step towards ratifying the 1975 treaty. This is definitely a welcome development.

Guwahati) is betrayed by one of their comrades. He is knocked unconscious and captured by the army when he attempts to escape through a back alley.

When Diganta regains consciousness, he finds that his hands and feet are bound tightly. His bound body is covered in a blanket and thrown into the rear end of an army truck. He could not figure out the direction in which they were heading. He realizes that it is best to feign unconsciousness, as the army personnel will only sport with him if they realize he is awake. A lot of thoughts flicker through his head. The guerrillas had been prepared for this contingency during their training period. The possibility that they could be tortured had been impressed upon them. They had also been told how to evade questions about the organization and its locations during torture. However, he thinks that there is a huge gap between training to withstand torture and actually experiencing it. The gap between the imagination and the actual event becomes the source of extreme fear for Diganta. While these thoughts are floating in Diganta's head, he also attempts to figure out where the truck was headed. When the truck stopped for a while at a railway crossing, Diganta realizes where they were going. He remembers that when he had gone to Guwahati for organizational work the previous month, Rajib (another guerrilla) told him about the Xorihyotuli Camp. The army had occupied a newly constructed veterinary campus there and converted it into a "concentration camp" (Das emphasizes this word in the text). To be captured by the army and taken to Xorihyotuli was like descending into hell for the cadres:

> More than half of the cadres died in the camp due to torture by the army. Later, official releases would state that they had been killed in encounters, and their broken bodies would be handed over to their families. The condition of the corpses beggared belief. A few of them had their eyes gouged out, a few had their hands chopped off; others had bellies swollen with congealed blood, just like the

> corpses of cows would look like after the floods. The fortunate few who came out alive from that hell were disabled physically or mentally for life (189).

The memory of these reports about torture and encounter killings chilled Diganta's blood.[265] He realized that he was going to undergo what he had only heard about thus far. Below are his first impressions and experiences at the camp after the truck stops at its destination:

> …two soldiers swung the bound Diganta in his blanket, as if he were a sack of potatoes, and threw him on the ground…Diganta lay motionless on the ground for a while. After a while, someone opened his binds and made him stand. An intense pain shot through Diganta's chest and stomach and he lost his balance. Upon seeing this, a soldier, grabbed him from the back, lifted him up and punched him very hard on the nose. Diganta somehow managed to keep his balance. After that, at the command of two other soldiers, he lifted his hands up weakly and entered the campus. Nothing could be made out because of the darkness. The only shape he could make out was a tin-roofed construction on the north side of a big field. As he walked closer to the construction, he heard hideous screams of agony from the others cadres who were interned inside. Imagining what lay in store for him made him shudder involuntarily (190).

According to Agamben the "dislocating localization" that is the camp is the fourth inseparable element that has added itself to and broken the triptych that defined the classical order of the nation-state: the state, birth (nation) and land. For what exactly is the camp? It is a structure where the state of exception can be realized normally. The camp's inhabitants are stripped of all political status and reduced to bare life. Here power "confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation" (*Homo Sacer*, 171). The camp

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[265] Although I begin my dissertation with a description of Sanjit's encounter killing, I won't go into it in great detail here. But here's a brief clarification of what I mean by encounter killing. An encounter killing refers to a predetermined resolve to eliminate the "terrorist" which is then presented in the media as if the victim died either in a shootout or an attempted escape from the security forces. An aggressive action is then camouflaged as a self-defensive reaction by the forces. In the U.S., a good example of an encounter killing would be the death of the Black Panthers leader, Fred Hampton, in Chicago in 1970.

thus is the hidden point where politics tipples over into biopolitics and the figures of the citizen and the *homo sacer* get confused with each other.

Even as a space, the camp falls outside the normal juridical order, but is not an external space—it is "taken outside, included through its own exclusion" (*Homo Sacer*, 170). The Xorhiyotuli camp that Diganta had heard about and now finds himself in was precisely such a "dislocating localization." Unlike Dinjan Camp, the title and location of the next chapter, Xorhiyotuli is outside the purview of the law.[266] Xorhiyotuli is juridically speaking, an "exceptional" space. People have only heard rumors about it, but no one is sure of its existence. It is a schoolyard which has been converted into a secret camp and kept off limits to the public.[267] To be taken to Xorhiyotuli was literally to disappear from sight; it was a space where, echoing Hannah Arendt, anything was possible. In such spaces, absolute enemies of the state, like the guerrillas, were prime examples of the production of bare life. In Das's novel, Diganta realizes that his life in the camp is even more "bare" than anything he experienced as a guerrilla—"His experiences (at Xorhiyotuli) were even more terrifying than the many days he spent without food in Hukong district (in Myanmar). Even if he didn't get anything to eat, at least he could move about with a certain degree of freedom in Kachin. He didn't have to spend each and every moment experiencing such indescribable agony" (192).

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[266] In Dinjan, after Diganta has been transferred there from Xorhiyotuli, he is able to meet his lawyer and plead his case as a citizen subject. In Xorhiyotuli, no lawyers are allowed.

[267] Unlike concentration camps in Europe, which are specially constructed for the purpose using available slave labor, many of the torture camps in the eastern borderlands include spaces such as existing schoolyards or even large animal shelters which are taken over by the army.

Das, of course, describes the agonies that Diganta undergoes in the camp in lurid and graphic detail. Diganta is electrocuted with magnetos, his toenails are taken out one by one, he is hit everywhere on his body with a stick, he is punched repeatedly on his chest and belly after being slung upside down on a ceiling fan and his skin is scraped off his back as he is dragged back and forth in the camp compound with a rope. More than the bodily hurt, what terrifies him particularly are the screams of other cadres as they are tortured in the adjoining room and the sight of his comrades being buried up to their necks and kicked repeatedly in their jaws. He loses all sense of time and place, simply recognizing that his body had been converted to malleable flesh that the torturer had absolute sovereignty over. Indeed, in torture, if the torturer is the absolute sovereign, then the tortured is simply an object that can be manipulated and broken according to the sovereign's will. In a cynical and perverted way, the torturer-tortured dialectic reminds us of Agamben's characterization of the sovereign ban. Both the sovereign and the beast are outside the purview of the law. In the hierarchy, the sovereign's sacred/sacalized body stands outside and above the law; the beastly figure, like the werewolf, also stands outside the law, but *below* it.[268] Similarly, in the scenario of torture, the torturer's body stands outside and above the law; the tortured body is profaned and rendered beast or thing-like—in Amery's words, the tortured's voice resembles that of a "shrilly squealing piglet at slaughter" (35). Diganta too reaches this state anterior to language and he can only express his pain by screaming in agony as his bodily integrity comes under severe assault.

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[268] Jacques Derrida has explored this connection in the recently published *Beast and Sovereign* (Volume 1).

In the beginning, Diganta attempts to resist this assault on his body and subjectivity. Initially, even after being softened up, he misleads the interrogator who, using psychological coercion, asks him questions about the organization. But, in a situation where he is constantly rendered helpless, it is not always easy to stifle the sense that his human dignity was being trampled upon. A small incident will illustrate this. Around the fifth day of his captivity,

> …in the morning, a soldier threw two *rotis* (bread) and some boiled *rajma* (kidney beans) to him in a packet. Like a starving animal, Diganta grabbed the food and was preparing to gobble it down. The soldier grabbed the food away from him and started laughing at Diganta's pathetic state with sadistic glee. It was as if shame and humiliation made Diganta forget the broken state of his body. He felt like throttling the soldier to death—not for the food, but for humiliating a starving man so. The next moment, he got a grip on his situation. What was the point of needlessly inviting death in the enemy's camp through a display of self-pride? Therefore, swallowing his dignity and pride, he underwent all the humiliation and torture meted on his body by the Indian army. The continuous subjection to torture and inhuman treatment made him gradually lose all sense of time (199).

Here, Diganta clearly recognizes that he has been reduced to pure objecthood. He is *astonished* that he is still alive, even after being reduced to flesh and near-death (the comparison I quoted earlier between the hunger Diganta endured as a guerilla and the feelings he experiences here also occur in this passage).[269] If he, in his helpless state, made even the smallest attempt to retain a shred of his human dignity, the torturer-sovereign had the absolute authority to enforce a decision over his life and death. Diganta realizes this when the soldiers escort him outside and exhort him to escape. He knew that this is merely an extension of "play" for the soldiers. If he runs, he will be shot from

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[269] See Amery—"Thinking is almost nothing else but a great astonishment. Astonishment at the fact that you had endured it, that the tumult had not immediately led also to an explosion of the body, that you still have a forehead that you can stroke with your shackled hands, an eye that can be opened and closed, a mouth that would show the usual lines if you could now see it in a mirror" (39).

behind and his death will be presented as an encounter killing. He feigns unconsciousness as he is exhorted to escape and thus manages to stay alive. Thus, Diganta's recognition of how the logic of sovereignty operates in this zone of exception eventually becomes the factor that enables him to preserve his life.

