

The Anticolonial Snapshot: South Asian Disruptions

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PUBLICATIONS

“Living for the Other Half: Slum Specials on Reality TV.” *Studies in South Asian Film & Media Studies in South Asian Film & Media* 4.1 (2012): 39-59.

“Anticolonial Folly and the Reversals of Repatriation.” *The Abject Objection: Essays on the Abject, the Comic, and Ordinary Resistance in the Vernacular Arts*, eds. Nicholas Sammond and Margaret Hennefeld (forthcoming).

Book Review. Leela Gandhi, “The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900-1955.” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 16.6 (2014): 926–937.

“Cheap Rice Limited: On Famine Photography.” *Photography and Culture* (Bloomsbury) (under review).

PRESENTATIONS

Invited Talks

“Militant Hindu Nationalism Online.” 2012
Centre for Internet and Society, India
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Modern Language Association, Austin, TX
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Photographic Archives Research Group, Brown University, RI
- “Embedded in Police Raids: Photography and Non-Referentiality.”
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- “The Partition Photography Project.” 2014
Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, RI
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Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Seattle, WA
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Family of Man and Its Aftermath: Photography and Human Rights, Brown, RI
- “Bodily Remains and Statements of Horror in Partition Photography.”
Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Chicago, IL
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World Picture, University of Sussex, U.K.
- “Living for the Other Half: Heterotopic Slums and Touristy Pieties in The Big Switch.”
Console-ing Passions, Boston, MA
- “The Monstrous Arrivant: Technology’s Future Opened and Closed.”
Derrida Today, University of California, Irvine, CA
- “People Have to Know: Graphic Witnessing and Humanitarian Politics in The Photographer.” University of Montreal, Canada
- “Raw Nature’s Denatured Rawness: Between the Colossus and Homo Monstrosus.” 2011
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Introduction to Cinematic Coding and Narrativity, Prof. Philip Rosen 2014

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Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Their Others, Prof. Ellen Rooney 2011

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Guest Lectures

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Introduction to Film and Media Studies Seminar, Colgate University, NY

“On Atrocity Photography and the Punctum.” 2014
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Visualizing Human Rights Seminar, Rhode Island School of Design, RI

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistantships, Brown University

With Prof. Bhargupati Singh, Anthropology 2014-2015

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With Prof. Ariella Azoulay, Comparative Literature and MCM 2014-2015

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Archival Research

- Presbyterian Historical Society Archive, Philadelphia, PA 2015
- Citizens’ Archive of Pakistan, Chicago, IL 2015
- Photo Division and Press Information Bureau, New Delhi, India 2014
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, India 2014
- British Library, India Office Records, Prints and Photographs Collections, London 2014
- Gandhi Ashram Archives and Library, Ahmedabad, India 2014
- Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad, India 2014
- National Archives of India, New Delhi, India 2013

EXHIBITIONS

- Women at the End of Empire, Photo Exhibit 2016
Granoff Center for the Creative Arts, Brown University
- Creator and Facilitator, The Partition Photography Project 2014-2015
An online collection of everyday 1940s South Asia (URL: partitionphotography.tumblr.com)

ORGANIZATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND ACADEMIC SERVICE

- Panel Organizer and Chair, *Photographic Events and Geopolitical Frames* 2015
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Departmental Representative, Graduate Student Council, Brown University	2012-2013
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Graduate Coordinator, <i>MCM@50</i> Three-Day Alumni Event, Modern Culture and Media, Brown University	2011
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WORK EXPERIENCE

Copy Editor, Digital Humanities Quarterly, Providence, RI	2011-2013
Teacher, Primary Years Program, Ahmedabad International School, India	2009-2010
Copy Editor, Oxford University Press, Education Division, New Delhi, India	2007-2008
Copy Editor, The Times of India, Ahmedabad, India	2006-2007
Translator, Katha Centre for Translation Studies, Ahmedabad, India	2006-2007

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Modern Language Association
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LANGUAGES

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DATE OF BIRTH: December 30, 1986

Frontispiece



Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Madiga Bridal Pair* (1909)

A tribal photograph was taken there, with the result that a deputation subsequently waited on me with a petition to the effect that "We, the undersigned, beg to submit that your honor made photos of us, and has paid us nothing. We, therefore, beg you to do this common act of justice." The deputation was made happy with a *pourboire*.

-- Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1909)

I met History once, but he ain't recognize me...
– Derek Walcott, *The Schooner 'Flight'*

Is that all? No, for I am still held by the image.
– Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*

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My enduring debt is to my committee. Till I read Ellen Rooney's scholarship, I never knew my own project. Under her inspiring and rigorous direction, I wrote wildly speculative drafts knowing that only her unreserved reading could bring me closer to getting my argument right. Drawn to Ariella Azoulay's fearless and kind spirit, I found myself in photo archives, the ground she broke anew and generously left open for the rest of us to tread on. Bonnie Honig's incisive, analytical feedback had me bubbling with delight. Leela Gandhi personified the care, humility, and wonder of insight. I am so grateful for my committee's mentorship as well as the support of faculty and staff of Modern Culture and Media and the graduate community at Brown.

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From eight thousand miles away, I dedicate this work to my parents, Shilpa and Ravi Mehta, whose steadfast love and total devotion bring me home no matter the distance.

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INTRODUCTION: PICTURE DISRUPTION

Anticolonialism is not a movement of opposition. It is a site of contestation. Rather than attend to a will-to-oppose, I theorize anticolonialism as the missing third term between colonialism and its opponents. A third term, one that accounts for mediation between antagonists, is necessary because the official markers of anticolonial success – national self-determination and native self-representation – frequently mirror the colonial structure, even as they are deployed as refusals of it. Independence from British rule through the Partition of India and Pakistan is one such failure of opposition, where gendered repatriation makes comparable colonial and decolonial states. Emancipation through autobiography is another failure of opposition where the craze for victimhood makes analogous colonial othering and colonized self-representation. That is to say, repatriation and victimhood exemplify tropes of resemblance between antagonistic interests, demonstrating the persistence of colonialism through the ruse of its termination.

At stake in my move against oppositional movement, then, is an anticolonialism that exists in the mode of the possible, in poses, looks, scenes, structures, tropes, figures, textures, and infinite little particulars that hold us. Implicated in formal devices, anticolonialism is nothing but an ever-renewed mediation between antagonists of injury and freedom.¹ Stopping short of concrete outcomes, turning away from declarations of intent, the analytic possibilities of anticolonialism as mediation are strengthened by two

paths renounced in the yearning for opposition: archive formation and close reading. The difficulty and care of close reading, the slow and risky exertion of archive formation, are, as I will show in the dissertation, essential to disrupt the stubborn persistence of colonial resemblances. At stake, therefore, is a subject of mediation in the colonial situation. This subject was made inconsequential in the yearning for willfully achievable freedom, from Aime Cesaire to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. Using literary and visual media for disruption, anticolonialism has invented an apparent life of immediacy where it assumes that the will-to-oppose frees it from the compulsion to read closely and archive imaginatively. For anticolonialism to surprise us, the transcendental subject of opposition must be deposed from the archives that we create. In this dissertation, I let my reading of inconsequential formal devices take root in movements of opposition – mutinies, accession to statehood, and armed insurgency – to reveal anticolonialism as minute and transformative disruption.²

There is no doubt today that colonialism is valuable only in so far as it is read for disruption. The ground gained by critical and cultural theory, postcolonial studies, settler colonial studies, gender and sexuality studies, and race and ethnic studies, shows that the university not only authorizes the reading of disruption but is itself a structure disrupted. Over the last year alone, students brought down the statue of Cecil Rhodes at a South African university and went on strike against educational apartheid in the U.S., India, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Venezuela, Brazil, the Congo, Canada, the U.K. and the Netherlands. In doing so, they joined the millions worldwide who marched on May Day against neoliberal restructuring; they joined Peruvians who demanded divestment from

mining projects, Americans who organized against state racism, and indigenous Nepalese who formed the longest human chain, among others. The sheer proliferation of protest movements and images of agitators is a testament to the iterative possibilities of disruption. But anticolonialism has become so useful, its proliferation so smooth, pleasant, and navigable, that the time has come to read its futile image in the barely available archive. With every rupture, the movement of opposition proclaims an inauguration of tremendous value – this is where it all starts, this is *just* the beginning – and the question of anticolonial images in the political, academic, and popular imaginations seems, yet again, and always, too urgent, too tumultuous, too evident for us to breathe the archival dust clouding the inconsequential document of history. Therefore, this dissertation not only breathes the dust of the inconsequential but infects the anticolonial snapshot residing in glassy, air-conditioned cases and moving across pristinely glowing screens, with the intractable futility of opening an album and finding only a dead roach, of accessing a website over fifty times and only ever viewing an error code, of seizing a single word with an obsession so grand that the text becomes less negotiable with the irrelevance we produced.



Photo 1: Pests in a rare manuscript collection, Roja Muthiah Research Library, India.

The willful subject cannot tolerate a bad archive of inconsequence. Here, documents end as meals for pests; decomposition of rare books is a customary recycling; the jolt of useless particulars derails bygone readings; negatives are burnt because there may be digital copies; and missing texts go unmissed. In contrast to the bad archive, willful anticolonialism progresses by a well-honed mechanism of iteration, repeating what it declares foundational, preserving what it knows as valuable, following archival rules relating to boxes of rare volumes, kilometers of photographic materials, shelves of alphabetized index cards, to networked images online that are designed to repeat the most viewed material as the most valuable.

It is no surprise, then, that upon hearing the terms “anticolonial” and “snapshot” together, we are taken by the notion of willful opposition. We picture agents of disruption with “a

rock in one hand and a camera in another,” the most cited phrase from the Third Cinema manifesto. The camera is a gun, say Solanas and Getino, plunging anticolonialism into the heady machismo of violent mimesis to bind it to image production. Anticolonial snapshots, it would seem, are analogous to rocks thrown by agitators, miming the actions of the referents they frame. The assumption that, the image *is* an agitator because it is an index of agitators, haunts our theorizing of the anticolonial snapshot. Instead of being forgotten and gathering dust, the anticolonial snapshot cuts through the colonial encounter with the velocity of projectile weapons. Ensconced at the heart of anticolonialism’s eruption, then, is the image of the rock thrower, the mass striker, the performer of ‘die-ins.’

I seek to dislodge this mimetic image of willful anticolonialism by assembling new archives of the non-mimetic, the selectively indexical, and the non-referential possibilities that accompany the inconsequential, whether it is an archive of identification portraits that hum with the muscular tension of deported women or an archive of decorum in the studio of nineteenth-century incarceration or an archive of rhetorical errancy in anti-caste agendas for representing victimhood. The “non-mimetic,” “the selectively indexical,” and “the non-referential” are simply methods to break anticolonialism’s analogizing of the action of the image and the referent, to ask what possibilities arise when mediations do not analogize resistance, when we divest the anticolonial snapshot of its mimetic impulse: How does a pose struggle with the notion of struggle? Is there an anticolonialism to geometry? Can an inter-species ecology claim anticolonialism? What role does irony play in the narrative of violation?

The bad archive reveals not only mediations with a different stake but discloses traces of anticolonial subjects that oppositional movements inscribe as superfluous. These subjects are mediated as permanently incapacitated, written off as too injured to have a say or judged as too free to warrant one. In the current archiving of opposition as inauguration, the proliferation of the willful subject is offset by the effacement of minor subjects and the erasure of their repeated effacement. In my photo-literary exploration of modern South Asia, I create an archive out of minor images, instead of mirror images, reading anticolonial possibilities that arrive in the wake of minor subjects estranged from any stake in the mimetic image of freedom. Through the bad archive of inconsequence, I read everyday mediations of subjects deemed futile in the movement of willful anticolonialism, subjects such as transported convicts after the Mutiny of 1857, raped and repatriated women after the Partition of 1947, and victimized dalits (ex-untouchables) after the indictments of caste apartheid in the twentieth century, especially since 1970.

Engaging with photographic and literary production, critical theory, and archival practices, my dissertation identifies an anticolonialism that does not repeat or resemble the colonialism it aims to contest. To write a history of anticolonial contestation beyond the achievement of independent state sovereignty and assertions of otherness, I read mediations that have been unrecognizable as anticolonial since putatively antagonistic regimes of the former colonizer and colonized mirror each other. ‘The anticolonial snapshot,’ I propose, is not a blend of aesthetic innovation and political activism – a tactical enterprise of disruption – but a compendium of inconsequential, often vernacular,

images that expose the play of sameness between opponents, and offer a significant contrast to both, breaking the disastrous resemblances of the colonial relation. In three chapters, my dissertation argues that, through the photographic and literary image, anticolonialism can be read as the third term of possibilities.

Each chapter identifies in its first movement a key trope of resemblance between antagonistic interests, namely (1) the aesthetics of sameness after mutinies in the late 19th century (2) the economy of repatriation after the partition of 1947, and (3) the ethics of victimhood after caste radicalism of 1970s. Together, these tropes of resemblance offer a theory of colonialism's persistence, permutation, and permeation into newer rounds of segregation and expendability in the decolonized population. I mark out this ground not simply to place the event of 1947 in a history of colonial continuity, but to argue that struggles against colonial ideology and attendant racialized expendability are buried and unfinished and outside of the will-to-oppose. If we are to change the question of anticolonialism from opposition to disruption, from closure to contestation, these struggles demand archival attention.

Given the problematic of resemblance, how does an archive of anticolonial contestation come into view? How do we read for disruptions that resemblance cannot coopt? I propose that such an archive can appear only after we disarticulate anticolonialism from state sovereignty and nativist authenticity. Rather than locating anticolonialism in the fight for the state or the flight from it, or in native authenticity, I argue that anticolonialism must be traced in the struggles to live with, resist, submit to, and displace

the colonial relation. I assemble an archive of everyday mediation from overlooked materials, setting to work fleeting, intermittent, small, and unrecognized acts of anticolonialism from documents at the British Library, Press Information Bureau of India, Citizens' Archive of Pakistan, LIFE magazine, the Red Cross, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, among others. Each chapter, in its second movement, reads photographic and literary images as contesting likeness: (1) images of decorous capture (2) images of non-possession, and (3) images of offensive pleasure.

Chapter 1, "How Sameness Became Unsafe for Empire," mobilizes against what historians have called the "aesthetics of the same," a rubric for nineteenth-century Indian and European photographers whose picturesque landscapes look alike. My chapter turns to portraits of criminal captivity after the failed mutiny of 1857, asking how the decorum of captives acts as a rejoinder to empire's self-sameness, which, as I show with *Robinson Crusoe* and first contact ethnography, relies on the primitive threat. I read decorous captivity as disrupting the ideology of both the picturesque and the primitive. In convict photography, I submit, colonized captives exhibited self-possession and workmanlike aloofness in the same moment that empire dispossessed them of land and labor rights. The pose of decorum inserts difference in the police's staging of racial denigration and in the aesthetic staging of sameness. I show the remaking of anticolonial subjectivity, masculine and feminine, in images by Oscar Mallitte, John Tressider, Darogah Abbas Ali, transported convicts and frontier officers, where details such as Victorian posing chairs, slender leg irons, oriental shawls, and courtesans' affluent boudoirs, signal self-distancing from injury through a pose of respectability.

Chapter 2, “Women Against Repatriation’s Marketplace,” calls attention to images of non-possession among displaced women subjects in order to unsettle the economy of violent repatriation that made colonial and decolonial regimes comparable in the post-colonial accession to state sovereignty. This chapter takes as paradigmatic the violence of women’s exchange and return across India-Pakistan borders after Partition. While masculinist anticolonialism played out through real and imagined violence against women, rescinding the native status of women to preserve the integrity of patriarchal households, I ask how repatriated and raped women imagined freedom. I theorize anticolonialism from the ground of women’s exchange, defining it as the non-possessive affirmation of being an irretrievable subject during the retrieval of correct patriarchal ties. The chapter brings together post-rape images, local testimony, Saadat Hasan Manto’s vernacular fictions, images by missionaries, and by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Margaret Bourke-White, to uncover women’s quiet and imperfect acts of freedom. I analyze the transvestism of heroic knights within testimony, the muscular tension in the pose for identification photos, and the literary punishment of rapists at a time of de facto amnesty, to give an account of exchanged women as anticolonial subjects – an account missing from South Asian Studies’ vast research on the topic.

Chapter 3, “The Native Informant Gives Offense” argues that the photo-literary image of caste radicalism has been read dominantly in the mode of auto-ethnographic sobriety and social realism that privileges violence, austerity, and renunciation, but is suspicious of pleasure and capital, preferring the victim and witness frame as the most ethical one.

While movements of caste and tribal reform have a unique insight into the persistence of racist ideologies across the event of decolonization, the sanctity and authenticity now attributed to their cultural production are signs of resemblance. “Untouchable” castes and indigenous tribes are valorized as consistently and manageably different, even in their anger. This chapter brings out images of *unmanageable* offense, such as the worship of an idol of “Goddess English” and the celebration of the epistemic violence of T.B. Macaulay’s infamous “Minute on Indian Education” on *Dalit Camera*, a YouTube channel. A new ethics of withdrawal from fetishized alterity develops in the tropes of inappropriateness, fantasy and pleasure, neoliberal cosmopolitanism, and unscrupulous politics in the texts of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Wendy Ewald, Shyam Selvadurai, and vernacular language novels such as Joseph Macwan’s *The Stepchild*, which disrupt the ethnographic slot reserved for the lower castes and indigenous tribes in self-declared anticolonial positions.

My dissertation, thus, enters into anticolonial thought through formal devices of visual archives and literary texts. I progress intermedially in my argument. I re-read photography for its figural quality (e.g. sound, epic simile, paradox) and literature for its visual imagination (e.g. snapshot, insight, jigsaw), bringing the assumptions of both media to continuous rupture. Re-reading is not to know all the details missed in the previous reading but to produce the detail that makes the previous reading untenable. As we will see, a detail does not have to be laden with meaning in order for it to disrupt how a text has been read. The archive of inconsequence in all three chapters is assembled by my personal investment in reading the specificity of form without claiming an

exceptional status for any device. Only re-reading reveals how anticolonialism has hidden from itself by its mediation. Since the best way to describe a reading is to produce it, there is nothing left to do but begin again and begin truly, now.

¹ I take the phrase “ever-renewed mediation” from Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*.

² On the inconsequential, see Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause*.

CHAPTER 1

How Sameness Became Unsafe for Empire

The indigenous peoples of the colonies were not even left their eyes for weeping.

– Antonio Gramsci, *The War in the Colonies*

A convict photograph is perhaps the last place to find a staging of freedom in the colony. If anything, it stages an impediment to the reclamation of freedom and enacts the visual subjugation of the colonized captive. Despite the fact that they are largely unhelpful in aiding police detection work, convict photographs in the late nineteenth century have been discussed primarily in terms of pseudoscientific detection, through discourses of physiognomy, phrenology, anthropometry, and so on.¹ It is, of course, outrageous to see bodies held to grids of measurement and treated as specimens to assert a hierarchy between the races of man. The modern-day mug shot still carries a whiff of this scandal in the norms of frontal and lateral profiling.² Photographs of captives, thus, have become critical mainstays for condemning the hermeneutic of visual technology, racist evolutionary pseudoscience, and denigration through knowledge making.³ But this default hermeneutic needs to be undone in order to analyze the captivity scene after the Mutiny of 1857 in South Asia, when the colonized revolted unsuccessfully against the British.⁴ After 1857, many rebels were captured, photographed, and transported or executed as punishment. The convict photographs, however, do not consistently convey dispossession, indignity, and debasement. Instead, they often suggest a striking

equanimity, thus extending and strengthening the very anticolonialism that led to their making, despite the colonial history of suppression they simultaneously “document.”

Like a worthy bourgeois sitter, the death-row convict in the studio props his hands carefully and focuses his gaze sideways, and, even shackled, he exudes self-possession. Like workmen, convicts at the frontier maintain aloofness from the scene of their penal transportation, thus proclaiming the alienation of forced labor. The photographic situation, through common codes such as the pose, prop, attire, angle, and backdrop, recasts captive and captor in perceptible sameness. To put this in slightly different terms, an aesthetic of sameness conjoins performative self-possession and land/labor-based dispossession in the figure of the photographed captive. This chapter argues that convict photography both proceeds from and contests an aesthetic of sameness. In her analysis of Andean Indian albums made for the French metropolis, Deborah Poole discloses an “aesthetic of the same.” She uncovers the counterfeit formulae that led to a sense of sameness in the interaction between colonizer and colonized. For example, one and the same native would be photographed to model different trades such as water carrying, lice picking, mule driving, rope making, and so on – each image a neat, repeatedly orchestrated, symmetrical match for albums in colonial bourgeois homes.⁵ To Poole, this corrupt “aesthetic of the same” distorts the social reality of the colonized. While this chapter also addresses the problem of aesthetic practice vis-a-vis sameness, it does not seek to revive a latent or “true” reality of social difference behind the putative colonial trick or artifice of sameness. Rather, my goals are to emphasize that there can be no anticolonial aesthetic of sameness without disruption and to examine what an attention to

disruption in the colonial relation permits us to say about photographic decorum and anticolonial subject formation. My account of colonized survival in the form of politeness, manners, and rarefied custom in convict photographic culture complicates the unspeakable brutality of captors as well as the barbaric crimes attributed to captives. It unsettles the notion that the white bourgeoisie alone defined civility on the basis of colonial violence, forcing us to ask how the colonized classes and sexes negotiated the value of decorum even as they were condemned to servitude, exile, and death; how they challenged the colonizers' demands for savage comportment while still resisting automatic docility; and how they remained anticolonial in an interval of civility, during the photo opportunity, thus to attain a measure of freedom from the abasement and perverse remaking of the self devised by the penitentiary system.⁶

This chapter studies anticolonialism as it is structured by the carceral photograph. I analyze penitentiary images through codes of decorum that contest the systematic breakdown and “reform” of the convict after his removal from social ties and his confinement to a grotesquely shrunk reality in varying degrees of isolation. Whereas the colonial regime assumes that decorum functions as the instrument and proof of civilization, I identify early photographs whose correctness places convicts beyond the reach of correction and isolation. Here, photographic decorum, or, the mediation of social intercourse in penal captivity, is the limit of the colonial imaginary. The chapter submits that convict photography led to the formation of an anticolonial racial subjectivity after the failure and criminalization of rebellion, when colonized populations were transported to cellular jails built often on secluded islands. I read “decorous captivity” as the pose of

the colonized subject who distances injury via courtesy, even as injury is being enacted, with the result that an impossible self-affirmation develops out of the infrastructure of confinement.⁷ I argue that convict photography functions to (a) disrupt the self-sameness of ethnographic and picturesque aesthetics; (b) locate racial-sexual antagonism in a tasteful photographer-sitter dialogue, rather than the lamprey grid; and (c) expose global capital accumulation in an aesthetic frame. Creating a new archive of convict photography that re-assembles the colonial trace beyond pseudoscience, the chapter reads scenes of freedom imagined under captive conditions. It brings together photographs by British civil surgeon John Nicholas Tressider, Indian municipal engineer Darogah Abbas Ali, French surgeon Oscar Mallitte, as well as amateur photos by political officers and unnamed convicts. By drawing on a wide range of seldom-seen penitentiary shots by artists, bureaucrats, captors, and prisoners across the spectrum of nationality and ethnicity, I build a convict photography archive that decarcerates decorum. Unlike the pseudoscience hermeneutic, which “always risks governing too much,” the new archive arises from tracking colonialism’s attempt to inflict just enough violence to dissolve ruthlessly and re-make the captive as safe and productive for empire.⁸

Wanting to break with pseudoscience, one recalls that pseudoscience is more than a hermeneutic – it is a structure that archives. Since Allan Sekula’s pioneering essay “The Body and the Archive,” pseudoscience has imposed provenance, order, and control over the visual production and analysis of racial-sexual captivity and punishment, starting with Galton, Bertillon, and Lombroso in the nineteenth century.⁹ Sekula targets pseudoscience by reiterating it as an imaginary that supports police regimes: it institutes the form of the

criminal body; it arranges the criminal body next to the respected body as a dark shadow; it profiles all bodies by matching inner character to outer appearance (10-11). However, Sekula does not look to produce an epistemic rupture with pseudoscience, as those working in the field of postcolonial critique might want and expect. Now that we are no longer satisfied with reiterating the problems of pseudoscience, how do we define the convict photograph? How do we change its archival form? How do we distinguish the convict image from the colonial ideology that generates and appropriates it?

The task of this chapter is to transform the reading of convict photography by way of a visual history of dignity, civility, and manners in the racialized scene of privation, transportation, and execution. Indeed, we should not assume we know what the convict photograph is, as though it were reducible to an offender's mugshot that doubles as a wanted poster; and we should not try to determine its "effectiveness" for police regimes since even failure, e.g., when composite sketches cause wrongful convictions, might lead to the consolidation of colonial power.¹⁰ So far, scholarly discussions of convict photography in the British Empire have focused on the crisis of colonial identification practices generated by pre-forensic indexing, ordering, and reading of faces.¹¹ This chapter changes the problematic of convict photography by asking, "In what ways does imprisonment, the experience of doing time for one's captors, rework the colonial scene?" To answer this, the chapter is laid out in five unequal sections about decorous captivity and disruption. First, I analyze convict photos depicting arrest, labor, and play – modes by which anticolonial subjects do time. The second section examines the master-servant dialectic in fiction and photography of isolation. The third section identifies an

optical colonization with economic rather than phenotypic emphases on the “primitive.” The chapter ends with a critique of the status of anticolonialism in photo theory, transitioning to the aporia of gender in photo history, explored at length in the next chapter. Together, the sections investigate the social, economic, and theoretical accounts of anticolonial subjectivity that appear across postcolonial theory, media studies, and cultural critique.

The archive in this chapter takes the pressure of the new sociality that arose between photographers and sitters and spectators in the colonial nineteenth century, focusing on the poses, surprises, and misrecognitions through which the imagistic instantiation of anticolonial subjectivity can be read. After the mutiny of 1857, the official minutes of photographic society meetings across the subcontinent affirm that “the terms of easy [British-Indian] fraternization” – if there ever were such terms – shifted towards suspicion and aloofness.¹² In search of a potential history of subjects living with disastrous relations after the mutiny, I take the photographic management of suspicious sociality and ambiguous hospitality as instituting an archive of convict photography that is not a police archive but an archive of early anticolonial subjectivity that becomes visible when we read captivity for freedom.¹³ Rather than delineate freedom as a marvelous power to break the cells and chains of captivity, I shed light on the continuum between freedom and confinement in the convicts’ social hour spent with photography.

1. Scenes of Captivity: Arrest, Labor, Play



Photo 1: John Tressider: Gungoo Mehter, convicted and hanged at Cawnpore 8th September 1859.

The albumen print of death row convict Gungoo Mehter is at odds with the chilling atrocity tale in which he is both perpetrator and victim. Mehter, a rebel leader of the 1857 war, was charged with the ferocious mutilation and murder of British men, women, and children during the Siege of Cawnpore when he broke the pledge of safe passage for the British garrison, refusing to give them asylum during the actual process of giving asylum. It seems that along with other rebels he guided the British out of Cawnpore during a ceasefire and slaughtered them as they were about to board ships for evacuation. On

death row, Mehter's captors took him to the spot of his crime. He was "[made to] crouch down, and with [his] mouth lick clean a square foot of the blood-soaked floor before being taken to the gallows and hanged."¹⁴ His punishment – licking the bloody ground of the massacre – replays the colonial terror and fantasy of being consumed by cannibals. Anthropophagy as penitential correction assimilates anticolonial violence as an anthropophagic crime retrospectively, the repeated interest in defilement and disfigurement making mutinous and reformatory acts commensurate by square footage. Yet, surprisingly, photography does not facilitate Mehter's debasement. Rather, it defers the regime's revenge for his withdrawal from civility and redirects both into a return to civility. Decorous captivity is a temporary pause in, an arrest of, the slippage between violence inflicted by colonizer and colonized.

Mehter's haunted eye bulges out of his dazed face, his starving side profile silhouetted against the arrestingly sparse décor of John Tressider's studio. The use of a one-armed Victorian chair to help him maintain his pose is incongruous since such posing chairs were, in all likelihood, designed to allow white bourgeois couples to pose, the man standing behind the seated woman with her gown unfurled, on the armless side.¹⁵ Here, the chair's elegant handle draws attention to leg irons, the hand that holds them, and a curiously long fingernail. In the sepulchral light, Tressider shoots his black subject in a wild improvisation on the same theme that preoccupies his other clientele, British families living in the colony: home and empire.¹⁶ The theme of home and empire in Tressider's studio is reconstituted by disruption with the carceral's permanent removal of

prisoners from their family and friends and all other vestiges of a pre-carceral life, from home, for the sake of empire.

The underexposed subject indicates that the optical apparatus – consisting of photographers, monocular lenses, skylights, the chemistry of darkrooms, and a range of manufacturers and dealers – was struggling to see black skin despite its integral bias and calibration towards whiteness as norm.¹⁷ Historically, the visual instantiation of black and brown subjects took place through the same technologies of lighting, emulsion, speed, and aperture that were developed to produce the likeness of white skin. Black skin as such disrupted the sameness of optical technology. Tressider's photograph sets up a relation between opaque blackness and anticolonial violence through decorous captivity, distancing injury by the use of gestures and props associated with white bourgeois portraiture. In the studio, Mehter is not hailed as a source of pseudoscientific anatomic information but called upon to participate, even when confined, in the apparent restoration of hospitality, resuming a pledge he had broken to practice anticolonial rebellion. As Mehter's body in the studio creates a transracial linkage with the optical apparatus, as his opacity transforms into and receives value from civil dialogue and social intercourse, one wonders, how did the photographer and the sitter arrive here? What was said that day between Mehter and Tressider? In what language? Did Mehter see his likeness? How many re-takes? How long did it take to prepare this portrait? From a scene of interpellation whose details are unavailable, we can at least say that early photography creates a precedent for an anticolonialism that is constituted and held mid-pose as a prolonged moment of stopped motion. Prior to the invention of roll film and portable

handheld cameras, the photographic medium was always too late and too slow to record the “action shot” of anticolonial violence. By chronicling the decorous captivity of a rebel brought back to hospitality before being executed, the pose of early photography forces us to redefine the anticolonial subject from within the civil interval of violence, i.e. from the space between mutiny and penitentiary wherein the common denominator of violence is displaced.

Mehter freezing for his studio portrait neither placates the vengeful master through servility nor appeals to him in the manner of a primitive “hell-dog’s...terrific embodiment of matted hair, rolling eyes and cruel teeth.”¹⁸ He is neither pacified nor unconquered. Photo 1 differs from the ceaseless transparency, measurability, knowability, and invasiveness that have come to characterize the reading of the genre.¹⁹ This historical moment of anticolonial fashioning owes much to the commercialization of studio portraiture, exemplified by but not limited to the legacy of Andre Disderi.²⁰ An undefined respectability, no doubt aided by turban and moustache, and arising in the photographic overlap of taste, commerce, and reciprocity of self-possession and dispossession, agitates the narrative of populations disciplined through visibility. Subaltern studies historian David Arnold has theorized the colonial prison on the Indian subcontinent as an expression of juridical power, medical experimentation, and penology, and in this way, a microcosm of modern social space outside the prison. But Tressider’s convict photography undercuts this dominant evidential logic to show that colonial power and rebellion had performative stakes, such as the corrective restoration of hospitality, that had little to do with constituting or attacking the captive body’s knowability and

visibility in a continuation of surveillance regimes.²¹ Yet, if pseudoscience objectifies by scrutinizing and knowing, decorous captivity raises this question for us: Is anticolonial subjectivity nothing more than the sitter remaining inscrutable in the wake of a power that seeks to know? The pose of photographic decorum – the very thought of the pose as social intercourse underpinning the still image’s illusion of instantaneity and its repetition in every event of early photography that is taken in a milieu of massacre and isolation – destabilizes any notion of the total concealment of the captive. Taking the pose as disruptive association between rebel and colonizer rather than sameness, the theorization of anticolonial subjectivity is not confined to the partial inaccessibility of the captive but accounts for surprises, misrecognitions, and his admission into legibility through the work of reading. The social game of photography played with cordiality and decorum, conditioned by mutinous violence and counterinsurgent punishment, offers a glimpse of anticolonialism that breaks with the struggle for ascent to state power in which both captor and captive are interwoven.



Photo 2: John Tressider: Jawala Prasad – the Nana's Commander-in-Chief at Cawnpore. He was hanged on the spot where he commanded on 3rd May 1859.

Tressider's portrait of rebel leader Jwala Prasad ("Joala Persad") demonstrates another step in the production of a convict album. Was it the photographer's decision to add the sartorial sophistication and intricacy of a shawl over Jwala Prasad's bedraggled attire and his ripped-open shirt? The shawl covers most of the chair, providing a sense of pomp and glory to the convict photograph that cannot be easily reconciled with interests on either side of the camera, interests that are split from themselves and mixed up with each other.

If Tressider intended to give Prasad the honors of war through photography, no matter that he was the despised enemy, why retain the dirty shirt? If Prasad intended to withdraw from the pledge of hospitality, as he clearly did during the Siege of Cawnpore, why stage a lyrical decorum through the diagonal look?²² No comfortable conclusion can be drawn here except that photographer and sitter created an anticolonial figure of genuine ambiguity through the photographic medium. The addition of the shawl to Prasad's portrait calls attention to the sartorial decomposition of the British garrison to whom he was to have granted safe passage after the siege: "Worked to death, underfed, and, in the later stages of the siege, starved, their uniforms rotting on their backs...they were such a pitiable sight to behold."²³ They were "destitute of all finery," with "few shoes, fewer stockings, and scarcely any shirts; these had gone on bandages for the wounded."²⁴ It is as though the empire clothes itself again by its investment in the captive's decorum. The signs of prestige associated with the commercial legacy of portraiture as well as the princely glory of court photography persist in this convict photo, becoming all the more remarkable when we compare it with the liminal sitter of Felice Beato's Jwala Prasad ("Jewalla Pessaud").



Photo 3: Felice Beato: Jwala Prasad, rebel leader, circa 1858. (Getty/Hulton)

In the Beato, Prasad appears to be a different man. He enters the anticolonial lexicon differently too, the Europeanized mistranslation of his name appearing as “Jewalla Pessaud” in Beato’s records at the Getty archives. Prasad squats on a flattened plane whose backdrop is retouched to remove any specificity of location, giving the impression that he is on the empty stage of history. Although wrapped in an elaborate turban, with a shawl incorrectly stacked on top of his turban, Prasad resembles an ascetic kneeling in voluntary self-abasement rather than the commander of rebels. There is nothing to be corrected in this penitentiary image. The portrait might be a costume study of an oriental yogi, were it not for his worldly shackles. With the blankness of décor, Beato appeals to

the status of the photograph as a transparent and immediate record of how his sitter looked at that moment, but this appeal is undercut by the translation of the native proper name for English-language audiences. At the same time, Beato, straight from the Crimean war, shoots studio portraits like a war photographer in search of drama after everything newsworthy is over. Too many capes and robes are added, sculpting Prasad's frame and passing for rarified custom in a documentary frame. This photo re-cites the famously indecorous action shot that Beato composed of the mutiny site at Secundra Bagh, albeit in an understated manner. Arriving to photograph key sites a year after the mutiny had ended, Beato ordered that the skeletal remains of massacred rebels be disinterred and arranged across the ruined courtyard. The desire to seize the space and time of a bygone event determines Beato's extreme aesthetic choice. The indecorous detail in Photo 3, unlike the comprehensively outrageous Secundra Bagh image, refocuses attention on the mutinous figure, rather than landscape, through incorrectly accented attire that might be mistaken for the specificity of native custom. In contrast to the repeated sameness of the model symbolizing different trades in Andean ethnography analyzed by Deborah Poole, here, photographs of one and the same subject – Prasad and Prasad, Joala Persad and Jewalla Pessaud, draped in shawl and turbaned cape – demonstrate internal distance in the aesthetics of sameness. The sameness of the colonial carceral progresses through the split subject in the archive.

Pictorialist and anti-picturesque modes of photographing convicts in groups enable us to see a different type of break with the aesthetic of sameness, one that is based on the temporal difference between the moment of arrest and prolonged confinement. I read

Photos 4 and 5 as marked by intensive removal, penal transportation, and forced labor.

These photos restructure the anticolonial subject in relation to the time done every day, instead of the arrest that occurs only once (even if it is photographed repeatedly).



Photo 4: Oscar Mallitte: Nagas, The Murderers of Lieut Holcombe and party. Calcutta, 1875.

In Oscar Mallitte's pictorial photograph, four barefooted Naga tribesmen accused of murdering a frontier expedition party are converted into symbols of taste, feeling, and dignity traditionally associated with sculpture and painting.²⁵ They wear leg-irons and mid-length loincloths in an outdoor set, possibly a prison yard balanced with the angular and circular lines of drapes, shawls, and rug. The sepia-toned print reconstitutes the value of convict photography, claiming for its transcribing mechanism the rank of a fine art composition, as though the convicts were effects of the pictorialist's instructed eye, as though they had not been accused of unpictorial brutality against a lieutenant Holcombe and his troops. Mallitte's stenciled caption adds to his undoubtedly skillful manipulation of what pictorialists saw as the "scant plasticity" of writing with light.²⁶ Along with the *mise en scène*, the look of two shackled subjects (frame right) revises the ephemerality of their violent action against colonizers. The puzzle of decorous captivity can only be addressed by returning to that formative historical moment of the murder of the troops. In the mainland reputation of the Nagas, they were an "isolated" hill tribe of savage head-hunters and raiders who were "incapable of abstraction and sociality" and, therefore, incapable of recognizing sovereign heads.²⁷ The Nagas' group participation in the pictorialist encoding of abstraction and sociality repositions their resistance to British sovereignty from the lack of culture to an expression of it. Anticolonialism becomes durable by severing the default association of culture and colonial state sovereignty.

Heading a military expedition at the frontier, a lieutenant Holcombe and his party of 80 mainland natives, sepoys, lascars, and coolies were killed by tribesmen. With the pretext of avenging Holcombe's death, the British state compensated for its lack of sovereignty

by dispatching two infantry regiments who exterminated much of the tribe, burnt down all the villages, and transported four survivors to the city of Calcutta many miles away. The anticolonial subject is not one that averts reprisal for refusing colonial power. Rather, the anticolonial subject is mediated precisely through the carceral complex of punitive measures. These measures reduce prisoners' lives to a ghastly state of emptiness, where time itself is a condition to be endured. Anticolonialism is not only recuperated by but advances through the carceral frame for which it is a trait to be corrected.



Photo 5: Convicts stone-quarrying at Pulo Obin, Singapore. JFA McNair and WD Bayliss, *Prisoners Their Own Warders, A Record of the Convict Prison at Singapore in the Straits Settlements Established 1825*, published in 1899. This undated photograph was taken between 1864 and 1873, when the prison shut down and convicts under confinement were removed to the Andaman Islands.