Sanglot Fengla fails, however, in showing the long-term results of torture on the Diganta's subjectivity. *Sanglot Fengla* is a flawed novel. Das's instincts and sympathies as a political activist interfere with his fictional endeavor. Diganta is a "flat" character to use E.M. Forster's terminology. Despite all travails and experiences, Diganta pretty much remains at the same spot where he begins—his ideological investment and idealistic belief in the cause of Assam's independence and his resistance to Indian "colonialism" remains unshaken despite all travails (torture, illness, near death experiences) and temptations (the lure of lucre). Like everything else, torture is yet another examination (*porrikha*) for Diganta in his desire to be a true and pure revolutionary absolutely devoted to the cause of national liberation.[270] Eventually, he is transferred to Dinjan. A few revolutionaries who turn over to the side of the government arrange to have him released. They try to lure him with money and the promise of other financial rewards, which Diganta refuses. In the closing scene of the text, Diganta and another guerrilla, Probin, walk out "like courageous soldiers" rejecting the lucrative

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[270] Of course, I am not saying that Diganta's resistance to torture is "unrealistic." There are people who break during torture and there are people who don't. All I am critiquing is that, while Das shows the effects of torture on the body and subjectivity very well, in the overall economy of the text, his ideological investment in the partisan cause overdetermines the characterization of Diganta. Of course, the question of moral strength and weakness displayed during torture is a difficult question which cannot be answered definitely. Amery too says that the distinction between the "moral" power of resistance to physical pain "bodily" resistance (both "moral" and "bodily" are in quotation marks) is very difficult to delineate (37). Why do certain people break down? Why do certain people resist? There is no generalizable answer to this question.

terms that "traitors" to the cause, like the former guerrilla, Ranjeet, offers them for surrender, and seemingly with no memory of the torture he endured at Xorhiyotuli. The last lines of the novel are significant—"It was a long way off for the dawn (The first part of *Sanglot Fengla* concludes here)" (212).[271] As a character, thus, Diganta remains as unidimensional as in the beginning—events happen to him, but he is not changed by them.

However, in the section on torture in the "Moukhuwa Chapori" chapter, Das inserts a curious little episode that can be the basis for a more complex ethico-political response. Diganta has been battered into pulp by the brutal army officers and loses consciousness. He regains consciousness the following morning in his cell. His broken body is shaking uncontrollably. He doesn't know how long he remained like that. Suddenly,

> …he heard the door of his cell opening. A young turbaned Sikh officer peered inside. Probably Diganta's condition aroused his compassion. He went out and brought a torn blanket and covered Diganta's body with it. It was as if the Sikh soldier's compassion was not for the broken body, but rather what that body truly represented in terms of its value to the respondent. Even in his helpless state, the very thought of this brought hope to Diganta's mind (121).

Here is, I think, an example of the common "political space" between the victim and the respondent that Rejali and Veena Das gesture towards. In the brief moment when the Sikh officer reaches out to Diganta's broken body, acknowledges his pain and reads his body in terms of what it "represented in terms of its value," we see a rare ethico-

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[271] In a private conversation, Manorom Gogoi told me that Das intended to write the second part of the novel after the end of the revolution. The image of dawn at the end plays with the ULFA's insignia of the rising sun. As a literary trope, Barbara Harlow notes that such inconclusive endings that play with the symbolism of dawn and darkness is a common metaphor that signals a "commitment to the future" for most "narratives of resistance" (75, 154).

political space emerging where subjects appear before each other as *human* agents. Diganta's broken body cries out for a response tht the other heeds. In an *inhuman* space, this remains a brief, ethical and human moment. Such moments, as Rejali says, have become harder in modern times. The fact that even an intensely partisan novel like *Sanglot Fengla* contains such moments, and also the alternative imaginary I outlined in my conclusion to the previous section, is proof that the effort involved at imagining such human spaces in inhuman worlds is not an entirely futile endeavor.

5.6: The Mo(u)rning After: *Borangar Ngang*

All changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

"Easter 1916," W.B. Yeats.

Raktim Xarma was a former member of the ULFA. On December 15, 2003, the Royal Bhutanese Army (RBA) launched a massive military operation named "Operation All Clear" against three closely allied separatist partisan groups from the eastern borderlands: the ULFA, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO). The three organizations had thirteen, twelve and five camps respectively in Bhutan. Over three thousand inmates of the camps, both combatants and non-combatants, fled and dispersed themselves across eastern and southern Bhutan. The Indian army was not directly involved in the operation. But the Indian army ferried the injured to hospital, captured militants who attempted to flee across the border, and in some cases, eliminated partisans who attempted to resist.[272]

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[272] "Prize" catches included Bhimkanta Borgohain, one of the founder members of the ULFA and Mithinga Daimary aka Megan Kachari, the publicity secretary of the ULFA. On December 26, 2003, Borgohain, along with thirty seven women and twenty seven children (many of the women who

Xarma was one among many ULFA combatants who was captured by the Indian army. He was in prison from 2003-08. *Borangar Ngang* was written and published when he was still imprisoned in Guwahati. The novel is set in Bhutan and encompasses the period from 1996-2003. Based loosely upon Xarma's own experiences in Bhutan, *Borangar Ngang* provides an intimate picture of life in guerrilla camps in Bhutan upto the point when ULFA cadres were forced out of Bhutanese territory by the Royal Bhutanese Army in 2003.

Bhutan was officially never part of the British Empire. The country was embroiled in a few conflicts over territory with the Empire in the late 19th and the early 20th century. However, the Wangchuk dynasty, which has ruled Bhutan since 1907, maintained cordial relationships with the British, dealing with the colonial powers through the offices of the Dorjes—Bhutanese noblemen—who were based in Kalimpong in India. Bhutan started moving closer to postcolonial India after the Chinese invasion of neighboring Tibet in 1959. India offered Bhutan development aid, assisted in building a road that linked Thimphu to New Delhi and also trained the Royal Bhutanese Army. Bhutan's "modernization," as Michael Hutt points out, literally began after the consolidation of its relationships with postcolonial India. Given the friendly relations between Bhutan and India, it is important to ask why Bhutan turned a blind eye to the presence of guerrillas hailing from India, and also why it actively assisted in the setting up of the camps of anti-Indian separatist camps in its territory? After Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino, the ULFA moved many of its bases to Bhutan. After Operation All

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surrendered were also partisan fighters), formally surrendered to the Indian army in Tezpur, Assam. *Borangar Ngang* is dedicated to Bhimkanta Borgohain who was also affectionately known as "Mama" (maternal uncle). Borgohain is also represented through the character named "Father" in the text.

Clear, the Bhutanese monarchy explained that groups like the ULFA had virtually invited themselves in its territory. Furthermore, Bhutanese officials said that the mountainous and heavily forested character of the 260 mile long Indo-Bhutanese border made it impossible to police who entered and who got out. However, as M.S. Prabhakara points out, Bhutan's assistance to and its later volte face towards anti-Indian partisan groups have to be understood in terms of the internal ethnic tensions in the country.

While official Bhutanese narratives propagate the idea of a monoethnic national identity, there are at least three major ethnic groupings in the country: the Ngalong in the west, the Sharchop in the east and the Lhotshampa in the south. The Ngalongs and the Sharchops are primarily Buddhist and speak the Tibetan derived language called Dzongkha, which was adopted as Bhutan's national language in 1961. The Sharchop also speak another Tibetan derived language named Shangla. The Buddhist peoples in Bhutan are known by the combined moniker of "Drukpa." The Dzongkha term "Lhotshampa" refers to the Nepali-speaking people who inhabit Southern Bhutan. The Lhotshampas are primarily Hindu. From the point of view of the official Bhutanese national narrative, which is itself derived from colonial era ethnography, all Lhotshampas are descendants of economic migrants from neighboring Nepal, who settled in Bhutan in the 19th century. The Lhotshampas, thus, occupy the position of the "foreigner" in Bhutanese national narratives.[273]

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[273]To be sure, the term Lhotshampa subsumes many internal differences within the ethnic grouping that has come to be called Nepali—there are distinctions, for instance between the "Aryan" Nepalis against the "Tibeto-Mongoloid" groupings such as the Gurungs. See Michael Hutt's *Unbecoming Citizens* for more details.

Since the 1980s, there have been increasing tensions between the Lhotshampas and the Drukpas. Inter-community economic rivalry and the all too familiar hierarchies between "civilized" and "savage" peoples are, of course, two of the major historical reasons for this conflict.[274] But a significant factor since the eighties has been discriminatory state policies employed against "foreigners." The 1980 Marriage Act, for instance, introduced punitive measures against Bhutanese citizens who married non-Bhutanese (read non-Drukpas). The 1985 act on nationality and citizenship provided for citizenship by *jus soli* (provided both parents were Bhutanese) or by registration provided both parents were domiciled in Bhutan on or before 31 December 1985. Applicants for naturalized citizenship also had to demonstrate fluency over Dzongkha and a good knowledge of Bhutan's officially sanctioned history. Finally, the controversial census of 1988 attempted "to identify foreigners and issue citizenship identity cards to all bonafide Bhutanese nationals" (quoted in Hutt, 152). One of the major aims of this controversial census was to sort out the Lhotsampa population into different categories and also to classify some of them as "non-nationals." Not surprisingly, some Lhotsampa dissidents were qualified as *Ngolops* (anti-national terrorists). The Lhotshampas resisted many of these state legislations leading to massive political demonstrations in Southern Bhutan in the 1990s. Since the 1990s there has also been a steady trickle of Lhotshampa refugees escaping state reprisals to refugee camps in Nepal. According to Hutt, more than 97,750 refugees inhabited these camps in 2000 (258).

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[274] The "Aryanized," educated Nepalis, for instance, were considered superior to the "Mongoloid," "simplistic" Drukpas in colonial records: anthropological categorizations which are later internalized as identities of the self.

M.S. Prabhakara says that when the ULFA set up its camps in eastern Bhutan in the 1990s two factors worked in their favor. First, the ULFA was seen as a "serviceable ally" of the kingdom, a possible buffer that could keep the indigenous Lhotshampa militancy under control. We notice this in *Borangar Ngang* as the interactions of the ULFA militants in the first part of the novel are largely with the Drukpa community in eastern Bhutan. There is very little interaction with the Lhotshampas. Second, the arrival of the anti-Indian militants and the setting up of their camps there was also beneficial for the economy of the region as the local Drukpas now had a stable base of consumers with whom they could trade their primarily agricultural and livestock produce. Indeed, for a while, the ULFA worked these internal pressures within the Bhutanese kingdom to its own benefit, and conducted its attacks into Indian territory from their Bhutanese bases. However, external circumstances changed drastically between the 1990s and 2003. There had always been immense pressure by the Indian government on the Bhutanese government to act against the partisan groups based there. But an additional factor that alarmed the Bhutanese monarchy was the gradual rise to power of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) led by Chairman Prachanda in neighboring Nepal. The rise of the CPN attracted many disaffected Lhotshampas to its ranks, and led to the formation of the Bhutan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) on April 22nd, 2003 in Siliguri (India). Like its Nepalese counterpart, the BCP was totally opposed to the "feudal" monarchy in the Himalayan kingdom and spoke in the name of all oppressed people in Bhutan. For the Bhutanese monarchy, however, the BCP was another example of Nepalese conspiracy against the kingdom. What was particularly alarming for the monarchy was a particular point made in the BCP manifesto. Prabhakara writes:

> One of the most interesting points made in the statement announcing the birth of the BCP (MLM) relates to its reading of Bhutan's population mix, every section of which is oppressed by the feudal monarchy. According to the statement, those oppressed include "even the Sharchops, who are next to Nepali origin Bhutanese..." In other words, this remarkable formulation takes it for granted that the demographic pattern has already changed and the "Nepali origin" population constitute the largest single group. The prospect of "Sikkimisation" is an ever-present nightmare in the imagination of the Drukpas.[275]

Recall that the ULFA, though not directly Maoist, was also committed to the idea of "scientific socialism." There were already reports that ULFA cadres were in contact with the Maoists. Thus both pressure from the Indian government and the internal fears precipitated by the Maoist uprising led to the attack on the ULFA bases by the Royal Bhutanese Army in December 2003.

Raktim Xarma was a "junior commissioned officer" of the ULFA based in Bhutan at that time. Xarma, a well educated youth from Guwahati, had undergone guerrilla training in Bhutan and had come in contact with the top brass of the leadership there. In an interview with Saswati Kaushik, he said that the ULFA cadres were "shocked" and felt "betrayed" by the unexpected attack on their bases by the Bhutanese army because the organization (ULFA) had an unspoken "political pact with Bhutan, and Asom enjoyed historical bonds with the country…" In better times, he claims, the top brass of the leadership had unrestricted movement all over the country and top leaders of the ULFA like Bhimkanta Buragohain were often presented with gifts or medicine by King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the current ruler of the country. While he acknowledges that there was constant pressure from India, he also suggests that the growing proximity between the militants and the local populace was assuming alarming proportions for the

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[275] The predominantly Nepali-dominated independent kingdom, Sikkim, opted to join the Indian union in 1975.

monarchy. When the monarchy imposed economic sanctions against the group, the local people would provide them with supplies on the sly. Even so, the attack in December 2003 was entirely unexpected, according to him. Apparently, a few days before the attack, the King had sent a personal message asking the leadership to relocate the cadres to other places so as to displace Indian pressure. He also promised that he would make a personal visit to the camps soon. The members of the camp had prepared traditional Assamese delicacies in expectation of his visit.

However, instead of the king, they were showered with a hail of bullets and bombs by the RBA. Consequently, the dispersed militants undertook an arduous trek to India through Southern Bhutan. Xarma's battalion was part of this group and underwent many hardships on their trek across the Bhutan-India border into Assam. Five members of his troop were killed in an ambush by the Indian army, while two died due to hunger and exposure to the cold. Xarma, along with a few other comrades, was captured and imprisoned by the Indian army. After being released on bail for the first time in 2005, he was exhorted by his parents to write an account of his experiences in Bhutan. *Borangar Ngang* (this term is from the Dzongkha language), a fictional account of his tenure in Bhutan was the result. It was published by Cambridge India Publications in Assamese in 2006, and enjoyed a limited, though successful distribution in Assam. In his preface to the novel, Xarma writes—"I…haven't tried to represent any particular partisan view through the novel; instead through the characterizations I have tried to uphold the individual right of expressing one's opinion bereft of fear" (i). Xarma has since formally abjured the path of violent revolution. He has been in and out of prison since 2005. I met and interviewed him personally in prison in Guwahati in 2007.

The central protagonist of *Borangar Ngang* is a militant named Pratyush Kalita and the text narrates his life in the camps in Bhutan from 1996 to 2003. The novel is narrated in the third-person. Pratyush's story is based primarily on Xarma's own experiences in Bhutan, although the author also incorporates details from the lives of his other comrades. Like Xarma, Pratyush is also an amateur painter in the text. The novel is digressive in structure, although a semblance of continuity is provided by the narrative of a slow but gradual expulsion from an idyllic paradise in Bhutan. This idyllic lifeworld is initially sustained by friendly, fraternal interactions with the local Drukpas. Gradually the idyll is torn asunder as the guerrillas are increasingly isolated. At the end, the guerrillas are forced to flee from Bhutan after being bombarded by the Royal Bhutanese Army (RBA) and nearly starved to death on their march across the border into Assam.

The novel is divided into four parts. Part I describes the interactions and fraternal relations established by the militants with the local Drukpa community in eastern Bhutan in intimate detail. It opens with a scene where Pratyush surveys and frames the idyllic mountainous landscape in eastern Bhutan—the region where the guerrilla bases were located in the mid nineties—through a painterly eye. The Drukpa community he interacts with is represented as "simple and uncomplicated," at harmony with the natural background. Their "simplicity" and backwardness is often compared to the apathetic attitude of the more "civilized" Assamese community that Pratyush belongs to.[276] Part II

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[276] Here's a representative passage where the "simplicity" of the Drukpas is compared to more "advanced" communities like the Assamese—"(The Drukpas')…lives were tough and closeted. In matters of education, civilization, science and technology they were almost a thousand years behind most people…They did not possess any language of rebellion. Actually in a region where there was no democracy, where it was a crime to raise one's eyes to the same level as that of the head of the state—the king—there was no other alternative but to passively accept one's fate and go on with life…But Assam! That was a democratic society. The right to democracy had been seized forcibly from the British through blood and toil. But why

gives a rich, detailed picture of camp life for the partisans than that portrayed in *Sanglot Fengla*. The camp life that *Sanglot Fengla* represents is exclusively masculine. It focuses on friendship and comradeship between male guerrillas.[277] In contrast, *Borangar Ngang* represents both the process of training female guerrillas, and also portrays scenes of family life and the rearing of children in the partisan camps. To be sure, the male and female battalions of the ULFA go on separate missions—male and female guerrillas are rarely seen together on the same battleground. But the second section of the novel presents a vivid picture of a social world comprising of men, women, children and the aged.