Anticolonial subject formation does not need a human portrait. Though one cannot tell immediately, the resignification of decorous captivity is the bedrock of the photograph of a Singaporean stone quarry. In it, colonial carceral injury is not distanced through courtesy but through the apathy of scale and geometry. Radically dissimilar to other penitentiary images, this prisoner-made anti-picturesque photo questions the exceptionality of carceral space. It makes invisible the barriers between incarcerated and free populations, and, with the pictured subjects positioned to elude the gaze in a speckled landscape, interrupts my notions of decorum as social intercourse and of anticolonial subjectivity developing in a civil interval of violence. There is no known historical or inferential connection between mutinous and corrective violence specific to this image, and yet, I reckon with it as I have done others. This is a carceral image under empire that is a theoretical instantiation of anticolonialism, that has a selectively or improperly indexical relation to anticolonialism (see introduction). Divested of human expression, the image invites a geometric conception of anticolonialism whose measure is not the human but the ground marked by enforced labor.

Without a perceivable enclosure or chains, guards or uniforms, three “transmarine” convicts excavate granite below the center of the frame and the fourth squats on frame left to split stone with a chisel.²⁸ The miniscule human figures amalgamate with the quarry’s boulders stretching end to end, the stones’ varying size, density and angularity stippling the picture to make the human presence fuzzy. The long shot of the desolate landscape puts the convicts in the picture as specks that grow more indistinct, multiplying or dwindling the more we stare at them. The photo’s optical illusion speaks to the

colonial project of treating entire races as vanishing points in history. With endless twists of perception, the convict – cut down to size – appears and disappears in the representation of British public works projects that run on convict labor. The mining at Pulo Obin is an example of prison’s well-ordered “intra-mural industries” including slating, blasting, masonry, and so on, and photo 5 is the evidence of industry.²⁹ However, the photograph morphs into misdirections and hallucinations, old and new, every time we look at it carefully: Is there someone near the edge of the cliff? How about someone next to the sieve? Is that even a sieve? The rocks become shrubs that become humans that are impressions and nodes, the fluid configuration of infinitely baffling and flickering shapes exulting over the spectator whose viewing makes visible those shapes in all their indeterminacy. Decorous captivity is entropic here. It is a measure of the disordering of our senses through interrelated displacements of details. The quarry’s ground, though it constantly brings us back to the myth of progress – the civilizing mission of the British empire – far from conforming to the myth, serves as a trope of indifference to its distortions.

Geometry’s distortions of injurious sentiment is a condition of possibility for picturing injury differently. The injury of enforced labor in the condition of banishment springs out of a picture where bodies are detached from scopic desire and from the scrutiny of expressions and gestures typical in narrow carceral spaces. Stony apathy resignifies the injured body on the page from evidential discourse toward a barely discernible yet graspable spectrality. The optical illusion produces a ghostly body peculiar to convict photography but consistent with the dispensing of living death in the colonial carceral.

While the illusionary technologies of spirit photography at the turn of the nineteenth century bound together the index with the ghost, as a trick, the spectral body has, by and large, been a structuring absence of the penitentiary image archive. Photo 5's apathy, then, changes the convict photography archive profoundly by keeping the spectral in the frame. But in what ways does apathy resignify anticolonialism?

This convict photo is inseparable from the aporia of anticolonial subjectivity. It is a photo of convicts taken by convicts on a penal colony managed by convicts who have been promoted to the position of warders, photographers, keepers of records, and so on.³⁰ Which is to say, anticolonial subjectivity is the blind spot of the image of putatively total colonization. Published in 1899 in an official report of a Singapore prison that detained convicts from overseas, a report tellingly titled *Prisoners their own warders*, the photo means to attest to the perpetual production of colonial power by the colonized, even in the absence of the colonizer. This official intent is undermined by the fact that the prison was shut down in 1873, and the remaining convicts were transferred to the Andaman Island jail where prisoners were *not* their own warders. By the time the claim was made in 1899 that the colonizer's disciplinary mechanisms worked in his stead, the exemplary prison of the supposedly self-subjugated colonized was already closed. The Singapore report, thus, deploys a ruse that we know as automatic docility via Foucault, for whom it is not a ruse: there is no longer a colonizer to resist, simply a field of colonial power that produces the body. For Foucault, just an eye – the eye of the panopticon tower that may or may not have a guard – suffices to make docile bodies. I am not interested in settling this debate on whether the specks of labor in photo 5 resisted or submitted to the colonial

carceral, with or without the presence of the colonized and to what degree. Rather, I would argue that the geometric anticolonial subject inaugurated by the image puts disruption beyond the pale of human intention and power. To write a history of anticolonial contestation beyond sameness in convict culture is not to write biographies of individuals, such as Mehter and Prasad, as though they disrupted automatic docility at will through a unique power of their own. It is to read the constitution of forces against the apparently self-sustaining cycles of colonial power, forces that might account for the possibilities of fearless withdrawal from automatic docility and the cultivation of self-possession in dispossession, without being reduced to them. Our interpretations of colonialism's venues of operations (such as the quarry or the treadmill in photo 6) must also move beyond docile thought, beyond the conception of anticolonialism as refusal or resistance, and hence absent from X or Y image, and towards redefining it as unpredictable disruption.

The photo of the stone quarry, even though it includes convicts at work, does not bristle with the physical toil of convict labor. In contrast, photo 6 is weighed down by the bodily pain of long, inhumane stretches of enforced activity by prisoners chained together on a treadmill. The photo presents to us a juggernaut of timeless and repetitive anguish. For the convicts doing time on the treadmill, the torture device must have disintegrated the sense of passing time into nothing but the anxiety of having to move to the next rung in order to prevent injury but being injured nonetheless while working hard to avoid it. The horror of the enforced tread is a counterpart to the long spells of enforced idleness without stimuli and the resultant shrinking of the subject's reality in solitary confinement.

That the convicts are kept shackled on the treadmill gestures toward not only the exacerbation of injury but also discloses as a misreading the prevalent reading that decorous captivity is a principle of self-subjugation.

The photograph of the Burmese convicts on the treadmill documents the injury of the colonized subject using a co-ordinate system of decorum. A chain of successive treadmills constitutes the horizontal axis of combination and the convicts compose a vertical axis by having been selected to work the treadmill. Only one convict in the distance is far enough to return our gaze by craning his neck to the left to the maximum possible angle. Otherwise, the architecture of looks is such that the photo nestles the right to spectatorship from the outside in – we look at the overseers who look at the convicts who look at the steps of the treadmill. Two figures on the ground attired like British officers look back at us with a bodily comfort that is insolent given the apparatus of torture before our eyes.



Photo 6: Watts and Skeen Commercial Studio: Burmese convicts on an overcrowded treadmill in 1901. India Office Library, London.

Historically designed to cure “idleness” in prison populations, the treadmill rotated on a horizontal axis, requiring the prisoners to constantly take a step up. The treadmills were usually made of 24 steps wrapped around a cylinder or turbine, with a handrail for necessary support. Prisoners would climb several thousand feet in a matter of hours and yet stay in the same place. The use of the treadmill as a punitive instrument was abolished in the British metropole by the Prisons’ Act of 1898, but the project of reform in the colonies owed much to the lessons of monotonous terror and severely futile work drawn at the treadmill.³¹ In Photo 6, the end product is not clear but the fact of overcrowding seems to imply there might be an end product, like grinding corn or pumping water, that absorbs the force and momentum of more men than can safely fit on

the steps. In prisoner reform tracts, an hour's worth of fruitless endeavor on the everturning staircase to nowhere promised to "subjugate the most obstinate convict" and infuse in him the spirit of industry, the feeling of futility where one goes nowhere but towards the production of more colonial power. Foucault's remark is useful here to put the treadmill in relation to the deployment of convict labor in public work projects, "As it was initially conceived, penal labor was an apprenticeship not so much in this or that trade as in the virtues of labor itself. Pointless work, work for work's sake, was intended to shape individuals into the image of the ideal laborer."³²

Convict labor is also a potential presence in colonial photographs that depict landscapes of tranquility and decorum.³³ Empire used photography to provide evidence of the myth of progress in the building of roads, barracks, railway lines, canals, and in the cultivation of "industry," as seen in photos 5 and 6. In the first wave of the institutionalization of photography in British India, army officials and public works department employees were trained and equipped with chemical resources and photographic tents to survey the territory, to map the unknown country, and to bring specimens of natives from their "survey" expeditions.³⁴ According to one Reverend John Mullins, "Before new roads and canals were built, photographic surveys would exhibit the nature of the ground they are to traverse, the gradients in which they can be made, and the difficulties that lie in the way," natives being one of the difficulties. The myth of progress, so integral to the project of the "white man's burden," involves the native's unacknowledged share of backbreaking burden in building the white man's road to progress. The erasure of convict labor is corroborated in official accounts, such as the story of "how the Englishman put his hand

to work,” which is, in fact, a story of how the Englishman put his enslaved hands, the convicts, to work. The annexation of convict labor by English enterprise, in such a way that convict labor becomes a cypher, is complete in this address by the Chief

Commissioner of the penal settlement:

Any one observing the work of the English in the East may possibly be struck with the idea that the reason for the acknowledged capacity of the race for colonial enterprise and the maintenance of empire is *the ability and the willingness of the average Englishman to put his hand to any kind of work that may come his way, without any special training*, from framing suitable laws and regulations and creating suitable organisations to making roads and ditches, building houses, and clearing land and ploughing it. Here in Port Blair [Andaman Islands], the officers entrusted with the creation, organisation, and maintenance of the Penal Settlement, have, without any special training for the work, and without any special guidance and teaching, managed with *the worst possible material* to work upon—life and long-term convicts from every part of India and Burma—to create in little more than forty years, upon primeval forest and swamp, situated in an enervating, and until mastered, a deadly climate, a community supporting itself in regard to many of its complicated wants...³⁵

The racialized capacity for enterprise, defined in the slippage between English hands and the hands of the English, will re-appear in the next section on literature and ethnography.

This ruse of self-sameness between the hands that work and the hands that put to work organizes the ethnographic photo production on the convict island. On the Andaman Islands and other penal settlements like Singapore, enforced labor was even assigned to the building of forts of refuge for the English, which were safe havens to be used in case of convict rebellion.³⁶ The stone quarry image tells us that transported captives became “the worst possible material to work upon” precisely because they were the living tools that generated the best possible work for empire – progress and civilization.

The civil interval of violence spans from arrest and convict labor to sex work. Photo 7 consisting of four cartes de visite from an album by Abbas Ali shows the theatricality and

play of decorous captivity. Its subjects are the mutinous courtesans of Lucknow who did time differently in the house of correction than the captured men of the mutiny. Affluent courtesans of Lucknow had distinguished themselves by rising to political power before and during the mutiny, leading rebels on the battlefield and contributing large sums of money to sustain the insurgent forces.³⁷ Instead of arresting those courtesans who were not exiled, the British government punished them through increased taxation, property seizure, and mandatory medical exams under the Contagious Diseases Act, among other corrective mechanisms that tracked their movements and brought them under continual surveillance.³⁸ The courtesans were removed from their roles as custodians of exquisite manners and courtly decorum, and were sent into the British cantonment bazaar as sex workers and dancers.³⁹ The colonizers conflated the *tawaif* (courtesan), the *nautch* (dancing) girl, and the sex worker, the sense of sameness sanctioning the range of corrective measures to which the sexualized female body of the colonized was subject. So, although there is no handcuffing, the cartes are a form of convict photography without shackles. We can access the making of anticolonial female subjectivity in Ali's cartes only by seeing them as carceral media.

Having their visiting cards developed after the defeat of the mutineers, the anticolonial female subject disrupted the colonial administration's aesthetic of sameness, not by overtly refusing the British conflation of sexual roles, but by mobilizing the genre of the courtly masque. The disruption comes with the performance of a pre-mutiny Urdu play *Inder Sabha* (*The Heavenly Court of Indra*), which celebrated allegorically Lucknow's princely court of Wajid Ali Shah – the same court that the British had toppled in 1858

when courtly factions joined the mutiny. During the rule of the nawab, the genre of the masque had offered an outlet for the subtle negotiation of power, rivalries, and intrigue in which patrons, courtiers, and love interests were engrossed at the time. But after the dissolution of nawab Wajid Ali's power, *Inder Sabha* plays out as the revival of a defeated system. It is not a coincidence that the courtesans posed for their visiting cards in costume for that particular masque, staying in character as players of the verse drama, "using masks or making up their faces with white paints and mica or silvery paper."⁴⁰



Photo 7: Abbas Ali, *Beauties of Lucknow*. Albumen print, 6x4.5" c.1870-75.

The courtesan was both an oriental sexual stereotype as well as an elite performer in the nawab's court. Her foremost trade was the cultivation of courtesy and sentiment, and the carte de visite was best suited to this trade with its palm-sized photographic sitter adorned in jewels and silks, and with the capacity to be passed from hand to hand. The form of the visiting card makes evident the performer's investment in recorded spectatorship and the spectator's investment in photo representations of courtesy. Photo 7 is taken from Ali's *Beauties of Lucknow* (1874), an album of twenty-four cartes de visite that had two editions, one published in Urdu and the other in English. The portraits of the women are printed with captions containing their proper names (Hasujaan) or theatrical names (Lall Puree – Red Fairy) or occupations (Gowhur dancing girl). The vocabulary of courtly opulence puts the stress on the same posing chair, the pose, the attire, the expression, and the drape in the album. In this, the aesthetic of the carte operates like the metrical conventions of amorous *rekhti* poetry in Urdu that draw attention to women's dress, jewelry, and music. The carte is a visually condensed form of the "head-to-toe encomium" found in amorous *rekhti* poetry. In the encomium, a female, rather than a male, persona praises her love object's female form. The persona blurs the distinction between the courtesan and the respectable woman, and crafts images of women's households that have to do with same-sex sociality, rather than marriage and children.⁴¹ Although Abbas Ali's *Beauties of Lucknow* does not contain a self-reflexive female persona, it does partake of the *rekhti* convention of the head-to-toe encomium, which undergirds the anticolonial female subject.

Ali's cartes are a part of courtesans' investment in subtle dissenting practices of performance and spectatorship, after the British reprisal for the mutiny. Outside the photographic studio, the courtesans resisted medical inspections through bribery, evaded punitive taxes by maintaining two sets of books on their incomes, sometimes even publicly refused to pay taxes.⁴² Inside the studio, they were photographed wearing masks or cross-dressing as mustached nawabs and crowned princes. The masque and the carte, thus, became modes of freeing oneself from the ostensible freedom of not being arrested and transported, from the state of *only* being captured in civic regulation, articulating an anticolonial subject of sex work.

This section has analyzed the decorous captivity of convicts doing time in the colonial carceral, through scenes of arrest, labor, and play. In the next section, I shift my critique of sameness from social intercourse to extreme isolation and deathly hostility on penal islands, examining novelistic and ethnographic mediations of the master-servant relation in confinement. I argue that carceral media's preoccupation with tool making and physiognomy, starting with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, provides theoretical insight into the self-sameness of empire and the course of its disruption.

2. Two Crusoes: Sly Civility and the Self-Sameness of Empire



Photo 8: Samples from M.V. Portman's vast body of ethnographic work on the Andaman Islands, now housed in the British Museum.

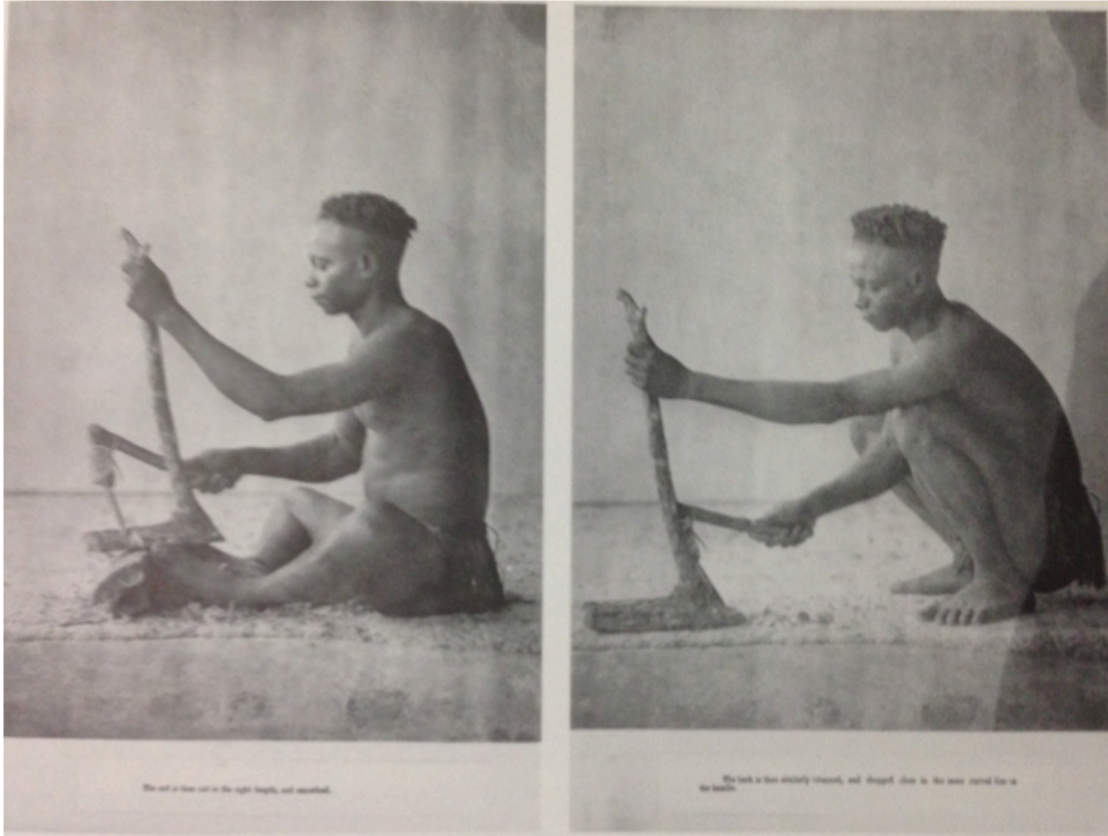


Photo 9: Detail: M.V. Portman, “Stages in the manufacture of an Adze, 1890-95,” Andaman Islands, Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean.

The man on the island – someone like but not quite Robinson Crusoe – is captured in the ethnographic archive of “savage races” using tools with the greatest decorum. Squatting in solo shots, careful not to conceal any line of action, the model demonstrates the making of an adze, where a blade of iron, usually secured from a shipwreck, is fitted to a wooden shaft.⁴³ The ethnographic camera choreographs the model in a scene that repeats the literary image of tool making in Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Considered the first English novel, *Crusoe* is a story about the solitary confinement of a white slave trader on an island that he colonizes, starting with an adze, after he is shipwrecked there.

[N]ever was a shovel, I believe, made after that fashion or so long a making...

I had never handled a tool in my life, and yet in time, by labor, application and contrivance, I found at last I wanted nothing but I could have made it, especially if I had had tools; however, I made [an] abundance of things, even without tools, and some with no more tools than an adze and a hatchet, which perhaps were never made that way before, and that with infinite labor.” (59)

Working iron without heat is vastly laborious and Crusoe’s record of his first weeks on the island emphasize how he invented what he lacked, albeit very slowly, wearily, and uniquely, that is, with “exceeding laboriousness,” and “inexpressible” and “infinite” labor.⁴⁴ Although Crusoe presents tool making as his solo and always-hyperbolic achievement, the island is not really the tabula rasa of his description, thanks to frequent shipwrecks from which he retrieves necessary equipment. He goes on to invent his own potter’s wheel. He stores grain in the “unexpected perfection” of his earthenware pots even they started out as “odd, misshapen, ugly things.” All in all, he conquers all endeavors except escape, for which he needs a slave. In contrast to every prisoner disintegrating in the horrors of solitary confinement, Crusoe asserts his sovereignty over races, spaces, species, and things by doing time on his “island of despair.”⁴⁵

Although acute psychosis in isolation is not a real concern for the sovereign narrator, it *is* built into his narration, which has often been seen as exemplifying solid “common sense” or dry formal realism that disavows the irrational.⁴⁶ Psychosis is registered in the structure of the novel when it repeats only two kinds of “human contact” fantasies in an account of over twenty years of extreme seclusion: cannibalism and enslavement. Every time a group of Moors, Caribs, or Africans enters his field of vision, Crusoe is certain he will be eaten. But since *Crusoe* is a “history” narrated in the first person, the reader is bound to be disappointed. Indeed, Crusoe is never eaten but he does plot for ways “to get

a savage into [his] possession.” After a futile year and a half of “fancies and schemes,” he catches a Carib captive whom he re-names Friday, and who “swear[s] to be [his] slave forever” (155-59). So-called Friday is a “comely handsome fellow” with all the “sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance, especially when he smiled.” (160) He is promptly decorous in his servility, quite European in his appearance, and Crusoe’s handpicked tool for escape (160-67). The novel lands on the question of self-sameness in the master-slave relation via tool making and physiognomy. Between the invention of the adze and the Europeanizing of the Carib, *Crusoe* redirects ethnographic difference into the self-sameness of empire. In the critique that follows, I analyze anticolonialism in the photographic re-citing of Defoe’s account of tool making and physiognomy.

Defoe provides ethnography with the literary image of originary tool making on an isolated island that is resolutely *not* the British isles.⁴⁷ The figure of Crusoe encodes ethnographic imaging of “primitive” toolmakers of vanishing races on “uncontacted” islands such as the Andamans. By consolidating the man on the island into a series of photographic truths, ethnography re-writes him as though he were a transcription of reality rather than a novelistic bequest. Defoe’s novel is a parable of civilization reclaimed by inexhaustible and futile work at the mythic origins of humanity; colonialism forms the connecting link between labor and the capacity for civilization. Pursuing the tack of labor from Defoe’s novel to the photo archive of savage races, one stumbles upon the obsessive documentation of the technological activity of the primitive who painstakingly manufactures adzes, bows, spears, ornaments, clothes, huts, and so on.⁴⁸

Subaltern Studies historian, Ranajit Guha, in his foundational essay “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” explains how, within the colonial ideology of correction, rebellious tribes could improve their lot and prove their capacity for civilization by entering with civility the super-exploited or cheap labor force of empire (24). By embracing “English enterprise,” the serfs of Indian society could exit feudal oppression. Guha defines mutiny as a destruction of the semiotic systems by which colonized tribes made meaning. In his argument, civility is a new coercive code of British pacification, departing from the overwhelming punitive nature of direct deportation and leading “backward” tribes from local vassalage into cheap labor for their supposed socioeconomic improvement without explicit incarceration. The tribes using primitive tools constitute the reserve for capitalist-imperialist accumulation, the point at which technology begins in nature again, with the colonizer plucking colonized labor like fruit.⁴⁹

Pacification and photography went hand in hand on the penal island. Nineteenth century ethnography figures the man on the island as the surveyor who arrives “to photograph for anthropological purposes.”⁵⁰ The colonial survey, a pseudoscientific institution forged in paternalism rather than outright violence, equates seeing with knowing, and knowing with control. A continuous lineup of British officers oversaw the project of “making friendly” the secluded Andaman tribes, from 1858 onwards, when the island in the Bay of Bengal became a penal colony for mutineers transported from the mainland. It is not for nothing that, today, after over two centuries worth of invasive and minute documentation, “the most comprehensive photographic record made of any one racial group” is that of the Andamanese.⁵¹ Between literature and photography, there are two Crusoes: one makes primitive tools, the other makes images of primitives tool making. With the

photographic consolidation of the man on the island, Defoe's adze-making Crusoe dissociates into craftsman and superintendent as if a blade had come down upon the persona of the wielder. But both Crusoes exclude primitives from image making. I nominate decorous captivity as the social intercourse with colonizers in which tribesmen make tools and images.

Once the problematic of savage origins and primitive tools is transformed into a photographic one, photography itself, like writing, is presented as the civilizational technology that the primitive is without. The tribesman is consistently enlisted in ethnographic photography – to pose, to carry, to clean, “to do mere manual work,” and to take and make images – provided that he is described as being without photography, and thus, at the threshold of civilization.⁵² By the early twentieth century, the carceral relation between savagery and civilization is set up through photographic aesthetics and the question of taste.

Some of them [prisoners] were excellent photographers, and they got orders for photo-enlargements from European officers in our jail, with the permission of the authorities themselves. Thus, these were released from hard manual labor, and got an opportunity for doing work that was entirely to their taste.⁵³

The soft labor of photography proves that the convict is civilized, a bearer of distinctive taste, as opposed to hard manual labor that carries only the mark of permanent *potential* for civilization.



Photo 10: Andamanese natives carry M.V. Portman's camera in a case (1890-95).

In photo 10, the bearers of technology are presented as civil but natural threats to technology. Ethnographer and commissioner M.V. Portman advises anthropologists: "Lock up all apparatus from savages and others, and on no account let your camera get wet," suggesting that the camera equipment must be protected from intractable elements of nature, both rainfall and savages. Ethnographers following Portman's tenure on the islands would, however, in a telling contradiction, find tribes skilled in the art of photography.⁵⁴ An anthropologist for the British Museum, Portman was the Chief Commissioner in charge of "making friendly" the native Andamanese tribes so that the work of penal settlement would continue unhindered. He photographed every activity in the manufacture of tools by natives, from "rough material to the finished article being shown." The visual record of the series, "Stages in the manufacture of an adze" (photo 8 and 9) with its lengthy letterpress captions, can be matched by Portman's own scholarly

publication giving stage-by-stage instructions in the photographing of natives.

“Photography for Anthropologists” (1896) is an astoundingly detailed recipe featuring specific brands of photographic outfits, varnish for negatives, printing paper, fixing baths, developer combinations, sketching umbrellas, and so on, for anthropologists to use in the unfamiliar conditions of the Andaman islands. Along with a manual to capture “almost every act of the life of a primitive people,” Portman gives an epic catalogue of photography’s materials. Camphorated Vaseline, Russian leather, waterproof mahogany woodwork, Bausch and Lomb shutters, and other commodities of global bourgeois taste and consumption take a social life of their own. The manual as good as instructs anthropologists to banish the native from this social life of things, while Portman’s own practice, we will see, belies his instructions.

And yet, the primitive is not a rabbit pulled out of the ethnographer’s lens. The photograph depends upon its subject’s pose in a way that the literary image does not. In photography, the trace and effect of the subject’s involvement are incontrovertible.⁵⁵ The demonstration by the photographed primitive is fashioned not only from the force of subjugation but also from the obligation to be civil to a benevolent colonial expansionism, from the ruse of overt compliance with assimilative violence, of the sort alluded to in this matter-of-fact fragment: “Portman has made pets of the [Andaman] natives, and [has] given them bicycles and champagne, relieved by occasional beatings.”⁵⁶ Portman inflicts well-punctuated punishment.

The succession of bicycles, champagne, and beatings for the pets of positions the colonized subject in a system of annexation that exerts both covert and total violence with benefits and pleasurable goods. That the super-exploited colonized should turn spokesperson for his own archaic status is a demand implicit in the photographing of the “vanishing races” where the subject must participate in the proof of his disappearance. Homi Bhabha’s intervention in the economy of beneficial ruin in the colony invokes the trope of “sly civility.” In the manner of Odysseus’s play on the word “nobody,” the most evoked instance of polite double-dealing, sly civility enacts “the native refusal” to satisfy the colonizer’s demand that the native himself, of his own accord, issue colonizing statements as a performance of his faith in the British civilizing mission.

Within such a coercive configuration, the native “turns off” the colonizer not with violent retribution but with “sly civility” and thus exacerbates the colonizer’s dependence on true and absolute compliance from the native. Sly civility exposes the role of native compliance in sustaining the self-image of empire. The statements demanded from the native are colonial in that they serve to “justify, authorize, and legitimize [the colonizer’s] presence [in the colony].” Bhabha uses a compelling injunction to explain the demand: *Tell us why we are here*. This procedure of “inquisitorial insistence” in the paradigm of confession/surveillance (*tell us exactly what happened*) organizes “first contact” in the colonial survey and extorts an unambivalent demonstration of submission from the native. Sly civility weakens the paradigm of confession, according to Bhabha. Yet, Bhabha’s theory makes a turn through the subjectivity of the paranoid colonizer who

falls prey to the sly civility of the colonized. It seems that sly civility is not what the colonized possess, internal to themselves – it is found by the colonizer’s reading.

By calling the colonized response “sly civility,” as the figure of Archdeacon Potts does in Bhabha’s essay, the colonizer reads cunning and guilt, reiterates mistrust in the native, and exhibits a persistent disbelief that cannot be suspended at will. Sly civility, in the surveillance paradigm, is the native’s permanent blameworthiness interpreted by the colonizer who lives in the fear and loathing of deception. Bhabha frames this trope with the Freudian “delusion of reference” in a paranoid subject who often takes the innocuous or indifferent gesture – of being “treated like the air” – as a sign of hatred. The photographic situation calls forth many gestures of (non) co-operation from the native. These are instances when subjects suddenly go rigid or move at the last minute, refuse to smile or shift their gaze, impersonate others or attempt to shrug off their escorts en route to the studio, nod whilst disobeying commands to disrobe, perform selective aphasia and amnesia, some innocuous, others not.⁵⁷ Colonial masters read such gestures as the secret mockery of the imperial imperative, when they are not attributed to ignorance or laziness. Such sly civility can be grasped as the native bringing to crisis the validation of the sovereign subject, when voluntarily opting out and completely surrendering are unavailable options. Although Bhabha himself does not push this trope to the point of absolute noncivility, I do so in order to suggest that the colonizer suspects that the relation of sly civility harbors the instrument of violence as its guilty secret. Obligated to help in his own disintegration, the colonized slips into hateful vengeance and violent loathing, providing the very evidence of his guilt that the colonizer has, until now, lacked.

This narrative is documented in the case of Sher Ali, a convict deported to the Andaman penal settlement in the 1860s.

Carte de visites of Ali circulated internationally in the late nineteenth century and reached the homes of bourgeois collectors. While serving a life term on the Andaman Islands, Ali, compelled by a desire to kill “a European of a high rank,” assassinated visiting dignitary Viceroy Mayo with a knife, for which he was executed in 1872.⁵⁸ At the photo opportunity, the British found Ali “childishly vain of being photographed as the murderer of a Viceroy.”⁵⁹ The sitter represents the colonizers’ dilution of revolutionary violence into narcissism. But oddly enough, instead of consigning his carte to a bonfire of the vanities, the white bourgeoisie collected it in their albums of famous people, a move to which Ali’s physiognomy undoubtedly contributed.

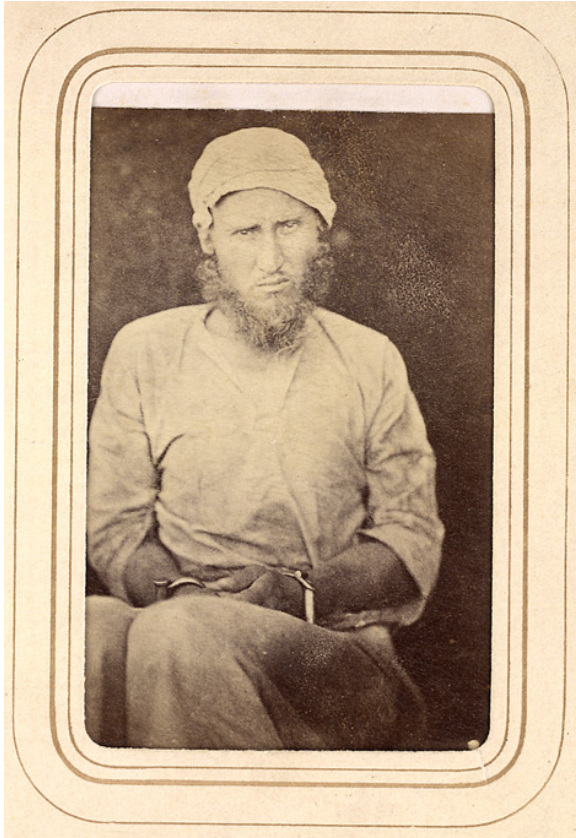


Photo 11: Carte de visite of Sher Ali, the murderer of Lord Mayo, at the height of Victorian collecting mania. (British Library)

By all contemporaneous accounts, Ali was the colonizers' darling who went rogue.

Reminiscent of Defoe's description of so-called Friday, "he was as fair as an European, with light beard and moustache, and blue eyes. He had an intelligent and, when animated, a pleasing face." Just as Friday is ready to worship Crusoe and his gun, Ali had been "a great favorite with the Commissioner and with all the sahib-log (masters). The Commissioner had given him a pair of pistols and other presents."⁶⁰ Ali, the sahib-log's favorite son, convict, and beneficiary, who passed as white, refused to be slyly civil and leaped from conciliatory sociality into the killing of a high ranking colonist, signing his own death sentence with this declaration of difference. The production of a photographic other who disrupts the self-sameness of empire is neither wholly premeditated nor is it

arbitrarily improvised, aberrantly desired, or collectively controllable; it comes a surprise in the translation from servile adoration to hateful violence.

The self-removal of the colonized from monetary relations with the colonizer occurs through the structure of the photographic gift in the wake of colonial looting. The self-sameness of empire shifts from the physiognomic, in Sher Ali's case, to colonial plunder and house-to-house looting, with the aesthetic production of photographer Ahmed Ali Khan who was part of the Indian rebel forces during the mutiny of 1857 and who gave away photographs as gifts to his sitters. British army captains and foot soldiers ransacking the city of Lucknow banished mutineers from his house and looted his photo albums of salt prints and his collections of photo negatives, claiming ownership over them. A Captain Weston described the removal and looting in Lucknow's houses and the haste with which he stole Khan's photographs:

[D]uring the Mutiny ... Ahmed Ali naturally enough, fought against the defenders of the Lucknow Residency, and on the capture of the city in March 1858, his house was one of those from which ... I cleared out some of the rebels. *My loot consisted of two small cases containing negatives, and a bundle of hastily collected photographs, which, unhappily turned out to be "failures". But I recognised that even these imperfect copies were of great interest and value*; many of the buildings had been injured or destroyed during the siege; many of the native gentlemen portrayed had been killed, had died, or were in hiding; and the photographs of the ladies of the harem were, of course, unique. Thus, *indifferent as they undoubtedly were as works of art, I brought these photographs home with me.* (cited in Sophie Gordon, *Monumental Visions*)⁶¹

Colonial plunder, in mutiny history, is defined by the infamous looting of the magnificent Kaiser Bagh (Emperor's Palace, Lucknow) from which the army stole jewels, arms, silks, and other luxurious finery of the nawab's court.⁶² The looting of Kaiser Bagh received much international condemnation and ridicule. Indeed, caricatures show "uncultured"

British militias and their Loyalist Indian plunderers in action: “Is this string of little white stones worth anything, Gentlemen?” asks the plunderer” holding up pearls in the obscenely opulent Kaiser Bagh.⁶³ But captains raiding houses and stealing photo prints only find aesthetic “failures” where they assumed precious possessions. The discrepancy between the valuable native object and the ignorant colonial plunder in Weston’s case is also a result of his haste in picking up the loot because of curfews put in place to control soldiers’ movements after Kaiser Bagh. The curfews are imposed even though plunder is the very basis of colonial ideology. For *London Times* correspondent W.H. Russell, who “acquired” Khan’s albums after the uprising, the salt prints were a “poignant record of the many Europeans who lost their lives during the siege.” Years after the acquisition, Russell would go on to inscribe Khan’s *Lucknow Album* with the fates of its British sitters, tracking down as many of them as possible from their likenesses, and marking their portraits with their survival or death in place X or Y during the mutiny.⁶⁴ The rebel’s *Lucknow Album*, in Russell’s hands, produces colonial continuity through civic memorialization of British subjects.

Within the project of continual theft and re-inscription of history, disruption comes in the unlikely form of photography as generous gift giving by the colonized. Before the army strolled into his home, gifting was the hallmark of Ahmed Ali Khan’s aesthetic practice. A *darogah* (superintendent) of Lucknow’s prominent shrine, the Husainabad Imambara, and a designer of Kaiser Bagh, Khan did not charge his sitters for the prints he gave them. A British Chaplain at Lucknow, Rev. Henry Polehampton sat for his photograph in Khan’s studio in October 1856 and described him thus:

[H]e is a very gentlemanly man, a Mahommedan, and most liberal. He won't take anything for his likenesses. He gives you freely as many as you want, and takes no end of trouble. I have no doubt his chemicals, etc., must cost him more than 100 pounds per annum, at the least. (Gordon, 122)

Khan's photography was a laborious and expensive activity given freely to the British, an example of his conduct and taste rooted in courtly Islamic culture. How, then, does one plunder what is freely given?⁶⁵ Khan's gift economy negates the possibility of equivalent recompense that governed the commerce of portraiture in the colony. His self-removal from putatively symmetric pecuniary relationality under colonialism remakes anticolonial subjectivity in the aesthetics of non-equivalence, as opposed to the aesthetics of the same. Colonial plunder is not only the permanent uncoupling of the mutinying photographer from his artistic production. It is also an erasure of the perception of the impossibility of the aesthetics of the same, an impossibility that structures the gift of the photograph.

The Primitive Without the Phenotype

In attending to pseudoscience, the prevalent critique of convict photography has bracketed out the history of global capital accumulation. Decorous captivity thus appears removed from the history of colonial relations of production, acquisition of property, sparse or excessive consumption, and the crises of international capital investment that put colonial governments on the verge of ruin. The question of capital accumulation has not, of course, wholly disappeared from the critique of pseudoscience, but when it is posed, the comfortable materiality of image production takes the sting out of the captive body's direct insertion into economic exploitation. The materiality of the penitentiary image is limited to an account of techno-chemical equipment, the feasibility of biometric

projects, cost benefit analysis of image reproduction, and so on.⁶⁶ The materialist reading, so far, has not questioned the very convention of the mug shot that naturalizes the flat physicality of convict presence and attempts to tame the inscription of all contingency, including economic crisis. The result is that the convict photo accrues transhistorical phenotypical value, and *only* phenotypical value. That the convict photo also carries economic value necessary to empire is the argument made in the section below.

Within a problematic that avows materiality while relieving capitalist crises of direct significance, the shackled primitive tribe, whose image negates phenotypic value-formation, makes critique stumble. This is not to claim that certain convict photos transcend the codes of racial-sexual exploitation but to argue that a visual track to economic exploitation materializes in the wake of aphenotypic appeals to the spectator. The aphenotypic appeal reveals most clearly that the redesign of racial-sexual exploitation is underway in the language of the convict photograph when phrenological, physiognomic, and anthropometric fantasies of the primitive are rejected. Aphenotypic primitivism constitutes the aesthetic and economic modes of convict photos 12, 13, and 14. The triptych shows tribal arrests after a crisis in territorial trade agreements, commodity speculation, and resource extraction. The photographed subjects are arrested for the murders of political officer Noel Williamson and Doctor J.D. Gregorson, “a tea garden doctor,” planter and geologist from the Assam Oil Company who had been accompanying Williamson into tribal territory since 1908.⁶⁷ The convict triptych at the frontier is a symptom of economic crisis, which is to say, of the colonial state’s

discursive management of the crisis to protect corporate business interests and government revenue.⁶⁸



Photo 12: Angus Hamilton: Three of the murderers under guard of military police. From L to R: 1. Morsang, who cut down Doctor Gregorson. 2. The Gam of Rotung, who gave the order for the massacre of the letter carriers 3. One of the men who cut down the letter carriers. (1912)



Photo 13: Angus Hamilton: The man who killed Mr. Noel Williamson, now in charge of an escort of military police. (1912)



14 "The murderers of Williamson."

photographer unknown, Pailghat?