Part III represents the guerrilla's harrowing experiences in the heavily forested no-man's land lying between the Indo-Bhutanese border. The act of crossing the international border and coming back to Bhutan comprises some of the primary action of this section. The last chapter (Chapter V) of this section also gives an intimation of the fateful events of 2003 as the narrator ruminates on the changed inter and intra-national situations that are no longer conducive for the partisan's fighters' stay in Bhutan. Their relationship with the Drukpa community also begins to deteriorate because of relentless propaganda against them by the Bhutanese government. Part IV vividly describes the unexpected attack by the RBA on the camps in December 2003, and the subsequent flight

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was the public so passive and silent there?" (3). Here, I think, is an illustration of the ambivalent *topos* that Romantic thinkers like Rousseau bequeathed to modernity. The "nobility," "simplicity" and "innocence" of the premodern is ambivalently compared to the order of "civilization." In this case, the "passivity" of the Drukpas is naturalized through an attribution of a premodern consciousness, only to be used later on as a mode for foregrounding the much more dangerous passivity of the "modern" Assamese.

[277] The women depicted in Das's novel are either stock romantic or mother figures (like Diganta's lover Anju, and his long-suffering mother) or society dilettantes who are satirized (like Bindu Baruah) for their shallow romanticization of the guerrilla cause.

of the militants and their families across the border. Significantly, *Borangar Ngang* and *Sanglot Fengla* both close with a similar image. The guerrilla troops are about to cross over from Bhutan to Assam under cover of darkness. Suddenly it seems like they hear a song in the distance—"as if beyond the inky darkness a new day was awaiting Pratyush and his comrades" (208). Both *Sanglot Fengla* and *Borangar Ngang*, thus, close with the image of the awaited dawn, but where Diganta strides confidently into the darkness absolutely sure that the revolution is around the corner in the first novel, Pratyush and his defeated comrades await the dawn with trepidation, unsure of what the "new day" holds for them.

In my reading, I focus on two specific aspects of the novel. In the first part of my analysis, I study the mournful and melancholic atmosphere of defeat that pervades the text and frames the subjectivity of its protagonist, Pratyush. If *The Glass Palace* was an attempt to contend with the culture of "absolute defeat" spawned by the destruction of the colonial lifeworld, then *Borangar Ngang* is about the absolute defeat of the lifeworld of the partisans. The difference between the two novels lies in the fact that while *The Glass Palace* gestures towards alternative possibilities in the figures of the slave-thing and Dinu, *Borangar Ngang* lacks any such alternative or redemptive standpoint. Xarma quotes the famous Kohima poem—"…When you go home/Tell them of us and say/for your tomorrow/we gave our today"—as the epigraph to the Chapter III of Part II.[278] Yet, as the novel progresses, this epigraph appears poignantly ironic as Pratyush realizes that they would simply among history's forgotten men and women. There would be no

[278] This poem, written by an anonymous soldier during World War II is carved on the memorial of the 2nd British Division in the war cemetery in Kohima, Nagaland. It is known internationally as the Kohima poem.

epitaphs to their name, and the tomorrow they fervently desired would be lost and forgotten. They would simply be ruins from a past that cannot be regained.

In the second part, I shift my focus from the ruined subjectivity of the defeated partisan to an exploration of the guerrilla's body-as-ruin, especially as s/he navigates the treacherous terrain of the "no man's land" between India and Bhutan. Like *Sanglot Fengla*, this novel shows how prolonged exposure to hunger, thirst and disease, the fear engendered by nature and sudden ambushes by armed forces, as well as the techniques utilized for trapping partisans in no man's zones transform guerrillas to the status of the living dead. By focusing on the representation of the guerrilla's body as an exemplar of the living dead, this section studies "forms of the subjugation of life to the power of death…and the reconfiguration of the relations between resistance, sacrifice and terror" that accrue when subjects inhabit spaces of abandonment that lie outside the reach of the law (Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 39).

5.6.1: The Revolutionary as a "Ruin" of History

A central idea of modern revolution, as Hannah Arendt reminds us in *On Revolution*, is the promise of making everything new. The "strange pathos of novelty"—a uniquely modern political phenomenon—arose from the conjunction of two factors: the idea of freedom for all and the experience of a radically new beginning (*On Revolution*, 19). Revolutionary hope is predicated on the temporal structure of the "morning after" the revolution when the blood and toil of the masses and the cleansing violence unleashed in their name heralds a world which wipes away the bitter memories of the older one. Concretely, this aspect of a new beginning is illustrated by the establishment of a revolutionary calendar (the Thermidorean calendar established after the French

Revolution is an example), or by the all-pervasive imagery, inherent in any modern revolutionary movement, of the shift from darkness (of night) to light (the dawn of the new beginning). *Sanglot Fengla* is predicated on this temporal premise as the text ends in media res suggesting that a new dawn is just around the corner if only the revolutionary spirit is kept alive. In contrast, *Borangar Ngang* repeatedly asks the same question about the morning after but takes it in a very different direction. It repeatedly asks—what has gone wrong? Were the deaths of so many guerrillas eventually worth it? What if, to paraphrase Megan Kachari, the revolutionary song is sung, but no one were to remember it because the primary auditors for whom the song had been intended had themselves fallen asleep with no possibility of their awakening? What if the movement were struggling with a long, dark night that would never end? Or to put it slightly differently, what if, eventually, the revolutionary cause itself had become a lost object; a mere "ruin" of history, possessing no collective charge like it once did?

I use the word ruin both in its literal sense of a fragment of a historical past that survives in the present, and also in its Benjaminian sense of an allegorical figure that signifies a process of historical decay. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin defines allegory as a form of expression not based on one-to-one equivalence, but as a form of expression based on loss, difference and openness in signification. Ruin is an allegorical figure that represents historical decay. For Benjamin, history signifies a flux-like state where a precise moment in the present stands directly in relation to an event or object from the past. The concept of the allegory represents the difference between what a particular event meant in the historical past, and what it means now from the specific

vantage point of the present. A historical or literary text thus allegorically represent past events in the present.

I contend that the figure of the revolutionary in *Borangar Ngang* represents an allegorical figure of the ruin in the Benjaminian sense. As an embodied figure of destitution and melancholia the ruined revolutionary provides us with a very different perspective on the phenomena of revolution and resistance. Anticolonial theory has celebrated the idea of revolution and resistance, while postcolonial theory has carefully and critically appraised these phenomena by introducing questions about exclusions and elisions in revolutionary discourse and national liberation struggles in particular.[279] But neither of these two bodies of theory has adequately contended with the question of failed revolutions and the ruins that they create in their wake. Indeed, post-colonial locales are littered with numerous instances of such ruined revolutions and revolutionaries. In this respect, *Borangar Ngang* represents a relatively unique instance when the ruins of a defeated revolution are appraised by a revolutionary who took part in it.

Borangar Ngang, thus, represents a direct counterpoint to the more conventional triumphalist tone of a nationalist text like *Sanglot Fengla*. The absolutist distinction between friend and enemy underpins Das's novel gives way to a more ambivalent and doubtful appraisal of the cause of national liberation. Recall that for Das, all forms of privation and deprivation were tolerated by the guerrillas because of their faith that the people supported their nationalist cause, and in the belief that the morning after, when the fruits of the revolution could be reaped, was not far away. By 2000, the question of mass

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[279] Fanon's chapter on "Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders" in *The Wretched of the Earth* remains an early, but understudied text on the subjectivity of ruined or potentially ruined revolutionaries.

support (or the lack thereof) for the organization increasingly came to the fore. Additionally, the ULFA was facing a lot of internal and external pressures that threatened its survival. In Bhutan, especially, the guerrillas were increasingly getting hemmed in because of the Bhutanese government's turnaround. At one point, the narrator tells us that Bhutanese government propaganda had held the guerrillas responsible for the closure of trade routes between Bhutan and Assam (125). Incidentally, most of these trade routes were utilized by the Lhotshampas. By that time, many of the Lhotshampas had been driven from the territory to refugee camps, while others had been imprisoned and tortured. The sudden breakdown of the lifeworld that had sustained the Drukpas for years made them feel very resentful towards the partisans. As a result they refused to supply food and other rations to the guerrillas as they had in the past. Some Drukpas had also become spies for the government, leading to a gradual deterioration of trust between the partisans and the local populace. The narrator says:

> When food shortages, desertions and economic blockades weaken a guerrilla force, then all other questions become subordinate to the daily activity of somehow getting by. The question of survival then becomes the primary consideration…In the current situation, there was no safe place left for a hideout. Daily there would be the report of one or two deaths at the hands of the army of guerrillas who had gone scourging for food to the border. It was as if for every grain of rice, they had to endure the sacrifice of one comrade (152).

The novel makes it clear that once survival becomes the main goal of a partisan organization, its key attributes of mobility and camouflage start to diminish. Its tactical advantage in the field of battle is lost. Self-preservation, rather than offensive action, becomes its primary goal.

The situation that Pratyush and his comrades face also becoming increasingly precipitous because of the presence of children in the camp. Often marriages occur

among the male and female guerrillas in the camp. After childbirth, many of the female guerrillas take temporary leave from the battlefield to rear their children, even though they participate in the cultural and social events in the camp. However, increasing economic blockades present the parents of these children with an increasing dilemma. On one side, there is the struggle of maintaining a "normal" domestic life amidst great scarcities; on the other hand, there is the constant worry about the children's futures as soon as they started growing up. These concerns keep the parents of the children within the vicinity of the camp, thereby significantly reducing the numbers of the guerrilla troops. Risks without insurance in these conditions assume a different complexion altogether. In *Sanglot Fengla*, the individual guerrilla could, to large degree, internalize the condition of risk without insurance as a "normal" condition. Once families and children came into the picture, as it does in *Borangar Ngang*, the notion of an instantaneous and unexpected death is tinged with something new: a fear of the uninsured future. In fact, one of the reasons why marriages and children among guerrillas were permitted in the first place was due to the false sense of security instilled among the guerrillas because of the hospitality initially offered by the Bhutanese government. The sudden volte face—Pratyush calls it *bixwaxghatokota* (betrayal)—by the Bhutanese brings this radically contingent nature of the partisan camp back into sharp focus. In the novel's representation of the 2003 attack on the camp, the guerrillas' retreat is significantly slowed down because of the presence of little children. Many casualties occur due to the attempt to save the children, a number of whom also die in the process. The children themselves had internalized the harsh conditions of the camp and the constant threat of attacks. Whenever they would spot spy aircraft, they knew that they

had to hide themselves immediately. But no matter how such emergency situations were internalized by the children or the camp's inhabitants, no one could prepare them for the terror unleashed by an unexpected attack. The following paragraph, occurring in between the attack on the camp by the RBA, illustrates this vividly:

> Entering the bunker, Pratyush and his troop saw the camp adjutant, who had a UMG by his side, hiding there with his family. The adjutant was feeling absolutely helpless due to the presence of his child. It was as if some spark reappeared on his face upon sighting Pratyush and his troop. His son, Tutu, lay crumpled and whimpering inside the bosom of his mother, Sgt. Major Sagarika Teron. His tiny body shuddered uncontrollably with each explosion…A few shells landed on the roof of the bunker. The roof of the bunker started shaking massively and the topsoil started to fall inside it. Clasping Tutu even tighter to her, Sagarika Teron looked extremely terrorized (186).

To live in such conditions is to experience is to experience a specific quality of unfreedom. Movement is restricted entirely within the vicinity of the camp. When the camp is being bombarded relentlessly, even that isn't possible. As Mbembe says, to live under such conditions of "late modern occupation is to experience a permanent condition of 'being in pain'" ("Necropolitics," 36). The guerrilla camps of the ULFA in its last few days in Bhutan resembled such a state of siege leading to reconfigurations of the relationship between death, sacrifice and terror. Death in such conditions is no longer the encounter with a limit or boundary. It is just a mode of escape from terror and nothing else. However, unlike in Mbembe, the desire to escape from terror in *Borangar Ngang* is not attached to any ecstatic notion of "temporality and politics." Death in the present is not a herald of any vision of a future to come. The only desire that exists is solely focuses on the moment—if one cannot survive under such conditions of terror, it is better to die than to be terrorized. If *Sanglot Fengla* represents an ecstatic notion of temporality, whereby sacrifice in the present is a herald of a future to come, *Borangar Ngang*

represents a non-ecstatic form of temporality. This form of temporality sustains the constant atmosphere of despair and hopelessness that pervades the text. The heroism that is associated with (self) sacrifice is subordinated to the sheer necessity for survival. If there is time *enough*, the subject contemplates, in a melancholy way, if s/he would be remembered tomorrow. But in the last few days of camp life, when the entire area is besieged by the RBA, all that the guerrilla and his/her family experiences is a visceral form of terror, illustrated vividly by the shuddering body of little Tutu in the passage above.

This feeling of hopelessness also shapes the subjectivity of the protagonist of the text. Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" is useful for sketching out the subjectivity of ruined revolutionaries like Pratyush. In this essay, Freud begins by noting the similarities between melancholia and mourning. Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of "a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" ("Mourning," 243). In mourning, the subject that is bereaved experiences the world as "poor and empty." By contrast, the melancholic individual experiences him/herself as "poor and empty." Effectively, melancholy is initiated by a significant disappointment with the loved object. Instead of the love for that external object being displaced onto another external object, the pain is internalized in the subject's psyche. Here it initiates a process of identification with the supposed object of love, and the devaluation of that object becomes the basis for the devaluation of the self. The libidinal and emotional investment in the loved object, which also serves as a mask for certain needs of the self, create a strong sense of ambivalence in the subject where the object of love is simultaneously loved and hated.

The fundamental affect of *Borangar Ngang* seems, at first sight, to be similar to the structure of mourning as Pratyush mourns the loss of an ideal love object. But read closely, the novel seems to shuttle ceaselessly between mourning and melancholia. At the end of the process of mourning, a certain amount of recompensation can be garnered from the world that has been made poorer by the loss. The labor involved in mourning thus has a certain expiatory dimension. In melancholia, the individual feels him/herself to be poorer individually because of the loss of the object—the process of experiencing grief then becomes literally interminable, almost a form of a pathology that necessitates the constant, melancholic return to the past. The subjectivity of the ruined revolutionaries in the novel shuttle ambivalently between mourning and melancholia, as perhaps happens when a revolutionary cause has very little prospects of success in the contemporary conjuncture. There is a sustained, continued belief in the revolutionary promise of the "morning after," but at the same time, there is a nagging, almost fatalistic sense that the moment for achieving this tomorrow has disappeared forever. The revolutionary idea of a collective rising forth to a call to arms literally becomes a romantic, individual dream struggling against the fear that it will be forgotten completely. A persistent feature of the novel's style in this context is the constant recourse to rhetorical questions. A passage like the one below is characteristic of the text as a whole as the memories of the past haunt the guerrilla's consciousness and accentuate his sense of hopelessness in the present:

> Truly, how simple were those days of his youth…when he remembered those days he felt as if an unfathomable void lay at the center of his heart. He often wondered where he had come to while traversing through the tough journey of life. And who knew how long a road was still in front of him? This path, though, was one he could never retrace. What lay at its end? Death or freedom? (162).

While memory imbues the bygone days with a rosy hue, the harsh reality of life in the present, allied with the consciousness that the path he had undertaken could no longer be retraced, combine to create the oscillation between mourning and melancholia I outline above. Das's Diganta would have banished these nostalgic yearnings because of his ardent devotion to the revolutionary cause. An "ideal" partisan subject like Diganta is almost non-human because s/he is trained to erase personal and previous history—think here about Guevara's famous injunction in "Message to the Tricontinental" that the guerrilla is an exemplar of the "new man." This new man, born through the labor of violence, erases history, and when in action, erases memory as far as possible too. But for a guerrilla such as Pratyush who is racked with doubts about the cause and who feels there is no way back, nostalgic reminiscences of the past come back with redoubled force.