Photo 14: Angus Hamilton: Two of the five men in chains were found guilty of killing Williamson; one, Manmur Jamoh, was transported for life to a penal colony, while the other man received 10 years in prison. The other three men, found guilty of killing his porters, were given shorter prison sentences. (1912)

At the turn of the twentieth century, the photography of white exploration attempted to repurpose the colonial routines of survey, pillage, capture, and removal as operations specific to British retaliatory missions against the “savagery” of anticolonial “primitives.” This repurposing took the form of a media event: the manhunt for hostile tribesmen at the frontier. Six months or more separate the murders of Nicholson and Gregorson from the counterinsurgent drama of state actors apprehending a single suspect and some accomplices at the frontier. In the moment of photography, anticolonial dissent is already evoked as a relic of the past, suggesting that the colonial state’s immobilization of the “hostile tribes” is complete. The photos are anchored to the language of order, proportion, rigidity, and solemnity, formally stalling the volatile intensity of capital proliferation,

conflicting interests in revenue collection, and bursts of miscommunication and insurrection that led to the photo opportunity. Photo 13 is an image of tribesman Manmur Jamoh, who is, quite literally, choreographed as outflanked by colonialism. The shackled Jamoh is surrounded on three sides by military guards in the frame, with the camera operator and presumably the spectator occupying the extra-diegetic position of the fourth. Jamoh the insurgent becomes photographically available to us only by his cooptation into the self-image of the British colonial regime of decorum. His capricious hostility, the anticolonial “other scene,” is at the illegible edge of the triptych of captivity until we account for the frontier as resource for accumulation.⁶⁹

I read the triptych as documenting a primitivism necessary to capital and its relentless project of constituting new peripheries and centers for resource extraction. In photos taken at the northeastern frontier of India, the slender chains around the barefooted primitive, including restraints made of rope, I argue, signify the preliminary containment of impediments to capital flow, rather than the capture of barbarians who are at once threatening and gratifying to civilization’s self-image, who will be broken and re-made in that image.⁷⁰ In the study of convict photographs, the phenotype has tended to displace economic crisis from the frame. I theorize the triptych through the volatile alliance of tribal and capital accumulation. Decorous captivity in convict photos interrupts the phenotype’s displacement of economic crisis. The ethnography of the primitive phenotype has been deplored by critical frameworks such as “optical colonization” that condemn the lucrative enterprise of ethnography without drawing attention to the constitutive role of capitalist exploitation in the very creation of the primitive image.⁷¹

The convict triptych at the frontier, thus, permits the thought of optical colonization through an a-phenotypic primitivism, instead of having us repeat in our critique the discredited features of ethnography.

At the frontier, the convict photo appears not when a pre-existing law is violated but in the “open season” of colonial punitive expeditions, to fulfill the resource, revenue, and labor requirements of both the colonial state and joint-stock companies.⁷² Colonial punitive expeditions in India were undertaken to secure the financial prospects of the northeastern resource frontier and to coerce loyal tributes from those who had not yet recognized British sovereignty. For instance, military troops punished the Abor tribe for “extorting” money from timber cutters and contractors of saw mills in “British territory” in order to secure the revenues generated from logging companies for the British government.⁷³ The frontier was a partially patrolled terrain of oil extraction, tea plantation, coal mining, and timber logging, over which the British state waged an intermittent war, in the form of cold weather punitive expeditions, to restructure tribality into regulated use for the colonial. This, even as capital proliferation benefited from the unregulated terrain and the insecure milieu because joint stock companies could speculate for resources without restraint, draw up fraudulent trade contracts, and expropriate frontier supplies by taking advantage of the state’s calculated absence. The convict photo by political officers, then, is part of punitive action against tribal raiders who re-direct the flow of capital and mandate taxes from white profiteers of the land. It represents the state’s periodic intervention against tribes who showed their opposition to the nexus of

political officers, petroleum geologists, corporate traders, various colonial personnel at large, with whom they had had beneficial alliances in the past.

Frontier settlers, tribal chiefs, traders, coolies, military troops, contractors, nomadic raiders, and private surveyors invested in the proliferation of capital with dazzling and lethal friction, to use Anna Tsing's influential formulation.⁷⁴ Convict photos 12, 13, and 14 are examples of the seasonal fluctuation between tribal collusion in exploitative schemes and the outright exploitation of the tribesmen by colonial-capitalist expansion. They incarnate the speculative frenzy of the frontier as well as the re-imagining of tribal identity, de-recognition of tribal territorial rights, and conscription of tribesmen into empire's imported indentureship.⁷⁵ Yet, instead of the visual rhetoric of frenzied revelations, a downcast sternness, a careful withholding of feeling, even a sense of torpor saturates the photographs – as if business at the frontier could not be duller or more secure. Never photographed alone and always yoked together with the representatives of state and company interests, the captive figure offers a necessarily binding social relationality in which decorum stands in for friction. The photographed bond between captors and captives is a literal link between the judicial system and speculative empire, pushing us to read convicts as figures of exchange value for international capitalism.

As a figure cross-hatched by speculation, investment, and exploitation, the frontier tribesman shifts between friendly collaborator and hostile worker, savage slave and sovereign chieftain, elite ruler and peasant rebel, on a continuum of coercive collaboration in the service of capital. He is a figure of indeterminacy that is strategically

useful to both colonialism and anticolonialism, and therefore all the more difficult to recuperate on the side of unalloyed and intentional anticolonialism even as the colonial state punishes him. Indeed, British conferral of chieftainships ensured that tribesmen collected revenue from other tribesmen on behalf of the colonial state, a process that contributed to the fabrication of the very category of native tribality. The convict photo, then, functions as shorthand to show that the British were making frontier tribes “realize that they are within British territory.”⁷⁶ The triptych gives an account of the phenotypically superfluous staging of the primitive during the battle over trading privileges and resource sharing between companies and tribes, when the British government wrote and rewrote the rules of frontier finance to ensure security for its economy. While the photographic capture of the hostile tribe compensates for empire’s insecure financial landscape at the frontier, frontier histories also contain tribesmen who withdraw themselves from the crises of resource speculation (by landing in prison) and from colonial relations of production (by being unavailable for indentured labor). Two former chiefs, made captive in the Lushai expedition and sentenced to ten years’ detention, hanged themselves in prison.⁷⁷ In destroying themselves, in refusing to do time for empire, they forced a remaking of anticolonial subjectivity by destroying their value for frontier speculation and empire’s organized commodity production.⁷⁸

3. The Auratic Anticolonial in Photo Theory

In nineteenth-century photo studies, the category called Colonial Photography has coalesced around the twin notions that (a) the British Raj articulated its colonial enterprise in India through optical technology to a significant extent and (b) colonial

India is a bygone era that can now be accessed through the archive of photographic production. The standard periodization for colonial photography in India is 1840-1900, give or take a decade. The genre is inaugurated with the daguerreotype (1840) and closed with the Eastman Kodak snapshot (invented in 1889, commercialized in 1911), where the prosthesis of speed tacitly organizes the limits of the proper object of inquiry.⁷⁹

Apparently, the snapshot constitutes such a perfect instrument of discontinuity that categorists of colonial photography feign indifference to the next forty-seven years of colonial rule in India, even when stylistic similarities cause later images to percolate into the category as examples for consideration. Given the temporal markers set for it, the genre “colonial photography” includes mainly albumen prints that were produced laboriously in commercial studios, in princely courts, and in makeshift tents in the field, with heavy, unwieldy cameras and tripods, travelling cases, and very expensive chemicals, carried by dozens of unnamed assistants and porters. Compared to the snapshot, these prints would represent the dark ages of photography in terms of the sheer difficulties of production.⁸⁰ From the extended duration of albumen printing to the split-second of the snapshot, the speed of light-writing, rather than anticolonial disruption, organizes statements about colonial photography. In a telling way, the confirmed “pastness” of colonial photography itself displaces colonialism from South Asia, as though the snapshot, at the cutting edge of universal, stable, democratized technology, withdraws photography’s slow material support of colonialism. Christopher Pinney’s “Sepia Mutiny: Colonial Photography and its Others in India” is a “reparative” reading of the aesthetic category of the aura, although he does not acknowledge it as such. Pinney frames his essay with his admiration for present-day sepia toning that “slows things

down” through archaic chemical processes even as we are menaced by the race to transmit first, farthest, and fastest. Today, “vintage” is available as an instant photo effect in-camera. The vintage filter directly produces the new image that mimics age, making simultaneous the event time, the production time, the duration of ageing, and the sentiment of nostalgia. Light writing faster than the speed of light and the renewed treachery of sameness – this is the problem Pinney’s admiration of the archaic technique assumes but never poses. His essay exemplifies present-day theoretical investments in the analytic constellation of the “turn to modernity” and theories of shock and stimulus shields, industrial fatigue, the dispersal of attention, the blasé metropolitan attitude, as well as the key question of critical weapons that colonialism cannot put to use.⁸¹

Authentic sepia, the pastoral past of photography, for Pinney, eloquently “reaches out...to the eye of the beholder, caressing it with a different temporality” (71). The term “beholder,” rather than viewer or spectator, is crucial here for it relies on the perceived distance between holding/feeling/touching and possessing. “Beholding,” for Pinney, signifies haptic intimacy between the photo and the spectator, instead of the norm of distance in the Cartesian system of Western perspective. Haptic intimacy agrees with the auratic, no longer antithetical to it, as Benjamin suggests in the *Artwork* essay.⁸² In the course of Pinney’s essay, the aura remains unnamed but is remade and re-aligned with the anticolonial to meet the requirements of visual anthropology in equating the non-West with the “human.” We are a long way from decorous capture’s self-distancing from injury.

Pinney cuts his path to the Others of colonial photography in India with the purpose of describing a space and time of alterity within the “colonial dromosphere” of the nineteenth century. This dromospheric phantasm, inherited from Paul Virilio, allows Pinney to contain anxiety about the speedy sameness in photography by offering specimens, or “some surprising postcolonial success stories,” that re-make the racecourse into a life-world. He omits the economic history of global capital accumulation from the currency of “success stories,” unconcerned with the network of unfree labor and sparse consumption practices of the native that produced the colonial dromosphere of railways, telegraphy, and photography to which he objects.



Photo 15: RC Temple Collection: “Convicts working on the old terminus of the tramline on Bamlungta Creek, middle Andaman, showing the tramline.”

The matching up of the edges suggests that this panoramic photograph of the creek is most likely a contact print, taken with a camera that rotated on its axis through a fixed angle from left to right, clicking a series of photographs. As C Boden Klauss remarks, in his travelogue *In the Andamans and Nicobars* (1903), “The whole place—in itself of much natural beauty—is kept in most perfect condition by a practically *unlimited* supply

of convict labour.” And because the supply was unlimited, it is practically overlooked in theories of the colonial dromosphere. Pinney positions photography outside Euro-America as opposing the repetition automatism of the camera’s eye that brings a speedy death to all it sees. I argue below, with the help of the auratic anticolonial in whose grip Pinney’s essay on photography unfolds, that the problematic of visual anthropology after the turn to touching, feeling, and holding is predicated on the magically restorative, humanizing powers of the native use of technology in the wake of colonial injury.

Pinney proposes that we understand the figure placed in front of the lamprey grid of the “unfeeling” pseudosciences as more complicit with the figure of the “feeling beholder” than in contradiction with him. In current approaches, exemplified by Pinney, this beholder promises to lead the enervated West back to life, warmth, vibrancy, immediacy, and all things re-enchanted. Colonial modernity is used to maintain the pre-modern purity of the anthropological subject that will in turn save it. We see this same gesture in the introduction to the edited volume *Feeling Photography* (2014), where Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu sew together “marginalized rubrics” and “marginalized subjects” into a single knot against the “rubric of thinking photography” that was dominant in the 1970s and 1980s, most clearly seen at work in Victor Burgin’s *Thinking Photography* (1982).

Brown and Phu charge Althusser-inspired photo critics such as Sekula and Tagg with disavowing feeling and with marginalizing “the bearers of the burden of excess feeling” from the definition of critical thought. *Feeling Photography*, then, makes good on the epistemic loss of feeling and thus reclaims “photography’s shadow subjects, most

notably, women, racialized minorities, and queer sexualities” (3). Echoing the silence about relations of production in Pinney’s text, Brown and Phu’s “reparative” approach is impervious to class or labor, production or consumption, as useful categories of analyses. Posing a version of Foucault’s “subjugated knowledge” argument, they set out to de-subjugate “naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity,” in this case, at the level of touching, feeling, and holding. Nothing appears irreparable or blank or missing or misrecognized in this approach of according “voice” to the marginalized. Redressing the epistemic injury to the concept of feeling and the ontological injury to the feeling beholder caused by theories of “the camera as a tool of surveillance, a discursive site, and an ideological apparatus,” Brown and Phu mobilize marginalized subject positions as snapshots of full aesthetic consciousness.⁸³

The argument is this: an oppressive experience is the minimal unit of feeling; the greater one’s oppression the more access one has to feeling. Therefore, theories of feeling avail themselves of oppressed consciousness by reversing the rule of admission. They think to undo the social effects of oppression and voluntarily step out of theory’s discriminatory motivations by focusing on the mysteriously autonomous feelings of human individuals. Thus, *Feeling Photography* speaks from the margin as though at the margin one only “includes” and “describes.” Brown and Phu explain their interest in “feeling photography” as a way to escape the consequences of poststructuralism, of “neo-Marxist historical materialism, discourse analysis, and psychoanalysis,” which they shortchange as dated hegemony and as phallogocentric, ethnocentric, heteronormative adversaries. By

disregarding the critique of subject effects and the necessity of radical anti-humanism characteristic of much of the work they dismiss, they re-situate the auratic within the tradition of the oppressed and convert the question of oppression and exploitations into one of consciousness in an alliance of pain and injury. The sense of injury that scaffolds the quasi-occult powers of the haptic problematic is seen as the best guarantee against the self-perpetuation of phallocentrism, ethnocentrism, and heteronormativity.⁸⁴ “Feeling” never thinks itself as operating at the expense of the other it wants to save.

Pinney, too, disowns his suspicion that contemporary sepia toning by an American photographer based in India might be indicative of anachronism, exoticism, and Orientalism. He expunges the term “aura” only to re-trope it as “slowness, centeredness, hierarchy” (81), “ritual engagement” (82), “divine power” (82) “cultic authority” (83), “uniqueness” (88) and “particularity” (88). This chain of values espoused for photography theory makes Pinney’s position indistinguishable from the native bourgeois elitists and technophobes he cites, as they worry about caste defilement through contact with “untouchables” and tribes in the democratizing space of photography. Historically, because the native bourgeoisie was working out the problem of how the masses might become modern without becoming Western, the anticolonial position often expressed itself by disparaging capital-imperial technology, as a call for the masses to restore humanity to itself with minimal prosthetic dependence (e.g. the spinning wheel).⁸⁵ For the native bourgeoisie and radical revolutionaries, railway lines and telegraph wires metamorphosed into “iron chains” and “accursed nooses” when the Empire used technology to nullify challenges to it (72). However, rather than taking the measure of the

double bind between modernization and westernization, under emergent class relations and the coveted “universal equality of things,” Pinney treats anticolonial statements as the outright refusal to “become modern” in order to stay human.

Benjamin radicalized the property of haptic intimacy for a theory of mass spectatorship during fascist state formation. Pinney conflates it with an anticolonial vernacular bathed in ideologies of bourgeois elitism – such as caste defilement – that needs the auratic and religiously ordained hierarchy to uphold its hegemony. If the collapse of spatio-temporal distance into apparent immediacy is the systemic cause of feeling assaulted in the dromosphere, then positing intimacy as remedy constitutes, for him, a usefully contradictory gesture. In the intimacy that leaves the image and the beholder completely open to each other, there is no point of inaccessibility, of absolute exclusion, except for the colonial eye. Pinney’s turn to the Third World Other in “Sepia Mutiny” treats Others and their Otherness as subjective causes of and prior to the comprehension of anticolonial effects in cultural production. There is no scene of racial interpellation, no notion of the violent struggle of the split subject, or the risk of the self-consolidating other in the theory of Otherness at work in Pinney’s text. The injury alliance is a phrase for constant openness without negation as well as a priori nativist anticolonialism.

The homonymy of Sepia Mutiny and Sepoy Mutiny, the British name for India’s anticolonial war of 1857, implies that the tenor “sepia” can be exchanged with “sepoy” (native infantry of the East India Company) in the mutiny against colonialism, such that sepia, too quickly, comes to carry the weight of combative photographic rhetoric.

Elsewhere, Pinney reserves the name “anticolonial photography” for the photographic evidence of anticolonial liberation struggles against the British Raj, including but not limited to the exposure of police atrocity. He works through the idea that there is a specifically Indian aesthetic tradition of atrocity/anticolonial photography, an elaboration of the priority of the Other’s consciousness.⁸⁶ It is no accident that, for Pinney, the crisis of the technologized West situates itself rather neatly in the split between Europe and its Others. The narrative is a sign of the nostalgic ethnocentrism that forms the proxy native as resistant to the malignant effects of Western modernity, to the malignant prosthesis.⁸⁷ There is a reassurance in thinking that technical life has laid waste to organic human life, that civilization has hardened because of the denaturing prosthesis that differentiated it from barbarism. It is reassuring precisely because the logic of malignant Western modernity does not negate the white man’s burden to civilize the savage races. Rather, it is a variant of the colonizing mission, with the figure of the native remaining necessarily resistant to both the good and evil of technology.

Pinney’s analytic credits native consciousness with pure oppositional externality. The native image, exemplified by the painted photograph that re-imposes social stratifications in the space of sameness, is alien to “the world-conquering logic” of small, flat, black and white images (81). The native prosthesis expresses a sensuously particularizing, individuating, concrete aesthetics of intimacy where a feeling beholder literally enters the image. Pinney provides the example of Hindu-theological art, where devotees viewing the centered statue of Krishna paintings are present on both left and right sides of the frame. These recursive photos – wherein we see the seer seen – react against the

“phenomenologically underachieved surface of the photograph” in the colonial Cartesian tradition. The celebrated habit of painting the photo, Pinney explains without the hint of censure, becomes a way for bourgeois elitism to re-heirarchize a technological space of apparently dehumanizing egalitarianism and to slow down a mechanized time of instant homogeneity. This is the native difference that, for Pinney, salvages the toxic refiguration of space and time in the colonial dromosphere: the native race disrupts the human race for more pure speed and self-alienating telepresence and forges a new humanism. The painterly exuberance and vibrant re-enchantment of over-sized native photography fascinate Pinney, leading him to conclude that the figure of the beholder who becomes part of the surface of the image cancels the “desiccating life-world” project inaugurated by the prosthesis of colonial technology.

The figure of the beholder who enters the image is an unstated cross reference to Walter Benjamin’s use of the Chinese painter (who entered his own painting) as the model of contemplative absorption that is to be habitually opposed in the Artwork’s program to fascist imperialism. Benjaminian distracted masses and the decline of the aura both privilege haptic intimacy over contemplative distance. They are concepts developed at a moment when Europe has brought colonialism home, in order to instantiate a disaggregation of technical media and colonialism. It is profoundly revealing that Pinney, in an essay on colonialism and photography, assumes that his undeclared position – namely, the auratic becomes the anticolonial – is one that can be adopted innocently or disinterestedly, as a mere “description” of what colonial others are “attempting to rediscover” after colonial modernity. The terms “native,” “vernacular,” “Indian

nationalist,” and “neo-traditional” are all equivalent to “anticolonial” and “the human” in Pinney’s argument. Working through that argument shows us that the trace of ethnocentrism remains in effect after the language of feeling, at once both self-evident and mysterious, invades the problematic.⁸⁸ The haptic problematic puts no check on the reflexes that draw it ineluctably towards the Other and thereby re-founds ethnocentrism benevolently. As Spivak and the early Derrida put it, ethnocentrism is most profoundly inhabited when it is assumed to have been successfully inhibited.⁸⁹ However, in wanting to retire or overhaul the vigilant work of postcolonial theory, without entering into conversation with it, the newest tropes of touching and feeling in colonial photography forget to let their errors catch up with them.

In his influential text, *The Coming of Photography in India* (2008), Pinney states offhandedly that “the earliest extant photographic images from India,” some thirty odd calotypes and photograms, were “probably made by a female photographer in Uttar Pradesh [north-central region of India] between 1843 and 1845” (9-10). So, instead of imagining there was no woman photographer in mid-century India, he flips the tenet and makes her the understated, unverifiable surprise in the history of colonial photography. He describes the content of these photos – leaves, temples, street scenes, churches —but says nothing about the woman, about why he attributes the calotypes and photograms to her, or what the history of colonial photography might owe to the possibility of the anonymous female photographer at the virtual foundation of modern mass-reproducible media. While Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* removes all trace of the absence of woman from the island of despair, photo history accounts for her absence by finding her at the origin.

5. Gender, Anticolonialism, and Photo History

The next chapter will begin by addressing the ways in which the scene of woman, including the corpse of the Sati who commits suicide on the funeral pyre of her husband, can be read for anticolonialism. The nonplace that gender occupies in the definitive South Asian text of photo history, *The Coming of Photography*, prevails when Pinney cites the image of one Rose Brown's denuded corpse, shot in a horizontal frame from the waist up. He takes this image to explain how photography was mobilized as "a cure" for the limitations of "the natural coordinates of time and space." The fact that the body could be photographed and the picture brought to a magistrate far away, thus putting a stop to bodily decay through the image, probably for the first time, is what catches Pinney's imagination.



Photo 16: Victim Rose Brown on a *charpoy* (bed woven with ropes around a wooden frame) in the case that was popularly known as the "Amherst Street Murder" in Calcutta, 1868, from Norman Chevers, *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India*, 1870.

While convict photographs contain no visible evidence of the crime committed, the scene of woman as corpse is denoted by Dr. Norman Chevers in his study of medical jurisprudence, and consequently reproduced by Pinney, as steeped in evidence, the trademark of victim photography in police archives. Brown was “a healthy young East Indian woman” found one morning in 1868 on a Calcutta street with her throat cut, in what came to be publicized as the “Amherst Street Murder” case – though Chevers insisted she was a suicide.⁹⁰ For Pinney, the exceptionality of Rose Brown’s photograph lies in the then new aspect of reproducible time and space that revolutionized the area of forensic investigation: the magistrate and civil surgeon had Brown’s remains photographed at the scene of the crime to be assessed in their offices many miles away. Pinney’s reading is a symptom of the way in which the history of colonial photography cannot take leave of the scene of woman. In his text, this is strictly because she is put under erasure. The ruse of discovery puts woman at the origin of technological innovation, with her calotypes and her photograms. It puts her at the origin of forensic science, as evidence that can be read as per the male specialist’s instruction. But this ruse also puts her in separation with anticolonial subjectivity, even as she is employed as the originary device in the colony.

Chevers states unequivocally that the denuding of Brown’s corpse in the photograph was not conducted indecorously after the fact of the murder: “Dr Colles told me her hair and dress were not rearranged” (424-425). It is because pseudoscience always seeks to declare itself as innocent of the indecorum that is its daily fare that one is fairly certain that her hair and dress were, indeed, “rearranged.” The unveiling or disrobing of the

colonized woman, in, for example, Algerian identification cards or slave daguerreotypes, has exemplified the voyeurism attributed to the colonial eye that captures women of the subject race, removing them from the native men for whom they ought to be reserved, in the ideology of masculinist anticolonialism.⁹¹ Woman's relation to anticolonial contestation is tied up in an economy that prioritizes the reproduction of racially endogamous patriarchal households. The sex appeal of the boudoir portrait, Photo 17, disrupts the scopic evidentiality of woman as denuded corpse in the history of colonial photography.



Photo 17: Unidentified photographer: A portrait of a lady c. 1900 probably meant for private viewing given her bare shoulders, flowing hair and the drape around the front of her body. Such images were taken to enshrine feminine youth and beauty, often before one's wedding. The inscription below attributes the image to the studio Kilgour at

Secunderabad, probably of British ownership. Silver gelatin print, 15.7x10.6 cm.
(Tasveer Foundation)

The intimate portrait represents a glamorous private realm beyond the threshold of colonizer-colonized masculinity wherein decorous capture is transformed into sensual play. The native auratic exists not only in theological Krishna paintings but also in early subcultures of disrobing, where a bride commissions her boudoir style image to be given to her intended. While tribal women and men were photographed and exhibited in states of compulsory undress, the partially denuded materialist chic of the mainland native woman as sexual signifier in a boudoir photo at the turn of the century is a surprise. This is especially the case, given “the nationalist resolution of the women’s question,” which was the question of how the colonized became modern without being western. Partha Chatterjee’s influential essay by that name explains how the nationalist project by the turn of the twentieth century had resolved the question of the social role of colonized woman. She was to symbolize the spiritual inner strength of the supposedly non-colonized traditional home while men moved into the colonial world of public culture, material acquisition, and technological progress. The nationalist project permitted men to yield to sameness with colonizers by holding on to the feminine as essential native difference. E.g. the wearing of cosmetics, “like British memsahibs,” was especially frowned upon. The boudoir portrait sitter’s chic at a British-owned studio defies the essentialized differences that sustained masculinist anticolonial nationalism.⁹²

The tableau of woman as corpse flickers at the canonical borders of photographic history. She is imagined in Walter Benjamin’s famous passage about the “tiny spark of

contingency” searing the frame of the photograph – the near magical foreshadowing of a future reality nested as a visual detail in the here and now (*Little History of Photography*, 1931). Benjamin finds the suicide of photographer Karl Dauthendey’s wife anticipated in the glance she “directed into an unhealthy distance” from within her double portrait with Dauthendey, a portrait that, detached from the historical truth of the ghastly consequence, is a completely conventional affair. Anna Olschwang, the first Mrs. Dauthendey, had committed suicide by slashing her wrists after the birth of their sixth child. Benjamin erroneously identifies Olschwang as the woman beside Karl Dauthendey. This error makes good his cherished aspirations to find something appealing in the banality of a betrothed couple’s portrait photograph. In fact, the subject in the photo was Dauthendey’s new fiancée, Charlotte Friedrich, not his late wife Olschwang who had committed suicide. Benjamin’s famous “spark of contingency” could not survive the removal of Anna Olschwang’s corpse from the frame.⁹³ The history of photography, in Benjamin and Pinney, eschews the specificity of gender only to have a gendered corpse turn up at the origin of things, as the breath of the auratic. Anna Olschwang and Rose Brown – one suicide mistaken for a living woman, the other wrongly treated as a suicide – haunt the default subject of history, who is apparently ungendered but actually masculine.

¹ Taryn Simon, *The Innocents* is a photographic collection chronicling the wrongful conviction and mistaken identification of perpetrators based on the composite sketches that were prepared from the victim’s description. Giacomo Papi, *Booked: The Last 150 Years Told Through Mugshots* (2006), provides data on rates of proactive and re-active success in detection. Allan Sekula’s canonical essay “The Body and the Archive” (1986) provides the frame for thinking criminal snapshots through Galton’s composites and Bertillon’s anthropometry filing cabinets.

² See Claudine K. Brown, “Mug Shot: Suspicious Person,” in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (1994). For an analysis of photographic culture in US prisons, see Nicole Fleetwood, “Posing in Prison: Family Photographs, Emotional Labor, and Carceral Intimacy” in *Public Culture* 27:3, 2015.

³ In 1845, Etienne Serres called for the creation of a photographic museum of the races of man based on frontal and lateral portraits. See Britt Rusert for the performative basis of science in “The Science of Freedom: Counterarchives of Racial Science on the Antebellum Stage.” Rusert prefers “science” to “pseudo-science” in order to highlight the discrediting of black and indigenous knowledges in the name of pseudo-science in “Delaney’s Comet: Fugitive Science and the Speculative Imaginary of Emancipation.”

⁴ Widespread mutiny against the British, from Bengal to Delhi, started by rebellious sepoy (soldiers) from the East India Company and supported/led by a few Indian princes. The mutiny led to the creation of the extraterritorial Andaman Islands as a penal settlement for the imprisoned revolutionaries.

⁵ Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (1997). Visual anthropologist Christopher Pinney interprets that same phrase as photography’s inability to register difference, the “sense of sameness in the world that photography uniquely engendered” leading to the “optical homogeneity” or democratization of strictly hierarchized Indian society, which makes the photographic space unseemly to conservatives and cultural specificists alike. (*The Coming of Photography in India*, 45) Zahid Chaudhary reads the aesthetics of the same in the genre of picturesque photography, practiced by both Indian and European photographers, which he defines as a perceptual armor that converts the foreign into the familiar, making the unseemly acceptable again. He argues that the anaesthetic effect of the picturesque renders difference into sameness, which is neither a consolidation nor a subversion of colonial power, but “an indication of the changing perceptual apparatus.” (*Afterimage of Empire*)

⁶ Caleb Smith, *Prison and the American Imagination* (2009)

⁷ See Clare Anderson on the “Penal Crisis in the Aftermath of the Revolt” in which she documents the dreadful conditions of captivity in 1858 and the resulting shame, embarrassment, and humiliation in the works penned by prisoners. *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8* (2007). Eg: “The toil, suffering and pain/Were greater than can be described.” (100)

⁸ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 17. Historian Bodhisattva Kar mobilizes Foucault to understand the historical workings of a resource-strapped cost-conscious colonialism, in “Heads in the Naga Hills,” *New Cultural Histories of India: Materialities and Practices* (2014).

⁹ Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” in *Refiguring the Archive* (2002) pp. 19-28

¹⁰ Christopher Pinney and Clare Anderson center their analysis of South Asian convict photography on the question of effectiveness in recapture of runaway convicts.

¹¹ See Satadru Sen’s *Disciplining Punishment* (2000) and *Savagery and Colonialism in the Indian Ocean* (2010). Clare Anderson, *Legible Bodies: Race, Criminality, and Colonialism in South Asia* (2004), *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of colonialism in the Indian Ocean world, 1790-1920* (2012). See Chandak Sengoopta, *Imprint of the Raj: How Fingerprinting was Born in Colonial India* (2003), for a history of how the colony stole the metropole’s thunder in the late nineteenth century by pioneering the technology that would become the touchstone of scientific criminology.

¹² *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, 1858. See G Thomas, “The First Four Decades of Photography in India” (1979) for an analysis of British-Indian relations after 1857.

¹³ See Ariella Azoulay, “Potential History: Thinking Through Violence” (2013) where she argues, “[Agamben’s] following claim might be inspiring for those writing histories of disasters: “to be free is not simply to have the power to do this or that thing. ... To be free is ... to be capable of one’s own impotentiality, to be in relation to one’s own privation.” See also Leela Gandhi, “Towards an ahimsaic historiography” in *The Common Cause: Postcolonial ethics and the practice of democracy, 1900-1955* (2014).

¹⁴ Tressider’s hand-written caption in the album at the Alkazi Collection of Photography.

¹⁵ Auction descriptions about one-armed Victorian posing chairs.

¹⁶ Alison Blunt, “Home and Empire: Photographs of British Families in the *Lucknow Album*, 1856-57 in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*. Eds. Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (2003)

¹⁷ On the relation between skin color, race, and optics, see Teju Cole, “A True Picture of Black Skin” and Rosie Cima, “How Photography was Optimized for White Skin Color.” In 1977, Jean Luc Godard famously refused to use Kodak film stock while on assignment in Mozambique, calling Kodak film “racist.”

¹⁸ Words used to describe Nanasaheb Peshwa, another mutiny leader, cited in Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, *The Great Uprising in India 1857-58: Untold stories, Indian and British* (2007). Author Thomas de Quincy invokes the hell-dog figure in his letters: “The horror was unspeakable from the hell-dog Nana; how if this fiend should get hold of Florence [his daughter] or the baby?” (132)

¹⁹ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (1988)

²⁰ Michel Braive, *The Photograph: A Social History* (1966)

²¹ David Arnold, uncovers a Foucauldian history of technologies of incarceration in India, arguing that the prison space represented a continuation of social space, rather than a break from it in “The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India,” *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986-1995* (1997).

²² On the use of the European chair in courtly photography, see native photographer Lala Deen Dayal’s royal portrait “The Maharaja of Bijawar, with European chairs, 1882.”

²³ Amelia Horne cited in D.S. Richards, *Cawnpore and Lucknow: A Tale of Two Sieges – Indian Mutiny* (2007) pp. 63

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Mallitte was photographer in residence at 10 Chowringhee Road, Calcutta, between 1873 and 75, and taught fine art photography at the Calcutta School of Industrial Arts. (*Thacker’s Commercial Directory*)

²⁶ Henry Peach Robinson, *The Pictorial Effect* (1869)

²⁷ Kar analyzes the myth of Nagas as headhunters who could not see the human head as the sovereign, *New Cultural Histories of India*, 342.

²⁸ 19th century term for non-native convict. The convicts were transported from India, Burmah, and Ceylon by sea to Singapore and the products of his labor were transported out of Singapore into the rest of South and South-East Asia.

²⁹ JFA McNair and WD Bayliss, *Prisoners Their Own Warders* (1899), 104

³⁰ *ibid*. 107-8. In the absence of “free warders,” “Photography was taught by one of us [Major McNair who supplied the apparatus and chemicals] to two intelligent convicts of

the Calcutta Baboo class who wrote English. All convicts had their likeness taken, and were registered for identification in case of escape; also local prisoners and men under custody by the police. We had not, of course, the knowledge then of Mr. Henry's method of identity by means of "finger-prints," for it was only approved last year by the Government of India."

³¹ At times used fruitfully to pump water or grind corn in prison yards, the treadmill was also used as a technology of pure punishment.

³² Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Interviews*

³³ See Samuel Bourne's photo *Reversing Station at Bhore Ghat Incline*, 1870

³⁴ See G Thomas, *History of Photography in India, 1840-1980* (1981)

³⁵ Addresses by the Chief Commissioner, Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Temple, to the Andaman Commission, *Andaman and Nicobar Gazette*, July 1897, and February 1901. He continues "They began with the dense forests, the fetid swamps, and the pestilential coral banks of tropical islands, and have made out of them many square miles of grass and arable lands, supporting over fifty villages besides convict stations. Miles upon miles of swamp have been reclaimed, the coral banks have been controlled, and a place with regard to which the words climate and pestilence were almost synonymous has been turned into one favourably spoken of as to its healthiness. The Settlement now grows its own vegetables, tea, coffee, cocoa, tapioca, and arrowroot; some of its ordinary food grains, and most of its fodder."

³⁶ McNair and Bayliss

³⁷ E.g. Begum Hazrat Mahal, who went from courtesan to the wife of nawab Wajid Ali, and eventually became the Begum of Awadh.

³⁸ See Anjali Arondekar on the contagious diseases act after the mutiny in *For the Record: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (2009): "Post-Mutiny era of venereal diseases firmly locates the racialized prostitute's body as the purveyor of a threat so deadly that the English soldier's body is no match for its effects."

³⁹ Veena Talwar Oldenberg, "Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow" *Feminist Studies* (1990).

⁴⁰ Amaresh Datta, *Encyclopedia of Indian Literature* Vol 2 pp 1640.

⁴¹ See Ruth Vanita's groundbreaking work on same sex love and Urdu rekhti poetry in *Gender, Sex, and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry in India, 1780-1870* (2012).

⁴² Oldenberg

⁴³ The adze is an originary tool used to make tools that make it, indicating idyllic closeness to nature within a regressive time. The man on the island, addressed by the camera to express a prehistory, performs a founding function for civilization. See the blinding of the Cyclops in *The Odyssey* in which the adze performs the function of a simile: "I was reminded of the loud hiss that comes from a great axe or adze when a smith plunges it into cold water – to temper it and to give strength to the iron. That is how the Cyclops' eye hissed around in the olive stake."

⁴⁴ See *Crusoe* pp. 53, 55, 59, 61, 91, 99

⁴⁵ Crusoe's Journal dated Sept 30, 1659

⁴⁶ See Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Ian Watt on *Robinson Crusoe*

⁴⁷ In Pierre Macherey's influential reading of the theme of conquest in island fiction, Defoe is considered as having "supplied his successors with images" of Crusoe, while

disrupting the ideology of civilization as colonization, of innovation as annexation. See Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (241).

⁴⁸ Maurice Vidal Portman's Andaman photo collection in The British Museum.

⁴⁹ In his essay "Zero World," Achille Mbembe analyzes native labor as the raw material that kept the whites alive, citing Hannah Arendt to argue that the native is the fruit that the colonizer picks. Mbembe defines racism as the institution of a contradictory relation between the instrumentality of black life and labor in the market sphere, on the one hand, and the constant depreciation of its value and its qualities by the forces of bigotry and prejudice, on the other. In Okwui Enwezor's *Rise and Fall of Apartheid: Photography and the Bureaucracy of Everyday Life* (2013).

⁵⁰ See M.V. Portman, "Photography for Anthropologists," *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 25 (1896).

⁵¹ John Falconer, "Photography in Nineteenth-Century India," in C.A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947*. For the "racial affinity" of the Andamanese with the black races of the world, see B.S. Guha's *Racial Affinities of the Peoples of India* (1935).

⁵² Portman, "Photography for Anthropologists"

⁵³ Vinayak Savarkar, *The Story of My Transportation for Life* (1950).

⁵⁴ See the case of "Luke" a native Andamanese photographer in Violet Talbot Clifton's *Pilgrim to the Isles of Penance*. C.A. Bayly's *The Raj: India and the British, 1600-1947* has an Andamanese native sketch on the topic of photography with the operator under the shroud of his large format camera.

⁵⁵ See Ariella Azoulay on the political ontology of photography as the ontology of being-together, *Civil Imagination* (2012) pp. 118-119.

⁵⁶ Violet Clifton, *Pilgrim to the Isles of Penance*, 150

⁵⁷ See Ray Desmond, Vidya Dehejia, John Falconer, Sophie Gordon et al.

⁵⁸ See Clare Anderson "Oscar Mallitte's Andaman Photographs, 1857-8." *History Workshop Journal* 67.1 (2009): 152-72.

⁵⁹ WW Hunter in his biography of Ali's victim, Lord Mayo, titled *The Earl of Mayo*

⁶⁰ From the "Execution of Shere Ali." *The Manchester Guardian* dated April 16, 1872.

⁶¹ See Sophie Gordon, *Monumental Visions* for the biographical investigation tying Ahmed Ali Khan to a photographer named "Chote Miyan" after Khan went into hiding with the defeat of the revolutionaries.

⁶² In Marx and Engels, "Details of the Attack on Lucknow," for the *New-York Daily Tribune* July 1857 - October 1858. For an engraving of the ransacking of the palace, see the photo "British soldiers looting Qaisar Bagh" in *The History of the Indian Mutiny* by Charles Ball (1858).

⁶³ See engraving in Ball.

⁶⁴ Alison Blunt in Schwartz and Ryan, *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (2003).

⁶⁵ In the late nineteenth century in India, photographic studios normally charged between Rupees 8 to 10 for half a dozen copies, including convict likenesses for police precincts. See Christopher Pinney, *Coming of Photography in India* (2008).

⁶⁶ Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* (2010)

⁶⁷ Angus Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles: Being an Account of the Abor Expedition, the Mishmi Mission and the Miri Mission*. (1912)

⁶⁸ Rosa Luxemborg defines “crises” as “the periodic collisions of the contradictory forces of the capitalist economy.” The northeast frontier crises had to do with tribal raids and the murders of white officials and company men: “The feeling of insecurity caused by the raids is reacting most injuriously on our revenues. The Hill tracts revenues consist chiefly of tolls on hill produce and these have gone down from Rs. 89,109...to Rs. 83,222 last year, and the amount collected will be even less this year. In fact, Mr Home does not expect it to exceed Rs 50,000.” From Robert Reid’s *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam: From 1883-1941*. (1983)

⁶⁹ Within the genre of white expedition photography, the convict photo blurs the boundaries between the mug shot and the spot news photo, between the ethnographic portrait and the war trophy.

⁷⁰ On the monster film, see Snead, “Spectatorship and Capture in King Kong: The Guilty Look” in *Critical Quarterly* (1991).

⁷¹ James Snead’s theory of “optical colonization” is derived from the phenotypic presence of the black man and the white woman in the Hollywood monster film *King Kong*.

⁷² The state’s “open season” was when the cold weather permitted officers, battalions, and coolies to march into frontier terrain and compensate for the state’s powerlessness during the rest of the year. The Companies Act of 1862 ensured Britain’s deregulation of the limited liability joint stock company and it intensified international finance and London’s credit markets. See Bodhisattva Kar on the northeast’s plantation economy in *Framing Assam: Plantation Capital, Metropolitan Knowledge and a Regime of Identities* (2007).

⁷³ See Reid, *History of Frontier areas bordering on Assam*.

⁷⁴ “Friction” is Anna Tsing’s term for frontier antagonisms in her influential *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005): “The frontier is made in the shifting terrain between legality and illegality, public and private ownership, brutal rape and passionate charisma, ethnic collaboration and hostility, violence and law, restoration and extermination” (33).

⁷⁵ As stated by Bodhisattva Kar, “The relationship between military expeditions and labor conscription has not been addressed in the existing historiography... Since the late nineteenth century, the British Indian state managed to seize a sizeable “tribal” workforce after every successful expedition into the extra-jurisdictional territories which was principally set to work on roads. During the 1911 Mishmi Expedition, the conscripts were forced to build 1843 feet of bridges and 13 miles of cart road in 37 days. Fourteen years after the brutal Abor Expedition of 1911-12, it was officially reported that “[t]he villages of Rengging, Rotung, Babuk and Kebung, who after the Abor Expedition were compelled as a punishment to maintain without payment the bridle path from near Pasighat to Yambung have been relieved of this compulsory labour and will henceforth be paid full rates for the work. The Pasi Minyongs are beginning to take contract work for road maintenance, a good sign that they are feeling land hunger and greater want of necessities and luxuries... The casual mention of the fact in a 1934 report that the Assam Saw Mills, notwithstanding its abnormally low wage rates, “expends something over a lakh on tribal

labour mostly on the Miris” makes one wonder how many “primitives” were “freed” into the invisible market of labor, the great marvel of modernity.” *Framing Assam* (2007).

⁷⁶ Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering Assam: From 1883-1941*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (2005).

⁷⁹ Vidya Dehejia’s *India through the Lens 1840-1911* takes the Kodak as a heuristic end point of colonial photography.

⁸⁰ In photo historiography, the “infancy” of photography is seen as immersed in the fog of technical problems, extreme weather, recalcitrant sitters and their nervous tics. See Walter Benjamin’s *A Short History of Photography* (1972) for the “fog surrounding the origins of photography.”

⁸¹ See the constellation of theories on modernity and media: George Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972).

⁸² On Benjamin’s ambivalence towards the aura, see Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura.” *Critical Inquiry* (2008).

⁸³ Their elaboration of the consciousness of the Other derives from Eve Sedgwick’s scene of identification with an image of Outsider artist Judith Scott standing beside her textile sculpture in *Touching, Feeling* (2003). The photo of Scott, who was denied subject status by various ideological and repressive state apparatuses, demonstrates her aesthetic consciousness, her “affective intentionality,” for Sedgwick and offers not a lack of consciousness but a mysterious plenitude to the intellectual. “The affect that saturates the photo,” says Sedgwick, “is mysterious, or at least multiple, in quality...”

⁸⁴ See Brown and Phu’s discussion of Jacob Riis’s Reformist work solely in terms of “the production and circulation of feeling designed to produce an activist viewer,” terms in which Riis’ complicity with police networks is not accounted for.

⁸⁵ For the notion of being modern without being western, see Kumkum Sangari, “New Patriotism: Beauty and the Bomb” in *Body.City: Siting Contemporary Culture in India* (2003) pp. 199-217.

⁸⁶ This position is elaborated in Christopher Pinney’s “Camerawork as Technical Practice in Colonial India.” Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce eds. *Material Powers* (2013) pp. 145-170.

⁸⁷ On the use of the prosthesis in the building of nationhood, see Pheng Cheah’s *Spectral Nationality* (1998).

⁸⁸ See Jacques Derrida’s “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1970) for an account of language invading the problematic.

⁸⁹ See Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1976) and Gayatri Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) for a critique of sovereign subject effects.

⁹⁰ See Norman Chevers’ photographically driven forensic analysis of the cause of Brown’s death in *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India, including the Outline of a History of Crime against the Person in India* (1870) pp. 424. Chevers also suggested that the stereoscopic image of the victim at the crime scene would result in the most

“hardened savage” confessing because the photo’s immersive, reality effect would haunt him into acknowledging his guilt.

⁹¹ E.g., J.T. Zealy’s daguerreotypes of US plantation slaves for Louis Agassiz, Marc Garanger’s Algerian Women. See Malek Alloula’s *The Colonial Harem* for an analysis of French picture postcards of Algerian women.

⁹² See Partha Chatterjee on nationalist and reformist caricatures of native women who wore cosmetics and were perceived as trying to imitate the British memsahibs, in *The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question* (1987).

⁹³ See Ariella Azoulay, *Death’s Showcase* (2001), on the problem of Benjamin’s misidentification of the women in Dauthendey’s life, an example of the absence of close reading in photography theory.

CHAPTER 2

Women Against Repatriation's Marketplace

“Actually trying to understand how the confusions of consanguinity worked becomes the project, because the outcome goes far to explain the rule of gender and its application to the African female in captivity.”

– Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

“*A fortiori*: why are men not objects of exchange among women?”

– Luce Irigaray, “Women on the Market”

“[After Partition] K. lived on in Pakistan [instead of returning to India like she was pressured to do]... The common description of her was that she was like a dervish whose words had almost oracular importance. She never moved out without a pistol, is supposed to have shot three intruders who entered her house when she was alone, was quite militant – and wrote reams of mystic poetry.”

– Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, *Borders and Boundaries*

This chapter takes gendered repatriation as a key trope of resemblance between colonizing and decolonizing regimes. In South Asia, masculinist anticolonialism acceded to state sovereignty by the violence of women’s exchange and return across India-Pakistan borders after Independence through Partition (1947). In what alternate ways, I have asked, did repatriated women imagine freedom? Through archival research, I assemble visual and literary images of non-possession in women who were made into “the non-native sex” or “the so-native sex” that they slipped from the construct of nativity while enabling it during the foundation of two new nation-states. The chapter analyzes how images of non-possession disrupt masculinist anticolonialism’s repetition of colonial violence in the will to possess territory, women, and descendants. I identify acts of

freedom that arise from women not shackled to the dream of state sovereignty, from women who are turned away from self-possession, and trafficked between nations.

From repatriation's ground of circulation and vagrancy, anticolonialism can be defined as the turn to the fabulated, the undeciphered, and the inaccessible in the composition of resistance, when it takes the risk of being in struggle with struggle itself. I name as anticolonial not just an act of freedom but the quality of having nothing but the non-possessive affirmation of being an irretrievable subject. This chapter, thus, gives an account of exchanged women as anticolonial subjects, an account missing from the vast amount of research on the topic in South Asian Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and Feminist History.

The question of whether and how woman is native to anticolonialism cannot be posed from outside the patriarchal structure of women's circulation through property transactions among men. Various abstracted as product, as territory, as corpse, as flesh, as conflagration, etc., women in circulation organize the relations among men, and masculinist anticolonialism follows this normative mode of commerce and homosociality. Nonetheless, the sanctioning of women's dispersion contradicts the sanctity of anti-dispersion in anticolonial politics. The principal assertion that sovereignty in the land of origin be attained by virtue of origin, as opposed to settlement, makes the native antithetical to the migrant or settler. The rhetoric of autochthony translates the physical detail of a fixed origin into a figuration of political sovereignty to undo the colonial theft of land and the compulsory dispersion of a nation. Which is to say, the

privileging of bloodlines, group descent, and the maternal function at the origin allows inhabitation to carry the demand for possession of self and soil and offspring. Yet, women's exchange hovers at the edges of the history of anticolonialism. This chapter, then, tackles the constantly deferred reading of women on the market in the prevailing discourse of masculinist anticolonialism and proposes to treat women who were swapped transnationally after 1947 as the unacknowledged creditors of home-rule in South Asia.

In South Asia, with the dawn of a new era of home-rule/self-mastery after 1947, the *raison d'être* of anticolonialism is seen as finished with the end of empire. But national liberation, far from bringing an end to the work of anticolonialism, depends on the subjugation of women and the supplanting of women's conception of liberation at the time of its achievement. Taking as paradigmatic the violence of women's exchange and return, detention and "repatriation," across India-Pakistan borders after Independence through Partition (1947-56), I claim that masculinist anticolonialism in its victorious accession to state sovereignty reveals that it has been continuously foreign to woman when it moves and removes her by force of its desire, by its regime of dispersion.

This chapter seeks to theorize anticolonialism from the ground of circulation and vagrancy rather than the truth of original inhabitation, examining how photographic portraiture and literary irony represent gendered repatriation in mid-twentieth century South Asia. I ask how repatriated native women – in the pleasing fictions of literature, the persuasive fictions of history, and the evidentiary fictions of reportage – imagined freedom from colonial masculine dominance, given these subjects' intense familiarity

with “being as it were from the very beginning at stake in the game” between men.¹ What intervention into anticolonial thought does woman’s discourse – her coming and going – make possible if it is neither taken chiefly as suffering due to preclusion from the myth of sovereign presence nor venerated as diverse through a conveniently fetishized alterity? What does it mean to take seriously women’s implication in the patriarchal game that undoes their native status and makes man the sole subject of native reference? An appraisal of gendered repatriation produces the possibility that women on the market uphold the difference between colonialism and its opponents at a moment of agonizing resemblance between the erstwhile warring factions.

This chapter, then, redefines anticolonialism as the turn to the inappropriate, the undeciphered, and the inaccessible in the composition of resistance. This turn – whose hinge comprises many desperate, eccentric, elusive, ad-hoc, low-key, fantastic, ambiguous, and fragmented acts of freedom in the Partition – shows the limits of masculinist anticolonialism. Whether it is the transvestism of a woman playing a heroic knight in survivor testimony, or the murder of a rapist in a literary break from the de facto amnesty for rapists; whether it is her demeanor in a photograph that hums, quietly but audibly, when she is deported, or her headlong rush out of safety and into the path of a mob to prevent racially-motivated reprisal killing – such acts of freedom, among others (featuring in this chapter), are an ultimately inescapable limit of the reigning problematic of anticolonialism that has precluded them. Attention to these acts that are often nothing more than traces, wisps, rumors, and twinges, does not simply enlarge the definition of anticolonialism but altogether transforms its field toward non-possession.

Indeed, when it does not succumb to the relief of protest or to the revenge of power reversal, anticolonialism takes the risk of being in struggle with struggle itself, with the interpretive protocols of resistance, and thus, with the established system that posits sovereign presence as the first freedom and enables the interpretation of only certain struggles as anticolonial. Studying the ruination entailed in Britain's release of South Asian territory – when each native religious community fought to gain the political freedom to rule other religious communities, fighting a civil war primarily through real and imagined violence against women – it is clear that masculinist anticolonialism shares the catastrophic prerogative of colonialism by its will-to-possess, declaring ownership over territory, women, and progeny. When men in two new nation-states, in their foundational act as free men, claim the entire population of women in the borderlands as their private possessions and their liquid currency, it is not an exaggeration to say that women are the non-native sex or the so-native sex. The terms emphasize that the exchange of women appearing to take place between men actually takes place between nation-states and women, while men act as the representatives and intermediaries exerting property rights over both. With her native status rescinded, woman changes nations so man can feel at home.

From the ground of the poor and perverse freedom of women in exchange, this chapter names as anticolonial not just an act of freedom but the quality of having nothing but the non-possessive affirmation of being an inaccessible and irretrievable subject. The retrieval mode of state-sanctioned feminist humanitarianism (1947-53) and feminist oral

historiography (1990-), although conceived differently, sees the irretrievability of exchanged women and their lives as its key moment of failure and disappointment. In overstressing that the give-and-take of women was the unjust price paid for freedom from colonial rule, neither humanitarianism nor historiography, separated as they are by decades and principles, ask how the position of the irretrievable subject transforms anticolonialism.

Organized in four distinct but overlapping styles of portraiture, in the order of intensifying production of spectatorial sentiment, namely, (1) the Postmortem Portrait (2) the Missionary Portrait, (3) the Humanitarian Portrait, and (4) the Photojournalistic Portrait, this chapter cites photos mined from diverse archival sources such as the Press Information Bureau of India, International Committee of the Red Cross, Citizens Archive of Pakistan, Presbyterian Historical Archives, the Acme Bureau, and the LIFE archives in the US. Most of these photos have not received scholarly attention, while a couple of them are shots taken and scrapped in preparation of an iconic image of the Partition, such as Margaret Bourke-White's stately frieze of refugees, where "a spindly but determined old Sikh, [carries] his ailing wife on his shoulders." The first two sections set to work terms, figures, and arguments that come to fruition in the problematic of the longer and more significant third section.

Together, the images in the chapter are occasions to ask, what kinds of difference did the camera make to the exchange of women that founded both states? What can we articulate differently about search and rescue procedures through photography? Given the literary

text's purchase on the profoundly figurative status of repatriation (of exchange, rape, and recovery), what does the medium of photography do with the question of repatriation?

The chapter answers that the repatriation portrait does not necessarily facilitate repatriation in the restricted sense of images leading to search, identification, rescue, and return of abducted or fugitive or non-nativized women. Although an integral component of masculinist anticolonialism's invention of woman as inherently recoverable national/familial debt, the repatriation portrait in the Partition cannot be reduced to the function of repatriation; indeed, the repatriation portrait effectively works in reverse as a record that gendered repatriation indeed took place. It is a testament to the violence of repatriation itself as a primary violence by which over ten million people were segregated to make one nation into two. In the borderlands, male children under eighteen and all women, officially classified as "abducted persons," were repatriated not once but multiple times as they were recovered, returned, re-abducted, or rejected again based on the whereabouts and desires of their pre-Partition household. Even though the local and precise uses of repatriation photographs are largely hidden, undocumented, or erased, photography remains implicated in the gendered accrual of repatriation, as we will see in the contextless images and the imageless contexts that this chapter brings together.

We can understand these two categories by surveying the work of Ariella Azoulay, Tina Campt, and Saidiya Hartman, who will serve as interlocutors for my reading of anticolonialism in this chapter. Given the prevalence of contextless images and imageless contexts, the history of photography cannot be written purely as the history of

accessioned and captioned images. With reference to the imageless contexts of colonial catastrophe, Azoulay's formulation of "untaken photographs" articulates the problematic of what can be seen of the images we never see. The phrase is an excellent placeholder for the image that predates its own putting into effect by being taken or being seen.

[untaken photographs put the question of] what can be seen of regime-made disasters when cameras are not present to document them; or when they are present but don't take photographs; or if they do take photographs, the photos remain in the hands of those interested in concealing them from public view, or in preventing those who come across them from displaying them publicly.²

Untaken photos are critical for unveiling the social relations of production and circulation that the given image, seen by itself, conceals. Behind the most benign or appealing image might be a camera that acts as a direct instrument of catastrophe.

Confronted with contextless portraits that seem to emit a dull ordinariness, Tina Campt's concept of "quiet photography" pushes against the limit of readability.³ Campt follows the tradition of black aesthetic critique in her emphasis on the trans-sensorial registers of identity card portraits when no recognizable sign of resistance is forthcoming. She reads photographs of everyday black life that are neither silent nor audible but, that, according to her, transmit a continual hum – everyday "sonic frequencies of quiet." For our purpose, the hum is a helpful mode of expressivity that lies between the poles of speech and silence that have thus far organized Partition Studies and have also motivated discourse on the Subaltern to be vigilant about the unavoidability of conflating the two poles, when speech becomes another mode of silencing, assigning a self-serving voice to the silenced other.⁴

Saidiya Hartman inhabits the performative contradiction of expressing the wish to narrate, telling us what she might narrate, while maintaining a second silence of narration under the disclaimer of the refusal to narrate. She describes the impossibility of anticolonial narration from the subject position of Venus, a simultaneously annihilated and romanticized figure in the archive of trans-Atlantic slavery, where the obliteration of black women's lives is almost complete. Hartman's preferred term, "critical fabulation," is a mode of narrative restraint that refuses to take the inaccessible as already known and yet "imagine[s] what cannot be verified," narrating the desire to narrate "impossible stories" about the lost "afterlife of property."⁵ Critical fabulation is the process by which she both "avoids and arrives at" an anticolonial narration of Venus.⁶ Taken together in this chapter, Azoulay, Campt, and Hartman represent different theorizations of the figurative quality of that which has been made unseen, undecipherable, and inaccessible by the problematic of colonial resemblance. This chapter submits the following propositions: women in exchange have a stake in anticolonialism and their mediation constitutes them as subjects of anticolonial history; their acts of freedom appear when we are free to read anticolonialism formally (through photography, literature, and history).

1. The Postmortem Portrait



Photo 1: *Photograph by means of which the victim of the “Amherst Street Murder” was identified* (1868). Photo by John Blessington Roberts, Coroner of Calcutta. From Norman Chevers’ *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India* (1870).

Where is the native woman in captivity? The previous chapter set up the question of if/how woman belongs to anticolonialism by contrasting the scene of woman as corpse with scenes of captured and immobilized native men at the turn of the twentieth century. Where men’s arrest is pictured as the permanent shackling to empire-building so as to compensate for the limits of the counterinsurgent state, woman’s arrest in the colony connotes a primarily interpretive project about preservative mediums, human remains and desire, denuding and mortification, in the newly stricken body under the detective’s gaze. Woman framed as body of evidence, as a “body of [arrested] time,” is, simultaneously, both the safe place of knowledge for man and the eternal puzzle that always leaves one more piece to be known.⁷

In the coroner’s portrait, the erotically resonant mosaic – comprising flesh, rope, jewelry, wood, cloth, and a blurred arm stretching out of the frame and almost touching the crouching camera – is named Rose Brown. The portrait of Brown presents an early example of woman’s petrification into forensic evidence, through photography, and through interpretive exchange between men of medicine and law in the colony. Moreover, the forensic photograph, a clue to “what really happened,” echoes interpretive indeterminacies instead of resolving them as an instrument of autonomous truth-value.⁸ Around Brown’s portrait, Chevers’ *Manual* stages her interpreters’ squabbles, and we see the legal status of the handbook get outplayed by its own novelistic structure and excessively unreliable narration, disrupting the course of information retrieval:

Dr Colles considered, "From the state of the body generally and that of the left arm, I am of opinion that the wound was inflicted while she was in an erect position, and that she almost immediately fell over on her left side."... If she had been held by one or two persons, would not the road and her hair and dress have borne evidences of a violent struggle, and would she not probably have aroused the neighbours by her shrieks before the division of the larynx could have been accomplished? "If," said Dr. Colles, "the wound had been inflicted by a second person, it might have been done from behind." Possibly, but then we have the question, whether the woman could well have been taken so much unawares as to fall dead under such a wound...

(from *A Manual of Medical Jurisprudence for India*, 425)

The multiplication of doubt, conditionals, questions, uncorroborated opinions, hypothetical scenarios, and counter-examinations carries on unhindered in this manual on how to read the signs correctly to reach a verdict about cause of death, so much so that this clumsy forensic handbook is a guide to nothing but its own ineptitude. The only certainty the handbook has is the certainty of lacking the truth of what happened to Rose Brown, and yet, like many a handbook of colonial governance, it doesn't rest with learning just enough and risks proving too much.

In a laughable overreach, Chevers suggests that Brown's forensic portrait functions as the best advocate for his proposed innovation of photographically preserving corpses.⁹ She is the "first" corpse in British India to have the clock on decay stopped while she herself decayed, thus accounting for the possibility of deferred identification based on photographically mummified remains. However, other than the identification of her remains, the claim of utility rings hollow: the more Chevers attempts to unravel the plot of her death the more the image lays bare a place not only of his disavowed ignorance but also of his obtuse angling for a verdict of suicide. Instead of giving access to the truth, the forensic portrait, with its indestructibly figurative quality, only portrays the *question* of

what actually happened to Brown. The portrait localizes the inaccessible when medical men attempt retrieving too much, too familiarly.

Nonetheless, the manual's precise impulse to arrest photographically and dissect human remains makes it impossible to resist Andre Bazin's theory of photographic ontology, where he defines the medium as a mummifying technology, obsessed with likeness, one that "embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption." All photography is a category of remains and all remains a category of photography that is labeled forensic. Photography's "mummy complex," when subject to the rule of gender in South Asian anticolonialism, demonstrates how Brown was posthumously and punishingly rescued from the passage of time, denuded for all time.

Precisely due to the sensational indeterminacy surrounding the verdict of her death (suicide or murder?), Brown became an unwitting spur for the establishment of a detective department in Calcutta and heightened policing of the native populations. This sealed her posthumous pairing with the paternalistic trope of the white savior. It is hardly news, here, that the colonial management of native populations is cloaked under the paternalistic protection of women. Used as an alibi to discipline and punish native masculinity through heightened policing, Brown is thus native to the suppression of anticolonialism, rather than the cultivation of it.¹⁰ Yet, the stock device of paternalism does reserve a few surprises – the punitive feminine being one.

Injury to women results in a breakdown of paternalism and in the ascension of the punitive feminine in Sa'adat Hasan Manto's Urdu-language short story about lust, death, and rape in the Partition, *Thanda Gosht* (1950) (*Cold Meat* (1994), *Colder than Ice* (2008)). On the verge of becoming a corpse himself after Kulwant Kaur, his spirited but jealous lover, stabs him in bed with his own dagger, the Sikh protagonist Ishwar Singh narrates to her the cause of his frigidity/impotence: upon abducting and raping a Muslim girl during the free-for-all of Partition violence, he had made the (to him) body-and-soul numbing discovery that his victim was cold as a corpse all along. *Thanda Gosht* does not concern itself with why necrotic rape is worse than rape, but by the end of the short story that spans all of five pages, Singh is the cold corpse. Manto, the master of quick-and-dirty dramatic irony, uses a title that refers both to the summarily dismissed rape victim and to her rapist, a Scheherazade-like figure whose end is tied up with the end of the rape story he tells and occurs at the hands of his steadfastly unsympathetic and suspicious lover, Kulwant Kaur. At a historical moment of de facto amnesty for rapists in the Partition, it is not incidental that this text has its rapist bleed to death.

[Kulwant Kaur said] "If you dare to lie to me, I'll cut you into pieces. Now swear by Waheguru that you weren't with another woman."

Guiltily, Ishwar Singh shook his head. Kulwant Kaur lost her head. She snatched the dagger lying in the corner, pulled it out of its scabbard and lunged at Ishwar Singh. Blood began to spurt out of the wounds. Still unsatisfied, Kulwant Kaur began to claw at his face like a mad cat and to curse the nameless woman. (*Cold Meat*, 94)

A feminist venture into a male author's plot of female jealousy over a male lover who is impotent because he has just returned from raping a corpse belonging to the enemy religion is, assuredly, not the happiest prospect. Nonetheless, as the passage cited above confirms, the narrative action is motivated by Kaur's desire for Singh and for Singh's

confession. Doubtless, Manto makes Kaur speak in Singh's voice ("curse the nameless woman") and looks at her through Singh's eyes ("like a mad cat"), but it is also evident and startling that Kaur's sexuality is not Singh's prerogative. Rather, it is the other way round. Through the aesthetics of brevity in *Thanda Gosht*, the romance plot, the rape plot, the impotence plot, and revenge plot converge on a series of two women, and the green-eyed madwoman is a flimsy smokescreen for the punishment of the rapist, one woman avenging the murder-rape of another. The paternalism of rescue – an illusion enabling the subjugation of women – is wholly exploded in the surreal mise-en-scene of Kulwant Kaur watching Ishwar Singh bleed to death without lifting a finger to rescue him. Kaur's quiet non-rescue of Singh is as much an action as the punishment she has meted out.

The punitive feminine is a rarity in Partition discourse, which normally intercuts between Woman-as-Corpse and Woman-as-Conflagration, between cold decay and spectacular fire of arrested women. Staying with Brown's portrait a little longer permits us to discover a visual citation of the corpse in the conflagration, a citation of the colonial politics of rescue in the anticolonial politics of rescue. Although Brown's riveted gaze lends a sense of macabre repose to her countenance, it transmits nothing else. Brown's outstretched dead hand, however, conjures the auspicious hand-imprint of the *sati* – the good wife, the flaming goddess, the Hindu upper-caste widow, who commits suicide by self-immolation at the pyre of her husband. Partition discourse resurrects the practice of *sati* to explain the forced mass suicides of women in the wake of rape threats:

"Hundreds of tins of *ghee* (oil) were poured and a fire lit. And then the young daughters were thrown into the inferno... Sati was being reenacted with the difference that this time those who jumped into the fire were not widows but virgins." (Shorish Kashmiri, *Humiliated and Harassed They Left*, 148)

“The chief had seven hundred wives, and they all threw themselves at the same time into the fire,”... “[w]e read of a pyre kept alight for three days, while relays of widows were fetched from a distance.” (Edward Thompson, *Suttee - A Historical and Philosophical Enquiry Into the Hindu Rite of Window Burning*, 37)

Kashmiri’s sensationally overdone, voyeuristic, eyewitness account, luxuriating in the narration of unrestrained violence against women, just like Thompson’s colonial discourse on the abolition of *sati* from a century ago, is strangely at odds with the unembellished photographic image conjuring the *sati* (Photo 2). Both Thompson and Kashmiri present hyperbolic, unwarranted, and cheaply thrilling scenarios of women’s annihilation. While Thompson would use the extravagant specter of native violence against native women to justify colonial intervention, Kashmiri uses native violence against native women to re-inscribe women’s non-native status.



Photo 2: *“The Sanskrit word “sati,” meaning “virtuous one,” was applied to the widow who joined her late husband on his funeral pyre. The Mughals tried to discourage the practice, which was prohibited by the British in 1829-1830. Poignant memorial stones such as those shown in this photograph of the year 1870 are to be found all over India. “Each luckless woman,” according to General C. Hervey (1892), “was required, by way of sealing her ‘determination’ to immolate herself, to place the palm of her right hand upon some yellow daub presented to her in a platter as she passed out, and to press it against the wall of the gateway, the hand-mark thus left being subsequently cut out in the wall, or, as in some instances, a hand was fashioned in marble from the model afforded by the impression and fixed upon it.” From Ray Desmond, *Victorian India in Focus*.*

In the late nineteenth century, the Archaeological Survey of India began a photographic project to preserve crumbling memorial stones across India that had been erected and engraved with imprint of the sati’s palm to commemorate the notorious native practice and the women who had become conflagrations. The British prohibition of the native Hindu upper caste tradition of *sati* in 1829 was seen as foundational to the emancipation of native women.¹¹ The colonial civilizing mission begins properly in the proprietorial “rescue” of native women. Of all rescues, the rescue from public suicide by immolation is of seminal importance, and it becomes the general frame of reference against which other apparent emancipations are measured. Inter-religious Partition violence makes advantageous use of the traditional effect of public self-immolation. The second moment of sati, during the twentieth century, is advanced as emancipation from the emancipation from widowed chastity, the practical reversal of colonial law in the name of anticolonial nativism.

The trans-historical spectacular accumulation of scenes of conflagration permits equivalence between colonial rescue in 1829 and normative anticolonial rescue in 1947. When the enemy states of India and Pakistan made a common decision to repatriate

abducted women on both sides of the border and send them to what they decided were their original households, often non-consensually, and largely without exception, this violent exchange was framed in terms of rescue work.¹² At the same time, mass suicide to save the original household and the original patriarch from dishonor was also represented as a ubiquitous modality of rescue. Accounts such as Kashmiri's are critical of mass suicidal practices during the Partition but are nonetheless intensely drawn to the figure of the good wife and the hyperbolic conflagration as a means to reveal renewed cycles of violence against women, symbolic and otherwise.

Between 1947 and 1956, South Asian feminist humanitarian workers under the sign of military evacuation organizations brought Hindu and Sikh women that they had searched out, invented, divined, or conjured in West Punjab (Pakistan) to be exchanged precisely for the same number of Muslim women they had made appear in East Punjab (India). Hundreds of single women, abducted women, destitute women, women in inter-racial relationships, young women, fugitive women, trafficked women, religiously converted women, pregnant women, women held hostage, tortured women, and raped women – just women, really – were detained in camps for repatriation. The indiscriminate legal re-circulation of women was jointly carried out by the Indo-Pakistan dominions to reverse what both the enemy states saw as the illegal transacting of women during partition violence. In forcibly repatriating the non-native sex, the violence of redress was expected to exceed, and often precede, the actual or alleged violence of injury. Woman in transit is a bearer of sex via quantity. Six hundred, nine hundred, twelve thousand, twenty thousand exchanged: in the repatriation project, the grammar of accumulation makes use matter less than number, to rephrase Irigaray's insight.¹³

Unlike in the case of the dervish K. (from my second epigraph), who, via family archives, is staged as a figure of militant positivity in isolation from another woman, woman's value in the general calculus of repatriation comes from the chain of exchange determined by native men, i.e., from a differential relation between at least two women measured against and by a third party of men. Under the same mandate of inter-state fair trade of women among men, infants were legally dekinned from their repatriated mothers if the marriage had taken place after March of 1947, the month acknowledged as the official start of Partition-related religious violence in Punjab. The Central Recovery Operation could pay no heed to blood relations between mother-child because of its focus on patriarchal domestic ties, precisely because the objective was to correct property transactions, not to unravel the kinship crisis brought upon by forced dispersion. Veena Das reads this moment as the state's reinstatement of the "correct matrimonial dialogue of men" (21). In my view, the dekinning law brings the Partition crisis closer in form to what Hortense Spillers, in the context of African female captivity, calls "another instance of vestibular cultural formation where kinship loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*" (74). Section Three of this chapter examines photographic kinship practices – pietas in the camps – that resist the dekinning function of masculinist anticolonialism.

What death does woman die after the colony? The women who supposedly chose to commit mass suicide in the well of Thao Khalsa village when faced with the possibility of rape and religious conversion in 1947, are said to have uttered, "We don't want to

become Musalmaan, we would rather die.”¹⁴ In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia rightly deconstructs the effect of agency behind such self-destructive statements that are attributed to threatened women. Basant Kaur, the woman who lived to tell the tale, could not drown in the well of Thao Khalsa because it was already so full of bodies: “it’s like when you put goyas, rotis into a tandoor [bread in an oven], and if it’s too full, the ones near the top, they don’t cook, they have to be taken out” (200). So Basant Kaur was taken out of the oven/well of mass suicide. Out of the infamous suicide well in Thao Khalsa village came another photographic trace of rape, this time illuminating the self-destruction/honor killing as the cost of rape prevention, and confirming that racial-colonial violence against women started well before the official date of Partition and Independence in August 1947. A staff photographer shone a flashlight inside the well and photographed the bodies slowly decomposing in its depths, before the well was blocked.¹⁵ The photograph of the well is another avenue of the disappearance of women under the sentence of perhaps impending rape. The medium becomes a way to highlight the sustained engagement of humanitarianism and historiography with the conceit of “what really happened?” In incendiary rumors and overdone atrocity tales, women figured as the infrastructure of exchange upon which Hindu, Muslim and Sikh men humiliated each other’s masculine virility.¹⁶

“Some days ago, there was a story told in the paper that some of the *goondas* (lawless ones) [henchmen hired by landlords] of Amritsar, where there has been extreme destruction by arson and looting, sent to fellow goondas in Lahore some glass bangles (bracelets). Thus intimating that the Lahore chaps were a bunch of sissies or “panty-waists” over against their more lawless and greater ruffians of Amritsar. *It could have happened*. At any rate, such spurring on of a particular community in one place by those in other parts is without doubt going on, so that there will be continuous disorder, or worse.” (George B. Leeder’s letter to family from Jullunder City, May 1947)

The statement “It could have happened” brings into crisis the forensic imperative we saw in Chevers, targeting women, probing again and again into “what really happened.” E.M. Forster’s novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is structured around the classic absence of “what really happened” to Adela Quested in the Marabar caves, the figural “nothing.” The narrator describes the operation of radical doubt in the colony, lightly, and with reference to a little green bird that the British city magistrate Ronny Heaslop cannot name correctly: “But nothing in India is identifiable, the mere asking of a question causes it to disappear or to merge in something else.” The problem is not simply that the truth is elusive and the colonial world is in a state of alienating flux for the magistrate, who mistakenly identifies the bird in both his guesses. Rather, the problem is that of irony. The mere asking of the question performs a sleight of hand upon the asker, dissolving any solid ground of assertion. The utterance then shifts suddenly from narrator to magistrate: “McBryde has an illustrated bird book,” he [Ronny] said dejectedly,” citing a manual for bringing the unknown into taxonomy. But, how should a manual be read in a system where disappearance *as well as* appearance thwarts taxonomy? The forensic fantasy of verifiability and retrievability, the methodical elimination of doubt and nonknowledge in favor of a determinate verdict – that joins Chevers to the fictitious city magistrate to the partisan fact-finding taskforces deployed in the Partition, and brings Rose Brown and Adela Quested together with Spivak’s Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri – are counterinsurgent complexes that organize scenes of women’s separation from the masculinist anticolonial.

The displacement of voyeurism and quantification, the history of what could have happened, and the quiet act of non-rescue place under heavy strain the equation of

anticolonialism with emancipation. The next section on missionary portraiture partially relieves that strain by asking how, in situations where the spectacular is not conjured, where the crisis of non-knowledge is suspended, and where no rescue of women is forthcoming, does spectatorial sentiment function? How do we read anticolonialism when the scale of catastrophe is changed to unbearable domestic ordinariness?

2. The Missionary Portrait

This section moves the figure of woman from the scene of spectacular rescue to the regime of missionary care that cannot care for her and compensates by besieging her with the ordinary rapport of masculine pity. I argue that uneventful, miserable domesticity enters into Partition history in the stead of sexual violation. By reading photographs and letters from the archival box of one George B. Leeder, a Presbyterian missionary who had been intent on bringing Western technology to rural Punjab when the cataclysm of Partition struck, the section focuses on native domesticity that is organized around the repression of both sexuality and sexual violation. No doubt this is another obscure nook in the edifice of Partition, but Leeder's eyewitness accounts plunge us into the misery that accompanies the segregation of shared life – misery that has not even the catastrophic weight of an exceptional event to redeem it.



Photo 3: *“A continuous stream of refugees plodding towards Pakistan. Five thousand passed here each hour of the day. Arrow points to a 3-storey house gutted by fire during rioting.”* George B. Leeder, 1947-1948.

Leeder’s act of witnessing takes the form of referencing and annotating the mundane. The small arrow on Photo 3 points to a gutted building in the background, making this a methodically unique image in the repertoire of repatriation for capturing within the same frame the transit of populations and the proximate cause of their repatriation, racially motivated arson. The serpentine file of refugees carrying bedding rolls, a change of clothes, and some vessels, pass by what appears to be a checkpoint of military escorts in the foreground on the left. This image represents the working of masculinist anticolonialism in the annihilation of race-specific households. The management of domestic relations on the road and the specter of women’s exchange are flattened into the symbol of the gutted building and the endless stream of humanity that steps out of the

frame. The photo might be a symptom of Leeder's pity, but it has the effect of making the everydayness of catastrophe seem compelling without being abject.

The Leeder papers, when they report the severance salaries of soon-to-be deported domestic workers, show that a critique of white bourgeois sympathy includes delegitimizing the more naturalized masculine sense of entitlement towards women's unpaid domestic, reproductive, and affective work, attained as personal services either through abduction or through repatriation during the reorganization of nation-states. Two codes of domesticity are at odds here: the chivalric code that desires to preserve racially pure bloodlines and the economic code that desires to reproduce the household at a minimal cost. Leeder represses women's sexuality so that the chivalric and the economic do not come up against each other. Or more accurately, the dual codes of domesticity produce the effect of a repressed sexuality in Leeder's oeuvre.

A mass hysteria is sweeping this land, and making it a veritable hell for the common people, - for those who so slowly and carefully built up a little home and a family they were going to be able to educate, as they had not been. Then smack comes the bottom out of it, and all that faces them is the will to live, to be saved from the swords of the "majority communities" of this area. And of course likewise sit the Hindus and Sikhs up in Pakistan, fleeing from similar fates.

Once Partition violence is figured as "mass hysteria" rather than regularized repatriation, it can come under Leeder's scrutiny because masculinist anticolonialism provides the best defense of the unending need for civilizing missions to restrain the savagery of native men.

The forensic question across bureaucratic, novelistic, and photo discourses was “what really happened?” without any pretense to the pursuit of ethical or sentimental standard. In contrast, the missionary enterprise offers pity as the correct and competent response to whatever has happened. The humanitarian project falls between the forensic and missionary projects in wanting to ascertain the facts of abduction and rape but, at the same time, mobilizing pity to cover over unverifiability or verification that was unfavorable to the goal of re-exchanging Hindu and Sikh women for an equal number of Muslim women. Almost a century after Rose Brown, the missionary regime had consolidated into a media-savvy global humanitarianism based on “moral rhetoric masquerading as visual evidence.”¹⁷ A movement initially framed in terms of Christian duty to uplift the languishing heathens, the missionary regime, with the proliferation of snapshot photography, rises to support a spectatorial regime of imaginative sympathy in the face of asymmetrical power relations. Gone underground is the blatant invective against the savages, though it is on standby, ready to be re-inscribed when needed. Instead, the civilized spectator has the capacity for flinching, trembling, gasping, crying, or at least being inwardly very moved, at the scene of others in pain. But Leeder’s photographs, which we can safely view without skipping a beat, prove that horror is not about horror but about the sense of the commonplace, and atrocity is not about atrocity but about the comfortably wretched ordinary.



Photo 4: George B. Leeder, “A woman “hooks” a ride.” Ludhiana-Ferozepur-Kasur Transit Route, 1947-48.