This nagging sense, allied with the breakdown of trust in the organization and also in the local population who earlier supported them, leaves the Pratyush feeling very lonely indeed. This feeling of loneliness increases even if the guerrilla band still cohabits with each other. The band now represents a form of what Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* calls "organized loneliness." The unbearable quality of this form of loneliness comes from a breakdown in "that elementary confidence in the world which is necessary to make experiences at all" (477). For the ruined revolutionary, racked by doubt and increasing isolation, and oscillating ceaselessly between mourning and melancholia, this "elementary confidence in the world" begins to dissipate slowly but surely. Anyone and everyone is potentially an enemy. An incident from the text, occurring during the band's last few days in Bhutan, will illustrate this. One day, on their

way back from a mission to gather rations, the guerrilla troop is confronted by the ghastly sight of eight of their comrades who had been brutally murdered. They find out from the neighboring Drukpa villagers that the murders were committed by two members of the medical unit of the troop: Alok and Sobin. The duo also stole the personal belongings from the corpses of the dead guerrillas before escaping. The troop discovers soon enough that Alok and Sobin were secretly in contact with the Indian army. Pratyush reflected:

> It was probably for the first time in the history of guerrilla warfare that such a heinous and inhuman act of betrayal had been committed…After this incident, suspicion, apprehension and mistrust enveloped everyone. There was a lot of internal tumult in the camps…It was as if in those dark days, the guerrillas were fearful of their own shadows. Apprehension took root primarily among the leadership. The lack of political direction had created such a chasm among the leadership and the ordinary cadres that the unity of the troops had begun to waver. Taking advantage of this uncertain situation, many spies from the Indian government had infiltrated the organization (83).

While the guerrilla troops demonstrate a tremendous amount of solidarity when the camp is attacked by the RBA later, incidents such as the above sap the morale of the troops. The increasing distance and miscommunication between the leadership and the cadre, isolation engendered by internal and external pressures and the necessity for self-preservation over offense cripple the partisan organization. Their organized loneliness engenders the sense that of "not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (*Origins*, 475). Ruined revolutionaries like Pratyush experienced this radical and desperate experience on an everyday basis. For them, the labor of mourning the lost cause of the revolution is constantly undercut by the debilitating isolation engendered by melancholia. Such isolated beings are powerless politically as they lose the fundamental attribute of acting together.

5.6.2: “Cruel” Reality: the Body as Ruin

Ruined revolutionaries also viscerally experience the feeling of “not belonging to the world at all” through their bodies. *Borangar Ngang* also hauntingly portrays the effects of inhabiting a no-man’s land on the guerrilla’s body. The concept of the ruin, thus, has another dimension for this section. While ruined revolutions possess the potential of destroying any form of political action for the participants, the harsh and perilous conditions encountered by partisans in navigating no man’s zones transform them to the status of the living dead—their bodies literally become ruins. A comparison with *Sanglot Fengla* will again illuminate the contrast I am trying to set up. In Das’s novel too there are instances where hunger and extreme hardship in no man’s zones are shown to reduce partisans to the status of wasted bodies. Yet, in *Sanglot Fengla*, the wasted bodies of the partisans, even though they are embodiments of the living dead, possess the potential of redemption because of the logic of heroism that underlies the text. Bodily suffering in the present is a step on the path to achieving the “morning after.” The absence of such a redemptive discourse in *Borangar Ngang* transforms the spectacle of the suffering, broken, rotting and decapitated body to the true signification of the living dead—forms of life that are gradually and instrumentally reduced to pulverized, destroyed and decaying matter, which in the end may not amount to anything at all.

The partisan fighters in *Borangar Ngang* regularly cross the heavily forested zones in the Indo-Bhutan border to cross over into Assam and get back. Only forest guards from India and Bhutan, army personnel, nomadic fishermen, smugglers, poachers and guerrillas cross through these remote and inhospitable regions (140). Hunger and thirst are normalized states for the guerrilla’s body. The lack of water in the densely

forested areas would often force the fighters to lap the water that had collected in the footmarks left by elephants (142). Besides the constant fear of a sudden ambush, the guerrillas also have to encounter the dangers posed by "…dangerous paths…the desert-like expanses of sand that would resemble a furnace when the sun's rays fell on it, leeches and mosquitoes, (and) the perils posed by wild animals…" (141). We are told that even with their weapons, the guerrillas would be absolutely helpless if a herd of wild elephants were to run amok. Leopards would camouflage themselves in the dense foliage and suddenly decamp with a straggling member of the band (141). The fear of ambushes would force guerrillas to lie hidden for hours tolerating innumerable mosquito bites and leeches sucking into the skin. The fear that wild animals posed was oftentimes far greater than the fear of the ambush.

The techniques employed to capture guerrillas in this no man's zone also resemble those used for trapping animals. The narrator recounts an episode where a guerrilla contingent is ambushed by the army. While many guerrillas were killed, an injured guerrilla named Bonojit Deka falls into the hands of the armed forces. Bonojit is inhumanely tortured by the army. His eyes are gouged out and acid is poured into his face. Bonojit's corpse is strung on a tree in the expectation that his comrades would come to fetch it. The army lies in wait for the guerrillas to come and claim the body, much like a "hunter who in a tiger hunt would string the body of a dead goat on a tree" (126). Bonojit's dead body lies there for days transformed into carrion for vultures and crows. The stench of his rotten corpse surrounds the entire area. But both the army and the guerrillas play a waiting game to see who would blink first. In such circumstances, one's care and attachment for the comrade has to be subordinated in the interests of

camouflage. If the camouflage were to be discovered, the guerrillas would be hunted down like a pack of wild animals. Bonojit's corpse rots there for seven days before the army watch is eventually called off. By that time, hardly anything is left of his remains. It would be tempting to read this in terms of the logic of heroism I outlined in *Sanglot Fengla*. While the guerrillas do not reveal themselves in the interests of self-preservation, Pratyush's anguished ruminations later (Pratyush is one of the witnesses to the incident) illustrate that the sight and memory of the decaying cadaver of Bonojit signifies utter meaninglessness. Note that in the quote below there is no indication of a sense of revenge or retribution (Diganta probably would have articulated that). The horrific sight of Bonojit's rotting cadaver forces Pratyush to think about the meaninglessness of their struggle:

> The memory of that sight was enough to make Pratyush feel like vomiting…It was as if this was a war with no end in sight. He thought sometimes—it would have been good if this war had never happened. But what was the alternative? No one had been able to pose any alternative to this hell till now. Or was it that everyone had been transformed into apathetic witnesses of such horrifying sights? (126).

The possibility that camouflage had simply become a cover for apathy troubled Pratyush. Was there any heroism or meaning involved in such acts any longer? Once again, we encounter the ruined revolutionary as he oscillates between mourning the loss of the comrade, who metonymically symbolizes the destruction of the revolutionary ideal, and a melancholic contemplation of the fact that, in the end, even this loss held no meaning.

In another episode, the narrator recounts a similar incident that involves one of Pratyush's dearest friends, Anurag. Anurag's unit is ambushed during a mission through the no man's zone and Anurag is wounded while retreating. Although, Pratyush and his

other comrades are able to bring back most of the wounded guerrillas to the safety of the base camp, four guerrillas are missing: Anurag, Maihang, Moon and Deepkon. They are given up for dead, until Deepkon manages to send them a message via radio transmission that he is stranded in the forest and badly injured. However there is no way they can go to his rescue, as the army is keeping watch. When the army finally withdrew, the guerrilla band sends out a search party that includes Pratyush, to retrieve the dead bodies. After two days of searching, the party is about to call off its search. Suddenly they hear someone crying out weakly in the distance. They come across Deepkon lying hidden within some tall elephant grass. The narrator describes the bullet-ridden, emaciated body of Deepkon thus:

> (Deepkon's) bullet-ridden leg had swollen considerably and resembled a bloated banana tree…They had never imagined that Deepkon would be alive in such a fashion. The ensuing sight horrified Pratyush and his troop. The smell of rotting flesh was wafting in the air. Kamal examined Deepkon's bullet-ridden leg by lifting it carefully and saw, to his horror, that hundreds of insects came crawling out of the holes that had been bored into the flesh by the bullets. Deepkon screamed in intense agony. The horrifying sight of insects crawling out of the body of a living person filled Pratyush with so much disgust that he was forced to close his eyes (146).

Somehow clinging on to life, the rotting, insect-ridden, half-cadaverous body called Deepkon resembles a form of the living dead. Pratyush is repulsed by the sight of Deepkon's cadaver-like body because he had never associated life with such images of decay. Deepkon meanwhile begged weakly for water, but there was none to be found. Even though it had rained the night before, the harsh tropical sun dried up everything. But Deepkon, who hadn't drunk anything for about five days, had grown desperate. He begs his comrades to open their sweat ridden vests, and squeeze any drop that would come out of them and put them to his lips. Eventually, seeing no other alternative, one of

the guerrillas, Kamal, takes off his vest and squeezes it near Deepkon's parched lips. Pratyush cannot bear to look at this sight. When he turns his gaze back to that terrible scene, he sees that Deepkon is still sucking Kamal's damp vest. "Such was the bitter taste of revolution," he thinks to himself (147). This encounter with a form of death-in-life and the horror that accrues from it makes Pratyush face up to the limit of his individuality, as he witnesses human matter being reduced to pure thinghood. Here, the human body, to paraphrase Bataille, is encountered at the limit—it is gradually reduced to decomposing, malleable matter that is no longer recognizable under any concept of the "human" (*Accursed*, 223).

A small contingent is sent back to the base camp with Deepkon; meanwhile, Pratyush and a few others go in search of Anurag. Eleven days after his disappearance, the search party finds Anurag. Miraculously, the wounded Anurag had somehow managed to frame a little dwelling with leaves and branches. He is sleeping there when the search party discovers him. Somehow he managed to divert a tiny stream of water from a neighboring brook. The water from the brook had sustained him for those days. Upon seeing his comrades, the weakened Anurag could hardly keep his eyes open. But he managed to mutter that if they hadn't arrived on that day, he had resolved to commit suicide to end his suffering. Anurag's body is totally wasted and shrunken. By the time they find him, the search party itself runs out of food. Only Pratyush has a *roti* (leavened bread) from the day before, which has now become as hard as leather. Pratyush softens the *roti* by chewing it himself and passing on the masticated remains to Anurag, who gobbles it greedily. Ruminating on this scene, Pratyush remarks—"Reality is so cruel!" (151). Indeed, "reality," as Amery says, is sustained by the indistinction between

imagination and event. Encounters with limit events like the above shatter this illusory indistinction as the auditor confronts the horror of decomposing, malleable human matter directly. Reality becomes "cruel" destroying the reassuring distance and space for retreat provided through mediation.

Later, when Anurag is recovering in the base camp, he revealed to Pratyush that he survived through those terrible days by convincing himself that he was only acting at being injured, and that his comrades too were scourging through the forest acting as if he were lost (151). The only resource for survival was to separate the mind from the body as far as possible, and to think as if the privations that the body went through were happening to another person who was only wearing the mask of Anurag. This subjective strategy of survival is a common one in situations of extreme bodily privation. Amery, for instance, speaks about the "astonishment" and "amazement" felt by victims of torture. Such feelings arise because of the dim realization that the Other is an absolute sovereign over my own being. One of the common ways in which the subject can cope with and survive through such situations is to split one's subjectivity into an "I" and a "you." The pain is externalized to the "you"—the objectified part of the self—while "I" look at it from the "outside" as an astonished or amazed observer. In Anurag's situation, nature seems to be the absolute sovereign. The way in which the fear of death caused in slow degrees by this absolute sovereign can be kept at bay is to imagine that he is part of a childhood game where he is only *acting* at being injured, and his comrades are searching for him *acting* as if he were lost. The extreme pain and privation endured by the body could be kept at bay through this act of looking at oneself from the "outside" as it were, while at the same time being astonished that one's corporeality could sustain such

deprivation. Anurag's survival strategy thus resembles what Bataille calls the "miraculous" dimension of existence—those simple, unanticipated moments experienced through the body which escapes the reach of the sovereign

These reflections provoke Pratyush to think that guerrillas like Anurag and himself were characters in a tragic play (151). For Pratyush, this act of imagining himself to be part of a tragic play becomes a way of distancing himself from the nihilistic onset of extreme melancholia. It becomes a way of attributing a semblance of heroism to their acts, while he himself is doubtful about this logic of heroism. And how does this "tragic" play end? It ends with the flight of the guerrillas to an uncertain future, as Pratyush faces similar situations on their final trek through Bhutan into Assam. Just as he is about to cross the border into Assam in inky darkness, Pratyush reflects:

> Everything was now quiet and still. Occasionally the stillness was pierced by the trumpeting of a wild elephant. It was as if the wind blowing through the somber forest would merge with this distant sound. The curtain had fallen on the battlefront. The only thing which was left behind was the ancient song of the forest. The music of that song was echoed by the reverberating music of the happy songs of the Bhutanese milkmen whom Pratyush had left behind forever…although even amongst that song was hidden the sound of many battles, the fearful heartbeats ramming against the innocent chests of Maina-Pahikon-Tutu, the painful writhing of youths like Anupam whose lives remained unfulfilled because of the splinters from the bullets and mortar shells that had infiltrated their body. All of these were part of the song of the forest, *borangar ngang*; where laughter and tears, happiness and extreme sorrow became one and the same…Someone's dream was fulfilled through such misery, whereas for others there remained only the pain of broken dreams (207).

This elegiac passage of leave-taking brings the curtain down on the melancholic drama of partisans in Bhutan. The text ends with an open-ended present—we cannot be sure what will happen to the guerrillas after the curtain falls and the lights blank out.

But is there anything that we can salvage from this tale of the defeated revolutionaries, their ruined bodies and worlds, and the "cruel" realities that they

encounter on a daily basis? An answer, I think can be ventured from a brief comment that Xarma makes in his preface to the novel:

> *Borangar Ngang* can never be a complete history; it is just a minute part of the bloody history of the last three decades, starting from the Hukong district in Myanmar to the last few days in the dense forests of Bhutan. Upto the point when the fires that burn Assam are not doused, till then *borangar ngang* will also remain incomplete. The partial nature of many of the things I have said through this novel can be attributed to this incompleteness. I hope that a stable peace will one day complete *borangar ngang*.

Boranagar Ngang thus is a presentist allegory whose incomplete nature and inability to properly fulfill its referent gestures towards the incomplete and contingent nature of the "peace" in Assam, and in the eastern borderland region as a whole, in the present day. This unstable peace is built on the ruins of many unfulfilled and destroyed lives like those of Deepkon and Pratyush. The suffering, broken body of the defeated guerrilla exists as a symbolic, almost invisible trace in the history of his/her own time, an increasingly obscure figure that appears sporadically in texts like *Borangar Ngang*. To re-read the history of an exceptional zone such as the eastern Indian borderlands from the perspective of the ruined revolutionary is to open up the question of the contradictions and incomplete nature of the closures desired by monumental histories and nationalist discourses (including Assamese subnationalism of the kind we encounter in Das's novel). The monumentality of triumphalist histories may forget ruins, the sorrows of defeated figures may fall asleep on evening's shoulders, but every now and then a ghostly, cadaverous remnant from those ruins comes back to remind us of the incomplete nature of what Spivak calls our "vanishing presents." Our task is to train our ears to listen to their voices. Works like *Borangar Ngang* illustrate the "cruelty" of reality for us through a representation of the suffering body in its bare immediacy. Not heed the call of these

suffering bodies, not acknowledging their pain represents what Veena Das calls a “failing of the spirit” on our parts (“Language and Body,” 88).

CONCLUSION: COMING "HOME" TO FEAR.

Each chapter on the literary texts in my dissertation focused on two key aspects—

i) Figures that lie on the threshold between the human and natural (animal, vegetal) being or between "life" and death.

ii) The political possibilities that open up when we contend with the forms of action practiced or employed by the non-humans, sub-humans or living dead (among other such figures) who inhabit zones of exception. These forms of politics are radically contingent and are not predicated on an *a priori* metaphysical idea of being "human."

Thus, the chapter on *The Glass Palace* studied figures that represent part-objects, like the colonized bourgeoisie, or objectified beings, like coolies in plantations. My reading of *An Outline of the Republic* tried to piece together the story of a gendered subaltern who represents a form of excess in the text. Then I read the figure of the refugee as a symbolization of the "waste" produced via the conjunction of the nation-state and violence. Finally, I looked at the figure of the guerrilla as an instance of the living dead. A few texts also gestured towards political possibilities that enabled us to imagine alternatives to the absolute colonization of "life" by the biopolitical state form in our conjuncture. The coded language that Dinu draws from photography in *The Glass Palace* facilitates forms of camouflaged critique against an authoritarian state form. The cross-border alliance between Leela and the Burmese dissidents in *An Outline of the Republic* illustrate that the "darkness" that supposedly lay beyond national borders can still be pierced through modes of action oriented towards publicness. A fleeting moment of solidarity in *Sanglot Fengla* between an Indian soldier and a tortured guerrilla in a

concentration camp demonstrates that the pain of the other can still be contended with and recognized even in the most inhuman of spaces.