Warped into a hook and balancing precariously on the narrow axel of a bullock cart, the woman in transit survives (for the moment) the ordeal of population exchange by latching on to the supporting frame with such force that the veins in her hands pop out to mirror the spokes of the wheel and the pillars of the bridge. Her place of continuous struggle outside the wagon, when a bundle of leaves makes up the inside, confirms that if the

occupants are, indeed, aware of her presence, they tolerate her only as a temporary commuter. In her look at Leeder, who is presumably photographing from the safety of his jeep, she interpellates him in the agon from which he has excused himself on account of his racial and gendered superiority and his privileged position as a missionary man of charity. The destruction of the fabric of her life while he continues to live more or less unhindered (except by the temporary loss of servants), the desperate bodily agony of her mode of transport compared to his, the violent reconfiguration of her native status into refugee status while he enjoys the privileges of immunity as a foreigner – this agon, so unnoticeable to him, becomes apparent when we remove the image from the one-way traffic and pre-arranged visual calculus of masculine pity. Curiously, this unknown image is quoted in Bourke-White's practice snapshot (see Photo 16) leading up to her iconic frieze of the Sikh refugees – this time, with the jeep of the foreigner also within the frame.

In the absence of the gratuitous scenes of horrific suffering that form the staple of Partition discourse, Leeder's restrained image-repertoire of the ordinary benefits from the signposts that he leaves for the spectator. Every salient trace in danger of going unnoticed because of its sheer ordinariness/invisibility is underscored in the form of explicit directions "see xyz" as part of the caption or marked in pen on the surface of the image with an X or an arrow. Leeder thus inserts his gesture of demonstration belatedly into the frame without being photographed in it, ensuring that his friends and family back home read the images in the way he intends them to be read, among many other possible readings. At work here is the anxiety of being distanced from the moment the letter will

be read and the photo will be seen. The photograph is not just what *it* says, it is also what *he* says. The Punjabi author Amrita Pritam had once remarked that looking out from her train journey of sudden uprootedness, “in the darkness outside, the mounds of earth seemed like the entire land is littered with graves.”¹⁸ Leeder’s papers provide an unnerving literality to Pritam’s simile, for it is entirely possible that she might have seen actual graves outside Lahore that she then mistook for mounds of earth that seemed like graves. The irony is that this innocuous archival photo is the figure by which the reader might take Pritam-the-poet literally, her horror compounded in our new knowledge of a simile that turns out to be a non-simile through a visual trace.



Photo 5: “*Graves outside Walton Camp, Lahore. 1947-1948.*” George B. Leeder.



Photo 6: “*Camp – Lyallpur Road after storm. See graves* [upper right corner].” George B. Leeder, 1947-1948.

In Photo 6, the shape of the tents and the graves match too profoundly. Even the puddles in the transit camp, formed after the disastrous floods that wiped out thousands of refugees, reflectively reiterate the tent as a grave. Yet, on account of Leeder’s aesthetics of normalcy, this might be just another pastoral scene were it not for the anchorage that he provides (“see graves”) to swerve his reader toward the surprise of the ordinary.

The missionary portrait sublimates sexual violence into the re-constitution of domesticity as uneventful and invisibly catastrophic. The single-minded investment in the locus of the invisible and ordinary nature of catastrophe and the disavowal of the colonial legacy through the figure of mass hysteria are modes of sublimation, preparing us to turn to the humanitarian portrait’s ways of seeing and representing sexual violence.

3. The Humanitarian Portrait

This section explains how and why the repatriation portrait does not repatriate but does reveal the figurative quality of photography. It is structured around three guiding photo-

statements of the Partition that were accessed at the Press Information Bureau archive in India. I set these images to work within Partition's feminist historiography, which has, thus far, productively relied upon oral testimony and conversational praxis to recover the collective memory of violence against women. I shift the emphasis from the voice to the image to argue that portrait photographs from state and humanitarian archives enable us to see repatriated women as anticolonial subjects and permit us to theorize an anticolonialism that is uninterested in the prizes of state sovereignty, what we might call a Third World feminist anticolonialism.

Colonialism installs a relation of substitution between sexual violence and territorial conquest. This relation of substitution takes rape not only as an "allegory of empire," in the words of Jenny Sharpe, but rape as also as an allegory of decolonization, as demonstrated in the give-and-take of women in the foundation of modern South Asia. The ideology of woman as territory remains a strong case of continuity between empire and decolonizing state. It structures Prabodh Chandra's pre-Partition photo exposé, titled *Rape of Rawalpindi*. Chandra re-inscribes the "rape scripts" of empire by photographing the landscape of Rawalpindi as a figure ruined by inter-racial violence, while eliding the women of Rawalpindi. The pioneering work of South Asian anthropologists and historians such as Veena Das, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, has problematized the ideology that conflates woman and territory, and yet, its stubbornness has kept it dominant both in the grammar of colonialism and in the concerted attempts to break from that grammar, such as Chandra's text.

Given this problem, I attempt to read with a different stake than the slippage between woman and territory, searching for a visual language of rape that retreats from the relation of substitution, without retracting it entirely. At stake is a reading that maintains a structural uncertainty and refuses epistemic certainty, a reading that accounts for apparent rape rather than ascertaining rape/not rape. I do this because stories of rape were used to incite mass killings and further repatriation in the Partition. It is through Tina Campt's notion of the quietness of photographic portraiture, of the sonic register of the hum of life, that one can rigorously activate insufficient knowability for feminist critique and introduce indiscernibility to the certainty of rape-as-conquest and woman-as-territory.

After two decades of excellent oral historiography of rape survivors, witnesses, and perpetrators in the Partition, new scholarly interventions on apparent rape face the challenge of making the structure of sexual violence somewhat uncertain again. Probably along with dozens of other researchers who managed to jump many bureaucratic hurdles to access a partial database of the Photo Division at Soochna Bhavan, Government of India, New Delhi, I stumbled upon transit camp images of possible rape and met our women protagonists under the watchful gaze of several database technicians/archive sentries. In my case, one sentry sat next to me from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm over multiple days in August 2014, our chairs sharing a single screen and a common question, "What else is there to know?" He could not have been less enthused by this recovery series that caught my fancy, indicating as much by suggesting I look at other, important "refugee images" because what else was there to know about these images? The gravity and

ridicule of this question – what else is there to know, apart from the fact that these women were raped and rescued – would stay with me, giving proportion to my own archive fever convincing me that a lot more would have to be rigorously imagined than could be certainly known.



Photo 7: “Rescued” non-Muslim women who arrived in the Ganga Ram Transit Camp in Lahore in February 1948 from Campbellpore and Kunja refugee camps in Pakistan for evacuation to India under military escort. Photo and Caption by Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Apparent mass rape emerges in South Asian portrait photography with the repatriation portrait, 1947 onwards. It appears as a chorus staged with disquieting unexceptionality.

As Ariella Azoulay has argued in her work in the Israeli/Palestinian context, the “unexceptional” photograph is a good place to think rape. I interpret unexceptionality as a call to reconstruct rape’s representation beyond foregrounded signs of force and resistance such as the ripped dress, or the scream off-screen, or the structuring absence of

a closed door. This group portrait of “rescue and repatriation” taken at the Ganga Ram Transit Camp Hospital in Lahore, Pakistan, is presented to the spectator as the end of the atrocity, rather than a continuation of it. The series of photographs, from which the transit camp image is taken, shows a group of women and children, huddled together on the hospital terrace, their faces strikingly under-lit in the bright sunshine of a cold February morning in 1948. A caption alludes to the fact that this group has been “rescued” without saying from whom or what. As we look closely at the image, the mysteries multiply. Why are the rescued subjects on top of a building, exposed to the elements on a freezing morning? How long did they try to shield their eyes in the blinding light? Who are they? These are questions by which one wants to reach some sort of a certain discovery, the aperture by which insight will open. To an extent, it does open, if we turn to the genre of autobiography.

In her Gujarati-language memoir *Mool Sootan Ukhdelan* (*Torn from the Roots*, 1982), Kamla Patel, an Indian humanitarian worker, who received a “rescued” group of six hundred women at the transit hospital, narrates their arrival at length, even if she does not mention a camera or reproduce images in her text.

Their bodies were full of sores, their clothes were dirty and torn, and their hair full of lice...For six months these women had not had any salt...They could take a bath only once in every fifteen days...In the 180-mile truck journey [to the camp], they had been given no drinking water. (Patel, 84-85)

The feast prepared to welcome the women had to be discarded, for all 600 of them were in various stages of death by starvation, and could not digest the rich food. So – the memoir continues – light porridge was cooked in the middle of the night, as the relief

workers dealt with more deaths in the group, and the next morning Patel awoke to find that

not only were all the bathrooms...full of excreta, but the entire passage and even some beddings had been soiled. It was impossible to even stand and look at this sight. I began wondering how to solve the problem. The sweepers, who were assigned the task of cleaning up our camp, were hardly enough to cope with this almost gigantic task...I made the women and the children sit out in the sunshine in the large compound of the hospital, as well as its terrace, and requested the Pakistani authorities, for about 10 sweepers to clean up the whole place.” (*Torn from the Roots*, 85)

This is presumably when the photograph was taken.

This partial reconstruction makes discernible to us that the image of apparent rape in the moment of repatriation reveals a certain blankness in a field otherwise beset by the plenitude of violence. This blankness has to do with the fact that the lives of these rescued women are largely obscure, their faces cannot be matched with accounts of missing and abducted women, their names and narration are gaps. What the photograph shows us visually is this very blankness, an uncommunicative blackout in the sunlight. The photo of apparent rape reveals to us the limit of insight without the suspension of sight, generating the possibility that a lot more might be rigorously imagined because very little can be certainly known. The limit of insight is different from the refusal of humanitarian workers to probe into “what really happened” to their subjects. The limit of insight represents the turn to the indecipherable and irretrievable in anticolonial critique as a necessary response to structural violence and mandatory circulation of women. A method of critical speculation is available to the scholar when she reaches the thresholds of archival recovery. In the case of Saidiya Hartman’s meditations on black women’s lives lost along the trans-Atlantic slave route, what is available is “critical fabulation”

along and against the grain of the archive, the method of “narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure” when there is none to be found, and “the imperative to respect” that which exceeds the discoverable. Critical fabulation is thus a narrative conceit of narrative restraint, narration via a performative refusal to narrate. And Hartman declares that she is “unsure if it is possible to salvage an existence from a handful of words” [about the murder of a slave girl Venus]. While I agree with Hartman’s assessment of irreparable loss in the archive of slavery, the rhetoric of recovery is worrying here because of the theory of language behind it, a theory where irretrievability is a matter of word count. Let us remember the irretrieval of Gayatri Spivak’s Bhuvaneshwari Bhaduri who had written not only an entire letter of explanation for her suicide but carried out an act of writing with her menstruating body – all with the hope of making her anticolonialism legible. While the distance separating Hartman’s slave girl and Spivak’s subaltern is great, each enables us to account for colonized women’s hope of being heard under erasure.

Jamila Hashmi’s Urdu-language short story on Partition violence, *Ban Vaas* (*Banished*, alternate translation *Exile*), has its abducted protagonist exclaim emphatically, “Nothing ever returns,” just as various scenarios of her own return to her former household are fabulated and abandoned one after another (87-105). Photography, differently from literature, provides a visual trace of this nothingness, of the abyss of the thing that never returns as knowable, recognizable, unaltered, after the subject’s encounter with annihilating power. The photograph and the event of its making and reception are well suited to the project of critical fabulation, since there are always visual details in excess, more noise than signal captured in the image, much like Hartman’s “black noise,”¹⁹ details that remain

extraneous to all epistemological explanation that might be derived from the photograph. “Like photographs, are we merely shadows of reality?” asks Hashmi’s narrator, giving her body the mediatized status of a revenant as she undercuts the possibility of *reveniens*, or return, in reality, because her brother never comes (back) to retrieve her and she has already put down roots with her abductor-husband.

In Pakistani author Bapsi Sidhwa’s English language novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988), the protagonist and narrator, Lenny, is an eight-year-old, disabled girl growing up in an Anglicized bourgeois home in Lahore when Partition is announced. Her Hindu nanny (ayah) named Santha is abducted by a group of Muslim men led by Santha’s friend and her would-be lover, the titular Ice-Candy-Man, for whom the Partition is the means to abduct, rape, convert, and keep dominating Santha after his sisters are dismembered on the train to Pakistan. Ayah returns from her first abductee stint as a shadow of herself – diminished in all animation except the look, a look that is oversaturated with the blankness of extreme dehumanization, a look that magnifies out of proportion her eyes till they take up the entire surface of her face and Lenny’s world:

“And Ayah raises her eyes to me. Where have the radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever: wide-opened with what they’ve seen and felt: wider even than the frightening saucers and dinner plates that describe the watchful orbs of the three dogs who guard the wicked Tinder Box witches’ treasures in underground chambers.” (260-261)

Lenny’s mock epic simile draws the recovery portrait of her nanny as a conflict of scale and number: the pair of her eyes is wider than the three pairs of monstrous canine orbs that are like teacups, supper-plates, and windmills in Anderson’s fairy tale. The look of

Ayah is not indomitable or phobia-inducing like the three dogs in the fable but alarmingly expansive and multiple like them, encompassing Lenny and making her own self into a subset of the look.



Photo 8: *Sharifo (8) recovered from Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan, dated 1955.* Photo and Caption by the Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Photo 8 is taken from a series of ten identity portraits of minors who were rescued and recovered from the India-Pakistan borderland areas like Sialkot, Lyallpur, Muzaffarabad at different points after the partition, some as late as 1956, long after the recovery operation had lost its momentum, and the head of the recovery operation, Mridula Sarabhai, had been sent to prison without a trial for her “anti-national” activities in India’s territorial dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir. Eight-year-old Sharifo’s nervous quietness – the pose that mixes candor and withdrawal, the shrinking away of the right shoulder – presents us with an ironic commentary on the predetermined postures of salon portraiture as well as the identity card image. By 1951, the Central Recovery

Organization showed signs of having used half-body identity portraits, such as Sharifo's, to maintain a somewhat systematic photographic record of a handful of missing children and women. This use of photography is remarkably different from the group photos taken at Ganga Ram Transit Camp during February of 1948 in medium and long shot that made it virtually impossible to identify individuals. In all cases, however, the photographs available today are clicked at the event of recovery and, to my knowledge, there is no mention of photographs leading to the successful repatriation of the displaced person or resulting in a recovery through photography. The repatriation portrait, then, does not repatriate, but becomes another citation in the long project of repatriation.

By 1951, captions start appearing in India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting archives that suggest an organized photo distribution effort might have taken place after recovery:

Photo of a deaf and dumb boy aged about 15 years who has been received from Pakistan through the DAV College Camp, Lahore, in October 1951. It appears that the Pakistani authorities admitted him into the Camp after releasing him from jail. Being illiterate, in addition to being deaf and dumb, he is unable to convey his identity but from facial features and dress, he seems to belong to Bikaner side. If anyone recognizes him, information may be passed on to the Central Recovery Organization "P" Block, New Delhi.

Clearly, state sanctioned fabrication, here in the form of racial profiling, is underway even before the photograph of the mute child is distributed. By 1955, the process is so systematized that we also find a combination of the identity portrait with the meticulousness of the missing property list, and the indication of multi-site cross-referenced records:

Ishwari, d/o Chela Ram, w/o Jamna Dass from Karachi about whom information was available with the Recovery Staff in Punjab, PEPSU [Patiata and East Punjab States

Union], and Delhi in September 1955.

The perpetrators, however, are subjected neither to repatriation nor to photoidentification.

In Sa'adat Hasan Manto's extraordinary short story *Khol Do (Open It)* (1994), *The Return* (2008)), the geographic exchange of women in Partition unfolds within the order of semiotic displacement. The exchanged woman in her comatose state activates the double entendre of the phrase "open it" upon which the narrative climax rests, as does the full impact of horror deriving from this succinct turn of phrase. Sakina, a teenager who is abducted, recovered, gang-raped, and recovered again in a comatose state, lies inert and corpse-like on a hospital stretcher, when she hears the instruction "open it" and immediately unfastens the drawstrings of her pants. Her action is driven by automatic audio violence, for Sakina can not see that the doctor examining her, in giving the command "open it" to his orderly, has, in fact, pointed to the closed window to let some air into the hospital. In the doctor's innocuous iteration of a command that Sakina might have heard often during the days of her abduction and rape by the group of her supposed rescuers, the referent is not Sakina, but a window: "The window, open it." However, the corpse-like Sakina, the still shadow of the teenager taken for dead at the hospital, is attested as living through her automatic movement to unfasten her trousers. The doctor "breaks out in a cold sweat," possibly shaken by this unexpected detail of rape, but her father "exclaims joyously" that his daughter is indeed alive, in the closing line of this extremely short narrative. The impact is gut wrenching. The near total evacuation of sentiment in the characters' and narrator's diegesis until this final point of the flare-up of feeling, amplifies this sledgehammer of a conclusion.²⁰

In her comatose state, Sakina, the subject whose structural or psychological point of view we never occupy, takes the phrase “open it” at its word. Irony operates here not by dissimulation but by things being taken at their word in the ground of exchange, by the perfect coherence between the living corpse, her automated muscle memory, and the ears’ exposed openness to the spoken phrase “open it” when the riveted gaze cannot see. I argue that it is through the structure of ironic iteration – in the break between what Sakina hears, what is audible and seeable to other characters, and what we read – that we recognize the violence of repair as a repetition of the violence of rape. In the double entendre, the reader discovers automated discipline as violent punishment. The difference is that the atrocity this time is not visited directly upon Sakina’s body but takes the form of a medical examination to ascertain life or death.

The condition of impossibility for Manto’s “returned” woman is her scene of retrieval: a scene where the aural-semiotic spark of rape – “open it” – and the automation of muscular conditioning, of blind obedience, suffice for the father to know that his daughter is alive and returned to him. This scene of retrieval is impossible without the father but retrieval is also impossible because of him. Sakina cannot return properly to life without the father’s word but, with the father’s word, she returns without a return to her father’s possession of her or her own possession of herself. The text is ironic not only because of the titular, double/mixed-up meaning but also because the father’s exuberant interpretative statement about Sakina’s denuding gesture demonstrates that her indecipherability unfolds narratively only to be interpreted inappropriately, only to be

determined proprietorially as life.²¹

Recent interpretations of *Khol Do* demand a disambiguation of the denuding gesture that is reminiscent of the Rose Brown case – whether Sakina’s denuding is intentional, whether she is alive, whether the doctor’s reaction verifies rape, whether the father ignores rape – psychologizing the silenced interiority of the repatriated woman and the vocal/physical outbursts of the protagonists at the scene of retrieval.²² It is true that Sakina’s father, in a benevolent fatherly fashion, apostrophizes as life, rather than treat as life-like, his daughter’s blind obedience to a destructive command. But Manto’s reader, she who sustains the textual contract of dark humor and cruel irony without breaking into a cold sweat, is expected to know better than the father: the pleasure of this text comes precisely because she is not a dupe like the father, because she can see irony at work. The figure of irony cannot unfold if the reader takes up the position of the father, as Veena Das’s revised reading of *Khol Do* requires of the reader in its affirmation of life.²³ Sakina needs to be indecipherable for literary form to unfold. No patriarchal glorification of life – and no anthropological reading along the grain of patriarchal kinship systems and resistant networks of care, life-affirmation, and positive familial healing and home-making in the wake of annihilation – can retrieve the continuous irretrievability that we confront in *Khol Do* through the device of the double entendre.²⁴ Sakina on the stretcher stages not the optimism of woman’s life-making but the unsentimental “black margin” of irony’s work: the play on words, the surprising intercutting of meanings unforeseen by the colonial-patriarchal will-to-possess, the grotesque misappropriation of irretrievable

blankness as affirmation of life or death.²⁵

Forcible automation, deciphered as a life-after-rape script by both the father and Das, gives them the impression of intent/agency due to Manto's perverse mix-up of signifieds, due to literature's delight in the "permission to be figurative"²⁶: life synecdochized as limbs that move with the aural apparition of perpetrators' words in the good doctor's voice; words we as readers attribute to prior conditioning and the gesture we give back as the missing detail to her time of abduction, as the most plausible move that maximizes the effect of irony. The disambiguating reading of automation-as-life shows that the possibility of lost proprietorship over woman makes no sense to the logic of possessive freedom that is at work in the father's interpretation. This is especially the case when the object of proprietorship is brought back within the field of patriarchal relations after an absence, or, in the words of humanitarianism, when the missing woman is "recovered." To formulate anticolonialism, exorbitantly, from the coming and going of Sakina, the irretrievable subject of irony, is to critique the nomenclature of resistance and interpretation, the signifying structure of arrest and circulation, from a position that is free of the longing for sovereign dominance.

In Manto's text, key to the paternalist rescue of happy domesticity for the raped daughter is the aside that "Sakina's mother was dead." While *Khol Do* quickly forecloses the question of mother right, the traces of a mother-child photographic genealogy within the setting of the transit camp, where unwed mothers were separated forcibly from infant progeny and descent through the mother was nullified, make it possible to emphasize an

anticolonialism without the bluster of family-owning patriarchs. Three pietas of repatriation follow (see Photos 11, 12, and 16), wherein women hold their infants quietly in the absence of fathers. Just as in Manto's *Thanda Gosht* where woman's sexuality was not man's prerogative, in the pietas of repatriation, quite undramatically, genealogy is forged without him. The analogy between patriarchal family and anticolonial state no longer holds up within the series of three women who assume mother right in the wake of exceptional homelessness, compulsory circulation, and the general law of the father that effectively reorganized entire nation states and transferred over 10 million people by maintaining the familial and proprietorial organization of patriarchy. The subjects' "hum" repeats the punitive feminine's critique of paternalism without an explicit object of punishment. The pieta forges a space of anticolonial intimacy and photographic genealogy within the legal terrain of mother rightlessness.



Photo 9: “*Photograph taken of “rescued” Non-Muslim women and children who arrived in the Ganga Ram Transit Camp in Lahore in February 1948 (from Campbellpore and Kunja Refugee Camps in Pakistan) for evacuation to India under military escort.*”
 Photo & Caption by Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,
 Government of India

The authoritative voice of Patel’s memoir *Torn from the Roots* is at odds with “the hum of the portrait,” to use the words of Campt, who characterizes the trans-sensorial sonic registers of an image through the phrase “quiet photography,” which is “neither silent nor

inaudible,” but necessitates us asking “at what frequencies do these images become audible or intelligible?” With the repatriation portrait, we might say that it is only under the disruption of the certainty of woman-as-territory and sexual violence-as-territorial-conquest that the chorus of “rescued” women becomes available, not in the loudness of protest or power reversal, but in the steady hum of living after and with apparent rape.

Photo 9 plays with the semiotics of rescue and the “confusions of consanguinity” that derive from an absent father in the patriarchal conferral of legitimacy. In the official caption, the word “rescued” is marked off within scare quotes, raising the question of what “rescued” really meant, whether it was a euphemism for rape and/or its redress, the ambiguity demonstrating that even photographic statements made during rescue operations were themselves skeptical about rescue as actual rescue. The unnamed woman who, by her frontal pose, looks out of the image at us, with a half-exposed neonatal infant in her arms, while retaining within herself the air of meditative quiet, disrupts the icons and illustrations of the shamed rape victim who hides her face but remains an object of the spectator’s gaze.²⁷ While it echoes conventions of classical iconography, this repatriation portrait of a woman and a neonatal infant together in a transit camp is surprising to encounter within the situation of search and rescue after Partition, when most “rescued” women were forced to leave behind their babies before they were repatriated, on the assumption that babies were the unwanted consequences of rape and were better off with their fathers or in foster homes or in camps for children. The Indian state even sponsored clandestine mass abortion (known as *safaya* – cleansing) at a time when abortion was illegal and would remain illegal till 1971 when the Medical

Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed.

The subject of this portrait appears as neither conjugal nor virginal, neither committed to anonymity nor desirous of differentiation, but rather as the *hum* of a life that is, as Sadiya Hartman says, only visible in the moment of its disappearance. Through the positioning of the trees in the background and open wall against which she leans, we can conclude that this image was taken as part of the same photo opportunity that unfolded in Lahore while the hospital was being cleaned of waste one February morning. Unlike street demonstrators, picketers, boycotters, marchers, and hunger strikers who constituted the classic anticolonial subject of resistance during the civil disobedience years prior to 1947, the repatriation portrait forces a change in the conception of anticolonial action, affiliating action with quiet.²⁸ The punitive feminine who acts by bearing arms and the meditative feminine who acts by being quiet are made visible as non-opposing figures of resistance by diacritical anticolonialism. If the look of the mother in Photo 9 addresses the spectator, claiming, “you [the spectator] are there...because I am looking at you,” the closed eyes of the mother in Photo 10 divert spectatorial sympathy to her ill child whose apertures of engagement in the Red Cross frame look awry.



Photo 10: *Indo-Pakistan Conflict 1948-1950. Indian Bengal, Dhubulia. Refugee camp. Patients of the camp in the consultation of the ICRC delegate-doctor. Red Cross Archive.*

The protective cocoon of a white shawl wraps into a tightly framed single entity the mother and her ill child in this photo taken by a Red Cross doctor in divided Bengal, the eastern front of the Partition. Without the frontal look, however, the close-lipped, closed-eye mother is absolutely withdrawn, the only spectatorial opening into the image being the eyes of her child. Staring to the left of the frame, the child appears infinitely vulnerable, the image as a whole playing directly into the stereotype of resilient and

sustaining motherhood in the brutal conditions of a refugee camp, while at the same time exploiting the transient instance, the affective impossibilities of the blink, and near total shut down of the theatre of the face. The audio violence of the doctor in Manto's *Khol Do* is transfigured here, in another clinic, as audible kinship in the time of state sanctioned dekinning. While her closed-off face diverts the visual transmission of feeling into an audio flow, the caption elicits the humanitarian spectators' sympathetic skepticism about the verbalization of the visual.²⁹ By any stretch of the imagination, the subjects in the image are not consulting with a doctor.

The erroneous caption that anchors this Red Cross image to the paradigm of doctor-patient consultation indicates a sustained image-making operation under way after the transit camps have been converted into more permanent refugee camps, so that this shot is given the caption of the larger series of publicity photographs where patients of the camp are photographed in consultation with doctors. The error reflects knowledge about the Red Cross's codification of photo opportunities most suited to its global mission of emergency disaster relief. Because of its non-partisan status in the post-Partition war between the states of India and Pakistan, International Red Cross delegates were granted access to the disputed territories of Kashmir.³⁰ In the case of the repatriation portrait, there is an urgent need to combine the photographic archives of women's histories, including mother-child genealogies, from present day India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, so that racial-colonial-national segregations are not carried over into the archives we make. The de-kinned children of Kashmir in Photo 11 and West Punjab's absented series of women in Photo 12 are formally alike and, when taken together, symbolize the politics of

masculinist anticolonialism, which was unyielding to any possibility of transforming a familial system under which woman had an official relation to the state and the law only through the man.

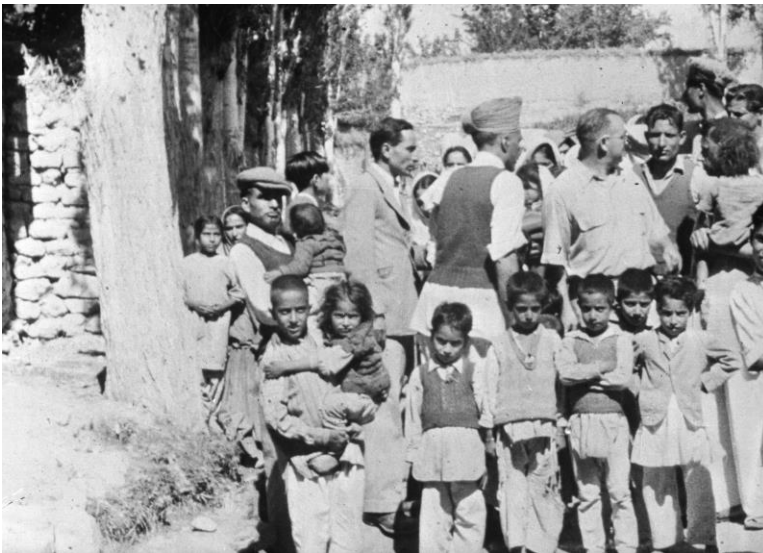


Photo 11: *Indo-Pakistan Conflict 1948-1950. Baltistan, Azad Kashmir. Skardu. Orphan refugees. ICRC/Pakistan.*

This humanitarian portrait, a photo that is testing the waters, takes as its subject the mode of preparing a group of “orphan refugees” for a portrait. Panning much to the left and encountering commotion in the planes beyond the nearest one, this test photo, not yet enough to be effective or usable, promises a more effective and usable photo developing imminently. As our eye gradually transitions from foreground to background, women’s partial faces and head coverings begin to flicker across the visual field, from behind and around the Red Cross volunteers. Because Kashmir was designated a disputed territory and because of the ongoing war between India and Pakistan, the women there were beyond the “aid” of the inter-dominion Central Recovery Operation.³¹

[ICRC's involvement] resulted in the establishment of a procedure under which the parties undertook to intensify searches, to place women and children who had been traced in camps in India and Pakistan pending their repatriation, to draw up and exchange lists in order to locate and contact their families of origin, and to allow adult women to decide freely whether or not to rejoin their relatives.³²

Of course, the head of the Central Recovery Operation had rightly questioned the possibility of “free choice” in the appalling situation wherein women were dependent on their abductors for their survival and had to modify their free choice depending on the side of the border on which they found themselves.³³ This questioning attitude, rather infamously, resulted in the further erosion of the agency of the abducted woman when women were forcibly and programmatically “recovered” for their own good, regardless of what they said.

The search and rescue operations between 1948 and 1957 were carried out by women humanitarian workers liaising with military evacuation units, units that were composed entirely of men overseeing the workers. Most often, information about the whereabouts of missing women had to be kept secret from these very agents who would either tip off the abductors or snatch the women themselves. The communist newspaper *The People's Age* frequently reported after December 1947 that humanitarian workers were threatened, beaten up, and raped at police stations, especially when they tried to rescue women who had been forcibly married to army officials. The military units maintained a pact of silence about atrocities committed against humanitarian workers, and no witnesses came forward. Apart from the unsafe environment in which the work of rescue continued, wherein rescuers needed to be rescued from their liaising overseers, the great contradiction of women's humanitarian work was the complete disregard that the state

expected them to show for the victims' wishes during their rehabilitation and repatriation.³⁴ Indeed, these are the conditions that make it easy for present day feminist historiographers either to accuse these mid-century activists of having done women wrong or to disavow the workers' feminist credentials by making statements like "Mridula Sarabhai was not a feminist."³⁵



Photo 12: *Mridula Sarabhai with refugees in West Punjab.* From Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (2009). Photographer unknown, image undated.

The densely packed, point of view shot, taken from inside the crowd of men, sets apart Mridula Sarabhai, who headed the women's recovery operation, principally by the gesture of her open, right-hand palm that recites the hand-print of the sati and the dead hand of Rose Brown. Neither conflagration nor corpse, woman as negotiator between state officials and familial patriarchs keeps out of sight the series of repatriated women for whom she is speaking. Everyone else is so cramped in the small space that they must fold their hands tightly to fit in. The slight luxury of interstitial space between Sarabhai

and her framed audience echoes the colonial politics of sexual segregation that made such a photograph, and the very idea of a recovery operation for women, possible in the first place. This is one way to plot the contradictions of a South Asian feminism that was co-opted by the militarized state and of a joint humanitarian operation that resulted in women's nonconsensual repatriation of women.

In an instantly perceivable manner, this image is a diagrammatic representation of the women's recovery operation, because women, the subjects of Sarabhai's program and the discussion pictured here, are, quite disconcertingly, missing in the frame. The existence of this undated and unattributed image also implies that either the humanitarian workers or the doctors or the army men took cameras or camerapersons with them. However, Gira Sarabhai, the current proprietor of the personal papers and photographs of Mridula Sarabhai, has denied the existence of photos of Mridula Sarabhai's everyday activities of search and rescue, even though there is anecdotal evidence in Mridula Sarabhai's biography *Rebel with a Cause* to suggest that photographs were, in fact, taken. Encountering this old but formidable problem of access to historical images, the text's anecdotes on photography are "untaken photographs," a critical fabulation of the photographic image from photographic description. *Rebel with a Cause* has many accounts of Sarabhai rushing out in the midst of a Hindu-Muslim riot, once with a camera, and managing to bring calm upon a volatile situation. It is my contention that the history of antiracist feminist humanitarianism should not be limited to the situation of search and rescue but should also be recognized as operating wherever a woman disrupts the path of racial-colonial chauvinistic violence.

As seen in Photo 12, Sarabhai might have botched the recovery operation by deciding for abducted women that they would be happier returning to households “unwilling” or only partially willing “to take them back.” But the account of feminist humanitarianism must go beyond the limits of women’s repatriation. One must introduce the “abrogation of partition” through anti-rioting non-aggression pacts in the 1940s as a key aspect of it, asking what kind of anticolonial grammar is available to photography and through photography in women’s quiet disruption of the deadly ethnic riot.³⁶

In the last decade, Internet groups and social media websites have started to “crowdsource” interviews with partition survivors in a bid to change the narrative. The viral Google advertisement of 2013 “Reunion,” in which childhood friends separated by partition are reunited by the ability of their descendants to use the search engine, captured how the popular imagination has now moved beyond the horror of partition toward the trope of reunification and reparation between men through their descendants. Now, women of the Partition are being recast as militant rescuers on horseback:

On one such afternoon I interviewed 93 year old Bhim Sharma in a dusty machine parts shop in Batala, Punjab. He recalled the day his village in District Narowal (West Punjab) was surrounded by mobs. The entire village was holed up in one house. When hope was nearly lost, three women rode in from behind a hill on horseback. Masked as men with turbans on their heads and straps of ammunition wrapped around their bodies, they caught the mob unexpected and lobbed grenades at the leader. He was killed instantly and the mob dispersed. The women then escorted the villagers to safety. Months later, and thousands of miles away in Morgan Hill, CA, Kuldip Kaur corroborates Sharma’s story and recalls the three women on horseback who defended the caravan she was in when it was being attacked by mobs. (Guneet Bhalla, 1947 Partition Archive)

This fantastic tale, very satisfying and not a little thrilling to hear, and, in a rare windfall for research, even corroborated at a diasporic level, transfigures Partition's quarry, the non-native sex, into three combative rescuers/masked anarchists that we cannot not want. They are masked, they are unidentified, and they galvanize inaccessibility and irretrievability with a vengeance. While one is naturally suspicious of the romance of resistance in the archive of apparent mass rape, this personification of our collective feminist desire, this moment of hurrah that comes without any foreshadowing when we have sunk so deep in the quicksand of horrific misogyny, is indeed a gift that beggars the imagination. Untrammelled by bureaucratic maneuvering, both in the act of freedom and in the researcher's ease of access, the three transvestite women rescuers embody the practice of critical fabulation that, in a performative contradiction, refuses to tell a story it has already told. But this gift does not come at the expense of those acts of freedom that are quieter, that come about as quiet, acts that might have to be shepherded and coaxed into the light of day from the invisibility in which they continue to partake.

Given the breakdown of communication after the Partition and the isolation of anticolonial acts by women, given that the patriarchal regime seriously undercut the possibility of collective struggle against repatriation by overemphasizing the idea of communal reprisals for the family's honor, the punitive feminine can not come at the expense of our tracking of the various personas through which imaged women sound through in new and previously unrecognizable or old and exceptionally recognizable ways.³⁷ The rule of gender makes all the difference to the action of anticolonialism. It upholds the difference between the colonial and the anticolonial at a time of heightened

likeness. After segregation, the sex that is made non-native defines what constitutes an act of freedom.

4. The Photojournalistic Portrait



Photo 13: Women's camp, Lahore, Pakistan. 1948. *“There they undergo medical examinations (to control epidemics). A woman taken there from the time of the August '47 troubles has been reunited with her husband but is detained pending verifications before she can leave prison. Camp has 800, but they come and go continually. This woman was separated from her husband for 10 months. They found each other with aid of Indian organization set up for purpose when Pakistan sent these women to India.”* (Photo: Henri Cartier-Bresson. Caption: Magnum)

The aesthetic of exchange seldom comes as heterosexual melodrama in repatriation portraiture but this filmic photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson is an exception, strongly resembling a still from a film or a still made on a film production set, and yet, doing the evidentiary work of reportage. The romance of heterosexual coupling, the gush of emphatic reciprocity, in the presence of the camera, constitutes the image's geometric space, with hand gestures, iron bars, and invisible lines of sight making up the horizontal and perpendicular coordinates. Explicitly framing the transit camp as a barrier to unification and to the happy ending in the love story, Cartier-Bresson's medium close-up

shot accentuates the intensity of heterosexual looking so much so that centripetal force of the look holds together the cleaved halves of the visual field (the quiet inside and the chaotic outside) and the multiple planes of space beyond the bars. The separated couple looks only at itself in the moment of the shot but the obscured faces in the crowd include in their gaze the audience as well as the white photographer who is rather incongruously allowed to be present inside the prison that doubled as transit camp.³⁸

If Cartier-Bresson was lying in wait with the Leica pinned to his eye, in his usual mode of “active *flânerie*,” his subjects could not possibly have known when the decisive shot would be taken, when to start or stop the pose of reunification.³⁹ The perfect timing of the shot offsets the restricted framing, gesturing toward the continuity of space – the blind field – both to the right and the left of the frame. Unlike the frontal pose of the other repatriation photographs – where frontality often muddies the fact that figures leave the frame, where the sitters must wait for the click of the shutter in order to resume movement again – in this image, contingency seems to have been preserved in all its intractability.⁴⁰ Faces and eyes emerging near the left blind field see us, scattering our attention away from the center.

Cartier-Bresson’s early desire for a lens-based practice that straddled the language of both photography and cinema is well known. Even though he went on to make his own documentary film *Le Retour* (*The Return*, 1946) that dealt with the Second World War’s displaced person crisis and the horror of transit camps, his main interest lay in inventing a new photojournalistic relation between form and the continuous business of living. The

perfectly geometrical photo compositions and the unstaged choreography of “[still] images taken on the run” in situations of extreme crisis and chaos, attest to this moment. Exemplified by his more famous image from the Kurukshetra refugee camp, in which a wide band of refugees does the *bhangra* dance, but also noticeable in this Lahore penitentiary image, Cartier-Bresson shapes intractable life into aesthetic pleasure in the fraction of a second. Yet, at the same time, the long event of Partition and his specific authorizations and privileges as a foreign journalist of repute provide him with this particular point of view where he can be located inside the women’s cell, when other men cannot, expecting, and indeed, preparing for this encounter to happen.

Other than in Cartier-Bresson’s photo, the public display of heterosexual affection is mostly absent from photographic reportage of the Partition transit camps, which contained sexually segregated groups of men and women. The legendary love story, however, as a motif for transgressing local religious boundaries between Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh, figures prominently in Amrita Pritam’s famous elegy about Partition violence in Punjab, titled after the Sufi poet who is the muse she invokes, *To Waris Shah* (1948), and composed on the train from Dehra Dun to Delhi with “trembling fingers.”

Uprooted from Lahore in 1947 and made a refugee by Partition, Amrita Pritam had the following utterance of Waris Shah coursing through her mind when she composed her *nazm* (poem) on the train: “How will the dead and the departed meet again?” In Pritam, anticolonialism is not only the literary attitude of impossible reunification – an attitude adopted knowing the real failure of reunification – it is also the condition of possibility of

meaning-making and co-identification in a local community torn into two parts. She apostrophizes Waris Shah, the Sufi *qissa-kar* (storyteller/balladeer) who had immortalized the pain of Heer at separation from her lover belonging to the Ranjha sub-caste.⁴¹ For Pritam, who places herself within Waris Shah's poetic tradition, he is the only poet who can make accessible, i.e. affectively translatable across divided communities, the yet indecipherable grief of all the women of Punjab. The *nazm* became so popular in refugee camps that the "distressed" populations, whose distress it was mourning, began wearing it as an amulet.⁴²

Today I implore Waris Shah
to speak up from his grave
and turn over a page in
the Book of Love.

When a daughter of the fabled Punjab wept
he gave voice to her silent grief.
Today a million daughters weep
but where is Waris Shah
to give voice to their woes?
Arise, O friend of the distressed!
See the plight of your Punjab.
Corpses lie strewn in the pastures
and the Chenab [river] has turned crimson...

In invoking Waris Shah's Book of Love, Pritam's poem becomes an entreaty to the Persian *qissa* (story) genre that has the celebration of illicit, star-crossed, and often inter-religious love as the central theme and is the shared popular tradition of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities in Punjab. The enjambed conditional of once when-hence today – the basis of the move from one Heer to a million Heers – forges a continuity between the eighteenth century literary space of the Book of Love and the mid-twentieth century

territorial space of Partition violence. Through the *qissa* tradition, the mournful contrast between the once pastoral landscape of Punjab (the land of the five rivers) and the current battlefield of corpses undergoes amplification.

War correspondent Bert Brandt's wire photo of a beautiful Muslim mother in a refugee camp in Delhi, picks up the tempo of Partition melodrama, as if one rushed to the end of Pritam's *nazm* to find a cameraman waiting to "get the picture" of her silent grief and transmitting it across continents. Sculpted out of a crowd of refugees at a mosque-turned-camp in Delhi, the doomed heroine, her eyes wide open with dread, is photographed at a short range while armed bands of Hindus and Sikhs gather at the gates to liquidate the Islamic population and history of the capital city. In the tightly framed, graceful composition of maternal suffering, Brandt excises the setting. It seems to be enough that she is sexed as Muslim in the caption. Gender makes and marks the difference in the photo of racial segregation. Without showing us a single minaret of the iconic Jama mosque under which she is huddled, the picture of sentimental realism depicts, through the racially profiled mother, the new architecture of segregation.⁴³



Photo 14: Bert Brandt, Acme Staff, New York Bureau: Delhi, India, 9/25/1947
Victims of Religious Strife: Hopelessness is mirrored in the eyes of this young Moslem mother as she sits with her child among the refugees at Juma Mosque, Delhi. They are among the thousands of Moslems who fled to this sanctuary to escape the wrath of the Hindus. There are no sanitary facilities in the mosque, and not enough food, and while the Hindus threaten them from the outside, disease lurks within. This photo was taken by Bert Brandt, ACME Staff correspondent, who is making a round-the-world trip by Pan American plane.

The frame cuts off many internal witnesses who nonetheless position the spectator on the literal ground of circulation, in the marketplace of populations, and the photo pulsates with the disquiet of displaced people cropped by the frame, offset by the infant's clueless slumber. The paternalism of rescue returns with Brandt's reliance on the damsel in

distress trope but its working is interrupted both by the tenacity of kinship in her pose and by the co-presence of Muslim men in a Muslim camp. Through her piercing eyes, through the set of her mouth, and through the placing of her hand, her pose articulates racialized victimhood with the resolve of mother-child genealogy. The chivalric code that exempts women from reprisal rape and abduction – a code that reserves Muslim women for Muslim men and reserves Hindu women for Hindu men – does not provide her with refuge from sexual violence but, rather, operates as correct sexual subjugation under the normal order of racialized patriarchy.⁴⁴ In Partition's project of repatriation, this exemption is taken one step further because women are not only reserved for race-specific men but for enemy nation-states.

Among the three pietas – the Press Information Bureau's, the ICRC's, and Brandt's – here, the subject's frontal look with eyes wide open enables its unary panic-stricken air, transmitting only the single key idea that the journalist called "hopelessness" – what we perceive "all at once" without goading our thought.⁴⁵ To recall Barthes, this unary photograph, with its reductive symbolism, "can shout [hopelessness], not wound [the spectator]." While that may be, the imaginative wounding of the spectator is not the only style of wounding that concerns us.



Photo 15: Margaret Bourke-White: *“The Great Migration, Pakistan, 1947. A spindly but determined old Sikh (right), his ailing wife on his shoulders, leads his family to the new Indian border and hoped-for sanctuary.”*

At the start of this chapter, I claimed to have organized it into four types of portraiture according to intensifying degrees of spectatorial sentiment, from the indifferent forensic to the aesthetics of suffering in the field of photojournalism. However, the mode of production of the sympathetic image of photojournalism is often far from sympathetic. It might wound the subject and even be out-and-out catastrophic for her. There is more that links the camera to catastrophe than a relationship of visual capture of the latter by the former. The camera itself can be wielded as an instrument of catastrophe, as a cause for further catastrophe, not only in extreme styles that fix guns to surveillance cameras, programming the hybrid to shoot with the detection of movement, but also in far more casual strains of authorizing violent ways of paying attention.⁴⁶ Photography has the potential to injure directly the subjects who are already in colonial crisis, the same subjects whose crisis it documents and on whose behalf it appeals winningly. This potential to injure in ways other than that of ideological abstraction laid the aesthetic

foundation of an iconic image of populations in transit taken by Margaret Bourke-White while she was on assignment for *Life* magazine.

While witnesses to the recovery operation and of partition violence, in general, have kept at the forefront of historical consciousness the relentless buying and selling of women and children for such and such price, some times by their own family members in exchange for safe passage, the consistent attention to trade has yet to account for the violence done in the pursuit of the eloquent image. Bourke-White's recently released photos and contact sheets provide an opportunity to address the question of monetary exchange in the photographic situation of repatriation.⁴⁷



Photo 16: *Lee Eitingon looks out of the jeep. Refugees wait to arrange themselves for Bourke-White (my caption)*

Lee Eitingon, an editor at *Life* magazine, had accompanied Bourke-White on her photo assignment in recently divided Punjab, when they came across a foot convoy of sick and exhausted refugees who had been walking for several days under the constant fear of being wiped out by mobs, cholera, or floods. To Eitingon's horror, Bourke-White detained some of these refugee foot convoys and had them stage their flight from home again and again, till she was sure she had in her possession a satisfactory and appealing image of the suffering refugee.⁴⁸ This, even though it was imperative and urgent, a matter of life and death, that the foot convoys not linger and move on as soon as possible. When Eitingon expressed her moral condemnation of such a detention and staging to Bourke-White, the photojournalist is said to have replied that she would pay her subjects before leaving, though Eitingon was not sure if she actually did pay them. Indeed, newly released, previously unpublished images in the *Life* archive show the same "spindly" man carrying his ailing wife, repeatedly re-arranged among various groups and sampled in different spatial configurations.

It is unclear how the impoverished subjects were persuaded to pose for Bourke-White, although the expectation of a monetary reward is a fairly plausible device. This example of violent staging, provoked by the presence of the camera, can be used easily to argue that the act of photography further dehumanizes those who have suffered dehumanization and have been dispossessed of everything (including access to the means of representing oneself photographically). The monetization of the performance of "refugee-ness," while populations are being made into refugees, is not necessarily worse than the nation-state's project of fabricating refugees, but it seems certainly worse for claiming to be better: an

image that will bring aid and transform the material conditions of its subjects. However, one must ask, why was the couple so interested in re-staging their flight in this precise manner? What did they hope to signify about repatriation through their pose? The prevalent notion that photography is an instrument of predatory complicity with the original event of dispossession makes the moral condemnation of Bourke-White's documentary style too easy and too quick.

The catastrophe of repatriation engenders an interest between Bourke-White and the displaced couple to represent non-possession with more urgency, by lingering in its interval, rather than resuming the long walk toward re-possession and rehabilitation. If populations are exchanged like currency in the market economy of colonialism, then anticolonialism, in the ground of exchange, is licensed to articulate the staging of repatriation as necessitating coin but also necessitating *careful*, time-intensive preparation for representation, where care is continuous with the horror of re-staging, rather than opposed to it.



Photo 17: *Same group of refugees re-arranged, now with newly choreographed bodily gestures, minus the jeep in the frame.*

Conclusion:

The making of South Asia's third state of Partition, Bangladesh, through mass rape in 1971, convinces us that the foundational violence of anticolonialism is sexual subjugation. Heteronormative exchange is the divisive force that achieves the segregation of races and nations at an everyday level by circulating women as currency and recovering them as family debt. This paper has taken gendered repatriation as a key trope of resemblance between colonizing and decolonizing regimes. I analyze visual and literary images of non-possession in women who were made into "the non-native sex" or "the so-native sex" that they slipped from the construct of nativity while enabling it during the foundation of two new nation-states. From repatriation's ground of circulation and vagrancy, anticolonialism can be defined as the turn to the fabulated, the undeciphered, and the inaccessible in the composition of resistance, when it takes the risk

of struggling with struggle itself. I name as anticolonial not just an act of freedom but the quality of having nothing but the non-possessive affirmation of being an irretrievable subject. The next chapter of this dissertation revisits anticolonialism as the reading of the errant details through the politics of caste annihilation in literary texts.

¹ The phrase is from Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" but is borne out by the epic figure of Draupadi, who is staked and lost in a wager by her husband during a game with his cousins in the *Mahabharata*. Draupadi is repeatedly invoked in Partition narratives. Draupadi's disrobing and Sita's abduction in the *Ramayana* became key moments in the Partition imaginary. See the short story "I have always been amidst pimps and procurers" in Mushirul Hasan's anthology, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* (1995).

² *Untaken Photographs*, a photo exhibition curated by Ariella Azoulay (2010).

³ From "Three Fragments" (unpublished manuscript). Campt bases her intervention on Kevin Quashie's *The Sovereignty of Quiet*.

⁴ See Rita Kothari, *Speech and Silence: Literary Journeys by Gujarati Women*, Veena Das's investigation of trauma and silence in *Life and Words*, Gayatri Spivak investigates the possibility of subaltern speech acts being received and understood in her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

⁵ See Saidiya Hartman "Venus in Two Acts." (2008)

⁶ Fred Moten's formulation, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. (2003)

⁷ See Andre Bazin "Ontology of the Photographic Image."

⁸ In Chevers' Manual, the plan for photography is that it should be employed throughout India to "impress more vividly, even upon the minds of the ignorant and superstitious common people, a conviction of the difficulty of eluding our vigilance and of our accuracy in the detection of crime" (74).

⁹ Chevers lauds the photographs of her bodily traces, including the "abnormality" of a "small pointed supernumerary tooth, between the middle incisors of the upper jaw," for enabling her identification as Rose Brown, many months after a beat constable discovered her body at daybreak.

¹⁰ Usually British "new women" victims became the ruse to punish the natives, in a cross-racial rape-lynching kind of scenario. In this case, Brown's ambiguous racial status suggests that the ruse extended beyond the respectable "new woman." See Jenny Sharpe *Allegories of Empire: Figure of the Woman in the Colonial Text* for the discourse of the rape of the British New Woman mobilized in the colonial management of anticolonial rebellion in the natives.

¹¹ See Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions*.

¹² In many situations women "preferred" to stay with abductors: (a) when poor women were abducted by wealthy and powerful men (b) when women's only "family" were their own abductor husbands and children because their actual family had tried to kill them or

sell them (c) when women had been abducted and raped by policemen and officials, so they did not trust them to “recover” and rehabilitate them without further violence.

¹³ See Irigaray’s “Women on the Market” in *This Sex Which is Not One*.

¹⁴ See Basant Kaur’s testimony in Butalia 1998: 199

¹⁵ According to the Punjabi scholar, Dr Kirpal Singh, “One copy of a photograph was given to me by late Sant Gulab Singh in whose land the well existed. He told me that his wife was the first to jump into the well. The photograph has been published in my book *Shahidian* [an account of the communal violence in West Punjab].” In “Women and Partition.” *Plight of Women during Partition Riots in 1947*. Sikh Studies, June 1999.

¹⁶ Bhisham Sahni’s *Amritsar Aa Gaya Hai (We have arrived in Amritsar)*, where the narrative movement is structured analogously to the train’s movement with various reversals in masculine supremacy/virility depending on the location of the train in its journey to Amritsar.

¹⁷ See Fehrenbach and Rodogno, *Humanitarian Photography* (2015)

¹⁸ See Nonica Datta in *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement* (2008) pp. 1-25.

¹⁹ She attends to “...the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man.”

²⁰ From the get go, this 3-page short story leaves most of its sentiment to be read between the lines: “The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon and reached Mughalpura eight hours later.” As per Rosemary George: “The story begins innocuously enough...But to the reader who knows that this distance is about thirty-five miles and can be covered in less than an hour, this is a chilling detail.” *Indian English and the Fiction of National Literature* (2013) pp 187

²¹ Irony functions as perspective on perspective.

²² Veena Das and Ashish Nandy, “Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 19.1 (1985): 177-95. See Das’s revised and reversed interpretation

²³ See Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary*

²⁴ Das takes the father’s proclamation of life as a moment of rejuvenation and renewal and life for Sakina and she does not examine whether this changed, affirmative reading aligns itself closely with the patriarchal affirmation of life. Das’s reading is: “He creates through his utterance [“my daughter is alive – my daughter is alive.”] a home for her mutilated and violated self.” The reader, however, remembers Manto’s gesturing toward the father’s unintended complicity with Sakina’s abductors. Earlier in the narrative, it is through the father’s photographic description of her (mole on the chin) that the gang of men in her “search party” go looking for her, and are able to identify her by her name and gain her trust and then abduct her, giving ample cause for his word to be rigorously suspected.

²⁵ In his Partition fiction collection “Black Margins” (*Siyah Hashye*), Manto says “I came to accept this nightmarish reality [of Partition] without self-pity or despair.”

²⁶ Spivak’s phrase, “Speculations on the subaltern and the popular.”

²⁷ See Naibuddin Ahmed's portraits of raped women hiding their faces, in the context of sexual violence in the Pakistan-Bangladesh partition of 1971.

²⁸ Quiet is not the absence of resistance. Campt argues: "A hum can be mournful; it can be presence in absence; it can take the form of a gritty moan in the foreground or a soothing massage in the background. It can celebrate, animate, captivate and compel. Yet it can also irritate, haunt, grate and distract. My aim is to re-animate the recalcitrant affect of this lower range of audibility by way of what I am calling *quiet photography*." From unpublished manuscript "Three Fragments."

²⁹ Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator*, tracks the movement of the humanitarian spectator from the politics of pity to the politics of irony over the last few decades. We relate to the history of decolonization as ironic spectators of the repatriation photographs.

³⁰ "The wound that keeps the paranoia and hatreds of 1947 fresh for both Pakistanis and Indians is Kashmir." (*Midnight's Furies*, 178)

³¹ On the raid of Baramulla, See Andrew Whitehead *A Mission in Kashmir*.

As per the ICRC archive: "Dr Otto Wenger was asked to act as a neutral intermediary to enable several thousand non-Muslim civilians (Hindus and Sikhs) trapped in "Azad Kashmir" to be evacuated. In order to ascertain the situation on the spot and to make the necessary contacts, Dr Wenger made several trips between New Delhi, the State of Jammu and Kashmir, "Azad Kashmir" and Pakistan."

³² *The ICRC's activities on the Indian subcontinent following partition (1947-1949)* Catherine Rey-Schyr, 30-06-1998, International Review of the Red Cross, No. 323. Letters No. 19 of 11 March 1948, No. 20 of 19 March 1948 and No. 57 of 6 June 1948 from Dr Wenger (ICRC archives, file G 3/37c)

³³ Those who had adamantly refused to leave their so-called abductors changed their stance the minute they crossed the border because they knew that the same preference could never work for their supposed "family" units on opposite sides of the border. See Bhasin and Menon's *Borders and Boundaries* for such episodes.

Forty Six Muslim women ran away from the Patiala transit camp when faced with the prospect of repatriation (3 March 1948, KC Neogy to Nehru)

³⁴ See Constituent Assembly debates. Women became "prestige cases" of conflict between India and Pakistan.

³⁵ Interview with Ritu Menon.

³⁶ MK Gandhi uses this phrase in *Hind Swaraj* (Indian Home-Rule) to describe the Bengal partition of 1905 that was retracted due to public discontent.

³⁷ Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, there have been organized feminist movements across India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh such as *Anti-Rape Forums*, *Anti-Price-Rise Movement*, *Shramik Stri Mukti Sangathana* (Toiling Women's Liberation Group)

³⁸ Bourke-White, *Interview with India*

³⁹ Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Mind's Eye*, pp. 67. Also see his *Scrapbook: Photographs 1932-1946*.

⁴⁰ Barthes's discussion of the Blind Field in *Camera Lucida*, pp 57-58

⁴¹ Waris Shah was an 18th century Punjabi Sufi poet and author of the legendary love story *Heer-Ranjha*. The Persian *Qissa* genre (1650-1850) has a long afterlife in popular print and film culture. See Nonica Dutta "Transcending Religious Identities" for an in-depth analysis of Amrita Pritam's poetry.

⁴² See Dutta

⁴³ Over September 1947, Muslims were removed from their homes and took refuge inside the architecture of Mughal rule such as Jama masjid, Purana Qila, Humayun's Tomb, etc.

⁴⁴ See *Third World: Second Sex*, pp 26.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

⁴⁶ See Harocki Farocki's *I Thought I Was Seeing Convicts*.

⁴⁷ In 2008, Google started hosting all of LIFE's archives and put watermarks for images that were never published in the magazine but had now entered the public domain through google

⁴⁸ Vicki Goldberg, *Margaret Bourke-White, a Biography* (1987)

CHAPTER 3

The Native Informant Gives Offense

Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me. How *can* any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me. -- Zora Neale Hurston, *How it Feels to Be Colored Me* (1928)

Leaving aside our traditional tools of looms and brooms and flaying knives, we have to pick up pens and become verse-makers... We know, to master any art or craft, we need to master its intricacies – as we know full well how to clean spick-and-span your stinking toilets, how to weave dreams in the upper caste bride's sari, how to tan the hard hides so that your rosy soles do not get pinched.

-- Manifesto of *Akrosh* (Rage), banned Dalit Panther poetry magazine (1978)

In the anti-caste archive, to witness segregation is to condemn it with indignation. But what if we put a pause on the consequent entailment? In this chapter, I examine anti-caste texts for details that confound the sympathetic reader. I uncover lapses, digressions, repetitions, and failures in the straightforward indictment of caste, proposing an anticolonialism that shatters the smooth course of the ethical mission by attending to minor yet intriguing breaches and errors. Reading modernist and contemporary South Asian novels, I draw attention to literary instances that stray from the guarantees of indictment and unsettle the sympathetic reader from the stability of routinely held anti-caste positions. These errant movements depart from the uses of indignation. They do not call for unequivocal response and responsibility from the reader. They break the stranglehold of the ethical over the rhetorical function in witnessing caste segregation, underscoring the unmanageable in the order of language and literature, and therefore in

politics.¹ Instead of stirring the readers to indignation, anticolonialism, I argue, is replete with the potential to tease us and seize us with eccentric details when we reorient the anti-caste archive towards the act of repeated reading rather than the singular sobriety of witnessing to condemn.

From B.R. Ambedkar's classic manifesto *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) to Om Prakash Valmiki's popular autobiography *Joothan* (*Leftovers*, 2001), ethical missions deploy the narrative of victimhood in order to do good, claim redress, and address a reader who becomes anti-caste in the witnessing of injury. The prevailing notion is that the reader, in undergoing a change of heart, attests to the potent authenticity of the victim, i.e., begins to take responsibility. This is not to accuse anti-caste authors of naïvely placing their hope in edification. Rather, it is to claim that, even as authors from Ambedkar to Valmiki fully understand the failure of response and agonize over the persistence of apartheid, conversion nonetheless remains the defining impulse of anti-caste ethics. The subject of conversion is both the caste reader and the dalit (ex-untouchable) victim. Since the 1990s, dalit autobiography, read as authentic and edifying, has only risen in popularity within the milieu of postcolonial literature where caste suffering is marketable worldwide as a burning issue. The dalit narrative of personal awakening from the pain of caste apartheid exemplifies the transformation of injury into a measure of truth, creativity, and assertion through the first person voice.² The otherness of the victim is manageable, rather than surprising, in its integrity and didactic capacity to bring the reader to see the virtues of caste annihilation. But, if the anti-caste archive is characterized by conversion, what does it do for an already sympathetic reader? As

millions bear witness to caste suffering, can we not risk theorizing an anticolonialism as the end of edification, not as its double?

This chapter revisits the figure of the native informant in postcolonial theory to think through the problem of reading in the anti-caste archive. It does so because the native informant can claim, crucially and advantageously, that mainstream anticolonialism never divested itself of latent caste apartheid tendencies, or that caste apartheid signifies the persistence of colonialism in the independent nation-state. The importance of this claim cannot be understated when theorizing from the assumption that readers want to annihilate caste. At the same time, the assumption of unquestionable integrity and authenticity channeled through the native informant predetermines a reading with near perfect outcomes: grievances of caste apartheid are shared significantly, difference is honored with felicitous value, and justice is demanded conscientiously and upliftingly across positions of privilege as well as disempowerment. It is no wonder that caste is so profitable an atrocity for the literary marketplace. By reading for the exorbitant work of base prejudices, hatreds that cannot be stomached, chauvinisms where empathy fails, unscrupulous gratifications, and other inappropriate instants in which the native informant does little to edify the reader or even overturn the logic of caste apartheid, I redefine anticolonialism as withdrawal from fetishized otherness that makes unresolved the future of anti-caste desire.

Anticolonialism, in this chapter, highlights the problems posed for edification and authenticity by literature. For example, we might *not* learn about the lived experience of

caste when a dalit character is beaten; we might be given sexist solutions to caste apartheid such as inter-caste reproduction; we might find anti-segregation positions that hate congregation. Such problems fail to conform to the rules of anti-caste ethics that have governed the field of literary possibilities so far. By calling attention to these problems, I trace how anti-caste novels in fact challenge the notion of a dalit identity based on victimhood and the subsequent conversion of that victimhood into political subjectivity, human rights entitlement, pre-fixed identity, social asset and cultural capital on the market.³ Not granting precedence to the fetishized otherness of dalits, theorizing anticolonialism means reading for violations of the ethical-commercial usefulness of edification and authenticity, and expanding what we mean by “anti-caste” positions in cultural representation.

The first part of the chapter argues that questions of touch in literature mark the limit of interpellation in theory. It proposes that caste interpellation shatters the ethical mission of self-professed anti-caste novels and offers a route to re-work both Louis Althusser and Frantz Fanon’s scenes of interpellation. Through a street scene of *flânerie* in Mulk Raj Anand’s modernist novel *Untouchable* (1935), I demonstrate how the literary disrupts the analytic and clinical theories of subject formation. The ban on inadvertent inter-caste touching in public space, I argue, demonstrates that individuals are interpellated as “averted” subjects. I focus on reading a single episode in Anand because, in it, rather unusually, the catastrophe of touch starts as a non-experience – an unnoticed detail – for the untouchable. This reading of Anand sets up the rest of the section, in which I analyze the postcolonial novel by attending to details in it – and its own representation of “the

detail” – that stray from conventions of anti-caste literature. Bringing together the native informant’s postures of hyper-sincerity in and hyper-contempt for the mission of caste annihilation, I emphasize the surprises of repeated reading that disrupt anti-caste ethics. Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Upamanyu Chatterjee’s *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988), and Shyam Selvadurai’s *Cinnamon Gardens* (1999) are the objects of my analysis.

Unlike Sanskrit and its derivative vernaculars, English has no history as the language of caste edicts in South Asia. There is therefore a justifiable propensity to see it as the best link language to move towards a casteless future, as the very basis of the formation of anti-caste archives out of cultural production in innumerable regional languages.⁴ The first section of this chapter resists this notion implicitly because the Anglophone postcolonial novel, and its pleasing creation of Indian English idioms that are marketable worldwide, emerges out of unspoken caste capital. The next section, therefore, brings to light some rhetorical functions in the vernacular anti-caste novel in translation, the less affluent cousin of the Anglophone novel, but a more intense appearance of the native informant. I analyze the ways in which a Gujarati-language vernacular novel intervenes in debates about caste traumas in the postcolonial present and tackles the question of ethnographic authenticity. The section focuses on Joseph Macwan’s *Angaliyat (The Stepchild)* (1987), considered the first novel written by a dalit in the wake of anti-dalit violence in the 1980s. I provide an account of the ways in which the native informant mounts his scathing indictment of caste apartheid drawing energy from misogyny, ableism, and other regressive structures, placing the sympathetic reader in a double bind.

The section follows the debate of vernacular versus English language into the emergent cultural regime of “Dalit Capital.” In the dalit capital movement, I argue, the claim to dalit otherness is restructured around aspiration and despair, rather than victimhood. The chapter concludes by focusing on the auto-ethnographic images of dalits in Wendy Ewald’s *I Dreamed I Had A Girl In My Pocket* (1996), where indignation is notably absent, to interrogate the notion of caste as a structure without visual signposts and to critique the notion of the anti-caste visual archive as a scrupulous and politically correct archive, even when it regularly admits statements made in bad taste. This chapter reads anti-caste cultural production across the twentieth century Anglophone South Asian novel, vernacular language writing in English translation, and visual media to undermine the “rigid identitarianism” of dalit politics.⁵

The bitter stalemate between caste annihilation and anticolonial movements on the Indian subcontinent has, till date, allowed only two positions to emerge in the rift: the first position picks one side as more revolutionary than the competing side, and the second takes each side as fighting a separate but equal revolution. The rift forsakes the very thought of affirmative inter-implication, i.e., the possibility of anti-caste anticolonialism, between the hostile camps. The shorthand for this historical stalemate is “Ambedkar versus Gandhi,” titled after the hostility between Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the ex-untouchable leader of India’s anti-caste era, and M.K. Gandhi, the caste Hindu leader of anticolonial nationalism. It indicates that problem is not simply that the nation did not overcome caste segregation or that the rhetoric of anticolonialism marked a tacit tolerance for caste atrocity. The problem is that caste annihilation and anticolonialism are two languages of

democracy whose relation is constituted by an intrinsic conflict: who has the right to represent the nation? Today, the mere mention of caste annihilation and anti-colonialism together leads to widespread protests, as illustrated in the uproar against Arundhati Roy's essay "The Doctor and the Saint" in her preface to the new edition of Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste*. The uproar has centered the conflict on the question of who has the right to represent Ambedkar (since Roy is herself not a dalit), rather than the nation, further congealing the dalit in the metaphysics of rigid identity, rather than coalitions of anti-caste anticolonialism.⁶

In Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, the native informant is a figure that adds to and substitutes for an originarily absent figure, as Third World representative or European intellectual. It is also a figure that is necessary to and complicit with dominant Eurocentric structures of knowledge-production – even as it is systematically expelled from the category of Man. For Spivak, the one who supplies "indigenous" data to the world, is, in a radical sense, the "name for that mark of expulsion from the name of Man – a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation" (6). Thus, the native informant is not a figure of straightforward ethics but is marked by having its own expulsion, the very unworkability of the ethical relation, crossed out. The problem for anti-caste positions is, of course, the problem about which Spivak is vigilant: a privileged subject, migrant and/or academic intellectual, comes to occupy the position of the native informant. The world, with the advent of "telecommunicative informatics, taps the Native Informant directly in the name of indigenous knowledge and advances biopiracy." But rather than focus on the "occupation" that Spivak attends to, in this chapter, I read the

ways in which the native informant contests easily achievable ethical missions rather than being excluded from ethics.

Anticolonialism has been historically interested in authentically *other* men “whom Europe had been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth,” in the words of Frantz Fanon. Under uneven globalization, where manageable otherness has accrued market value over the decades since the opening of the canon, anticolonialism is now primed for an autocritique of this founding interest in authenticity and otherness.⁷ Caste-based alterity claims in literature that is committed to caste annihilation open up a performative contradiction by which anticolonialism can undertake autocritique. In the caste-based alterity claim, the subject speaks as the other of brahminical supremacy, “as the muck at the bottom of the pond” that reengages or re-stages ritually enforced injury in order to call for repair and justice.⁸ The contradiction is that justice entails removing the very traction of stigmatized alterity by which the pariah subject seeks to speak. The ethico-political commitment to caste annihilation brings a wide-ranging, multilingual, and canny readership into relation with each other and with an archive of literary and visual materials. For who would not wish to eliminate caste? Yet, managed alterity is the foremost style of bearing witness to the rhetoricity of the outcaste’s shame, rage, pride, and/or victimhood. Through the management of alterity in the indictment of caste, the dalit’s cultural production can be accepted without irreversibly disrupting our perceptual, political, and aesthetic apparatus.

A key example of managed otherness is the anaesthetization of the shock value that was once fundamental to Dalit Panther outrage and the protest movement's interrogation of the ruling definitions of literature and politics. The notorious opening simile of Namdeo Dhasal's Marathi language poem *Cruelty* – "I am like a venereal sore on the private part of language" – is now taken as a remnant of controversy rather than controversial in itself, the remnant of a moment when the curative capacities of outrage and violence were emphasized. The dalit as language's sexually transmitted disease is now a familiar figure of the challenge posed to Marathi literature's respectability politics in the 1970s, rather than a challenge issued every time the line is read. In fact, Dhasal and the Panthers' enraged and assertive self-definition of *dalit* (crushed, ground) loans its untranslated Marathi name to the worldwide mainstream caste annihilation movement, partly because global capital has comprehended and cannibalized the alterity value of crushing objecthood.⁹ As argued in Aniket Jaaware's essay, "Eating, and Eating with, the Dalit," "The only metonymy through which the non-dalits can bear the touch of the dalit is through the dalit's words...For speech, though intimate, is less intimate than touch, inter-dining, or inter-marriage. [So] it is through their words that dalits are consumed" (145).

Despite optimism that a "Third Dalit World" would uproot the caste system through a politics of fury in nations of the oppressed, the ethico-political value of caste annihilation exists in tandem with the market value of sustained caste alterity. Reading the written word of the dalit, Jaaware argues, is the best way to honor his otherness by maintaining a system that produces that otherness. The project of caste annihilation, thus, is anchored to the interest that authors, readers, and publishers have in sustaining the rhetoricity of the

pariah mystique of otherness and the attendant effects of authenticity and sanctity in the language of suffering.

1. Caste Interpellation and the Averted Subject

In his iconic text, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), radical theorist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, himself an ex-untouchable, characterizes the caste system as the ban on social intercourse: “The caste system prevents common activity...the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole, refusing to have any contact with others...his whole life is one anxious effort to preserve his caste” (250). Given his account of caste annihilation as a robust congregation with the world, what literary values are ascribed to the life of seclusion in politically committed literature?¹⁰ How does the modernist novel in South Asia, which was contemporaneous with Ambedkar, figure desegregation? Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935) and Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1937) are stylistically experimental English-language novels and poignant portrayals of how caste stigmatization regulates the relations among colonized populations. Both novels abjure caste tyranny and offer ameliorative measures in the diegetic arrival of the idea of Gandhian anticolonialism, though without drawing upon Ambedkar’s work. They displace the category of caste into the language of anticolonial critique, binding them together irrevocably, though not quite seeing caste *as* a category of colonial power.

Although there are no pass laws or “for colored/whites only” signposts in Anand’s North Indian army town, the opening phrase – “the outcaste colony” of scavengers, leather-workers, washer-men, and others – indicates that caste inflects the separation of metropolis and colony, core and periphery, home and township. Rao’s *Kanthapura*, named after the novel’s fictional South Indian village of “four-and-twenty houses,” opens with an impressionistic account of the British theft of cardamom and coffee from the

village, followed up with a detailed quasi-ethnographic mapping of its Brahmin, Potter, Weaver, Sudra, and Pariah quarters. If British modernism is thought to have imagined the world as a decentered network of connections, the modernist anticolonial novel in India focuses on profoundly graded inequalities on the ladder of caste-to-outcaste that accompanies the decentering of the world.¹¹ In *Kanthapura*, Rao revises the pleasure and excitement provoked by the *hari katha* (legend of the gods) style of local, oral storytelling into a modernist antidote to caste excommunication; in *Untouchable*, flânerie, epiphany, and inadvertent touching, a key constellation of Western modernity and modernism, function as supplements of caste segregation. Re-written in the wake of Gandhi's 1934 protest against Ambedkar's demand for a separate minority electorate for untouchables, Anand's novel takes a final turn from the Mahatma towards the modern Machine, celebrating the flush system as the immediate solution to caste tyranny. The notion of "practicality" is the novelistic resolution of the Ambedkar versus Gandhi knot in Anand, whereas Rao represents the Gandhian mobilization of lower caste women into the anticolonial nationalist work of satyagraha, which forms the climax of *Kanthapura*. Famously, Rao wrote *Kanthapura* between 1929 and 1933 in "a thirteenth century castle in the French Alps belonging to the Dauphins of France [where he] slept and worked on the novel in the room of the Queen." Anand wrote *Untouchable* after his meetings with the Bloomsbury set in England. All this is to say that the classics of anticolonial anti-caste modernism, renowned for forging a distinctive Indian English idiom from "native" experience of the nationalist movement, were marked by the caste capital of two authors of the diaspora on lengthy writing trips abroad. Indian English may not have a history of issuing caste edicts but its constitution is marked by brahminical privilege.

Caste interpellation in Anand's *Untouchable* follows an activation of the subject that is different from and disruptive of Althusser or Fanon's scenes of interpellation. The body is ritually assembled into caste gradation by behavior, rather than being hailed or not hailed, racialized or non racialized.¹² With a short epicurean reverie, Anand cuts *Untouchable*'s daylong plot in halves. The reverie itself plays out as an error and in it the pariah protagonist Bakha desegregates public space momentarily by straying from his stigmatized emplacement. Having spent yet another morning cleaning latrines without drainage and removing human excreta manually, Bakha still finds some things left to love: the English language, hockey, and delicious and warm jalebi (sweet pretzels). The jalebi cause a lapse in his obedience of caste edicts because once he tastes them, he loses his mindfulness of segregated space and the behavioral habits that uphold segregation. In the reverie that eventually leads to a nasty epiphany of his own untouchable status, the pariah trapped in residential segregation and zoning of food transforms into an urban flaneur – he eats, walks, and gazes like a man in the crowd. In the reverie, he is far away from his own object of aversion, the bentover untouchable who ritually debases himself by begging for sodden joothan (leftovers) thrown to him from the plates of caste Hindus. He has just bought expensive jalebis instead of begging for joothan. The untouchable body is primed to liberate itself of the little ruinations inflicted by caste everyday.

But just when a new future seems possible for Bakha because he is a man of the crowd, he is no longer just a man of the crowd. Because he carries a broom and a bucket, the caste marks of untouchability, the sanitation worker, even with his Anglo-Indian

“gentleman” clothing and “noble” physique, cannot pass as a man of the crowd in the precise instant that he assumes a casteless future. The reverie and its underlying imagination of non-segregated public space terminate abruptly when Bakha discovers that he has inadvertently touched an upper caste man. He discovers the fact of touching only because he is punished for it with invective and assault. Lost in his reverie, he has not *experienced* it as touching. Rather, the touch takes the proportion of a catastrophe for the caste Hindu man first who then administers a resounding slap. In this strange transfer of the trauma of touch, Bakha loses his jalebis and his dignified future. After the assault, caste is re-inscribed in his body through the enforced and self-emitted warning signal “sweeper coming,” by which he calls out his arrival to caste Hindus on the street, giving them time to move away from him. Compulsory warning, the embodied voice of and about untouchability, makes impossible another reverie:

Then, aware of his position, he began to shout aloud the warning word with which he used to announce his approach: ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming.’ The undertone, ‘Untouchable, Untouchable,’ was in his heart; the warning shout, ‘Posh, posh, sweeper coming!’ was in his mouth. (42-43)

Taking his place on the street means taking his place within the schema of bodily pollution. The repetitions “posh, posh,” “Untouchable, Untouchable” extend bodily alienation into the words on the page. Henceforth, rather than be a silent man of the crowd, Bakha will call out warnings of his arrival constantly, addressing everyone and asking them to move away. Caste ideology has him interpellate himself as untouchable by hailing others as Hindu. The interdiction on inaudible flanerrie accompanies the notion of distance pollution in the caste system. Distance pollution takes the untouchable body as filth incarnate, so much so that even its shadow is a contaminant. The voice, then, is

temporarily and pragmatically non-polluting so as to better regulate the possibility of being touched by the shadow of an untouchable. The call “sweeper coming” that Bakha himself puts out, after being assaulted for not calling, is a call for self-preservation in a ritual of self-ruination. Bakha is like a ventriloquist sustaining his own segregation and excommunication, and therefore his life. He sends out a call to which the upper caste subjects respond automatically with a physical movement of aversion – not a compulsion to turn around but a desire to turn away. The Hindu who hears the warning identifies the crier as untouchable without having to look at him. In the street scene of caste interpellation, the one who puts the call is isolated, rather than the one who receives it, as in Althusser and Fanon. An aural fold determines the connection between the untouchable body and the world, making the call of arrival also the call of apartheid. Paralleling Bakha’s reverie and his resumption of untouchable behavior, Anand’s anti-caste ethical mission re-inscribes caste ideology more perfectly in wanting to condemn it.

Literary questions of touch raised by Anand mark the limits of both analytical and clinical scenes of interpellation. Althusser and Fanon’s scenes of interpellation are premised on a necessary bodily distance between the source of the call “Hey, you there”/“Look, a Negro!” and the individual hailed by the call, the individual who becomes a subject in responding to the call by default. Anand’s literary figuration adds a third decisive street scene to the theories of subject formation, casting the caller as an untouchable subject. In Anand’s scene, the caste subject is hailed via the breakdown of proper distance – the experience of the breakdown as well as the non-experience of it. That is to say, caste interpellation is tailored to the prevention of touch, not the

assumption of distance. The subject that emerges from the literary account of interpellation is not a turned subject à la Althusser, or a double subject à la Fanon, but an *averted* subject.¹³

Bakha's body, otherwise metaphorized in the novel as a force of nature, as the dignity of ascending fire and as the fineness of sparkling water, is here converted into both averted subject and segregation sign. His body does the work of explicit announcements such as the "whites only" signs or the legal bureaucracy of pass laws in other apartheid regimes. We might translate Bakha's cry "sweeper coming" to "Look, an untouchable!" to mirror the deictic structure of "Look, a Negro!" – the hail that makes Fanon choke and tremble with contempt in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the aural fold of caste politics, the key difference is that the hail is a self-deixis, a paradoxical pointer that must originate from the ventriloquizing untouchable self and point contemptuously at the untouchable self. In Bakha's response to the instance of being called "Dirty dog! Offspring of a pig," constant aural self-objectification ("sweeper coming") is a form of addressing oneself as the other, as the object of contempt. After the lapse, Bakha becomes a subject conscientiously inhabiting ritualized caste ideology by "conduct[ing] himself in such and such manner, adopt[ing] such and such practical behavior," in Althusser's words.¹⁴ The force of segregation that compels him to call out his arrival is not prior to the warning shout – it is exerted by being reiterated in and by the untouchable body itself.