As I conclude this dissertation, I turn from the political possibilities immanent in the literary texts to an example from "real life." The photograph below shows a protest by a group of women before a headquarters of the Indian army in the state of Manipur on 15 July, 2004. The women were protesting the torture, rape and murder of a 32 year old woman named Thangjam Manorama, who was picked up from her residence by the army on the evening of 11 July. Manorama was allegedly the member of a banned Manipuri separatist organization: the PLA (People's Liberation Army). A day later, her dead body was found four kilometers from her residence carrying the signs of torture, rape and bullet wounds. On 15 July, half a dozen middle-aged to elderly Manipuri women walked up to the barred gates of the headquarters of the Assam Rifles—a squadron of the Indian army based in the eastern borderlands—at Kangla, Manipur. They women belonged to a human rights group called the Apunba Lup. They wore no clothes and were carrying placards that read "Indian army rape us." The demonstration by the naked women made headlines in the local, national and even the international press. However, the state responded by jailing the women for three months on the charges of disturbing public "peace."[280] Following the public outrage in Manipur following Manorama's death and the naked protest, a few army jawans were convicted. The AFSPA, under whose aegis Manorama had been detained, was also relaxed in towns like Imphal for a while. But as my opening example of Thongkam Sanjit's encounter killing illustrates, the AFSPA is

[280] See Soma Chaudhary's article at Tehelka.com for more details.

very much around in these regions possessing the potential of reducing any borderland subject to the status of bare life.

Figure 5: The "Naked Protest" by the Apunba Lup

Ananya Vajpeyi reads the naked protest by Apunba Lup the as an expression of resentment against the Indian state. Drawing from the work of Jean Amery, she distinguishes the political emotion of resentment from that of revenge. In resentment, Vajpeyi says, the aggressor is not made to “undergo what the victim suffered…but only to become conscious of what he did to change forever the victim’s life” (27). As a political strategy, resentment is often utilized by a weaker side in an unjust war to remind the aggressor of the effects of his brutal actions on the other. Vajpeyi also focuses on the speech acts of the protest banners. The banners did not say “Indian army leave Manipur!”

or "Indian army stop the rape" (31). Instead, they read "Indian army rape us." Focusing on this statement is important because the women were not *resisting* subjects, but *resenting* subjects. They were not using their bodies as weapons—either of the destructive type (the suicide bomber) or the type that resists through moral force (the Gandhian *satygrahi*). Instead the "frightening originality" (M.S. Prabhakara, "The Furies") of this image arose from a different relationship to time than the ecstatic temporality inherent in the utilization of the body as a weapon. There was nothing liberating in the act of the women baring their bodies. Their actions were not oriented towards a future; rather, they were predicated, as Vajpeyi says, on the "insistence of the past" (42). The iconicity of the image arose from an equation of the bare body with a loss of rights. Equating clothes with rights, Vajpeyi says that the absence of clothes on the women's bodies metaphorically stood for the absence of rights for the citizen subjects of the eastern borderlands. The naked bodies of the women in the photograph represented an icon of absolute powerlessness. In such situations of powerlessness, where subjects are reduced to the status of bare life, resentment is one among many of the political emotions that serve as a mode of protest against the brutality of sovereign power.[281] As Amery

[281]Whenever we think about forms of protest in zones of exception, the question of violence immediately rears its head. In my conversations with many of my friends and interlocutors, I have often been asked to spell out clearly whether I support a violent or non-violent resolution to the problems in the eastern Indian borderlands. However, I have always considered the opposition of violence to non-violence to be a false question—one of the reasons why I disagree with Arendt's formulation that violence is "anti-political" in its very essence. My position is that the question of the recourse to violence is ultimately a contextual one. All forms of politics require an audience; because politics, after all, is a performative act. Non-violent forms of politics, like Gandhian *satyagraha* or Martin Luther King's march on Washington, were successful because it was presented successfully before an audience. But such politics may not work in a zone of exception because the very possibility of an audience may be denied to the political performer. This is the real point behind the Orwellian cliché that Gandhian politics would not have worked in a concentration camp (see his essay titled "Reflections on Gandhi"). Unlike what Orwell says in this essay, the success of Gandhian politics cannot be utilized as a yardstick to praise the "natural" liberalism of the British race versus the brutality of Hitlerite Germany. Both the British Empire and the Third Reich

says—"What happened, happened. But that it happened cannot be so easily accepted. I rebel: against my past, against history, and against a present that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history and thus falsifies it in a revolting way" (quoted in Vajpeyi, 48). By refusing to forget, resentment, like other political emotions, stands against the excesses of sovereign power. Developing a vocabulary for such *unrecognizable* political emotions and strategies was one of the primary objects of my dissertation as well.

But have the image of the naked protests and also Thongkham Sanjit's bullet-ridden dead body finally given a "face" to bare life in the eastern Indian borderlands? The circulation of these images has definitely pushed discussion about the status of the eastern borderlands as a zone of exception into public consciousness in India in a way that has not been seen before. This, I think, is a development rich with implications for the future of democracy in India. There is much to celebrate in the sixty-three year long process of democratization in the Indian nation-state. A different and unique vocabulary of democratic politics has developed in India. India also has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. It is definitely not a "fake democracy" as the renowned author Arundhati Roy described it in her controversial recent article in *Outlook*. But it is an abominable fact that zones of exception, like the eastern borderlands or the "tribal" belts

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represented zones of exception of different types. The "success" of non-violent politics in India has to be studied taking the audience that it addressed into account. In the dark spaces of a concentration camp, the very possibility of an audience is obliterated. Would non-violence have worked in the absence of an audience? No. Would violence have worked as a form of protest in such a situation? Maybe yes. That it did not happen in the concentration camps in Germany is a different matter altogether. That is why, I think, the Fanonian reading of violence in *The Wretched of the Earth* has to be placed in its context. Fanon describes the terror-space of the colony as "one vast concentration camp where the only law is that of the knife" (*Wretched*, 232). He is not talking about violence as a political category *in abstracto*, as Arendt seems to presume in *On Violence*. And is violence a legitimate mode of protest in a zone of exception like a camp or a colony. I would say a qualified "yes."

in Central India, where a full-scale war is currently going on between Maoist rebels and Indian security forces, still exist in the Indian nation-state. If critical analysis has to adequately contend with this unfortunate phenomenon, it needs to focus on the conjunction between biopower and sovereign power. Biopower and sovereign power are not mutually exclusive. As the example of the eastern borderlands illustrate, they complement each other producing bare life in the process. The task of representation is to show the point where these two modalities of power converge to produce disposable bodies, and the forms of politics and collectivity that emerge as reactions to such convergences. Representation, like the literary texts I read or the photographs of Sanjit and the Apunba Lup, enable us to "de-transcendentalize" what we hold sacred and move that towards "imagination, away from belief" (Spivak, *Other Asias*, 10). That is still the task of literature and the secular humanities. That is also what giving a "face" to bare life means—not in the banal sense of making subalterns speak, or of speaking *for* suffering victims. It rather represents *my* encounter with a limit. Very often these encounters have the possibility of de-transcendentalizing what I hold sacred. If we dream of imagining a different world, we have to begin the process at "home."

In fact, I choose to begin and end my dissertation with the two photographs of "bare life" in Manipur because they made me encounter a limit and brought me "home" in a very different way. I *identified* with the images of Sanjit and the women of the Apunba Lup. In this concluding paragraph, I will briefly describe the steps of this process of identification. Judith Butler, in her Levinasian inflected reading of the face in *Precarious Life*, argues that any understanding of the relationship between images and humanization has to consider the "conditions and meanings of identification and

disidentification" (145). Identification, she says, relies on the notion of a difference that has to be overcome and it can succeed only by bringing back the difference that it claims to have conquered in the first place. The one with whom I identify is not me, and this fact of not being me then becomes the condition for identification; bereft of this process, identification collapses into identity. How did I, a subject who spent a majority of his life in this zone of exception in relative safety identify with this image? When I first saw these pictures, my first reaction was that of outrage. I was outraged that human beings could be instrumentally reduced to a dead body; that to restore their dignity human beings had to strip themselves to the level of bare naked bodies. My initial reaction probably wasn't very different from a lot of auditors who look at these images. I identified with Sanjit and the women of the Apunba Lup as fellow human beings. But as I reflected on these images further, it slowly brought an identification of a different sort—I felt that it could have been *me* in Sanjit's place. It could have been my younger brother or any of the other people that I love and care for. My father, my mother or my uncles and aunts could have been reduced to protesting like the women of the Apunba Lup. I remembered the anxious note in my parents' voice over the phone one day in the nineties when I would be very late in returning home from a friend's place. I would often remonstrate that I was now a grown-up and could stay out late. My father or my mother would reply with the same sentence—"*Aajikalir dinkaal bhal nohoi, xeikarone bhoi khau*" (The times are not good, that's why we get so scared—*bhoi* means fear in Assamese). When I saw those two photographs, this sentence, which I absolutely detested at that time, kept coming back to me again and again. It was this shock of recognition that led me to write this dissertation.

Like the narrator of *The Point of Return*, these two photographs and the literary texts I read earlier brought me “home” to fear.

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