While Althusser's subject is hailed from behind and undergoes a literal 180 degree physical conversion recognizing that he is the individual who is hailed, Fanon's black

man and Anand's untouchable are called to self-contempt by an intersubjective exchange of gazes and words with dominant subject positions. Unlike the whistle or fairly neutral policing call of Althusser's "Hey, you there!" the hail of racism and casteism are both assigned to specific sources of othering. The white child in Fanon complains to her mother on the train that "the negro's going to eat me" and a street urchin adds public insult to Bakha's injury by falsely accusing him of violence (39). The Hindu's assault on Bakha – the slap – is conveyed by Anand through a classic estrangement technique: the reader abruptly leaves Bakha's stream of consciousness and hears the slap through the sound perspective of a nearby spectator, a Muslim tonga driver, who "heard a sharp, clear slap through the air" (40). In the swift chain of narrative events from Bakha eating, touching, being assaulted, to crying and shaking with revenge, and shouting out the warning "sweeper coming," the untouchable ontology of nausea, phobia, humiliation and smouldering rage is constructed from different voices on the street, rather than the single consciousness which is usually taken as the signature style of *Untouchable*.

As in Althusser and Fanon's scenes, nonparticipation in casteist interpellation seems possible but evasion is never acted out in the seemingly compulsory acquiescence to the hailing. No matter how much he peels, strips, hemorrhages, mourns, and refuses to accept the amputation when his body is language in the event of racist shaming, Fanon's black man cannot *not* acquiesce to the historical-epidermal schema. This schema displaces his lived experience of corporal sensations in the world, rendering him a crushed object (*dalit*) in his own eyes. As Bakha is encased by a crowd of onlookers gathering for the spectacle of punishment, "a moral barrier" rather than a physical barrier prevents any act

of volition or escape on his part because “he knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men” (39). Caste ideology puts the onus of its maintenance on the bearer of the stigma.¹⁵

Masculine sexuality is a key component of the corporal schema that is displaced in Anand as it is in Fanon. Buried in the episode of touching is a small, stray detail of “a figure sitting in a window.” After repeated reading, this detail appears as anything but redundant because it demonstrates that scopophilia is the missing link between Bakha’s epicurean reverie and catastrophe of touching the Hindu:

The taste of the warm and sweet syrup [of the jalebis] was satisfying and delightful. He attacked the packet again. It was nice to fill one’s mouth, he felt, because only then could you feel the full savor of the thing. It was wonderful to walk along like that, munching and looking at all the sights. The big signboards advertising the names of Indian merchants, lawyers and medical men, their degrees and professions, all in broad, huge blocks of letters, stared down at him from the upper stories of the shops. He wished he could read all the luridly painted boards. But he found consolation in recalling the arrangement he had made for beginning his lessons in English that afternoon. *Then his gaze was drawn to a figure sitting in a window. He stared at her absorbed and un-self-conscious.* (37) (italics mine)

In the next moment, he has already touched the Hindu who breaks his scopophilia with a litany of abuse: “Keep to the side of the road, you low-caste vermin!...Do you know you have touched me and defiled me...You swine, you dog, why didn’t you shout and warn me of your approach!” (37) The object of Bakha’s engrossed gaze is never identified. Nor is the figure in the window even mentioned again in the novel. In the aftermath of the humiliation, images of caste tyranny repeatedly conjure up in his mind. There are “dim ghosts of forms peopling the scene he has been through” in Bakha’s interior monologue of the “soundless speech of cells receiving and transmitting emotions, which was his

usual way of communicating with himself” (41). But among the ghosts, people, forms, and self-reflection, there is no flashback cutting to the figure sitting in the window. Scopie investment marks the limit of Bakha’s memory. Scopophilia sets off incoherence and segregation without ever being recalled as the proximal cause of infringement through touch.

Bakha is banned from ambulatory muteness as caste disrupts the inaudibility that defines *flânerie* in urban conceptions of modernity. He can never be a man of the crowd because his broom and basket, akin to bodily extensions, are markers that alter the perceptual field of the crowd rather than blending in. Reading Baudelaire’s poem on the formative experience of being touched, even jostled, by the crowd, Walter Benjamin theorizes the shock of modernity through the figure of the *flâneur*. Benjamin’s *flâneur* indicates a shift from vision to touch in the crowd and the resultant crisis of the perceptual regime. In light of the jostling and alienation of the new man in the crowd, Benjamin critiques the beguiling here-and-now of modernity by analyzing disparate histories and spaces that constellate in modernity as a “dialectical image.” In Anand’s episode on the public touch, the caste system’s averted *flâneur* forms a dialectical image of anticolonialism. This image constellates in a flash the history of caste atrocity, the thwarted future of an oppressed but noble protagonist, present fantasies of revenge against caste Hindus, the latent desire for English dress and speech, and the arrival of Gandhian caste re-structuring.

Even as Anand’s modernist anticolonial *bildungsroman* indicts the caste system as the

greatest hurdle in the development of protagonist and nation, Bakha the averted subject is surprised to find that he inspires responsibility for his well being in a Muslim passerby, Hinduism's other outcaste, who comes to his aid after seeing the Brahmin assault him. But "the Muhammedan" is careful not to touch the Brahmin (41). The caste Hindu is automatically recused from responsibility to anyone except other caste Hindus. The ethical moment, thus, observes the rule of segregation fully, revealing the persistence of caste in the forging of new anti-caste relations between Bakha and the Mussalman. Inviting the reader to partake of the critique of the caste system, *Untouchable* makes possible a modernist literary imagining of an outcaste subject's refusal to accept filth and manual scavenging as his destiny. For Anand, who was equal parts Bloomsbury aesthete, founder of the Progressive Writer's Association in India, a Marxist, a Joycean, and a Gandhian, the novel form was the most powerful articulation of socially purposive aesthetics of "new humanism." Without using didacticism and sermons, he thought that the novel might "help raise the untouchables, the serfs, the coolies and other members of society to human dignity and self-awareness" by inserting them into literariness, "the flight of winged words" and "poetic realism" (78-79).¹⁶ Under the influence of Gandhi's condescending advice to use simple and austere language because "Harijans [untouchables] sigh, moan, and groan," Anand rewrote the novel to rid it of the inventive avant-gardism of Joyce. Anand, following Joyce, had initially sought to describe "a state which cannot be rendered sensible by the use of wideawake language, cutanddry grammar and goahead prose."¹⁷ The reverie is an occasion to spot the tension between go-ahead prose and experimental prose in Anand. The interest in non-standard uses of language, indicated in the proliferation of Indian English glossaries (not exclusive to

Untouchable and *Kanthapura*), inscribes the postcolonial novel's commitment to caste representation. Anand demonstrates the pre-independence modernist languaging of the anti-caste body. What follows is an analysis of self-reflexive fiction in the anti-caste archive after independence. In what ways, I ask, does fiction move beyond the question of touch and caste interpellation in its critique of caste apartheid?

If titles are admissions, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a novel that acknowledges the pleasure elicited from the trifling detail, i.e., the possibility of pleasure in saving, savoring, and sticking to small, if not sweet, nothings. The errant detail knows no caste line, and the right care for the errant detail is crucial to character formation in Roy. It forms the principle of finely wrought distinctions between benevolent and spiteful individuals in the caste-stratified village of Ayemenem in South India. Roy creates a fictional world obsessed with infectious word play – phonetic mix-ups, palindromes and anagrams, nonsense verse, alliterations, neologisms, quirky code switches, farcical pidgin, and orthographic jumbles. The rhetoricity of texts – ranging from *Heart of Darkness* to *The Sound of Music*, from *The Reader's Digest* to *The Mahabharata* and grade school composition notebooks – saturates the narrative. With Roy, we learn most about characters when we learn how they respond to a certain text. The titular god of small things is singled out in the narrative as one who “instinctively” colludes in the “conspiracy of fiction,” a reader surrogate who willingly suspends disbelief and preserves the fragility of play with his care for detail (181). He is Velutha, untouchable Marxist factory worker, Naxalite revolutionary, and Bauhaus-style carpenter, soon to be killed in

police custody on the false charge of rape. A frequently cited passage valorizes his act of faith in the role-play of children:

A grown man entertaining three raccoons, treating them like real ladies. Instinctively colluding in the conspiracy of their fiction, taking care not to decimate it with adult carelessness. Or affection.

It is after all so easy to shatter a story. To break a chain of thought. To ruin a fragment of a dream being carried around carefully like a piece of porcelain.

To let it be, to travel with it, as Velutha did, is much the harder thing to do. (181)

Although it is protagonist Rahel's retrospection about her bygone childhood, the passage is undeniably supported by the narrative voice. Everyone, except the truly malicious characters in Ayemenem, is naturally partisan to the wonder that is Velutha. The anti-caste ethics of the novel reveres the notion of revering the fictional detail, reveres the characters that revere the notion. Pleasure in small things is self-reflexively set up as a foil to the tragedy caused by "Big Things," such as caste apartheid – not as its brittle antagonist but as a refuge from it. For the inter-caste couple Ammu and Velutha, who will be destroyed at the hands of caste protective family and police, caste is the "Big Thing...ever lurk[ing] inside" (320). They disregard the Big Thing because they know it too well. "They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things" – like ant-bites on their skin, caterpillars and beetles in the rain, and fish that sting. They fixate on a spider and name it, in Malayalam, *Chappu Thamburan* or Lord Rubbish for its camouflaging capacity; fallaciously identifying with it, taking every day that the spider lives as a prophecy for their own impossible love. Here, too, the narrative voice reveres the detail, going back at the conclusion of the novel to correct an error that is utterly trifling, given the scale of tragedy:

They [Ammu and Velutha] knew that things could change in a day. They were right about that.
They were wrong about *Chappu Thamburan*, though. He outlived Velutha. He fathered future generations.
He died of natural causes. (321)

In resolutely sticking to the path of small things, Ammu and Velutha avoid talking about caste, but they cannot avoid paying the price for being anti-caste. The novel, too, resolutely sticks to the small things as its key ethical gesture and seems poised to get away with the self-proclaimed redemption of the minor and its true truths. For example, in their opposing positions on the novel's valuation of pleasure, theorists Aijaz Ahmad and Brinda Bose seem to agree that pleasure is the difference between majority and minority politics.¹⁸ I argue against them that anticolonialism enables us to critique this account of difference by challenging the ethical card of the detail, the card the narrator plays to trump caste violence. It prompts us to notice, in repeated readings of *The God of Small Things*, first in passing and then to an all-consuming degree, those instances where the notion of the detail slips out of the narrator's control and shatters its anti-caste alignment. For all the diegetic delight in the safe, pleasing, and true force of the detail, the novel breaches its own narrative structure through the detail. It represents "the vivid detail," the "specific little detail," whether it is a smell or an image, as the spark by which Ayemenem's spiteful characters are instigated to commit caste atrocity (240-251).

What confounds the sympathetic reader, then, is that the detail is profoundly unethical. In a narrative that repeatedly sets up the detail as a primary mode of giving pleasure, of being anti-caste, reverence for the detail is in bad faith, for the detail also protects caste

interests. In fact, through the caste-protective detail, rather than the caste-annihilating detail, the reader finds that, in *The God of Small Things*, pleasure is taken in giving offense to the sympathetic reader; pleasure is taken in the failure to keep the detail an exclusive preserve of anti-caste desire. This pleasure is of an impersonal kind, diffused in and produced through language passively, rather than arising from the definite intentions of any enunciator. Forces of caste patriarchy in Ayemenem deploy lurid details of aversion and prejudice to close ranks, collude with the conspiracy of rape, and whip up caste hatreds: “*Like animals*, Mammachi thought and nearly vomited. *Like a dog with a bitch on heat*...Mammachi lost control.” (243); “with that specific detail [how could she stand the *smell* of the untouchable?], the Terror unspooled.” (244) Even policemen demonstrate their eye for detail, over and over again. Destroying Velutha, they pause to remark on the “strange” detail that his nails are painted red. While torturing and maiming him, caste agents are readers and artists who, in the words of the novel, smash and reconstitute ordinary things (32), “seeking aesthetic distance” to observe their craft (294). So, the devil of caste is very much in the detail. Caste reiterates itself in and as the aesthetic detail, but the narrator effaces iteration by disguising caste as the Big Thing. The surprise of re-reading *The God of Small Things*, thus, comes from discovering that care for the detail is not the other of caste segregation. Rather, care for the detail is both the fetish supposed to ward off caste violence as well as the fetish by which caste violence is incited. The parallels between the caste-affirming detail and the caste-annihilating detail speak to the rhetorical machinery of apartheid and injury that is irreducible to human responsibility or intention.

That it takes repeated readings to see the regard for detail repeated on both sides in Ayemenem's polarized world, is not incidental. This is because the narrative voice deftly excuses the caste agents' use of the detail by digressing into an accidental death, the drowning of Ammu's young niece Sophie: "It wasn't entirely their fault though, that the whole thing spun out of control like a deranged top. That it lashed out at those who crossed its path" (244). The thing lashed out: care for detail certainly does not translate to precision in Roy's fictional world, even when it comes with a simile for visual clarification. Throughout the novel, the narrator relies on the deliberate vagueness of "the thing:" the whole thing, the Big Thing, this Other Thing, the small things, ordinary things, Worse Things. The rhetorical function of "the thing," along with the pronoun "it" that lacks an antecedent, raises a pleasing haze of encryption around the plot mechanisms. We hear the familiar rhythm of colloquial speech in "the thing." Through the haze, the reader appreciates elusiveness as Roy's signature style, as if "it" and "things" were secret codes and in-jokes, moments of pleasure felt when we catch the thing that is trying to elude us. For example, "The road rose to meet him and the darkness grew dense... *It's happening*, a voice informed him. *It has begun*" (270). With this utterance, the reader knows that "it" might signify Ammu and Velutha's separation, "History walking the dog," "things getting worse before they get better," Velutha's death, and/or all of the above (272-274). Whenever used, "the thing" needs to be made precise, provoking a re-telling. But the lack of precision is itself so meticulous that we are confident of knowing exactly what we need to know at that point. In a climactic scene where Velutha in police custody might still be saved, the false but easy utterance "Yes, it

was him,” easy because vague, seals his fate (32). “It” provides a structural rationale for repeated re-tellings and re-settings of the same story of betrayal.

Explaining that the anger, redress, and exorcism of victimhood were not available to twins Rahel and Estha who betrayed Velutha out of love and fear, the narrator once again summons the elusive detail and a simile: “...there was no face to put on this Other Thing that they held in their sticky Other Hands, like an imaginary orange. There was nowhere to lay it down...It would have to be held. Carefully and forever” (182). Because Roy crosses the frame between the diegetic and nondiegetic detail thoroughly, the twins’ lapse from anti-caste ethics and resultant tragic separation generate *The God of Small Things*, the book held by the reader, that cannot be laid down until the last words “*Naaley. Tomorrow*” are exchanged between Ammu and Velutha twenty-eight years prior to narrative time. Which is to say, attempts at caste annihilation only heighten the protagonists’ isolation and diminish their capacity for social intercourse, but their lapse from caste annihilation adds to our pleasure in reading.

The narrative approaches the color of caste as a matter of language. “He was called Velutha – which means White in Malayalam – because he was so black” (70). Caste perception is at the intersection of skin color, translation, and the rhetorical figure of irony by which the name mimics what the named is emphatically *not*. While the postcolonial novel thinks caste as a category of segregation specific to South Asia and its diaspora, Velutha’s blackness, I would argue, offers a way to place caste within the global racial formation that began with voyages of discoveries in 1492. A sedimented

word standing for “pure species,” caste comes from *casta* meaning unmixed stock in Portuguese and from the Latin *castus* meaning chaste, with the French spelling *caste* overriding the English *cast* in the mid-nineteenth century. In Indian languages descending from Sanskrit, caste is both *jati*, meaning birth, and *varna*, meaning color. Its etymology positions caste within the colonial modernity that emerged with routes of domination and exploitation between Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The arrival of Portuguese trader Vasco da Gama in India in the late 15th-century, a journey he undertook in the name of the Portuguese state, no doubt spurred the translation of Hindu segregation practice into the English-language word “caste” via Portuguese. The untouchable name Velutha illustrates the status of rhetoric in what Lisa Lowe calls “the intimacies of four continents,” an opening to analyze caste slavery as coeval to and entangled with the history of global racial slavery through black skin language as white.

The vernacular language text offers unique insight into translation as the act of crossing the line into another caste. Cross-caste love offers no solutions to caste apartheid in *The God of Small Things*, and yet it is novelized as the secret to meaningful social intercourse that breaks through the repressive “Love Laws...that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much” (31). In contrast, inter-caste love is a pyrrhic but practical solution to dalit dispossession and humiliation in Kumud Pawde’s “The Story of My Sanskrit,” a short story excerpted from her autobiography and published in the first Marathi language anthology to be translated into English, *Poisoned Bread* (1992). By marrying a caste Hindu and taking his name, Pawde, the dalit Sanskrit teacher who has struggled with unemployment for years, suddenly finds a permanent position. Once translated into an

upper caste name, Kumud's "merit" is instantly accepted. In the narrative, the acquisition of Sanskrit language by low-caste Kumud coincides with the performative stakes of an upper caste or bourgeois standard of living and culture: "they [students and colleagues] detect a Brahminical standard of culture in my every thought and action...My ancestors should consider themselves guilty of a crime if they even heard the sound of this language [Sanskrit]. And that is the language in which I have to speak." Pawde exposes caste differentiation as a false or erroneous differentiation, but she refuses to lose all differentiation altogether. Rather, she simply reverses the principle of the averted dalit body, keeping intact the bodily principle of differentiation based on hygiene, odor, and the body in the caste system.

Every day, I bathed myself clean with Pears soap. My mother rubbed Kaminia oil on my hair, and plaited it neatly. My clothes were well-washed and sparkling clean. The girls of my own caste liked to play with me because it enabled them to smell some fragrance. For my father himself was fond of toiletries. So there was always a variety of oils, soaps, and perfumes in the house. (*Poisoned Bread*, 99)

Her body, her clothes, her Pears soap, her kaminia oil – these details have a pleasant sensory attraction, a positive distinction with which she expresses her disgust with the "sour smell" and "bad breath" of her upper caste companions. The aversive subject of caste apartheid persists in Pawde's work, with the exception that is languaged into purity and fetishized sanitation through a consumer culture that includes an ensemble of acquisitions that are traditionally forbidden by the caste system: elitist Sanskrit, conspicuous consumption, inter-marriage. *The God of Small Things* avoids such a neat reversal of filth, but it does attempt to maintain a positive distinction similar to Pawde's in its reverence for the detail. Literary anti-caste ethics cannot extricate itself from the dialectic

of false and true distinctions. But it can think in terms of a commons in which these distinctions cease to matter, as we see with *Cinnamon Gardens*.

Shyam Selvadurai's historical novel *Cinnamon Gardens* (1998) is hyper-sympathetic to the possibility of forging an anti-caste commons. In the Crown Colony of Ceylon in the 1920s, diasporic queerness, heterosexual feminism, and the progressive lobby of the British colonial establishment combine to advocate for universal franchise without discrimination of caste and class. The Ceylon National Congress, however, attacks the progressive coalitions, petitioning to remove their bill on casteist anticolonial grounds that universal franchise is a "European," not home-grown Ceylonese, tradition (29). In the course of the narrative, the forces of inter-caste marriage, inter-racial marriage, inter-racial queerness, and feminist critiques of marriage rearrange the familial structures of kinship – which demand caste, race, and sexual conformism during "the age of agitation for self-rule." These structures based on positive differentiation are transformed into anti-caste familial articulations that organize against conformism. *Cinnamon Gardens*, named after a residential zone of grand Ceylonese homes thriving under the colonial economy, mobilizes anti-caste intercourse at the level of the family unit in order to recuperate the family as a progressive commons.¹⁹ Annulukshmi, the unmarried feminist, rides a bicycle in a saree. Her uncle Balendran identifies with her "transgressive" act on account of his secret homosexuality. Balendran's exiled brother offers timely support having guessed his secret. Selvadurai re-frames the form of caste atrocity in *The God of Small Things*. A family's deadly betrayal of kin in favor of the merciless annihilation of inter-caste

coupling is here rewritten as the tentative formation of a coalition of anti-caste kinship between members of the family who have nothing else in common.

“What in God’s name is the point of a free Ceylon when that freedom is to be enjoyed by an oligarchy of the rich and the high born?”: this is the rallying cry of familial anti-caste kinship in *Cinnamon Gardens* (151). The trace of familial violence frames the story with a flashback to twenty-eight years ago. Arul, the scion of a wealthy Tamil landowner and Balendran’s older brother, is punitively banished to India for marrying an outcaste maidservant. It turns out that she was intended to be his father’s sex worker. Arul stabs his father, sealing the banishment of the inter-caste couple to India. Here, caste annihilation is figured as the violent disruption of kinship as well as the end of national belonging, a figuration that will be reversed with the welcoming of Arul’s son back to Ceylon. Caste apartheid is not only about the debased acts of scavenging and carrying of night soil or about a silent system of untouchable sex work that sustains national and familial belonging, but about a visceral rejection of the untouchable:

Balendran knew that, to his father, caste differences were as real as the earth being flat and inhabited by spirits had been to his forebears. One’s birth, one’s caste were tangible, as if these differences were manifest in one’s veins, one’s ligaments, the very smell of one’s sweat. His father had a story that he often told of how, unknowingly, he had drunk from the cup of an untouchable and had spontaneously vomited. His body, aware of the very poison, had rejected it. Balendran did not agree with his father at all, but he would have taken his father’s feelings into consideration...(221)

Of course, divine interpellation is not the only way that caste recognition operates and, once again, a vernacular language text helps us uncover the rhetorical function that sustains the Anglophone novel’s anti-caste commons. In Gujarati language poet Shankar Painter’s *A journey by bus down the countryside* (2011), the averted body of the human

scavenger, or “shit-shifter,” is the result of a single-minded interrogation of the first person narrator by villagers on a bus, who try to determine his caste without asking him about it directly in conversation. Rather than a spontaneous knowledge formed through a visual giveaway or a visceral sixth sense like that of Selvadurai’s patriarch, the caste of the stranger is revealed only after a prolonged and unrelenting ferreting for it:

The villagers struck up a conversation:
“Sahib, you don’t seem to belong to these parts.”
They seemed to be curious about a thousand things:
My name, my moholla, my village,
My destination, my job in the city.
They had no qualms about invading my privacy.
But there was something lurking in the background
Baring its teeth and fangs to pounce upon me.
They were digging away at a mountain of questions
To ferret out my caste from its molehill.
They were on to it soon enough –
When I confessed I was visiting a family of ‘shit-shifters.’
The old adage about poking noses.
To make the best of a bad case
They put the lid on all questions.

That is to say, the sudden change in the behavior of co-passengers after they attain the object of their curiosity as material a part of the modern caste apartheid habitus after the official end of apartheid as the historical belief in the visceral sensing of the untouchable, when caste apartheid was legal. In the lax metaphors of Painter’s poem, untouchable caste always lurks in the background of a conversation with a stranger. Caste status is a rodent or a weasel that the cat of Hindu supremacy is waiting to pounce upon. Once the “ferret” is caught, the relation ends. By putting caste into the absurdity of divine interpellation rather than the reality of detection, by making the progressive commons a

familial construct, *Cinnamon Gardens* invents a persuasive way to sustain an anti-caste commons.

From *Cinnamon Gardens*' hyper-sympathetic and honorable attitude to caste abolition, I now turn to a novel characterized by the utter failure of sympathy and honor in the witnessing of caste apartheid, a veritable celebration of the unconcerned spectator and his boredom with the uses of sincerity. Phallogentric, irreverent, and comic offense-giving is the primary mode of address in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story*, which might pass as a colonial anti-bildungsroman on account of its ethically bankrupt posturing combined with a suspicion of progress, teleology, and edification. The novel plays edification for laughs, achieving its shock effect by putting under erasure the idea that witnessing atrocity entails condemning it, acting to end it, or even being nominally moved by it.

Protagonist Agastya, the unconcerned spectator, is barely an other, let alone a fetishized other for the First World. Rather, he is other only in name and color, wholly English in sensibility (as illustrated by his nicknames "English" and "August"), one who basks in upper caste cosmopolitan privilege while evacuating anticolonialism as false piety. Needless to say, *English, August* poses problems for the anti-caste archive by trans-valuing unconcern as authenticity and concern as depraved imposture from a position of caste privilege. Far from rushing to condemn the caste violence, the novel perversely figures a native informant who could not feel more alien to caste:

To him [Agastya], these places had been, at best, names out of newspapers, where floods and caste wars occurred, and entire Harijan [untouchable] families were murdered, where

some prime minister took his helicopter just after a calamity, or just before the elections. Now he looked out at this remote world and felt a little unsure he was going to spend months in a dot in this hinterland.

Chatterjee, of course, carries Agastya's alienation to a ridiculous extreme

I am not quite sure whether the cook at the Rest House here understood yesterday what boiling means.

Yes, you'll face the problem of language in Madna [district]. They can't even speak Hindi properly.

A district administrator for the postcolonial Indian government, Agastya is training to become a bureaucratic native informant but the novel is suspicious of any idea of development, especially the protagonist's. So, education aside, he remains an Anglophile who fakes being a native (mis)informant, an ethnographic authority concocting lie after lie, all the more ridiculous because he is believed. Rather than do good, or do his job, his time is spent pursuing aesthetic experiences of extreme disjuncture: reading Marcus Aurelius and listening to Vivaldi while smoking marijuana and masturbating in the underdeveloped "hinterland" of the Madna district in Central India where his poverty-stricken constituents have no access to water or sanitation.²⁰ By escaping into indulgent aesthetics, Agastya repudiates anticolonial action, and action as such, imagining Madna as the end of time. The stage is set for satire. He finds it apt that, in the back country, a lopsided statue of M.K. Gandhi is held steady with a stick up its backside – to him, an honest indicator that "patriotism and its bloodletting had simply bypassed" the area (256). He assumes that the shocking poverty of castes and tribes is a choice made to irk him. Seeing tribes send their children into dried up wells, without safety harnesses, just to fetch muddied pails of water,

Agastya wanted to protest against the people [starving castes and tribes] who led such lives... They irritated him, almost to the point of anger; and later, nothing could convince

him...that the tribals were compelled to live like this, risking the lives of their children for half-buckets of mud [drawn from the dried up well]. (288)

Ostensibly, this is a cue for the reader to part ways with the privileged parodic position of Agastya, if parting is even necessary. Chatterjee represents Agastya's response to caste violence as a litmus test for satire, the point at which the comedy of unconcern and misinformation, the humorous segregation of the First World in the Third World, brings a hatred that cannot be stomached. Having driven the comic into the caste corner, what is the way out? *English, August* provides none. It springs the trap laid for unconcerned aesthetics all along and then simply springs it again, instead of opening it, with Agastya's misdirected anger and protest. The narrative has Agastya repeat his incredulous anger when confronted with structural poverty only to drive home the point of disidentification: "I can't believe that they are *forced* to live like this" (292). The novel ends in a scene of double avoidance with Agastya leaving Madna, having assuming yet another alienated identity: "I've become your American, taking a year off after college to discover himself" (321).

From start to finish, we are given a protagonist who disavows the existing relation between reading Marcus Aurelius and seeing lives risked for a cup of water. The reader knows that the same caste system that enables Agastya's access to the highest levels of global commodity consumption produces the scene that angers him incorrectly. A world citizen and compulsive liar, August's incessant appetite for alienation from his provincial scene, his angst-ridden inauthenticity complex, and his gloating political inertia are invitations for the metropolitan bourgeois audiences to dis-identify with him precisely

because he mirrors them. Chatterjee spends much of the novel's denouement laying bare the illusion of "development" in rural India as well as of the movement rebelling against it. The public sector machine that temporalizes the countryside as the unglamorous nonmodern by having privileged urban bureaucrats manage it, and the Naxalite rebellion against colonial power wielded by the Indian state's development agendas for tribal lands – both opponents are equal targets of satire. But, in a novel that revels in the inappropriate and the unscrupulous, the desultory and the farcical, the episode of misdirected protest spurs a close and critical revaluation of the exhaustion attributed to concerned positions, anti-caste archives, and anticolonialism. A denouement cannot survive the end of concern, so concern returns erroneously towards the end.

The English language plays a key role in the breakdown of ethics. Training in the English literary canon only isolates Agastya further from the fictional world of Madna district. He has mastered the Anglophone canon at the cost of Indian vernacular language acquisition, severing his relation with proximate reality so completely that his immediate frames of reference, when he thinks about the district bureaucracy, are John Dryden and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. Becoming native thus proves contentious when he enters the bureaucracy. But rather than make a point about its irrelevance, Chatterjee deploys the canon to bring Agastya closer to the implied metropolitan reader, adding allusions and citing literary passages that are commonplace for students to memorize for a college syllabus. "English in India is burlesque" – suite is pronounced soot, "hardly must" is a legitimate phrase, Macbeth is taught in Hindi for an M.A. English degree, English-less midwives and boiler operators get job instructions in English, and so on – so the implied

reader feels ever so pleased and clever in recognizing allusions. Citations from Shakespeare to T.S. Eliot are peppered through the text without attribution. For example, J. Alfred Prufrock's pair of ragged claws, from *The Love Song*, scuttle across Chatterjee's Indian story as Agastya's desire in this manner: "to slink away from having to think, to wish to be that pair of ragged claws that had so tantalized him in his college years, scuttling over the floors of silent seas" (130). The freeplay of postcolonial intertextuality with the great tradition of canonized authors, rather perversely, makes common ground out of unscrupulous and hateful statements, switching between burlesque and sincerity, irreducible separation and improbable connection.²¹ So, the English statement "Bengali uncle has come," becomes "Pumbaali Kunkal has bum," which, Agastya the native informant and interpreter of languages tells a visiting Englishman, is a tribal prayer for fertility sung in those parts of the world. Through colloquial transformations of the English language, the novel recites the voyages of discoveries, at times earnestly and at other times as an internal wink at the reader.

'But their taste,' whined Agastya. The curtains of Menon's [hotel] room had small red aeroplanes on a green background. 'Oh, I don't think you should be critical like that,' said Menon solemnly. Agastya wondered if he could slap him, many times, grab his hair and jerk his head off his neck, and say, Don't apply a different standard of aesthetics just because this is Madna and you've been to bloody Cambridge.

Speaking unsavory truths entails launching an offensive against the ethical reflex of manageable alterity. This subject position entails exposing as hollow the ethical gesture of others who earnestly embrace the nonmodern, nondeveloped space rumored to practice human sacrifice, without criticism, out of their guilty reckoning of cosmopolitan privilege, from wanting not to offend. Menon continues to be the native informant who knows better than the other more native informants, and yet refuses to acknowledge it by

articulating it, leaving Agastya feeling violent. Agastya wants to move away from the kneejerk valorization of everything rural, tribal, and/or outcaste as well as everything that is popular in the metropolis, a desire that forces him to make unjustifiable and offensive utterances: “He’s the sort who’d love to get AIDS just because its raging in America.” Or “If Gandhi seduced a tribal woman, surely it was equally true that she liked the seduction.”

Agastya’s startling moment of misdirected empathy in the novel comes in response to the news that his friend, the impossibly named “Mohan Gandhi,” has been accused of raping a tribal woman and that her tribe cut off Gandhi’s arms as punishment. The burst of empathy is itself an image of unmanageable offense. With Gandhi’s amputation, August sympathizes with him and dismisses the rape either as a false charge or a consensual act or a tribal misunderstanding. The structure of masculinist caste privilege drives Agastya’s staunch refusal to bear witness to the possibility of sexual violence, and this refusal permits him to affirm his distance from the possible victim and feel the chills for the perpetrator:

[Prakash Rao, a tribal activist, says to Agastya] “A man called Gandhi, even he abused the honor of the tribal woman who cooked for him. The men of her village were very angry. They visited Gandhi three nights ago, and surprised them both. In revenge, and as punishment, they cut off his arms.”

A light breeze, forest whispers of leaves and dust, the faint discomfort of damp at the armpits, something crackling in his [Agastya’s] hand, and some warm fluid seeming to flood outward from the base of his spine. Mohan. (290)

The mutilated body of Mohan Gandhi, the Assistant Conservator of Forests, a tribal amputation, if you will, becomes a bigger and more immediate problem for Agastya than

bonded labor, rape, debt, water scarcity, and so on. Agastya himself experiences this (un)ethical aberration as bewilderment.

[Agastya said] “If Gandhi seduced a tribal woman, surely it was equally true that she liked the seduction.” He stopped, out of a kind of bewilderment. (292)

Of course, the stage for this sympathetic image of unmanageable offense is set much earlier when Agastya claims matter-of-factly of the civil servants that, “If they're posted reasonably far from their bosses and their families, they even keep a tribal woman at home, for sex and scrubbing the floors.” *English, August* is an interesting literary text for anticaste anticolonialism because it works so hard at never representing its ethics or politics, unlike *The God of Small Things*.

In the postcolonial Anglophone novel, the commitment to repudiating caste results in an undecidability between the sustenance and endangerment of otherness. This is not to suggest that caste is reducible to otherness. Rather, it is to understand that the claim of otherness and caste annihilation affirm each other, curiously enough, by always being at odds. On the one hand, the repudiation of caste is seen as sustaining, rather than endangering, the life of otherness; on the other, caste accrues value for the global market as the locus of otherness that ethics should not tolerate. By anchoring commitment to interest, we see that caste subjects remain othered in the literary ethics of removing them from othering.

2. Native Self-Representation and the Question of “Shooting Back”

“Do your family members use shampoo?” Surveyors from the Centre for Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, posed this question to twenty thousand dalit

households in northern India in 2008.²² The survey was undertaken by proponents of “dalit capital,” an emergent regime that revalues ex-untouchables’ consumption patterns under free-market capitalism, and treats lifestyle re-programming as a mode of concerted struggle against caste poverty, stigma, and atrocity. Rather than mounting a resistance to post-nineties neoliberal restructuring and the inequalities of contemporary capitalist societies, the dalit capital regime aligns dalit emancipation with entrepreneurship, surplus value, and the luxury of consumption. Whereas the caste system stigmatizes everyday dalit behaviors of eating, drinking, dressing, speaking, and walking as unclean, dalit capital invites a desecration of the stigma of desecration; it hallows the dalit body as an unalienated body whose pleasures derive from the pleasure of the commodity form, from having merged with the commodity form. Seeking an ideal dalit who abandons the affect of caste shame, who finds sharp upward mobility in market-oriented reform, and who conforms to the dictates of conspicuous consumption, this regime measures its success by counting the number of low-income shampoo users and billionaires alike. It advocates the creation of a dalit bourgeoisie that privileges property ownership as well as hedonistic pleasures over utility and austerity, envisioning the unfulfilled caste annihilation project come to fruition in the cultivation of anti-Brahminical style, e.g., cooking beef in rum. Everything anathema to Brahmins is up for grabs in the dalit capital revolution.

In the dalit utopia, a commodity is a happy, shiny, hollowed-out, unsullied good that seems to bear no trace of the caste violence immanent to the social relations that produced it.²³ The exorbitantly good life is made possible by the same injury that the regime seeks to redress. The abjection of caste suffering is simply reversed into the

ecstasy of pleasure. Far from seeking an end to capitalism, the dalit capital regime builds itself upon the ongoing co-constitution of aspiration and desolation, enchanted anti-austerity and disenchanting reification, phantasmagorias of pleasure and utopias of atrocity. Tellingly, the regime disavows anticolonialism as a part of the dalit intellectual tradition because “history shows that imperialism has been fairer to dalits than the native rulers have been.”²⁴ In dalit capital, anti-caste is never anticolonial.

However, hedonistic dalit style is at a significant remove from the survey question “do your family members use shampoo?” That question seems less interested in discerning the art of the good life than at gauging the minimal levels of consumption of dalits, in measuring their progress from filth to hygiene. Caste annihilation is obviously irreducible to the dalit consumption of shampoo. The survey question articulates commodity fetishism with the fetishism of dalit otherness under uneven globalization. To find a household that has not been tapped by shampoo is a victory for such a survey. We do not need an actual answer to the question in order to recognize that the research center’s alterity fetishism is remarkably reminiscent of both colonial modernity and the acclaimed project of writing back to it as colonialism’s permanent other. On the market for global Anglophone writing, the identity categories of woman, native, subaltern, minority, outcaste, nonwhite, queer, retain unequivocal otherness. Given the ossification and strengthening of the default currency of the alterity claim that is no longer effective in restructuring political action or ethical relation on the grounds of injury or injustice, one can suggest the paradox that only when the management of alterity is sought to be

dutifully betrayed that alterity might retain some of its radical value for anticolonial discourse.

The dalit capital regime breaks with the Dalit Panther manifesto, the formative document for post-independence caste abolition in the 1970s, which listed its enemies as: “1. Power, wealth, price. 2. Landlords, capitalists, money-lenders and their lackeys. 3. Those parties who indulge in religious or casteist politics, and the government which depends on them” (145). By contrast, the pursuit of power, pleasure, and money in dalit capital is accompanied by the desire for the cultural capital of English. Chandra Bhan Prasad, the founder of this movement, takes the English language as a guarantee of access to sociocultural and economic mobility that dalits are missing, subscribing to the narrative that vernacular native languages subordinate the dalit and English language frees them: “Instead of wasting resources, time and talent in trying to stop the unstoppable, dalits should seek their share in it.” Rather than the denial of pleasure and the flesh – the basis of Gandhian *satyagraha* – dalit capital embraces English as part of its embrace of all capital. In an interview with the YouTube channel *Dalit Camera*, Prasad elevates Thomas B. Macaulay – the nineteenth century British politician much despised in the anticolonial tradition for instituting English as the medium of instruction in India – as a friend of the dalit. As a celebratory sign of dalit hedonism, he commissioned a statue of “Goddess English” modeled on the Statue of Liberty, laying it as the foundation stone in a dalit temple of job aspirations. Everything about dalit capital is designed to confound the sympathetic audience and our conventional modes of defining the revolutionary.



Photo 1: Goddess English. Banka village, Uttar Pradesh, North India, 2011.

In the dalit capital movement, the English language is seen as the space of political and socioeconomic assertion where anxiety over inauthenticity can finally be laid to rest. So far, political theorists, historians, and anthropologists have analyzed caste as (1) a segregational structure of Aryan Brahminical supremacy with archaic religious origins, (2) a correlate of race and/or class-based discrimination, (3) a modern democratic concept for political representation, (4) an essential and untranslatable regional category of victimization and stigmatization.²⁵ The emergent regime of dalit capital analyzes caste as a remnant of a multilingual era of hierarchized native languages which, according to Prasad, “ought to be eradicated and put in a museum” because they have participated in caste violence.²⁶ For Prasad, then, not only is English the condition of possibility for caste annihilation but caste annihilation is intrinsic to English. We are, with dalit capital, as far away from anti-caste ethics as possible. This is a model of language in which rhetoricity is replaced by profit and pleasure. The regime does not yet have a literary text it claims for itself, but in the critique that follows, I analyze the breaks in anti-caste ethics

in vernacular literary and visual literacy texts. My analysis will establish the rhetoricity of vernacular texts to argue that hedonistic pleasure is gendered and to demonstrate how the English language defers caste annihilation.

Joseph Macwan's *Angaliyat* (*The Stepchild*, 1987) is a provincial novel of untouchable life set in the 1940s in western India. A tenaciously gloomy text, it portrays caste tyranny ripping the fabric of male comradeship as well as heterosexual intimacy in two neighborhoods of untouchables during the heyday of the independence struggle. Its male heroes, trapped in a cycle of rural disenchantment with revolution, call out anticolonial nationalism for being an alibi of caste segregation. Combining the marriage plot with crime noir, the buddy tragicomedy with social realism, *Angaliyat* is an anti-caste novel written by a dalit and celebrated for its truth to life. That it won the Sahitya Akademi award from India's National Academy of Letters only confirms its status as a faithful and singular re-creation of regional caste oppression and its co-optation by literary nationalism. In the first reading, *Angaliyat* appears to be a straightforward indictment of the Hindu supremacy of landowners who attack weavers and male buddies Teeha and Valji in properly villainous fashion, to humor themselves, even as they claim to be anti-caste before the Indian National Congress. The title signals its main theme as the trials and tribulations of an unwelcome angaliyat (stepchild) in a new family, a metaphor for untouchables in the new nation. However, neither son taunted for being an angaliyat in the narrative is an actual angaliyat – the child from a woman's previous marriage who holds her finger (angali) and follows her, uninvited, into her second husband's home. In one case, he is the son from his mother's second marriage, not first; and in the other's

case, the second marriage of his mother never takes place. The catachrestic metaphor and the slippage from son to stepson, stepson to caste, caste to conjugality and kinship, put the question of women's sexuality at the forefront of our reading. The narrative, however, counts woman as a negative force, always there to dissolve the life-affirming male bonding of the buddy complex.

The mere presence of untouchable women in public space galvanizes caste violence and disturbs the Teeha-Valji bond, moving the weaver protagonists of *Angaliyat* to the conflict with landowners, a conflict that is fatal for the valorous duo. Needless to say, the marriage plot is foiled at every turn, soon relegated to a deadweight subplot that irks everyone, including the reader, with the deaths of the buddies not simply overriding and bookending it but caused by the pursuit of marriage. Valji is killed first, trying to stop the landowners who are abducting Teeha's fiancé, and Teeha in the conclusion, bludgeoned to death by a vengeful Hindu. But long before that, he has refused marriage to his fiancé because, after Valji's death, his "desires have gone numb" (109). The novel as an extended celebration of their bond – "these two were an unusual pair. Inseparable, two bodies with a single soul" – uncovers the libidinal energies of anti-caste indictment. In a telling episode, Valji cross-dresses as a woman to escape angry landowners on the lookout for him, veiling his face and retreating to the fields. Teeha, who has persuaded Valji into this "unmanly/eunuch-like" disguise minutes before, rather disingenuously forgets all about it. The narrator, then, colludes in Teeha's pretend bewilderment when he sees a "heavily built woman," perhaps an apparition or a witch, instead of Valji, at their designated meeting spot:

“As he [Teeha] turned he saw a heavily built woman, her face hidden by a veil, gesturing and beckoning. He had heard of strange apparitions in these hedges, but this was rather early in the day and surely witches didn’t call out for company!” (28)

The false surprise of the reveal that it is Valji is one of the most self-satisfying tricks played by the duo in the name of besting the landowners. The dominant fantasy of this anti-caste novel is that the buddy plot can free itself of the liability of reproductive partners, untouchable cis women, who tend to send up in smoke male comradeship without providing a substitute for it. At the same time, however, the buddy duo becomes anti-caste only in order to protect *their* women from the lascivious landowners, and the novel represents anti-caste ethics by its libidinal investment in the figure of the doubly oppressed, untouchable cis woman. This defining tension between needing women and disavowing the need for them runs through the novel’s excoriation of caste apartheid. In the endless grief unleashed by the marriage plot, atrocity follows upon atrocity, misfortune upon misfortune, so much so that the valorization of the de-eroticized woman offers relief to the reader because it has the appearance of hope, the potential of a feminist moment from the minor irritant of women’s chastity. The potential offers relief because what merely vexes us saves us from what numbs us to horror.

But, on repeated reading, we see a lacuna of untouchability in the text: why are *weavers* designated as untouchable? What is so repugnant about men at the loom? What possible equivalence is there between fabric and filth? The question of correlation is neither hidden nor evident in the ethics of indictment. Macwan, the native informant, possesses local knowledge that in the Charotar district of western India, *Angaliyat*’s setting, weavers are historically cast as untouchable, an exception to their touchable standing

elsewhere. Macwan, the novelist, far from giving us the key piece of data, writes the ethnographic reality of untouchability as trope, withholding the data but letting it work its effect upon the reader. No matter how we read – closely, repeatedly, speedily, slowly, searching cover to cover – we find no answer, no laying bare of the bizarre correlation between fabric and filth. In Anand, untouchability is a literal correlation that can be denounced: “They think we are dirt because we clean their dirt.” But, rather than a literal correlation, untouchability is a trope of double displacement in Macwan, one whose effects can be denounced, but its reason never explained: “This too was sad and ironic – you could accommodate the woven cloth in the cart but not the weavers themselves. *They* were impure!” (9). It is tempting to speculate how weaving gained the connotation of filth, and the translator’s preface attempts to pin this down through historical evidence. Macwan, crucially, does not speculate or clarify. Instead, he retains the enigma of the category error – of caste errantry – to undermine the correct working of caste, when untouchability can seemingly be understood and denounced because it works literally. The ethnographic surprise of inexplicable and arbitrary segregation, the skein that never unravels, is constitutive of *Angaliyat* and its focus on the weavers of Gujarat.

Set during the food and cloth famine of the Second World War, Macwan’s novel dialogizes the false promise of anticolonial nationalism by shuttling jarringly between the pastoral and the patriotic: a local despot receives a national testimonial for being an ideal revolutionary (202); upper castes conspire to squash the “dhedhas [half castes] well and proper” before independence because “this country belongs to the Hindus and will remain so” (101); and “the sun of Swaraj [self-rule]” is a key phrase repeatedly uttered by

antagonists to articulate the different futures of apartheid after independence from British rule (20, 32, 100, 199).²⁷ Indeed, Macwan's primary mode of engaging with the persistence of caste in his postcolonial present of the 1980s is caste violence in the Gujarati countryside in the historical context of the 1940s. While the individual characters of the weaver community in *Angaliyat* are represented in the struggle to survive the quotidian violence of caste, the plot makes short shift of their victories by reproducing a caste-specific cycle of murder, sexual harassment, rape, child marriage, arson and larceny, conspiracy and blackmail, bonded labor and vassalage. Whenever the justice system intervenes in the name of injured minority groups, or when the injured characters take matters of justice into their own hands, Macwan shows reprisal as immanent to the event of redress. The novel's condition of production was the brutal anti-dalit violence of 1981 and 1985 in Gujarat, sparked by upper caste anger at the initiation of affirmative action for minority castes and tribes. So, with every small victory of Valji and Teeha in the novel, "the thorn of revenge grows into a spear" in possession of the landowning castes, and upon this spear of revenge the dalits find themselves impaled more painfully after each refusal of subjugation. That is how the burning issue of urban anti-Dalit violence against affirmative action in education is written symptomatically in the opposite setting: the bucolic Charotar district of the 1940s, with its lunar charts, auspicious days, non-Hindustani dialects, and ritual behaviors, where the enforced illiteracy of the weavers swings the story of their emancipation towards more defeat.

Displacing the project of caste annihilation to the moment of its originary betrayal at the hands of anticolonial leaders of the nation, Macwan, with post-independence hindsight

into colonial continuities, has reason to treat the arrival of independence as nothing but an upper caste announcement about equality and unity that does not translate into the reality of action or social relations – exactly as his characters treat it. The novel ends on a new note of antagonism from a final sudden contrivance, on the question of education, once again displacing the woman. Teeho’s “stepson,” the son of the woman Teeho never married, establishes a local high school in his “father’s” memory with funds collected by the sale of fabric. The so-called stepson refuses to accept the repeated pronouncement of caste violence as “the writing on his forehead,” presenting literacy as the anti-caste position from which the dalits write a new future, a position mirrored in the dalit literature movement and its decision to pick up pens instead of brooms. The child naturalized as Teeha’s stepchild, the child woven out of chastity rather than birthed from conjugality, is the assurance of Teeho and Valji’s endless survival.

Notwithstanding the future of the homosocial untouchable, the novel’s twin indictments of the national failure to be anti-caste and the rural failure to organize collective anti-caste action, comes out of a repeated lapse into misogyny, homophobia, puritanism, and ableism. These prejudices, far from being gratuitous or futile to anti-caste ethics, are the means by which indictment operates and are sanctified by its success. Teeha’s throwaway remark – “People talk of Independence, but look at what’s happening to *our* womenfolk. Doesn’t that matter to anyone?” – demonstrates that his crushing chauvinism generates his capacity to critique anticolonial nationalism. The narrative accords him transcendental status due to his anti-caste able-bodied valor, excusing if not encouraging his assault on a nagging wife. The narrative reinforces the shame and self-blame of the abused woman to

spur the energies of dalit radicalism in Teeha's solo conflict with the landowners: "But after all the atrocities inflicted upon her was [village] and all because of her, she found it difficult to show her face in the neighborhood" (38). Macwan's impulse to reiterate misogyny in order to reach the truth of dalit experience galls the sympathetic reader. The novel's most salient feature, the suspicion of the national freedom struggle, relies on the language of caste patriarchy, sexual segregation, and hypermasculine ableist valor, setting up an osmotic exchange between its progressive and conservative gestures. The coalition of utterances shared by anti-caste thought and caste patriarchy makes it impossible for the sympathetic reader to align with only the anti-caste gesture.

At the root of the conflict between the landowners and the weavers is the sexually harassed dalit woman upon whose person both castes of men lay an equal claim. The literary image of scopophilia comes at an auction block where Teeha sells his cloth towards the beginning of the novel:

The Vaisakh heat was intensifying, building in [Teeha] a strong urge to swallow a leisurely lota [tumbler] or two of water...As Teeha was saying these words, c-r-a-ash came a sound and a young woman carrying a pot of water on her head stood completely drenched. The stone that had broken her pot struck Teeha's hand and fell right next to him...The woman herself, wet from head to foot, stood rooted to the ground....Flustered over their lascivious gaze she re-adjusted her wet pallav [end of saree] across her chest. (15-16)

To put this plainly, thirsty Teeha sees a drenched woman; valorous Teeha discovers a damsel in distress. The narrative corroborates our rhetorical impression of this passage, revealing later that she is not *a* woman, but *the* woman he knows as Methi, whom Valji dies trying to save, whom he wants to but will not marry, the reason he is at the auction. The omission gains new significance when Teeha strong-arms the caste Hindus who

aimed the stone at her, thus creating the key complication of the marriage plot in a caste patriarchy. The English translation preserves the everyday idiom of the Charotar residents who drink in lotas or brass pots, not glasses, during the stifling weather of Vaishakh or April-May, in a community where proper names contain variable suffixes, Teeha-Teeho-Teesaram-Teesalal. The typographic manipulation of onomatopoeia – c-r-a-ash – brings movement into the picture of the immobile woman. In fact, this is Macwan’s distinctive style preserved in the English translation and script, the kinesthetic image recurring untranslated in instances like “phataak, phataak, phataak – Bijal’s whip rained down on him” (98-99). The “phataak” (પહાટાક) of the whiplash is onomatopoeic only in Gujarati, in which it shares the cracking sound “phataak” (પહાટાક) with the term for firecracker “phataakda” (પહાટાકડા). Its appearance in English symbolizes the onomatopoeia for non-Gujarati speakers while preserving the precise phonetic imitation for Gujarati speakers. Even in translation, Macwan’s novelistic style mobilizes oral storytelling.

By its name, Gujarati dalit literature defines itself in opposition to style. As theorist and poet Harish Mangalam explains, “In its preoccupation with fostering and upholding human values, dalit literature cannot afford to be a decorative piece or a consumer article. Dalit literature is not ‘lalit’ literature, or literature for entertainment” (71).²⁸ Lalit is the word for style, elegance, and refinement in the Gujarati canon; what caste authors can afford but dalit authors cannot, in Mangalam’s explanation. Because dalit is the opposite of lalit, and an unbridgeable gap is assumed between the political and the aesthetic, the notion of dalit aesthetics is an oxymoron under the prevailing conception of belles lettres.²⁹ By aligning themselves with the urgency of political activism, practitioners of

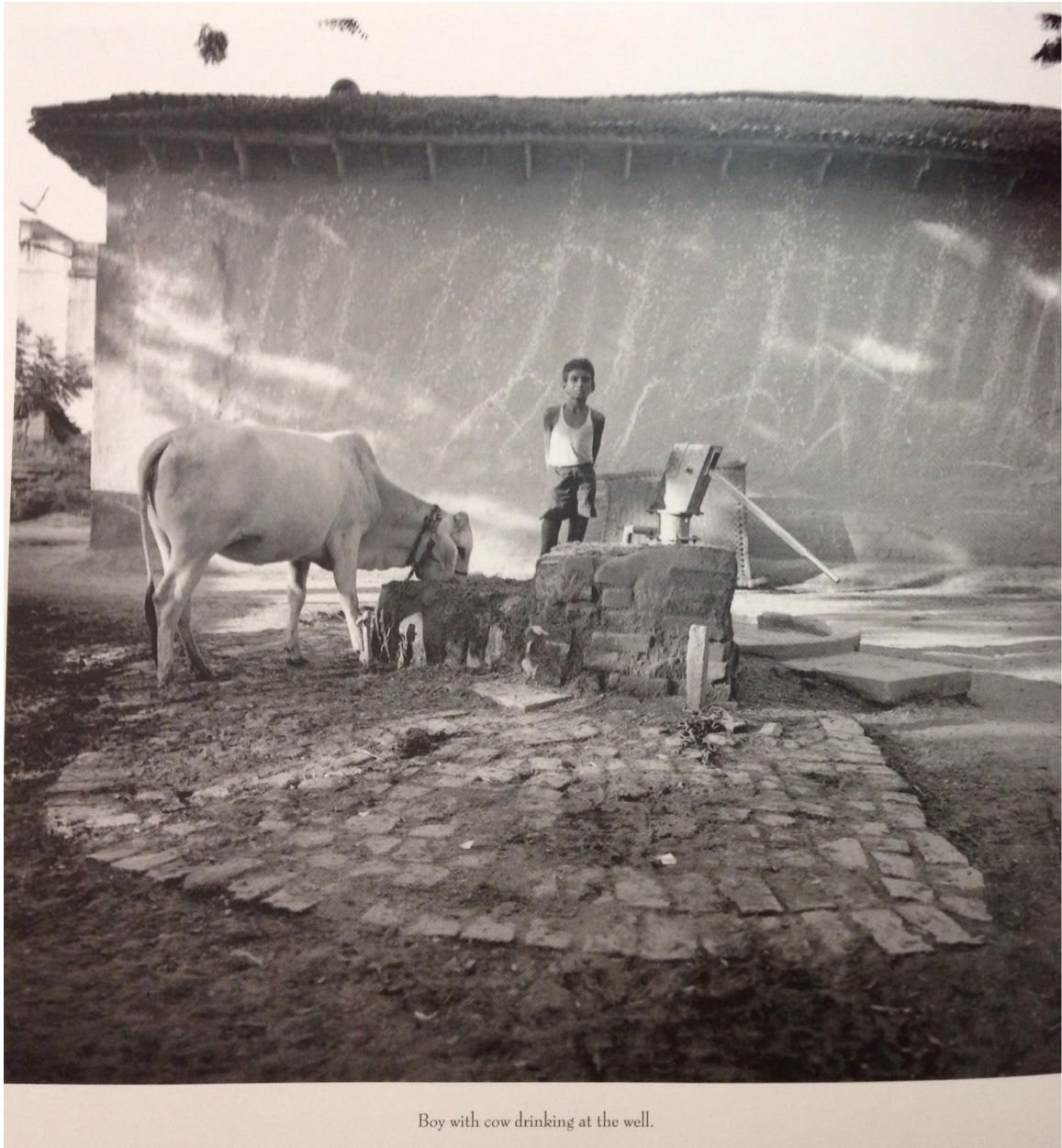
Gujarati Dalit literature have suspected aesthetic style and popular entertainment value of obstructing the injury claim even as they have embraced both, without acknowledgement, to carve out a distinct literary movement for themselves. The dalit-lalit opposition has not only meant that dalit writers have disavowed style for the supposedly style-less virtue of urgent indictment, but also that style is the basis on which dalit literature is rejected by the canon of Gujarati literature whose cultural capital comes from the prestige of the Sanskrit language. Macwan's signature style finds its strength in the "coarseness" of the Charotari dialect, rather than standardized Sanskritic Gujarati, in performance arts and entertainment traditions popular to Charotari locals, marking the condescension of the Sahitya Akademi award as all the more condescending. Anti-caste ethics in *Angaliyat* is caught in the inequality between English and Gujarati, between Charotari Gujarati and Sanskritic Gujarati, between dalit and lalit aesthetics, between local popular entertainment and national recognition. Attending to its rhetoricity releases an anticolonialism that accounts for the fraught imbrications of language, translation, critique, and caste.

The critique of drastically unequal language capital should not be limited to lamentation, of course. B.R. Ambedkar's powerful *Speech at Mahad* (1927) drafts an anti-apartheid rights charter for untouchables, taking the French Revolution's Declaration of Human Rights as his guide. For Ambedkar, the conference for de-segregation called at Mahad Lake in Maharashtra was unprecedented in Indian history and comparable only to the National Assembly of 1789 in France. Basing his vision for Indian democratic politics on the abolition of the estates in France and the declaration of human rights, Ambedkar

argues for a society that practices the annihilation of caste, a society in which “things that unite are considered laudable and things that divide are condemned” (232). To him, the prohibitions on inter-marriage, inter-dining, inter-drinking and social intercourse were driven by the anxiety of a common world, rather than a fear of pollution. By burning the orthodox scriptures that laud divisions, by drinking from a public tank prohibited to untouchables, Ambedkar asserted a new norm of commonality. The new commons was based on a cross-species logic in his keynote at Mahad: “Nor do the caste Hindus prevent members of species [they] consider lower than the human, such as birds and beasts, from drinking at the lake.” This is not an argument to restrict the lake to those who are genetically human, thus including untouchables. Rather, it is a claim for untouchables to be included in the cross-species access to water bodies in a public space. The French declaration of human rights, then, is a language into whose revolutionary currency Ambedkar inserts the anti-caste movement for democracy. Through the cross-cultural encounter of caste and estate, he rewrites the human as one of the many species to whom public spaces belong.

Between the drastic inequality of Marathi and French cultural capital, Ambedkar’s keynote address bases itself on the monolingualism of rights that runs counter to the multilingual hierarchization of cultural capital worldwide.³⁰ The trace of inter-species ecology in Ambedkar’s anti-caste position finds resonance in Wendy Ewald’s medium shot of a boy, a cow, and a well in deep focus, although her image from Gujarat in the 1990s is not intended to cite the detail of radical conspecificity I highlight. In this closing section of the chapter, I make the case for reading visual literacy projects for disruption

rather than intervention, in an attempt to break from the problem of ruined intervention in which the critique of media advocacy is trapped.



Boy with cow drinking at the well.

Photo 2: Photo and caption by Wendy Ewald, *I Dreamed I Had a Girl In My Pocket*, 70.

In Ewald's representation of public space in the Gujarati village, the foregrounded brickwork recedes to converge at the center, the masonry of the well an in-built line of

sight guiding the spectator to the trio of human, animal, and thing in the middle ground. Deep space organizes an inter-species commons with neat and distinct planes of interaction rather than lines of segregation. A *khatalo* (bed) standing up against the wall in the background indicates that this public space is for sleeping too. Ewald takes many photos of public beds, at times her main subjects, and in a rare gesture, she adds the Gujarati word for bed untranslated into her caption: “Rice drying on the *kotla* at Jivabhai’s house” or “*Kotla* in the fields.” However, because she transcribes what she hears of a language she does not know, she mistakenly calls the bed *kotla* (□□□□□) instead of *khatalo* (□□□□□) (62-63). Ewald’s supposed Gujarati word *kotla* is not a word in Gujarati. She ends up with this neologism in her photography by combining *otla* (verandah, □□□□) and *khatalo* (bed, □□□□□). The inter-lingual malapropism gains another layer of irony because in one of Ewald’s images, the bed is actually on the verandah. Photography might be a universal language but it does not escape multilingual babel even though the project of visual literacy misses the intentionless confusion in language by its focus on social change. In Photo 2, Ewald does not specify the caste of the boy, unlike another series of portraits where each child is identified by first name and caste, e.g. Tidi, Harijan (untouchable caste). But given the history of segregation and its persistence, no village scene focused on a public tank of water and the act of drinking can be read without caste in mind. The boy’s positioning at the apex of the triangulated hand-pump and cow makes inter-species drinking in the commons the errant caste detail readable only with Ambedkar’s speech at Mahad. The details of the two animal posts, the hand-pump, and the double-level container for water, mark the tank as used by both humans and animals in the village.

Following photo 2, with this chapter's final movement, I ask: How is caste a photographic object? Ewald's photo-book *I Dreamed I Had A Girl In My Pocket* (1996) documents a long-term project of photographic literacy she carried out with children in a remote Indian village named Vichya in 1989. Arriving in the village with 30 cameras, one enlarger, chemicals, paper, and 300 roles of film, Ewald, worked with her students and her coworkers to produce many photographs in the months that followed, some of which were eventually published with the stories written by the children to illustrate the photographs. In Ewald's literacy through photography (LTP) method, photography is described as a way to stimulate the untapped creativity of children. She has set it to work in diverse socially disadvantaged communities including the United States, Saudi Arabia, India, and South Africa. From learning the workings of a camera to building a dark room for the first time, the children who become visually literate through Ewald's method are children who are unlikely to have had much or any access to photographic production. Ewald does not simply "hand over the camera" to the disadvantaged children but integrates herself in the community for years, living with and photographing her students learning photography. From their unique position of disadvantage, the idea is that the children produce images never seen before, images that are fabulously compelling even in their blunders, for they express the fresh otherness of children unspoiled by media saturation.³¹ Julia Ballerini has argued that the ideology of volunteerism in charitable visual literacy projects is "exemplary of the successful assimilation of conservative arguments" about the futurity of children and disabled subjects even as

[t]he four photographers I have chosen [Jim Hubbard, Mary Ellen Mark, Jim Goldberg, and Wendy Ewald] – primarily because of the exceptional public visibility of their

projects – would be the first, of many, to deny, vehemently and sincerely, any connection with such conservative politics. (3)³²

Ewald's is not "a shoot-and-run venture" but a lifelong pursuit of photographic ethics and social responsibility, which is why Ballerini insists on highlighting what Ewald would deny: the project of social change through visual literacy is based on a conservative assumption of the mythic value of children, especially underprivileged children, whose experience of victimhood makes them natural storehouses of creative genius that photography harnesses.

Rather than accuse or defend Ewald with reference to Ballerini's charge, I am interested in the critique of visual literacy or media advocacy because that critique is trapped in a problem of ruined intervention. The critique goes like this: intervention for social change produces profit for photographers, publishing houses, art galleries, donor organizations, and so forth; their profit-making might perhaps be acceptable if the intervention did not hide a logic of non-interference in structural inequality; but this is not the case; through an insidious logic of non-interference, intervention for social change maintains structural inequality in the name of respecting cultural specificity and propagates volunteerism to change individual lives. To critique *I Dreamed* along these lines would be to argue, correctly, that Ewald believes social change in the village can be realized without demanding caste annihilation. Published by the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and W.W. Norton, the book is sold at thirty-five US dollars, or, twenty-three hundred Indian rupees, a prohibitively steep price for the urban middle class, let alone villagers in the poverty-stricken Vichya community. But how does one read *I Dreamed* without such efficient and replicable condemnation? Why bother reading every detail in

the photo-book as a demonstration of ruined intervention? I argue that anticolonialism, when faced with the predictable critique of visual literacy, can complicate the media text by reading for disruption rather than intervention. Anticolonialism, in attending to the vexing or pleasing or confounding detail, such as conspecificity in photo 2, can break the traditional understanding of social change through photography, cultivating a notion of change in which disruption exceeds the lure of the replicable in visual literacy and its critique.



Photos 3 and 4: (Left) Tidi with her Harijan Neighbors. Photo and caption by Wendy Ewald, *I Dreamed*, 1996.

(Right) Apatani tribal priest looks through the viewfinder of one of Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf's cameras, 1944. (SOAS archive)

Though separated by decades and locations, the impetus to indigenize photography through the figure of the native “shooting back” similarly informs group portraits 3 and 4. The mise-en-scene of teaching the natives by “putting cameras in their hands” offers a

strong colonial continuity between Ewald's long-term project and the fieldwork of anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, who was also a pre- and post-independence government agent. Both natives with cameras are seated cross-legged on the ground, surrounded by a group of camera-less natives cut off by frame. Tidi is a child; the Apatani priest a childlike tribesman of an "uncontacted" region. With the addition of the cameras into the frame and the positioning of the remarkable group behind the main subjects, both shots represent the teachers as though they were mirrors, reflecting instead of taking the images we see. In contemporary parlance, the natives might well be selfie takers. The notion of accessing an entirely distinct grammar of native photography by putting cameras in the hands of natives is compromised by the overdetermined frame of the teacher, repeated in Furer-Haimendorf and Ewald. The fact that these are not self-portraits but look like they very well might be, undercuts the absolute innate difference that the LTP program imagines in the native, a difference lying latent for photography to access in the form of creative potential. In the photo-book Ewald retains some of the embarrassingly misogynist and racist statements her students make to give the impression of unmediated authenticity, even as she emphasizes the collaborative nature of LTP.

The LTP program, which was arranged with the help of women laborers and activists of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, trained children to photograph day-to-day events as well as restage dreams, fantasies, aspirations, and games for photography. The demand for photo literacy did not include an anti-apartheid demand to challenge the caste system that organized their every interaction with each other and with Ewald everyday. In fact, rather surprisingly, Ewald interpellated herself into the caste system.

She classified herself as a tailor. In her account, a day before she left the village, she grew tired “of [her] poor reply to the inevitable village question, ‘What caste are you?’”

Instead of saying she did not have one, Ewald decided to take her place in the Vichya caste system with what she considered a better reply. Using her middle name and her mother’s maiden name, “Taylor,” and a family romance about their lineage going back to the Yorkshire guild of tailors, she became a tailor: “That evening the tailor’s family invited me to an elaborate dinner. I did indeed have my place” (14). Caste, for Ewald, is a redemptive zone of inclusion and belonging, rather than violent discrimination. Everyday caste sociality incorporates whiteness by redefining the limits of its reach and power and extending its assimilative tendencies to newcomers, regardless of their overseas status.³³

Caste segregation is not the only interpellation undergone by Ewald. Her entry into menstrual segregation and codes of secrecy due to women’s perceived uncleanness or filth are crucial, too. She collaborates with caste apartheid in order to have her students collaborate with her in their roles as native informants who provide her and themselves with data revealing who they really are. Ewald and her collaborators, thus, treat photography as a visual field at a remove from caste’s deployment of the visual through bodily markers such as food, dress, shelter, etc. The students conceive of the camera “as a machine that could manufacture any image conjured in the mind” but the conjuring of caste annihilation remains unarticulated in dreams or fantasies. Instead, the fear of religious conversion from outcaste Hinduism to Christianity dominates the dalit imagination in the photo-book. Ewald says:

When Hansi [student] brought home the portrait I’d taken of her, which showed her skin much darker than normal (I had shot it at dusk) a rumor started in the Harijan (untouchable) community that I was using photography to convert the children to

Christianity. Next, it was said, I might kidnap the children, take them to Delhi or America, and murder them. But these stories did not stop the students from coming. (13)

The interpellation of the white newcomer into the caste system is matched by fears that the darkening hues of the untouchable body, in a photo taken under low-key lighting, signifies its forced entry into Christianity through the camera. Ewald's recounting of parental paranoia over her visual literacy project is meant to explain why she handed the cameras to children, not adults, in Vichya. Photography is supposed to mirror the child photographer's world and values, like a soul-document, an image in harmony with the self and its dreams and phobias.³⁴ Bizarre anecdotes of adults who are out of sync with the photographic function reinforce the child as the future of native self-representation.

The camera of caste segregation, or rather, its lens of power, is the subject of Sahil Parmar's Gujarati poem *Need*. He portrays his right to "shoot back" at the caste Hindu with his own camera, not the camera with a "fissured," i.e. segregation, lens.

The lens of their camera is fissured,
They made me a slave
And took my photographs in different poses.
Now, I take the snaps
My own and theirs
As they are,
With my own camera,
That's why they shout
There is no need of another camera
There is no need of another camera.

Offering "now" as the moment of redress after centuries of violence, Parmar's poem, through the conceit of the camera, brings into a single visual field both caste segregation and photography, and one as the case of another. He forecloses the possibility of

sympathetic identification between photographer and subject during the moment of role reversal. Though figured as a chiasmic reversal of “their camera, my self” and “my camera, them,” i.e., the corrective replacement of a negative stereotype with an authentic self-representation, or ethnography versus autoethnography, the first person narrator’s emphasis falls on the shout of the caste Hindu. The Hindus’ urgently declared redundancy of another camera merely underscores the impossibility of doing away with the slave’s representational apparatus, one that does not have a fissured lens, from which he films them as they are, instead of making them what they are not. The slave’s action of taking the snapshot of the master, and instituting a new statement of photography through “another” camera, is not arrested by the master’s shout but preempts the shout that seeks to arrest his looking. The point, then, is not to hand over cameras to the dispossessed and disadvantaged for the first time but to acknowledge that they already have another camera that takes snapshots that the master/teacher does not like. This is not a camera born of innate difference but out of the history of dispossession.

¹ For meditations on rhetoric and politics, see Paul de Man “Semiology and Rhetoric,” Roland Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text*, and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

² Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (2014)

³ Anupama Rao, in her groundbreaking work *The Caste Question*, thinks injury as the grounds of political recognition. Through injury, we “[c]onsistently reengage the social degradation and nonrecognition that Dalits experience at the edge of the Hindu social order. Stigmatized existence secures the ground of political struggle even when politics anticipates its disappearance”(25).

⁴ See Rita Kothari “Caste in a Casteless Language? English as a Language of ‘Dalit’ Expression” (2013) for an exploration of the English language as an archival medium for the cultural production of caste.

⁵ Toral Gajarawala’s phrase, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste* (2013)

⁶ Writer Perumal Murugan has addressed the question of dalit representation by non-dalits in *Expression of Distress* (1999): “I don’t, of course, claim that I have entirely freed myself from the casteist perceptions of the dominant community. But I have no hesitation in declaring that my efforts to free myself continue.”

⁷ Frantz Fanon's phrase, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965)

⁸ From the Dalit Panther Manifesto published in Bombay, 1973. Reprinted in Barbara R. Joshi, *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement* (1986). On the performative contradiction of the rights claim, see Jacques Ranciere's essay "Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" (2004) in which he argues that citizens "acted as subjects that did not have the rights they had and had the rights that they had not."

⁹ The New Humanism of Fanon after the lived experience that he "was an object in the midst of other objects" results in newness birthed out of crushing objecthood. In Sanskrit, *dal* (of dalit) means crushed (similarly in Hebrew). Leela Gandhi, in *The Common Cause* (2014), has gestured toward "the theme of modern *dalit askesis*" as a mode of making common cause with practices of self-abasement and humiliation in dalit leaders from Ambedkar to Narayan Guru, a democratic commons in contrast with the stress on uncommon excellence and ascent that formed the basis of imperialist ideology. See Gandhi (2014) for an incisive critique of race ethnology's double manipulation of the South Asian caste-system resulting in the Aryanization of caste Hindus. See Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism* (2012) for a historical consideration of the relation between caste and race.

¹⁰ On the problematic of commitment in literature, see Walter Benjamin, "Author as Producer," Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is Literature?" and Georg Lukacs, "Tendency or Partisanship."

¹¹ See John Marx, *The Modernist Novel and the Decline of Empire* (2005), for an exploration of the decentered world system in the twentieth century.

¹² See Jasbir Puar, "The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints" (2012) for an account of gradations and switch-points of the body in disability studies.

¹³ Pierre Macherey gives a brilliant comparative reading of the scenes of hailing in Althusser and Fanon in "Figures of Interpellation in Althusser and Fanon," *Radical Philosophy* 173:9 (2012)

¹⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1971)

¹⁵ In *The Caste Question*, Anupama Rao argues persuasively that caste stigma appears habitually rather than catastrophically in our modern, supposedly casteless times: "Elements in the modern habitus of caste include the small insult, the sudden withdrawal of friendship and intimacy, and the surprised discovery of caste identity or caste-identifies practices." (265)

¹⁶ Mulk Raj Anand, *Apology for Heroism* (1946). For a description of Anand's experience of being an "outcaste" of sorts on a ship to India, see his autobiographical "The Story of my Experiment with a White Lie" (1967). Famously, Anand rewrote Bhaka based on his reading of M.K. Gandhi's essay on "The Untouchables" in *Young India* (1919-1922).

¹⁷ James Joyce on the writing of *Finnegans Wake* in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, November 1926. Anand's creation of Bhakha's stream of consciousness from his millionth encounter with caste apartheid resonates in Stephen Dedalus's paradoxical resolution at the end of *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*: "I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (275-76).

¹⁸ Aijaz Ahmad “Reading Arundhati Roy *Politically*.” *Frontline* 8 August, 1997: 103-8. Brinda Bose “In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 29.2 (1998): 59–72.

¹⁹ Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* (1996) does the same with race relations between Tamils, Sinhallas, and Burgher populations in Sri Lanka.

²⁰ In her critique of the relationship between privilege and dissent, Leela Gandhi argues, “I would like to suggest that the figure of the new/postcolonial Indian English novelist is in a deliciously ‘win-win’ situation. The intervention of critics such as Said makes it possible for this figure to speak simultaneously from an enviable position of privilege and dissent. Paradoxically, it is by virtue of its hegemonic status within the nation that the new Indian English novel becomes counter-hegemonic in relation to the ‘West’. In this sense, the postcolonial novel seems to occupy the same space and possess a similar agency to the anti-colonial nation-state... To put this simply: so as to always speak back to the ‘West’, it is crucial to speak in a way that the ‘West’ understands, publishes and, paradoxically, authorises. It is crucial, that is, to hold a ticket to the new ex-colonial and globalised middle-classes.” From “Indo-Anglian Fiction: Writing India, Elite Aesthetics, and the Rise of the ‘Stephanian’ Novel,” *Australian Humanities Review*

²¹ See Bishnupriya Ghosh, *When Borne Across* (2004), for her argument that *English, August* stages a political critique of linguistic nationalism by creating an English language that is “not an idiom that can be reproduced.”

²² S. Anand, *Outlook Business*, June 28, 2008, pp 89

²³ This is not limited to dalit mobilization into capital flows. See Ani Maitra’s “In the Shadow of the Homoglobal” (2013) for an analysis of queer consumption patterns under the neoliberal state.

²⁴ Chandra Bhan Prasad, *Dalit Diary 1999-2003*

²⁵ See V.T. Rajasekhar, *Dalit: The Black Untouchables* (1995), Daniel Immerwahr, “Caste or Race? Indianizing Race in the United States” (2007), Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (1998), Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (2001)

²⁶ Chandra Bhan Prasad’s interview with *Dalit Camera: Through Un-touchable Eyes* Prasad ignores the anticaste dalit intellectual tradition going back to 200-100 BCE. E.g., Buddhism’s break with caste by admitting everyone regardless of caste; twelfth century poet Basava’s movement for caste eradication in South India; poet-saints Kabir, Meera, Ravidas, Janabai were anticaste poets of the Bhakti movement in India. See Arundhati Roy’s introduction to Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* (2014)

²⁷ Imagery of the rising sun for anticaste movements recurs in Marathi Dalit poetry. – E.g., Sharankumar Limbale, *White Paper*: “I’ll uproot the scriptures like railway tracks./Burn like a city bus your lawless laws/My friends!/My rights are rising like the sun./Will you deny this sunrise?”

²⁸ K.M. Sherif, “Dalit Literature Has Never Been Sectarian” Conversation with Harish Mangalam” in *Indian Literature* Vol. 37, No. 1 (159) (January-February, 1994), pp. 69-77

²⁹ Achyut Yagnik and Rita Kothari, introduction to *The Stepchild*

³⁰ See Ariella Azoulay on the universal language of rights, “‘The Family of Man’: A Visual Declaration of Human Rights” in *The Human Snapshot* (2013), eds. Thomas Keenan and Tirdad Zolghadr, pp. 19-48.

³¹ See Pooja Rangan for a critique of “intervention” politics in photo literacy projects “Immaterial Child Labor: Media Advocacy, Autoethnography, and the Case of *Born into Brothels*.” *Camera Obscura* (2011)

³² Julia Ballerini, “Photography as a Charitable Weapon: Poor Kids and Self-Representation” in *Radical Historical Reviews* (1997)

³³ Newcomers to the caste system are not only white. Dilip Menon, in *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India* (2006), has persuasively made the case of Hindu-Muslim violence as the return of the repressed histories of caste: “The entry of subordinated castes into Hinduism was through baptism by blood at the dawn of independence...From being the others of Hinduism to reclaiming mosques for their Hindu patrons.” Menon reveals the involvement of *dalit* and *adivasi* groups (lower castes and tribes) in the killings of Muslims, whether in the late nineteenth century, the partition riots in 1947, and in Gujarat in 2002.

³⁴ I derive “soul-document” from “bio-documentary,” a term coined by Sol Worth in *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology* (1972)

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Of the frontispiece, we notice upfront that the “Madiga bridal pair” of untouchables is hardly a pair. There are four subjects in the frame: one holds the backdrop perhaps ready to be cropped out but he will never be, two are not yet inhibited and they never will be, and the fourth is already lost to the mortifying precision of being a body in front of a lens. Between them, the four subjects plot for us a range of gestures from anxious inhibition to spontaneous disregard for the camera in one of the strangest wedding photographs ever staged in the early twentieth century. The photographer is an Indian named K. Rangachari “assisting” Englishman Edgar Thurston in his interpellation of the “castes and tribes of southern India.” And like all mediations in the mode of anticolonial possibility, the question of ethics is posed just beyond the mimetic project. Thurston writes:

A tribal photograph was taken there, with the result that a deputation subsequently waited on me with a petition to the effect that “We, the undersigned, beg to submit that your honor made photos of us, and has paid us nothing. We, therefore, beg you to do this common act of justice.” The deputation was made happy with a *pourboire*.

The signed petition for payment in exchange of posing/acting for a photographer, payment as a commonly recognized code of conduct that is initially flouted, the visit by a delegation of photographed subjects, Thurston’s passive voice and quick translation – these details make clear that there is no caste interpellation without a trace of disruption in inconsequential archives.

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